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THE "CHINA CARD": ACE OR DEUCE?

INTRODUCTION

Secretary of State George Shultz's visit to Beijing in early February comes at a critical juncture in Sino-American relations. For more than a decade, U.S. policymakers have been tantalized by the prospect of China's becoming a colleague or partner or even ally in the global confrontation with the Soviet Union. Wily American strategists spoke confidently of playing "The China Card" as a kind of trump in the international, geopolitical sweepstakes. Today, however, the China card increasingly seems more like a deuce than an ace. The danger, therefore, is that American officials may still be tempted to view China as a trump card. It is a temptation that George Shultz must reject.

Yet there are valid fears that Shultz could fall for the China temptation. After all, Ronald Reagan in many ways has continued essentially unchanged the policies of previous administrations, which have placed a very high priority on "improving" relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC). This has been based on a number of assumptions:

- o Tilting U.S. policy toward the PRC strengthens America's overall strategic posture and hence inhibits Soviet advances in Asia.
- o The People's Liberation Army (PLA) is an effective counterweight to Soviet forces in the Far East.

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- o The PRC is an ally of the U.S. in its worldwide struggle against the Soviet Union.
- o The PRC is a force for stability in the Asian-Pacific region.
- o Deng Xiaoping has firm control of the PRC.
- o Rapprochement between the PRC and the Soviet Union is entirely out of the question.

Basing its China policy on these as well as other conclusions, the Reagan Administration made a public commitment to normalization; it has exhibited a willingness to pursue even closer ties with Beijing than had the previous Administration. In fact, the Reagan Administration has made enormous, and often unilateral, concessions to the PRC; by way of contrast, there has been little reciprocity.

As the Reagan Administration begins its third year in office and as Secretary Shultz leaves for Beijing, the time is ripe for an overall reassessment of the current state of Sino-American relations. The time has passed when American policy toward the PRC can be based on an optimistic, somewhat romantic view of Chinese domestic, military, and foreign affairs.

To base America's China policy on such misunderstandings, misconceptions, and "myths" is not only foolish but potentially dangerous. Optimistic calculations and romantic misconceptions cannot be the basis of policy. America's reassessment of its China policy must be founded on caution and realism.

BACKGROUND

The myth that tilting U.S. policy toward the PRC strengthens America's overall strategic posture and hence inhibits Soviet advances in Asia, voiced "officially" during the Carter and Reagan Administrations, has its origins in the early 1970s. It was argued that three advantages would accrue to the U.S. in any U.S.-Chinese military relationship.¹

- 1) The military payoff would serve as a concrete reward for the pragmatic Chinese policy of establishing working diplomatic relations with the United States.

¹ Michael Pillsbury, "U.S.-Chinese Military Ties?," Foreign Policy, No. 20 (Fall 1975), pp. 57-58. This piece presumably was based on more detailed, classified analysis which Pillsbury prepared for the Pentagon in March 1974.

- 2) U.S. arms and technology transfers to China may aid in deterring a Soviet attack or further Soviet military pressure on China, forestalling a future Sino-Soviet war which could jeopardize world peace.
- 3) Increased Chinese military capabilities, especially if deployed near the Sino-Soviet border, could induce even greater Soviet deployments to military districts on the Chinese border than currently exist, tying down a greater percentage of Soviet ground, naval, and air forces. Approximately one-fourth of the Soviet army, navy, and air forces is already located near China. Increases in Chinese military forces will bring corresponding decreases in Soviet forces available for combat against U.S. allies.

The consideration of a serious policy option of utilizing the PRC as a strategic asset dates from the Ford Administration. From Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger's perspective, China offered a great potential for tying down a substantial portion of Soviet military resources and complicating Soviet defense planning for both conventional and nuclear war with the West.²

The first serious consideration of military ties with China came in late 1975 in the context of worsening U.S.-Soviet relations and a slippage in Sino-American ties. In December, during a visit to Beijing by President Gerald Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, the U.S. approved the British sale to the PRC of Rolls-Royce Spey jet engines and a Spey factory. The following October, the National Security Council (NSC) approved the U.S. sale to the PRC of two advanced Control Data Cyber 72 computers with military applications.³ Three days later, on October 15, Kissinger announced that "the territorial integrity and sovereignty of China is very important to the world equilibrium and we would consider it a grave matter if this were threatened by an outside power."⁴

Though the Kissinger-Ford moves were significant, they did not constitute an overall U.S. policy. However, by mid-1978, Jimmy Carter was under increasing pressure to take a strong stance both in the SALT negotiations and in response to Soviet and Cuban military intervention in Africa. Though Carter rejected any form of "linkage" with respect to the Horn of Africa (which National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski favored), the idea of the China card became increasingly attractive.

