

CHINA ARTICULATES SHARP SUSPICIONS ABOUT US INTENTIONS

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As the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) prepares for the transfer of power at the highest echelons this October, suspicion of the US among China's leaders has become more acute thereby sharply heightening tension in the bilateral relationship. The US is viewed as persisting with its 'Cold War mentality', trying to 'contain China's rise' and 'meddling' in the South China Sea. A series of recent authoritative signed articles in the official Chinese media reflect these concerns.

The articles have been sought to be balanced, however, by others which highlight the collaborative aspects of Sino-US relations. China's official news-agency 'Xinhua', for example, while reporting the meeting in Beijing between Chinese President Hu Jintao and visiting US National Security Advisor Tom Donilon on July 24, 2012, in this vein observed that both had specifically described Sino-US relations as "the most important relationship in the world".

Three recent signed articles, that unusually and bluntly articulated the suspicion at the highest levels in the Chinese leadership of the US' perceived clandestine efforts to bring about the collapse of China from within, merit special attention. Written by Ministerial-level Party cadres they also laid bare the Chinese leadership's frustration at USA's apparent unwillingness to dispel the ambiguity that surrounds its policy of re-entering the Asia-Pacific.

China's expert on American affairs, 60-year old Vice Foreign Minister Cui Tiankai, authored one such article which exceeded 5000 words. Entitled 'Sino-US Relations in the General Mapping of Chinese Diplomacy in the New Era', it was published in 'China International Strategic Review - 2012'. Publication of the article coincided with US National Security Advisor Tom Donilon's important 2-day (July 24-25, 2012) visit to Beijing. No doubt

because his name is circulating in Washington as a possible successor to US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Beijing accorded Tom Donilon a red carpet reception. He was received by Chinese President Hu Jintao, Vice President Xi Jinping, State Councillor Dai Bingguo and Military Commission Vice Chairman General Xu Caihou.

Reviving memories of the time when, immediately after the collapse of the erstwhile Soviet Union in 1989, suspicion of

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perceived covert efforts by the US to bring about China's downfall from within was at its height in the top echelons of the Chinese Communist Party, Cui Tiankai used the term 'peaceful evolution' twice in the article. The term has not been noticed being used in the official Chinese media for many years. 'Peaceful evolution' is a descriptive short-hand that the Chinese used to refer to USA's perceived

clandestine actions intended to: dismantle the CCP; introduce multi-party democracy; and replace the socialist economy with free-wheeling capitalism. Cui Tiankai used it in the context of the US interfering in China's internal affairs on the issues of Tibet, Xinjiang, democracy and human rights. Acknowledging that 'in a multi-ethnic country with a huge population it is not difficult to find dissatisfaction', he cautioned that if this is perceived by those 'obsessed' with 'peaceful evolution' as an opportunity to engage in 'color revolution', then they are committing a major strategic error.

As if to convey the enduring, long term nature of China's policy towards the US enunciated in this article, a younger co-author, Pang Hanzhou, was named. Pang Hanzhou has been identified as a Second Secretary posted in the Chinese Embassy in London around 2008. Some reports emanating from Beijing, incidentally, speculate that Cui Tiankai is likely to be appointed China's next Ambassador to the US.

Referring to China and the US as 'self-confident' nations, Cui Tiankai emphasized that China is focused on its domestic development and has steadfastly pursued a peaceful policy of cooperation. He wrote that 'the road of peaceful development is a strategic choice made by the Chinese collective leadership, the ruling party and the overwhelming majority of the masses'. He added that China and the US have 'no territorial claims against each other, therefore there is no important source of antagonistic conflict between the traditional powers'.

Emphasising their mutual economic inter-dependence, Cui Tiankai observed that over 60 platforms of bilateral engagement exist between the two countries, that economic and trade exchanges had become an important link and, U.S. capital and technology play an important role in China's development. He underlined that the relationship benefited the US. China and the US are now each other's second largest trading partners with the bilateral trade volume in 2011 reaching \$ 446.6 billion, or an increase of 182 times since diplomatic relations were established. He cited US-China Trade Committee statistics to show

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that US exports to China increased 468 per cent between 2001-2010, and that this trade directly supported between 4 million and 8 million jobs in each country. In the same period, imports of low cost Chinese goods saved U.S. consumers \$ 600 billion. By the end of 2011, U.S. investment projects in China totaled 61,068, with a contracted amount of \$ 162.3 billion and an actual investment of \$ 67.6 billion. He referred to an American Chamber of Commerce report that enterprises in China generated a 60 per cent higher profit margin than the global average. The non-financial direct investment of Chinese companies in the US had accumulated to about \$ 6 billion. He reminded that 'China is a huge market with over 1.3 billion consumers and the next five years will create \$ 10 trillion worth of demand for imports'.

The Chinese Vice Foreign Minister, thereafter, acknowledged that as two 'great powers' neither China nor the United States 'will give up their own deeply rooted historical and cultural traditions, beliefs, values and social systems, and will firmly safeguard their own interests'. However, he warned that 'the strategic long-term cost of any mis-judgment of each other's strategic intentions may be bigger than a war'. He declared that China has 'no intention of challenging the status of the United States

and no intention of competing with U.S. hegemony', and that it would be incorrect to make such an assumption.

