

Ripe for Cooperation:

THE SINO-AMERICAN RELATIONSHIP SINCE SEPTEMBER 11

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THE MOMENT HAS COME

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet threat, predictions of a rival-ridden East Asia with notable absenteeism on the part of the United States came into vogue. Suddenly, the U.S.-Japan security alliance looked like an anachronism propped up only by the ambiguities of the post-Cold War environment. Even though the Soviets no longer aimed missiles from Vladivostock, uncertainty about China loomed large. Thus, the old bilateral alliance stayed put. Meanwhile, apprehension heightened as visions of rivalry among China, Taiwan, Japan, and the Koreas captured the imagination of pundits and politicians. Ballistic weapons in East Asia made U.S. withdrawal from the region seem prudent – and maybe even imminent. Such a development prompted even more conjecture. Would an unstable multipolar system emerge? Would Japan remilitarize, spurring its neighbors into an arms race that would resurrect on a new continent the great power politics of 19th century Europe? And then, quite unpredictably, on September 11 the dice were cast. Terrorist attacks on New York City provided the long awaited catalyst for change in East Asia: the U.S. war on terrorism.

The past three months have refocused the world and brought change to East Asia. Since September 11, prospects of American withdrawal from Asia seem more remote as military forays into Central Asia expand U.S. involvement in the region. Moreover, revisions

made to the function of the Japanese Special Defense Forces (JSDF) heralds a new role for Japan that will probably arouse trepidation from China. Both of these recent developments threaten to upset an already fragile balance of power in East Asia. Nevertheless, a continued, and perhaps even intensified, U.S. presence in Asia mollifies the rising tension.

The American presence in Japan has long been viewed as the “cork in the bottle” – a way to contain Japan from erecting another Co-Prosperity Sphere. Nonetheless, an American presence is not welcomed in all parts. In China’s eyes, the U.S. is an uninvited guest in Central Asia. The ad hoc deployments that occurred after the terrorist attacks on New York City have the potential to activate the rivalry that pundits have claimed would rock East Asia. The intensified U.S. presence is a mixed blessing for China. However, constructing a relationship that encourages multilateralism in the region will mitigate differences arising from perceived intents and actual intents, thereby laying a firm foundation for cooperation within East Asia.

JAPAN ON THE RISE

Japan’s military role has widened considerably since September 11. Most remarkably, Prime Minister Koizumi pledged to send Japan’s Special Defense Forces (JSDF) to aid U.S. military efforts in Afghanistan. The deployment of Japanese forces represents a significant change in Japan’s military role in

East Asia over the past 50 years. Constrained by a constitution that places severe limits on indigenous military capabilities, Japan took shelter under the American security umbrella and let its ally point the guns during the Cold War. However, since the terrorist attacks on the United States, Koizumi has volunteered JSDF to provide rear-guard support for U.S. troops.¹ Japan's newfound military role signals a long-awaited shift toward an equal partnership in the US-Japan security alliance. Since the Gulf crisis of the early 1990s, Japan has been more willing to lend the U.S. military support during international conflicts. After much deliberation, the 1990 Kaifu government stalled in sending JSDF to assist in Desert Storm.² The cautious deliberation that followed, however, produced legislation that enabled the JSDF to participate in UN peacekeeping operations.³ Additional changes worked out during the Clinton-Hashimoto meeting in 1996 portended a more active, robust Japanese military partnership. These changes created an opportunity for Japan to obtain military autonomy and rely less on the United States.

The transition gained momentum after 1996 when new guidelines were drawn up for the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty. As indicated by the 1996 Japan Defense White Paper, U.S.-Japanese cooperation became more assiduous, consisting of joint exercises, shared research and development, and a more defined role for Japan in peacekeeping activities. According to political scientist Yu Bin,

[Revisions to the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty] considerably expand the

Japanese role from "self defense" to that of "joint action" anywhere in Japan's periphery, thus opening the door to a bigger Japanese role in dealing with future regional conflicts.⁴

The 1993-94 North Korean missile crisis and the 1996 Taiwan Strait crisis quickly made it apparent that the United States was the only military power in East Asia adequately equipped to handle such events. Fears of vulnerability in Japan prompted an expansion of the role of the JSDF. The treaty, therefore, repositioned the U.S.-Japan security alliance for a new century fraught by new defense problems in East Asia. From fighting terrorism to containing rogue states, the new JSDF gives Japan a rising profile in the changing East Asian security architecture. Jianwei Wang and Xinbo Wu characterize the transformation in dramatic terms: "Prior to the [new] U.S.-Japan security arrangements, the United States was a 'sword' while Japan remained the 'shield.' The latest round of redefinition, however, has turned Japan into another 'sword.'"⁵ China considers itself the direct target of the new sword.

