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A Checklist on Vital National Issues

NOT ANOTHER PHOTO OP: PRIORITIZING U.S. INTERESTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL SUMMIT WITH CHINA

By Stephen J. Yates



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INTRODUCTION

On October 29, 1997, President Jiang Zemin will become the first top Chinese leader to be received by the White House for a full state visit since the late Deng Xiaoping in 1979. Former National Security Adviser Anthony Lake first announced plans for the presidential summit in July 1996 while visiting China to repair relations after the March 1996 crisis in the Taiwan Strait. The October meeting will be the first in an exchange that will bring President Bill Clinton to China in 1998. The objective of these summits is to improve communication and avoid miscalculations that could lead to war, as was feared during the Taiwan Strait crisis. During the October presidential summit, the Clinton Administration plans to discuss an extensive list of issues as part of its policy of "comprehensive engagement."

Before meeting with China's Foreign Minister in New York on September 23, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright announced a list of subjects on the October summit's agenda. The Administration plans to focus on discussing "cooperation on global issues" such as energy, the environment, law enforcement, nonproliferation, trade, human rights, and the United Nations, as well as on conducting "strategic dialogue" on areas such as Korea and Cambodia. The issues listed by Secretary Albright are broad but are not necessarily the most important issues of concern to the American people. The President would do well to consider as worthy of discussion such issues as relations with Taiwan, freedom in Hong Kong, religious persecution, political prisoners, military sales and purchases, privatization, and relations with Russia, Japan, and Iran.

Presidential summits are rare occurrences, especially between the governments of the People's Republic of China and the United States of America. In addition, because discussion time in October is extremely limited, it will be impossible for the Administration to cover every issue or concern on its list. In fact, the summit will demand something that the Clinton Administration has yet to produce: a clearly articulated set of priorities. Without prioritizing U.S. interests in China, the Administration's present construct of engagement is meaningless. Trying to discuss many issues means that the Administration will have to shortchange every item on its list or leave important issues unaddressed. The better thing to do would be to set priorities to take advantage of this opportunity to communicate the issues and concerns that are most important to Americans. The Clinton Administration has failed to do this. Instead, the meeting has been the message. If this pattern continues, this summit risks becoming merely another "photo op."

The October summit should begin with an exchange of strategic visions in which each side articulates its national interests and identifies what it sees as threats to those interests throughout the world. In addition to facilitating the identification of areas of common interest and concern, this exchange would provide the context for setting an agenda that respects these interests and seeks to resolve disputes. Then each side should set its priorities and select the few key issues that are consistent with these priorities. Many important issues may need to be set aside temporarily and addressed through normal diplomatic channels after the summit.

The President and his Administration would do well to remember that the proper priorities for the U.S. government (and, thus, for the summit's agenda) are well-articulated in the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution: "provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity." These goals—national security, commerce, and democratic values—can be achieved in U.S. relations with Beijing only by promoting greater transparency and rule of law in China.

Transparency, or openness, is needed to correct any errors in Washington's assessments of China and to identify accurately the problems that need resolution. The rule of law, or the improvement of China's legislative, judicial, and law enforcement system, is a necessity if each U.S. goal is to be realized. The successful pursuit of U.S. interests in national security, commerce, and the establishment of democratic values will require two things: changes in China's domestic law and a commitment from China that it will uphold international obligations embodied in such treaties and institutions as the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, World Trade Organization (WTO), and Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Without such a commitment from Jiang Zemin, President Clinton will fail to take advantage of this rare opportunity to secure America's most important interests in China.

ISSUE PRIORITIES FOR THE SUMMIT AGENDA

To support U.S. interests at the October summit in Washington, President Clinton should prioritize issues by their relationship to the U.S. government's constitutional imperatives of security, commerce, and democratic values.

