

The Diplomatic Face of China's Grand Strategy: A Rising Power's Emerging Choice*

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Much of the debate about the rise of China since the early 1990s has addressed two questions: how fast are China's economic and military capabilities increasing; and how should the world, especially the United States, respond to this emerging great power (for example, contain or engage)?¹ Assessing the significance of China's growing capability and the advisability of alternative ways of responding to it, requires a grasp of the way leaders in Beijing seek to realize their nation's interests given the constraints imposed by their own resources and the international context within which they must operate. This article analyses such efforts by examining the role of diplomacy in China's grand strategy. It argues that after several years of ad hoc attempts to deal with the new challenges that accompanied the end of the Cold War, a clearer consensus on China's basic foreign policy line began to emerge among Party leaders in 1996. This consensus, tantamount to the country's grand strategy, has provided a relatively coherent framework for the PRC's subsequent international behaviour and the expected contribution of diplomacy to the country's security.²

During much of the Cold War, Beijing's overriding challenge was to ensure a relatively weak China's security in the face of pressing threats from the superpowers. The priority was clearly to address core survival concerns (territorial and political integrity) and the imperatives for Chi-

* In addition to cited publications, this article draws on approximately 105 hours of interviews the author conducted in Beijing (65 hours in June–July 1998, March–April and October 2000), Shanghai (15 hours in June–July 2001), Washington, D.C. (10 hours in February 2000), Tokyo (15 hours in March 1999). The interview subjects (promised confidentiality) were civilian officials and military officers, as well as advisers and independent analysts. Their institutional affiliations are available upon request from the author. I thank Tang Wei and Chen Cheng for their research assistance. Research support for this project has been provided by the Smith Richardson Foundation as well as the University of Pennsylvania's Research Foundation and Center for East Asian Studies.

1. See Michael E. Brown, Owen R. Cote, Jr., Sean M. Lynn-Jones and Steven E. Miller (eds.), *The Rise of China* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000). For overviews of the containment versus engagement debate, see especially David Shambaugh, "Containment or engagement of China: calculating Beijing's responses," *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Fall 1996), p. 202; Gerald Segal, "East Asia and the 'constraint' of China," *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (Spring 1996), pp. 107–135.

2. This consensus constitutes a grand strategy for China in the sense the term is often employed by international relations scholars – the distinctive combination of military, political and economic means by which a state seeks to ensure its national security. For this broad understanding of grand strategy, as distinct from military strategy, see Paul Kennedy, "Grand strategy in war and peace: toward a broader definition," in Paul Kennedy (ed.), *Grand Strategies in War and Peace* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984). Richard Rosecrance and Arthur A. Stein (eds.), *The Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993). Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947–1958* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

nese diplomacy were correspondingly straightforward. The tight constraints of bipolarity resulted first in alliance with the Soviets as a necessary counter to the perceived threat from the U.S. and then, after a fruitless effort to unite with the Third World in opposing both superpowers, in a security entente with the U.S. to counter the perceived threat from the Soviets. Today, however, China has greater strength and also believes it faces few immediate threats. In addition to providing for core survival concerns, China's contemporary grand strategy is designed to engineer the country's rise to the status of a true great power that shapes, rather than simply responds to, the international system. Achieving this goal, however, will take several decades of continued economic and military modernization during which China must sustain its recently impressive record of growth. It also presents a tough diplomatic challenge. As had become clear by the mid-1990s, China's expanding, yet still limited, power had already begun to elicit worried reactions from the U.S. and China's Asian neighbours. Concerned about the dangerous possibilities inherent in these reactions, since 1996 Beijing has forged a diplomatic strategy with two broad purposes: to maintain the international conditions that will make it feasible for China to focus on the domestic development necessary if it is to increase its relative (not just absolute) capabilities; and to reduce the likelihood that the U.S. or others with its backing will exploit their current material advantage to abort China's ascent and frustrate its international aspirations.³ These considerations have resulted in efforts to reassure potential adversaries who had grown increasingly worried about China's rise and also efforts to encourage the other major powers to view China as an indispensable, or at least attractive, international partner.

Elements of China's present diplomatic approach were evident before 1996,⁴ indeed, as far back as the early 1980s. As tensions with the Soviet

3. Swaine and Tellis refer to China's current grand strategy as "the calculative strategy," also emphasizing that China's approach is one for a state that faces a very tough challenge in trying to become a peer competitor of the currently dominant U.S. See Michael D. Swaine and Ashley J. Tellis, *Interpreting China's Grand Strategy: Past, Present, and Future* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2000), p. xi. On the alternative possibilities for adjusting relations between a dominant and rising power, see Robert Powell, *In the Shadow of Power: States and Strategies in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); A.F.K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

4. In particular, China's attempt to resolve disputes with bordering states and promote "good relations with neighbours," to improve relations with the West and Japan after sanctions were imposed following the crackdown on demonstrations in 1989, to eschew strategic alignments or alliances, and to play a constructive role in international organizations all presaged the more concerted and coherent diplomatic offensive that would take shape in 1996. On the early 1990s, see Zhu Qizhen, "China's foreign policy: independent policy of peace," *Beijing Review*, Vol. 34, No. 17 (1991), pp. 35–39; Qian Qichen, "Adhering to independent foreign policy," *Beijing Review*, Vol. 34, No. 52 (1991), pp. 7–10; Qian Qichen, "An independent foreign policy of peace: excerpts from Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen's March 12, 1992 speech," *Beijing Review*, Vol. 35, No. 13 (1992), pp. 13–15; Xing Hua, "China's successful diplomacy," *Beijing Review*, Vol. 35, No. 19 (1992), pp. 12–16; Liu Huaqiu, "China's diplomatic achievements in 1992," *Beijing Review*, Vol. 35, No. 52 (1992), pp. 8–11; Chen Qimao, "New approaches in China's foreign policy: the post-cold War era,"

Union ebbed, Deng Xiaoping envisaged a politically stable China embracing a more independent foreign policy that would take advantage of a less threatening international environment in which bipolarity and the risk of superpower war would give way to multipolarity and a peaceful opportunity for economic development.⁵ With less of a need to address immediate military challenges, China hoped to focus on the tasks of modernization that would provide the foundation for realizing the century-old nationalist goal of making the country a rich, powerful and respected member of the community of modern states.

But, as described below, it took until the mid-1990s for Beijing to adapt Deng's strategic logic effectively, in part because the post-Cold War world turned out to be significantly different from the one Deng had anticipated. First, although the Chinese Communist Party retained its firm grip on power, the domestic political challenge of 1989 and the serial collapse and partial disintegration of one-party communist states elsewhere between 1989 and 1991 had elevated the salience of "unity and stability" at home as an important security consideration. Thus, it was more important than ever to ensure continuation of the economic development on which domestic political order largely depended for a regime whose ideological foundation had eroded. Secondly, although the risk of world war remained low, the risk of China's involvement in limited military conflicts over sovereignty disputes along its periphery had grown. Thus, it was important to reduce the growing possibility that others would be united by their anxiety about a purported "China threat." And thirdly, although the bipolarity of the Cold War had indeed faded, it had given way to an unexpected era of American unipolarity rather than the dawn of multipolarity. Thus, it was necessary to cope with the resulting potential dangers China saw in surprisingly robust American primacy – reflected both in the stunning demonstrations of U.S. military superiority in the Persian Gulf and the Balkans and the enviable performance of the U.S. economy. After several years of struggling with these challenges, in 1996 Beijing began to make the adjustments described below that resulted in a relatively coherent approach.

Before proceeding, however, a brief comment about my characterization of China's diplomacy reflecting a "grand strategy" is in order. Some might argue that the term overstates the coherence of China's foreign policy. However, although the power of the paramount leader in Beijing today is less than it was under Mao or Deng, the regime's Leninist

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Asian Survey, Vol. 33, No. 3 (1993), pp. 237–251; Bonnie S. Glaser, "China's security perceptions: interests and ambitions," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (1993), pp. 252–71; Wei Zhongyan, "China's diplomacy in 1993," *Beijing Review*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (1994), pp. 10–15.

5. See Deng Xiaoping, "We must safeguard world peace and ensure domestic development, May 29, 1984," *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/dengxp/vol3/text/cl200.html>. See Ye Zicheng, "Zhongguo shixing daguo wajiao zhanlue shizaibixing" ("The imperative for China to implement a great power diplomatic strategy"), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* (*World Economics and Politics*), No. 1 (2000), pp. 5–10; Michael Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment* (Washington, D.C.: National Defence University Press, 2000), pp. xxiv, 3, 9–10, 11.

structure endures and, especially on major foreign policy matters, enables the Party centre to provide the broad direction within which actors must operate. And while there are differences about the wisdom of particular policy choices, on the most important foreign policy issues a consensus has formed.⁶ As a consequence of international constraints and China's experience in the early post-Cold War years, a *de facto* grand strategy has emerged – one that seeks to maintain the conditions conducive to China's continued growth and to reduce the likelihood others would unite to oppose China. After a brief discussion highlighting the principal influences that shaped this consensus, the article examines the key elements of the diplomacy it has yielded and considers its durability and implications for international security in the coming decades.

Stimuli for Change

In the early 1990s, China's Cold War grand strategy (siding with the less threatening of the world's two superpowers) was dead, but a new direction was not yet clear. Until 1992, China's leaders were focused on addressing the immediate internal political and economic challenges that had emerged at the end of the 1980s and had culminated in the widespread demonstrations of spring 1989. Foreign policy was limited essentially to small steps to try to repair the damage to the country's stature and reduce the isolation that followed international outrage about the military crackdown in Tiananmen Square on 3–4 June 1989. After 1992, however, the regime began to evince greater self-confidence at home and abroad, apparently satisfied that it had weathered not only its own internal difficulties but also the political storm of communist collapses throughout the former Soviet Empire.⁷ With a decisive push provided by Deng Xiaoping and sustained by Jiang Zemin, aggressive economic reforms re-ignited rapid growth catalysed by large-scale foreign trade and investment.⁸ The resulting boom had international political effects as Beijing refocused on peace and development as the central themes of its diplomacy. It stepped up the emphasis on improved relations with neighbouring states – engaging in constructive dialogue about border disputes, normalizing state-to-state relations, and working to manage “problems left over from history.” In 1993, China and Taiwan even opened unofficial talks and began to establish a framework for expanding economic, social and academic exchanges. And in 1994, with memories

6. See Paul Heer, “A house united,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 79, No. 4 (July–August 2000) pp. 18–25; Swaine and Tellis, *Interpreting China's Grand Strategy*, p. 8. On dissenting views, see *ibid.* p. 81.

7. According to the Director of the Foreign Affairs Office under the State Council, China had “withstood the impact from the drastic changes in Eastern Europe and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, smashed Western sanctions ...” (Liu Huaqiu, “Strive for a peaceful international environment,” *Jiefang ribao* (*Liberation Daily*), 17 November 1997, FBIS-CHI-97-321; author's interviews, June–July 1998).

8. See Suisheng Zhao, “Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour: elite politics in post-Tiananmen China,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 33, No. 8 (1993), pp. 739–756; Nicholas R. Lardy, *China in the World Economy* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for International Economics, 1994).

of Tiananmen Square fading, U.S. President Clinton began to emphasize economic engagement and called for an end to the annual American debate linking renewal of "most favoured nation" trade status with Beijing's domestic and foreign policy behaviour.⁹ China's international prospects seemed to be brightening.

