

FACING UP TO ANOTHER COLD WAR

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STI COMMENTS ON CURRENT AFFAIRS

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For the second time in half a century the United States is engaged in a “cold war” with a powerful adversary—The People’s Republic of China. Knowledgeable individuals, both military and civilian, on both sides predict conflict is likely if China continues to press forward with its present policies, policies that have strained relations between the two countries in the past and ones that the PRC shows no signs of abandoning. Included is an aggressive foreign policy in Asia, an unnecessary military buildup of staggering proportions, the threat to take Taiwan by force if it does not agree to unite with the Mainland, and a continuous denial of human and political rights to its citizens. The response of the United States to these policies and other areas of contention has been ambiguous; sometimes recognizing the threat to U.S. national interests and reacting positively; sometimes denying that an obvious threat exists.

The question at the mid point of the year 2000 is whether a cold war does, in fact, exist and if so, why is it not recognized as such? The answer is not spelled out in black and white but in shades of gray. In this context, failure to acknowledge the existence of a cold war with the People’s Republic of China can be attributed to two main causes.

First, the Clinton administration would vigorously deny that any such conflict existed. It would argue that in the long run a policy of forbearance in the short term will eventually lead to a more democratic and less aggressive PRC. Thus, espionage, sales of sophisticated weapons to rogue states, threats against Taiwan, repression in Tibet, a major military buildup with no enemy in sight, and the threat to target American cities with nuclear weapons should America interfere in a Taiwan Strait conflict, are viewed as only rough spots and best ignored, as China travels the road toward becoming a benign and peaceful member of the community of nations. President Clinton has labeled this policy as “constructive engagement.”

A second, more obscure, but equally compelling reason is that the American public is not ready to accept the fact that we are again engaged in a cold war with another major and hostile military power. This trauma is not unlike that experienced by the British and French after the first World War. They paid a terribly high price in their victory and were unwilling to recognize Hitler’s Germany as a threat when all evidence pointed to the contrary. In essence, they were war weary and willing to rationalize any policy that would avoid another conflict. The parallel is plain enough. In

the 45 years following World War II the United States also paid a high price for its cold war victory over the Soviet Union in terms of its dead (Korea and Vietnam) and in national treasure expended.

Also important was the high psychological cost paid. The ever present threat of a nuclear holocaust, the Cuban missile crisis, surrogate wars in Africa, Central America and Afghanistan, and daily headlines pointing out areas of disagreement with the Soviet Union that could lead to conflict. All of this took its toll. Simply put, Americans by and large are not willing to so soon give up a peace won at so high a cost and embark on another cold war struggle.

A positive reaction to the PRC's threat to use force against Taiwan was the House passed "Taiwan Security Enhancement Act," legislation which would allow the United States to sell state of the art military technology and equipment to Taiwan. This was an essentially a Republican bill and was vigorously opposed by the Clinton administration. On the other hand, a Republican Congress granted permanent most favored nation status to China with respect to trade between the two countries. Such contradictions can only confuse public opinion and give comfort to those who deny reality and pursue peace at any price.

But if a cold war with the People's Republic of China exists as argued here, then the United States must recognize it as such and strive to prevail in the shortest time and at the least cost. And while another 45 year long cold war is not acceptable, it is quite reasonable to believe that China can be changed into the kind of country that the Clinton administration envisages and in a much shorter time frame. The paramount consideration is that the United States face reality. What if Britain and France had recognized the threat posed by Hitler in the run up to World War II and accepted the risk of positive action. One can only speculate but it seems fair to conclude that no matter what the outcome, it would have been a thousand times preferable to the known cost of six years of world conflict.

What can the United States do to end the cold war with the PRC quickly and on favorable terms, that is, the establishment of a democratic and non-threatening China. In this respect the United States must:

- Explain its position and rationale to potential allies and also be prepared to accept that many of its traditional friends will oppose a more confrontational policy toward China. e.g. the European Union.
- Counter PRC diplomatic efforts to secure actual and de facto mutual security agreements with neighbors with which it has fought border wars in the past—Russia, India, Vietnam. In other words use all the tools of diplomacy and persuasion to deny the PRC secure borders in its cold war struggle with the United States.
- Make clear its absolute determination to defend Taiwan against a military attack by the PRC, and further, initiate direct contacts between the Taiwan and U.S. military.
- Increase its military capabilities in the Western Pacific and, by definition, significantly increase overall military spending. While the cost will be initially high, it

will be more than offset by a democratic and non-threatening China down the road. A second, and not insignificant benefit, would a large reduction in military expenditures by nations in East Asia.

- Make a major, full press effort to bring Russia and Japan to an agreement over the Kurile Islands followed by mutual security and trade agreements.
- Make clear to China that every provision in the recently passed most favored nation trade agreement will be strictly enforced and that riders to the legislation monitoring certain aspects of Chinese behavior are as important as the legislation itself. And further, the first violation of the agreement by China will bring about swift and effective retaliation.
- Make clear that any threat, overt or covert, to America's East Asian allies and de facto allies—Japan, South Korea, the Philippines and Singapore—will be considered a threat to U.S. security.
- Write into law as necessary and strictly enforce prohibitions against the export of militarily useful technology/equipment to the PRC.

Implementing the above will be an exercise in “hard love” and will not be easily embraced by the American public. But it also should be noted that President Reagan's strategy for ending the cold war with the Soviet Union on American terms was not without its critics. Insuring that a totalitarian China does not dominate Asia, as Germany planned to dominate Europe, is not without risk. But then, what are leaders for?

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