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THE U. S. COMPREHENSIVE ENGAGEMENT POLICY TOWARDS CHINA : KEY ISSUES

Abstract

The U. S. 'comprehensive engagement' policy is a strategy developed by Clinton Administration vis-à-vis China aimed at achieving some specific goals seen in terms of its politico-strategic and economic interests. While the U.S. relationship with China has not been without troubles due to the existence of a number of conflicting issues, the thrust for vital co-operation has placed 'comprehensive engagement' policy to dominate over the troubling issues due to positive response to a great extent from the Chinese side. The policy has helped improve the relationship between the two countries in an atmosphere of convergence of interests. The article examines the convergence of interests between the U. S. and China.

INTRODUCTION

China's rise to world power status perhaps represents one of the biggest U. S. foreign policy challenges in the post-Cold War era. With a view to facing the challenge, Clinton Administration has been relying on a broad policy--'comprehensive engagement'— designed to render China's behaviour more compatible with the U.S. interests through

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accommodation and greater integration in world affairs. However, pursuing the policy has not been without constraints. With the demise of the Soviet Union, anti-Soviet basis of consensus among the U.S. policy-making institutions with regard to China has lost its relevance to some extent. As a result, post-Cold War China policy has been a subject to debates from White House to Congress, to prominent academic China specialists.

Towards the goal of examining the 'comprehensive engagement' policy, the article first begins with focus on divergent strategies that has evolved in the U.S. to deal with China. Although 'comprehensive engagement' is the official policy, other strategies may also be highlighted to understand the constraints in pursuing the former. It attempts to highlight the interests that the official policy seeks to serve along with the tools that has been employed to materialise those interests. To understand the materialisation of the interests, it also seeks to examine to what extent the U.S. interests converge to those of China. The article concludes with a future outlook of the U.S. relations with China.

DEALING WITH CHINA: DIVERGENT SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

Officials of Clinton Administration as well as the U.S. law makers, China specialists, and other decision-making elite have been well-cognisant of China's rising power and the many challenges this poses to the U.S. However, there are divisions among these policy-making institutions and personalities on how to deal with China. Three divergent schools of thought, in this regard, have emerged in the 1990s, particularly since President Clinton came to office in 1993: school of engagement, school of confrontation and school of destabilisation.

The majority of the policy makers in the Department of State, Department of Defence, the National Security Council, and the White House, along with most China specialists, have articulated a long-term strategy of "comprehensive engagement." The Bush Administration's

“open door” policy through which the United States sought to influence changes in China by maintaining a presence in the country, has been the guiding principle of the policy of “comprehensive engagement.” The proponents of this view argue that a stable, open and prosperous People’s Republic of China that assumes its responsibilities for building a more peaceful world is clearly in the U.S. interests, and that a “closed door” neo-containment would cause China’s isolation that would be unworkable, counterproductive, and potentially dangerous for the United States. Thus, the thrust of this policy is to bring China into the community of nations by devoting continuous high level policy attention -- issue by issue, case by case -- in order to moderate China’s assertiveness and encourage China’s accommodation to prevailing international order in the greater U.S. interests.¹

A second group offers what is known as the confrontation policy. The proponents of this school of thought see China in more adversarial terms and favour a tougher position across a range of issues. They are sceptical that engaging China would produce substantial progress on the wide range of issues dividing the U.S. and China since such a policy over the past several decades has yielded little real progress on these issues of vital importance to the United States. They continue their allegation that China ignores international norms and acts contrary to the United States interests. In their view, China is likely to emerge as a threat—perhaps similar to that posed earlier by the former Soviet Union. Therefore, the United States should concentrate on containing China’s growth and be willing to employ more sanctions or threats to bring the desired changes in the country’s behaviour. The proponents of this perspective can be found throughout the legislative branch and other sectors of the American public including some prominent academic China specialists.²

¹ David Shambaugh, “The United States and China: A New Cold War?” *Current History*, Vol.94, No.593, September 1995, pp.243-44.