² Banning Garrett, "The United States and the Great Power Triangle," in Gerald Segal, ed., The China Factor: Peking and the Superpowers (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1982), p. 85.

³ Ibid., p. 87.

⁴ Ibid.

In May 1978, Brzezinski was sent to Beijing where he was to lay the foundation for a strategic relationship with the PRC. It was widely reported that the sale to the PRC of U.S. dual-purpose, military-related technology and Western arms was discussed, as was the NSC's strategic view, which contrasted with that of Secretary of State Cyrus Vance.

Such an exchange paved the way for normalization of relations, which was announced by President Carter on December 15, 1978, and was made effective on January 1, 1979. Incidentally, Vance apparently was not consulted on the timing of normalization and was appalled at its implications for SALT.

During late summer and fall of 1979, the Carter Administration took further steps to solidify the strategic relationship between the U.S. and the PRC. In late August, Vice President Walter Mondale, during a visit to the PRC, announced on Chinese television that "any nation which seeks to weaken or isolate you (PRC) in world affairs assumes a stance counter to American interests." He further stated that the U.S. was committed to joining with China to "advance our many parallel strategic and bilateral interests."⁵

In early October 1979, a secret Pentagon study--titled "Consolidated Guidance Number 8: Asia During a Worldwide Conventional War"--was leaked, which said that, in view of China's "pivotal role" in the global balance of power, it would benefit the U.S. to "encourage Chinese actions that would heighten Soviet security concerns." Such encouragement could include arms transfers or the employment of U.S. forces in joint operations. Among the possible recommendations considered in the study were: (1) U.S. military assistance to the PRC to increase the likelihood of Chinese participation in a global war, including provision of advanced technology and intelligence data, (2) sale of advanced arms, (3) Chinese production of American weapons, and (4) joint military exercises.

The month after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, Secretary of Defense Harold Brown visited Beijing and announced the decision to sell nonlethal military equipment to the PRC.

When the Reagan Administration took office in January 1981, Sino-American military relations had blossomed into a broad range of military and intelligence contacts and exchanges with deepening U.S. involvement in China's defense and defense equipment problems. President Reagan himself announced in a press conference in late May that arms sales to the PRC were to be considered a "natural development." The following month, Secretary of State Alexander Haig in Beijing announced the lifting of restrictions on arms sales to the PRC.

⁵ Ibid., p. 93.

Further emphasizing the strategic importance with which Washington viewed the PRC, a U.S.-China joint communiqué of August 1982 limited both quantitatively and qualitatively arms sales to the Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan. Reagan noted that the communiqué promotes further friendly relations but also contributes to a further reduction in tensions in the Asian-Pacific region. More important, he noted that "building a strong and lasting friendship with China has been an important foreign policy of four consecutive American Administrations" and "such a relationship is vital to our long-term national security interests and contributes to stability in east Asia." He concluded, "it is in the national interest of the United States that this important strategic relationship be advanced."

For just over a decade, the United States has sought not only to improve bilateral relations with the PRC, but more significantly to forge a new strategic relationship with Beijing. Has that relationship significantly strengthened America's overall strategic posture vis-a-vis the Soviet Union? Has that relationship inhibited in any way Soviet advances in Asia? To both questions, the answer is no.

The strategic relationship has had no perceptible impact upon Soviet activities throughout Asia. On December 27, 1979, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan and have yet to be repelled. Soviet support also made possible the Vietnamese conquest of Laos and Kampuchea, to say nothing of Hanoi's 1975 overthrow of the South Vietnamese government in direct violation of the Paris Peace Agreements. The Soviets have also increased their presence in Vietnam and now have access to air and naval bases at Da Nang and Cam Ranh Bay. Finally, the Soviets have allied themselves with the government of Indira Gandhi in New Delhi. The rapprochement between Washington and Beijing has not inhibited Soviet designs either in Asia or in any other part of the world.