Yet as Beijing re-emerged from the shadow of the 1989 violence, it confronted a more suspicious, less forgiving world than when it had provided a useful counter to a threatening Soviet Union. Consequently, in the mid-1990s, China's international position again deteriorated when others were quick to react with alarm to what they saw as an increasingly powerful PRC's assertive behaviour in the South China Sea (where it seemed willing to deploy military assets to buttress its claim to disputed territory) and the Taiwan Strait (where it undertook military exercises including missile tests in 1995–96 to highlight the risks for Taipei if it renounced the ideal of reunification). By spring 1996 Beijing seemed to face an international environment potentially more hostile than at any time since the late 1970s. Concerns about a rising China's international behaviour had successively antagonized the ASEAN states, crystallized the view of an important segment of the U.S. foreign policy elite that China represented an emerging challenge to American interests in Asia, and even aroused Japan's fears about the PRC's future role in the region.¹⁰ Thus, although China was increasing its capabilities, as others reacted to what Beijing believed were simply necessary steps to ensure its own interests, greater capabilities were not clearly enhancing the country's security. China's leaders were caught in the familiar dynamic of the security dilemma.¹¹ And as is often the case in such circumstances, they focused less on their own role in provoking concern and more on what they saw as others' unwarranted and threatening hostility.¹²

9. "Text of President Clinton's address about China," CNN transcript 406–2, 26 May 1994, LEXIS-NEXIS, Reed Elsevier Inc. (hereafter LEXIS-NEXIS).

10. See Aaron Friedberg, "Ripe for rivalry: prospects for peace in a multipolar Asia," *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Winter 1993/1994), pp. 5–33; Denny Roy, "Hegemon on the horizon? China's threat to East Asian security," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Summer 1994), pp. 149–168; Thomas J. Christensen, "Chinese realpolitik," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 75, No. 5 (1996), pp. 37–52; Allen S. Whiting, "ASEAN eyes China: the security dimension," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (1997), pp. 299–322; Richard Bernstein and Ross H. Munro, *The Coming Conflict with China* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997); Robert S. Ross, "The 1995–96 Taiwan Strait confrontation: coercion, credibility, and the use of force," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (2000), pp. 87–123; Ye Zicheng, "The imperative for China," p. 5.

11. Simply put, the vexing choice captured by the term "security dilemma" is the following: take steps to enhance one's security even though this may worry others and trigger a reaction ultimately undermining security, or accept the risks to one's security that may follow from self-restraint.

12. See Robert Jervis, "Hypotheses on misperception," *World Politics*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (April 1968), pp. 454–479. Although such a lack of empathy is not unique to Chinese leaders, the sharp limits on domestic debate about the nation's foreign policy may exacerbate the problem. See Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment*, pp. xxxi–xxxii.

Perceived threats. The potential threat from a hostile U.S. topped the list of Beijing's newly acute security concerns.¹³ After the demise of its Soviet rival, an unchecked U.S. with the peerless and improving high-tech military capabilities on display ever since the Gulf War was free to undertake repeated military interventions around the globe. Most worrying was its decision to dispatch two aircraft carrier battle groups to the area around Taiwan in response to China's coercive diplomacy during 1995–96 intended to weaken separatist sentiment on the island. This experience led Beijing increasingly to focus its military thinking on the possibility of armed conflict in the Straits involving the U.S. In addition, Beijing was concerned about nearly simultaneous U.S. efforts to update and upgrade its network of Cold War alliances, in particular those with Australia and Japan. China saw these as part of an American attempt to ensure its continued international dominance. The East Asian facet of this strategy allegedly entailed exploiting the notion of a "China threat" to "sow divisions [among the region's states and] ... to prevent China from becoming developed and powerful."¹⁴ Defense Secretary William Perry's assertion that there were two U.S. "anchors in the Asia-Pacific Region," Australia in the south and Japan in the north, reinforced Beijing's view that the U.S. had an incipient anti-China containment policy.¹⁵

Though Beijing expressed concern about the evolving U.S.–Australia alliance, it was the prospect of change in U.S.–Japan relations that it found most alarming.¹⁶ Chinese scepticism about Japan's commitment to a peaceful foreign policy coloured Beijing's interpretation of the revised guidelines for U.S.–Japan military co-operation in the post-Cold War era being hammered out in 1996.¹⁷ While Washington and Tokyo portrayed

13. For a view of this change in U.S. Asia policy in 1994 (from a sharply reduced to an increasingly active role), see Lu Youzhi, "Chongxin shenshi Zhongguo de anquan huanjing" ("A fresh examination of China's security environment"), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi*, No. 1 (2000), pp. 58–59; Fang Hua, "Yatai anquan jiagou de xianzhuang, qushi ji Zhongguo de zuoyong" ("The current Asia-Pacific security framework, trends and China's role"), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi*, No. 2 (2000), p. 12.

14. Fu Liqun, "Several basic ideas in U.S. strategic thinking," *Beijing Zhongguo junshi kexue* (*Beijing China Military Science*), 20 February 1997, pp. 28–37. See also Zhang Dezhen, "Qianghua junshi tongmeng buhe shidai chaoliu" ("Strengthening military alliances does not conform with trend of the times"), *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*), 31 January 1997, p. 6; Fang Hua, "The current Asia-Pacific security framework," p. 12; Chu Shulong and Wang Zaibang, "Guanyu guoji xingshi he wo duiwai zhanlue ruogan zhongda wenti de sikao" ("Reflections on some important questions about the international situation and our external strategy"), *Xiandai guoji guanxi* (*Contemporary International Relations*), No. 8 (1999), p. 20; Lu Youzhi, "A fresh examination," pp. 58–59.

15. Li Xuejiang, "The 'two anchors' of the United States," *Renmin ribao*, 6 August 1996, FBIS-CHI-96-156.

16. China mainly objected to possible Australian co-operation with the U.S. on ballistic missile defences. See Tang Guanghui, "Behind the warming of Australian-U.S. relations," *Beijing shijie zhishi* (*Beijing World Affairs*), No. 20 (16 October 1996), pp. 19–21, FBIS; "Australia: PRC criticism over security pact with U.S. noted," *Melbourne Radio Australia*, 7 August 1996, FBIS; Zhang Dezhen, "Strengthening military alliances." The concern endures. See Li Xuejiang, "RMRB warns Australia NMD program could 'lead to greater danger,'" *Renmin ribao*, 22 July 2000, p. 3, FBIS-CHI-2000-0722.

17. For the widespread argument that unlike the Germans, who had undertaken "the kind of self-introspection" that "promoted European reconciliation," Japan refuses to confront its militarist past, see Li Jun, "On strategic culture," *Zhongguo junshi kexue* (*China Military*

the new plans as merely an updating of longstanding security ties that was made necessary by the end of the Cold War, Beijing asserted that the heart of the revision was contained in the section that called for Japan to assume greater responsibilities if a crisis emerged in regions on Japan's periphery.¹⁸ Beijing immediately sought to ensure that such regions would not include Taiwan and its surrounding waters. When China asked for clarification on this point, Japan pointedly refrained from providing sufficiently explicit assurances.¹⁹

What Beijing insisted were unfounded concerns about China's growing power and regional behaviour not only seemed to be shaping the reorientation of Cold War U.S. alliances with Japan and Australia but also seemed to be fostering anxiety among the ASEAN states. Despite occasionally reassuring rhetoric and a willingness to discuss opportunities for economic co-operation, China's stance on sovereignty over contested territories in the South China Sea remained uncompromising. Especially unsettling was Beijing's fortification of Mischief Reef in 1995, soon after agreeing to avoid military solutions to the region's disputes.²⁰ Together with the growing perception in the 1990s that its economic and military capabilities were rapidly increasing, such actions, however justifiable, raised red flags. Against this background, several South-East Asian states increased their bilateral security co-operation with the U.S. (including joint military exercises) and Indonesia and Australia signed a new security pact.²¹

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Science), No. 1 (February 1997), pp. 8–15, FBIS; also Ma Junwei, "Political trends in Japan following the general election," *Xiandai guoji guanxi*, 20 February 1997, FBIS-CHI-97-089.

18. Zhang Guocheng, "Ling ren guanzhu de xin dongxiang-rimei xiugai fangwei hezuo fangzhen chuxi" ("A new trend catching people's attention – the emerging Japan-U.S. revised guidelines for defence co-operation"), *Renmin ribao*, 14 June 1997, online edition; Zhang Guocheng, "Hewei 'zhoubian you shi xie zai xin 'rimei fangwei hezuo fangzhen' qiaoding zhi shi?" ("What's the meaning of 'situations arising on the periphery' written in the new 'Japan-U.S. Joint Defence, Guidelines'?"), *Renmin ribao*, 25 September 1997, p. 6; Ni Feng, "Meiri tongmeng yu diqu anquan" ("The U.S.-Japan alliance and regional security"), *Taipingyang xuebao (Pacific Journal)*, No. 2 (1999), pp. 69, 72.

19. See "Chi Haotian yu riben fangweiting zhangguan huitan, huijian riben zimindang ganshizhang he zhengtiaohuizhang" ("Chi Haotian holds consultations with the director of Japan's Defence Agency, meets with Japan's LDP Secretary General and the head of the LDP Policy Research Council"), *Renmin ribao*, 5 February 1998, online edition; Gerald Curtis, "Japan: Kato on domestic, international politics," *Tokyo chuo koron*, September 1997, FBIS-EAS-97-238; Liu Changmin, "Shixi dangjin riben zhengzhi de youqinghua" ("A tentative analysis of the right-wing drift in contemporary Japanese politics"), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi luntan (World Economics and Politics Forum)*, No. 6 (1999), p. 24; Wang Yiwei, "Dui tai junshi douzheng dui shijie zhanlue geju de yingxiang chutan" ("A preliminary exploration of the effects on the international strategic situation of military action against Taiwan"), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi luntan*, No. 6 (1999), p. 28.

20. See Whiting, "ASEAN eyes China"; Masashi Nishihara, "Aiming at new order for regional security – current state of ARF," *Gaiko Forum*, November 1997, pp. 35–40; Michael Leifer, *The ASEAN Regional Forum*, Adelphi Paper, No. 302 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, July 1996), pp. 37, 43–44; and Mark J. Valencia, *China and the South China Sea Disputes*, Adelphi Paper, No. 298 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, October 1995).

21. See Fang Hua, "The current Asia-Pacific security framework," p. 12; Lu Jianren, "Yatai daguo zai dongnan yazhou diqu de liyi" ("Asia-Pacific great powers' interests in South-East Asia"), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi*, No. 2 (2000), pp. 41, 45; Ross, "The 1995–96 Taiwan Strait confrontation," p. 116.

Responding to the danger. By the mid-1990s, China faced an emerging array of increasingly suspicious states along its periphery. What could Beijing do about this trend whose continuation might have resulted in China confronting an encircling coalition including virtually all the major and minor powers in the region as well as the U.S.? An important part of Beijing's response has been the emphasis in its diplomacy since mid-1996 on two interrelated efforts. The first entails actions, and not just words, to reassure China's regional neighbours and to enhance the PRC's reputation as a more responsible and co-operative player. So far, the principal manifestations of this have been a more active embrace of multilateralism and widely touted self-restraint during the wave of currency devaluations that accompanied the Asian financial crisis. The second element of the present approach aims to reduce the likelihood that others will unite to prevent China's rise to the ranks of the great powers. Rather than pursuing a more traditional diplomatic strategy of forming alliances or simply repeating its long-standing mantra (that China has an independent foreign policy, will never seek hegemony, and poses a threat to no one), Beijing instead began a concerted effort to cultivate "partnerships" with the world's major states, arrangements that it hopes will increase the benefits they perceive in working with China while underscoring the opportunity costs of working against it. The following section examines more closely these two distinctive components of China's present strategy. As noted above, although this adjustment in PRC diplomacy does not mark a sharp break with Beijing's foreign policy of the early 1990s, it is distinguished by the level of China's international activism, especially in its great power diplomacy, and by Beijing's recognition that it had to do more to mollify its neighbours' concerns.

