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ESSAY

The Advantages of an Assertive China

Responding to Beijing's Abrasive Diplomacy

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Over the past two years, in a departure from the policy of reassurance it adopted in the late 1990s, China has managed to damage relations with most of its neighbors and with the United States. Mistrust of Beijing throughout the region and in Washington is palpable. Observers claim that China has become more assertive, revising its grand strategy to reflect its own rise and the United States' decline since the financial crisis began in 2008. In fact, China's counterproductive policies toward its neighbors and the United States are better understood as reactive and conservative rather than assertive and innovative. Beijing's new, more truculent posture is rooted in an exaggerated sense of China's rise in global power and serious domestic political insecurity. As a result, Chinese policymakers are hypersensitive to nationalist criticism at home and more rigid - at times even arrogant -- in response to perceived challenges abroad.

A series of recent standoffs and tough diplomatic gestures certainly seem a world apart from China's previous strategy, set in the 1990s, of a "peaceful rise," which emphasized regional economic integration and multilateral confidence building in an effort to assuage the fears of China's neighbors during its ascendance to great-power status. Examples of China's recent abrasiveness abound. In 2009, Chinese ships harassed the unarmed U.S. Navy ship *Impeccable* in international waters off the coast of China. At the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) Regional Forum in July 2010, Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi warned Southeast Asian states against coordinating with outside powers in managing territorial disputes with Beijing. Later that year, Beijing demanded

an apology and compensation from Tokyo after Japan detained -- and then released, under Chinese pressure -- a Chinese fishing boat captain whose boat had collided with a Japanese coast guard vessel. Also in 2010, Chinese officials twice warned the United States and South Korea against conducting naval exercises in international waters near China -- even after North Korea sank a South Korean naval vessel in March, revealed a well-developed uranium-enrichment program in November, and then shelled a South Korean island, Yeonpyeong, that same month.

Despite the image of a more powerful China seeking to drive events under the rubric of a new grand strategy, Beijing -- with a few important exceptions -- has been reacting, however abrasively, to unwelcome and unforeseen events that have often been initiated by others. In many ways, China's foreign policy was more creative and proactive in the two years leading up to the financial crisis than it is today. Between 2006 and 2008, China adopted constructive and assertive policies toward North Korea, Sudan, and Somali piracy that were unprecedented in the history of the People's Republic of China's foreign relations. The United States and its diplomatic partners should promote the return of such an assertive China -- without which Washington will face greater difficulty in addressing pressing global challenges such as nuclear proliferation, climate change, and global economic instability. China has become far too big to stand on the sidelines -- let alone to stand in the way -- while others attempt to resolve these issues.

THE GOOD OLD DAYS?

In September 2005, then U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick called for China to become a "responsible stakeholder" on the international stage. The goal of this Bush administration initiative was to move the U.S.-Chinese relationship beyond traditional bilateral issues -- relations across the Taiwan Strait, human rights, and economic frictions -- and toward cooperation on ensuring stability in places such as Northeast Asia, the Persian Gulf, and Africa.

In the following two years, the Chinese responded impressively, although only partially, to this shift in U.S. policy. Beijing not only continued to host the six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear program but also participated in the crafting of international sanctions against Pyongyang in the UN Security Council. Especially in late 2006 and early 2007, China also exerted bilateral economic pressure on North Korea, which led to the disablement of its nuclear facilities at Yongbyon, the only concrete progress made to date as part of the six-party talks.

Beijing also changed course on Sudan. It went from protecting Sudan's regime against international pressure over human rights abuses in Darfur to backing then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's three-phase plan for peace and stability in the region in late 2006. Chinese officials pressured Khartoum to accept the second phase of that plan, which called for the creation of a joint United Nations-African Union peacekeeping force. Then,

in early 2007, after a dialogue about the region between the U.S. State Department and the Chinese Foreign Ministry, Beijing agreed to send more than 300 Chinese military engineers to Darfur, the first non-African peacekeepers committed to the UN operation. In late 2008, China also agreed to send a naval contingent to the Gulf of Aden to assist in the international effort to counter piracy off the coast of Somalia. Perhaps most significant, considering Beijing's traditional principle of noninterference in the internal affairs of sovereign states, the UN resolution enabling the mission allowed for the pursuit of pirates into Somalia's territorial waters.

