

GREAT DECISIONS

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How significant is it that the high level economic dialogue has moved beyond economics?

I think its reflection of the reality of US general relationship, which is that although economics drives most of the relationship that increasingly have a larger number of strategic interests that we share with the Chinese, and even in those areas that we have divergent strategic interest we want to be talking with about where we are going, where we think they're going and how we can perhaps resolve those differences.

Does the US have an accurate picture of China's military buildup, and at what point will it cause a threat to the US, if any?

I think we have a pretty good picture of the trends and directions of where the Chinese military is going. We might not know everything that we want to know or have some doubts about intentions - what the Chinese hope to do with their military force when they're finished modernizing - but I think we have pretty good sense of what they're trying to do and not such a good sense of how quickly they're going to get there. The question of threat depends on what type of scenario you're thinking about.

Clearly for a scenario that would involve Taiwan or a conflict that would be across the Taiwan straight, already the Chinese military is a threat and that could significantly slow down of hamper US response to a conflict across the straight.

If you're talking about challenging the United States globally, something the Soviets did than they're at least two to three decades away from doing that.

Do you think that in the immediate long term, China's military will play positive role in the region?

I think it's too early to tell. We have already seen some evidence that it can play a positive role. For example, the sending of a three Chinese navy ships out to the Gulf of Aden [Somalia] to deal with the Pirate issue of the coast of Somalia. That was clearly a positive. There has been an increasing cooperation with South East Asian nations. Clearly I think it's all positive. On the negative side going back to what I said about intentions, we're not sure what the Chinese long term goals are, but clearly the ability to project power farther away from the coast of China clearly gives the US navy some cause for concern and for some of China's neighbors as well.

Is there a potential for conflict over resources and other contentious issues such as Taiwan and Tibet?

I think the most likely source of conflict would be Taiwan

although given the recent election of President Ma and the movement of the two sides to try and discuss the issues like linked by air and communication links, that tension has dropped significantly. I think the resource issue is unlikely to cause any tension in the near term. I think the Chinese have decided at least now to rely on the market for most of their resource supplies. But as the Chinese build up their naval capabilities and project power farther out into the Indian Ocean, there is more potential for conflict over misunderstandings or confusion.

I think most recently the most likely reason why we would have conflict is because the Chinese want to push the US navy farther away from China.

We've seen two instances where US surveillance ships were off the coast of China and Chinese fishing and research boats which had some ties to the PLA Navy harassed those ships and tried to push the US Navy farther away.

Do you think incidents like that - misunderstandings - will be the most likely spark?

I think it could be very likely to be a spark. I think given what happened before, with the US spy plane over Hainan, when the US EP-3 was forced down, [there was] difficulty [between] the two sides. They had difficulty in communicating with each other immediately after it had happened. You could see again a similar set of misunderstandings spiraling out of control. We have been trying to talk to the Chinese about how we deal with these issues. The installation of a hot line between the two sides might help reduce those tensions but I think that's probably the most likely cause.

Are those scenarios tied to a growing nationalism in China? What is the perception of the US in China?

If you read the Chinese Defense White Paper, there is clearly a discussion of the US as a threat to China.

I think that the White Paper talks about it encirclement by a hegemon. It doesn't say the US by name but clearly it is referring to the US. These instances at sea clearly reinforce the belief in China that the US is trying to contain or prevent China's rise.

I think that in the public sphere on the internet there is a great deal of nationalism. I think attitudes towards the US go back and forth between extremes.

After an incident like the one at sea, there is a great deal of anti-American sentiment [and a sentiment] that China is a great power and it should be flexing its power more often. I think generally the average Chinese still has positive views of the United States of the bilateral relationship and think that the US and China working together is a positive thing. I think one of the issues the Chinese leadership is rising expectations, which is that if you continually talked about how much China is becoming a great power and you have to discuss Chinese military power and eventually the Chinese people are going to expect you to use it. And at least be more assertive than the Chinese have usually been. I think one of the characteristics of the Chinese foreign policy over the last decade has been to let other countries take the lead and eventually the Chinese people are going to expect China to do more.

China being doing more internationally to address some issues such as keeping nuclear weapons away from North Korea?

I think the question about what kind of role China is going to take is a big question of the future of China. I think Deputy Secretary Robert Zoellick framed it as "we want China to be a responsible stakeholder." China is benefiting from the current economic system, it has benefited from international institutions that the US built after WWII and opened free trade. Because it has benefited so much, China has to take a role in maintaining those institutions which means contributing money and people and ideas to the system.

I think the Chinese have been very happy recently to say that "we're responsible, we have been doing more in Darfur and Sudan than we get credit for. I don't think that they want to be a leader.

They are not comfortable right now in saying that these institutions don't work, we think we should have new ones. I think North Korea is one of these cases where the Chinese have been fairly helpful and have brought North Korea back to the table several times. I think the larger issue is of course is that China has an interest in a denuclearized Korean Peninsula but China also has an interest in stable borders and does not want a collapse of North Korea. And that is its primary interest and so it is not going to be a limitation on how far China will move with North Korea and the US is right up into that.

What is China's role in climate change?

I think the Chinese have been very clear that as a developing country they expect that the more developed countries in the West will take a greater responsibility in cleaning up what has already happened.

You see the number of arguments that say well yes China's Co2 output is now second and soon will be first in the world, but most of China is producing for the west and that's the west's response to it. I think the Chinese have said that they're expecting to be compensated. Measures that they take from the west they are going to expect a technology transfer. And so like India, I think they're going to make negotiations difficult by continually arguing that they're still a developing country.

Is the quest for resources around the globe an area where China might come into conflict with some of its adversaries or competitors?

I think right now the Chinese are fairly happy to allow the US Navy to continue to create the comments. They can take advantage of open naval communication and I think the Chinese are pretty happy with that now, I don't think that's their long term goal. I think long term they want the Chinese Navy to be able to have some capabilities there.

I think the most likely conflicts that are going to come from China in the search for resources are not going to be conflicts from the United States or a great power conflict. But I think what is happening already is that China is finding that when it deals with African countries or Latin American countries that it faces the same type of problems that the US or Europeans faced when dealing with these countries.

Many of them are unstable, many of them don't have complete control of their territory, and many of them have insurgencies and so China's efforts to say "well we separate business from politics" won't be tenable. You can already see some states that there has been a push back. Places like Zambia where NGOs have said to the Chinese, "you have to be operating in a more responsible way." So I think that that's the more likely way that the search for resources could cause a conflict. I don't see US and China trying to get equity states in resources as being a major source of conflict.

Could you give us a quick view on the importance of international education for the US public?

I think as we are seeing China grow and as we are increasingly impacted by everything that happens in China from the clothes we buy, the toys we give our kids, the food we eat and from the air we breathe, there is no way to escape the fact that rising China is changing and shaping our world. To be able to understand that will give us many of the tools to deal with things in our own lives at the local level. How do you respond to something that is so very far away? Trying to understand what China wants and how we have common interests and how to build common approaches with China is important for all of us.

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