Diplomacy in China's Grand Strategy: the Elements

Reassurance. In the early post-Cold War period, China participated in multilateral diplomacy, but mainly in order to symbolize the PRC's formal status as a country that must be included when deliberating matters of regional or global importance. Its rather reluctant involvement reflected a scepticism that multilateralism could serve China's interests and a concern that such forums, especially in the Asia-Pacific, were subject to manipulation by the U.S. and Japan to encourage others to "gang up" against China.²² Moreover, because it increased the number of participants, multilateralism was seen as further complicating a difficult process and as vitiating the power advantage China enjoyed when it could deal separately with many of the region's countries. Experience, however, soon suggested that Beijing's original calculation of the costs of multilateralism and benefits of bilateralism was misguided. Even in its dealings with relatively small powers in the South China Sea disputes, bilateralism

22. See "Analyst interviewed on APEC's prospects," *Chuon koron*, 4 December 1995, FBIS-EAS, p. 13. Han Hua, "Zhang Yishan [Chinese Foreign Ministry Official] on China's multilateral diplomacy," *Wen Wei Po* [*Wenhui bao*], 7 January 1997, FBIS, p. A2.

was not providing Beijing with the leverage it hoped for. When disputes intensified, regional actors whose unity China did not want to face, united anyway.²³

By 1996, China apparently concluded that accepting the constraints that come with working in multilateral settings was preferable to the risk of isolation and encirclement and could help foster a reputation for responsible international behaviour.²⁴ At every opportunity it began proudly to point to its continuing work within the group of five nations (China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan – the “Shanghai Five”) that in April 1996 signed “the first multilateral treaty ... to build confidence in the Asia-Pacific region,” citing it as a “powerful rebuttal of the ‘China threat theory’,” and evidence that “instead of being a ‘threat,’ China actually plays a constructive role in preserving peace and stability in its peripheral areas.”²⁵ Other prominent manifestations of Beijing’s warmer embrace of multilateralism were its August 1996 decision to sign the CTBT, its role in facilitating talks to reduce tensions on the Korean peninsula, its support for the nuclear non-proliferation regime (especially joining others in condemning the South Asian nuclear tests of 1998), and its increased flexibility on settling differences with the ASEAN states (especially on accepting a nuclear weapons free zone in South-East Asia and working towards a code of conduct in the South China Sea).²⁶

Multilateralism also served specific strategic interests for Beijing. Consultations and agreements among the Shanghai Five would facilitate China’s access to Central Asian energy supplies and help it cope with a growing concern about the risks of foreign support for Islamic separatism in the PRC’s western provinces. The comprehensive test ban and non-proliferation efforts would help slow the increase in the number of potential nuclear adversaries and the size and technological sophistication of the arsenals against which the adequacy of China’s modest deterrent is measured. Peace efforts in Korea would help to satisfy China’s multiple

23. See Noel M. Morada and Christopher Collier, “The Philippines: state versus society?” in Muthiah Alagappa (ed.), *Asian Security Practice: Material and Ideational Influences* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 549–578.

24. Many of my interlocutors emphasized this point. See Liu Di, “Deng Xiaoping’s thinking on diplomatic work – interview with Liang Shoude, Dean for College of International Relations for Beijing University,” *Ta Kung Pao [Dagong bao]*, 2 November 1997, FBIS, p. A6; Fang Hua, “The current Asia-Pacific security framework,” p. 15; Nishihara, “Aiming at new order for regional security”; Alastair Iain Johnston and Paul Evans, “China’s engagement with multilateral security institutions,” in Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert S. Ross (eds.), *Engaging China* (London & New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 258–261.

25. Xia Liping, “Some views on multilateral security cooperation in Northeast Asia,” *Xiandai guoji guanxi* No. 12 (20 December 1996), pp. 12–15; “Five-nation agreement provides model in peaceful conflict resolution,” *Jiefang ribao*, 27 April 1996, p. 4. In June 2001, the “Shanghai Five” (so-named because of the site of their original meeting) added a sixth member, Uzbekistan, and formalized its existence as the Shanghai Co-operation Organization.

26. See “Roundup: China becoming active force in multilateral cooperation,” *Xinhua*, 2 January 1997, FBIS-CHI-97-001; “ARF support group meeting ends in Beijing,” *Xinhua*, 8 March 1997, FBIS-CHI-97-001; Fang Hua, “The current Asia-Pacific security framework,” p. 15; “Text of Chinese foreign minister’s speech to ASEAN,” *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 31 July 2000, LEXIS-NEXIS.

and potentially conflicting interests in saving face with its historical ally in the North, ensuring the health of its close economic ties with the South, and reducing the chance that a reconciled Korea in the future might become a hostile neighbour backed by the U.S. or Japan. Working on practical measures to resolve differences with ASEAN countries at the ASEAN Regional Forum and its associated venues would facilitate China's access to the resources and sea lanes in the region at a time when Beijing lacks the power-projection capability to support its claims decisively. And to the extent it countered the adverse reaction to China's growing capabilities and assertiveness evident by the mid-1990s, it would permit Beijing to focus on its more pressing interests – resolving the Taiwan issue and reducing the potential dangers it saw in U.S. efforts to strengthen bilateral military ties with countries in the Asia-Pacific.²⁷

In sum, Beijing's warmer embrace of multilateral diplomacy represents a symbolic change in style and also serves substantive purposes. Beijing still views national military power as the primary guarantee of "comprehensive security" and its embrace of multilateral diplomacy is partial and conditional.²⁸ Thus, China continues to resist suggestions that sovereignty disputes be settled, rather than set aside, in multilateral forums and flatly rejects suggestions that disputes about matters it regards as internal (specifically Taiwan) even be part of the agenda.²⁹ Nevertheless, the change is real and important. Harnessed to serve the country's grand strategic purposes, multilateralism has become one of the tools available for countering the more hostile views of China and a useful means for countering the risks Beijing sees in unfettered American primacy.³⁰ While it advocates a "new security concept" that condemns "power politics" and reprises the themes of the "five principles of

27. On China's recognition of potential interaction between the South China Sea and Taiwan disputes, see Wang Jianwei, "China's policy towards territorial disputes in the South China Sea," paper presented at the 94th Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, 3–6 September 1998; Wang Yiwei, "Preliminary exploration," p. 28.

28. See Zhou Guiyin, "Xin shiji de guoji anquan yu anquan zhanlue" ("International security and security strategy in the new century"), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi luntan*, No. 1 (2000), p. 69; Yan Xuetong, "Dui zhongguo anquan huanjing de fenxi yu sikao" ("Analysis of and reflections on China's security environment"), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi*, No. 2 (2000), p. 9; "China pushes peace but ignores Spratlys code," *Agence France-Presse*, 24 November 2000, clari.world.asia.china, ClariNet Communications Corp. (hereafter clari.China). Cf. the more expansive definition of multilateralism that is not dependent upon self-interested calculation in John Gerard Ruggie, "Multilateralism: the anatomy of an institution," in Ruggie, *Multilateralism Matters* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

29. Zhou Guiyin, "International security and security strategy," p. 70. At the level of "track-two" discussions, Beijing's view of multilateralism is more relaxed, even permitting some unofficial exploration of the Taiwan dispute. See Han Hua, "It is better for multilateral dialogue to be started by scholars," *Wen Wei Po*, 13 November 1997.

30. Yan Xuetong, "Analysis and reflections," p. 10; Fang Hua, "The current Asia-Pacific security framework," pp. 11, 14; Chu Shulong, "Lengzhanhou Zhongguo anquan zhanlue sixiang de fazhan" ("The development of China's thinking about security strategy after the Cold War"), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi*, No. 9 (1999), pp. 11–13; Xiao Feng, "Dui guoji xingshizhong jige redian wenti de kanfa" ("Perspective on several hot issues in the international situation"), *Xiandai guoji guanxi*, No. 12 (1999), p. 3; Sa Benwang, "Woguo anquan de bianhua ji xin de pubian anquan guan de zhuyao tezhen" ("The change in our country's security and the main features of the new concept of universal security"), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi luntan*, No. 1 (2000), p. 51; Wang Yiwei, "Preliminary exploration," p. 28.

peaceful coexistence" articulated in the mid-1950s, Beijing asserts that multilateral diplomacy should be a substitute for strengthening bilateral military alliances (especially the U.S. alliances with Japan and Australia) or deploying more advanced weapons systems in the region (especially ballistic missile defences).

A second element in China's attempt to transform the reputation it was acquiring by 1995–96 as a rising, revisionist and potentially dangerous power, was its response to the Asian financial crisis in late 1997. As its neighbours' currencies fell in value, Beijing decided not to devalue the *yuan* and, more importantly, to emphasize that this decision was a costly step it took to help stabilize a precarious international situation. Although some foreign economists noted that there were also very sound self-interested economic reasons for the decision (that is, the net economic effect for China would be negative),³¹ Beijing's repeated assurances that it was not going to devalue its currency to maintain the competitiveness of Chinese exports paid significant international political dividends. These grew as observers intermittently predicted that China would soon devalue because declining exports were hurting national growth in a period when the regime was initiating a painful new round of domestic economic reforms. The more observers speculated, the greater the reputational pay-off for Beijing as it reiterated its pledge even while an economic slowdown set in during 1998.

Beijing's currency policy was touted, justifiably or not, as evidence of a responsible internationalism that seemed to contrast with the narrowly self-interested approaches of its neighbours.³² Even if the crisis eventually made devaluation of its currency an economic necessity, the longer China's leaders could delay the decision, the more likely they would be able to portray the step as a result of others' (such as Japan's) failure to assume their share of the burden for fostering a regional recovery while China took on more than its share. In the event, China stuck with its currency pledge through 1999, after which signs of a regional recovery began to appear. The heavily qualified trial balloons floated during May and June 2000 about possible devaluation in 2001 suggested Beijing's wariness about damaging its newly acquired reputation for responsible behaviour and that this grand strategic concern will continue to shape its currency decisions.³³

31. On China's ability to substitute other measures for devaluation, see Nicholas Lardy's comments in Gerrit Gong *et al.*, "China into the abyss?" *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Spring 1999), pp. 27–85.

32. "China's international status is in the ascendance," *Ta Kung Pao*, 6 July 1998, FBIS-CHI-98-187; "EU chief congratulates China as pillar of Asian economy," *Agence France-Presse*, 26 October 1998, clari.China; "Yuan must remain stable, says China's Central Bank governor," *Agence France-Presse*, 30 October 1998, clari.world.europe.union, ClariNet Communications; Peng Shujie and Liu Yunfei, "Partnership promotes China's all around diplomacy," *Xinhua*, 28 February 1999, FBIS-CHI-1999-0228; Ross, "The 1995–96 Taiwan Strait confrontation," p. 117.

33. See "China could float the yuan this year: prominent economist," *Agence France Presse*, 11 May 2000, LEXIS-NEXIS; Sara French, "U.S. rates and yuan to weigh on growth," *South China Morning Post*, 17 June 2000, p. 3, LEXIS-NEXIS; Christine Chan, "Time not ripe for yuan float," *South China Morning Post*, 28 June 2000, p. 6, LEXIS-NEXIS.