² *Ibid.*

The proponents of the third school, school of destabilisation, are a definite minority found in Congress and outside government. They are in favour of an assertive policy designed to destabilise the rule of Chinese Communist Party. They are of the view that without any change in the political system in China, Beijing's leaders would not be able to develop long-term and co-operative ties with Washington. The United States policy should thus deal with China in a way that would cultivate political reform in that country while keeping up a circumspect stance in dealing with disruptive Chinese behaviour towards the external world.³

These three schools of thought have a common goal of compelling China to change its external behaviour. While 'comprehensive engagement' with China evolved out of the compulsion to integrate China with global and regional affairs by replacing deteriorated relations that had existed since 1989 Tiananmen massacre, other schools of thought largely reactive to contentious elements often come to dominate the relationship between the two countries by creating pressure on the Administration. In this context, challenges facing the U.S. policy will be elaborated in one of the latter sections of discussion, but before that let us concentrate on examining the policy of 'comprehensive engagement'.

INTERESTS BEHIND COMPREHENSIVE ENGAGEMENT

With the demise of the Soviet Union, the anti-Soviet basis of the U.S. rapprochement with China is of no relevance in the new international environment. However, new interests have been making compulsions for the U.S. to pursue an engagement policy towards China that is comprehensive in terms of its goals and objectives. In this regard, February 1995 Department of Defense *East Asia Strategy Report* may be mentioned here. The Report emphasised the need to manage the balance of power amongst East Asian countries. Towards that goal, among other things, the report contains recommendation for a four-part strategy which advised the US Government to : maintain the forward

³ *Ibid.*

presence of American forces; try to develop multilateral institutions; put US alliances, particularly with Japan, on the firm post-Cold War basis; and from that position of strength, encourage China to define its interests in ways that could be compatible with the national interests of the United States.⁴ Those interests *vis-à-vis* China can be said to have developed in two broad categories:

- i) Politico-strategic interests,
- ii) Politico-economic interests.

i) Politico-strategic interests:

Strengthening the moderates: China's communist leadership often has been in division between moderates and conservatives. Moderates represent, more or less, a liberal view towards the external world including the West while the conservatives represent the opposite view. Such division was seen even between Deng Xiaoping and Mao Zedong. The Nixon-Kissinger view, during the Sino-US rapprochement in the 1970s, was that since the traditional policy of seeking the collapse of communism in China would be unproductive, the U.S. should pursue a realistic way aimed at strengthening moderate leaders like Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping in the hope of moderate communism in that country.⁵ This policy is still a part of the Clinton Administration's China strategy. By remaining engaged and rejecting Cold War-style containment policy towards China, the United States wants to see that China's present leadership and next generation of leaders will be moderate at home and abroad.

Stabilising East Asia: US national security interests require stability in East Asia. Containing or treating China as an enemy is not the way to

⁴ Cited in Swaran Singh, "Sino-US Defense Ties: Whys and Hows of Their Recent Engagement", *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. XXII, No. 1, April, 1998, p.74.

⁵ Roger W. Sullivan, "Discarding the China Card" *Foreign Policy*, Number 87, Summer, 1992, p.9.

serve the interests. If the United States treat China as an enemy, it would lead to the messianic versions of Chinese nationalism⁶ that would hurt the U.S. interests. According to David Shambaugh, a China specialist, "while a confrontation policy might satisfy domestic constituencies in the United States, it would be counter productive in eliciting co-operation from China."⁷ Such a policy is likely to affect stability in the East Asian region. It could cause China's withdrawal from the four-party talks concerning implementation of nuclear accord over North Korea. It could lead to military and political pressure by Beijing against Taiwan, and restriction could be exercised on the autonomy given to Hong Kong. It could create compulsion for China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) to expedite the process of force modernisation by purchasing sophisticated weapons from Russia and other countries. China could also put in more efforts to develop a blue water navy, including a projection capability that could be a potential threat to the East Asian sea lanes.⁸

Implementing global non-proliferation regimes: One of the security concerns of the United States in the post-Cold War era is the proliferation of mass destructive weapons. China is accused of transferring such weapons and related technology to Pakistan, Iran and rogue regimes in other countries. In this regard, by engaging China and encouraging its participation in regional and international security agreements, the United States seeks to strengthen its global non-proliferation agenda.