China's mild reaction to the activation of the JSDF reflects an attempt to show support for the U.S. war against terrorism. Regardless, Chinese compliance belies a deep-seated distrust of the U.S.-Japan partnership. Envisioning Japanese and American soldiers fighting shoulder-to-shoulder sends shivers through Beijing. In the late 1990s, China viewed the treaty as a cover for U.S.-Japanese containment policy in East Asia. Yu Bin underscores this view: "Many in China believe

¹ *The Washington Post*, 28 September 2001, A30.

² In fact, only 20 out of 100 appointed medical volunteers ended up going to the Middle East, and then only for a very brief stint. This failure to contribute manpower during an international crisis reinforced the view of Japan as a constrained partner in military affairs.

³ Kenneth Pyle outlines the five conditions set forth by the Diet for SDF participation in UN peacekeeping operations: (1) the existence of a cease-fire agreement; (2) an acceptance of a Japanese role by parties directly involved in the conflict; (3) a neutral stance by UN force; (4) a withdrawal of the SDF in the event of a collapsed truce; (5) the restriction of SDF fire to self-defense only. Kenneth Pyle, *The Japanese Question* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Press, 1996), 131.

⁴ Yu Bin, "Containment by Stealth: Chinese Views of and Policies Toward America's Alliances with Japan and Korea after the Cold War," (Stanford: Stanford University Asia/Pacific Research Center, September 1999), 18.

⁵ Jianwei Wang and Xinbo Wu, "Against Us or with Us? The Chinese Perspective of America's Alliances with Japan and Korea," (Stanford: Stanford University Asia/Pacific Research Center, May 1998), 32.

that the new treaty is the beginning of 'soft containment' or 'containment by stealth.'⁶ In recent months, Japan has done everything possible to assuage Chinese edginess over containment by giving early notice of Japan's contribution to the U.S. military effort. Koizumi even flew to Beijing to inform Jiang Zemin personally that Japan would assist the United States in Afghanistan. Jiang's response was calm, yet circumspect when he reminded Koizumi to "remember the wariness of other Asian countries."⁷ This mild reaction greatly contrasts with China's tendency toward saber rattling and histrionics. Practically speaking, however, China still lacks both the diplomatic and military clout to prevent Japan from remilitarizing, yet Japan still endeavors to make China feel that its opinion carries weight in the changing tide of East Asian security. Meeting with China prior to releasing the JSDF sends reassuring signals to China that it is not being excluded. Such a gesture, coupled with Koizumi's symbolic visit to a war memorial at the Marco Polo Bridge, will hopefully ease Sino-Japanese relations. Notwithstanding Japan's diplomatic whitewashing, a remilitarized Japan will inevitably stir up unease in China.

The United States must also play a role in easing Chinese fears of a remilitarized Japan. By virtue of its alliance with Japan, the United States intent seems to be exclusion for China. Alliances by their nature aim to benefit those who are in them and exclude those who remain outside of them. The triangular relationship among the United States, China, and Japan has suffered from this pattern. The war on terrorism promises to bring all of the countries together under one banner. Both China and Japan have fought terrorism within their own borders. Shared experience and a common cause should encourage collaboration in critical areas such as intelligence gathering and logistical support. Such efforts will establish a level of trust that, if properly cultivated, could make way for further integrative measures, such as regional

collective security. Directing diplomatic capital toward this end will enhance all three relationships. In handling such multilateral efforts, however, the U.S. must be careful not to steal too much thunder away from its two partners, especially China.

UPSTAGED IN CENTRAL ASIA

The aftermath of September 11 has also yielded promises of cooperation between China and the United States that gloss over the underlying wariness each country harbors about the other's future interests in East Asia. The United States is resolute in maintaining a stronghold over the region. And China may interpret September 11 as its own long-awaited cue to resume dominance in East Asia. From both perspectives, tenuous collaboration is better than unwavering confrontation under any circumstances – and especially the present one. Nevertheless, conflicting interests tarnish the cooperation. How China interprets its purpose in East Asia in light of the recent terrorist attacks will be of central importance to American strategy. In order to ensure peace, the United States must remain aware of China's objectives and forge a policy that blends these objectives with its own goal of maintaining regional stability.

