

ASSESSING THE RENEWED U.S. CONTACT WITH CHINA

This past weekend, George Bush dispatched two senior aides to Beijing for twenty-five hours of discussion with China's leaders. The Americans were the highest ranking officials to visit China since the June 4 carnage in Beijing's Tiananmen Square. From Bush critics and supporters alike, there have been loud outcries condemning the trip.

The outcry is understandable, given the atrocities committed this summer and since by the Beijing regime. But understandable too, are the reasons for the trip. High-level American-Chinese contact does not signify United States condoning of China's massacre of pro-democracy demonstrators, just as high-level American-Soviet contact in the past seven decades has not signified condoning of the gulag. It was time, it could be persuasively argued, for senior Chinese and American officials to take seats across from each other at a negotiating table. Bush's effort over the weekend to probe whether there is some ground to revive the extremely important U.S.-China strategic relationship is an appropriate use of executive responsibility. Appropriate, too, was the secrecy with which he deftly conducted his diplomatic initiative.

Reality dictates why the Bush policy can be viewed as sound. China is a nuclear power. A China with constructive ties to the U.S. has proved a force for stability in Asia and the world. China borders some of the globe's potential flashpoints. Beijing's approach to hostilities on the Korean peninsula, the Cambodian civil war, and nuclear proliferation in South Asia and the Middle East is critical to American and Asian interests. And while it is no longer correct to talk about playing the "China Card" against Moscow, the Washington-Beijing relationship nonetheless remains important so long as Soviet sights are targeted on American forces in Asia. Despite all the changes in Europe, the Soviet Union remains a military threat to the U.S. globally and in Asia. This fact is emphatically made by some who now, curiously, denounce Bush's mission to Beijing.

Spurring Reciprocal Actions. Understandably, the American public and the Washington policy-making community were taken by surprise by the Beijing trip. It occurred suddenly and secretly. They now deserve an explanation from Bush of why the trip was necessary. If he fails to provide this explanation, he invites further criticism and congressional micromanagement of Washington's relationship with Beijing. Bush partly has explained his action by implying that his probe to China will spur reciprocal actions by the Chinese. If so, then Bush's diplomatic gambit will deserve bipartisan applause. Beijing already, in fact, has lifted its ban on Voice of America reporters from operating in China; it now should stop jamming VOA broadcasts.

The VOA issue is just a start. More will have to follow over the next months if Bush's initiative to Beijing is to be judged a success. Laying out criteria for measuring this should be an integral element of a Bush strategy to explain his policy to the American public. Such criteria could include:

- ◆ ◆ Lifting of martial law in Beijing and Tibet.
- ◆ ◆ Resolution of outstanding dissident cases. Foremost among these is Fang Lizhi, China's most famous dissident currently taking refuge along with his wife in the U.S. Embassy in Beijing. The

U.S. should examine means to seek safe passage from China for them. One possible solution: an arrangement like that which allowed the East Germans who, in September, sought refuge in the West German embassy in Prague and ultimately got to West Germany. The Chinese dissidents, for example, could be given extended tourist visas and allowed by Beijing to go to the West; or they could be "expelled" by Beijing, thus saving Beijing from the humiliation of having the dissidents flee. Short of a solution allowing the dissidents to leave, the U.S. should insist that Beijing make public the names of those imprisoned, the charges against them, and the dissidents' mental and physical condition. The U.S. vigorously should seek information on the fate of the more well-known dissidents: Cao Siyuan, Wang Dan, Wang Juntao, Han Dongfang, and Chai Ling, among others.

- ◆ ◆ Reaffirmation by Beijing that it will resume the nearly decade-old "open-door" policies. Integral to this is Beijing's commitment to assure a stable and safe atmosphere for American students, businessmen, and government officials to return to China and pursue their work.
- ◆ ◆ Resumption of U.S.-Chinese cultural and academic contacts such as the Fulbright Scholar Program and resumption of the negotiations for a Peace Corps program in China. The Peace Corps' scheduled inauguration of operations in China in August was cancelled by Beijing on June 26; it would have been the first Peace Corps contingent in any communist country.
- ◆ ◆ An end to Beijing's criticism of U.S. decisions to extend the visas of Chinese studying in the U.S. Such criticism reduces American confidence that the students would be safe when they return home.
- ◆ ◆ Evidence from Beijing that it is honoring its pledges regarding missile sales to the Middle East; nuclear nonproliferation; stability on the Korean peninsula; and U.S.-PRC trade agreements involving technology transfer and protection of American investments in Asia.
- ◆ ◆ Commitment by Beijing to address the present crisis of confidence concerning the future of Hong Kong. This could include reassurances to abide by agreements set forth in the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984.
- ◆ ◆ Evidence that Beijing is examining the grievances of the pro-democracy demonstrators and the fate of those jailed.

The weekend visit by U.S. diplomats to Beijing does not dilute America's repugnance at June's brutal repression of the peaceful demonstration in that city. China's leaders must pay a price for such repression. And there has been a price imposed by the U.S. and some other countries that, by and large, remains imposed. Even greater are Beijing's self-inflicted costs: a sullen work force and an alienated intellectual class, hunted down and silenced today, destined to rise as martyrs tomorrow. More important are the costs that come with a society whose expectations, both politically and economically, have been sufficiently raised by its contacts with the outside world to know there exists a more accountable means of governance and a better way of life.

Upholding American Ideals. America has played a key role in molding the political consciousness of China. Over the past decade, the U.S. has made an extensive political, economic and social investment in China. It was not by accident that the Goddess of Democracy, erected by the students in Tiananmen Square, was modeled after the Statue of Liberty. Through American contact in the past decade and one-half, the germ of democracy infectiously has spread through China. This proves yet again the subversive nature of the American example. If China becomes isolated, this example will die. George Bush seems to understand this and thus is trying to conduct a delicately balanced China policy that upholds American ideals, pursues American interests, and offers the hope of a better tomorrow for China.

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