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NO CONCESSIONS TO CHINA AFTER THE MISTAKEN EMBASSY BOMBING

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In the wake of the accidental May 7 bombing by the United States of China's embassy in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, and the ensuing government-approved riots in China, the United States should resist the temptation to make concessions to China. China demanded apologies, an investigation of the incident, and punishment of those responsible. President Bill Clinton has apologized, and an investigation is under way. But there also have been reports that China has further suggested that the United States relax conditions for China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) and reduce its support for Taiwan. Meanwhile, China essentially has halted diplomatic activity with the United States in areas like arms control, military exchanges, and human rights.

Although the bombing was a tragedy, the United States should not overreact to China's stage-managed protests. These protests call into question the overly optimistic objective of establishing a "constructive strategic partnership" with China. The U.S. relationship with China needs to be placed on firmer ground with more realistic expectations and a greater appreciation of U.S. long-range interests in Asia.

THE LIMITS OF CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT

On the evening of May 7, a U.S. aircraft mistakenly bombed China's embassy in Belgrade, killing three Chinese nationals. Within a day, President Clinton had apologized for the incident. After three

days, Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen acknowledged the "institutional error" that resulted in the use of outdated maps by the United States. News of the bombing caused an almost immediate outpouring of anti-American anger and protest in Beijing and many other Chinese cities. Chinese police sat idle as a throng of protesters hurled rocks through windows at the American embassy in Beijing, keeping Ambassador James Sasser a virtual prisoner for almost a week. China also brought its diplomatic relations with the United States to a standstill, suspending talks on human rights, arms control, and military exchanges and, more recently, barring U.S. Navy ships from entering Hong Kong for rest stops.

President Clinton has invested an unprecedented amount of presidential time (two summits in Washington, D.C., and one nine-day trip to China) in building a constructive partnership with China. The underlying assumption seems to be that, if China received sufficient attention and concessions, it would cooperate in advancing common interests in Asia and beyond.

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China's reaction to the bombing revealed the limits of constructive engagement with China. The calculated encouragement of nationalistic riots was a message to the United States: Stop pushing China on human rights, espionage, missile defense, and Taiwan, or else China will unleash the deep reservoir of assertive nationalism within its borders and abroad. China seems to sense weakness in the Clinton Administration and believes it can extract strategic concessions from the United States as the price of an isolated accident. This is not the behavior of a strategic partner.

TIME FOR U.S. VIGILANCE, NOT CONCESSIONS

Well before the bombing, U.S. relations with China were riddled with conflict and mutual suspicion. As the Cox Commission report shows, U.S. national security was compromised by China's success in obtaining U.S. missile technology via commercial transactions and nuclear secrets by espionage. In recent months China has amassed a significant missile arsenal near Taiwan, and has tried to destroy a fledgling China Democracy Party. Most recently, despite 13 years of negotiations, the two sides failed to reach an agreement on China's entry into the WTO during Premier Zhu Rongji's visit to Washington, D.C., last month. This is no time for the United States to make political or economic concessions in order to revive U.S.–China relations. Instead, the Clinton Administration should reassess its policy toward China and devise one that better protects U.S. interests.

No Excessive Apologies. After making several apologies, the Clinton Administration feels it must send a special envoy to China to deliver an even more formal apology. The United States, however, has apologized for its error sufficiently. A more appropriate message for an envoy would be that the United States remains committed to protecting security and promoting freedom, and that this isolated accident will not diminish U.S. concerns about China's military intentions, alleged espionage, or human rights abuses. In addition, the United States should not compensate China for the accident in Belgrade until China agrees to pay for

the deliberate damage to the American embassy in Beijing and the consulate in Chengdu.

No Strategic Concessions. The United States must not offer China any concessions on missile defense or on U.S. commitments to Taiwan. The United States must continue to assert its right, and that of its allies, to defense against missile attack. China is likely to push the Clinton Administration to pledge not to assist Taiwan in developing its own missile defense, but Taiwan's freedom and security must not be compromised in the rush to apologize.

Press for Economic and Political Freedoms. Instead of backing down on demands for reform, the United States should continue to press for legal reform, greater transparency, the free flow of information, and competitive markets for corporate control in China. Reforms in these areas would make China more prosperous and stable, and would increase freedom and openness. An effective legal system protects civil as well as commercial rights. Competitive markets for corporate control would have obvious implications for political control in China. And freedom of information not only is vital to properly functioning markets, it is the oxygen of democracy. The Clinton Administration should continue to press for progress in these areas as part of China's membership in the WTO.

Although Americans should express regret over the tragedy in Belgrade, it is important that the United States not allow its short-term response to undermine its long-term responsibilities. The Clinton Administration set U.S. expectations of change within China too high, and at the same time diminished China's incentive to change by being overly willing to compromise. The Administration should use China's suspension of dialogue on human rights, arms control, and military contacts to undertake its own reassessment of its policies in these areas. Ultimately, short-term contrition is less important than building a China policy that fosters developments within China that allow freedom, opportunity, and civil society to flourish.

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