

# Introduction:

## Orchestrating Washington's Voice to Beijing

By Andrew B. Brick

Like any aspect of American foreign policy formulation, U.S.-China policy results from the elaborate interplay of national security concerns, bureaucratic interests and perspectives, public constituencies, and individual opinions.

The policy-making process, moreover, is complicated and often works at cross-purposes. A congressional initiative aimed at extending the length of Chinese student visas, for instance, clashes with the President's traditional prerogative to define America's immigration policies. Other factors work to affect policy-making as well. Among the most prominent: the political calendar, the global context, the bilateral context, personal relationships between Americans and Chinese, the unpredictable outcome of events clashing with bureaucratic agenda, and the capabilities of the respective actors to convey their interests successfully.

The papers gathered here were presented at a July 9 seminar focusing on the role of the congress, the press, and the private sector in affecting America's China policy. The strategies the participants employ to change the behavior of their governments are described, and the clash of diverse goals, particularly in light of the events in U.S.-China relations since the 1989 massacre at Tiananmen Square, is analyzed. This nuts and bolts approach to the subject recognizes that Washington's China policy does not stand alone, enjoying a distinctive status and managed in a single arena. Instead, it approaches China policy-making as a pluralistic process, informed simultaneously on a great variety of fronts by a great variety of voices.

Historically, America seldom has spoken with one voice when it came to China. Generations of Americans have thought they knew the Chinese well, as special friends—or demonic enemies. Indeed, for two hundred years China has intrigued the United States. Young American children digging in their sand boxes are warned—or encouraged—that their efforts may end a world away in China. Like a magnet, China has lured American soldiers plotting conquest, merchants dreaming of wealth, and missionaries proselyting for Christian salvation.<sup>1</sup>

As such, few of America's relationships with other countries have exhibited the fragility, confusion, and contradiction of the U.S.-Chinese relationship. Since the beginning of this century alone, U.S. policy toward China has shifted significantly with each Administration: from Theodore Roosevelt's indifference to Woodrow Wilson's sacrifice of Chinese sovereignty at Versailles to Franklin Roosevelt's vision of a unified, independent China. For over two decades after the communists won control of the mainland in 1949, U.S. policy sought to contain and isolate the People's Republic of China (PRC). Only in the decade and a half before the Tiananmen Square massacre had the relationship started to surmount some of its characteristic volatility.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on America's relationship with China, see: Michael Schaller, *The United States and China in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

## Structure and Process

The China network informs America's relationship with China. As is the case in Washington's relations with other important nations, the China network consists of government officials and outside parties interested in Sino-American relations. Each participant sees a different face of the issue at hand, and each has a different stake in policy determination.

At the center of the China network stands the President. His role and influence over China policy are qualitatively different than that of any other participant. He alone makes the crucial decisions that determine the general direction of U.S. China policy.

Although the President may make his role in foreign policy formulation as large as his competence and inclinations dictate, he usually delegates much of his operational authority to a handful of subordinates. Among the most important are his National Security Advisor, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretary of Commerce, the Vice President, the White House Chief of Staff and Press Secretary, and others.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, almost every cabinet secretary has responsibilities dealing with China. These advisors assist in the initiation and coordination of policy. They screen pertinent information for the President and advise him on the issues at hand and the range of choices he enjoys.

A legion of China specialists generally advises the advisors. The National Security Advisor, for instance, draws on the staff of the National Security Council (NSC) for analysis and counsel before he consults with the President. The Secretary of State chiefly relies on the East Asian Bureau of the State Department (DoS) for his papers and briefings on China, though the State Department's Bureau of Planning, Bureau of Political and Military Affairs, and Bureau of Intelligence and Research may also inform his China policy recommendations. The Secretary of Defense looks to the Defense Department's (DoD) offices of International Security Affairs (ISA), International Security Policy (ISP), and the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) to assess the military's interest in America's China policy. The Director of Central Intelligence, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretaries of Commerce and Agriculture, and the U.S. Trade Representative similarly rely on their respective department's China hands.

Interagency policy coordination generally is accomplished by these China experts. China specialists at the NSC, the Departments of State, Defense, and Commerce, and the CIA, for example, might meet to reconcile differences on U.S.-China technology transfer policy. If consensus on the issue cannot be reached, it is passed on to their superiors for resolution. If agreement cannot be reached at that level, the issue might be sent to the President for a final decision.