To be sure, Washington and its diplomatic partners would have liked to have seen even more from Beijing in this period. But China's new policies represented more than a minor shift. Beijing was moving away from its traditional foreign policy relationships and softening, although not abolishing, its long-held and once rigid positions on sanctions and noninterference in the internal affairs of states.

By making clear to skeptical Chinese audiences that Washington does not view the relationship as a zero-sum game, the Bush administration's initiative was good for U.S.-Chinese bilateral relations. More important, U.S. policy underscored that addressing global problems, such as nuclear proliferation in North Korea and Iran, terrorism, transnational crime, global financial instability, environmental degradation, and piracy on the high seas, is in everyone's interest, including China's. Finally, the U.S. initiative reflected Washington's understanding that with China's rising clout comes increased responsibilities. Put simply, China has become too big to maintain its traditional policy of noninterference and its aversion to economic sanctions; too big to preserve friendly diplomacy toward international pariahs such as Pyongyang, Khartoum, and Tehran; and too big to fall back on its developing-country status as a way to resist making sacrifices to stabilize the world economy and mitigate environmental damage.

LOST MOMENTUM

Unfortunately, China has failed to maintain this positive momentum in its foreign policy, damaging U.S.-Chinese relations in the process. The most dramatic change is in its North Korea policy: rather than pressuring Pyongyang after its nuclear and missile tests in the spring of 2009, Beijing seems to have doubled down on its economic and political ties with Kim Jong Il's regime. Knowledgeable observers believe that trade and investment relations between China and North Korea have deepened over the past three years. There has also been frequent high-level public diplomacy between Chinese and North Korean leaders, including two visits by Kim to China last year. Last October, Zhou Yongkang, a member of the Chinese Communist Party's Politburo Standing Committee, stood with top members of the Kim regime during the Korean Workers' Party's anniversary celebration. This attention was most welcome in Pyongyang during the regime's sensitive transition period, in which Kim has been grooming his youngest son, Kim Jong Un, to eventually take over.

Driven by the fear of a precipitous collapse of a neighboring communist regime and the reduction of Chinese influence on the Korean Peninsula, Beijing has fallen back on long-held conservative Communist Party foreign policy principles in backing North Korea. In particular, it stood by the Kim regime during the course of several crises sparked by Pyongyang last year. In May, an international commission determined that a North Korean submarine had indeed sunk the South Korean naval ship *Cheonan* in March; for its part, China refused to review the evidence and protected North Korea from facing direct criticism in the UN Security Council. In so doing, Chinese leaders alienated many in the international community, especially South Korea, Japan, and the United States. Beijing similarly protected North Korea from international condemnation after Pyongyang revealed last fall that it had secretly developed a uranium-enrichment facility. And then, after North Korea shelled a South Korean island in November, Beijing once again adopted an agnostic pose, simply calling for calm and warning all sides against any further escalation. The only specific warning it could muster was its ultimately unsuccessful effort to dissuade U.S. warships involved in joint U.S.-South Korean naval exercises from entering the Yellow Sea, which overlaps with China's exclusive economic zone.

The picture on Iran is more mixed, in part because the Bush administration and U.S. partners had made such limited progress on eliciting China's cooperation before 2008. Beijing's efforts to water down UN Security Council Resolution 1929 -- which imposed a fourth round of sanctions against Tehran in June 2010 -- therefore cannot be seen as retrograde behavior. In fact, the Obama administration deserves credit for managing to get any resolution passed at all. Optimists can point to the fact that these UN sanctions -- which include an arms embargo and financial measures -- might cause some real discomfort to influential figures in Iran. Still, the sanctions placed no direct pressure on Iran's lucrative energy sector.

In what might be a sign of progress in China's policy on Iran, media reports suggest that China slowed its pursuit of new energy deals with Iran in the months following the passage of the sanctions resolution. China's continued pursuit of oil and gas agreements with Iran, even as new international sanctions have been leveled against the country, has long been a sore point for those worried about Iran's nuclear ambitions. Many fear that as European and Japanese firms leave the Iranian market, Chinese firms will simply "backfill" that economic space.

It is too soon to judge the meaning of any alleged change in China's policy toward Iran. Not much time has passed since the adoption of the latest UN resolution; moreover, the reasons behind the reported slowdown in new Chinese business activity in Iran remain unclear (purely economic issues may be the cause). It is also possible that any newfound Chinese restraint in Iran is less a symptom of a sudden acceptance of its role as a responsible stakeholder and more a sign of its grudging, and potentially temporary, acquiescence to unilateral measures enacted by the United States and Europe that target

third-country firms working in Iran. Beijing views such sanctions as illegitimate and unfair.

