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# AN EVITABLE WAR: ENGAGED CONTAINMENT AND DEFINING MOMENTS IN THE US–CHINA RELATIONSHIP

BY

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# An Evitable War:
# Engaged Containment and Defining Moments in the US-China Relationship

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## ABSTRACT

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The current US policy of "engagement" with China is in dire need of revision. The lack of a coherent and unambiguous policy may be leading to a defining moment in US-China relations that could dramatically alter the current balance of power in Asia. A defining moment is a climactic event, actively driven by an emerging power that almost immediately reconfigures the strategic landscape.

Since Chinese and US interests are congruent in some areas and diametrically opposed in others, US policy should reflect this duality. It should ensure that the future Chinese "defining moments" are those which are attained by *peaceful means*, not through the use or threat of force. In short, America's acknowledged policy toward China should be one of "Engaged Containment": a policy that builds on the gains that have been achieved in the US-China relationship, through the process of engagement with all the elements of national power, yet maintaining the threat of a credible military response to any Chinese military provocation. This central concept should be part of a comprehensive Asian policy, premised on alliances, to deter the Chinese use of force to alter the balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....vii

AN EVITABLE WAR: ENGAGED CONTAINMENT AND DEFINING MOMENTS IN THE US-CHINA BALANCE.....1

- ESSENTIAL CONDITIONS FOR STABILITY.....1
- REAPPRAISING CHINA'S AIMS.....3
- DEVELOPMENTS IN CHINESE MILITARY DOCTRINE & CAPABILITIES.....5
- DEFINING MOMENTS.....9
- ENGAGED CONTAINMENT.....13

ENDNOTES.....17

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....19

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# AN EVITABLE WAR:
# ENGAGED CONTAINMENT AND DEFINING MOMENTS IN THE US-CHINA BALANCE

> War is of vital importance to the state; the province
> of life or death; the road to survival or ruin.
>
> —Sun Tzu

## ESSENTIAL CONDITIONS FOR STABILITY

America's success as a world power since 1898 has hinged on balancing its interests in Asia and Europe, often in the face of significant distractions and conflicting interests. Though our policy of engagement with China barely harks back to the reestablishment of diplomatic ties in 1972, it has proven adequate to managing that balance. Though far from perfect, engagement provides a workable foundation for our continued relationship with that country, provided that all three of the following conditions are met:

- China's internal political configuration remains stable.
- China's economic ambitions continue to take precedence over military ambitions.
- The cost of using force to redress the balance of power in Asia remains prohibitive to all parties.

America can do little about the first condition. The second condition is the major premise driving our relationship with China, and our engagement concept currently focuses on our economic relationship. The third and final condition is almost entirely up to the United States, and there are serious reasons to doubt that our current policies are adequate to its continuance. The problem lies not with US capabilities, but with US interpreted intentions; not with our resolve, but with our ability to redefine and communicate our vital interests in a rapidly changing strategic environment; not with our ability to use force, but with the credibility of its possible use to deter potential antagonists.

In a 1998 speech on America's Asia-Pacific Security Strategy delivered in Singapore, amid souring US-China relations, Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen drew on the paintings of Toko Shinoda to craft a metaphor of the Asian security landscape, warning that we must beware of monochromatic interpretations, and have

"...a complete palette, and an ability to capture on our conceptual canvas both light and shadow—one that reflects Asia's complex, but enduring features, while also conveying the dynamism of the region...because in the security realm it is critical to understand the interplay between what is fixed and what is in flux if we are to successfully anticipate and manage change".[1]

Secretary Cohen went on to recite a list of US efforts to make its military apparatus more open to China, and to express official optimism at the forthcoming summit between Presidents Jiang Zemin and Bill Clinton. Quoting a 1997 speech at the National Defense University in Washington, in which Minister of Defense General Chi Haotian had expressed a hope to prevent the "zigzags" in our bilateral relationship, Secretary Cohen expressed a hope that the US and China's ties would in the future be marked by a "steady and sustained engagement".

