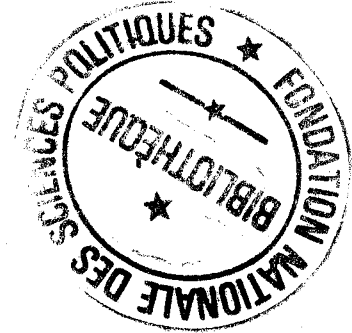
China's "New" Diplomacy

Tactical or Fundamental Change?

Edited by Pauline Kerr, Stuart Harris, and Qin Yaqing



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However, despite the efforts from China and the international community, even before the ink of the Joint Statement was dry, North Korea undertook its most extensive ballistic missile tests and conducted its first alleged nuclear test. Beijing's anger was obvious. Immediately after Pyongyang's nuclear test, China's Foreign Ministry issued a statement expressing Beijing's firm opposition to North Korea's test. Beijing's unambiguous and strong-worded opposition to Pyongyang's reckless behavior was unprecedented.[32]

China worked closely with the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and supported the adoption of the UNSC's sharply worded Resolution 1695 on July 15, 2006 in response to Pyongyang's missile tests. Five days after the nuclear test, the UNSC strongly condemned the test and imposed major new economic sanctions against Pyongyang.[33] Then on July 31, 2006 the UNSC adopted Resolution 1696, which demanded that another state challenging the nonproliferation regime, Iran, suspend its uranium enrichment program. Due to opposition from China and Russia, the United States and Japan made certain concessions and did not invoke Chapter 7 of the UN Charter in relevant resolutions, which could have aggravated tensions with Iran. China's actions show that on two recent occasions it has supported the tough decisions made by the UNSC on dangerous nonproliferation issues. That said, Beijing has every reason to be cautious and not to corner North Korea. China is unwilling to see a totally collapsed country on the Korean Peninsula or a war close to its periphery.

The Six-Party Talks on the Korean nuclear issue, after years and rounds of patient negotiations, eventually achieved remarkable progress in 2007 and 2008. In February 2008 China convinced North Korea to rejoin the talks and the parties agreed on a deal, involving a sixty-day deadline for North Korea to freeze its nuclear program in exchange for aid and release of the Banco Delta Asia funds, on which the U.S. Treasury Department had put restrictions.[34] In May 2008 North Korea presented 19,000 pages of documents to the United States which detailed production records of its nuclear program. On July 12, 2008 the press communiqué of the sixth round of the Six-Party Talks stated optimistically that "the parties spoke highly of the positive progress made"[35] regarding verification and monitoring mechanisms, and economic and energy assistance which went along with disablement of the Yongbyon nuclear facilities by October 2008. Recently, North Korea has demolished the cooling tower at Yongbyon, the United States has removed the designation of North Korea as a state sponsor of terrorism and terminated application of the Trading with the Enemy Act, and the negotiation between Japan and North Korea has also made positive progress. All these achievements and progress has opened new opportunities for the everlasting peace and stability of the Korean peninsula.[36]

In reviewing the outcomes of the Six-Party Talks thus far, it would appear that China's diplomatic role has been of critical importance.

Reasons for China's "New" Diplomacy

What explains these new manifestations of China's diplomacy? What are the reasons and history behind them? First, profound and rapid changes have occurred in the world situation. After the end of the cold war, the aspiration for cooperation and institution-building among countries is stronger. Chinese leaders believe that, in the contemporary world, the factors leading to war are lessening, while the factors contributing to world peace are increasing. Peace and development are the call of the times. Globalization and the scientific and technological revolutions have deepened the interdependence among countries on all fronts. Economic interests are intertwined, and trade links are closer. The all-around deepening of economic interdependence coupled with increasingly acute nontraditional security issues have, to a certain degree, contributed to the forging of a bond of common destiny among all countries. Daunting challenges on global issues require broad international cooperation. Peaceful coexistence and common development have become the overriding trend of the contemporary world.[37]

In addition, the continuing presence of nuclear weapons has raised the cost of war to an unprecedented level. The consequence that no single nation will emerge as a winner in nuclear war has effectively reduced the chances of the outbreak of full-scale war among powers. Since no one will benefit from the war, diplomacy is playing a much more important role, leaving more room for coordination and compromises among powers.[38]