MYTH # 1: THE PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY (PLA) IS AN EFFECTIVE COUNTERWEIGHT TO SOVIET FORCES IN THE FAR EAST

To argue that China can, or ever could, offset the huge Soviet military buildup represents a gross overestimation of China's military power.

The People's Liberation Army (PLA)--though numerically the world's largest land army (3.2 million), second largest navy (over 1,000 small, high-speed patrol craft included), and the third largest air force (some 5,300 combat aircraft)--is a weak organization that is patently vulnerable to Soviet military operations.

Of necessity, the PLA must allocate sufficient forces to protect its northeastern province of Manchuria, its southern border with Vietnam, its coast opposite Taiwan, its traditionally hostile border with India (now a Soviet ally) and its remote Western provinces of Zinjiang and Gansu. Manchuria, of course,

has the highest defense priority, given the fact that a significant percentage of the PRC's heavy industry, communication links, and population centers are in this region.

The western reaches of the PRC, though hard to defend given their isolation, are strategically important. A substantial number of China's nuclear missiles (ICBMs and MRBMs), as well as Lop Nor, its major nuclear testing facility, are located in these regions. The PLA is in the unenviable position of being surrounded by potentially hostile nations; the Soviet Union actually threatens the PRC on two sides. A strategic problem of such magnitude requires a highly developed internal communications network, able to transport large numbers of men and equipment over thousands of miles in a short period of time. The fact of the matter is that the PRC does not have such a network.⁶

China's current nuclear forces provide only a minimum deterrent--at best.⁷ These forces consist of single- and multiple-stage liquid fueled missiles. These CSS-1 and CSS-2 missiles are deployed close to the PRC's northern border. They have a range of 620+ miles and 1,860+ miles respectively and are considered to be effective only against large cities; CCS-1 has a 20-kiloton warhead, and CSS-2, a 1-megaton warhead. It is estimated that the PRC has no more than 130 of these missiles. The PRC also has a maximum of 15-20 CSS-3 and CSS-4 missiles with respective ranges of 3,720 miles and 7,440 miles. These are also liquid fueled; the former has a warhead in the 1 to 3 megaton range. Because of their liquid fuel, these missiles require several hours to erect, fuel, and aim. They also must be defueled after a period of readiness and are vulnerable to conventional and nuclear attack during their preparatory stages. The Soviets almost certainly would counter these weapons before attempting a major operation against the PRC. It is also questionable whether the PRC would risk its own total destruction by using its few, low quality missiles against a small number of Soviet cities in response to a limited Soviet invasion.⁸

At medium and high altitudes, the Chinese early-warning radar net suffers from huge gaps, while at altitudes below 5,000 feet there is virtually no coverage.⁹ About 200 surface-to-air missile (SAM) sites protect major industrial and political centers with copies of the obsolete, high-altitude, surface-to-air Soviet SA-2 GUIDELINE missile. There are also some 9,000 anti-aircraft guns, some of which are radar controlled. All Chinese radars and the SA-2 are vulnerable to Soviet electronic countermeasures. Thus, China's cities have little air defense. The PLA ground and

⁶ June Teufel Dreyer, China's Military Power in the 1980s (Washington: The China Council of the Asia Society, August 1982), p. 7.

⁷ Harlan W. Jencks, "Defending China in 1982," Current History, Vol. 81, No. 476 (September 1982), p. 247.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

naval formations also lack modern tactically mobile SAMs and guns necessary to defend themselves against Soviet tactical airpower.

The PLA Air Force, though larger than the Soviets', is severely handicapped by obsolescent avionics and has limited all-weather, night-fighting capability. Overall, Soviet combat aircraft in the region is much superior in performance, in weapons systems, and in electronic and air defense capabilities.

