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America's China policy remains stalemated. The Carter administration, like the Nixon and Ford Administrations, seeks improved relations with the People's Republic of China. But after Secretary of State Vance's trip to China in 1977, China's Deputy Prime Minister Teng Hsiao-p'ing announced that relations between the United States and China had suffered a setback. He declared that President Ford had promised to break diplomatic relations with Taiwan and to establish an embassy in Peking. Teng went on to emphasize that diplomatic relations between China and the United States could never be established unless the United States satisfied three conditions: it must break relations with Taiwan, withdraw all its troops from Taiwan, and abrogate the U.S. alliance with Taiwan. He said that Secretary Vance had proposed changing the U.S. presence in Peking from a liaison office into an embassy, and simultaneously changing the embassy in Taiwan into a liaison office, a proposal the Chinese firmly rejected.

The press commentary on this announcement and on the Vance trip reflected the American preoccupation with the Taiwan issue and with the establishment of formal diplomatic relations. Almost completely neglected in both the diplomatic statements and the press comments was the fact that there is a second major issue in Sino-American relations, an issue many specialists believe to be more important in the near future than Taiwan. This is an issue of overwhelming importance to the Chinese, but one that has remained almost invisible to the American public. It is the issue

which originally led the Chinese into the 1972 rapprochement with the United States, symbolized by President Nixon's trip to China: namely, the intense Chinese desire to strengthen parallel Sino-American resistance to the Soviet Union.

Opposition to the Soviet Union is the most urgent component of Chinese foreign policy. All other aspects of Chinese foreign policy, including the recovery of Taiwan, are subordinate to this one. This was not always true. But China's fears of both Taiwan and the U.S. have diminished over the years.

The intensity of Chinese hostility toward the Soviet Union has been built up over many decades of hidden conflict with the Soviet Union. For instance, in the early days of the Chinese Communist Party, Stalin supported a strategy of revolution based on the urban proletariat--a strategy that inevitably led to slaughter of Communist supporters in the agrarian society of China. Simultaneously, Stalin pushed the Chinese Communists into a disastrous coalition with Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang. Territorial disputes remained unsettled. During the 1960s, Sino-Soviet hostilities became open. Sino-Soviet denunciations of one another gave the world its most violent political rhetoric. The Soviet Union initiated a huge military buildup on China's border, now amounting to nearly a million troops backed by nuclear weapons, and China responded both with its own conventional military buildup and with accelerated development of nuclear weapons and missiles. The Soviet Union began promoting an "Asian Security System" designed to encircle China with a politically hostile coalition that would eventually become a military alliance. In 1969, a long series of minor border incidents culminated in serious military clashes over Damansky/Chempao island and in northwestern Sinkiang. By the early 1970s, therefore,

China was convinced that it was in mortal danger from the Soviet Union. It was also convinced by American conduct during the Vietnam war and by later military withdrawals that the United States was not the military threat China had assumed it to be. Therefore, the way was open for the Nixon trip of 1972.

China's hostility to the Soviet Union is thus the principal cause of the Sino-American rapprochement. It remains China's strongest interest in workable relations with the United States. The Chinese become very upset when the United States appears not to be the strong, determined opponent of the Soviet Union that would serve China's best interests. Knowing this, many China specialists have gone to the opposite extreme from the newspapers' usual exclusive emphasis on Taiwan as the central Sino-American issue. Some have even gone so far as to say that U.S. withdrawal from Taiwan would do more harm than good, because it would shake Chinese faith in U.S. strength and determination. It is probably better to think of U.S. concessions on Taiwan as doing both good and harm--in relation to different planes of PRC policy. The amount of harm depends on PRC perceptions of the reasons for our weakening of support for Taiwan. If it is seen as a result of isolationism, as part of a withdrawal from Asia, it can do considerable harm, even while it makes possible a move toward normalization. If on the other hand concessions on Taiwan were made from a U.S. position of rising influence in Asia, then the moves toward normalization need not be damaging. (A parallel situation exists in Korea, where the Carter plans for withdrawing U.S. ground forces, intended to be a celebration of South Korean economic and military success, were allowed instead to become entangled with human rights controversies, influence-buying scandals, and post-Vietnam disengagement feelings, and as a result made the U.S. appear to be deserting an ally--

with unfortunate consequences for U.S. relations with China, Japan, and Southeast Asia.)

The Chinese view of Taiwan is comparable to the American view of Long Island in their perception of history and geography. Moreover, although Chiang Kai-shek is dead, and although Taiwan cannot in normal circumstances threaten the mainland government militarily, the government on Taiwan represents a symbolic, and sometimes more than symbolic, threat to Chinese Communist values and sovereignty. The intensity of Chinese feelings about Taiwan shows in Chinese policies. Despite ambitious new Chinese economic programs which the United States could greatly facilitate, the Chinese have recently delayed or prevented such assistance by toughening their stand on Taiwan, through publicly reiterating their three conditions in very firm fashion and threatening to invade if Taiwan should declare itself an independent nation. (This is an empty threat because of the weakness of the mainland's naval and air forces--not to mention their army.) Because of the dispute over Taiwan, the Chinese Communists have held up the solution of economic conflicts with the U.S., have reduced trade with the U.S. (preferring to buy grain from Australia and Canada rather than from the U.S.), have refused to expand scholarly exchanges, have refused all formal discussion of arms control issues, and have even refused to discuss such vital military issues as potential exchange of intelligence with the U.S. China has been probing Taiwan's side of the Taiwan Strait with MIGs for the first time in many years. Therefore, Taiwan is important, but it is not the exclusive Chinese concern most Americans believe it to be.