Great power diplomacy: partnerships and linkage. Policies to reassure others and transform China's international reputation are important features of Beijing's current approach, but its principal strategic focus is great power diplomacy. The change on this front that emerged in 1996 was China's broadened effort to cultivate "partnerships." China's purpose has been to enhance its attractiveness to the other great powers while retaining flexibility by not decisively aligning with any particular state or group of states.³⁴ These bilateral ties are expected to establish a simple linkage: if great power partners opt to press Beijing on matters important enough to sour relations, they will jeopardize important benefits from partnership such as opportunities for trade and investment, and co-operation on managing the security problems of weapons proliferation and terrorism. In this fashion, Beijing seeks to increase its leverage over those who could be the weightiest members of any hostile coalition by highlighting the advantages of mutually beneficial relations and by clarifying the costs of acting contrary to China's interests.³⁵

Cultivating partnerships is also part of China's attempt to cope with the constraints of American power in the post-Cold War era and to hasten the advent of an international system in which the U.S. would no longer be so dominant. Chinese spokesmen regularly emphasize that these partnerships are both a reflection of the transition to multipolarity and an arrangement that will accelerate the process.³⁶ Moreover, partnership

34. This diplomatic usage of "partnership" and "strategic partnership" was not coined by the Chinese (its most prominent early post-Cold War usage was the U.S. attempt to forge a new type of relationship with the former Soviet bloc countries). China's leaders, however, decided to embrace the term as useful for describing the sort of bilateral working relationships they hoped to establish with other states, especially great powers. See Peng Shujie and Liu Yunfei, "Partnership promotes China's all around diplomacy"; Lu Jin and Liu Yunfei, "News analysis: from Beijing to Washington and from Moscow to Beijing – a revelation of new-type relations between major powers," *Xinhua*, 9 November 1997, FBIS-CHI-97-313; "Interview with Song Baotian, Deputy Director of the China Institute for International Relations," *New Report and Current Events, Beijing China Radio International*, 13 November 1997, FBIS-CHI-97-317; Swaine and Tellis, *Interpreting China's Grand Strategy*, pp. 114–121; Guo Shuyong, "21 shiji qianye Zhongguo waijiao da zhanlüe chuyi" ("A modest proposal for China's diplomatic grand strategy on the eve of the 21st century"), *Taipingyang xuebao* (*Pacific Journal*), No. 2 (1999), pp. 91, 95–96. On the alleged obsolescence of alliances in the post-Cold War world, see "Gouzhu xin shiji de xinxing guoji guanxi" ("Building a new type of international relations for the new century"), *Renmin ribao*, 8 December 1997, p. 6; Liu, "Deng Xiaoping's thinking on diplomatic work."

35. See Shi Nangen, "1997: a fruitful year in China's multi-dimensional diplomacy," *Beijing Review*, Vol. 41, No. 7 (16–22 February 1998), p. 7; "Prospects of China's diplomatic activities in 1998," *Beijing Central People's Radio*, 25 January 1998, FBIS-CHI-98-028: Several of my Chinese interlocutors frankly noted that the transfer of arms or dual-use technology to states like Iran was one of the few "cards" in China's hand when dealing with the world's other great powers. See also Guo Shuyong, "A modest proposal," pp. 92–94. For assertions of China's indispensability to others, see "China's international status is in the ascendance."

36. "Yici yiye zhongda yingxiang shenyuan de fangwen-zhuhe Jiang Zhuxi fang E yuanman chengong" ("A visit of great importance and far-reaching influence – acclaim the complete success of President Jiang's visit to Russia"), *Renmin ribao*, 27 April 1997, online edition; Liu Huaqiu, "Strive for a peaceful international environment"; Tang Tianri, "Relations between major powers are being readjusted," *Xinhua*, 15 December 1997; Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment*, p. 54. Chinese analysts argue that declining U.S. economic dominance will contribute to an increase in resistance to American

diplomacy enables Beijing to address its own concerns about U.S. primacy without alienating the economically indispensable U.S. and its prosperous close allies like Japan and to ease the concerns of others who, even if they were not designated as adversaries, might be wary of a direct Chinese challenge to U.S. international leadership that permits many to enjoy the collective goods of peace and prosperity.³⁷ Finally, and of lesser importance, by emphasizing partnerships (and multilateralism), Beijing seems to believe it can gain a propaganda advantage insofar as it is able to portray what it views as worrying U.S. efforts to reinvigorate, expand and redirect its alliances in Asia and Europe as an anachronistic reflection of a Cold War mentality that China and others are discarding.³⁸

Although an official definition of partnerships has not been stipulated and their specific content has varied from case to case, in all Beijing has emphasized a commitment to: building stable bilateral relations without targeting any third party; promoting extensive economic intercourse; muting disagreements about domestic politics in the interest of working together on matters of shared concern in international diplomacy; and making official visits routine, especially military-to-military exchanges and regular summit meetings between top government leaders.³⁹ Beijing does not equate such partnerships with wholly co-operative relations but does expect that partners will be sufficiently committed to managing unavoidable conflicts that they will take the long view and continue to work together on important areas of common interest despite other areas of disagreement. Since 1996 China has sought to establish some sort of partnership with each of the world's major powers. Its efforts to cultivate ties with Russia and the U.S. were deemed especially important. This judgment was reflected in their designation as "strategic" partnerships because they were expected to have the greatest significance for regional and international security.

footnote continued

foreign policy leadership. See Fu Fuyuan, "Zhiyi Shidai de qiwen" ("Questioning the ridiculous article in *Time*"), *Renmin ribao*, 9 September 1997, online edition; "Iraq crisis revealed collapse of U.S. global authority: Chinese analysts," *Agence France-Presse*, 9 March 1998, clari.China. However, repeated displays of U.S. military superiority in the post-Cold War era have led to expectations of a long, yet allegedly inevitable, transition. Chinese analysts finesse this point by referring to an emerging world order with only one superpower, but many great powers (*yichao, duoqiang*). This actually seems to mean an international system with one true great power (i.e. unipolar), but several regional powers.

37. Ye Zicheng, "The imperative for China," p. 8. This view of the benefits supplied by a leading state is emphasized by international relations scholars advancing "hegemonic stability theory." See Charles P. Kindleberger, *The World in Depression, 1929–1939* (Berkeley: University of California, 1975); Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*; Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

38. See Zhao Gangzhen, "Daguo guanxi, 'huoban re'" ("Great power relations: 'Partnership Fever'"), *Renmin ribao*, 21 April 1998, online edition.

39. Peng Shujie and Liu Yunfei, "Partnership promotes China's all around diplomacy"; Sun Baoshan, "Shilun lengzhanhou guoji guanxizhong de huoban guanxi" ("Preliminary discussion of partnerships in post-Cold War international relations"), *Taipingyang xuebao*, No. 2 (1999), pp. 84–90.

The formation of a strategic partnership with Russia set the pattern for China's preferred approach to bilateral relations with great powers. Boris Yeltsin's initial state visit to China in December 1992 had laid the groundwork for improving Sino-Russian ties in the post-Soviet era and resulted in the September 1994 joint announcement during Jiang Zemin's return visit that China and Russia were establishing a "constructive partnership." At a third summit meeting in Beijing in April 1996, the relationship was redefined and labelled a "strategic co-operative partnership."⁴⁰

The broader significance of the term used was not immediately obvious, and some wondered whether the arrangement was in fact simply a step towards an old-fashioned alliance, especially since it emerged amidst sharpening Chinese and Russian concerns about American international dominance. Moreover, Moscow had become a valued vendor of military hardware that Beijing could not produce for itself, and these Chinese purchases had become a rare bright spot for the troubled Russian economy. Nevertheless, the strategic and economic costs of moving towards a Sino-Russian alliance targeting the U.S. would have far exceeded the benefits.⁴¹ The weapons that Russia was willing to sell to the PRC would not provide it with a decisive counter to U.S. military power, yet even these had begun to trigger concerns among some Russians about the risks of an increasingly powerful China. More importantly, an anti-American alliance would entail steep opportunity costs for both Russia and China as it would jeopardize their vital interest in continued modernization that depends on integration with an international economic system in which the U.S. and its allies remained the key players. Shared anxiety about the role of an unchecked American superpower, therefore, resulted not in an old-fashioned alliance, but instead in the first and most stable of Beijing's new partnerships.⁴²

40. See Zhang Yunling (ed.), *Huoban haishi duishou: tiaozhengzhong de Zhong Mei Ri E guanxi* (*Partners or Adversaries: Amid Adjusting China-U.S.-Japan-Russia Relations*) (Beijing Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2001), ch. 5; Fang Yinwan and Yang Guojun, "Beneficial enlightenment for large countries to build a new type of relationship," *Xinhua*, 25 April 1996, FBIS-CHI-96-082; Wu Songzhi, and Yi Shuguang, "Gongzhu mulin youhao hezuo guanxi" ("Build relations of friendly co-operation with neighbours"), *Renmin ribao*, 22 April 1997, online edition; "Zhong E zuigaoji huiwu" ("Sino-Russian summit meeting"), *Renmin ribao*, 7 November 1997, online edition. Some of my interlocutors attributed the precise phrasing to Yeltsin.

41. Zhou Guiyin, "International security and security strategy," p. 71; Ye Zicheng, "The imperative for China," pp. 9–10. When Russian Premier Primakov floated a trial balloon (subsequently disavowed by President Yeltsin) about a Russia-India-China defence alliance, China (and India) rejected the idea. See "China cautious on Primakov plan," *The Hindu*, 23 December 1998, LEXIS-NEXIS.

42. Some Chinese see the relationship as much more fragile than official rhetoric would suggest. See Zhao Longgeng, "Zhong E zhanlue xiezuo huoban guanxi maixiang jianshi zhi lu" ("Strides towards strengthening the Sino-Russian strategic co-operative partnership"), *Xiandai guoji guanxi*, No. 5 (1999), pp. 32–33; Li Jingjie, "Pillars of the Sino-Russian partnership," *Orbis*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (2000), pp. 527–539. Yet Sino-Russian ties have seemingly strengthened at the start of the Putin era. For Putin's assessment, see Francesco Sisci, "Neighbours push for better ties with Russia – China: military transfers get boost after talks," *The Straits Times* (Singapore), 4 November 2000, p. 39, LEXIS-NEXIS. See also "China is Russia's most important partner: poll," *Agence France-Presse*, 4 December 2000, clari.China.

The relatively pain-free U.S. operations in the Persian Gulf and especially the Balkans (where the American bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade provided a bitter focus for China's opposition to Washington's Kosovo policy) suggested that neither prospective adversaries nor international organizations would pose much of a constraint on U.S. decisions about where and when to act abroad. Because Moscow and Beijing each have territories over which they seek to secure or maintain sovereign control (for Russia, Chechnya; for China, Taiwan and perhaps some day Tibet or Xinjiang), in the late 1990s both were increasingly wary of the role that a more fearless U.S. might decide to play.⁴³

U.S. missile defence plans reinforced this worry. As it became clear that Washington was unlikely to allow prior obligations (the 1972 ABM treaty) or technological difficulties (a series of disappointing tests) or a reduction in the threat that provided the immediate rationale for early deployment (North Korea) to stand in the way of its missile defence programme, Moscow and Beijing increased the frequency and vehemence of their objections.⁴⁴ The potentially serious challenge such defences could pose to one of the few areas of Russian and Chinese military strength, led these partners to co-ordinate joint expressions of opposition.⁴⁵

Shared international security concerns have thus become the basis for a robust Sino-Russian strategic partnership overshadowing the problems that continue to plague their bilateral relations (most prominently, pro-

43. See Huang Zongliang, "Miandui beiyue xin zhanlue chonggu Zhong E guanxi" ("Reassessing Sino-Russian relations in the face of NATO's new strategy"), *Xin shiye* (*New Vision*), No. 5 (1999), reprinted in *Zhongguo waijiao* (*China's Diplomacy*) No. 1 (2000), pp. 25–28.; "PRC: more on Sino-Russian strategic partnership," *Xinhua*, 25 April 1996, FBIS-CHI-96-081; "PRC: Qian Qichen, Primakov hold breakfast meeting," *Xinhua*, 25 April 1996, FBIS-CHI-96-081. For a sceptical Chinese view of Russia's interests in the Taiwan Strait, see Wang Yiwei, "Preliminary exploration," p. 28.