Second, China itself is changing. Its status and power outstrip that of thirty years ago to a considerable margin. As the reform and opening up deepens, China is becoming increasingly aware that change in the international system is not simply about the replacement of the old system by the new one. China can only gain its due benefits by joining the existing international system first. It also needs to make use of the existing rules to protect its interest and achieve development.[39] China has forged strategic partnerships and cooperation with many countries and has acceded to almost all the important regional and global organizations. It steadily promotes regional economic cooperation and advocates the security cooperation model based on nonalliance, nonconfrontation, and nontargeting of any other countries and the region. China is adopting integration policies and conducts proactive diplomacy at both the international and the regional level. While advancing its own interests in the international system, China is also committed to promoting the common interests of mankind.[40]

Third, another important factor is that China's external environment has changed. The multipolar trend is advancing rapidly. Other developing countries are advancing along a similar path to China: the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries and India in Asia; Brazil, Mexico, and Chile in Latin America; and South Africa, Nigeria, and Egypt in Africa. At the same time, however, China's decades-long high growth has fuelled suspicions among some countries, leading to the rise of the China threat theory. Moreover, the surging trend of globalization has caused new problems and posed great social challenges to both the developing and developed world. The economic nationalism and resurgence of U.S. trade protectionism are testimony to their poor preparedness for the impact of globalization. Through its policy of "peaceful development," China aims to reassure the world, and especially its Asian neighbors, that it has no grand design to create a China-centered regional order in Asia. The basic connotation of "peaceful development" is that China seeks development and harmony among all people internally and promotion of peace and cooperation externally. Regional stability will depend on whether China and the rest of the Asia can prosper together and resolve the problems they face.

The factors above represent the overall background of China's new diplomacy. Since the late 1970s when Deng Xiaoping pointed out that peace and development are the way forward, China has started to improve its relations with the rest of the world on all fronts to create favorable external conditions for its economic take-off. China has been developing steadily and fairly fast over the last few decades, which not only benefits the Chinese people but also benefits other peoples across the world.

Conclusion

Diplomacy is the extension of domestic affairs. Chinese diplomacy will continue to serve the country's bid to bring about a moderately well-off society. Chinese President Hu Jintao put forward the concept of "harmonious world" at the UN General Assembly in 2005. This concept shows the consistency of the nature of China's foreign policy—a nonconfrontational foreign policy of a continuously growing power, seeking for a multipolar balanced world. "Peaceful development" will continue to serve as China's national development strategy in the next fifty years.

In the short- and mid-term, China will pay special attention to improving its relations with developed countries, particularly the United States, and also with its neighboring and developing countries. These aspects of China's external relations are of great significance to nurturing a favorable external condition for its modernization program. The Chinese leadership will enhance high-level visits, especially promoting personal summits so as to enhance mutual understanding and continue strategic dialogues with the world's major powers.

China is now faced with an important strategic period for its development. In the mid- and long-term, the central task of Chinese diplomacy is to make the best use of such an important period of strategic opportunities and to try to lengthen it as much as possible. To enhance its global and regional standing, China will stay with the existing international institutions. Chinese leaders will be more pragmatic and less ideological in handling foreign relations.

With its deeper and broader integration into the international community, China will conduct multilateral diplomacy in much greater depth and scope. Chinese leaders believe that if a country wants to move forward and develop, it needs democracy and the rule of law. The same is true of the international community. Multilateral diplomacy is the basis for exercising democracy and the rule of law in international relations. China will place high value on participating in international organizations and the building of international mechanisms with the United Nations at the center. The United Nations is an important forum for developing countries to express their will and aspiration and, to some extent, an important battlefield for checking unilateralism and hegemonism. Intensifying its activities and attaching great importance to coordination with other members of the United Nations are the top priorities of China's multilateral diplomacy.

China will play a more appropriate and active role in the global scene, a role that conforms to its status and features and shoulders due responsibility and a role that serves China's interests, conforms to historical trends, and safeguards the common interests of mankind. It is expected that China, with its growing comprehensive national power and maturing new diplomacy, will be able to exert greater influence on major international issues.