Environmental concern: Moreover, the United States needs Chinese co-operation on key environmental issues. According to a US analyst, China's recent economic growth is not without cost. China is viewed as one of the largest countries in the world contributing to both global

⁶ Thomas J. Christensen, "Chinese Realpolitik", *Foreign Affairs*, September/October, 1996, p.52.

⁷ David Shambaugh, "The United States and China: Cooperation or Confrontation?", *Current History*, Vol. 96, No. 611, September, 1997, p.245.

⁸ *Ibid.*

climate change and the depletion of the ozone layer that affects the Americans in a number of ways ranging from skin cancer to agricultural productivity to the frequency of natural disasters. However, the prospect of co-operation between the US and China on such environmental problems appears to be bright since it has appeared as a common problem.⁹ Only an engagement policy can serve best the interests when there is a moderate regime in China, who are, more or less, responsive to international co-operation

ii) Politico-economic interests:

US economic relations with China is based on Most Favoured Nations (MFN) status granted to the latter subject to annual renewal by the congressional concurrence. Going back to the history, the U.S. signed its first trade agreement with China immediately after the two countries restored diplomatic relations in 1979. The basis was MFN status which had come to be the first such status granted to a communist country outside the regime of General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). The MFN treatment was complemented by the economic reform policies of Deng Xiaoping that facilitated economic relations between the two countries. Despite continuation of MFN treatment for several years, it was intensely opposed by different domestic groups against the backdrop of 1989 Tiananmen massacre in China. The US Congress and different human rights group opposed renewal of MFN status and called for linking MFN status to the improvement of human rights in China. US Congress also used the tool of increasing trade deficit in disfavour of the U.S. along with the allegations of China's violation of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), restricted market access in China and so on. President Bush, however, could overcome Congressional opposition by using his veto power. Presidential candidate Bill Clinton attacked President Bush during the 1992 election campaign on charge of being

⁹ Elizabeth Economy, "Painting China Green: The Next Sino-American Tussle," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 78, No. 2, March/April, 1999, pp.14-15.

soft to China and he became a proponent of linking MFN status with human rights situation in China. But things did not come to a pass. By 1994, administration's "comprehensive engagement" policy towards China delinked human rights issue for annual extension of MFN status despite China's alleged violation of IPR and lack of transparency of trade deals. It also lifted sanctions imposed on China for missile sales to Pakistan. This is due to the fact that China's emergence as a major economic power has important implications for the United States. Direct bilateral economic relations between the U.S. and China are expanding. In addition, Sino-U.S. competition in third-country markets, and the broader effects of rapidly modernising China on the Northeast Asian region and the world are some of the important considerations for the United States to abandon sanction-oriented economic policy towards China.¹⁰ As such, extension of the MFN status to China since Bush administration has been continued for a number of reasons. Firstly, with regard to economic relations with China, the United States pursue a strategy of "peaceful evolution" directed towards making life difficult for the Chinese leadership. Depriving of MFN status is not the right way to press that goal. China has been gradually opening its economy for foreign goods and foreign investment. By seizing this opportunity and keeping up MFN treatment to China, the United States cultivates the market-oriented special economic zones, introduces modern ideas, and weakens the communist system at the same time.