The Chinese demonstrate constantly, in speech and action, how crucial to Sino-American relations is U.S. strength and determination vis-a-vis the Soviet Union. The Chinese emphasize in every meeting with a Westerner how dangerous the Russians are. They reiterate on every available occasion that the main threat to world peace is "the Polar Bear." They seek out leaders of conservative American groups, like the Committee on the Present Danger (a group of Americans devoted to warning the U.S. about the Soviet military menace and demanding a tougher U.S. stance toward the U.S.S.R.), which share their opinions about the Soviet Union. They gave almost royal treatment to former Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger when he accepted their invitation to visit China last Spring. China promotes the strengthening of NATO and cultivates West European conservatives. It supports the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the political-economic bloc of non-communist nations in Southeast Asia, as a bulwark against Soviet influence. It has refused to sign a peace treaty--from World War II!--with Japan, unless Japan will include a clause, directed against the Soviet Union, opposing the efforts of any nation to attain regional "hegemony." It supports Japanese efforts to regain islands seized by the Soviet Union in World War II. China paralleled the United States in opposing the rise of Agostino Neto with Soviet and Cuban support in Angola. And China has even encouraged Japan and the Philippines to remain allies of the United States and to retain American bases.

The Chinese have frequently deplored what they perceive as American weakness. They denounce the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. as U.S. appeasement of the Soviet Union--as well as in their eyes, a fraud and a scheme to perpetuate superpower hegemony. Chinese officials express their regret over Carter's cancellation of the B-1 bomber.

Similar feelings show through in the report that Mao, a strong supporter of Vietnam against the U.S., remarked to Kissinger that it was unseemly for a great power to have given up after losing only 50,000 men. Mao's foreign minister denounced the U.S. for appeasing the U.S.S.R.. He argued that Chamberlain sought through appeasement to ensure that Hitler would attack Russia rather than Britain, and that Kissinger sought through appeasement to ensure that Russia would attack China rather than America. Regardless what one thinks of the historical validity of such interpretations, the charge testifies to the strength of Chinese emotions on the subject.

In a U.N. speech on September 29, 1977, China's current foreign minister repeated his predecessor's accusations, this time directed against Carter administration policies:

...the United States is on the defensive, while the Soviet Union is on the offensive. Social-imperialism [the U.S.S.R.] is exerting its utmost to carry out all-round arms expansion. It surpassed the United States in conventional armed forces long ago and is striving for over-all supremacy in nuclear weapons as well.

....[T]here is still a strong trend towards appeasement in the West. Some people hope that temporary ease can be gained by making compromises and concessions. They imagine that they can restrain social-imperialism by signing agreements and expanding economic exchanges with it and by giving it loans. Some even seek to divert this peril towards the east in order to preserve themselves at the expense of others...like rearing a tiger to one's ultimate detriment, a policy of appeasement will simply encourage aggression and hasten the outbreak of war. To follow in Neville Chamberlain's footsteps means courting self-destruction.

Neither Henry Kissinger nor his successors has failed to comprehend these Chinese views. Reportedly Zbigniew Brzezinski conveyed to the Chinese, via former Chief of Naval Operations Elmo Zumwalt, that the Carter administration does not share Kissinger's tragic view that the U.S. is a power on

the decline while the Soviet Union is an ascending power. Reportedly, too, Secretary of State Vance went out of his way, during his summer trip to China, to reassure the Chinese that the U.S. would remain a Pacific power. But, as the quotations above suggest, the Chinese are not persuaded. They see the U.S. giving the Soviet Union a free hand in southern Africa and in the Horn of Africa as well. They see the U.S. military power declining while the Soviet Union continually builds up its forces. They see the U.S. emphasizing SALT negotiations and other relationships with the Soviet Union while publicly consigning relations with China to a second level of priority. They see the U.S. largely ignoring its ASEAN allies and associates while it initiated talks with Vietnam.

That the Chinese see things this way does not mean that they are correct. And the damage done to Sino-American relations by the appearance of American weakness doesn't mean that the U.S. is wrong in the choices it has made (just as the continuing problems over Taiwan don't imply that the U.S. has made the wrong choice about Taiwan). Even if detente with the Soviet Union does damage relations with China, most Americans would not want to abandon detente (although some would wage it differently). But recognition of the Chinese reaction to demonstrations of real or apparent American weakness should raise questions, for instance about the U.S. withdrawal from Korea, the recent antagonisms with Japan over Korea and nuclear power as well as trade, and the relegation of ASEAN issues to a low priority compared to normalization with Vietnam. Above all, such recognition should dispel the notion that good relations with the Chinese are simply a matter of bargaining over Taiwan. In the quest for formal exchange of embassies between Washington and Peking, Taiwan is certainly the central issue. But in the great issues

affecting the world balance of power, U.S. ability to work with the Chinese may depend more upon U.S. refusal to respond to Chinese concerns about the Soviet Union will probably harden the Chinese position on Taiwan and could some day enhance Chinese interest in closer relations with the Soviet Union.

In 1975 Teng Hsiao-p'ing is paraphrased as having said to Cyrus Vance: "You will note that we have said nothing about your base on Diego Garcia. We view such issues from the level of global strategy. In comparison, such matters as 'kith and kin' on Taiwan and the controversy about the mayor's delegation are just 'chicken feathers and onion skins,' and not important. The polar bear is much more important."^{*}

^{*}Quoted by Jay Mathews, "Vance Visit Seen Soothing Chinese," Washington Post, 27 August 1977.