44. See "Joint statement by the PRC President and the Russian Federation President on the antimissile issue," *Xinhua*, 18 July 2000, FBIS-CHI-2000-0718; Chen Ying, "Zhanqu daodan fangyu xitong yu dongya anquan xingshi" ("Theatre missile defence and East Asia's security situation"), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi luntan*, No. 4 (1999), pp. 28, 30; Zhu Feng, "TMD yu dangqian Zhong Mei guanxi" ("TMD and current Sino-American relations"), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi*, No. 5 (1999), p. 10.

45. Each, however, pursues its own approach to coping with the prospect of American deployment. The greater size and diversity of Russia's nuclear arsenal enables Moscow to entertain a deal with the U.S. on permissible defensive systems. China's very small and slow-to-modernize ICBM force makes it more difficult for Beijing to strike a deal permitting even very limited U.S. national missile defences. China's determination to maintain a shorter-range missile threat to deter Taiwan from adopting separatist policies also means that theatre missile defences complicate the Sino-American agenda in ways that are not pertinent to the Russo-American case. In addition, Chinese intransigence is fuelled by the view that missile defences are part of the U.S. effort to prevent the rise of China. See Lu Youzhi, "A fresh examination," p. 59; Chen Ying, "Theatre missile defence," p. 28; Zhu Feng, "TMD and current Sino-American relations," p. 12. For an American assertion that the most important purpose for U.S. missile defences is indeed to cope with a more powerful China, see Gay Alcorn, "China 'real reason' for missile shield," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 July 2000, <http://www.smh.com.au/news/0007/28/text/world03.html>; Peter Brookes, "The case for missile defense," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 7 September 2000. On China's need to invest in efficient countermeasures, see "Chuanwen Jiang Zemin zhishi gaibian Zhonggong de guofang zhengce" ("Jiang Zemin said to indicate a change in CCP national defence policy"), *Xinwen zhongxin* (*News Centre*), 5 August 2000, from dailynews.sina.com.

foundly disappointing economic ties and recurrent tensions over the high profile of Chinese nationals in Russia's far eastern regions).⁴⁶ President Putin's July 2000 state visit to Beijing carried forward the themes motivating the partnership.⁴⁷ And when President Jiang visited Moscow in 2001, the parties signed a formal treaty that revealed the strengths of the relationship that had been evolving since April 1996. Speculation to the contrary notwithstanding, however, the treaty was also accompanied by clear statements that it was not and would not become a military alliance.⁴⁸ The Sino-Russian strategic partnership remains vital to the PRC because it permits China to turn its attention to security concerns in the East and South, provides access to weapons it can neither produce itself nor purchase elsewhere, and complicates U.S. attempts to isolate Beijing on matters such as arms control, the inviolability of national sovereignty and Taiwan. But the relationship does not promise the economic benefits necessary for China to realize its great power aspirations, and there are also mutual suspicions rooted in recent history as well as the belief that rivalry between big neighbours is natural and will be hard to avoid once Russia recovers from its economic downturn. China therefore limits its ties to Russia by drawing a line short of alliance while also working to build partnerships with other great powers that can better serve its grand-strategic interest in modernization. In this effort, China's relations with the U.S. have top priority.⁴⁹

At the October 1997 summit in Washington, the PRC and the U.S. agreed to work towards a "constructive strategic partnership." The term had been chosen, after some haggling, in order to indicate that the countries would work together to solve problems threatening peace and stability (thus, a partnership); underscore the significance of this bilateral relationship for broader regional and international security (thus, strategic); and distinguish it from the closer ties already in place with Russia (thus, the need to work on making strained bilateral relations more

46. See Chen Xiaojin, "Buru 21 shiji de Zhong E guanxi" ("Sino-Russian relations entering the 21st century"), *Zhongguo waijiao*, No. 3 (2000), pp. 31–35; Zhao Longgeng, "Strides towards strengthening." In the mid-1990s, Russia and China set the target for two-way trade volume at \$20 billion by the turn of the century. As the new millennium dawned, trade volume remained in the \$5–6 billion range, with Russian sales of raw materials and modern weapons the only real bright spots. See Gilbert Rozman, "Sino-Russian relations in the 1990s: a balance sheet," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (April–June 1998), pp. 93–113.

47. See "New agency interviews Russian President on visit to China," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 18 July 2000, LEXIS-NEXIS; "PRC academics interviewed on Putin's visit to China," *Hong Kong Ming Pao [Ming bao]*, 19 July 2000, FBIS-CHI-2000-0719.

48. See "Joint statement signed by the Chinese and Russian heads of state" and "Treaty of good-neighbourliness and friendly co-operation between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation," available at the Regional Documents, Russia page of the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (<http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/c2258.html>).

49. See Huang Zongliang, "Reassessing Sino-Russian relations"; Ye Zicheng, "The imperative for China," p. 7; Zalmay M. Khalilzad *et al.*, *The United States and a Rising China: Strategic and Military Implications* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1999), pp. xiii–xiv, 3–5.

constructive).⁵⁰ In announcing and then explaining the partnership, Chinese and American spokesmen emphasized the mutual economic benefits of exchange between the world's largest developed and developing countries, the importance of consultation on political and security issues (especially establishing a Beijing–Washington hotline, regular meetings between cabinet level officials, military-to-military exchanges, joint efforts on counter-proliferation, environmental protection and drug enforcement) as well as the hope that differences on any single issue (such as human rights, trade disputes) would not obscure the big picture of common strategic interests.⁵¹

Just as some at first misinterpreted the Sino-Russian partnership as a prelude to alliance, some mistakenly anticipated that the proclaimed intention to work towards a Sino-American strategic partnership heralded an era of close co-operation that would preclude traditional great power conflict. Diplomatic pleasantries and lofty summit rhetoric aside, the announced effort to build a Sino-American strategic partnership actually reflected an incomplete and still difficult search for a workable framework to manage the significant differences and conflicts of interest between the two most active major powers in Asia after the Cold War.

For its part, China had no intention of abandoning its aspiration for increased international influence. Beijing saw strategic partnership with the U.S. as a way to cope with the potentially dangerous constraints of American hegemony during China's rise to great power status. Partnership, after all, made co-operation conditional, linking it to American behaviour that did not infringe on important Chinese interests. Implicit in the effort to build a Sino-American partnership was the threat that its collapse could lead Beijing to: give preferential economic treatment to other partners (Japan or Europe); complicate U.S. diplomacy by exercising the Chinese veto in the UN Security Council; be less circumspect in its export controls on sensitive military technologies (especially nuclear and missile technologies) to states about which the U.S. has strong

50. Discussions about announcing plans to work towards such a partnership were initiated in July 1997 when China's foreign minister and the U.S. secretary of state met in Malaysia. See Liu Huorong, Wu Dingbao and Yang Zhongyi, "China: Qian Qichen holds talks with Albright," *Xinhua*, 26 July 1997, FBIS-CHI-97-207; Guo Jian and Su Xiangxin, "China: Shen Guofang hails Jiang Zemin's U.S. trip," *Zhongguo xinwenshe (China News Service)*, 2 November 1997, FBIS-CHI-97-306. Serious talks about summit meetings began during July 1996, in the wake of the 1995–96 Sino-American tensions over Taiwan. See Ross, "The 1995–96 Taiwan Strait confrontation," p. 113. For an overview of the evolving relationship, see Liu Xuecheng and Li Jidong (eds.), *Zhongguo he Meiguo: duishou haishi huoban (China and the United States: Adversaries or Partners)* (Beijing: Jingji kexue chubanshe, 2001).

51. Gu Ping, "Sino-U.S. relations are facing historic opportunity," *Renmin ribao*, 19 October 1997, FBIS-CHI-97-292; "Jiu Zhong Mei guanxi, Taiwan wenti, Zhongguo renda zhidu deng wenti: Qiao Shi jieshou Meiguo jizhe caifang" ("On Sino-American relations, the Taiwan Question, China's People's Congress system, and other questions: Qiao Shi receives visiting American reporters"), *Renmin ribao*, 17 January 1997, online edition; He Chong, "China and the United States declare their endeavour to build a constructive and strategic partnership relationship," *Zhongguo tongxunshe*, 3 November 1997, FBIS-CHI-97-297; Chi Haotian, "A year of our army's active foreign contacts," *Renmin ribao*, 26 December 1997, p. 7.

concerns; delay its participation in agreements that comprise the non-proliferation regime, especially the Missile Technology Control Regime and the proposed agreement to cut off fissile material production; limit its co-operation in the fight against international terrorism, especially in Central Asia; or play a less helpful role in containing regional tension in Korea or South Asia.⁵² Given the material advantages of the U.S., of course, concerns about such Chinese responses may not much constrain American policy makers. Moreover, China's self-interest on several of the issues (such as Korea, fighting terrorism) suggests that these warnings are bluffs rather than credible threats. But the limited leverage of such attempted linkages may simply be the best of a bad lot of options available to a relatively weak China trying to cope with life in a unipolar world the U.S. dominates.⁵³ In the event, soon after the optimistic period bracketed by Jiang Zemin's 1997 visit to Washington and President Clinton's successful return visit to China in June 1998, the willingness of each country to continue working towards a constructive strategic partnership was tested.

Beginning in late 1998, support for the partnership in the U.S. began to erode dramatically. American disillusionment followed from disappointment with China's renewed clampdown on political and religious dissidents, accusations of Chinese corporate and military espionage aimed at acquiring advanced missile and nuclear warhead technologies, and the belief that after the accidental U.S. bombing of China's embassy in Belgrade the Communist Party leaders had cynically fanned the flames of anti-Americanism resulting in violent demonstrations targeting the U.S. embassy in Beijing. Although high-level American envoys to China still privately invoked the term "strategic partnership" during their meetings with PRC leaders, in the U.S. the phrase virtually disappeared as a public way to refer to Sino-American relations, except when used pejoratively by critics of Clinton's administration policy.⁵⁴ In China, however, the upshot of deteriorating Sino-American relations after late 1998 was different. Although the unexpected troubles so soon after the two successful Jiang-Clinton summits provoked a sharp internal debate, by late summer 1999 China's top-level leaders decided that the foreign policy

52. See Teng Xiaodong, "Dialogue on 1996 international situation: China in the United Nations," *Jiefangjun bao* (*Liberation Army News*), 26 December 1996, p. 5; Jin Xin, "Meiguo yanfa TMD de yitu ji dui quanqiu he woguo anquan de yingxiang" ("U.S. plans for research and development of TMD and its influence on the security of the world and our country"), *Guoji guancha* (*International Observer*), No. 4 (1999), p. 24; Monte R. Bullard, "Undiscussed linkages: implications of Taiwan Straits security activity on global arms control and nonproliferation," *CNS Reports*, 11 October 2000, available at the website of Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies, <http://cns.miiis.edu/>.

53. Tactics such as China's cultivation of ties to the U.S. business community, however, help maximize the political appeal of maintaining good Sino-American relations. See Swaine and Tellis, *Interpreting China's Grand Strategy*, p. 117.

54. In 2000, advisers to Republican candidate George Bush suggested that China be viewed as a strategic competitor, rather than a strategic partner. See Condoleezza Rice, "Campaign 2000 – promoting the national interest," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 79, No. 1 (January–February 2000), pp. 45–62. See also "Commenting on recent U.S. policy toward China," *Hong Kong Wen Wei Po*, 27 July 2000, FBIS-CHI-2000-0727.

line in which great power partnerships (including one with the U.S.) were a central feature must remain in place.⁵⁵ The different reactions in Beijing and Washington are partly explained by their different visions of the strategic partnership.

