

GREAT DECISIONS

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What does It mean for Chinese-US Relations that the height of the dialogue that moved beyond economics?

The high-level dialogues were always about more than economics. In the Bush administration a number of foreign policy issues were addressed in what we call the senior dialogue which was led by Deputy Secretary of State. What has happened now is the level for the strategic side of the dialogue has been raised to the secretary level and they have been combined in one umbrella structure but once the weaving is convened than the two break up into an economic dialogue and a strategic dialogue. So not so much has changed. What's important is that we're talking at a high-level... with a variety of Chinese institutional interlockers.

With decades of double digit growth in China's military expenditures what does that mean to US and peace station security today and in the future?

First of all, the past growth that China has taken, which depends on rapid expansion of exports, does create a macro imbalance with the rest of the world and particularly with the US because we got it not the habit of consuming those goods. If we do not rectify that imbalance, that will become almost a security problem for the US. With respect to China's military development which is occurring at a steady and systematic pace, that does not challenge US security per se. It does challenge or maybe seem to challenge the security of our allies, Japan and South Korea and Taiwan. It also involves Chinese military unit particularly air and navy in areas that the US navy used to see as its monopoly. And it was the forward extension of our forces that gave us greater sense of security. Now China wants to push out into the same area to improve its security and we saw symptoms of this contest in early 2009 when vessels associated with the Chinese navy harassed US reconnaissance ships.

Some in the US military are suggesting that some of the Chinese naval growth is focused on the US...It seems that a lot of the growth is to directly counteract US forces in the region. Is there any real concern there of conflict between US and China?

I don't think there is a risk of deliberate conflict. The problem comes with situations or episodes of miscalculation where the Chinese naval vessel that are seeking to extend China's security perimeter in the maritime area, challenge us in a way that we feel that we have to respond. Another possibility that's existed in the past has been that the United States and China might come into conflict because of a prior contest between China and Taiwan that occurred through accident or miscalculation. Finally the US is not the only actor in the East China Sea, Japan has fairly substantial Navy, fairly significant air force. It also has interest in preserving its security in the area.

What is the popular Perception of the US in China and is any concern over growing nationalism justified?

Well, China's views of the US are mixed. On the one hand we're respected for our values when we adhere to them. Second, we are source of high technology, capital, and good education. All of that has spurred China's economic growth over the last three decades. On the other hand there is also a perception which the Communist government has not seemed fit to negate that the US is somehow blocking China's return to great power status. I think that's an incorrect perception but it does feed what China does.

The communist government sees this [nationalism] as a two sided problem. On the one hand nationalism improves their legitimacy. They're proud of what their country has been able to do. On the other hand, there is always a concern that this nationalistic feeling could be turned against the regime itself because people think that the government is being too soft in its dealing with Japan or Taiwan.

Will strengthening China be a force for stability in the region and in the world in the coming decade?

It depends.

I think the next two or three decades will determine what kind of great power China is going to become. And the key to this is how we interact and shape China's future trajectory.

I think on a variety of issues Taiwan, North Korea, Iran, the global economy, climate change...we will interact with China for good or ill. Each of us will learn lessons from the interaction about the broader intentions of the other. An optimist would hope that we manage these issues in a way that both of us have less reason to fear each other. A pessimist would say that negative conclusions and suspicion are inevitable.

The US and China are in some places like Africa, competing for resources it seems more and more. What are the implications for the US/China relationship in view of this increasing competition?

It is understandable the China would want to secure its supply of natural resources from Africa and other places.

It [China] has become a leading manufacturing center in the world and natural resources are what drive that, and china in affect is replacing us as the key manufacturing center.

I suppose the main implication is an what matters most for the US is how Chinas quest for resources affects governance in Africa and affects environmental protection because at least at the outset China pursuing this in a way that promotes corruption and environmental damage. It may be that China will come around and move in a direction that other countries have done in dealing with Africa. Also, it's worth noting that China is not monolith in its regard. In a number of cases the government is following Chinese national companies and they are the ones that are cutting the deals and then depending on government support.

Some of the contentious issues between the US and China revolve around human rights, Taiwan...what role would these play in the near future - in 2010?

I think that in 2010 the key issue is going to be North Korea. We would all hope that North Korea would return to the 6 party talks. And seriously seek a negotiated solution to this problem but its far from clear that North Korea still maintains in anyway whatsoever the goal of the 6 party talks and the is the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. It seems to have based its security on keeping nuclear weapons rather than giving them up and gaining the benefits that that would bring. It has also said that at least for now the 6 party talks are dead. It only wants to talk to the US.

So both China and the US along with others will face two big issues. First of all, how to contain a North Korea that seems intent on keeping it nuclear weapons and has a reputation for reckless behavior. Second, this is not a particular stable regime. Nobody knows that will happen there when Kim Jung Il passes from the seat. One cannot rule out the possibility of some kind of collapse. And in that scenario US has certain interest. China has certain interest. It is very important that we start a process on coordinating with each other to make sure that our respective interests are compatible and we act in ways that don't threaten the interest of the other.