Unfortunately, "zigzags" are exactly what has occurred. Two years later, and after relations with China had significantly "cooled" following the US accidental bombing of their embassy in Belgrade, Secretary Cohen cheerfully announced:

"I just returned from China...after a year's hiatus in our relationship for — as what they said, obvious reasons—China wants to get back on a solid track with the United States. I had a very good meeting with the Chinese leadership, and they want to establish good military-to-military relations. And it's important for us that we do this."[2]

This sort of merry-go-round is typical of the type of volatile US-China relationship that is a product of the current engagement strategy. The Defense Minister of the Philippines, a country at the top of anyone's list of candidates to feel the sharp edge of Chinese force in the near future, calls it "talk and take".[3] The truth is that "zigzags" appear not to be a byproduct of our bilateral relationship with China, but rather the very essence of it. What have remained steady, however, are China's national objectives and Beijing's relentless efforts to upgrade the force projection capabilities of the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

## REAPPRAISING CHINA'S AIMS

The current balance-of-power in Asia is deeply unsatisfactory to Beijing. The two chief points of Chinese dissatisfaction are: Japanese economic power, with a concern for resurgent Japanese militarism; and suspicion of what Beijing sees as an orchestrated US effort to "contain" China, in order to preserve American dominance over a unipolar world.[4] The reality today, at least as perceived by Beijing, is that China must generally defer to what either the US or Japan want in Asia.

What China wants may be simply stated: national unity and regional hegemony. As conservatively formulated by the country's political leadership, China's national objective is to emerge as a medium-sized world power and as the preeminent power in Asia by the year 2050. Much has been written about China's hegemonic desire "to restore the Middle Kingdom", a historical entity which until the middle of the 19th century exacted tribute and held sway over much of Asia.[5] While there may undoubtedly be people in the Chinese leadership who think in such terms, a more commonly held goal is more prosaic: "for no country in Asia to be able to make a decision that affects China's interests, without deferring to Chinese wishes."[6] (Students of history will be struck by the resemblance between this, and the formulations emanating from Wilhelmine Germany, to the effect that all Germany sought nothing more than "a place in the Sun", and for "no question of world politics to be settled without the consent of the German emperor".[7])

The role of China's military in achieving these aims shifted dramatically after the death of Mao. His successor, Deng Xiaoping, categorically decreed that China would be guided by the "Four Modernization's", and that economic modernization would be Priority #1. The military was relegated to Priority #4. This formulation paid rich dividends, in terms of improving the standard of living of the average Chinese, and in consolidating the legitimacy of the Communist Party. It is the basis of America's diplomatic and commercial ties with China and continues to guide Beijing.[8]

However, there are signs that China's younger leadership is beginning to question whether China's objectives can be fully attained if they are not backed by military force.[9] This group believes the military should be Priority #3 and perhaps even Priority #2. At the very least they believe that China should credibly back up the threat of force with real power. This generation of military leaders knows nothing of the debacle of the Korean War and has little recollections of China's embarrassing performance in combat against Viet Nam in 1978. What they <u>do know</u> is that US influence stands in the way of accomplishing China's goals in Asia. They also recognize

that the United States won against Iraq and Yugoslavia because it implemented a Revolution in Military Affairs, gained control of the skies, maintained information superiority, and used high-tech warfare to wipe out its opponents' command and control capabilities.[10]

Nevertheless, unless the Chinese achieve a unilateral breakthrough in technology, there is simply nothing Beijing can do to catch up with the United States in the near term. At least for the next decade, China's military will not be able to make any *rational* move against our interests that we cannot stop...if we have the national will to do so.

