

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

SHAPING A SECURE FUTURE—AN ASSESSMENT OF U.S.-CHINA POLICY

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ABSTRACT

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The development and maintenance of amicable U.S.-China relationships in the next five to ten years is critical to U.S. national security. U.S. policies toward China will have significant influence on U.S. national military strategy. The predominant view expressed by defense planners and other Bush administration strategists is that China may be our next near-peer military confrontation. With China as a strategic partner rather than as a strategic competitor, the U.S. might shape its defense structure for the 21st century threats without engaging in an arms race with China. This project analyzes the Taiwan issue and the People's Republic of China's military modernization initiatives to present alternative U.S. policy options in an attempt to steer the U.S. away from a path of military confrontation with China.

SHAPING A SECURE FUTURE—AN ASSESSMENT OF U.S.-CHINA POLICY

"We have our best chance since the rise of the nation-state in the 17th century to build a world where the great powers compete in peace instead of prepare for war."

- President George W. Bush, 1 June 2002¹

The development and maintenance of amicable U.S.-China relationships in the next five to ten years is critical to U.S. national security and reveal significant implications to U.S. national military strategy. The predominant strategic view expressed by defense planners and other Bush administration strategists is that China may be our next near-peer military confrontation.² Are current policies steering the United States toward this confrontation or are there policy options that the U.S. should adopt to mitigate China as a military competitor? The United States lies at a critical turning point in its defense history. The national security environment changed with the end of the Cold War. The events of September 11, 2001, and ongoing U.S. military operations confirm that the conduct of war has changed. September 11 also ushered in the idealist view that most of the world is so economically interdependent that the days of "great power" wars are over.³ China is on the rise to great power status with among other changes, projections of significant defense spending. With China as a strategic partner rather than as a strategic competitor, the U.S. can appropriately shape its own defense structure and organize, train, and equip a force capable of dealing with the security threats of the 21st century without engaging in an arms race. This paper will analyze two critical areas and present alternate policy options to avoid unnecessary military confrontation with China. The two areas are the Peoples Republic of China's historical sovereignty perspective in regards to Taiwan and its military modernization initiatives.

The Taiwan Issue

Currently, the Republic of China on Taiwan is pushing its independence agenda, while the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) stands firm that Taiwan will remain a part of China—at all costs.⁴ The United States remains a staunch supporter for Taiwan. To understand the implications and potential peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue, one must explore its genesis and understand both U.S. and China's interests in Taiwan. On November 20, while in Beijing, President Bush indicated though complex, the relationship with China is a "good working relationship."⁵ This U.S. presidential insight indicates significant progress, considering the adversarial status of the U.S.-China relationship since the PRC's inception in 1949.

The U.S.-China relationship began with no inter-governmental cooperation agreements, but has grown to include more than thirty.⁶ It is worth recalling the antagonistic relationship

between China and the United States, then rivaled only by that between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, until initial Sino-U.S. normalization under the Nixon administration and full normalization under the Carter administration.⁷ The U.S. relationship with China has since weathered the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, the 1996 and 2000 democratic elections in Taiwan, the 1999 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) bombing of the Chinese embassy, and the 2001 U.S. Navy EP-3 collision with a Chinese fighter and subsequent detainment of the U.S. aircraft and crew.⁸ Though the U.S.-China relationship has recently improved, the Taiwan issue prevalent during normalization remains the predominant issue that could lead to military confrontation between the two nations. Unlike most issues dealing with foreign policy, the foundation of U.S. policy toward Taiwan is captured by three joint communiqués and the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA).⁹ It is important to distinguish between the communiqués and the TRA. The communiqués are prime examples of documented strategic communications between country leaders. The TRA, however, is a legally-binding act of the U.S. Congress and provides the primary guidance on U.S. policy—a rare occurrence in today's foreign policy arena typically driven by the executive branch.¹⁰