Prior to the U.S. military action in Afghanistan, China attempted to spearhead a separate multilateral effort aimed at fighting terrorism and Islamic extremism in Central Asia. Known as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the group members included China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The United States was conspicuously absent from the roster. This omission was anything but unintended. Given U.S. supremacy in the Asian-Pacific, Central Asia and the fringes of Russia are all that is left for China, and China therefore endeavors to exclude the U.S. from its own developing sphere of dominance. Although Soviet dominance and a hostile Sino-Soviet

⁶ Yu Bin, "Containment by Stealth," 10.

⁷ *New York Times*, 9 October 2001, A7(L).

relationship shut China out from Central Asia in the 20th century, China has a long legacy in Central Asia dating from its glorious imperial past. China has returned full force to regain its stronghold in the region by diversifying its oil interests in the 21st century. Currently, China National Petroleum owns 60% of Kazakh oil giant Aktobemuniyaz,⁸ encouraging visions of replacing the legendary Silk Road with oil pipelines into Xinjiang thereby tantalizing Chinese expansionists. By throwing itself into the scramble for Central Asia, the United States will dampen the pace of China's expansion and raise the stakes in the competition for hegemony in East Asia. As a newcomer to Central Asia, the United States will further alter the strategic calculus of the region, thus fomenting Chinese fears of encirclement.

Security expert Zhu Feng cites a Chinese adage to illustrate China's fear of encirclement: "A wolf at the door and a tiger out back." And China has reason to be concerned. The U.S. presence on China's eastern flank stretches from the bases in Korea and Japan down to the island of Taiwan, where the U.S. tacitly supports Taiwanese autonomy. For years these military postures have had Chinese strategists tearing their hair out. Plowing its way into Central Asia through Afghanistan will enable the United States to tighten an imaginary noose around China. Even though American intent is focused on ousting the Taliban, Beijing may perceive this move as part of an overarching strategy aimed at China's containment. In this case, an eagle, rather than a wolf or a tiger, sits at the door, front and back.

The United States has upstaged Chinese efforts to develop a leadership role in the region. Referring to the overshadowed Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Zhu Feng notes: "The role China has been trying to play in the region has been replaced by the United States and the international coalition, which has given China a big

shock." Not only has the United States taken the limelight away from China's newfound role as a multilateral coordinator, it has also made China's allies its own friends. Pakistan has risked tremendous domestic upheaval to demonstrate its support for U.S. military action in Afghanistan, and Russia, a wavering ally of China's and recent partner in the outstripped Central Asian alliance, has gravitated closer to the United States in a series of meetings culminating at President Bush's ranch in Texas.

China found itself upstaged in its bid for a leading role at the APEC Conference in Shanghai last October. By playing host, China positioned itself as leader in Asian institution building. Still more of a talk shop than an international policy-making institution, APEC nevertheless affords China the opportunity to shape the politico-economic order of Asia. China planned to use the conference to dazzle the world with its burgeoning economic progress and modernity; however President Bush stepped in and used the conference as a forum to shore up support for the war on terrorism. In other words, China was upstaged on its own turf.

In spite of the wariness American presence in Central Asia arouses, China has found that U.S. cooperation, rather than opposition, is more in its interests. The tragic events of September 11 compelled nations around the globe to offer condolences and support to the United States. In the case of the Sino-American relationship, this tragedy has opened lines of cooperation that could ease tension between the two states. Henry Chu, a journalist at the LA Times writes: "Many Chinese are relieved that the U.S. has discovered a new enemy, a role they feel China has been unfairly saddled with since the collapse of the Soviet Union."⁹ Redirecting attention toward Muslim extremism and international terrorism gives China and the United States common ground as China faces unrest in the Muslim dominated frontier province of Xinjiang.

⁸ *The Washington Post*, 18 October 2001, A01.

⁹ *Los Angeles Times*, 28 September 2001 A6.

With a U.S. beachhead so close to its border, a wary China clearly prefers for multilateral action in the war against terrorism as a way of restraining the United States. Despite some international support, the United States continues to lead the pack in carrying out the military action against Afghanistan. In the long term, however, this strategy will only work if China is included.

