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Sino-U.S. Relations in the Era of the Post-Cold War: Issues and Implications

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DRAFT

Over the past 22 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the United States, Sino-U.S. relations have made much progress. Among other things, China and the U.S. signed a bilateral agreement on November 15, 1999 after 13 years of negotiations that was a crucial step toward making China a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO). This is an event of immediate and far-reaching historical significance in the development of Sino-U.S. relations. To reach agreement with the U.S. negotiators, China has made many concessions--lifting the barriers on imported agricultural products; risking a new wave of unemployment; opening its lucrative telecommunications market; significantly reducing tariffs; and lowering protections for its car industry, etc. In the ultimate, the settlement of this problem is helpful to the comprehensive development of economic and trade relations on the basis of equality and mutual benefit to the two countries, and will also create positive conditions for the long-term healthy and stable development of Sino-U.S. relations.

However, Sino-U.S. relations are still dogged by three major issues in the era of the Post-Cold War. The purpose of this article is to address these issues, and to show how these issues have impaired the bilateral relations.

### The Taiwan Issue

The Taiwan issue remains the most important and most sensitive problem in Sino-U.S. relations after the end of the Cold War. The Taiwan issue is entirely a Chinese internal affair and evidence of this is China's civil war between China's Communist Party and the National Party. Had the United States not sent its Seventh Fleet to the Taiwan Straits in the beginning of the 1950s, the issue could have been solved long ago.

The United States has done three things regarding the Taiwan issue. First, it has increased its arms sales to Taiwan both in quantitative and qualitative terms. In the 1982 Joint Communiqué, the U.S. promised that arms sales to Taiwan "will not exceed, either in qualitative or in quantitative terms the level of those supplied in recent years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and China"; it will not seek to carry out a long term policy of arms sales to Taiwan; and it does intend to gradually reduce its sale of arms, leaving over a period of time to a final resolution of the Taiwan issue. However, the U.S. has not kept its commitment.

Today, the U.S. is essentially the sole source of imported arms for Taiwan's military. Of the \$3.5 billion in arms sold to Taiwan between 1993 and 1995, the U.S. share was \$3.2 billion.<sup>1</sup> From 1991 to 1998, the U.S. foreign military sales agreements with Taiwan totaled \$9 billion while deliveries amounted to \$12.3 billion during the same period.<sup>2</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Defense (DOD), Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers*, Washington, D.C.: DOD, Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, 1996. Quoted from John P. McClaran, "U.S. Arms Sales to Taiwan, Implications for the Future of the Sino-U.S. Relationship", *Asian Survey*, Vol. XL, No. 4, p. 624 (July/August 2000).

<sup>2</sup> U.S. DOD, Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), DSCA (Facts Book) *Foreign Military Sales, Foreign Military Sales, Foreign Military Construction Sales and Military Assistance Facts*, pp. 1-2, Washington, D.C.: DSCA, Deputy for Financial Management Comptroller, September 1998. Quoted from John P. McClaran, "U.S. Arms Sales to Taiwan, Implications for the Future of the Sino-U.S. Relationship", *Asian Survey*, Vol. XL, No. 4, p. 625 (July/August 2000).

## DRAFT

U.S. is also considering the provision of TMD to Taiwan. Given that the cost of a single F-16 is approximately \$25 million, Taiwan's reliance on the U.S. is decisive. These arms will only bolster Taiwan's separatist forces and increase tensions across the Taiwan Straits. Also, the supply of weapons could drag the United States into a war that it is neither prepared for nor willing to fight.

The U.S. insists that the Joint Communiqué is an executive branch decision, not an international treaty, and thus does not carry the force of law in the U.S. domestic political context. China maintains that arms sales are a flagrant violation of her sovereignty and America has broken its commitment on such sales agreed to by itself in the 1982 Joint Communiqué, and thinks that international law has precedence over a country's domestic law. China believes that the U.S. intends to revise or cancel out their obligations under the 1982 bilateral, international agreement on this pretext.

Undoubtedly, the fact that the U.S. is Taiwan's largest supplier of arms is the basis for one of the most important disputes between the U.S. and China, with far reaching implications for the bilateral relations.

Second, the U.S. permitted Mr. Lee Teng-hui to make a private visit to the U.S. to his alma mater, Cornell University, which caused the Taiwan Straits crisis among the mainland of China, Taiwan, and the United States.

When the States Department announced this decision in May 1995, the U.S. "reversed a 16-year old U.S. practice. That practice had been to bar Taiwanese leaders from visiting the United States on grounds that it would antagonize Beijing and contradict Washington's 'one China' position."<sup>3</sup>

This crisis ended a year later. As the crisis unfolded and in its aftermath, the Clinton administration came to realize the need to be more realistic, recognize the interests involved and the limits on pursuing them, and take clearer and more cautious positions on this crucial issue. So this crisis served to jump-start the bilateral relationship that had been stalled by Lee Teng-hui's visit. A series of visits by high-level government officials ensued, leading to official state visits by President Jiang Zemin to the U.S. in 1997 and President Clinton's to China the following year. Both governments declared that a constructive strategic partnership had been established. The U.S. reaffirmed that it is adhered to one China policy and clarified its position on Taiwan, which become known as "three No's" policy: no support for Taiwan independence; no support for "two Chinas" or "one China, one Taiwan"; and no support for Taiwan's membership in international organization in which statehood is a requirement.