Secondly, Bush administration's policy persuasively held that cutting MFN treatment to China might weaken China's non-state sector and hurt those in China whom Americans expect growth. Apart from this, in the 1990s, "Greater China" includes China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Hong Kong and Taiwan are two long-standing U.S. allies. Evidently, its interests beyond trade in its relationship with these two allies are

¹⁰ Nicholas R. Lardy, *China's Entry into the World Economy: Implications for Northeast Asia and the United States*, University Press of America, New York, 1987, p.49.

virtually linked to China. Therefore, the U.S. has no option other than to deal with "Greater China." Depriving MFN status to China would adversely affect long-standing U.S. allies.¹¹

Thirdly, closer economic ties with the Asia-Pacific region would improve the U.S. economy by generating more jobs for the Americans at home. In this regard, China is an important factor. During 1979-1997, an annual growth rate of 9.5 per cent of China's economy has placed it in the position of world's fastest growing economy. This growth rate has taken China's GDP to \$900 billion and its forex reserves to \$140 billion. By the end of 1997, foreign registered investment in China had reached \$521 billion, while the actual investment had topped \$221 billion. This amount of overseas investment was achieved with over 300,000 foreign funded enterprises operating in China. These statistics may help understand China's internal strength and external acceptance. U.S. European allies like Germany, France and Britain, have more compelling commercial interests in relation to China than agreeing with the U.S. to impose economic sanctions against Beijing. By the end of 1996, with a volume of 13.8 per cent of China's total foreign trade, the EU had become China's fourth largest trading partner. Japan, another U.S. ally and one of the economic superpowers, has also been pursuing the same policy. The volume of bilateral trade between Japan and China reached \$63 billion in 1997. By 1996, Japan's total realised investments in China reached \$13.036 billion. With these trade figures and investments, Japan had become China's largest trading partner and investor from Asia.¹² Thus, in the face of China's external acceptance, the U.S. government has come round to the view that it would not be rational for it to place human rights over economic interests, as linking the two issues would deprive her of the latter.

¹¹ Snehalata Panda, "Sino-US Relations: Strategic Perceptions", *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. XXII, No. I, April, 1997, p.121.

¹² Swaran Singh, "China and the Emerging New Balance of power in Asia", *Asian Strategic Review*, 1997-98, pp.223-29.

POLICY TOOLS OF COMPREHENSIVE ENGAGEMENT

The aim of the “comprehensive engagement” policy was to restore and stabilise the Sino-US relationship that had existed since 1989. The compulsion for the restoration and stabilisation of the relationship lies in the need to work together in possible areas of interests that have already been analysed in the previous section of the paper. However, the strategy underlying the new American policy had three main tools with a view to materialising these interests: reinstitutionalising the relationship, re-establishing a strategic dialogue, and integrating China into the international institutional order.¹³

Reinstitutionalising the relationship: This component was applied to re-establish regular channel of contact at both high and working levels. Application of the component is found in exchange of visits by the successive U.S. Secretaries of State like Warren Christopher and currently Madeline Albright raising the interaction between the two countries at many other working levels. In his process, military-to-military exchanges have developed as one of the key parts. Exchange of visit by the Chinese Defence Minister and the US Secretary of defence respectively in 1995 and 1996 triggered off a series of exchange of visits between high-level military delegations from both sides. Exchange of visits at the presidential level also took place. Vice President Al Gore paid an official visit to China in February 1997. President Jiang Zemin’s U.S. visit in October 1997 and President Bill Clinton’s China visit in 1998, the first by an American President in a decade, spoke volumes for the strong desire on the part of both the countries for a co-operative framework geared to the needs of the post-Cold War times. These official exchanges at both high and working levels have favoured discussions on a host of issues of mutual concern that paved the way for narrowing differences on issues of dispute like human rights, Taiwan and

¹³ David Shambaugh, *op.cit.*, pp. 242.

trade; and made headway with regard to co-operation on regional and international security issues.¹⁴