He then asserted that in 'recent years the United States had chosen not to solve certain problems with a pragmatic attitude, but instead exaggerate them and, worse still, speculate about China's intent'. He questioned the 'true intentions' behind the US policy of 'return' to the Asia-Pacific, 'greatly strengthening the alliance system', 'promoting the Asia-Pacific Anti-Ballistic Missile system', implementation of the Air-Sea Battle concept, and 'intervening in differences between China and its neighbors'. He said 'not only the Chinese but other

countries in the region are also uneasy'. It was therefore necessary, he insisted, for the US to 'make clear' its true intentions and ensure that the 'core interests' of both countries are safeguarded. China, he added, 'has always respected the reasonable interests and concerns of the United States' in the Asia-Pacific.

Indirectly referring to the South China Sea dispute as 'some of the problems in areas surrounding China', he projected China as 'not the initiator, but the victim'. He reiterated that China will never seek a dominant position in the Asia-Pacific region. In

conclusion, he said the 'US policy of military expansion' and forging 'Cold War type military alliances' had aroused public concern and that countries in the Asia-Pacific region are 'unwilling to be forced to choose between the US and China'.

The second equally important article was written by Yuan Peng, Director of the Institute for American Studies at the China Institute for Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), which is directly subordinate to the powerful Ministry of State Security. Entitled 'China's Real Challenge is the next 5-10 Years', it was published in the Party mouthpiece 'People's Daily' on July 31, 2012.

This article assessed that China's real strategic contest with the US and West will start only after 5-10 years when its economy overtakes that of the US and its military and sci-tech capacities had risen appropriately. There will be no military conflict, but the contest will be in the non-military realm. Very interesting was the article's frank assertion that China intended to settle all issues of sovereignty and territorial integrity by military force.

Yuan Peng said the US strategic community is already debating three fundamental questions regarding China. These are: how to respond to the resource, energy and

economic demands of a great power with 1.3-1.5 billion people; how to respond to the successful alternate political system, developmental model and cultural values of a socialist great power; and, 'how to respond to the military challenge posed by a socialist great power that has not yet settled all its issues of sovereignty and territorial integrity'. This last statement is of great import for India and China's other neighbours who have unsettled territorial issues. It also has implications for Tibet, Xinjiang and Taiwan.

Assessing that after the US and Europe tide over the current difficult phase they will witness an explosive growth of technology and productivity, he said they will then close China's window of strategic opportunity. Over the next 3-5 years the US will strive to revive national power and ensure its 'hegemonic status'. The 'pivot' to the East will reinforce its leadership of the Asia-Pacific. The US will avoid a militarily confrontation with China, but instead exploit the latter's sovereignty and territorial differences with other countries.

Identifying sectors such as finance, the internet, and legal activists as attractive to the US, the article detailed the methods that the US will employ to 'contain China' or 'disrupt its rise'. Convertibility of the RMB, it said, will be used to open China's financial and insurance markets and enter China's services sector to reap 'huge economic and financial' benefits and 'control the lifeblood of China's development'. Using 'Internet freedom' as a slogan, the US will attack 'top-down' governance to advocate 'liberal democracy'. It warned that the US will use 'human rights lawyers', 'underground' religion, dissidents, 'internet heroes', and disadvantaged social groups as the core forces to push for a 'bottom-up' grassroots approach to governance for changing China. In foreign affairs, the US will attempt to weaken and split China's ties with North Korea, Pakistan and Myanmar. It


will offer these countries alliances or cooperative partnerships. It will seek to re-build US-Russia relations to isolate China and constrict its diplomatic space. In conclusion, it said that to weaken China's ability to compete or strategically challenge the US, the latter will promote dialogues on subjects like the 'global commons' of sea, air and space as well as cyber.

The third article was written by Ye Xiaowen, who is Vice President of the Central Institute of Socialism, which is equivalent to a Minister, and an alternate member of the 17th CCP Central Committee. It was released around the same time as the other two. Published by the People's Daily on July 24, 2012, it was captioned: 'Do not let

Strategic Anxiety lead to Strategic Misjudgements'. Stating that as the sole superpower the US had acquired "unrivalled power as well as conceited, arrogant, domineering and meddlesome ways", the article assessed that when the US suddenly found itself on the decline and another power rising to catch up, it had become anxious. It cautioned the US against making strategic mis-judgements, prompted by strategic anxiety, and trying to "contain China".

The appearance within the span of a week of three signed articles authored by Ministerial-level cadres is unusual in China. They obviously convey the views of China's top Party and government leadership. The articles signal the serious suspicion among top Chinese leaders that the US intends to try and engineer the collapse of the CCP and China from within and prevent it from rising internationally to its true potential. They additionally reveal that China's leadership is feeling vulnerable. At the same time, it is evident the Chinese leaders are keen that the Sino-US relationship is kept in a state of good repair. The views would appear to be shared by the new generation of Chinese leaders who will soon enter the CCP CC's Politburo and Politburo Standing Committee.

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