The first United States-People's Republic of China joint communiqué (Shanghai Communiqué) dated February 27, 1972, summarized discussions between President Richard Nixon and Chinese Premier Chou En-lai and Communist Party of China Chairman Mao Tse-tung. Three key elements on the Taiwan issue are drawn from this communiqué. First, the Taiwan issue was the critical issue for normalization. China confirmed its standing position that Taiwan is a province of China, that the People's Republic of China is the sole government of China, and that resolution of the Taiwan issue is an internal affair "in which no other country has the right to interfere."¹¹ Second, the United States acknowledged that there was "but one China" with Taiwan being part of China and all Chinese people on both sides of the strait recognized this fact.¹² Third, both U.S. and PRC leaders concluded normalization between their countries was in the best interests of their respective peoples, the region, and the world.¹³ The second joint communiqué (Joint Communiqué on Establishment of Diplomatic Relations) dated January 1, 1979, reaffirmed the U.S. and PRC positions of the Shanghai Communiqué and established formal diplomatic relations. Specifically, "The United States of America recognizes the Government of the Peoples Republic of China as the sole legal Government of China. Within this context, the people of the United States will maintain cultural, commercial, and other unofficial relations with the people of Taiwan."¹⁴ The final communiqué dated August 17, 1982, reiterated the commitments of the first two with joint emphasis on peaceful resolution to the Taiwan issue. However, the most significant element of this third communiqué addressed U.S.

arms sales to Taiwan. Specifically, the U.S. admitted that its arm sales to Taiwan were not to be a long-term policy, they would not provide a “qualitative or quantitative” advantage, and it would gradually reduce its arms sales leading to final peaceful resolution.¹⁵ As stated earlier, these communiqués are documented strategic communication between U.S. and PRC leaders. However, the Taiwan Relations Act, a domestic public law set fourth in the 96th Congress, is the backbone to U.S. policy on Taiwan.

The Taiwan Relations Act was enacted January 1, 1979, “to maintain peace, security, and stability” in the Asian theater and to preserve an unofficial relationship with the people of Taiwan.¹⁶ The TRA recognized the need for the U.S. to support a traditional ally and represented U.S. commitment against communism. The TRA provided three crucial elements to U.S. policy. First, it declared that United States’ recognition of the People’s Republic of China was contingent on an eventually peaceful resolution to the future of Taiwan and any actions indicating “other than peaceful means” would be “of grave concern to the United States.”¹⁷ Second, it identified the requirement for the U.S. to provide arms and services to help Taiwan maintain a self-defense capability. Finally, it required the United States “to maintain the capacity...to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or the social or economic system, of the people on Taiwan.”¹⁸ Though enacted almost 27 years ago, the TRA is a permanent requirement in foreign policy to support Taiwan. As U.S. Senator Sam Brownback, a member of the Committee on Foreign Relations, noted on the 25th anniversary of the TRA, “[It] does not dictate every facet of U.S. policy toward Taiwan, of course, but it is the indisputable foundation for policy.”¹⁹ The TRA has proved enduring—no foreign policy event since 1979 has energized amendments. The consequence to U.S. policy on Taiwan is twofold—U.S. commitment remains steadfast, and presidential administrations since 1979, to include the Bush administration today, are bound by the foundations of the TRA to deter aggression and provide Taiwan with a self-defense capability.²⁰

Implications of the Taiwan Policy

The Bush administration’s latest policy on Taiwan was confirmed during the President’s Beijing visit on November 20 with Chinese President Hu Jintao. The United States remains committed to its responsibilities under the TRA and to the one-China policy. In remarks following this meeting, Secretary of State Rice reemphasized, “The United States also opposes any efforts by either side to unilaterally alter the status quo and does not support Taiwan independence.”²¹ Previously, in December 2003, President Bush himself confirmed directly with Premier Jiabao this position of nonsupport for Taiwan independence and unilateral changes to the status quo.²² James Keith, Department of State Senior Adviser, East Asian and Pacific

Affairs, in his September 2005 statement to the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commissions stated, "... the United States has a vital interest in the peaceful resolution of differences across the Taiwan Strait."²³ This current policy is clearly captured in the 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS) with the objective of promoting a stable, peaceful, and prosperous Asia-Pacific region. It is worthy to note that aside from the TRA, current Bush administration policy is synthesized from Presidential visits, staff clarifications and explanations, congressional reports and testimony, as well as media interpretation. Surprisingly, U.S. policy on Taiwan remains plainly succinct. However, it immediately raises two questions: What vital interests are driving U.S. policy on Taiwan and what exactly does "responsibilities under the Taiwan Relations Act" mean?