Notes

1. Guoli Liu, ed., *Chinese Foreign Policy in Transition* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 1.
2. Evan S. Medeiros and M. Taylor Fravel, "China's "New" Diplomacy,"Foreign Affairs, (November/December 2003): 22, http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20031101fasay82604/evan-s-medeiros-m-taylorfravel/china-s-new-diplomacy (accessedFebruary 18, 2008).
3. Huang Renwei, *China International Status Report* (Beijing: People's Press, 2006), 1–5.
4. Liu, *Chinese Foreign Policy in Transition*, 10.
5. In case of emergencies involving Chinese nationals overseas, leaders of the central government oversee in person the handling of relevant issues. Chinese diplomatic and consular missions abroad have launched emergency mechanisms with rapid response and proper handling. The evacuation of overseas Chinese in the Solomon Islands is

CHAPTER 9

China's "Unofficial" Diplomacy

Brendan Taylor

Introduction

China's engagement in "unofficial" diplomatic processes has received little scholarly attention. This apparent academic oversight is both surprising and intriguing. In the Chinese case, the proximity of official and unofficial diplomatic processes is closer than in almost any other country—often to the point where the two levels are indistinguishable. For the analyst of China's often opaque diplomatic processes, therefore, an analysis of this country's unofficial diplomacy promises to reveal much about Chinese official attitudes. Indeed, as this chapter demonstrates, unofficial diplomacy constitutes an integral yet seriously underexamined component of China's new diplomacy.

The chapter begins by defining the often confused and confusing terminology surrounding unofficial diplomacy. It then reviews China's engagement in unofficial diplomatic processes. The final part of the chapter analyzes what this exercise reveals about China's perceptions regarding the utility of unofficial diplomatic processes in particular and Beijing's approach to Asia-Pacific multilateral diplomacy more generally.

What is "Unofficial" Diplomacy?

Despite the prevalence of its usage in international politics, the term unofficial diplomacy is often a confused and confusing one. It is a descriptor that could be applied, for instance, to the "backstage" negotiations that were so critical to resolving the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis or to Jimmy Carter's meeting with Kim-Il Sung, which played such an important role in bringing the 1993–94 North Korean nuclear crisis to a close. Yet it is a term that can also

be used to describe a whole raft of international conferences, workshops, and meetings that are occurring on an almost daily basis throughout the Asia-Pacific region, involving academics, journalists, politicians, and officials acting in their "private" capacities—such as the annual Asia-Pacific Roundtable that is organized by the ASEAN Institutes for Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS).

Theorists and practitioners of Asia-Pacific security politics, in particular, have endeavored to cope with the slippery nature of the term unofficial diplomacy by compartmentalizing it into several "tracks" of diplomatic activity. In this schema, official (or Track 1) diplomacy refers to institutions and activities operating at the government-to-government level, where officials are the only participants. Unofficial (or Track 2) diplomacy refers to activities involving academics, journalists, think tanks, researchers, and former officials, as well as current officials participating in their private capacities. A defining characteristic of Track 2, however, is the existence of some linkage to Track 1, either through the participation of officials or institutionalized reporting arrangements or both.

Although seemingly straightforward in theory, the distinction between Track 1 and Track 2 has proven a great deal more difficult to maintain or even apply in practice. Indeed, analysts remain unable to agree upon a definition for Track 2 processes. A recent study by Canadian scholar Brian Job, for instance, correctly observes that the term has at least two connotations in the Asia-Pacific context. The first refers to "the entire complex of informal networking activities, unofficial channels of communication, and people-to-people diplomacy, across national and regional levels, including official and nongovernmental diplomacy, undertaken across social, political, and economic realms of civil society." A second, more widely accepted definition describes "a particular form of dialogue activity associated . . . with the promotion of cooperative security and multilateral security regionalism." This type of dialogue activity typically involves academics and journalists, as well as politicians and government officials participating in their unofficial or private capacities.[1]

This definitional problem is compounded by the fact that nations in the Asia-Pacific region have often tended to adopt quite different perceptions of and approaches to Track 2 processes. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, in the case of China, the demarcating line between Track 1 and Track 2 is often so blurred as to become almost indistinguishable. The term "Track one and a half (or 1.5)" diplomacy, coined by Paul Dibb in the mid-1990s, has proven useful in partially resolving this issue. Track 1.5 processes are those unofficial activities attended predominantly by officials from government and the military or where the agenda has been set by government officials.

The Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue (NEACD) and the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) Shangri-La Dialogues are the two most prominent examples within this category. Given their unofficial nature and a central Chinese involvement in these processes, they will be considered as falling within the purview of this chapter.

At the other end of the spectrum, "Track 3" diplomacy describes activities undertaken by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), transnational networks, and advocacy coalitions that claim to represent peoples and communities largely marginalized from the center of power. The influence and importance of Track 3 organizations and activities have grown in recent years, particularly in China and throughout Southeast Asia.[2] This is partly a reflection of some of the limitations of Track 2 processes. In particular, the so-called "autonomy dilemma," wherein Track 2 institutions are seen as becoming too closely aligned with their Track 1 counterparts, has played a key role. Because Track 3 processes typically adopt a more critical stance toward government and seek to influence policy more indirectly, a perception exists that it is much easier for them to avoid this characterization. For that very reason, however, Track 3 processes will not fall within the purview of this chapter.

China's "Unofficial" Diplomacy: A Review

Prior to the 1990s, there was very little multilateral activity in the Asia-Pacific, and only a handful of unofficial processes were in existence. This situation has dramatically reversed, and there are now estimated to be in excess of two hundred unofficial diplomatic mechanisms.[3] Obviously enough, it is not possible in this chapter to document China's engagement with each and every one of these processes. Nor would it be a particularly useful exercise, given that the influence and importance of many of these processes remain negligible. For that reason, this chapter will only analyze China's engagement with those unofficial diplomatic processes that have generally been regarded as the most important and influential in the Asia-Pacific: the South China Sea workshops, the NEACD, the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP), the Boao Forum for Asia (BFA), the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue, and the Network of East Asian Think Tanks (NEAT). The chapter will also survey a number of influential unofficial bilateral discussions that Chinese institutions conduct with their American, Japanese, Taiwanese, and Australian counterparts.

The following factors will be taken into account. First, a brief overview of the unofficial diplomatic process in question will be undertaken. This overview will set the context by providing a very brief history of the process

China's other primary interlocutors in such unofficial dialogue processes are Japan, Taiwan, and Australia. The China Institute of International Studies, for instance, holds regular workshops with the Japan Institute of International Affairs. The China Foundation for International and Strategic Studies in Beijing holds regular dialogues with counterpart institutions in Taiwan. Likewise, a range of Chinese institutes meets regularly to engage in dialogue with leading Australian think tanks. The China Institute for International Strategic Studies, for instance, holds an annual Track 1.5 dialogue with the Australian Strategic Policy Institute. The fifth and most recent of these gatherings was held in China in October 2007.

Interpreting China's "Unofficial" Diplomacy

There is no question that China has both broadened and deepened its engagement in unofficial diplomacy since its first experimentation with this form of dialogue in the early 1990s. To be sure, Beijing has tended to approach unofficial diplomacy rather tentatively. It initially resisted sending high-level officials to dialogues such as the South China Sea workshops and the Shangri-La Dialogues, for instance, opting instead to have delegations led by Foreign Ministry officials. Over time, however, as China's diplomatic confidence levels have grown, higher level officials have attended unofficial dialogues. Most recently, the presence of Vice Foreign Minister Wu on the sidelines of the NEACD and the attendance of Lieutenant General Zhang at the 2007 Shangri-La Dialogue are indicative of this growing confidence. Based on the foregoing analysis, however, what utility does Beijing see in these processes, and what might its deepening engagement in them tell us about official Chinese attitudes to Asia-Pacific multilateralism more generally?

First, Beijing's deepening involvement in unofficial diplomacy appears designed to alleviate regional apprehensions regarding China's (re)emergence. In this regard, China's deepening engagement in unofficial diplomatic processes is virtually synonymous with Beijing's new diplomacy—the more nuanced approach to foreign relations that is covered in detail elsewhere in this volume. China's attendance at the South China Sea workshops could be seen as a precursor to this new approach, occurring as it did at a time when most governments in the region exhibited a high degree of apprehension regarding the motives for China's aggressive moves in the Spratley Islands and then during the 1995–96 Taiwan Strait crisis. Chinese efforts to assuage these apprehensions—through, for instance, Zheng Bijian's famous "Peaceful Rise" speech to the 2003 BFA—constitute a continuation and, indeed, an evolution of this trend. However, it was perhaps Lieutenant General Zhang's recent

address to the 2007 Shangri-La Dialogue that represented the best exposition of this new approach by trying to demonstrate a greater willingness and ability on the part of China to exhibit more openness and transparency regarding its intentions. Likewise, Beijing's recent use of the NEACD to demonstrate China's commitment as leader of the Six-Party Talks process can be viewed in a similar light.