The American understanding of the evolving relationship included the expectation that in the interest of international co-operation, China's leaders would at least temper their domestic political behaviour in ways the U.S. would find more palatable. China's leaders, however, saw a constructive strategic partnership with the U.S. as a means for maintaining an international setting in which they could pursue their principal national interest – the modernization that would enable China to become a wealthy and strong country. In their view, this interest justified the suppression of political and religious groups within China that they saw as threats to the stability required for rapid economic development, American opinions notwithstanding. And their understanding of a strategic partnership was that it meant both countries would view co-operation on key international matters as important enough to sustain despite areas of disagreement, such as those over internal political affairs.⁵⁶

Each side was dismayed by the other's failure to abide by what it believed were the basic ground rules of their nascent partnership. In the U.S., support for the new approach to Sino-American relations collapsed amidst spreading disappointment that it was failing to inhibit the repressive policies of a defiant communist regime. In China, however, among the small group of relatively insulated Communist Party leaders who determine the country's foreign policy, support for working towards a constructive strategic partnership with the U.S. endured. Sino-American tensions (especially the embassy bombing) did spur a vigorous debate; indeed, there was at least brief consideration of shifting to a new diplomatic line that would emphasize straightforward opposition to American hegemony by uniting closely with Russia and the developing world.⁵⁷ By late summer 1999, however, this option had been rejected.

55. On the debate's unusually wide range of views and its resolution see David M. Finkelstein, *China Reconsiders Its National Security: "The Great Peace and Development Debate of 1999"* (Alexandria, VA: The CNA Corporation, 2000); Tao Wenzhao, "A foreign policy debate in China after the tragic bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade," unpublished ms., Institute of American Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

56. Ye Zicheng, "The imperative for China," p. 7; Chen Demin, "90 niandai Zhong Mei guanxi tanxi" ("A preliminary analysis of Sino-American relations in the 1990s"), *Xiandai guoji guanxi*, No. 9 (1999), reprinted in *Zhongguo waijiao* No. 1 (2000), pp. 20–24; Jin Canrong, "Zhong Mei guanxi de bian yu bu bian" ("What's changed and what hasn't changed in Sino-American relations"), *Guoji jingji pinglun (International Economics Review)*, No. 11/12 (1999), reprinted in *Zhongguo waijiao*, No. 3 (2000), pp. 21–25.

57. See Finkelstein, *China Reconsiders Its National Security*; Zhou Guiyin, "International security and security strategy," p. 71; Lu Youzhi, p. 60; Chu Shulong and Wang Zaibang, "A fresh examination," p. 21; Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment*, p. xl. For a more strident view of the U.S. as enemy even before the Belgrade bombing, see Zhang Wenmu, "Kesuowo zhanzheng yu Zhongguo xin shiji anquan zhanlue" ("The Kosovo war and China's security strategy in the new century"), *Zhanlue yu guanli (Strategy and Management)*, No. 3 (1999), p. 3.

While China's leaders shared the internal critics' more suspicious view of U.S. intentions after it bombed their embassy in Belgrade, they also acknowledged that an important lesson of the Kosovo War was that the American advantage in relative capabilities was proving remarkably robust and, therefore, that the transition to a multipolar world would take longer than previously anticipated. The simple conclusion was that there was no feasible substitute for cultivating a positive working relationship with the U.S.⁵⁸

As long as the U.S. did not pose a direct and immediate threat to vital PRC interests, its importance for China's economic modernization and for managing delicate cross-straits relations (evident in Washington's negative response to Lee Teng-hui's "two-states theory" in July 1999 and its quiet pressure to discourage Taipei from adopting dangerously provocative policies after the traditionally pro-independence party won the presidency in March 2000) sustained a strong interest in sound ties with Washington.⁵⁹ This interest was again tested when the new Bush administration raised concerns in Beijing about possible changes in American China policy. Events between February and May 2001 (a tense stand-off following the mid-air collision of a U.S. reconnaissance plane and Chinese fighter jet that resulted in the death of the Chinese pilot and the detention of the U.S. crew on Hainan island; the approval of a robust package of U.S. arms for sale to Taiwan) dramatically intensified these concerns. Yet, even though some in China argued that the increased tension confirmed that "struggle and opposing hegemony" rather than "peace and development" should become the central themes of the country's foreign policy, by June 2001 those who had resisted similar arguments in 1999 again prevailed.⁶⁰ The logic of nurturing the essential elements of a partnership with the U.S. was doubly compelling. Confrontation with the U.S. would not only complicate China's ability to enjoy

58. After a year of quiet diplomacy getting Sino-American relations back on track, at the September 2000 UN Millennium Summit Jiang Zemin publicly signalled the U.S. that China remained interested in working towards a constructive strategic partnership after the Clinton era. ("Jiang Zemin on Sino-U.S. ties, Taiwan, WTO, Tibet: text of speech by President Jiang Zemin at luncheon held by U.S. Amity Group in New York," *Xinhua*, 8 September 2000, FBIS-CHI-2000-0909). Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment*, pp. 13–15, 25, 27–28, 58; Chu Shulong and Wang Zaibang, "Reflections," pp. 17, 21; Xiao Feng, "Perspective," p. 3; Sun Jianshe, "Shiji zhijiao dui woguo anquan huanjing de sikao" ("Reflections on our country's security environment at the turn of the century"), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi luntan*, No. 6 (1999), pp. 21, 22; Ye Zicheng, "The imperative for China."

59. For Lee's "two-states" comments and the many interpretations, clarifications, and criticisms his statement provoked, see the articles and papers collected at <http://taiwansecurity.org/TSR-State-to-State.htm>. On reports that Jiang and the other top CCP leaders decided at their August 1999 Beidaihe gathering to signal the U.S. that continued co-operation required Washington's help in trying to rein in Taiwan's Lee Teng-hui, see "'Source' says PRC to pressure U.S. over Taiwan issue," *Agence France-Presse*, 14 August 1999, FBIS-CHI-1999-0814. See also Zhou Guiyin, "International security and security strategy," pp. 69–70.

60. The turning point, according to my Chinese interlocutors, came at the time of U.S. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick's visit to Shanghai in June 2001 that sealed final U.S. approval of the terms for China's accession to the WTO, followed soon thereafter by the upbeat messages surrounding U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell's July visit laying the groundwork for the U.S.–China presidential summit planned for October 2001.

the full fruits of participation in the international economy and unequivocally put it in the cross-hairs of an incomparably more powerful U.S. military, but it would also free the Bush team to upgrade security ties with Taiwan further (and strengthen U.S. alliances throughout the Asia-Pacific) since there would no longer be valued links with China on matters such as proliferation or Korea. Therefore, however difficult the process, Chinese leaders have remained determined to continue working towards a constructive strategic partnership with the U.S. even if American sensibilities now seem to preclude applying that label.

As part of its strategy to establish linkages to reduce the likelihood of confronting a broad coalition united by its hostility towards China, after April 1996 Beijing also intensified its efforts to build partnerships with other actors it considers likely great powers in a future multipolar world – key European states and especially nearby Japan. Because it views the broader effects on international security as smaller than those obtained through its relations with Russia and the U.S., Beijing has refrained from using the adjective “strategic” to describe these partnerships. In practice, however, they establish many of the same linkages. Nevertheless, China has chosen a distinct label for its ties with each of these other major powers: “long-term comprehensive partnership” with France; “comprehensive co-operative partnership” with Britain; “trustworthy partnership” with Germany; “long-term stable and constructive partnership” with the EU; “friendly and co-operative partnership” with Japan.⁶¹

Because a united Europe with a common foreign policy remains a goal but not a reality, China has simultaneously worked on partnerships with Europe's leading states (France, Britain, Germany), and also cultivated ties with the institutions of the EU as a whole. The lure of upgrading bilateral relations with China and especially the interest in improving economic ties, induced first France (1997), and then each of the other leading European powers to stake out a less confrontational posture on the PRC's human rights policy and agree to ease the conditions for China's trade with Europe.⁶² While cementing its partnerships with France, Britain and Germany, in 1998 the tempo of building links with the EU also accelerated. The fanfare that accompanied the first China–EU summit in April 1998 (labelled the beginning of “a new era” in relations with China), the announced plans “to intensify high-level contacts,

61. See Xue Longgen, “Zhengzai shenhua fazhan de Zhong Fa quanmian huoban guanxi” (“The deepening and developing Sino-French comprehensive partnership”), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi luntan*, No. 5 (1999), p. 26.

62. “Presidents Jiang and Chirac agree to build ‘comprehensive partnership’,” *Xinhua*, 15 May 1997, BBC Summary of World Broadcasts; “China: France's foreign minister gives press conference,” *Xinhua*, 23 January 1998, FBIS-CHI-98-023; Huang Xingwei, “Sino-British relations develop steadily,” *Xinhua*, 18 October 1999, FBIS-CHI-1999-1018; Si Jiuyue and Huang Yong, “Zhu Rongji held talks with Schroeder, and delivered important speech to German industry and trade council,” *Xinhua*, 30 June 2000, FBIS-CHI-2000-0630; Wang Xingqiao, “A positive step taken by the European Union to promote relations with China,” *Xinhua*, 10 July 1998, FBIS-CHI-98-191; Peng Shujie and Liu Yunfei, “Partnership promotes China's all around diplomacy”; Han Hua, “Four keys in 1998 Chinese diplomacy,” *Wen Wei Po*, 4 March 1998, FBIS-CHI-98-063.

including possible annual summits,” the EU’s 29 June 1998 meeting that approved a new China policy “establishing a comprehensive partnership,” and a series of visits to Europe by China’s top three leaders (Jiang Zemin, Li Peng and Zhu Rongji) suggest that Beijing may well be laying the groundwork to use the term “strategic partnership” to describe its relations with the EU if it is ever convinced that the entity is able to speak with a single, weighty voice in international affairs.⁶³

China’s relationship with Japan, though recently improving, has been more troubled. Japan does not yet play an international political or military role commensurate with its capabilities, and China remains nervous about the uncertain prospect of Japan departing from its recent role as a limited and constrained junior ally of the U.S. In the late 1990s, Beijing was still expressing its displeasure with what it saw as signs of an anti-China undercurrent in Japan – including renewed controversy about the disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, thinly veiled China-threat references inserted in Tokyo’s Defence White Papers, Japan’s characterization of its conduct in China during the Second World War, and especially the possible Taiwan implications of the revised U.S.–Japan security relationship.⁶⁴ Even so, China also emphasized Japan’s self-interest in fostering better bilateral relations in an increasingly competitive global economy, especially as the spreading Asian financial crisis after summer 1997 compounded the challenges already confronting a stalled Japanese economy.⁶⁵ As the 20th anniversary of the 1978 Sino-Japanese Peace and Friendship Treaty loomed, China indicated its expectation that “the two sides will construct from the high plane of orienting to the 21st century a new framework of relations of the two big neighboring nations.”⁶⁶

In 1998 China’s asking price for announcing a Sino-Japanese partnership seemed to be a more convincing display of contrition for Japan’s behaviour in China during the Second World War and assurances that Tokyo would not become involved in any future Taiwan Straits crisis under the terms of the revised U.S.–Japan security guidelines. China may have anticipated that an economically troubled Japan, needing a viable partner in the region, would so covet improved ties with China that it would be willing to accommodate Beijing. Japan resisted. At the November 1998 Tokyo summit meeting between President Jiang and Prime Minister Obuchi, Japan refused to go beyond previous public apologies

63. See “China and EU to step up dialogue, may hold annual summits,” *Agence France-Presse*, 2 April 1998, clari.China; “European union calls for new partnership with China,” *Agence France-Presse*, 29 October 1998, clari.China; Wang Xingqiao, “A positive step taken by the European Union to promote relations with China.”

