The Sino-U.S. Relationship and Its Impact on World Peace

By

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Thank you very much for that warm introduction. It is a great honor for me to be here and to meet with the leadership of the PLA [People's Liberation Army]. British author Graham Greene once wrote that "There always comes a moment in time when a door opens and lets the future in." With the ending of the Cold War, a door has opened for the Asia-Pacific region. Together, the nations of this region can work to shape that future to make it prosperous, peaceful, and secure.

The Asia-Pacific region today is more peaceful and more stable than at any time in its history. The rivalry of the Cold War has been washed away by a flood tide of democracy and economic progress. And throughout the region, there is a sense of increased confidence and optimism about the future. The seeds of this triumph were actually sown during the Cold War as Asian nations undertook market reforms and began building strong trade links with their neighbors and the rest of the world. The results have been extraordinary.

The gross domestic product of this region essentially matches that of the United States and Europe combined. Asia now accounts for one-third of the world's gross world product. This enormous economic growth now makes the prosperity of Asia essential to the economic health of the world. And good economic relations require healthy political ties. Consequently, leaders around the globe are placing increased importance on their relations with the nations of this region. President Clinton has done so, including convening the first-ever meeting of leaders of the region last November in Seattle, at which time he met President Jiang Zemin.

The challenge facing us today is to ensure that this region's stability and prosperity are strengthened for future generations. The United States and China share a special responsibility for making this happen. That is why I am here today. I want to talk to you this morning about the reasons why our security relationship is so important and about some of the most important challenges that we face. I want to talk about the importance of building ties between our two militaries.

THE IMPORTANCE OF STABILITY

There are four principal reasons why the United States and China share a special responsibility to secure the present and future stability in the West Pacific.

The **first** is strategic. The size of our countries and their populations, our vast natural resources, and the creative spirit of our peoples combine to make the United States and China key players in the Asia-Pacific region, with China at one end of the Pacific and the United States at the other. Together, we play a defining role in every aspect of the region's economy and security. This is not an idle boast. I do not want to downplay the contributions of other nations in the region, but

history shows that when the United States and China enjoy positive, stable relations, the entire region benefits.

The **second** reason our nations have a special obligation to get along is that we have many overlapping interests. Both the United States and China regard economic progress and the economic well-being of our people as a vital national priority. Economic progress requires, above all, stability and peace. Fortunately, the economic strengths of our two countries complement each other, and the forces favoring cooperation between us are growing stronger all the time.

The **third** reason our relationship is so important is the danger posed by a proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems. China and the United States are two of a handful of nations capable of producing both. Early this month, our two governments signed important agreements to control missile transfers and fissile material production. This was an important step, but more needs to be done to promote global security by limiting weapons of terror and mass destruction.

Restraint by China in transferring these technologies, in concert with the United States and other major powers, is vital to the success of current, global non-proliferation regimes. Indeed, without the full participation of both China and the United States, no effort against proliferation can be successful.

Fourth, because China and the United States play such key roles in Asia, our cooperation is essential to solving the major threats to regional stability. This won't be easy. The Cold War world was one of great danger, but it was also somewhat stable. The thaw that came with the end of the Cold War alleviated one of the greatest dangers—that of a nuclear world war. But the new world is more complex—and still dangerous. Right now, Asia faces many challenges and threats to its stability—challenges and threats that require Chinese-American cooperation. This morning, I want to focus on four of those challenges.

REGIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGES

First, the most serious challenge is on the Korean Peninsula. There is both a nuclear and a political connection to this challenge.

Let me consider first the nuclear dimension. If North Korea produces nuclear weapons, the peace and security of Northeast Asia will be threatened, and the worldwide effort to control weapons of mass destruction will be dealt a heavy blow. I have discussed this with [PRC] Minister of National Defense Chi, and I believe that we have a common view on this issue. North Korea must honor its commitment to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and to its agreement with South Korea for a denuclearized Korean Peninsula.

Both the United States and China support a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula. Right now, we are deeply engaged in discussions and dialogue with North Korea. Just this morning, I heard that the negotiations in Geneva have reached agreement. I am hopeful that this agreement will result in the ending of the nuclear threat from North Korea. All during these negotiations, we consulted very closely with your government which has been very helpful.

The second dimension of this challenge is finding ways to reduce the overall tensions on the peninsula that have plagued the Korean people and their neighbors for half a century. We are deeply interested in the long-term future of the Korean Peninsula and its contribution to peace and stability in the region. And we want to work with China to ensure that peace and stability. But only the Korean people themselves can address the root causes of the tensions between them. That is why it is so important for the North and South to revive their dialogue and work toward removing military confrontation and increasing economic and human ties.

Reducing tensions in Northeast Asia also depends on other outside factors. America's security alliances and military presence in Northeast Asia, I believe, are key components of the region's stability. A keystone of security in Asia is the firm fabric of strategic ties and the military alliance between the United States and Japan. The people and the Governments of Japan and the United States are committed to maintaining and strengthening the alliance to deal with the challenges of the post-Cold War world. I believe that this alliance is a force for stability.

The American and South Korean security alliance is also an important force for regional peace and stability. The United States will maintain a ground and air military presence on the peninsula for as long as the Republic of Korea and the Korean people feel that it meets their security interests.