Conversely, rationality is an assumption not a mandate. Like it or not, emotion, error, self-delusion, inadvertence, and miscalculation —in short, *imponderables*— may cause China to act "irrationally". The biggest threat to our interests in Asia today comes from the imponderables. Indeed, the possibility of a Chinese "miscalculation" with regard to America has almost imperceptibly become a standard theme in official US pronouncements. Then JCS Chairman John M. Shalikashvili and CINCPAC Joseph W. Prueher issued strong warnings against actions that could have "unpredictable consequences", and on the need to "reduce the potential for misunderstanding and miscalculation".[11] Most notable, of course, was Secretary Cohen's warning at the Academy of Military Science in Beijing of the possibility and threat of "misunderstanding and miscalculation resulting from either unfounded fear or misinformed folly".[12]

Our own vague intentions also contribute to the US-China convoluted relationship. Though our long-standing policy of "strategic ambiguity" may be appropriate for the unique situation of Taiwan, it may be counterproductive if Beijing comes to believe that, by extension, it somehow describes our other commitments in Asia. The stakes are certainly highest for us in Taiwan, and it is rightly a priority security concern. But Taiwan is a relatively mature and stable situation, and our focus there may be blinding us to new threats elsewhere.

## DEVELOPMENTS IN CHINESE MILITARY DOCTRINE & CAPABILITIES

Within the last 30 years, Chinese military doctrine has gone from being largely defensive, to focusing on "active defense", to within the last decade a focus on force projection and offensive, rapid-strike capabilities.

The bombing of the Chinese embassy was another one of those "zigzags" whose consequences are still unfolding. The US issued a rather frosty apology and eventually sent Beijing a check to pay for the damage; as far as we were concerned, that was the end of the affair. But in China, the event triggered a renewed discussion on what China's military should look like in the 21st Century. This discussion encompasses both doctrinal and technology issues. Since China's aims are far ahead of her current capabilities, they provide useful insight into what may be in store.

This debate has led to intense military study on the problem of how "the inferior can defeat the superior". The debate has revived interest in military classics, such as Sun Tzu's writings on the political-military continuum, and the importance of deception, boldness, and speed. There is also an effort to retain perennially valid concepts of Mao's "People's War".[13] The new doctrine that China's military planners are developing for the next generation stresses the need to fight "a people's war under modern conditions", meaning the ability "to fight local wars under high-tech conditions". As described in the FY 2000 Department of Defense *Annual Report on the Military Power of the People's Republic of China*:

> "The technological level of China's defense industrial complex is too far behind that of the West to produce weaponry that could challenge a technologically advanced foe such as the United States or Japan for an indefinite period of time. However, the predominant view within the PLA, as advocated by the late Deng Xiaoping, is that "selective pockets of excellence" are sufficient. Rather than shifting priority resources from civil infrastructure and economic reform programs to an across-the-board PLA modernization, Beijing intends to focus on programs that will give China the most effective means for exploiting critical vulnerabilities in adversarial defenses. This approach could give Beijing the "credible intimidation" needed to accomplish political and military goals without having to rely on overwhelming force-on-force superiority, a concept known as "victory through inferiority over superiority". [14]

The new doctrine thus envisions war as taking place in a 5-dimensional context: air, land, sea, space, and the electromagnetic spectrum. Perhaps the most interesting shift in perspective is an emerging consensus, driven by a sophisticated understanding of the continuum of politics and war, that China must fight its next war within a limited time frame. The essential, distinctive innovation driving China's new military doctrine is *attaining a quick strategic decision*:

> "If Beijing perceived that war was inevitable, China would attempt to contain and limit the conflict, but fight with sufficient force and tactics to achieve a military solution before outside powers could intervene militarily".[15]

The idea is to strike first, strike hard, and degrade or deter the opponent's ability or will to respond, if need be through the threat of a nuclear response. This concept, referred to as "*winning victory with one strike*" or *coup de main* in US Doctrine, reflects a startling departure from traditional Chinese concepts of wars of attrition, subversion, or overwhelming ones opponents by strength of numbers over time.