First, addressing U.S. interests in Taiwan, three interests are immediately apparent; 1) regional stability, 2) economic security, and 3) support for a democratic society and partner. The first two interests are tied directly together. Mitigating conflict between China and Taiwan translates to reducing the flashpoint for military conflict between China and the United States. Based on embedded trade relationships, conflict over Taiwan would have major implications to regional and global economies. From 2004 figures, China was the United States' third largest trading partner (\$231 billion—annual) behind Canada and Mexico. China was the United States' second primary source for imports, and its fifth primary destination for exports. The U.S. was China's primary destination for exports, and its fifth primary source for imports behind Japan, the European Union, Taiwan, and South Korea.²⁴ Taiwan's major export destinations are in order the PRC, the U.S., and Japan. Its primary sources for imports are in order Japan, U.S., and PRC.²⁵ Regional stability and economic security qualify by definition as vital interests. The third interest—support for a democratic partner—arguably does not qualify as a vital interest, though it is emotionally tied to U.S. moral (and for Taiwan legal) obligations to support democratic societies and to support friends and partners.²⁶

The second question raised by the Bush administration's policy is its interpretation of U.S. responsibilities under the TRA. Per the TRA, anything "other than peaceful" means to decide Taiwan's fate is of "grave concern to the U.S.," and Congress directs the U.S. to possess the capacity to "resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion" that would put Taiwan at risk.²⁷ It is likely that an unprovoked or preemptive attack on Taiwan would be met with U.S. military might. Due to China's current economic priorities, this scenario is improbable but could develop in the future. However, knowing the Bush administration opposes an independent Taiwan, would the U.S. go to war with China after China attacked Taiwan on the declaration of Taiwan independence? The answer is not clear, but some experts doubt that the U.S. would

risk war in this case based on Taiwan's classification here as a peripheral U.S. interest.²⁸ What clearly stands out in examining the Bush administration policy questions of; 1) U.S. interests in Taiwan, and 2) the interpretation of U.S. responsibilities of the TRA, is an imbalance of useable instruments of power. Specifically, there is an over-emphasis on military power to affect the U.S. strategy over the Taiwan issue. A second imbalance deals with diplomatic power.

The most glaring critique of U.S. policy on Taiwan is the previous failure of the United States and now the Bush administration to properly consider and respect the Chinese perspective—a basic diplomatic skill. As President Hu clearly stated in his New York visit with President Bush in December 2003, “The proper handling of the Taiwan question holds the key to the sound and steady growth of the China-U.S. relationship.”²⁹ His position during the November 20 Beijing meeting with President Bush was even more powerful stating, “We will by no means tolerate Taiwan independence.”³⁰ For China, their position stems from historical fact. Written records as far back as 1,700 years, territorial exploration and administrative governments through the 1800s, and a full province establishment of Taiwan in 1885 legitimately support their claims. In addition, the Cairo Declaration (December 1, 1943) and the Potsdam Proclamation (July 26, 1945) from World War II, both signed by the United States, returned Taiwan (Formosa) to China after Japanese occupation since 1895.³¹ To China, Taiwan is about national unity and territorial integrity. PRC leaders sincerely believe, “Unless and until this state of affairs is brought to an end, the trauma on the Chinese nation will not be healed and the Chinese people's struggle for national unification and territorial integrity will continue.”³² (The U.S. fought its civil war over a similar issue). China further states that the United Nations Charter provides the basis of international law that gives them the moral and legal high ground; “...the United Nations and its Members shall refrain from any action against the territorial integrity or political independence of any of its Members or any State and shall not intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any State.”³³ To China, settling the Taiwan issue and achieving national reunification “is a sacrosanct mission of the entire Chinese people” and is solely an internal affair.³⁴ Solving this issue would eliminate a destabilizing factor for the region. Their stated intent is to reunite peacefully, though their current military preparation leads many to believe otherwise. China also believes the United States is responsible for delaying unification.

United States support for the Republic of China government after it was overthrown during the Chinese Civil War, and the U.S. mutual defense treaty with Taiwan after the Korean War are viewed by the PRC as “interference in China's internal affairs.”³⁵ In addition, it is no

mistake that President Hu notably ignored the Taiwan Relations Act during his September 2005 visit with President Bush;

President Bush has, on various occasions, stated his commitment to the one China policy, the three Sino-U.S. joint communiqués, and opposition to the so-called Taiwan independence, which I highly appreciate. I hope that the United States will join the Chinese side in safeguarding peace and stability across the Taiwan Straits, and opposing the so-called Taiwan independence.³⁶

Justifiably, China sees the domestically legislated TRA with continued provisions for arms sales to Taiwan, contrary to the third joint communiqué and international law, as an obstruction to peaceful reunification.³⁷ The PRC confirms this policy sends mixed messages to both parties and does not help stabilize the situation.³⁸ China strengthens its position by citing the fact that most of the world recognizes there is only one China, Taiwan is a part of China, and the Government of the People's Republic of China is the "sole legal government."³⁹ Understanding the over-emphasis of military power and the under-utilization of diplomatic power in crafting the current Bush administration U.S. policy on Taiwan, it is now possible to examine policy alternatives. Three options are presented; 1) rescind the Taiwan Relations Act, 2) amend the TRA by removing the U.S. security commitment, and 3) maintain the status quo with diplomatic modifications.