Policy coordination traditionally is one of the most contentious and difficult aspects of American foreign policy formulation, and the making of U.S.-China policy is no exception. Interagency rivalries, inadequate manpower, and lack of clout often obscure and complicate policy debate. Michel Oksenberg, Jimmy Carter's NSC China expert, indirectly gave voice to this in a 1984 reflection on his old job. Charged with the monitoring and implementation of presidential directives on China policy, Oksenberg noted that the task often brought him into conflict with recalcitrant bureaucracies. "To perform his multi-faceted task well," wrote Oksenberg, "an NSC staffer depends

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<sup>2</sup> For more on the structure and process of U.S. policy to China, see: Michel Oksenberg, "Reflections on the Making of American China Policy," *China Policy For the Next Decade*, George R. Packard, rapporteur, Boston, 1984.

upon assistance, often silently rendered, from middle and lower ranking officials throughout the government bureaucracy."<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the President and his core of advisors, the China network is informed by other institutions as well. Principal among these is the U.S. Congress. From the very beginning of the Republic, Congress has chafed at the logic that made the presidency the chief inspiration for foreign policy; the history of legislative-executive relations over international issues is one of recurring dispute.

America's China policy formulation has been no exception. The dilemma has been painfully clear since June 4, 1989, in the differences between the Bush Administration and many in Congress over Washington's ties to Beijing.

The Bush Administration has argued that China, despite the events in Tiananmen Square, is important and worthy of continued dialogue. Constructive U.S.-China ties over the past several decades, the Bush White House contends, have reduced tensions in Asia, contributed greatly to regional stability, and helped defuse conflicts in critical areas, principally the peace across the Taiwan Strait. Although often repeated, it remains true that by virtue of its size, geographic position, historic role, and dimensions of its military, China's centrality in Asia must be an overriding factor as Washington formulates Asia policy.

The opinion of many American congressmen, by contrast, is that China can be benignly neglected. China simply is not as important as it once was to U.S. national interests, say these critics of George Bush's policy, who cite the events in Eastern Europe and the consequent reduction in East-West tensions. Moreover, congressional critics feel the Administration's China policy fails to punish Beijing for its continuing human rights violations. The President, they have repeatedly stressed, encourages democratic and peaceful change in Eastern Europe but closes his eyes to the explicitly undemocratic regime in Beijing.

The Tiananmen Square debate reflects much about the congressional role in China policy formulation. For one thing, Congress is essentially a reactive body, putting its own stamp on decisions already taken by the President and his assistants. Congress also exercises some form of negative control on executive decisions, either by refusing to accept them or by changing their substance, direction, or timing.<sup>4</sup>

For another thing, Congress is more prone to reflect transitory shifts of public opinion than the executive branch. To no small extent, this is because it generally is more sensitive to electoral politics than the President, especially in the House of Representatives, where members must face the voters every two years.

Congressional influence on China policy is expressed through a wide variety of means. The sense of Congress can be found in the appropriations process, as it ratifies treaties, or as it approves executive branch personnel appointments. Congressional hearings, particularly in the House and Senate Subcommittees for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, can have an important effect on U.S.-China relations. Visits to Beijing by Congressman and their staffs, their speeches, their

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3 *Ibid.* p. 71-72.

4 See: Daniel Cheever and H. Field Haviland, *American Foreign Policy and the Separation of Powers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952). Congress frequently has criticized the Bush Administration as "reactive," bemoaning what many feel is a dangerous absence of China policy.

quiet interventions and consultations with the President and his key advisors also influence the course of America's China policy.

Voices outside the government help inform U.S.-China policy as well. Sino-American cultural exchanges are promoted by prominent organizations like the National Committee for U.S.-China Relations. The U.S.-China Business Council facilitates American commercial contact with the PRC. The Committee on Scholarly Communication with the People's Republic of China sponsors exchanges in the natural sciences, social sciences, and the humanities. Tourist agencies, professional associations like the AFL-CIO, and sundry American-Chinese community organizations have developed ties with counterpart PRC organizations and also have a vested interest in healthy Sino-American relations.

This is equally true for many in academia. The Johns Hopkins University Paul Nitze School for Advanced International Studies in Washington, D.C., runs a forum on China affairs and manages a unique program for American and Chinese students of international affairs at Nanjing University in Nanjing, China. Think tanks like the Washington-based Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and the Brookings Institution all staff experts in China studies who work to inform the policy debate. The Heritage Foundation publishes *Backgrounders* analyses on American policy to China, including one that outlined U.S. options for responding to the Tiananmen Square massacre within two days of the event. Another think tank, the National Institute for Public Policy, faxed periodic China updates to Washington policy makers and opinion leaders.