Second, unofficial diplomacy is seen as useful by Beijing in that it provides China with a valuable mechanism for the discussion of highly sensitive issues. In particular, Beijing is willing to allow its representatives to interact with their Taiwanese counterparts in unofficial processes. CSCAP study group meetings, for example, enable policy experts from China and Taiwan to interact and exchange views in informal settings. In the process, Beijing hopes that they might gain a greater appreciation of each other's viewpoints and gradually begin to develop certain shared understandings. Indeed, as noted earlier in this chapter, one of Beijing's primary motivations for initially participating in the South China Sea workshops was to promote cooperation between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait.

Third (and a related factor), the informal nature of unofficial diplomacy is seen as highly advantageous from the Chinese perspective. Indeed, Beijing has tended to strongly resist attempts to formalize or further institutionalize these mechanisms. The clearest example of this was Beijing's continued resistance throughout the 1990s to repeated attempts to formalize the South China Sea workshops. The informal nature of this mechanism allowed for Taiwanese participation without giving any degree of credence or legitimacy to Taiwan's separatist claims and Taipei's desire for greater international recognition. At the same time, the informal nature of this process and the ability of representatives to contribute in their private capacities were conducive to Beijing's participation at a time when internal contestation remained over the nature, scope, and desirability of China's participation in Asia-Pacific multilateralism more generally.

Fourth, in weighing the costs and benefits of Chinese participation in unofficial diplomacy, Beijing appears to have calculated that it is better to be present at such groupings. In the case of the South China Sea workshops, for instance, the judgment appears to have been made in Beijing that it would be disadvantageous for China to be left out of a major forum on the South China Sea. More broadly, however, China also derives other benefits from its participation in unofficial dialogues. CSCAP meetings, for example, serve as a useful tool for information gathering, whereby Beijing can gain an appreciation of what security issues are preoccupying the minds of various academic and policy communities throughout the region and how, in particular, China's (re)emergence is being perceived.

Fifth, unofficial diplomacy serves as a mechanism that the Chinese can use to undermine American influence in the region. For example, China's strong support for the NEAT and the establishment of the BFA have been interpreted as quite deliberate efforts on the part of Beijing to counter the influence of more established unofficial diplomatic processes, such as CSCAP where U.S. influence is more prominent and deeply embedded. Similarly, Lieutenant General Zhang's speech at the 2007 Shangri-La Dialogue provided an opportunity to counter American allegations regarding an emerging China threat, which had become such a prominent feature at earlier dialogues.

Conclusions

The foregoing analysis confirms that China has, to a great extent, become a committed multilateralist. Much like its potential "strategic competitor," the United States, however, the findings of this chapter also suggest that China's particular brand of multilateralism remains a highly pragmatic one. The chapter clearly illustrates that China has deepened its participation in unofficial diplomatic processes in a very careful and measured manner. To an extent that few analysts were able to anticipate, it has also sought to engage with these mechanisms on its own terms and to actually "socialize" them to Beijing's way of doing business. As Beijing's economic and strategic weight in the region continues to grow, thereby leading to a commensurate increase in its ability to shape diplomatic processes, there is little to suggest any reversal of this trend.

Yet this socialization has not been a one-way process. Indeed, one of the initial rationales for trying to enmesh China in the emerging regional architecture was to socialize its international behavior by increasing its exposure to regional and global norms. And to some extent this appears to be happening. The South China Sea workshops, for instance, gradually created sufficient confidence in Beijing to allow for the discussion of the highly sensitive South China Sea dispute in a multilateral (as opposed to a bilateral) setting—a confidence that eventually culminated in a willingness on the part of Beijing to sign the Declaration of the Conduct of Parties to the South China Sea in 2002.[25] Alice Ba takes this socialization argument even further, observing that "some Chinese participants of Track 2 processes have been most explicit about regional processes performing important reassurance functions towards mitigating Asian security dilemmas not only in terms of China-ASEAN relations but also China's relations with Japan and the wider East Asia."[26]

In the final analysis, therefore, this chapter suggests that scope does indeed exist to shape China's (re)emergence in positive ways. A clear correlation would appear to exist between Beijing's confidence levels and its willingness to engage more deeply in unofficial diplomacy. In the case of the NEACD, for example, Beijing was initially the greatest skeptic of that mechanism but is now counted as its greatest supporter. Likewise, whereas the Shangri-La Dialogue was initially viewed by Beijing as an anti-China forum stacked with U.S. allies, China has recently committed to sending senior-level officials to all future gatherings of this grouping.