From this point of view, Saddam Hussein really made only one mistake in the Gulf War. That was to gamble that the United States would rely on sanctions, rather than strike back to force him out of Kuwait. The fact that Hussein's estimate of the US national will was underestimated by just three votes in the US Senate is hardly reassuring, and has not gone unnoticed within China. Indeed, Chinese military journals have been filled with articles arguing that Yugoslavia and Iraq lost their wars because of "excessive passivity", consequently, Chinese military theorists are attempting to find ways to attack a potential opponent by targeting his operational systems, especially through unconventional means such as computer warfare or electronic disruption; in other words, asymmetrically. Most ominously, it appears as if "the NATO operation in Kosovo during 1999 served to reinforce the PLA's sense of urgency of pursuing the notion of "active defense" and "preemptive strikes."[16]

In practical terms, this is already having an impact as China shifts its military investment from quantitative into qualitative capabilities. China's woeful lack of joint capabilities is perhaps the area in which improvement is most vigorously being sought, particularly with regard to blue water naval operations. This implies a de-facto expansion of Beijing's definition of China's defensive perimeter.

China's "drawdown" of 500,000 traditional soldiers needs to be seen in the light of its increased investment in highly deployable rapid-strike Special Operations Forces. China's elite airborne troops are being turned into a combined army corps, which is the lynchpin of China's strategic fast-response units.[17] Furthermore, under the revised doctrine, the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) is being strategically transformed from "its traditionally defensive nature in combat" in order to apply "new principles in exercising airpower in a pro-offensive manner". These changes incorporate the chief features of US air/land doctrine and the idea of "air deterrence" in particular.[18] And of course, looming over all this is China's nuclear strike capability with its increasingly sophisticated missile delivery, submarine, and strategic bombing forces.

Within 10 or 15 years, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), which for now includes China's air and naval capabilities, will consist of four components:

- A high-technology, highly-mobile force capable of joint action/combined arms operations in regional contingencies
- Low- to medium-technology forces for internal security
- Electronic disruption capabilities
- A viable nuclear deterrent

American policymakers should be well aware of where all this is going: a quantum leap in China's ability to project force at the regional level. A capability that will be consummated within the next decade and that will be coupled with unknown stand-off capability in nuclear strike forces. The question is what, if anything, our allies and the US should do about all this. As far as the US (or Japan) is concerned, there is only cause for caution since there is no foreseeable Chinese technological advance that we currently cannot counter. However, there is a growing recognition that China's military advances, if left unchecked, may gradually tip the balance of power across the Taiwan Straits. The "dominant scenario guiding PLA force planning, military training, and war preparation" continues to be conflict with Taiwan that is expected to involve the United States[19]. Even if Taiwan currently is capable of fending for itself, the situation is different for China's other historical and potential antagonists such as Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines, or India.

The place where China is most likely to seek conflict —indeed the only place where real conflict has recently occurred with significant loss of life— is in the South China Sea.[20] If there is one thing that the member countries of ASEAN agree upon, it is that the Spratly Islands are the most dangerous flashpoint in East Asia.[21] It is remarkable that about one-third of the annual report of the Secretary of Defense to

Congress on our relationship with China is devoted to a rambling discussion of Taiwan, while there are barely four passing references to the situation in the Spratly Islands.

The Spratlys are a sprawling collection of about 200 barren islands that straddle the blue water of the otherwise shallow and treacherous South China Sea. It is a rich fishing ground. There are also conflicting claims of vast reservoirs of oil somewhere in the Spratlys, though this remains speculation. What is certain, however, is that control of the Spratlys significantly contributes to the control of trade in East Asia. It is a key part of the conduit that channels one third of the world's trade including oil from the Persian Gulf to Taiwan and Japan.[22]

If a surprise major Chinese military action ever forcefully secured this contested island chain, it certainly would go down as yet another of the great intelligence failures of history. Apart from the South China Sea, other possible Chinese strategic defining moments are: the endgame in North Korea; China's rapprochement with Myanmar, perhaps the most unsavory regime in Asia after Pyongyang; and support to Islamic militants in the Western reaches of China.[23] The forces of globalization, trade, communications, and decentralization that drive today's global strategic environment mean that all these situations —Taiwan, the Spratlys, North Korea, Indonesia, and Central Asia— are in flux, and that the potential consequences to US national interests are more profound than we may realize.