Taiwan Policy Options

The first option is to start from scratch with a relevant baseline. The TRA clearly reflects the Cold War experience. Communist containment was a concern in 1979 and deterrence was the answer to providing protection for U.S. friends such as Taiwan. Deterrence is decreasingly less likely to be effective as China grows stronger, economically, diplomatically, and militarily. According to Ted Carpenter, Vice President for Defense and Foreign Policy Studies at the Cato Institute, there are three reasons for this lessening of the deterrent effect. First, comparatively, Taiwan is more crucial to China than it is to the United States, even as a significant trading partner and democracy, and China knows this. Second, Taiwan is historically a national and emotional issue for China, and that fact tends to cloud judgment even for "normally dispassionate political leaders."⁴⁰ Third, the Chinese have watched the American people and have noted U.S. military performances in Somalia, Kosovo, and both Gulf Wars and it is not certain that they will be so risk-averse—if the Chinese believe the U.S. is hollow in its commitment to Taiwan, it may "call that bluff," setting the stage for a "humiliating U.S. retreat during a crisis or a catastrophic war with a nuclear-armed China."⁴¹

In addition to potentially defunct deterrence, it is time to look at global politics in the 21st century. China is major regional and global power influence with promising future growth in all

categories. The U.S. has already successfully engaged China's help with the Global War on Terrorism and with North Korea nonproliferation concerns.⁴² The U.S. must also work diplomatically within Taiwan's domestic situation. Taiwan's Koumintang (KMT) and People's First Party (PFP) favor some form of democratic integration with China, in direct opposition to the current leading Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). The U.S. might be able to capitalize on KMT and PFP progress with the Chinese Communist Party.⁴³ China's domestic legislation of the Anti-secession Law at the National People's Congress in March is yet another message that Taiwan is viewed as an internal affair. Perhaps it is time to rescind the TRA and develop another strategic communications construct with China for the 21st century. At a minimum, one would suggest a fourth joint communiqué with China stressing diplomatic methods to solve the Taiwan issue—methods such as processes and procedures for constant, creative, and critical dialogue between China and Taiwan. However, a ratified three-party treaty between the U.S., PRC, and Taiwan might provide a more solid diplomatic environment in which China-Taiwan stability could flourish. This three-party treaty would need to address the four key issues of; 1) the actual relationship of Taiwan to China, 2) the diplomacy requirements to ensure constant and productive dialogue, 3) the expected role of the United States as partner to both parties, and 4) U.S. arms sales to Taiwan.

If complete rescinding of the TRA is unacceptable for Congress or the Bush administration, a second viable option to bring more diplomacy to the Taiwan issue is to remove any U.S. security commitment requirement. Selling arms to Taiwan would remain an option if Taiwan wants a defense capability, but it would be a relationship as with any other U.S. arms customer. It would not be codified in law. According to Ted Carpenter, the president should retract the U.S. pledge to defend Taiwan.⁴⁴ Removing this pledge would have significant impact in the diplomatic arena. Proponents supporting this action tout it removes doubt about U.S. intentions and holds Taiwan singularly accountable for its actions or inactions—a stabilizing factor for the region.⁴⁵ Removing the U.S. defense pledge to Taiwan might be the catalyst to break the log jam on cross-strait dialogue between China and Taiwan by weaning Taiwan from a pseudo-U.S. protectorate status. While initiating cross-strait communications, this retraction of the U.S. defense pledge would also force Taipei to deal with "current international power realities."⁴⁶ These realities might convince Taiwan's current majority party, the DPP, to establish a unified party position to promote amicable China-Taiwan relations.⁴⁷ With a unified DPP position, the DPP forms the basis for internal democratic consensus with the KMT and PFP which, in turn, might promote a unified Taiwanese position to present to China on future relationship proposals. Removing Taiwan from the U.S. shadow might also highlight the

bilateral economic ties of China and Taiwan, a vital deterrent to both nations, should either contemplate risking conflict.