U.S. Security Interests

The security agenda for the President should focus on Beijing's burgeoning program of military modernization and its proliferation of missiles and nuclear technology. To address U.S. concerns about these issues with China at the summit, President Clinton should:

- **Urge China to be more open about its military modernization program.** In recent years, China has been upgrading its military capabilities by purchasing former Soviet hardware and acquiring advanced foreign technology. This buildup has raised concerns in the United States and throughout Asia about how China intends to use these increased capabilities. If Beijing does not view its quest to modernize its military as a threat, it is up to its leaders to demystify its actions and make its program transparent through broader and more reciprocal exchanges.
- **Remind President Jiang that enhanced military capability does not exist within a vacuum.** China has a right to modernize its military, but such modernization—viewed next to missile tests off Taiwan and PRC adventurism in the South China Sea—contributes to the arms race in Asia and drives a need in the United States to develop and deploy more advanced weapons systems in the region.

- **Require Beijing to demonstrate an improved track record on nuclear and missile nonproliferation before the Administration will agree to peaceful nuclear cooperation.** The Clinton Administration intends to make peaceful nuclear cooperation a highlight of this summit. The President must certify that China no longer exports nuclear technology to nations with unsafe-guarded nuclear facilities before a 1985 agreement on peaceful nuclear cooperation can be implemented. China needs to improve its track record before the international nuclear nonproliferation regime considers it a reliable and responsible member. China's recently announced export controls on sensitive dual-use goods is a step in the right direction, but Beijing needs to understand that failing to uphold international security agreements threatens U.S. interests beyond Asia.

Commerce

The issues relating to commerce on the summit agenda should focus on China's bid to join the World Trade Organization and its announced plans to reform its state-owned enterprises. To protect U.S. commercial interests, President Clinton should:

- **Urge China to further reduce tariffs and nontariff barriers and increase the transparency of its trade rules and regulations in order to meet WTO standards.** China has made progress in reducing tariffs and other trade barriers, but they still fall short of WTO standards. Although trade liberalization may face tough domestic resistance, President Clinton should emphasize that the discipline and benefits of membership in the WTO serve China's goals for further economic development. Beijing's implementation of the reforms necessary for compliance with WTO standards also will serve U.S. interests.
- **Support legal reforms in China that will improve the enforcement of contracts, independent arbitration, and property rights protection.** Even though the People's Republic of China has made great strides in accelerating the growth of its economy, it lacks many of the laws and institutions which global commerce demands. The United States has an abundance of lawyers, mediators, and other legal experts who could offer their services to accelerate the development of a sound legal infrastructure in China. Such an infrastructure is needed to support China's continued economic growth and participation in the global economy. President Clinton should encourage such professional exchanges to protect the rights and property of Americans doing business in China.
- **Insist that Taiwan's bid to join the World Trade Organization will not be held hostage by China's separate application for accession.** President Clinton should make it clear that the United States rejects the premise that Taiwan's separate application to join the WTO should be delayed until China has met the necessary requirements.
- **Suggest that China increase access to its market for U.S. businesses to alleviate any loss of jobs created by the privatizing of state enterprises.** President Clinton should commend President Jiang for announcing an ambitious plan to reform China's large and ailing system of state-owned enterprises. By privatizing these firms or allowing them to "go public" by selling stock, Beijing will expand the involvement of the non-state sector in its economy and thereby increase the level of economic freedom for the Chinese people. President Clinton should suggest as well that allowing more U.S. firms to compete in China and hire workers could alleviate the unemployment created by this reform.

Democratic Values

The issues surrounding the firm development of democratic values in China that should receive priority attention on the summit's agenda are religious persecution, international covenants on human rights,

legislative and judicial exchanges, and grassroots democracy. To promote and protect democratic values in China more effectively, and to improve Beijing's record on personal freedoms and human rights, President Clinton should:

- **Urge Beijing to relax its controls on religious affairs.** Americans and their elected leaders have been horrified by the reports of torture and abuse of Catholics who recognize papal authority and home-based Christians who refuse to register with the government. President Clinton should warn China's leaders that government suppression of religious belief will lead to internal instability, harm bilateral relations, and threaten the ability of the United States to assist China's further economic development.
- **Urge China to sign and ratify two U.N. human rights covenants: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESAR).** Doing this would bring China into the fold of countries that recognize the universality of certain fundamental human rights. It also would make it a matter of international law that universally recognized rules and norms will be respected in China. China has made a commitment to Hong Kong that it will apply the standards outlined in these international covenants to the people of Hong Kong, and has indicated a willingness to sign the ICESAR. The United States should applaud China's willingness to join an international human rights regime and should urge Beijing to sign and ratify both covenants.
- **Support legislative and judicial exchange programs.** President Clinton should acknowledge the daunting challenge China faces in modernizing its legal system. Most of the disputes between the United States and China in the areas of human rights and religious persecution are rooted in China's lack of due process and legal protection of property. Because China is late in taking on this challenge, it should draw on the experiences of Hong Kong, Taiwan, Europe, and the United States, and thereby avoid the trials and errors made by those countries. The United States should strongly support legislative and judicial exchange programs that promote the transition.
- **Commend China's initial success in implementing democratic reform at the village level.** Villages are the lowest level of government in China, but democratic-style village elections are taking place and represent an important first step in political reform. The Administration should emphasize the deeply held American belief that democracy is the best path toward China's eventual national reunification. The United States also should offer any assistance that the Chinese are prepared to accept in this area.

Additional Issues

The interests of the United States in Taiwan and Hong Kong also raise concerns about security, commerce, and the establishment of democratic values. To protect U.S. interests in Taiwan and Hong Kong, President Clinton should make it absolutely clear that:

- **Reunification with Taiwan must occur through peaceful means and with the consent of the 21 million residents of Taiwan.** This policy is firmly grounded in principles declared in three Sino-U.S. joint communiqués and in policies outlined in the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act. These principles make it clear that any resort to military intimidation or invasion by China in these territories will provoke a U.S. military response. Specifically, given Taiwan's success in establishing democracy at all levels of government, any resolution of the cross-Strait dispute must come about through democratic and peaceful means.
- **The United States will not agree to stop selling defensive arms to Taiwan just to get a commitment from Beijing that China will stop selling missiles and nuclear technology to Iran and Pakistan.** The United States should reject any linkage between Chinese nuclear and weapons

proliferation and U.S. arms sales to Taiwan. No U.S. Administration should ever consider trading the security of the Taiwanese people simply to obtain China's word that it will abide by international rules and norms.

- **U.S. interests in Hong Kong are great and require that China uphold its commitments in the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration.** U.S. interests in Hong Kong—such as treating Hong Kong as a separate customs territory for trade, cooperating with the Hong Kong government to fight crime and corruption, and protecting the lives and property of the more than 35,000 U.S. citizens who reside in the Special Administrative Region—depend on an assurance from Beijing that Hong Kong's government and people will continue to enjoy the high degree of autonomy promised in the Joint Declaration.

CONCLUSION

These important issues of national security, commerce, and democratic values represent the priorities the United States must emphasize during the October Clinton-Jiang summit in Washington. Both presidents will be wise to frame their common goals and particular concerns within these priorities. The purpose of the October summit must be more than good photographs and congenial dialogue. To the Clinton Administration, dialogue often serves as a placebo rather than an opportunity for good policy, and the policy of engagement has often clouded its strategic vision. Engagement with China has been virtually content-free as a strategy, and the essential questions concerning the nature, quality, and purpose of that engagement with China remain.

The summit offers an excellent opportunity for President Clinton to change this orientation. The President should make every effort to be unambiguous about the U.S. desire to see greater levels of transparency and rule of law in China, especially if Beijing hopes to secure normal trade relations and peaceful nuclear cooperation with the United States. The President should be emphatic about the importance of greater openness and legal reform when he addresses key U.S. interests and concerns. A modern, open legislative and judicial system in China is necessary to protect religious, economic, and political freedoms.

Most Americans believe that promoting freedom in all its forms throughout the world will lead to greater peace, stability, and prosperity for all. President Clinton should find out whether Jiang Zemin also agrees with this principle.

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