64. See Zhang Guocheng, “Ribei de daguo waijiao” (“Japan’s great power diplomacy”), *Renmin ribao*, 19 December 1997, online edition. See also Thomas J. Christensen, “China, the U.S.–Japan alliance, and the security dilemma in East Asia,” *International Security*, Vol. 23 No. 4 (Spring 1999), pp. 49–80.

65. See Avery Goldstein, “The political implications of a slowdown,” *Orbis*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Spring 1999), pp. 203–221; Liu, “Deng Xiaoping’s thinking on diplomatic work”; “Editorial: great success in China’s big-nation diplomacy,” *Ta Kung Pao*, 2 April 1998, FBIS-CHI-98-092.

66. “Prospects of China’s diplomatic activities in 1998.”

for its wartime role in China. It also refused to go beyond its basic Taiwan policy recognizing Beijing as the sole government of China or to offer promises about actions it might decide to take in unforeseeable future circumstances. The result was that no ceremony was held to sign a communiqué. Instead, in his post-summit speech Jiang simply announced that the two countries had “agreed that we should establish a friendly and co-operative partnership in which we make efforts together for peace and development...”⁶⁷ Observers immediately labelled the meeting a disappointment, contrasting with Jiang's highly publicized successes in other countries.

Yet this apparent setback seems to have been small and temporary. Indeed, the Sino-Japanese relationship continued to develop most of the characteristics of a great power partnership – extensive economic ties, regular summit meetings including reciprocal visits by top government officials, and even military-to-military exchanges. Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji's visit to Japan in October 2000 seemed to represent a renewed effort to boost the partnership and mute some of the problems that had marred Jiang's 1998 trip.⁶⁸ To the extent the two sides are able to move beyond their differences over the Second World War, it becomes easier for Beijing to establish the sorts of linkages it hopes will influence Japan's readiness to co-operate with any American effort in the region to promote policies that are deemed “anti-China.” Of course, even a robust Sino-Japanese partnership will not enable Beijing to shape debates in Tokyo about matters such as missile defences as effectively as Japan's long-standing ally in Washington. But if China succeeds in cultivating a sound working relationship with Japan on important regional security concerns and offers attractive economic opportunities to vested Japanese interests, it expects at least to alter the cost-benefit calculations underlying Tokyo's foreign policy. Japan's hesitation to embrace the U.S. determination to deploy missile defences as quickly as possible is almost certainly the sort of reluctance to ignore China's clearly stated strong objections that Beijing hopes to encourage.⁶⁹

67. Yumiko Miyai and Mami Tsukahara, “Jiang hails new era in Japan-China ties; 3 hecklers held for interrupting Waseda speech,” *Yomiuri shimbun*, 29 November 1998, LEXIS-NEXIS; Willy Wo-Lap Lam, “China, Japan struggle on accord; leaders fail to sign joint statement after disagreement over apology for war atrocities,” *South China Morning Post*, 27 November 1998, from LEXIS-NEXIS. For China's official characterization of the state of Sino-Japanese ties, see “China-Japan: bilateral political relations,” available at regions link of the Foreign Ministry of the PRC website, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/4278.html>.

68. On Tokyo's mixed interests, see Jiang Lifeng, “Zhong Ri guanxi de xianzhuang yu weilai” (“The current and future state of Sino-Japanese relations”), *Riben yanjiu (Japan Studies)*, No. 3 (1998), pp. 6–15. Premier Zhu's visit represented a victory for those advisers who believed that China should emphasize the importance of Japan's integration within a regional economic community, and that this meant de-emphasizing, though not forgetting, disputes over issues “left over from history” on which Jiang had focused attention in 1998 (author's interviews October 2000). Indeed, Zhu subsequently advanced this general idea of fostering region-wide co-operation at the ASEAN plus three summit meetings in November 2000 (Robert J. Saiget, “China pushes higher profile for ASEAN talks with Japan, South Korea,” *Agence France-Presse*, 22 November 2000, clari.China).

69. See Doug Struck, “Asian allies see hazards ahead; Bush plan raises sensitive defense issues for Japan, S. Korea,” *The Washington Post*, 3 May 2001, p. A16.

In sum, Beijing's central challenge, clearly grasped since 1996, has been to craft a foreign policy that enhances the country's security and facilitates its rise to great power status during an era of American primacy. To meet this challenge, its diplomacy has combined efforts to reassure nervous neighbours and forge great power partnerships. These measures are expected to maintain an international environment conducive to the arduous task of modernization. China's diplomacy thereby serves the political, economic and military needs of the country's grand strategy. Increased participation in multilateral forums, restrained currency policy and active cultivation of great power partnerships help mute perceptions of a "China-threat," build China's reputation as a responsible actor, and convince others of the benefits of engagement with China as well as the counterproductive consequences of attempting to threaten, isolate or contain it. Growing relations with diverse trading partners and sources of foreign investment help weave a network of beneficial economic relations and limit the leverage of any single partner. In turn, containing great power tensions while fostering integration with the global economy helps address China's military concerns by: reducing the likelihood that the PLA will need to fight a battle for which it is far from ready (especially in the Taiwan Straits);⁷⁰ creating some breathing space for the daunting long-term task of comprehensive force modernization; muting the security dilemma dynamic that encourages prospective rivals to respond quickly to even measured improvement in the quantity and quality of the PLA's capabilities; and increasing access to advanced technologies essential if China hopes to move beyond the stop-gap, second-best solution of importing Russian equipment (most of which falls short of the best available) and attempting to reverse engineer Chinese versions.⁷¹

China's Diplomacy and the Future

The broad contours of China's diplomatic strategy after 1996 arguably reflect a pragmatic response to the country's circumstances and the lessons that China's leaders drew from the troubling trends emerging in the immediate post-Cold War years. Will the current approach endure? If it does, what are its likely consequences for international security?

Durability. The approach has already survived the challenge serious Sino-American conflicts posed to one of its central features (great power partnerships) in 1999 and the opening months of the Bush administration in 2001. More importantly, there are underlying domestic-political and international-power considerations that suggest it may have staying power.

70. See Michael O'Hanlon, "Why China cannot conquer Taiwan," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (2000), pp. 51–86.

71. See "U.S. report discusses China weapons upgrades," *Reuters* 11 October 2000; Jeff Gerth, "Congress investigating sales of satellite technology to China," *New York Times*, 16 April 1998, p. A5; "The sanctity of missile secrets," *New York Times*, 15 April 1998, p. A24; See also Michael Hirsch, "The great technology giveaway?" *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 77, No. 5 (September/October 1998), pp. 2–9.

First, to the extent it combines elements of more exclusively “soft” and “hard” lines, China’s current diplomatic strategy seems politically sustainable among the elite that shapes its foreign policy. Each of the more extreme alternatives was partly discredited by the events of the mid-1990s, especially the Taiwan crisis of 1995–96. Support for the softer line of reconciliation with Taiwan, reflected in Jiang Zemin’s January 1995 speech, was undermined by the unanticipated U.S. reversal of policy in May 1995 that granted Lee Teng-hui a visa and provided him a new platform for promoting views that Beijing labelled separatist.⁷² Support for the harder line to which China then shifted in the summer of 1995, one emphasizing coercive diplomacy, was in turn undermined by the apprehension military exercises and missile tests triggered among East Asian neighbours and the new demonstration of U.S. military backing for Taiwan’s security they provoked in early 1996. Against this background, the contingent nature of co-operation in the new diplomatic strategy appears to be a realistic compromise.⁷³

China’s response in 2000 to Taiwan electing Chen Shui-bian, a leader it expected would be even more enthusiastic about pursuing independence than Lee Teng-hui, both reflected and reinforced this consensus behind Beijing’s emerging diplomatic strategy. The PRC took a position that was neither as soft as the conciliatory diplomacy of early 1995 nor as hard as the coercive tactics adopted after May of that year. Despite Beijing’s rhetorical flourish in a February 2000 White Paper on Taiwan that clarified and expanded the contingencies under which it might use force against the island, following Chen’s election China stood its conditional middle ground.⁷⁴ In the opening months of the Chen administration, Beijing alternately rattled its still sheathed sabre, excoriated those it viewed as symbols of Taiwan independence and expressed its preference for resuming a dialogue with Taipei but only on its own terms. With its Russian strategic partner unwavering in support of its hard sovereignty position on Taiwan (a stance Beijing reciprocated on Chechenya), its European and Japanese partners nervously aloof lest they jeopardize

72. See “President’s speech on Taiwan reunification,” *New China News Agency*, BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 31 January 1995, LEXIS-NEXIS; Ross, “The 1995–96 Taiwan Strait confrontation.” For arguments emphasizing basic consensus on core security questions such as Taiwan, see Heer, “A house united.” On the multiple reasons China views Taiwan as a core security interest, see Wang Yiwei, “Preliminary exploration,” p. 29.

73. On the strong doubts some harbour about the resolve of personnel affiliated with the Foreign Ministry, see Thomas J. Christensen, “Realism with Chinese characteristics: Beijing’s perceptions of Japan, the United States, and the future of East Asian security,” research report submitted to the Asia Security Project, Olin Institute for Strategic Studies, Harvard University, 28 November 1996, typescript, p. 16.

74. This White Paper for the first time indicated that an indefinite refusal to negotiate by the authorities on Taiwan (and not just an explicit declaration of independence or foreign intervention) could prompt China to take military action. For the text, see “White Paper – the one-China principle and the Taiwan issue,” 21 February 2000, <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/7128.html>. The White Paper, however, did not set a deadline for action. As some on the mainland began to put it, this was “a deadline without a date,” basically a concession to the hard line position that ultimately force might have to be used, but one that granted leaders on both sides of the Straits time and provided them with stronger incentives to discover a negotiated solution.

growing economic ties to the mainland (whose potential attractiveness soared with its expected accession to the WTO), and the U.S. wary of allowing Chen to undo the progress in getting Sino-American relations back on track after mid-1999, China successfully limited the opportunity for Taiwan's new leader to take steps that it viewed as unacceptable. The episode highlighted a central theme of China's current diplomatic strategy: the approach includes both hard and soft options and enables Beijing to pursue its goals through the sort of conditional co-operation associated with linkage. This flexibility increases the prospects for the strategy to survive all but the most extreme shifts in the leadership's composition.

Beijing's keen sensitivity to the importance of relative capabilities is a second reason to anticipate the durability of the current approach. As others have noted, China's contemporary leaders, like their predecessors, prize the practice of *realpolitik*.⁷⁵ Because China's ability to improve its international power position is sharply limited both by the burden of a still developing economy and by the long head start of its advanced industrial rivals, the diplomatic line Beijing has pursued since 1996 is likely to continue for several decades into the 21st century. Power considerations suggest the sorts of changes in China's circumstances that would probably have to occur for Beijing to discard its present grand strategy and the diplomacy that serves it.

The current approach might be abandoned under two scenarios – one in which external constraints became much tighter, and one in which they became much looser.⁷⁶ If China, while still relatively weak, found itself facing dire threats from one or more great powers, core survival concerns would probably lead Beijing to reprise the Cold War approach of straightforward counter-hegemonic balancing. In the new century China would probably rely on its nuclear deterrent as the ultimate security guarantee while also attempting to win the backing of a powerful ally, perhaps transforming one or more of its strategic partnerships into a traditional security alliance.⁷⁷ Alternatively, if China's relative capabilities were to increase dramatically, or if Beijing concluded that the system's other most capable actors no longer posed much of a constraint on action, it might believe that it no longer needed to reassure others or prevent their collaboration. China might then shift to a strategy that more assertively attempted to reshape the international system according to its

75. See Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Alastair Iain Johnston, "Cultural realism and strategy in Maoist China," in Peter J. Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture Of National Security: Norms And Identity In World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 219–220, 247; Christensen, "Chinese *realpolitik*"; Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment*, pp. xxxv, xxxvix; Swaine and Tellis, *Interpreting China's Grand Strategy*, pp. xii; 231, 233, 236.