## DEFINING MOMENTS

China's newfound interest in the *coup de main* is of concern because it suggests Chinese impatience with the current, evolutionary pace of development. It could portend that the US and its Allies will face a new kind of threat from China in the near future. Regardless of whether their actual force development achieves the requisite capability to truly "selectively" challenge the US militarily, it may nevertheless lead to increased audacious and provocative actions that could destabilize the region and/or tip the balance of power towards China by creating their "defining moment".

For purposes of this argument, a defining moment is a climactic event, actively driven by an emerging power, that virtually overnight reconfigures the strategic landscape so that things "are never again the same". Examples of such "defining moments" would be Sadowa in 1866, Santiago and Manila Bay in 1898, and Tsushima in 1904; these engagements decisively shifted the balance of power in favor of Prussia, the United States, and Japan respectively.

For example, the Spanish American War resulted in three strategic consequences:

- In Europe, it obliterated the last claim of Spain as a world power and demonstrated the global reach of US naval power.
- In Asia, it introduced a whole new array of ideological and strategic forces that challenged the old colonial order.
- In the Americas, it consolidated the position of the US as the premier regional power.

In one hundred days, the United States strode onto the world stage as a full-grown global power. The Spanish-American war, one of the most bloodless of all our wars, had a profound strategic impact.

Never before —probably never again— will the US set off such far-reaching changes in world affairs with such a relatively small commitment of its resources. This serves as an example of how relatively small actions can have large strategic consequences, and of how quickly these actions can alter the entire calculus of power.

A postulated Spratly Island scenario illustrates how a "defining moment" might evolve in the near term.

It is 2005. China has experienced a sharp economic downturn caused by the collapse of the Chinese financial system. There are wholesale closures of inefficient

state enterprises, fuel shortages, and increasing civil disturbances in major cities. Savings are devoured by triple digit inflation. Nervous Japanese investors begin raising the issue of governability. The ASEAN nations stubbornly refuse to open their markets further to China. Moreover, Beijing suspects them of sabotaging Chinese trade with the US through competitive devaluations of their currencies. Beijing will definitely not get the Olympics in 2012. There is a lack of centralized and strong leadership since key Chinese Communist Party members have died or lapsed into senility. Additionally, there is no consensus on how to replace the leadership.

But the picture is not totally bleak: there has been major progress in talks on the reunification of Taiwan with China. Taiwan-Chinese relations are the best they have ever been. The same holds for China's relations with India and Russia. Chinese arms sales to Iran have never been more lucrative, nor French arms sales to China. Additionally, the recent election campaign in the US emphasized an isolationist sentiment and no candidate even mentioned the US-China relationship.

Amid all this, an incident occurs near Mischief Reef, in the Spratly Islands. A Chinese fishing vessel sinks; it could have been an accident, however, Chinese lives are lost. China immediately blames the Philippines or Vietnam. In Beijing, all eyes turn to the South China Sea. The incident provides a means to direct national energy and help shake out and consolidate the convoluted Chinese national leadership hierarchy.

Five nations lay claim to the Spratlys: Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and China. These claims are about as complicated as the sovereignty issues that plague Bosnia but are nevertheless of national importance to these regional actors. Over the last decade China has steadily encroached on the claims of Vietnam and the Philippines and exercised military force when the circumstances warranted.

For the last few years, in order to assuage the ASEAN forum, Beijing has avoided the use of force in resolving the issue of the Spratlys. However, Chinese deployments to the area have increased year by year to the point where the PLA is now by far the pre-eminent operational force in the area.

Virtually everything that the PLA has done to prepare for conflict with Taiwan is applicable to and can be easily redirected toward the Spratlys. The PLA's paratrooper battalions, bombers, missile batteries, air defense, submarines, destroyers, cruisers, anti-submarine warfare devices, mines—all would be relevant to a short sharp conflict in the South China Sea.