UNDERSTANDING AND WORKING WITH CHINA

Vacillating between the extremes of engagement and containment brings ambiguity to the Sino-American relationship. Both of these approaches originate in the era and homeland of great power politics – 19th century Europe. Political scientists and historians have a habit of assigning the conditions of 19th century Europe to 21st century East Asia in an effort to understand and manage relations with China. Although such comparative exercises hold some predictive power, they often liken apples to oranges. For this reason, the Sino-American relationship should be understood and managed on its own terms rather than as a mirror of 19th century great power politics. Acknowledging Chinese traditions of diplomacy and foreign policy will be crucial for the United States to undertake as it revises its own role in East Asia in the aftermath of September 11.

Viewing China through a comparative lens misconstrues Chinese intentions by dismissing them as similar to the ambitions of revisionist nation-states that existed in different circumstances and operated from different historical experiences. When analyzing geopolitics, experts often use a two-front paradigm to explain US strategy in Europe and Asia. Embedded in this line of thought is the

assumption that the arrangement of nation-states in Asia mirrors the one existing in Europe. The following statement by a Chinese strategist, as quoted by Aaron Friedberg in “Ripe for Rivalry” exemplifies this tendency to hold a mirror up to Europe and see Asia:

We can visualize several different scenarios . . . One is that Germany and [Russia] will move closer together . . . On the one hand, the US might ally with Germany to control Europe. Alternately, the US and Britain might combine to balance Germany’s influence. In Asia, the range of possibilities is similar”¹⁰

Friedberg, building on this view, extrapolates an Asian scenario from the European one to explain the uncertain future of China’s diplomatic alignments:

Substituting Japan for Germany, Korea for Britain, and Asia for Europe, this statement suggests that the Chinese have already begun to consider a wide array of possible relationships, including a continuation of the US-Japan alliance, a new Russo-Japanese entente, and an anti-Japanese grouping consisting of the United States and Korea .¹¹

Drawing comparisons between nation-states assumes that all nation-states exhibit the same behavior patterns and are driven by the same motives. This basic assumption may hold true when examining relationships among European states or states that have been heavily influenced by Europe.¹²

The assumption that the same motives drive all nation-states falls apart

¹⁰ Robert Delfs, “China Sees Danger from Japan, Soviet Union: Two Front Threat,” *Far Eastern Economic Review* 13 December 1990, 28 cited in Aaron Friedberg, “Ripe for Rivalry,” *International Security*, 18, no. 3 (Winter 93/94), 28.

¹¹ Friedberg, “Ripe for Rivalry,” 28.

¹² This assumption bears considerable explanatory power given Japan’s considerable success at transforming itself into an imperial power resembling those of Europe in the late 19th century.

when applied to China. Haughty condescension toward Western ways prevented China from modernizing as Japan did in the late 19th century. Civil wars and Cold War antagonisms prolonged the isolationism. Arguably, China did not even begin to function according to a Western model of statehood until the latter part of the 20th century. China thus enters the 21st century with a domestic institutional structure that is not based on a Western model and with limited experience dealing with other nation-states as equals rather than subordinates.¹³

Assuming these conditions hold, one can aptly predict that China will become a revisionist power like Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union because its *modus vivendi* does not match with the *modus operandi* of the current international system. The comparison errs, however, when it portrays China as the next superpower rival for the United States. Nazi Germany and the

Soviet Union had their eyes set on global domination. In contrast, a rising China threatens regional stability in East Asia. Given its low level of economic development *relative* to the United States, China will not grow from a regional threat into a global threat in the foreseeable future. The comparative exercise between Asia and Europe is therefore not entirely flawed; it simply misconstrues the scale of China's hegemonic ambitions.

Drawing parallels between European countries and China does not

capture the entire picture, but seeing the contrasts does prove useful. The most notable contrast between Asia and Europe is the differing degree of institutionalization that links states within each region. Asia is not as highly institutionalized as Europe. Unlike in Europe, the aftermath of World War II in Asia hardly laid the groundwork for intergovernmental cooperation between former rivaling nation-states. Additionally, America had little diplomatic maneuvering room once China fell under the yoke of Communism.