Last year was also marked by bilateral tension between the United States and China over such issues as Chinese Internet hacking and media restrictions, U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, and U.S. President Barack Obama's meeting with the Dalai Lama. Even though U.S. policies on these issues were not new, the reaction in Beijing was more strident than in the past. China was also rankled by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's diplomacy regarding the management of sovereignty disputes in the South China Sea at the ASEAN Regional Forum meeting in Vietnam last July. China is the only nation in the region that claims all the disputed islands in the sea. Its expansive claims are also ambiguous, relying on maps that predate the People's Republic of China and sometimes on vague terms such as "historic waters," which carry no validity in international law. At the meeting, Clinton called for the peaceful settlement of differences, freedom of navigation, a legal basis for all claims rooted in customary international law, and multilateral confidence-building measures. Even though Clinton did not specifically name China and her comments did not change the United States' traditional neutrality on maritime sovereignty disputes, the U.S. initiative was unwelcome in Beijing. The Chinese foreign minister's harsh reaction at the conference -- warning regional actors against collaborating with outside powers in dealing with the disputes -- created tension between China and relevant ASEAN states and between China and Japan, which, like the United States, has no territorial claims in the South China Sea but is concerned about maintaining freedom of navigation there and regional security.

BEIJING'S CONFIDENT INSECURITY

What explains the acerbic turn in Beijing's foreign policy? Rather than a simple assertion of its newfound power, China's negative diplomacy seems rooted in a strange mix of confidence on the international stage and insecurity at home. Since the onset of the financial crisis in 2008, Chinese citizens, lower-level government officials, and nationalist commentators in the media have often exaggerated China's rise in influence and the declining power of the United States. According to some of my Chinese interlocutors, top officials in Beijing have a much more sober assessment of China's global position and of the development challenges ahead. Yet those domestic voices calling for a more muscular Chinese foreign policy have created a heated political environment. Popular nationalism, the growth in the number of media outlets through which Chinese citizens can express their views, and the increasing sensitivity of the government to public opinion in a period of perceived instability have provided the space for attacks on the United States and, by association, criticism of Beijing's U.S. policy as too soft. These are the views of not just those far from power, however: the authors of such critiques have notably included active-duty military officers and scholars at state-run think tanks and universities.

Apparently gone are the days when Chinese elites could ignore these voices. The government currently seems more nervous about maintaining long-term regime legitimacy and social stability than at any time since the period just after the 1989 Tiananmen massacre. Party leaders hope to avoid criticism along nationalist lines, a theme that has the potential to unify the many otherwise disparate local protests against Chinese officials. Moreover, individual officials need to foster their reputations as protectors of national pride and domestic stability during the leadership transition process, which will culminate in 2012 with the party's formal selection of a successor to President Hu Jintao. Such an environment does not lend itself to policies that might be seen as bowing to foreign pressure or being too solicitous of Washington.

Further complicating matters is the fact that an increasing number of bureaucracies have entered into the Chinese foreign-policy making process, including those of the military, energy companies, major exporters of manufactured goods, and regional party elites. This is a rather new phenomenon, and the top leadership seems unwilling or unable to meld the interests of these different groups into a coordinated grand strategy. Some of these domestic actors arguably benefit from China's cooperation with pariah states, expansive and rigid interpretations of sovereignty claims, and, in some cases, tension with the United States and its allies. They might benefit less -- or even be hurt -- by the sort of Chinese internationalism sought by the the European Union, Japan, South Korea, the United States, and others.

Therefore, nationalist pundits and bloggers in China find allies in high places, and top government officials are nervous about countering this trend directly. The result has been the creation of a dangerously stunted version of a free press, in which a Chinese commentator may more safely criticize government policy from a hawkish, nationalist direction than from a moderate, internationalist one.