If, in a *coup de main*, China were to seize the Spratlys and retain effective control over them, it could instantly accomplish several objectives. Apart from gaining rich fisheries and potential oil reserves, it would:

- Signal an increase in both capability and national will for Chinese unilateral action
- Reaffirm its primacy as champion of the territorial integrity of "one China" (perhaps even with Taiwanese support, since Taipei also has a claim on the Spratlys)
- Demonstrate its capability for force projection
- Reconfigure the strategic landscape of the entire East Asian seaboard, Indonesia, and the Philippines
- Control a major strategic choke point of west-bound Japanese and Taiwanese trade
- Obtain a valuable footing for forward projection of Chinese power

In short, if it did not immediately redress the balance of power in East Asia, it would show that the time for such redress was near. The potential gain or loss to China, of course, would depend on the dynamics of the global and regional strategic environment. However, if it succeeded in such an effort it would likely be as a consequence of the US and its Allies being unwilling to pay the cost of a military or economic response to Chinese aggression intended to maintain the status quo in Asia.

What would the US do about the Spratlys? What *could* the US do, in the face of such a *fait accompli*? We recognize the South China Sea as a danger zone, and vaguely acknowledge its importance to our national interest. Although contingency plans for this scenario undoubtedly exist, would any of those plans ever be used?

To return to the original point of this article, America's weakness lies not with her capabilities, but with her national will. Current American doctrine (roughly reflecting the formulation of then Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger) instructs us that the US will engage its armed forces if four clearly defined criteria are met:

- A vital US interest is involved
- The benefits outweigh the costs
- It can intervene as part of an alliance
- There is a clear exit strategy.

It is doubtful that any scenario in which the US must wrest the Spratlys back from China's grasp would satisfy any of these criteria. Chinese control of the Spratlys, *per se*, is an important regional factor, but it probably does not directly threaten the US vital

interests. Would we risk running one of our carrier battlegroups against a minefield in order to secure Japan from "a potential chokehold" on its westbound trade? Is standing by the Philippines worth more to us than continuing to engage China? Are the Chinese claims any less or more valid than the other claimants? Do we really care who owns the Spratlys? Above all, what would we be fighting for? These are all issues that Americans would debate. The Spratlys are not Kuwait; they are not even the Falklands! They're not about oil, they're not about democracy, and they're not about human rights—for the most part they are not even inhabited.

The correct answer, of course, is that in the Spratlys we would be fighting over the balance of power in Asia and, by default, stability. In the scenario described above, the Spratlys would be not only about the symbolic realities of "face", so essential to sustaining our alliances in Asia and elsewhere, but about the substantive realities of a new and dangerous Chinese power projection threat. With the successful Chinese projection and use of force, comes the political and regional power that the credible threat of its use demands; and with it, the swinging of the balance of power in Asia towards China.

The only credible way that the US can "win" in such a scenario, is to deter potential Chinese action. Deterrence is achieved through a real or perceived threat in any given situation and is the framework for influencing foreign powers without actually using force. The fundamental principals of deterrence and containment remain applicable although not exactly what they connoted during the Cold War. To deter and contain, the US must continue to present a military threat to China and capitalize and/or exploit the overwhelming gap between our capabilities. Notwithstanding Chinese complaints about US "plots" to "contain" China, no "plot" is needed. The US should simply strive to maintain the military status quo and be content with Chinese protestations. But to realistically deter Chinese aggression, the US and her Allies must convince China that the geo-strategic consequences of a *coup de main* would be severe. The potential response by major regional actors must be credible with substantial and probable negative consequences.

## ENGAGED CONTAINMENT

China's ambitions in 2001 are by no means as grandiose as those of nineteenth century Germany, Japan, or America. What is more, the socialist ideology that supposedly motivates China is in a state of decline, quite unlike the zeal and exuberance inspired by the doctrines of Imperialism or Manifest Destiny. To the contrary: China's aims appear for the most part temperate and sensible. They can probably be accomplished through modest and conservative improvements in its political, economic, and military spheres of influence. Insofar as China's economic aims are concerned, they are generally consistent with the US and cooperating is decidedly in our mutual interest. Nonetheless, as this paper has suggested, there are areas where the US interests and Chinas may clash: Taiwan, the Spratlys, freedom of the seas, and human rights.