Re-establishing a strategic dialogue: Re-establishment of a strategic dialogue with the Chinese leadership, military, and security establishment began with the invitation of National Security Adviser Anthony Lake extended to his counterpart, Lsiu Huaqiu, the Director of the State Council Office of Foreign Affairs, to the United States in March 1996 for wide-ranging discussions. Lake hinted at China's need to move in the direction of interdependent multilateralism that the United States pursue in its foreign policy. This channel of strategic dialogue has been supplemented with contacts between military and civilian officials while the channel witnesses continuation by Lake's successor, Samuel Berger.¹⁵

Integrating China into the international institutional order: Materialising the major interests analysed earlier largely depends on integrating China into international institutional orders that exist mainly in the form some non-proliferation regimes like the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and others of the same kind, and economic regime like the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Integrating China with these institutional orders inevitably aimed at bringing and constraining China's behaviour under the norms of international law and thus making the way easy to deal with her for materialising the interests.¹⁶

CONVERGENCE OF INTERESTS BETWEEN THE U. S. AND CHINA

Application of the tools of comprehensive engagement policy has proved effective to a great extent in materialising the U.S. interests due

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 242-43.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p243

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

to increasing trend in China's active participation in the U.S. sponsored economic and security regimes. The nature of China's response to the U.S. policy may be well understood from the statement of China's Vice-Premier and Foreign Minister Qian Qichen with regard to the gravity of relationship between the two countries:

We [China and the U.S.] share a common responsibility in maintaining peace and stability in both Asia-Pacific and the rest of the world. We also share an important responsibility in promoting global economic prosperity, improving human environment and many other important matters. The need for both countries to stay engaged with each other is increasing, not decreasing. The potential for both countries to cooperate in various fields is expanding, not dwindling. We should firmly bear these common interests in mind and step cooperation. We should also work together with other countries to bring a peaceful, stable and prosperous world into the 21st century.¹⁷

In fact, the statement should be viewed not only from the perspective of a mere formal courtesy, but also from the real need of the relationship between the two countries in the sense that there are some areas where their interests converge. The following are the two broad and major areas where the U.S. interests converge to those of China that may be the very contents of Qian Qichen's statement:

- i) China's quest for economic security,
- ii) China's quest for regional and international stability.

i) China's quest for economic security

China's security strategy in the post-Cold War era seems to have more economic content than real politik issues, as also argued by a

¹⁷ The statement came at a speech during his visit to the U.S. in April 1997, cited in *Beijing review*, Vol. 40, No. 20, May 19-25, 1997, p.7.

scholar.¹⁸ China's security strategy during the Cold War was dominated by its focus on military strategy to defend herself from foreign military invasion. But the end of the Cold War has brought a major shift in China's security thinking. As economic competition has emerged as the core of international politics in the post-Cold War era, economic security has become the major part of China's security policy. Chinese leaders have learnt a lesson from the disintegration of the Soviet Union that national security depends on overall national strength, especially on a sound economy as well as military might.¹⁹ In fact, in the post-Mao era, Chinese leadership redefine international environment as one of the interdependent that offers payoffs for the open door pragmatist while giving hardly anything for the closed-door dogmatist. The report of the 14th Congress of the Chinese communist Party (CCP) states:

Modern Chinese history and the realities of the present-day world show that so long as a country is economically backward, it will be in a passive position, subject to manipulation by others. Nowadays the competition among the various countries is, in essence, a competition of overall national strength based on economic, scientific and technological strength ... If we fail to develop our economy rapidly, it will be very difficult for us to consolidate the socialist system and maintain long-term social stability. Whether we can accelerate economic growth is therefore an important question both economically and politically.²⁰

China's economic restructuring seems to have two inseparable and basic parts: bolstering the domestic economy and liberalising it for the external world. The two are also important for China's socialist market

¹⁸ Donald S. Zagoria, "The End of the Cold War: Its Impact on China" in Frank J. Macchiarola and Robert B. Oxnam (eds.), *The China Challenge: American Policies in East Asia*, The Academy of Political Science, New York, 1991, p.4.