According to my sources in China, these factors produce two deleterious effects on Chinese foreign policy. First, for domestic and bureaucratic reasons, Beijing elites need to react stridently to all perceived slights to national pride and sovereignty. When, for example, various Asian states sided with Clinton at the ASEAN meeting in Hanoi, Chinese Foreign Ministry officials felt compelled to respond in caustic terms that alienated several of China's southern neighbors. The negative Chinese reaction to Japan's jailing of the fishing boat captain on domestic legal grounds was predictable, but the Chinese government was especially bellicose in its response: Beijing cut off rare-earth shipments to Japan and, perhaps most important, demanded an official apology and reparations after the Japanese had already acceded to Chinese demands to release the ship's captain and crew. This may have impressed domestic audiences in China, but it deeply alienated the Japanese public, which, according to recent polls, now holds very negative views of China. All of this trouble is occurring while the Democratic Party of Japan -- traditionally considered very accommodating to China -- is Japan's ruling party.

The timing of the tense state of Chinese-Japanese relations thus speaks volumes about the opportunity costs of China's diplomatic truculence.

Similarly, no one believes that China truly supports North Korea's military provocations or development of nuclear weapons. But Beijing's concerns about maintaining domestic stability in North Korea, peace on the Korean Peninsula, and social stability in China have prevented Chinese officials from criticizing North Korea publicly or allowing the UN Security Council to do so. What is more, these interests also keep Chinese officials from refuting conspiracy theories in the Chinese media and on the Internet that the United States and South Korea plotted to exacerbate tensions on the Korean Peninsula to create an excuse to carry out military exercises near China's borders. To the contrary, the Foreign Ministry only fed the fire in July and November 2010 by warning the United States not to place warships in waters near China without Beijing's permission. This move may have won some favor within the Chinese military and the Chinese public, but the diplomatic costs of being seen to pardon or even defend Pyongyang's actions were high in Seoul, Tokyo, and Washington. A truly assertive great power would not allow a small pariah state to hijack its foreign policy in such a fashion.

The second negative and important effect on China's foreign policy is that Beijing has become less likely to join the international community in tackling global problems. For example, a tough Chinese stand on North Korean or Iranian nuclear proliferation is now easily portrayed by nationalist elements as an accommodation to the United States. At the same time, domestic interest groups -- such as energy companies and financial institutions in the case of sanctions against Iran and economic interests in northeastern China and the military in the case of North Korea -- oppose policy innovations that would hurt their parochial interests. Such groups can express themselves directly in a more diversified policy process, and they can also use the media and the Internet to create a negative domestic political environment for policy changes.

WHAT BEIJING CAN GAIN

Throughout 2009, many Chinese both inside and outside the government believed that the new Obama administration was seeking to accommodate China, either as a matter of political orientation or based on a realistic assessment of the perceived global power transition. That year, U.S. officials discussed the need for mutual strategic reassurance, eschewed new arms sales to Taiwan, and kept the Dalai Lama from meeting with Obama in Washington prior to Obama's trip to China in November. On that visit, China and the United States issued a joint statement in which the two nations pledged to respect each other's "core national interests" and sovereignty. But then, in early 2010, as many in Beijing saw it, Washington appeared to reverse course. In this view, the Obama administration violated China's core interests by notifying Congress of the impending sale of defensive weapons to Taiwan, criticizing China's poor record on Internet freedom, and allowing for a private visit between Obama and the Dalai Lama. It is only logical,

according to many Chinese observers, that Beijing should in turn refuse to assist the United States in pursuing what Beijing believes to be U.S. core national interests, such as preventing nuclear proliferation in Iran and North Korea or stabilizing the U.S. economy and the international financial system through the sale of U.S. Treasury bills.

But understanding U.S.-Chinese relations as a horse trade over Chinese and U.S. core national interests is intellectually incorrect and politically unhelpful. The most basic problem is that almost everything the United States is asking of China falls directly in line with China's interests. In other words, curbing nuclear proliferation or policing international waters for pirates is not "assisting" the United States -- it is serving China's own interests as well. Consequently, if China reduces its cooperation with the United States on such issues, it will harm its own foreign policy portfolio.

China's North Korea policy provides the clearest example. If the six-party talks were to fail permanently, the biggest loser -- besides the North Korean people -- would arguably be China. Beijing justifiably gained diplomatic prestige by becoming a leader in the six-party talks; the other parties were quick to credit China for taking an unexpectedly proactive stance. But just as China gained praise for the progress in the six-party talks in 2006 and 2007, it now suffers a loss of prestige when North Korea refuses to abide by the demands of the international community. How can China portray itself as a great power when it cannot even influence the behavior of its weak neighbor and ally, which is entirely dependent on its economic ties to China? Moreover, since China maintains basically normal economic and diplomatic relations with North Korea -- despite the UN Security Council sanctions it helped create and the much stricter unilateral sanctions by Japan and South Korea -- its relationship with North Korea raises suspicions in regional capitals about Beijing's long-term intentions.