The **second** challenge to regional security in Asia lies in South Asia. We are on the brink of a nuclear weapons race on the subcontinent, where relations between India and Pakistan have been tense for years. India and Pakistan both have the right to a strong defense, but the combination of nuclear weapons and enduring tension could prove catastrophic to both countries—indeed, to the entire region. As in the case with Korea, China has a huge stake in this issue since it involves nations on its borders.

With so much at stake, it is essential that countries with influence in South Asia try to stop the potential arms race before it gathers momentum. The recent progress between the United States and China on missile technology and fissile material is a positive step in that direction. But we must do more if we are to prevent a South Asia nuclear arms race.

A **third** challenge we face lies in the South China Sea. This situation has been a source of tension for years, and it creates anxiety about the future. If disputed territorial claims to the Spratly Islands erupt into conflict, it could be a devastating blow to regional security and could threaten sea lines of communication vital to the United States and other countries of the world. Inflammatory statements and military deployments help keep tensions high. They also prevent the development of natural resources which might help reduce tensions. That is why I am encouraged by the stated desire of China and Vietnam to avoid conflict. I am also encouraged by the Indonesian-led efforts to find a long-term solution to the disputed territorial claims involving other nations. What is needed are permanent and peaceful solutions to these problems.

The **fourth** regional security issue is Taiwan. Over the past 22 years, six American administrations have demonstrated America's commitment to abide by the terms of the Taiwan Relations Act and the three communiques between China and the United States. Responsibility for resolving differences lies with Chinese on both sides of the Taiwan Straits. The overriding United States interest is that the resolution be peaceful and not threaten regional security. Not long ago, relations across the straits reflected fierce hostility between the two sides. But, today, economic and cultural relations are robust and growing stronger every day.

More significantly, political contacts appear to be developing at a pace with which both sides are comfortable. We welcome any progress that the two sides can agree upon. Overall, military tension has been reduced and the situation is far less volatile.

This is a promising trend accomplished by the two sides. And we believe that our policies contributed to these positive developments. These policies include strict adherence to the agreements between China and the United States and include the maintenance of unofficial relations with Taiwan. This will not change.

U.S.-CHINA COOPERATION

None of the challenges to Asian stability and security can be fully met without cooperation between the United States and China. Each of us has a particular kind of influence and each of us must use this influence appropriately. Maintaining regional stability is our cooperative task. It is also the strategic basis for our relationship.

An important component of a healthy political relationship between our two countries is military-to-military ties. By building trust, these ties contribute to our ability to solve regional problems.

One way that military ties build trust is by helping both sides understand each other's defense policies and strategic intentions. Both of our countries need to do better in this area. And, indeed, that is a major purpose for my visit here today. China is a large country with a proud, independent spirit. Your capabilities in all areas, including military areas, are growing every day. This growth, particularly in the military area, creates much speculation in Washington and in capitals throughout Asia.

We welcome your assurances about the focus of your defense budget and the peaceful, defensive orientation of your modernization program. Nevertheless, it would be helpful if your defense budget and strategic planning were more open and visible to the outside world. This would contribute to stability in the Asia-Pacific region. We have nothing to fear from a better understanding of each other.

Of course, we understand that this is a two-way street. We want you to know about U.S. military planning as well. I know that some in China believe that the United States regards China as a threat or, at least, a future threat.

As Secretary of Defense of the United States, I can assure you that those who make these arguments do not understand American defense policy. The fact that some people believe them just highlights the need for greater openness and understanding.

For all of these reasons, I am pleased that, in the past year, we have begun rebuilding ties between our militaries. Just last August, your Deputy Chief of General Staff, General Xu Huizi, visited the United States. We were able to talk very frankly and productively about each other's concerns. I am convinced that our two militaries are working toward the same goals of mutual understanding, peace, and stability.

We want to build military-to-military ties with China that will endure long into the future. Doing this means building a consensus and a strong foundation of domestic support in the United States. No military relationship can grow in a vacuum, and it cannot survive without a healthy political relationship.

I must tell you that the idea of U.S.-China military-to-military ties has its critics in the United States, in the capitals of our allies, and, I'm sure, in China as well. That's why we must proceed cautiously and within a framework of overall progress in our relations, including difficult issues such as nonproliferation and human rights. But we must proceed.

I envision a relationship that is led by our defense officials but which rests on a solid foundation of officers—like yourselves—who will lead the armed forces into the 21st century. I can assure you that your American counterparts, who also proudly wear their uniform, share this vision.

In the past 200 years, the United States and China have met under various circumstances and for various purposes. At times, we have opposed each other; at other times, we've been drawn together by common interests.

From the outset of his Administration, President Clinton decided that our countries needed to follow the path of cooperation instead of confrontation. That is why he launched a policy of comprehensive engagement, including a resumption of the military ties which I am discussing today. And that is why he renewed most-favored-nation trading status for China—to pave the way for expanding our ties. I have strongly supported these policies. Now the challenge is to use our expanded ties for our mutual advantage and for the benefit of peoples around the world.

China is a great nation. China's influence reaches every corner of Asia, and, increasingly, the world. Your future is important to us and to all of the Asia-Pacific region—indeed, is important to the world.

In the Chinese classic *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu, there is some good advice about how to maintain peace. It says,

> . . . always remember danger when you are secure and remember chaos in times of order, watch out for danger and chaos while they are still formless and prevent them before they happen . . . .

I hope my trip to China helps both our nations use the security and order in our present relationship to prevent dangers and to build a lasting peace for the future.