Should China be doing more to influence North Korea or to try to convince them that their interests lie in not having nuclear weapons?

China is in a quandary here. It could bring down the regime if it wanted to because it provides key resources like petroleum. But it also is worried about its own domestic security, it pushed to hard and the regime fell than you would have probably refugees into China and creating problems there. Second, China since the UN Security Council Resolution agreed to in June 09 after North Korea's nuclear test has been quietly tightening its sanctions. Along with other countries and that's to the good. Those who suggest that the a little bit more pressure would help the US fulfill its goals I think ignore the real possibility that North Korea has made a decision that is incompatible with what Both China and the US want which is denuclearization. In that case, increments of pressure are probably not going to change that. Only a change in North Korea's view in how to preserve its security or a collapse of the regime would change things.

Do we need a Special Envoy for China?

I don't think so. I think that we have actually got into trouble in the past where we have relied on one person to conduct what is now become a very complicated relationship. Instead we should deal with China as we do with most important countries: Insure that there are rich and effective interactions at the level of the two leaders, and insure that there is good dialogue and communication between senior personnel in two governments and here the strategic and economic dialogue is a good device. And we should rely on good old fashioned diplomacy. We have a good foreign service. China has a good foreign service. Lets them do there job.

A place where there is a gap I think is with communication between two militaries. If there is a danger with China securities it's the security realm but we don't talk to the People's Liberation Army as much as we should. That's not a fault on the US side. It's a place where China has been more reluctant than we have. But perhaps that will change.

And what role does China play in the climate change debate?

It [China] plays a huge role because it is now the leading emitter of greenhouse gases. Unless it and the US make a credible commitment to reducing those and the mitigating the fact there is no incentive for anyone else in the world to go along. And so this is an area where a lot of countries will be watching at what China does along with watching what the US does. Again China is in a quandary here because it is still in the middle of its industrialization process and it is still seeking to be a prosperous country. There are a lot of poor people in China have yet to reach the full benefits between economic growth. Many in China say why should we make sacrifices if the price is going to be poverty for our people?

What role in the relative future - in the next five years - does Taiwan plain in US/China relations?

Taiwan is one of those issues where the US and China could come into conflict despite the fact that they want a good relationship and the dangers of that grew from 1994 to 2008. China and Taiwan caught themselves in a spiral of mistrust suspicion and fear. Each took actions on the basis of its fears which in turn provoked the other to feel more fearful and take compensating actions. That situation was fortunately changed in 2008 when there was a transfer of power to the Chinese nationalist party, the Kuomintang. The leader of that party believed that the best way to preserve China's security, freedom and prosperity was not to provoke but to reassure China that its intention were benign. It wasn't interested in independence. President Ma also sought to expand the areas of cooperation between the two sides and give more of a stake in a positive relationship. Fortunately the Chinese leadership under Hu Jintao was ready for that kind of approach and they had responded in kind. There are a number of ways that this process could stall. But for the foreseeable future it seems that the two sides have found a way to reduce the tensions between them and to reduce the possibility of some kind of conflict through accident or miscalculation that could withdraw the US.

Dr. Richard Bush, thank you for joining us on Great Decisions. If the show is focusing primarily on the military do you think there is anything we should touch on or do you think we have covered all bases?

Civil - military relations in China is not the same as it is in other places. I guess the main one is the reluctance of China's military to engage in dialogue with ours. To at least create the opportunity that we could each re assure each other about our intentions because frankly, it's the job of each military to be suspicious about what the other is doing. The danger is that each draws the worst case conclusions and then makes proposals for procurement and what not on the basis of that. Specific question about Taiwan is why is China's military build up that's relevant to Taiwan even when they got a good guy in as president of the Island.

Something very curious has happened since President Ma Ying-Jeou has taken office and that is that even though cross state regulations have improved, even though he has tried at some political cost to reassure China about his good intentions, the military build up that affects Taiwan has continued. China has not been wiling to make adjustments and make positive changes on the political side. Frankly, nobody has an explanation for this.

It could be simply that the PLA could get its hardware on a rigid procurement cycle. And we happen to be at 2009 at the very end of that cycle and so perhaps when they do the next procurement schedule they will make that adjustment

The Second reason and it's the one we hear from Chinese military types is that Beijing is far from confident that this positive trend is going to continue. They worry that pro independence forces may come back to power in which case the deterrent that China has built up to forestall that objective needs to continue to grow. The irony of that is that if China continues to procure these systems and make Taiwan less secure it may lead to the victory of these pro independent forces because they can say that as result of President Ma's policies we are not secure - we

need a different approach. Finally there is a possibility that civil military relations for the explanation and that China civilian leadership cannot force the military to change procurement as a result of political changes...that China's military to some extent will decide what it needs to deter as what it sees as the big threat.

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