If the TRA proves to be sacrosanct, maintaining the status quo remains the most probable option, but even then the U.S. can increase diplomatic efforts to provide a more stable policy. One issue has already been addressed—Taiwan needs to deal with the international power realities. It is not a recognized state by the U.S., China, the United Nations (UN), and most of the world. China on the other hand is a recognized state by the U.S., the UN, and the world. The United States must assuage China-Taiwan tensions by diplomatically persuading Taiwan of the risk of provoking China with a move toward independence and convince Taiwan that U.S. diplomatic efforts with China are now also part of the U.S. construct to promote peace, security, and stability in the region. This effort might help with Taiwan's internal perspective and lay the foundation for domestic political cooperation. With Taiwanese domestic political consensus, the U.S. must drive the lead in opening and maintaining cross-strait dialogue until peaceful resolution. The U.S. opening and maintenance of cross-strait dialogue by no means should remain a unilateral action. The U.S. must diplomatically solicit assistance and expertise from China's global and regional partners. Furthermore, the U.S. might strengthen its diplomatic position established in the TRA by emphasizing with China that peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue is now a UN and global issue in the 21st century, as opposed to the U.S. communist containment concern when the TRA was drafted in 1979.

China's Military Modernization

Following the Taiwan issue, the next indicator pointing to an inevitable military showdown between the U.S. and the PRC is China's military modernization and build-up. Most United States Defense Department strategists take the position that though U.S.-China relations appear peaceful, the U.S. needs to be prepared if future U.S.-China relations deteriorate.⁴⁸ China is equally cautious when revealing its strategic thought on its own future military competitor. Brian Bender, columnist for the Boston Globe, captures the mutual paranoia best when he cites:

In the corridors of the Pentagon and Congress, and in the secretive recesses of the People's Liberation Army in China, hard-liners in each country are highlighting the potential threat posed by the other side to enlist support for a major new buildup in conventional arms, according to diplomats and military and intelligence analysts.⁴⁹

Bender continues, citing that Chinese scholars and American defense specialists believe realists of both countries are magnifying potential conflict "to justify buying new weapons and maintaining large standing armies and navies."⁵⁰ The danger might be that by preparing for a

hostile relationship with China, the Bush administration could set up a scenario for a “self-fulfilling prophecy.”⁵¹ China seeks to build a defense structure that protects its homeland and its interests—and so does the U.S.⁵² The Pentagon sees its role to balance military forces and protect U.S. interests in the region.⁵³ The obvious questions evolve: What does the U.S. fear in this build-up and when should it begin to worry?

It has been 16 years since China began its large increases in military spending, designed, as it claimed, to offset years of military neglect; however, analysts advocate a more pragmatic view—it was the genesis of a serious effort to upgrade its armed forces and apply military influence in the region.⁵⁴ China shifted from a “Peoples War” doctrine of protracted national resistance to one of limited local war. With an expanding economy, the immediate availability of inexpensive Russian military equipment, and the demonstration of advanced Western technology of the 1991 Gulf War, China set a course for force modernization consistent with this doctrine.⁵⁵ As China’s military prowess grows so does the concern of its threat to Taiwan and U.S. interests in the region. According to the Office of the Secretary of Defense Annual Report to Congress on the Military Power of the Peoples Republic of China, 2005 (here-to-after referred to as the 2005 Report to Congress), China is developing a force “capable of prosecuting a range of military operations in Asia—well beyond Taiwan—potentially posing a credible threat to modern militaries operating in the region.”⁵⁶ The report further confirms most of China’s defense capability remains with older and less capable systems, however, key developments of its force modernization include;

- Extensive and proliferating short-range ballistic missiles with increased range and accuracy
- New, more survivable longer-range missiles to include future road-mobile intercontinental-range ballistic missiles
- Fourth-generation Russian Su-30MKK multi-role fighters and the indigenous Su-27SK, the F-11, and the F-10 fighter aircraft
- Plans for escort jammers for bombers, transports, and unmanned aerial vehicles in addition to tactical aircraft
- Acquisition or development of cruise missiles and air-to-air, air-to-surface, and anti-radiation missiles
- Deployment of Russian-made SOVREMENYY-class guided missile destroyers and additional KILO-class diesel electric submarines
- Production of indigenous SONG-class diesel electric submarines with advanced anti-ship cruise missile submerged launch capability
- Employment of new YUAN-class diesel submarines and production of a next generation nuclear attack submarine

- Deployment of robust Russian air defense systems—the S-300PMU-1/SA-20 strategic surface-to-air missile (SAM) system and the FM-90 (CSA-7) tactical SAM comparable to the French Crotale.⁵⁷

In addition, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has a current ground force estimated at 375,000 that is upgrading its tanks, armored personnel carriers, and battlefield vehicles.⁵⁸ These proliferating advanced systems, currently small in numbers but viable tools in China's growing arsenal, are only part of U.S. concerns. In fact, what worries the U.S. most is how the PRC intends to use this vastly-enhanced military capability.