76. *Ibid.* pp. 152, 153–179; 183–97.

77. See Yan Xuetong, "Analysis and reflections," pp. 7, 8; Chu Shulong and Wang Zaibang, "Reflections," pp. 18–19; For Chinese views that anticipate a more threatening environment, see Sun Jianshe, "Reflections on our country's security environment," pp. 20, 21; Yan Xuetong, "Analysis and reflections," pp. 5, 6.

own preferences. China would not be free to do as it pleased on the world scene, but it would have greater latitude than it now does to follow preference rather than necessity.⁷⁸

For the foreseeable future, however, neither of these more extreme alternatives seems as plausible as a slow but steady increase in China's economic and military clout within an East Asian region where potential rivals remain vigilant.⁷⁹ Indeed, China's analysts prudently anticipate a protracted and multifaceted struggle between American efforts to prolong the present era of unipolarity and other countries (especially China, Russia and France) attempting to hasten the transition to a multipolar world.⁸⁰ China's leaders understand that their country's military capabilities will lag significantly behind those of the U.S. for several decades.⁸¹ They now also understand more clearly than in the early 1990s that even though the PLA's growing capabilities remain limited and even if, as Beijing insists, its intentions are benign, neighbouring countries naturally harbour doubts about China's future international role that the U.S. could exploit if it wants to hem China in.⁸² The present need to minimize the likelihood of provoking such a dangerous deterioration in its international environment is an important reason that some variation of China's current diplomatic approach is likely to endure. China will continue to rely on policies that strive to advance its interests without relying on methods (unrestrained armament or explicit alliance) that

78. See Swaine and Tellis, *Interpreting China's Grand Strategy*, pp. 231, 233, 236.

79. See Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), pp. 164, 165–167; Avery Goldstein, "Great expectations: interpreting China's arrival," *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (Winter 1997/98), pp. 36–73. For Chinese assessments of the power trajectories of various countries, including discussions of "comprehensive national power," see Yan Xuetong, *Zhongguo guojia liyi fenxi (Analysis of China's National Interest)* (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1997), pp. 87–95; Gao Heng, (ed.), *2020 daguo zhanlüe (Great Power Strategy in 2020)* (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 2000); Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment*, p. 203, ch. 5.

80. Lu Youzhi, "A fresh examination," pp. 57–58; Sun Jianshe, "Reflections on our country's security environment," p. 19; Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment*, pp. 13, 15, 25, 28, 58; Ye Zicheng, "The imperative for China," pp. 6, 7; Chu Shulong and Wang Zaibang, "Reflections," p. 17; Xiao Feng, "Perspective," pp. 1, 2.

81. Yan Xuetong, "Analysis and reflections," pp. 7, 9. For a Chinese vision of naval modernization consistent with the notion that the first three decades of the 21st century are a period in which China must strive simply to catch up with the world-class military powers, see Liu Yijian, "Zhongguo weilai de haijun jianshe yu haijun zhanlüe" ("The future of China's navy building and naval strategy"), *Zhanlüe yu guanli*, No. 5 (1999), pp. 99, 100. China's most innovative military strategists have focused on the need to cope with their country's present material disadvantage by emphasizing investment in improving the technological quality of selected forces and by developing clever varieties of asymmetric warfare. See Mark Burles and Abram N. Shulsky, *Patterns in China's Use of Force: Evidence from History and Doctrinal Writings* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2000); Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment*, ch. 6; Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare* (Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House, 1999), reprint, FBIS translation, available at <http://www.terrorism.com/infowar/index.shtml>; Zhang Wenmu, "The Kosovo War," p. 4; Chu Shulong, "The development of China's thinking," p. 13; Khalilzad *et al.*, *The United States and a Rising China: Strategic and Military Implications*, pp. 39–44, 48–59.

82. Yan Xuetong, "Analysis and reflections," pp. 8, 9; Chu Shulong and Wang Zaibang, "Reflections," p. 20.

would alarm potential military rivals and alienate valued economic partners.⁸³

Consequences for international security. If Beijing adheres to its current approach, what are the consequences for international security? Some have offered troubling forecasts inspired by loose analogies between China and other rising powers in the past. The truly disturbing parallels are those with some of the 20th century's most disruptive actors – Wilhelmine or Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan and the Soviet Union.⁸⁴ These historical analogies seem inappropriate. Unlike Wilhelmine Germany, China is not eagerly pursuing imperialist glory; unlike Imperial Japan, it is not bereft of resources to the point that it is driven to minimize its dependence through expansion; unlike Nazi Germany, it does not have an ideology of racial superiority or a lust for *lebensraum* to motivate it to conquer neighbours; unlike the Soviet Union, China no longer sees itself as the champion of a universally relevant way of life whose dissemination justifies an unrelenting effort to erode that championed by its rival.⁸⁵ China is instead a nationalist rising power whose interests sometimes conflict with others', but one that lacks any obvious ambition or reason to indulge a thirst for international expansion, let alone domination.

Nevertheless, it is possible that China's rise to power will result in newfound ambitions or intensify conflicts with suspicious rivals. If it does, Beijing's present diplomatic strategy could collapse with tragic consequences.⁸⁶ The chief danger, however, is not likely to result from aggressive nationalism. Chinese nationalism focuses on protecting the territorial and political integrity of the country as delimited at the close of the Second World War and ensuring international respect for China as a great power.⁸⁷ While bitterness about the ravages of imperialism China

83. See Guo Shuyong, "A modest proposal," pp. 92–93, 94. On the enduring interest in not provoking others while China remains weak, see Wang Sheng, "'Taoguang yanghui' bu shi quan yi zhi ji", (" 'Concealing one's strength and biding one's time' is not a stopgap"), *Huanqiu shibao* (*Global Times*), 17 August 2001, available at <http://www.peopledaily.com.cn/GB/paper68/4027/31430/index.html>.

84. See Arthur Waldron, "Statement of Dr Arthur Waldron," *House Armed Services Committee*, 21 June 2000, <http://www.house.gov/hasc/testimony/106thcongress/00-06-21waldron.html>. See also Edward Friedman, "The challenge of a rising China: another Germany?" in Robert J. Lieber, (ed.), *Eagle Adrift: American Foreign Policy at the End of the Century* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc., 1997).

85. My interlocutors often noted, and some lamented, the lack of any universal appeal in China's current pragmatic, eclectic socio-economic programme that is tailored to their country's particular problems. They explicitly contrast this with the revolutionary socialist ideals of the Soviet Union and Maoist China, as well as with the universality of political and economic principles that underpin what Joseph Nye labels contemporary America's "soft power." See Joseph S. Nye, Jr. and William A. Owens, "America's information edge," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 75, No. 3 (March/April 1996), pp. 20–36.

86. For a strategic culture argument that suggests the possibility of changing capabilities altering China's choices, see Johnston, "Cultural realism and strategy in Maoist China"; Johnston, *Cultural Realism*.

87. See Richard Baum, and Alexei Shevchenko, "Will China join an encompassing coalition with other great powers?" in Richard N. Rosecrance (ed.), *Creating an Encompassing Coalition to Prevent International Conflict* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), pp. 298–314.; Zhao Suisheng, "Chinese nationalism and its international

suffered during the late Qing dynasty lingers, there is no indication of a broad interest in redressing such historically distant grievances. Nor are there indications of an interest in incorporating foreign territories in which large populations of ethnic Chinese reside. China's principal claims to territory currently beyond its control in the East and South China Seas (Taiwan, the Diaoyus, the Spratlys) do not reflect a revisionist, expansionist agenda, but rather Beijing's determination to restore what it believes is the *de jure* status quo. For reasons illuminated in the literature about the security dilemma, however, even such policies can contribute to adversarial relations (especially when the unavoidable consequences of anarchy are compounded by historically grounded mutual suspicion, as in the Sino-Japanese relationship). But China's behaviour since the mid-1990s suggests that its leaders have finally become more aware of the counterproductive security dilemma its behaviour can exacerbate and, without abandoning core interests, that they seek at least to mute its intensity.⁸⁸ More important, perhaps, even an unexpectedly ambitious China would face the constraints on using force to pursue international interests that distinguish the contemporary era (especially the risks of nuclear escalation inherent in great power conflict).⁸⁹

There is, then, little evidence on which to base an expectation that China will abandon its current approach and set out on an ambitious crusade to overturn, rather than adjust to and attempt to reform, the international order it faces. Instead, the greater danger is the emergence of unintended consequences from its relatively circumspect diplomacy. China at the dawn of the 21st century seeks to establish extensive and intensive linkages with states that have overlapping, competing and common interests. As long as relations are more co-operative than conflictive, fostering tight interdependence may be attractive. But the risk in this sort of arrangement is that any problems tend to ripple through the system in unpredictable ways that complicate efforts at management.

footnote continued

orientations," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 115, No. 1 (2000), pp. 1–33; Zheng Yongnian, *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China: Modernization, Identity, and International Relations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Allen S. Whiting, "Chinese nationalism and foreign policy after Deng," *The China Quarterly*, No. 142 (1995), pp. 295–316; Michel Oksenberg, "China's confident nationalism," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 65 (1987), pp. 501–523.

88. On the problems and possibilities of managing the security dilemma, see Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the security dilemma," *World Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (January 1978), pp. 167–214. For the special problems posed by the Sino-Japanese relationship and conflicting ideas about what constitutes the status quo in the Taiwan Straits, see Thomas J. Christensen, "Posing problems without catching up: China's rise and challenges for U.S. security policy," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (2001), pp. 5–40; Christensen, "China, the U.S.-Japan alliance, and the security dilemma in East Asia"; Christensen, "Chinese realpolitik." For views that suggest a lack of sensitivity to the security dilemma, see Liu Yijian, "The future of China's naval building," pp. 96, 97, 98; Guo Shuyong, "A modest proposal," pp. 92–94.

89. See Avery Goldstein, *Deterrence and Security in the 21st Century: China, Britain, France and the Enduring Legacy of the Nuclear Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

Should China's relations with any of the major powers significantly deteriorate, especially if this happens in an international system that has become genuinely multipolar, others may be inclined to reinterpret Beijing's remaining great power partnerships as *de facto* alliances.⁹⁰ States intimately entangled, unable to remain aloof, might feel compelled to choose sides. Because the advent of nuclear weapons, economic self-interest and changed international norms have dramatically altered the role of force for resolving inter-state disputes in today's world, a disastrous "fail deadly" scenario seems implausible. An era of renewed international division into rival economic and military blocs would be unfortunate enough. However unlikely such an outcome might now seem, the essential point is that the largely benign consequences of a prudently self-interested China's adherence to its less confrontational diplomatic strategy in the present era should not obscure the complexity and challenges such an approach poses for all drawn into its orbit.

90. On partnerships as "quasi-alliances," see Ye Zicheng, "The imperative for China," pp. 9, 10. For a generally pessimistic perspective that asserts the inevitability of acute conflict between China and the U.S., see Yan Xuetong, "Analysis and reflections"; Yan Xuetong, "Lengzhanhou de jixu: lengzhanhou de zhuyao guoji zhengzhi maodun" ("Continuity in the post-Cold War era: the principal international political contradiction after the Cold War"), *Zhanlue yu guanli*, No. 3 (2000), pp. 58–66.