North Korea's nuclear program is also likely to spur the buildup of new military hardware and the deepening of alliances in East Asia. Japan considers Pyongyang's development of deliverable nuclear weapons a real threat, for example. In the most dramatic, although arguably least likely, scenario, advancements in North Korea's nuclear program might cause Japan to scrap its nuclear taboo and develop its own nuclear weapons. What is less appreciated is how North Korean nuclear developments could affect Japan's conventional military programs in ways that would worry China. It is reasonable to expect increased Japanese participation in the ongoing U.S.-led program to develop a regional missile defense system in East Asia, an initiative that China considers a challenge to its own deterrent capabilities. Moreover, Japan seems likely to jettison its long-standing self-restraint on developing offensive conventional capabilities by investing in an arsenal of fast, conventionally tipped strike weapons that could destroy North Korean missiles on the ground before launch. These strike weapons would have multiple uses, and their development would have symbolic meaning for the future of Japan's overall military posture, making such an outcome undesirable from China's perspective.

If left unchecked, the further development of North Korean nuclear weapons would also lead to greater and more active cooperation between the United States and its regional allies. Many components of this effort would be unwelcome in Beijing. For example, South Korea might more readily join a regional missile defense program with Japan and the United States. More generally, since the international community is also concerned about the transfer of nuclear materials from North Korea to other states and nonstate groups, the United States and its regional allies are likely to enhance their naval cooperation and exercises, as well as active inspections of North Korean shipping vessels as part of the Proliferation Security Initiative. In a related way, North Korea's military provocations last year led to a series of U.S.-South Korean military exercises, including antisubmarine warfare training, and a tightening of security consultations among Seoul, Tokyo, and Washington. In the near term, Chinese leaders must consider the potential for instability or war on the neighboring Korean Peninsula in the event North Korea were to retaliate against these new measures. And over the long term, Beijing is likely to be concerned about the effects of this increased cooperation on its own military position in the region.

What is true for China's North Korea policy is also true for its policy toward Iran. China is a net importer of energy with a large export sector that would be greatly affected by sudden, sharp price increases in energy, which would raise the costs of both production and shipping. This reality should affect its calculus with Iran, a major destabilizing force in the energy-rich Middle East and Persian Gulf -- and one that would likely become only more destabilizing if its regime gained the added confidence of a nuclear deterrent. Moreover, Israel considers the development of Iranian nuclear weapons an existential threat; it appears quite probable that if diplomacy fails to alter the current trajectory of Iran's nuclear ambitions, Israel will eventually take military action against Iran. Such a turn of events could lead to massive instability in the region, threatening the free flow of energy on which China and all other net importers rely. It is therefore in Beijing's interest to work more closely with Washington and its allies -- all of which would like to see stable energy markets -- to craft diplomatic approaches that might prevent such an outcome.

PERSUASION, NOT CONTAINMENT

There may be some cause for optimism, however restrained, regarding Beijing's recent turn toward a more conservative and reactive foreign policy. Fortunately for the United States and its allies, there is an active debate among elites in Beijing about the costs and benefits of the country's current policy line (according to my interlocutors, this debate is most heated about China's recent policies toward North Korea). Washington and other governments have an opportunity to shape the international environment in a way that can assist those Chinese elites who are espousing creative, constructive, and assertive policies while undercutting those who advocate reactive, conservative, and aggressive ones. The best way to do this is to consistently offer China an active role in multilateral

cooperative efforts -- and without displaying jealousy of the newfound influence China might gain by accepting this role. At the same time, the United States and its allies need to emphasize that they will react to the challenges posed by North Korea or Iran with or without Chinese cooperation; China's interests will suffer if it obstructs those efforts or even stands on the sidelines.

Such an approach has historically been successful. In the mid-1990s, Beijing similarly alienated many of its neighbors and the United States, by bullying Taiwan, adopting a muscular posture toward the Philippines in the South China Sea, and overreacting to enhanced U.S. security cooperation with Japan. But a combination of wise and firm policies by Washington and its partners (for example, the "Nye Initiative" to strengthen the U.S.-Japanese alliance and the dispatch of two aircraft carrier battle groups to the waters off Taiwan during a crisis in 1996) helped foster the ascendance of more moderate thinking in Beijing. By 1997, Chinese diplomacy was on a much more positive track.