Though the PLA Navy is large, it is no match for the Soviet Pacific Fleet. The Soviet Navy is superior in long-range submarines, major surface combatants, fleet support ships, oceangoing missile-armed air, surface, and subsurface platforms, and fixed-wing Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) aircraft. In contrast, the Chinese have few long-range submarines, a sole missile submarine, no surface combatants larger than a destroyer, and no air-to-surface missile-armed or ASW aircraft. Its main strength lies with its medium-range torpedo attack submarines, a large number of minor surface combatants (all coastal patrol craft), fighter aircraft, and close-encounter weapons (guns, torpedoes, and small ASW launchers). Most of the major equipment and weapons in the PLA Navy are obsolete. 95 percent of submarines, 32 percent of major surface combatants, 30 percent of patrol craft, all mine warfare vessels, 96 percent of tactical strike aircraft, and nearly all of its radar and identification systems are copies or variants of Soviet systems turned over to the Chinese more than twenty years ago.¹⁰

Internal conflicts, uncertain military doctrine, and poor strategic and tactical communication severely reduce the combat capability of the PLA. There appears to be considerable tension between the military, the political leadership, and the civilian population. The military is already suffering from a lack of funds and a low modernization priority that greatly reduces its training and effectiveness; this was demonstrated by the generally poor PLA performance in the Sino-Vietnamese conflict in 1979. The PLA now seems to be changing its military doctrine, away from the strategy of a "people's war." That strategy is based on mass mobilization, and its aim is to give ground in tactical retreats, draw in the enemy, engage him in protracted war, and wear him down by sheer size. Whether the Soviets would be willing to oblige such a scenario is questionable. While there is agreement on the need for change, there is little agreement as to how it should be changed. Also being considered today is the extent and type of military modernization that should be implemented.

In sum, vis-a-vis the Soviet Union in wartime, China's armed forces are at a disadvantage with the qualitatively superior Soviet forces. To assert that the PRC is in any real sense a combat menace to the Soviet Union should a conflict arise between the U.S. and the Soviets is a misreading of the military balance.

¹⁰ Donald C. Daniel, "Sino-Soviet Relations in Naval Perspective," in Douglas T. Stuart and William T. Tow, eds., China, the Soviet Union, and the West: Strategic and Political Dimensions in the 1980s (Boulder: Westview Press, 1982), p. 119.

There is, however, some merit to the assertion that China currently is "tying down" some 46 divisions along the Sino-Soviet border. But even that assertion is somewhat misleading. For one, it is generally conceded that no more than half of the Soviet ground formations are at anything like full fighting strength at this time, with some divisions being little more than cadres. Second, if a rapprochement occurred between the PRC and the Soviet Union, it is hardly likely that all divisions would either be demobilized or redeployed to another theater of operations. Note should be made of the fact that even before the dramatic military buildup of Soviet ground forces (1969-72), some 16 divisions were already deployed along the frontier.

It is, of course, correct to conclude that a massive redeployment of Soviet forces from its border with the PRC to its European front would have an impact upon the military balance in the West. However, given that the Soviets already have a strong conventional force lead over the West now, such an increase could only affect the balance at the margins.

However, it does not follow therefore, as some have suggested, that it is in the interests of the U.S. to supply substantially increased weaponry to the PRC in order to force an even greater reallocation of Soviet forces to the PRC sector.

The major problem with such an assertion arises, as Professor Edward N. Luttwak observes, "from the consequences of the move, and not from its feasibility." The Russians might very well decide that the threat of such military cooperation was "not merely ominous in its long-term consequences but also dangerous in the short-term," and thus launch a strike against China.

There are a variety of military operations that the Soviets could employ: nuclear strike (though unlikely), a full-scale invasion, surgical strikes against Manchuria or the two north-western provinces, chemical warfare, and so on. The transfer of lethal military equipment to the PRC only raises the possibility of confrontation.

The limited U.S.-PRC alliance also has thus far failed to blunt Soviet moves to alter the military balance in Asia. On December 27, 1979, more than two years after the Sino-American rapprochement, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan and have yet to be repelled. Soviet support also made possible the Vietnamese conquest of Laos and Kampuchea, to say nothing of Hanoi's overthrow of the South Vietnamese government. The Soviets have also increased their presence in Vietnam and now have access to air and naval installation at Da Nang and Cam Ranh Bay. The Soviets also have allied themselves with the government of Indira Gandhi in New Delhi. The rapprochement between Washington and Beijing has not in fact inhibited Soviet moves either in Asia or in any part of the world.