In October 2005, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld met with his Chinese counterpart in Beijing, General Cao Guangchuan. Outcomes of the meeting were positive and the two defense establishment heads made progress in their relationship. However, Secretary Rumsfeld identified "China's lack of transparency about spending as it expands its military capabilities" as an impediment to progress.⁵⁹ There is no doubt that China is investing in a military modernization that "target[s] the sorts of capabilities that would enable China to play the role of an authentic great power."⁶⁰

In today's security environment, three immediate fears from the U.S. perspective are obvious. First, a China with "an expanding military-industrial complex that proliferates advanced arms" would be extremely detrimental in regard to global security.⁶¹ Second, a capable military based on a strong economic foundation combined with a resurgent nationalism and confidence could tempt China to "attempt to dictate the terms of foreign security and economic interactions with its trading partners and neighbors."⁶² The third fear for the U.S. is not knowing (or believing) China's true intentions of its military modernization.

As the 2005 Report to Congress points out, insights into China's national strategies are hard to ascertain.⁶³ Stated more directly, there are no indicators, other than a Taiwan declaration of independence, on when the PRC might use force. The single most critical factor for the U.S., beyond the fact that there is a build-up in progress, is that of China's secrecy. The U.S. seeks to deter aggression through transparency, interaction, and demonstrations of capabilities, while China seeks to deter by maintaining secrecy.⁶⁴ China's White Paper on National Defense, published December 27, 2004, is the closest document published by China espousing its national security strategy (here-to-after referred to as the 2004 White Paper). As conveyed in the 2005 Report to Congress, a key development noted that, though improved, the 2004 White Paper "provides only limited transparency in military affairs."⁶⁵ However, as recent visits from heads of defense, and heads of states demonstrate, as well as openings in military-to-military contacts, China is demonstrating a willingness to reduce some of this secrecy and to open dialogue on "global issues of mutual concern."⁶⁶

Despite U.S. fears about China's military progress, the United States is still spending more than four times more than China on defense annually, even by the most aggressive estimates on the elusive Chinese defense spending figures, causing some analysts to question U.S. response to this military threat.⁶⁷ Analysts conclude that for first part of the new century, the U.S. military has a distinct advantage over China that will not soon disappear, pointing out that it was an embroiled arms race with the United States that helped conclude an eventual economic collapse of the Soviet Union—a fate that the PRC must not follow.⁶⁸ In contrast however with China's current rate of economic expansion and with a worst case estimate of a national defense budget, China has the capability to sustain a modernization and build-up that will continue to close the gap with the U.S. military.⁶⁹ China insists it has peaceful intentions, but Pentagon assessments are convinced China will retake Taiwan by force and use its modernized military to shape the Asia-Pacific region to its liking.⁷⁰

As with every dialogue, there are always two sides to the story—the truth normally lies somewhere in between. Are Pentagon fears founded? As professed in China's 2004 White Paper, the world has nothing to fear from the PRC defense modernization. It indicates that China's goal for the next 20 years is to develop into a “moderately prosperous society in an all-round way” and PRC leaders contend it will do this on its own strength and therefore pose “no obstacle or threat to any one.”⁷¹ The 2004 White Paper is very insistent that for China to reach its developmental goals it needs a peaceful international environment. Permitted this environment, the 2004 White Paper continues, China will “enhance peace and development in the world.”⁷² Therefore, China continues to submit that its national defense policy of modernization and build-up is strictly defensive in nature. The 2004 White Paper emphasizes, “China will never go for expansion, nor will it ever seek hegemony.”⁷³

The thrust of China's stated national strategy is to balance its current economic and national defense development—the two objectives are inseparable and mutually supportive.⁷⁴ Though it maintains it has peaceful intentions, China continues to analyze the security challenges of the region and the world. Specifically, in addition to the Taiwan issue, China identifies the technological gap with other modern military forces, the “prolonged existence of unipolarity vis-à-vis multipolarity,” and globalization as threats to its national security.⁷⁵ The 2004 White Paper identifies the United States' military presence, missile defense developments, and alliances as destabilizing factors in the region. In addition, China fears Japan's military developments and security policies, the unclear future of North Korea, and terrorism.⁷⁶ It makes it very clear that China will not tolerate Taiwan's separation and will promote reunification, as

well as defend against aggression for “national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and maritime rights and interests.”⁷⁷