US policy should reflect this duality. It should ensure that the "defining moments" available to China are those which can be attained through *peaceful means*, not by the exercise of force. In short, America's acknowledged policy toward China should be one of "Engaged Containment": a policy that builds on the gains that have been achieved in the US-China relationship through the process of engagement with all the elements of national power; excepting the military element. While China should be allowed to flourish in the economic, social, and political arenas, the power projection capability of its military element must be discouraged. This does not mean that we can define for China what she can and cannot have in the way of military capability. However, we can make it perfectly clear that there are limits as to how it may be used. This unambiguous signal should be part of a comprehensive Asian policy, premised on alliances, to deter the use of force by China that may upset the balance of power in Asia. A simple, yet hypothetical, example of the application of the "Engaged Containment" policy described above might be:

- Diplomatically – encourage and/or assist, if asked, in the process of reunification between China and Taiwan, with Taiwan becoming a Special Autonomous Region similar to Hong Kong and Macao. This would eliminate a major barrier between the US and China, and would likely occur, with or without our participation. However, with our participation comes leverage in other foreign policy issues.
- Economically – lead the way for the adoption of China as a member of the World Trade Organization, again this provides leverage.

- Socially –realize that social change in the Chinese culture does not move at the same speed as that in the Western World, but it is changing. Thus, be less critical and more patient with the speed of social reforms. A democratic, industrialized, yet militarily provocative China could be a significant challenge to global stability.
- Militarily – ensure that appropriate forces (US and Allied) are forward positioned so that they automatically become committed should the Chinese use force. The forward presence establishes the credibility of a US response that should prevent Chinese aggression. A 1.0 CVBG presence in the South China Sea region would be a significant deterrent.

As we proceed through a new millennium, the gap in capabilities between the US and China will probably narrow. At a certain point, as Chinese technologies begin to cross vulnerability and precision thresholds, China may selectively challenge US capabilities in several key vulnerable areas and reduce our advantage in many others. In particular, differences in quality will probably reduce our standoff advantage. "Engagement," "containment," and "deterrence" are going to become more problematic. Whether the US can sustain the current balance of power in Asia and maintain its world hegemony depends, in large part, on its willingness to exercise its elements of power before it is required.

To be effective, America must recognize that the New World Order is not a place; it is a process. The security perimeter can no longer be defined in terms of this place or that, this country or that. Rather, it must be defined in terms of systems, relationships and objectives such as democracy, free trade, stability or freedom of the seas. For policy-makers, this presents the challenge of crafting strategies that are sufficient to deter challenges to our interests, but vague enough to keep from boxing the US into open-ended commitments. Unfortunately, both are sometimes not achievable.

America has not come to grips with the central question of whether it wants a unipolar or multipolar world. This question is of extreme import to countries like China, India, and Russia, and confederations such as the European Union. The US has been able to beg the question, precisely because no challenger is in a position to force the choice. However, in the future, the choice will be either made for the US or by the US; it will be made. Historically, world hegemony has always been a temporary condition. Moreover, most nations are reluctant to place their security and interests into the hands of another people/nation. China, indeed all of Asia, is no exception. The "coin of the realm" in the Asia-Pacific region is stability. The maintenance of that stability in the face

of an increasingly capable Chinese military will be the future strategic challenge for the US. That challenge will necessarily depend upon the evolving US role within a dynamic global strategic framework.

US military doctrine holds that the aim of America's armed forces is to support the diplomatic and strategic objectives of the United States. The selection of those objectives is up to the civilian leadership of the country, and ultimately, the American people. As long as those objectives are ambiguous, the most we can expect from our military is that it will work to preserve the integrity of the security environment. In Asia, this means that the aim of US military policy and operations should be to ensure that no player feels it can afford to use force to change the balance of power. Even as deterrence becomes more costly and more dangerous, America must leave China no room for doubt on this question. Through a deliberate policy of measured "engagement" in the political, economic and social spheres; coupled with a policy of "containment" practiced through mil-to-mil contacts, forward presence and unambiguous discourse that portrays credible negative consequences for possible Chinese provocations, the US and its allies can ensure stability in the Asia-Pacific region. Our own prospects as a world power, whether in a multipolar or a unipolar world, depend on it.

WORD COUNT = 5465

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