¹⁹ Yan Xuetong, "China's Security after the Cold War", *Contemporary International Relations*, Vol. 3, No. 5, May 1993, p.6.

²⁰ Cited in *ibid.*, p.6-7.

economy.²¹ For China, it is important to take advantage of the favourable conditions created in many countries and regions for their own economic development and revitalisation. For the crucial goal of modernisation, China is in need of advanced technology, access to world market, capital investment and managerial know-how. The United States, as China views, has become a key partner in its economic reform and modernisation programme in the context of their partnership in trade and commerce and the former being the source of modern technological know-how, investment, and managerial knowledge for the latter.²² In fact, China's economic development, which its leaders and economists claim as their own accomplishments, owes a great deal to the advanced industrialised countries that have facilitated the inflows of foreign direct investment, acquisition of sophisticated technology and expertise.

Obviously, convergence of interests in economic realm has helped them to resolve their trade disputes immediately after they had arisen. The United States has negotiated landmark agreements to combat piracy of intellectual property and the interests of its creative industries. At their 1997 and 1998 summits, President Clinton and President Jiang Zemin agreed to take a number of positive measures to expand U.S.-China trade and economic ties. Both the presidents also agreed that China's full participation in the multilateral trading system is in their mutual interest. They agreed to intensify negotiations on market access, including tariffs, non-tariff measures, services, standards and agriculture, and on implementation of WTO principles so that China can accede to the WTO on a commercial basis at the earliest possible date. China's entry into the WTO is in the interest of both the countries. For the United States, China's entry into the WTO would mean more free trade with China.

²¹ Yan Qixian, "China's Economic Reform and Opening-up in the 1990s," *Contemporary International Relations*, Vol. 3, No. 4, April, 1993, p.11.

²² Steven I. Levine, "Sino-American Relations: Renormalisation and Beyond" in Samuel S. Kim (ed.), *China and the World: New Directions in Chinese Foreign Relations*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1989, p.99.

For the Chinese, WTO accession would mean easier trade with the rest of the world--a boost for their export-dependent economy. Although WTO deal with China failed during Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji's visit to the U.S. in April of 1999, a considerable concessions to the U.S. by China during his visit can be said to be the most significant achievement for comprehensive engagement policy in economic realm.

The factor that signified the role of comprehensive engagement in economic realm was the recent East Asian financial crisis. The financial crisis led the countries like Japan and South Korea to raise question on the existing burden-sharing arrangements with regard to the long-standing presence of U.S. troops which has come to be the central element of the overall U.S. East Asia policy in the February 1995 Department of Defense East Asia Strategy Report. Here it can be mentioned that as international capital makes an exodus from financial markets in East Asia, the region has to take immediate measures for those left behind. As a member state of the region, China was vulnerable to the effect of the investment's sudden and unexpected moves by both the overseas Chinese and Western regions.²³ As a matter of fact, China preferred a regional approach in handling the crisis. Chinese president Jiang Zemin, during the crisis, attended an informal meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) held in December 1997, at which he relieved the leaders of ASEAN of their fears for a competitive devaluation of currencies by assuring them that China would not devalue the Renminbi. Later, U.S. policy helped China in this regard. The United States cut interest rate to promote import from China and other East Asian countries which compete in the U.S. market. If China would have devalued its currency to maintain its external competitiveness, it could trigger a new wave of shocks in currency market of the South East and East Asian countries.

²³ Zhu Feng and Jaewoo Choo, "Asian Financial Crisis and East Asian Economic Cooperation : A Chinese View " *Global Economic Review*, Volume 27, Number 4, Winter 1998, p.76.

ii) China's quest for regional and international stability

China's economic prosperity also requires peaceful regional and international environment. This is another point where the interests of the U.S. and China converge. The U.S. administration officials believe that progress has been made in ensuring a peaceful international environment with China's recent accession to a series of bilateral and multilateral security regimes.