Implications of PRC Military Modernization to U.S. Strategy

To consider policy recommendations, the U.S. must look first at its own National Security Strategy. The U.S. recognizes that its current military forces were developed from a Cold War-era construct and that these forces must now be transformed to meet the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.⁷⁸ The NSS elaborates that the future U.S. military force won't be one required to deter massive armies as the threats have changed. However, the NSS also states, “Our forces will be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States.”⁷⁹ This statement directly translated to “shape and size” of military forces in the 2005 National Defense Strategy (NDS), drives a requirement to: defend the U.S. homeland; operate in and from four forward regions to assure allies, dissuade competitors, and deter aggression; swiftly defeat adversaries in overlapping campaigns; and conduct a limited number of lesser contingencies.⁸⁰ With the 2005 Quadrennial Defense Review due out in February 2006, there are indications that this same shape and size construct will drive our force requirements for the next five to ten years.⁸¹ Nested within the NDS, the 2004 National Military Strategy (NMS) captures the intent of force size and shape by citing, “U.S. Armed Forces must remain superior to any other nation...”⁸² As the NMS states, its objectives are derived “from an analysis of the NSS, NDS, and the security environment.”⁸³ In addition, the NSS identifies that U.S. relations with China are important to its strategy and though there are areas of disagreements, the U.S. desires a constructive relationship and welcomes China as a prosperous, strong, and peaceful nation.⁸⁴ The most probable implication might be that if U.S.-China policies are not adapted to curtail China's military modernization, the U.S. may be locked into a force structure race to keep the PRC in military check.

PRC Military Modernization, U.S.-China Policy Options

The next five to ten years present a window of opportunity for changes in U.S. policy with China. Prudence dictates the United States should keep a watchful eye on China's military modernization, but there are several promising options for the U.S. to do more to shape the security environment. First, to avoid a proverbial arms race and a second Cold War, the U.S. needs to take the lead among the world powers in supporting China in its great power emergence and treat it as a peer. A China that sees itself respected, nurtured, and engaged as an equal by the U.S. would dissipate feelings of distrust and insecurity and be more willing to

disclose its intentions.⁸⁵ Second, the U.S. must eliminate China's perception of strategic encirclement—its military build-up is fueled by a defense mentality to remain independently capable of protecting its sovereignty and addressing potential barriers to its economic progress.⁸⁶ The U.S. needs to fold China into an Asian-Pacific treaty organization—a NATO-like security blanket for the Asia-Pacific theater.⁸⁷ Development of this organization would do more than any other action in convincing China that heavy contributions to defense are unnecessary (indirectly it worked very well in Europe). Third, the U.S. needs to diminish the Pentagon's open rhetoric about the future “Big One” with China.⁸⁸ China's new generation of leadership is pragmatic with global focus, a change from the ideologues of the past.⁸⁹ However, how can the U.S. national strategy “preserve the peace by building good relations among great powers” yet indirectly propose to China a future in which the U.S. will engage it militarily?⁹⁰ Based on their doctrine, China has no alternative but to prepare its defense. Finally, the U.S. needs to continue to open up its military-to-military opportunities with China. Secretary Rumsfeld captured this benefit by describing these opportunities as a chance to eliminate misconceptions and “contribute to demystifying what we see of them and what they see of us.”⁹¹ General Cao agreed during his October visit with Secretary Rumsfeld stating, “Developing constructive, cooperative relations between the two countries is in the fundamental interest of the two peoples and is conducive to world peace, stability, and development.”⁹²

J. Stapleton Roy, in his article, *Opportunities and Challenges for U.S.-China Relations*, offers;

To gain perspective, it might be helpful for us Americans to step back from time to time and think about our role in the world. After all, it is we who have the biggest defense budget in the world; it is we who are increasing our military spending faster than other countries. Do other countries see us as aggressive and threatening because we are building up our military? The answer is some do and some do not. Expanded defense budgets are not inherently threatening; how they are seen depends on how countries perceive each other's actions and intentions.⁹³

The U.S. must be the stronger leader to mitigate the PRC's military modernization and act as an example. Currently, all indications are that China is not going curtail military modernization on its own. China appears to be imitating the great power thoughts on military might—quality (late generation, high technology) versus quantity and it takes defense spending to get the advantage. The U.S. must engage China as an equal, build China's faith and confidence, and demonstrate responsible dialogue and actions if it is to convince China of a peaceful future.

