

The NATIONAL STRATEGY FORUM REVIEW

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Publisher's Note

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The National Strategy Forum has been studying China from a strategic perspective for the past decade. The purpose of this ongoing project is to strengthen U.S. national security by understanding China's strategic objectives and coupling these objectives, when possible, to U.S. strategic objectives. The China of 2001 is very different than it is today. The same is true of the U.S. However, change has occurred for different reasons and with varying trajectories and velocities in both countries. The trend line for the U.S. is downward, while it appears markedly upward for China.

What has changed during the past decade? China has become a creditor state, while the U.S. has become a debtor state. The U.S. has been bogged down in two wars without victory, while China has used its resources to strengthen its ties with Latin America, Africa, the Western Pacific, and the Middle East by providing major gifts to gain access to critical natural resources. The U.S. is conducting a war on terrorism, while China has conducted a more targeted counter-terrorism campaign. Finally, the U.S. has alienated much of the Islamic world, while China has increased its trade and enhanced its reputation in many Islamic states.

China's rapid economic rise in the past decade is attributable to its incremental and adaptive strategy, while the U.S. has focused on tactics. The U.S. has major economic, budgetary, and unemployment problems that are not being resolved by presidential policies or Congressional action. The 2012 presidential election campaign has begun early with a new wave of China-bashing that blames China for some U.S. problems. This is causing damage to the U.S.-China relationship that will have long enduring consequences for whatever political party that wins the presidency or achieves a majority of seats in Congress.

There are legitimate U.S. concerns about China's policies, including currency manipulation, sanctioned computer hacking, military modernization, and foreign policy. Some U.S. commentators regard China as an enemy. The better course is to regard China as a skilled adversary that has multiplied its once meager resources brilliantly, while the U.S. has squandered its massive resources and tainted its long-standing international goodwill.

China views the U.S. policy towards China as rooted in unfeasible containment. China is aware of and is sensitive to U.S. economic concerns, and is revising slowly its currency valuation, but not rapidly enough to ameliorate U.S. economic problems. China could accelerate its currency

reevaluation process as a token of goodwill. However, China-bashing will continue to grow because demonizing China is a simplistic election campaign ploy.

There is a major dichotomy between the U.S. and China regarding how they develop and implement their respective national security-related policies. U.S. policy, in large part, is made behind closed doors by the president and a few cronies. This inner sanctum group, both Republicans and Democrats when in office, lack preexisting national security experience. They are usually very intelligent and highly skilled in electioneering and enhancing the power of their respective political parties. They appoint qualified national security experts who do not have access to their inner sanctum, and their perspectives are trumped by domestic political considerations over long-term international strategy.

The China policymaking process is considerably different from the U.S. In large part, China's international relations and national security policy evolves and is derived from a series of judgments made by highly skilled professionals who are associated with Chinese academic think tanks and governmental bodies. Thus, there tends to be a Chinese "farm club" process wherein talented people are vetted by their peers and moved upwards depending on their skill and sound judgment. The Chinese inner sanctum that makes policy is much larger than the U.S. counterpart. The major difference is that the Chinese process is consultative. The policy that emerges may be wrong, but it is relatively free of both domestic and political partisan pressures that enthralls and stultifies the U.S. policymaking process.

The U.S. and China policy process differs in another essential dimension—the distinction between strategy and tactics. The U.S. focuses on tactics, rather than strategy—how to extinguish today's fire. Only infrequently is U.S. policy based on well-informed, long-range strategic considerations and their consequences. The ruling Chinese Communist Party objective is to retain power by achieving economic prosperity for its people. At present, the urban population is stable and quiet. Yet, the expectations of the rural poor are not being met.

For example, I was invited to interview the Guinean (West Africa) president's staff and the newly appointed cabinet ministers and agency chiefs. The objective was to draft a master strategic plan. While in Guinea, I was urged by Chinese government acquaintances to meet with the Chinese ambassador to Guinea. I also met with the representatives of the U.S. Embassy and USAID. These people are professional and knowledgeable. The essential difference is that the U.S. has no strategic plan in place and there was a very limited amount of money available for assistance to Guinea. The Chinese counterpart is vastly different—a lot of available money and a strategic objective and implementation plan. China has recently constructed a 50,000 seat modern soccer stadium and an 80-bed hospital, free of charge, in Conakry, Guinea's capital city. The Chinese strategic objective in Guinea is to gain access to their natural resources, including uranium, iron ore, and bauxite. In Conakry, China is providing the first street lights and minibuses to alleviate traffic problems. In conversations with Guinea government officials and the general public, they believe that U.S. assistance is for the military, rather than for Guinea's people.

In addition to economic competition, China regards Western Pacific states as part of their "near abroad." For many years, the U.S. has regarded itself as paramount in the region. The lesser

states of the region are apprehensive about China's regional hegemony. The use of U.S. military forces to protect these states is unfeasible, and for the U.S. to bluff in this regard is an obvious sham. The U.S. must recognize the reality of China's ascendancy in the region and adapt accordingly. The way forward is based on constructive competition. The U.S. can adapt China's strategy in Africa and use it in the Western Pacific region—compete for friendship and affiliation.

Although the U.S. has legitimate concerns with some components of China policy, China-bashing is retrograde and harms U.S. national security interests. China is no longer a U.S. enemy. Rather, it is a highly skilled competitor that should be treated with both respect and condemnation when appropriate. The National Strategy Forum principle is complementary strategy, wherein the U.S. should understand the strategic objectives of other states and integrate these objectives whenever it is appropriate to do so. The second principle is constructive competition. Competition is always present; however, it can be managed by mutually agreed rules and enforcement mechanisms.

The National Strategy Forum has been given the unique opportunity of access to China's leading national strategy thinkers and institutions, notwithstanding our critical analysis of what we perceive to be China's shortcomings, and our support for improved Taiwan-centric relations with China. We are grateful for this opportunity because it will result in enhanced U.S. national security based on mutual respect and informed candor.

A superficial review of U.S. deficiencies and miscalculations may appear to be self-imposed America-bashing. However, this is not the intention of this edition of the *National Strategy Forum Review*. Rather, U.S. strength is based upon our collective ability to pause on occasion, think about our errors, and make the necessary corrections.