Against that backdrop, the lack of attention previously given to China's unofficial diplomacy remains somewhat puzzling. Perhaps it is a product of the fact that Chinese diplomatic processes have traditionally been so opaque and reliable information on them so difficult to obtain. However, as these processes take on new dimensions and as the number of inputs into them increases to a point where such information will inevitably become more readily available, the analysis of these processes promises to serve as a potentially rich and fertile area of study.

Notes

1. Brian Job, "Track 2 Diplomacy: Ideational Contribution to the Evolving Asia Security Order," in *Asian Security Order: Instrumental and Normative Features*, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 246–47.
2. See Mely Caballero-Anthony, "ASEAN ISIS and the ASEAN Peoples' Assembly (APA): Paving a multi-track approach in Regional Community Building," in *Twenty Two Years of ASEAN ISIS: Origin, Evolution and Challenges of Track Two Diplomacy*, eds. Hadi Soesastro, Clara Joewono, and Carolina G. Hernandez (Yogyakarta: ASEAN-ISIS, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2006), 58–59.
3. Data obtained from Japan Center for International Exchange, "Dialogue and Research Monitor," http://www.jcie.or.jp/drm/overview.html (accessed December 23, 2007).
4. Lee Lai To, *China and the South China Sea Dialogues* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), 62.
5. Ibid., 61.
6. Ibid., 68.
7. See "Nuke Meeting by Any Other Name?" *Korea Times*, April 11, 2006.
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10. Susan L. Shirk, "Informal diplomacy continues in stalled North Korea talks," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, April 21, 2006, http://sports.uniontrib.com/uniontrib/20060421/news_lz1e21shirk.html (accessed February 18, 2008).
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12. For further reading, see Sheldon W. Simon, "The ASEAN Regional Forum Views the Councils for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific: How Track II Assists Track I," *NBR Analysis* 13, no.4 (July 2002): 5–23.
13. Ball, *The Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific*, 14.
14. Paul Evans, "The New Multilateralism and the Conditional Engagement of China," in *Weaving the Net: Conditional Engagement with China*, ed. James Shinn (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1996), 261.
15. Sheldon W. Simon, "Evaluating Track II approaches to security diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific: the CSCAP experience," *Pacific Review* 15, no. 2 (2002): 186.
16. See "Official Says Boao forum not intending to replace World Economic Forum," *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, April 21, 2007.
17. Robert L. Suettinger, "The Rise and Descent of 'Peaceful Rise,'" *China Leadership Monitor*, 12 (Fall 2004): 2.
18. See, for example, Tamora Vidaillet and Joyce Li, "China forum rolls ahead, but still not a Davos," *Reuters*, April 22, 2005.
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CHAPTER 10

Case Studies in China's "New" Diplomacy

United States, Latin America, Six-Party Talks, Energy Security, and Regional Neighbors

Stuart Harris

Introduction

When President Hu visited Washington, DC, in 2006 he gave President George W. Bush a present—a copy of Sun Tzu's *Art of War*. This not only may offer some suggestions about the methods that the United States should consider using in handling its international relations but also may be read as to how China may relate to the United States. In practice, however, in the past decade or more, China has been implementing its foreign policy through a changed diplomacy and is making more effective use of traditional diplomatic practices and norms as the United States starts to withdraw from a largely diplomacy-free foreign policy. More generally, China has been working increasingly within the international system, conceiving international law "not merely as an instrument of power but as a set of international rules providing the foundation of international order."[1]

Are these signs of weakness or strength? In the case of the United States, the neoconservative agenda was conceived of as using U.S. strength and avoiding the modern equivalent of foreign diplomatic entanglements. For China, however, the period of its international weakness was during the cold war when the threats from both superpowers to a relatively weak China did