Conclusion

The development and maintenance of amicable U.S.-China relationships in the next five to ten years is critical to U.S. national security and reveal significant implications to U.S. national military strategy. The predominant strategic view expressed by defense planners and other Bush administration strategists is that China will be our next near-peer military confrontation. Adapting current U.S. policies to the conciliatory global situation early in this century might steer the U.S. away from this prophesized confrontation. With China as a strategic partner rather than as a strategic competitor, the U.S. can appropriately shape its own defense structure and organize, train, and equip a force capable of addressing the security threats of the 21st century. These threat are likely to be profoundly different from those posed by the great power wars of the 20th century.

The United States appears to be changing its view—shifting its attitude from China as a strategic competitor to China as a strategic partner.⁹⁴ Indicators of the shift include recurring and reciprocal visits of President Bush, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, and Secretary of State Rice with their Chinese counterparts. These high-level visits must continue; further, more visits are required to promote an environment of trust and confidence from both sides. The Bush administration is headed in the right direction. However, it must take a more active role in peacefully resolving the Taiwan issue and it must convince China that the PRC has nothing to fear in the security environment that requires significant defense expenditures for military modernization. The time has come to put more emphasis on candid and determined diplomacy and to treat China with the dignity and respect of a great power. Aggressive diplomatic relationships are more relevant to the 21st century globalized world than the extensive military establishments of the 20th century, and offer the keys to peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue and a graceful reduction of the PRC's escalating military modernization programs. Globalization increased the interdependence of developed nations significantly and thus increased the costs of war. If one accepts this premise, then the influence of military power for developed nations is decreasing and the U.S. must compensate for this new void in the tools of national influence. The essence of the U.S.-China relationship and the true foundation that should drive the overall policy today, to include Taiwan, is captured in the following statement from the 1972 Shanghai communiqué:

There are essential differences between China and the United States in their social systems and foreign policies. However, the two sides agreed that countries, regardless of their social systems, should conduct their relations on the principles of respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states, nonaggression against other states, noninterference in the internal affairs of other states, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. International

disputes should be settled on this basis, without resorting to the use or threat of force. The United States and the People's Republic of China are prepared to apply these principles to their mutual relations.⁹⁵

This agreement presents the diplomatic challenge. One inescapable fact is certain: With the 2008 Olympics in Beijing and the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai, China will be predisposed to the opportunities presented by effective and focused diplomatic relations for the next several years. The United States should seize the opportunities to effect positive changes to global stability.

Endnotes

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³ Thomas P.M. Barnett, *The Pentagon's New Map* (New York: Berkley Publishing Group, 2004), 312.

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⁸ Suisheng Zhao, ed., *Chinese Foreign Policy*, (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), 270-271.

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¹² Ibid.

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¹⁴ Ibid., 119.

¹⁵ Ibid., 120-121.

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¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Brownback.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Peggy B. Hu, "Bush, Chinese President Discuss Trade Issues at Beijing Meeting," 20 November 2005, linked from *USINFO.STATE.GOV Home Page* at "Products," available from <http://www.usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/Archive/2005/Nov/20-347688.html>; Internet; accessed 21 November 2005.

²² Keith.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, "2005 Report to Congress of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission," linked from *U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission Home Page*, available from http://uscc.gov/annual_report/2005/05annual_report_contents.htm; Internet; accessed 20 November 2005, 25-26.

²⁵ "Background Note: Taiwan," September 2005, linked from *U.S. Department of State Home Page* at "Background Notes A-Z," available from <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35855.htm>; Internet; accessed 4 December 2005.

²⁶ Vital interest—if unfulfilled, it will have immediate consequences for core national interests. In this case, core national interests are economic freedom and peaceful relations. See J. Boone Bartholomees, Jr., ed., "U.S. Army War College Guidelines for Strategy Formulation," in *U.S. Army War College Guide to National Security Policy and Strategy*, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: n.p., 2004), 282.

²⁷ *Taiwan Relations Act, Public Law 96-8*.

²⁸ Ted Galen Carpenter, "Going Too Far, Bush's Pledge to Defend Taiwan," 30 May 2001, available from <http://www.cato.org/pubs/fpbriefts/fpb66.pdf>; Internet; accessed 16 November 2005, 5.

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⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Solomon.

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⁶¹ Office of the Secretary of Defense, 8.

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