Moreover, the mainly bilateral approach used by the United States in East Asia did not foster a sense of regionalism in Asia that could counteract the rival-ridden ambitions common to nation-states. The post-war security framework implemented by the United States dampened interstate cooperation rather than promoting it. As a result, national rifts still scar post-war East Asia. This lack of regional unity in East Asia makes it, in the alarmist words of Aaron Friedberg, "ripe for rivalry."¹⁴ It is the Chinese will to power that is seen

as the primary cause of these regional rivalries.

Assuming that China is an expansionary power aiming to gain territory beyond its current continental borders misdirects U.S. strategy in East Asia. Realist theory has been marshaled to analyze Chinese behavior in the 20th and 21st centuries. John Mearsheimer offers a compelling version of realism known as "offensive realism" in his recently published book *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. According to this

¹³ In fact, Martin Mayer claims that the Chinese symbols used in the word diplomacy mean "barbarian control." Martin Mayer, *The Diplomats*, (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1983), 36.

¹⁴ Friedberg, "Ripe for Rivalry," 5-33.

theoretical framework, states maximize their power through aggressive measures (e.g. waging war against other states). Offensive realism brings dynamism into the calculations of states by assuming that states actively seek to become superior to their peers. Relative power among states still matters, but attaining absolute power is the holy grail of this crusade. The balance of power so important in other strains of realist thought is eclipsed by the drive to become a hegemon.¹⁵ The expansionary state, therefore, focuses on gaining enough material power to dominate its peers. Accordingly, extensive military spending and economic growth would classify China as such an expansionary state. Thus, the realist approach sees China as bent on reshaping the world order to suit its *own* hegemonic aspirations.

Certain aspects of this power-hungry characterization of China are convincing, but overall, offensive realism overstates China's ambitions. China has also voiced its own intentions to garner more influence in world affairs,¹⁶ excoriating the United States for being hegemonic in its dealings with other countries. These postures provide fodder for alarmism. Stephen Mosher recently presented such an interpretation in *Hegemon: China's Plan to Dominate Asia and the World*. He writes:

The PRC . . . has . . . the historical grievances of a Weimar Republic, the paranoid nationalism of a revolutionary Islamic state, and the expansionist ambitions of a Soviet Union at the height of its power. As China grows more powerful, and attempts to rectify these grievances and act out those

ambitions, it will cast an ever-lengthening shadow over Asia and the world.¹⁷

John Mearsheimer presents a moderated estimation of China's intentions, yet still emphasizing the nation's global ambitions. He writes:

What makes a future China threat so worrisome is that it might be far more powerful and dangerous than any of the potential hegemonies that the United States confronted in the twentieth century. . . . It is hard to see how the United States could prevent China from becoming a peer competitor. Moreover, China would likely be a more formidable superpower than the United States in the ensuing global competition between them.¹⁸

Both analysts rightly pit China in a competition against the United States. And indeed, the inevitability of such a standoff is highly plausible. But both analysts overstate the extent of the competition. China poses more of a threat to the United States' interests in East Asia than to U.S. global hegemony. Traditionally, China has had regional ambitions rather than global ones; China's worldview at the height of its imperial history was limited to Asia. Practically, China will not be able to spread its influence further than the borders of its ancient empire because it faces the challenge of managing secessionist regions. Handling Tibet, Xinjiang, and Taiwan should keep China occupied restoring a replica of its ancient worldview rather than taking over the rest of the world.

Building a cooperative relationship with China requires an understanding of China's unique worldview. Centuries before Western powers entered East Asia, China based

¹⁵ John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 22.

¹⁶ The 1998 white paper, *China's National Defense*, openly reveals China's ambitions to lead the world in the 21st century. However, much of this rhetoric does not translate into reality. China is more focused on leading Asia, not the world. Text available at: <http://tiger.uic.edu/~rodrigo/white_paper_98.htm>

¹⁷ Stephen Mosher, *Hegemon: China's Plan to Dominate Asia and the World*, (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2001), 30.