MYTH # 2: THE PRC IS AN ALLY OF THE U.S. IN ITS WORLDWIDE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE SOVIET UNION

This myth, as Dr. Ray Cline, Senior Associate at Georgetown University's Center for Strategic and International Studies, has

observed, "has never been true, not even at the time of Carter's joyful greeting to Deng at the end of January 1979."¹¹ That China deemphasized its anti-American propaganda during the Carter years, there is no doubt; that China changed its basic values and goals, there is every doubt. In fact, the PRC has again adopted a position criticizing both the Soviet Union and the United States as "hegemonistic" powers.

Hu Yaobang, Chairman of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, in an address delivered in September 1982 at the 12th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, stated:¹²

The superpowers that practice hegemonism pose a new threat to the people of the world. In their pursuit of global domination, the superpowers have been contending on a worldwide scale with military power far exceeding that of any other countries. This is the main source of instability and turmoil in the world.

The authoritative party organ, Guangming Ribao, on September 26th, was much more explicit:¹³

The two superpowers--the Soviet Union and the United States--are the biggest international exploiters and oppressors and the main causes of instability and upheaval in the world...In the past year and more, the Reagan Administration has sought to incorporate the Third World in its main strategy of contending for hegemony with the Soviet Union. Its connivance in Israel's invasion of Lebanon, its dogged refusal to recognize the national rights of the Palestinian people, its support of the South African invasion of Angola and its interference in the internal affairs of certain countries in Central America--these actions on the part of the United States have met with strong resistance from the relevant countries and their people and the condemnation of the world.

Though the PRC, on occasion, has stood with the United States in condemning the Soviets and their proxies (e.g., boycotting the Olympics in response to Afghanistan and supporting an anti-Vietnamese coalition in Kampuchea), the PRC is still no ally of the United States. The Chinese have never claimed common

¹¹ Ray S. Cline, "U.S. Foreign Policy for Asia," in Ramon H. Meyers, ed., A U.S. Foreign Policy for Asia: The 1980s and Beyond (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1982), p. 7.

¹² Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), China Daily Report, Vol. 1, No. 174 (September 8, 1982), p. K20. The full text of Hu Yaobang's report was published on September 7, 1982, by the official news agency, Xinhua.

¹³ Reported in FBIS, China Daily Report, Vol. 1, No. 207 (October 26, 1982), p. A4.

interests with Americans, merely the possibility of parallel courses of action.

Examples of divergent PRC policies are abundant. In late September, the PRC reversed its seven-year policy of hostility to the MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) regime in Angola and negotiated to establish official diplomatic relations. Until this action the PRC had been the most important government in the world that had joined with the U.S. in refusing to recognize the Cuban sustained Luanda regime. Beijing had previously provided direct support to both the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) and more recently the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). The Chinese action directly undermines the effort by the U.S. to force the withdrawal of Cuban forces as a pre-condition for a settlement of the continuing civil wars in both Angola and Namibia.

Despite Soviet support for repression in Poland, China not only refused to impose economic sanctions on Poland but actually increased its trade with both Poland and the Soviets following the suppression of Solidarity. Beijing has strongly attacked U.S. policy in the Middle East and Central America. In fact, the only areas of the world where U.S. and Chinese policies largely coincide are in Asia, where Beijing directly fears the Soviet client states on its borders, Afghanistan and Viet Nam, and also the growth of Soviet naval power in the Western Pacific.

MYTH # 3: The PRC IS A FORCE FOR STABILITY IN THE ASIAN-PACIFIC REGION

With respect to the Asian-Pacific region, though all American administrations during the past ten years have viewed the PRC as a potential force for stability in the area, many indigenous governments in the area are far less sanguine.

China's foreign policy has caused widespread apprehension in Asia. In particular, continued Chinese support for indigenous Asian communist movements consistently has strained Beijing's relations with governments in the region. The pro-Beijing Communist Party of Malaysia recently purged Soviet elements, changed its name to the Malayan People's Army, and proclaimed: "Our party and our army will maintain the road of encircling the cities from the villages to seize political power by armed force." The foreign minister of Indonesia, Mochtar Kusumaatmadja, recently warned that "The biggest threat in the region is Communist China." He noted the emphasis in the U.S. on the growing Soviet presence, but indicated that historically China has been much more aggressive in the area. Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore have all expressly stated that they consider China dangerous and are apprehensive about the sale of lethal arms to the PRC. These three states perceive China's present "friendly" stance toward the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a temporary phenomenon based, in part, on the fact that the PRC now needs ASEAN support for its objectives in Indochina. At a future date, these governments fear the return of a belligerent attitude towards Southeast Asia, based on a "Middle Kingdom Syndrome," which views these states as tributary nations.