There is no reason to believe that a similar process cannot occur today -- but given the perceptions about China's increased power and potential domestic instability discussed above, the challenges now may be greater than they were in the 1990s. Although some in Washington and many in Beijing grossly exaggerate when they say that the United States has "returned to Asia" under Obama, there is no question that China and other regional players have noticed that Obama and his principal advisers -- Secretary of State Clinton, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, and National Security Adviser Thomas Donilon -- have traveled often to the region, including in November 2010, when Obama and Clinton went on separate multination tours of Asia. More concretely, the U.S.-South Korean military exercises in the Yellow Sea following the November attack by North Korea and the trilateral meeting of Japanese, Korean, and U.S. security officials in Washington demonstrated that the United States and its partners have diplomatic and security options even without China's active cooperation. Beijing does not like such initiatives -- all the more reason for China to return to a more creative, assertive, and reassuring set of policies to solve the problems that caused the United States and its allies to react this way in the first place.

The Obama administration should continue to strengthen U.S. relationships in Asia. Such an agenda is a good idea under any circumstances. But especially when China's policies are damaging to everyone's interests -- including its own -- Washington should underscore that even though it would prefer to address problems with Beijing's active cooperation, there are other, less attractive options available. This is persuasion and not containment; China is still being asked to play a larger, not smaller, role both regionally and globally. In addition, Washington should portray the prospect of cooperation not as a request based on U.S. national interests but as a means through which Beijing can pursue its own interests and, at the same time, reassure other actors. The fact that the term "core national interest" has not been used by a high-level U.S. official since the 2009 joint statement suggests that U.S. government officials already understand the

counterproductive psychology that such terms foster in China's strategic thinking. Instead, U.S. diplomacy toward China has appropriately emphasized the pursuit of mutual interests while recognizing areas of serious difference. Finally, as it has in the past, Washington should publicize and laud the examples of past and current Chinese cooperation with the international community in addressing global problems.

In 2010, the Obama administration's policies in Asia had a positive, albeit limited, effect. Despite ongoing differences between China and the United States -- over North Korea, Chinese currency valuation, and the U.S. Federal Reserve's "quantitative easing" policy -- Beijing nonetheless sought to improve bilateral relations in the lead-up to President Hu's visit to the United States in January of this year. For example, Beijing allowed for the restoration of military-to-military dialogue in the fall of 2010 after a nine-month hiatus caused by China's disapproval of U.S. arms sales to Taiwan earlier in the year, and China's minister of defense, General Liang Guanglie, invited Defense Secretary Gates to visit China the same month Hu traveled to Washington. There are also signs that China is beginning to reach out to ASEAN member states to address ongoing security concerns that were exacerbated by Beijing's bullying at the last ASEAN Regional Forum. Finally, China may have played a constructive role in reining in North Korea after it threatened South Korea in response to a South Korean artillery exercise off Yeonpyeong Island in December 2010, just a month after North Korea's attack on the island: as of this writing, no retaliation had occurred.

That is the good news. What is less commonly noted, however, is that the same factors that have caused China's recent tensions with its neighbors and the United States have produced an arguably stickier and more consequential long-term problem: they have retarded, if not halted outright, what was a very positive and much-needed shift in Chinese foreign policy during the last two years of the Bush administration. During that period, Beijing showed a willingness to soften some of its traditional prohibitions on an assertive foreign policy so as to assist the international community in dealing with problems faced by all global actors, including China.

Even if U.S.-Chinese ties improve and China reverses the negative trends in its regional diplomacy, Washington may still be unsatisfied if the shift does not include enhanced Chinese participation in international efforts to tackle global problems, especially proliferation in North Korea and Iran. For the United States and its allies, securing this kind of Chinese cooperation may be the highest hurdle to clear. Obama has an impressive group of advisers on Asia, but the domestic political and psychological factors in China will create reasons for pessimism, at least until China's succession is complete in 2012. Unfortunately, without such a change in China's policies, solving problems from proliferation to climate change will be much more difficult for the United States and the rest of the international community. In this one important sense, the United States needs a more assertive China.