¹⁸ Mearsheimer, *Tragedy*, 40.

its foreign policy on a Confucian worldview that emphasized harmony and hierarchy. Specific to this notion of the international order was the centrality (both geographic and political) of the Chinese state, *zhongguo*, literally translated “Middle Kingdom.” China saw itself at the center of a harmonious world order in which foreign states paid tribute to the Middle Kingdom by presenting gifts and performing self-subjugating rituals.¹⁹ Foreign dignitaries traveled to Beijing from the steppes of Mongolia and Manchuria, from the kingdoms of Korea, Taiwan, and Annam (present day Vietnam), and from the arid lands of Central Asia to acknowledge the ultimate power of the Middle Kingdom. Tributary states extended from the center without demarcated borders that might otherwise limit the preeminence of the Middle Kingdom. China expected more distant lands to pay tribute, though with less regularity. These outliers lived beyond

the harmonious reach of the Confucian order, giving them lower rank than proximate tributary states. Thus, a hierarchy of states comprised the elaborate tributary system, and China sat at its pinnacle.²⁰ Philosophically, the Confucian order had global reach; practically, it remained confined to Asia.

China’s vaguely delineated, hierarchic system of tributary states brought calamity to China when it dealt with European countries. Instead of gifts and kow-tows, China got opium and unequal treaties. Exploitation by the West followed by a half-century of communist experimentation, which ultimately dispelled the Confucian worldview and escorted China into the system of nation-states. Today, China no longer holds celestial claims over surrounding states and its borders, for the most part, are clearly marked.²¹ Still, China

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wants to hem in the autonomous regions of Tibet, Lower Mongolia, and Xinjiang, and bring secessionist Taiwan back under its control. These territorial designs either reflect the tendency for nation-states to have border disputes or expose the remnants of the ancient tributary system still at work in Chinese foreign policy. In either case, it is important to understand the

forces motivating China’s policies.

China’s quest for inner stability arises from a history scarred by civil war and disunity. Irredentism, therefore, is a major pillar of a foreign policy²² that, as China finally finds its place on the world’s stage, will be marked by three objectives: unity, independence, and prosperity.²³ As an

¹⁹ Most noted among these rituals is the kow-tow – kneeling three times and knocking one’s head nine times on the floor. This gesture signified the submission of the outside world to the ultimate authority of the Middle Kingdom.

²⁰ John King Fairbanks, ed., *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China’s Foreign Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968).

²¹ These borders are subject to dispute. China has waged border wars with Vietnam and India. China also claims several islands in the South China Sea.

²² China considers its relations with Taiwan a matter of domestic policy. Consequently, irredentism would fall under the same classification.

²³ Michel Oksenberg, “China: A Tortuous Path onto the World’s Stage,” in Robert A. Paster, ed., *A Century’s Journey: How the Great Powers Shape the World* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

ascendant power, China seeks to restore its dominance in the region. Western intrusion destroyed Chinese preeminence 150 years ago. China would like to transfer the balance of power in East Asia back to its own orbit. The United States stands directly in China's way, however, by tacitly supporting Taiwanese autonomy. Favoring Taiwan reminds China of its territorial losses, and U.S. posturing in favor of Taiwan also makes Sino-American relations highly volatile. The United States must carefully position itself in order to stave off conflict.

Unsurprisingly, China aspires to restore the economic abundance that once flourished within its borders. Imperialist exploitation and communist mismanagement brought tremendous economic hardship to China and retarded advanced industrialization, but the past 20 years have witnessed breathtaking strides in economic growth. This prosperity will lend greater credibility to the ruling Communist Party. Increased wealth also reinforces China's foreign policy objectives. Economic opportunity might entice Taiwan back into China's fold, thus finally realizing a long held goal of unification. Greater wealth will, therefore, augment China's bargaining power in international negotiations. Clearly, China's foreign policy objectives constitute China's cause célèbre – the reclamation of dominance in East Asia. Nevertheless, distinctions of scale need to be made. Achieving its

foreign policy objectives should direct China toward *regional* hegemony, but not *global* hegemony.

A recent article by Lieutenant Colonel Soong-Bum Ahn articulates an approach to handling China that lends greater consideration to the Chinese mindset.²⁴ Soong-Bum Ahn questions the assumption that a dominant China will threaten its neighbors and the United States. Ahn argues that perceptions rather than actual intents have governed the relationships between China, Japan, and the United States.

"AHN ARGUES THAT PERCEPTIONS RATHER THAN ACTUAL INTENTS HAVE GOVERNED THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CHINA, JAPAN, AND THE UNITED STATES. COOPERATION AMONG AT LEAST TWO OF THESE POLES HAS BEEN ROCKY BECAUSE EACH PERCEIVES THE OTHER AS HAVING INTENTIONS INIMICAL TO ITS OWN INTERESTS."