No institution, however, influences policy and opinion on China like the American press. In the policy arena, it is used by both Chinese and American officials for damage control and initiative advancement. As the political fallout from the Tiananmen Square massacre mounted, for example, the Chinese Embassy in Washington urged all visitors to read what they considered a relatively favorable *U.S. News and World Report* feature on China's turmoil.

The influence of the press on American public opinion is especially profound. The extensive press coverage of the pro-democracy demonstrations and suppression in Beijing made Tiananmen Square an important event in American consciousness. The massacre scenes in Beijing, vividly relayed via television, portrayed an armed suppression of student demonstrators. Tanks, soldiers, armored personnel carriers—the trappings of the military repression—came into American homes with terrifying clarity. Commentators glibly captured the event: The People's Liberation Army had turned on the people.

Indeed, it can be argued that the press contributed greatly to voicing the underlying sentiment of Americans toward China in the days and months after June 4, 1989. Largely because America's major networks aired more stories on China in the month from May 14 to June 14, 1989, than they had in the entire decade from 1972 to 1981, the words "Tiananmen Square" became linked in the American lexicon to the word "massacre."<sup>5</sup> By association, it implied a democratic revolution crushed in mid-step, violently suppressed by a legion of totalitarians.

The political debate that subsequently ensued made George Bush and his China policy the target of a critical press. The *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* frequently questioned the

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5 See: S. Robert Lichter, "Media insight: TV's China Syndrome," Council for National Policy, July 1989; and "The Gallup Survey on American Attitudes Toward China in the Wake of the June, 1989 Crackdown" (Princeton, New Jersey: The Gallup Organization, Inc., July 28-31, 1989.)

President's stewardship of the crisis. Newspaper coverage bemoaned the poverty of his rhetoric and his tin ear for the greater issues of democratic politics. Editorialists lambasted his inability to find ringing words to express America's dismay and repugnance at the events in China, and denounced him for dispatching his National Security Advisor to bandy words "with the butchers of Tiananmen Square" so soon after they had slaughtered protesting students. In such light, it is not surprising that George Bush's well-known problems with the so-called "vision thing" may have multiplied significantly in his China policy.

### **The China Network and U.S. Policy**

The China network is important to the policy-making process for several reasons. Its very existence enhances America's capability to respond effectively to policy challenges. Confronted with the varied interests of a community concerned with China policy, government officials must cope with the forces of democratic consensus. Although consensus building is not necessarily a prerequisite of policy formulation, the sundry voices of a concerned network do help clarify the tasks at hand.

Among the most important tasks involved in policy-making are:

- ◆ ◆ Developing a coherent conception of U.S. interests.
- ◆ ◆ Articulating problems, collecting information, and identifying issues that may require action.
- ◆ ◆ Developing alternative courses of action and analyzing their costs and benefits.
- ◆ ◆ Making decisions, without undue delay.
- ◆ ◆ Taking effective action as required.
- ◆ ◆ Assessing the results of action and revising policy thoroughly.<sup>6</sup>

The existence of a China network also vests special interests and perspectives. In this instance, organizational arrangements are crucial. How power is distributed in an organization or network and the skill key players use to advance their interests determine whether and how effectively particular considerations will be represented.

Finally, and perhaps most important, the existence of a China network helps legitimate China policy. It makes decisions broadly acceptable by assuring that those with relevant competence are heard. Interaction among the President, Congress, the bureaucracy, the press, academia, private foundations, and think tanks, assures the representation of multiple interests, and enhances the likelihood that even those who sought a different policy will accept the policy adopted.

### **Orchestrating Washington's Voices**

The papers collected here seek to identify the many voices that make America's China policy, focusing especially on the principal public players in the China network. Special attention is given to where the network defines—or fails to define—U.S. interests in Sino-American relations. Three aspects of policy formulation particularly are highlighted. These are:

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6 For more on this see: Graham Allison and Peter Szanton, *Remaking Foreign Policy: The Organizational Connection* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1980), p. 21.

- ◆◆ Capabilities of each of the China network's participants, especially the quality of the experts and their organizations and the means they employ to influence policy.
- ◆◆ Perspectives of the network's participants, examining how the principal players see the issues under consideration, define their interests, and reconcile their differences.
- ◆◆ Coordination of policy implementation, focusing on the divergent interests that frequently inform the policy-making process.

*America's China Policy and the Role of the Congress, the Press, and the Private Sector* explores the varied interests that define America's tie to the People's Republic and, where possible, seeks to identify which interests advance which policies. The critical issue in making America's China policy is similar to almost every other aspect of U.S. foreign policy-making: a pluralistic society committed to continuing meaningful U.S.-China relations must seek to balance many objectives. How best to go about achieving such a balance is the purpose of the papers gathered here.