In late September 1982, fears of Beijing's extending its rule to Hong Kong created financial panic in the British Crown colony. Despite Prime Minister Thatcher's attempt to quell concerns during a visit to Hong Kong, little confidence exists in the survival of free enterprise if effective sovereignty is transferred to Beijing. The PRC refuses to recognize British ownership of Hong Kong Island and has demanded that de jure rule of all of Hong Kong be transferred to Beijing with the expiration of the lease on the New Territories portion of the colony in 1997.

The PRC earns about 40 percent of all its foreign exchange through Hong Kong and has made major efforts to persuade the 5.5 million Chinese residents to welcome transforming the area into a new "Chinese zone" which could maintain its present economic and social system. Public opinion polls indicate, however, that the Chinese residents prefer British to PRC rule. If the PRC cannot persuade Hong Kong to accept its sovereignty, then quite clearly it is even less likely to impress the Chinese on Taiwan with similar proposals for incorporating that territory.

MYTH # 4: DENG XIAOPING HAS FIRM CONTROL OF THE PRC

Though the so-called pragmatic reform leaders, headed by Deng Xiaoping, substantially consolidated their power base during the 12th Party Congress held in Beijing (September 1-11, 1982), strong opposition still exists to the current leadership in several important areas:

o People's Liberation Army

Resentment toward the present leadership derives from the following: (1) during the past several years, national defense has been classified as the lowest priority in the "four modernization programs" and the defense budget itself has been consistently revised downward; (2) morale problems exist within the military, in part due to primitive barracks, poor diets, substandard equipment, and the fact that large numbers of troops have been demobilized recently without any prospect for gainful employment; (3) the government's economic policies, particularly their emphasis on instituting material incentives and bonuses in factories and encouraging sharecropping as an alternative to collectives, have been seen as insufficiently socialistic; (4) Maoist philosophy as to strategy and conduct of war, which the PLA has held sacrosanct, has been diluted by the present leadership; and (5) the recent purge and humiliation of military leaders associated with Lin Biao and the "gang of four."¹⁴

¹⁴ Dreyer, op. cit., pp. 15-20.

o Leftist/Maoist faction associated with Hua Guofeng

Though most of the leadership allied with Hua has been effectively eliminated or purged, a complete eradication of this faction is near impossible for the reason that, of the 39 million members of the Communist Party, nearly 18 million "leftists" joined their ranks during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Similarly, of the 20 million party and government cadres, about 9 million benefitted from the Cultural Revolution. Most of the 9 million remain today in middle- and lower-level positions within the party and the government. Though not in a position to dictate policy, they can effectively sabotage government policies.

MYTH # 5: RAPPROCHEMENT BETWEEN THE PRC AND THE SOVIET UNION IS OUT OF THE QUESTION

Though it is highly unlikely that there will be a restoration of the close Sino-Soviet alliance that characterized the 1950s, recent events indicate the possibility of some form of reconciliation.

The Sino-Soviet dialogue began to pick up momentum in March 1982 when late Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev made a conciliatory gesture to China during a review of Soviet Asian policy in a speech in Tashkent, U.S.S.R. Emphasizing the common ground between Beijing and Moscow, instead of focusing on more customary allegations of China's alignment with the West, Brezhnev affirmed that a "socialist system" exists in China, reiterated Moscow's support for the PRC's claim to Taiwan, and used language designed to portray a new flexibility in the Soviet position on bilateral disputes with China. Brezhnev proposed reopening Sino-Soviet border negotiations (stalled since 1978) and suggested the possibility of discussing "confidence-building measures" in the specific context of the Soviet-Chinese frontier.

Brezhnev's overture was followed in September by another call for improved relations. In October, the PRC finally agreed to bilateral negotiations and allowed Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister L. I. Ilyichev and Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Qian Qichen to begin such discussions in Beijing. After six formal sessions over seventeen days, the talks produced an agreement that the two sides would continue what were called preliminary consultations on an alternating basis in Beijing and Moscow.