Cooperation among at least two of these poles has been rocky because each perceives the other as having intentions inimical to its own interests. Ahn outlines the stated intentions of China to illustrate what he thinks are China's actual intentions. These intentions are not as jingoistic and provocative as many realist theorists predict. Drawing

upon the history of Chinese military, Ahn writes, "Chinese military action has been defensive or punitive in nature and seldom imperialistic."²⁵ He identifies the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence formulated by Prime Minister Zhou Enlai as "based on concepts of noninterference and no stationing of troops outside one's own territory."²⁶ Traditionally, Chinese military forces have been employed to maintain domestic stability and national defense, but not for offensive purposes. Moreover, China has historically been a continental power. Occupying a large part of the Asian land mass, and deeply engaged in trade and foreign investment with

²⁴ Soong-Bum Ahn, "China as Number One," *Current History* 100, no.647 (September 2001)

²⁵ Soong-Bum Ahn, "China as Number One,"

²⁶ Soong-Bum Ahn, "China as Number One,"

its neighbors, it is highly doubtful that China will bite the hands that feed it by attempting to expand into Korea or overseas into Japan.²⁷ China, therefore, does hold the potential to behave in a way that encourages cooperation. It simply needs to exercise sovereignty over its claimed territory, which still includes Taiwan. Handing some of the regional leadership over to China, therefore, will appease its frustration and pave the way to greater cooperation. And perhaps, create a benign regional hegemon rather than a threatening one.

Given Chinese foreign policy goals and the evidence of China's regional hegemonic ambitions, the United States must craft an approach to China that capitalizes on the window of opportunity that the tragedy of September 11 has provided in East Asia. Clearly, China has reason to benefit from the relationship. As observed by Minxin Pei and Catherine Dalpino:

There is . . . [a] . . . tangible benefit for China in joining an international coalition against terrorism. A targeted campaign could reduce China's own vulnerability to terrorism, particularly in Xinjiang province. The separatist movement there has received funding, weapons and training from Afghanistan, so the eradication of the terrorists' networks inside Afghanistan would be a result much welcomed by Beijing.²⁸

An American effort to destroy terrorist networks in Central Asia is in China's short-term interest. Molding the U.S. presence so that it will be more aligned with China's long-term interests will require multilateral efforts that place China in a leading role in determining the future of

Central Asia. Stealing the spotlight from the Shanghai Organization for Cooperation is not advisable in the long-term because it perpetuates Chinese perception of encirclement. Moreover, allowing China to take a leading role in Central Asia will satisfy China's desire to have involvement in the region as it once did in the days of the tributary system. This sort of framework encourages multilateral strategic partnerships involving the United States and China.

Engaging China through multilateralism has long been on the agenda for some policy makers. Nesting the security alliances that flank China's eastern front in multilateral institutions engages China and will start East Asia on a path towards greater institutionalization that, as exemplified by Europe, leads to greater peace and settles long-held resentments. As argued by Douglas Paal, multilateralism is still in its embryonic stages in East Asia,²⁹ but the extreme shock of September 11 gives states the impetus for greater cooperation in intelligence-sharing and military exercises. Cooperative ties of this nature can direct states toward multilateral efforts in the future. China may view the deployment of the JSDF forces as a harbinger of Japanese militarization when Japan remains tied to the hip of the U.S. Placing the JSDF within the framework of a multilateral security organization could calm Chinese anxiety, and forging a similar multilateral framework in Central Asia could relax Chinese fears of encirclement.

Perception of intent rather than actual intent has robbed China, Japan, and the United States of the chance to assess where their respective interests coincide. Identifying and constructing institutions that mitigate conflicts of interest should rank high on the U.S. "to-do" list in East Asia. September 11 has expanded the frontier for

²⁷ Soong-Bum Ahn, "China as Number One," 252.

²⁸ *South China Morning Post*, 19 September 2001.

²⁹ Douglas Paal, "Nesting the Alliances in the Emerging Context of Asia-Pacific Multilateral Process: A U.S. Perspective," (Stanford: Stanford University Asia/Pacific Research Center, July 1999).

a more comprehensive Sino-Japanese-American cooperation. Asia may remain “ripe for rivalry”, but with renewed alliances directed toward multilateralism, the United States can become a broker for cooperation.

This essay was written while on leave during Fall 2001. In it, the author lays out the possibilities for cooperation between China and the US in the wake of the events of September 11.

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