Third, the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) passed by the U.S. Congress in 1979 contradicts the spirit of the principles governing the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the United States.

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<sup>3</sup> Audrey Kurth Cronin and Patrick M. Cronin, "The Realistic Engagement of China", *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 19, No. 1, p.154, Winter 1996.

## DRAFT

For years, the Taiwan Relations Act has been the keynote of the U.S. stand toward the Taiwan issue. The U.S. government, while declaring it values U.S. relations with China, says at the same time it wants to abide by the Taiwan Relations Act which means that it unwilling to stop its interference in China's internal affairs. Indeed, the Act almost revived pledges of the Mutual Defense Treaty, which expired on December 31, 1979, and even went further in extending coverage to protect Taiwan from boycotts and embargoes not mentioned in the former treaty. Thus the U.S. policy towards China is enmeshed in a dilemma.

The Taiwan Relations Act is America's effort to strengthen its relations with Taiwan. Beijing views that the U.S. support Taiwan under the jurisdiction of the TRA as the main obstacle to both China's goal of reunification under the one country, two systems framework and the development of normal relations with the U.S.

And again, there is the "Taiwan Security Enhancement Act (TSEA)" passed by the U.S. House of Representatives last year, which seeks to strengthen military ties between the U.S. and Taiwan through deeper interaction in operational matters, and expands the scope and scale of military training opportunities for Taiwan in the U.S. China views the TSEA as having removed any pretense over reestablishing the 1954 Defense Treaty with Taiwan and an irreconcilable block to reunification by boosting the voice of pro-independence forces behind the safety of U.S. military protection. It will pose a severe threat to China's security and increase the chances of military confrontation across the Taiwan Straits. Beijing also sees it as having jeopardized the peace and stability of the Asia-Pacific region and world at large. The United States should take effective measures to prevent the Taiwan Security Enhancement Act from being adopted as a law.

During the presidential campaign, George W. Bush announced definitely that the United States would help Taiwan with its self-defense, which altered the "ambiguous policy" the Clinton administration employed in its relations with Taiwan and the mainland of China. This is an important signal that the U.S. government led by Bush Jr. would undermine the one-China policy.

All these moves by the United States have constituted serious violations of the three signed joint communiqués and commitments the U.S. Government made to China. The Taiwan issue has become the single biggest obstacle to establish fully normal relations between China and the U.S., and narrow the options for both sides to either conflict or cooperation in the future.

### The BMD Issue

Another issue influencing Sino-U.S. relations is the U.S.' plan of Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD), which includes the National Missile Defense (NMD) and the Theater Missile Defense (TMD) systems.

The United States formulated the Strategic Defense Initiative, which aims for comprehensive defense against large-scale missile attack, as early as during the Reagan

## DRAFT

administration. At that time, the United States had to abandon its plans because the project consumed too much money and suffered continuous failures in its tests. In 1993, President Clinton, who had just come into power, announced the beginning of the Ballistic Missile Defense plan. At this time, the U.S. said that the U.S. development of NMD and TMD is entirely to deal with “rogue states” and to strengthen U.S. security. Recently, the Bush administration declared that the U.S. will make the fourth test of NMD, and wished to amend and threaten to withdraw from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM).

In fact, the United States possesses the largest and most advanced nuclear and conventional weapons arsenal in the world. For the United States, the current development of NMD and TMD is not the terminus of the road of developing a missile defense system, but a step to developing a more advanced comprehensive strategic defense system. Maintaining global hegemony and absolute security is the important strategic objective of the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, national security cannot be separated from international security in contemporary international relations. Absolute security sought by one nation alone cannot be stable. The strategic instability resulting from the United States’ development of BMD will only further weaken its own national security. Only with the insurance of common security, could the United States be secure.

At present, the United States’ efforts to spur on the deployment of NMD and TMD, has become the focus of the international community, and they consider the BMD plan as “unreasonable”, for it has been forbidden under the ABM Treaty.

Moreover, it does not only affect the process of nuclear disarmament and undermine the basis of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, but can also bring about a new arms race, possibly extending to an outer space arms race.

For these reasons, China has thought that the nature of NMD and TMD is to seek a unilateral military and security advantages. If the deployment of NMD and TMD approved, this would undoubtedly damage the stability and balance of the international situation and trigger a new round of the arms race. It would also reverse the process of nuclear disarmament, and even destroy the International Non-Proliferation Regime that was reached with many difficulties by the international community. The action of develop, deploy and transfer the anti-ballistic missile system with strategic defense potential does not strengthen security or prevent the proliferation of missiles, on the contrary it only damages security and violates the ABM Treaty. It is a widely known fact that during the Cold War years, the AMB Treaty constituted a cornerstone of global strategic stability, paving the way for the limitation and reduction of offensive strategic weapons between the United States and the former Soviet Union. Despite the drastic changes in the international situation following the end of the Cold War, the crucial role of the AMB Treaty to international security remains unchanged. The ABM Treaty shares very significance for safeguarding the global strategic balance and stability and maintains the momentum of disarmament process and should be strictly adhered to. Pending the

elimination of nuclear weapons, any substantive amendment to this treaty will undermine global strategic stability.