Brezhnev's death on November 10 and the gathering of international leaders for the funeral in Moscow provided an opportunity for the highest level Sino-Soviet official dialogue in over a decade. Chinese Foreign Minister Huang Hua met for ninety minutes with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko on November 16. The new CPSU General Secretary Yuri Andropov also appeared to go out of his way to show a continuing Soviet interest in better ties with China. During a reception for foreign dignitaries, he warmly greeted Huang Hua and chatted with him for several minutes--markedly more than the time he gave other guests.

At present, it appears that three issues block a rapprochement between the two states: (1) the large number of Soviet divisions deployed along the Sino-Soviet and Sino-Mongolian frontiers; (2) Soviet support for Vietnam's invasion and occupation of Kampuchea; and (3) the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. Some form of accommodation on one or more of the above could well occur, thus opening the door to considerably improved relations. Modest conciliatory gestures toward China on any of these issues could promote a gradual reduction of Sino-Soviet hostilities. In particular, a withdrawal or reduction of a portion of the huge Soviet military force on China's northern border could act as the most likely catalyst for a rapprochement. This could serve as a justification for further reductions of PRC military forces. More broadly, rapprochement could possibly stimulate renewed access to valuable sources of supplies for China's vast amount of Soviet-made machinery.

CONCLUSION

During the past ten years, America's foreign and military policy towards the People's Republic of China has been premised on several assertions that have proved inaccurate. For one, the rapprochement between Washington and Beijing has not demonstrably improved America's strategic balance vis-a-vis the Soviet Union. In fact, during the past ten years, America's strategic power has noticeably declined in Asia and other areas of the world.

Second, to consider the People's Liberation Army as an effective counterweight to Soviet forces, either now or in the immediate future, not only grossly overestimates China's capabilities but also seriously underestimates Soviet capabilities in the region. Moreover, the historical record belies the proposition that U.S. arms and military technology transfers to the PRC will seriously impede or restrict the Kremlin. Such a contention also unjustifiably restricts the military options that the Soviets might take vis-a-vis the PRC.

Third, it is misleading to assert that the PRC is a loyal friend, virtually an ally, of the United States in its worldwide confrontation with the Soviet Union. As a socialistic/communist state, the PRC is fundamentally and ideologically opposed to America's basic principles and values. Though China has, on occasion, opted to act in cooperation with the U.S., it has never claimed common interest with Washington. It has merely claimed the possibility of parallel courses of action with the United States.

Fourth, while the United States has been preoccupied with the Soviet threat and has viewed China strategically as a force for stability in the Asian-Pacific region, most of the states within the region are justifiably and historically suspicious of Beijing's motives and actions.

Fifth, given China's erratic and unstable political conditions, it is somewhat illusory to think that Deng has effective control of the country's domestic and military establishments.

Though the Deng faction has substantially consolidated its power base in recent months, there nevertheless are power bases within the PRC that could easily disrupt policies and force a major deviation in current policies.

Sixth, and finally, it is foolhardy to believe that some form of accommodation between the PRC and the U.S.S.R. is out of the question. While the hostility between Russians and Chinese is deeply rooted and many-faceted (cultural, historical, territorial, and ideological), there is a distinct possibility, as recent events point out, that some movement toward lessening of tensions is in the offing.

U.S. China policy should not be based upon wishful thinking, or assumptions that have proved incorrect in practice. Modest and limited working relationships, and even tacit alliances on specific international issues, with the PRC may well be appropriate. But such activities should only be undertaken when they coincide with specific U.S. national interest; but not as the implementation of a general policy, which assumes that the PRC is a continuing important strategic asset for the U.S. Such a policy is in the long-term interests of the U.S., the PRC, and our longtime Asian allies.

When Secretary Shultz holds his upcoming talks in Beijing, he should keep these points very much in mind. There is always the temptation to make friendly statements or gestures in the hope of further "strengthening" the U.S.-PRC relationship. Yet the record demonstrates that such past U.S. efforts failed to yield significant or long-term benefits either to U.S. national security or to foreign policy interests.

In Beijing, Secretary Shultz should stand firm. He should insist that any U.S. actions beneficial to the PRC, or in response to PRC demands, will be considered only if, and to the extent that, the PRC itself takes actions of direct and measurable benefit to the United States.

So far, the Shultz record on China policy is still an open book. He still has the chance of pursuing policy that meets the twin tests of furthering U.S. interests and at the same time keeping faith with America's traditional friends in Asia.