China has adopted a clear-cut stance on opposing the U.S. NMD and TMD programs. China is a peace-loving country and an important force in safeguarding regional and world peace as well as global stability. As a permanent member of the Security Council and the largest developing country, safeguarding the global balance and stability is an unshirkable duty of China. Not only that, the places, scale and capability of the NMD and TMD deployment will directly infringe upon China's strategic security interests. Furthermore, there is the possibility of Taiwan's involvement in TMD. The U.S. announced that it plans to incorporate Taiwan in the proposed TMD systems. If extended to include Taiwan, TMD could not only act to integrate Taiwan into a U.S.-led joint command system, which would be tantamount to the creation of a de facto military alliance, but also eliminate the only credible option left to China to deter Taiwan from seeking independence. As Premier Zhu Rongji once declared, "We ... are firmly and particularly opposed to including Taiwan in the TMD because it not only violates international missile agreements but also interferes in China's affairs and encroached on China's sovereignty and territorial integrity."<sup>4</sup>

### The Human Rights Issue

The third issue influencing Sino-U.S. relations is human rights. In the 1990s, the United States politicized human rights and used the issue to discredit China.

The U.S. has used the issue of human rights in various ways to defame China, cause trouble and interfere in China's internal affairs. Also, the U.S. opposition to China in the human rights affairs, contravenes the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and runs against the prevailing trend in international human rights: dialogue, not confrontation. Also, the U.S. had an intention to get a draft resolution on China past the UN Commission on Human Rights. However, these China-bashing activities have repeatedly failed.

Chinese Government has all along valued human rights and made continuous efforts to protect Chinese people's human rights. Now the human rights situation in China is the best it's ever been in the country's history, and this improvement is recognized internationally. Chinese Government believes all countries should conduct dialogue about human rights issues in a way that shows respect and equal status in order to expand common ground and minimize differences. China is ready to work with other members of the international community in a joint effort to promote the sound development of the international human rights cause in accordance with the purpose and principles of the UN Charter.

In fact, the United States has used human rights issue as a diplomatic tool and provoked confrontation. Always posing as a "human rights judge" and formulating resolutions, the U.S. seeks nothing but hegemony. It interferes in other countries' internal affairs and

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<sup>4</sup> "Chines Premier's Press Conference, full text", BBC Worldwide Monitoring, March 16, 1999.

imposes its values, including its human rights views, upon others. All of this is done under the guise of human rights. Anyone who refuses to follow the United States' edicts will be subjected to punishment, threat of force, or even the use of force.

Otherwise, the United States has long practiced a double standard on the issue of human rights. Every year, the U.S. State Department produces a political biased report on human rights conditions in different countries, criticizing China and other countries. However, the report is always blind to human rights problems in the United States itself. One-fourth of all the prisoners in the world are in U.S. prisons, and 49 percent of U.S. prisoners are black, even though the black population accounts for only 13 percent of the country's total. In the United States, the infant mortality rate of blacks is three times that of whites. Every year, 15 out of every 100,000 young people are killed.<sup>5</sup>

It seems that the United States forgot one thing while obsessing over China: it did not join the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights until 1992. It drags its feet still in signing the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. These two covenants are the basis for examining human rights abuses via the United Nations. In addition to this, the United States remains among only a handful of nations that have not joined the Convention on Children's Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Kinds of Discrimination against Women. For a country that bills itself as a world champion of human rights, not signing above-mentioned agreements is ridiculous and hard to understand.

### Conclusion

These three issues are important in determining the future of Sino-U.S. relations. As long as these issues are unsettled, it will be difficult for Sino-U.S. relations to develop in a healthy manner. The development of China-U.S. relations is an interactive process and has its own logic, either country should be better prepared for a more realistic attitude about it. The Sino-U.S. relationship's magnitude has great significance for other countries and regions, particularly the Asian-Pacific area, since China and the United States are large influential nations in the world. Maintaining and developing friendly and cooperative ties and normal state-to-state relations between China and the United States, will be important to safeguarding world peace and promoting the development of the global economy.

Sino-U.S. relations, though experiencing many twists and turns, have developed with the mutual efforts of both countries. The Sino-U.S. relationship is now facing the opportunity of further development and improvement in the era of the Post-Cold War, however, there have issues mentioned above that need to be urgently resolved between the two countries. If both the United States and China insist on examining and handling Sino-U.S. relations from a strategic and long-term perspective, and if the two countries abide by the three joint communiqués and relevant promises, particularly the principles of mutually respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity and non-intervention into internal affairs,

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<sup>5</sup> "Attitude Toward Cult Reflects US Double Standard on Human Rights", *People's Daily*, April 21, 2000. Quoted from *Beijing Review*, Vol. 43, No. 20, p. 24, May 15, 2000.

DRAFT

the Sino-U.S. relationship will strive forward in the new century toward the goal of establishing a constructive strategic partnership.

DRAFT