One of the key results of the 1998 Beijing summit between the United States and China was the agreement on de-targeting at each other. Both the sides agreed that their missiles targeted at each other would be de-targeted. Although the agreement does not call for verification and it is believed to be technically possible to retarget the missiles in a short period of time, it can be said that the agreement has a symbolic and political significance as a confidence-building measure (CBM) in bilateral relations.

China has been adopting an increasingly positive posture to stabilise the situation in the Korean Peninsula through the four-party talks. China's friendly influence in North Korea has emerged as an essential factor for the United States in persuading North Korea to abandon its nuclear programme. Although China refrained from publicly censuring North Korea when it test-fired a missile in August 1998, there have appeared signs showing the embarrassment China had suffered. Certainly, stability in the Korean Peninsula is in China's interests. As mentioned earlier, U.S. allies like Japan and South Korea carry great significance for China due to commercial and economic interests. So in case of any trouble in relations between the U.S. and China, the latter is not likely to elicit its co-operation from its commitment of maintaining peace and stability in the region mainly by stopping its behind-the-scenes help with implementing the nuclear accord over North Korea. Because such an action would not only hurt the U.S. interests by threatening the security of its allies, but would also hurt China's economic and security interests.

China's quest for a stable international environment may be well understood from its accession to some global security regimes. In 1992 China promised to abide by the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) and acceded to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). In 1993, China signed the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC); in 1996, China signed the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT); and in 1997, China joined the Zangger Committee of NPT exporters. On January 12, 1998, the U.S. president signed the required certifications to implement a nuclear co-operation agreement with China, citing that there had been "clear assurances" from China on nuclear non-proliferation issues. China's accession to these security regimes has already created a positive result with regard to the U.S. non-proliferation agenda in South Asia. The declaration by presidents Bill Clinton and Jiang Zemin after their 1998 summit in Beijing said, Washington and Beijing "shared interests in a peaceful and stable South Asia and in a strong global non-proliferation regime put at risk by (Indian and Pakistani) tests."²⁴ They agreed to intensify consultations on security issues and to co-ordinate efforts to strengthen peace and stability in South Asia, as well as in the Korean Peninsula and the Middle East. The statement confirmed that the United States and China would not export to India and Pakistan any equipment, materials and technology that might lead to the development of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

CHALLENGES FACING THE U. S. POLICY : A DOMESTIC PERSPECTIVE

Clinton Administration's policy of "comprehensive engagement" has been targeted by Congressional critics who are pressuring the White House to take a firmer, more sanction-oriented approach to China. Congressional opposition to China policy involves a variety of allegations against China: the latter's alleged violation of human rights like treatment of dissidents, repression of religious rights, particularly

²⁴ *The Rising Nepal*, June 28, 1998.

suppression of Tibetan culture and religious rights, harsh birth control policies, prison labour; “large bilateral trade surplus of \$50 billion in favour of Beijing”, charges that China is continuing to violate its non-proliferation commitments and helped Pakistan gain nuclear weapons capability while Iran has been a steady customer of Chinese technology for weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles. Congressional complaints also include China’s alleged military bullying to Taiwan, its military modernisation programme and its territorial claims in the South China Sea. China is also accused of illegal financial contributions to the presidential and other political campaigns in the United States in 1996. But the issue that generated debate throughout the year of 1999 was the charge of Chinese espionage alleging that Chinese agents had stolen design secrets from American nuclear-weapons laboratory over more than two decades.

In the past, on many occasions, President Clinton has responded to such pressure. For example, he imposed sanctions on China for its alleged missile sales to Pakistan, allowed Taiwan’s President Lee Teng Hui to make a private visit to the United States, met with Dalai Lama in the United States which made Chinese leaders angry with the threat of withdrawal of its commitment from the U.S. sponsored security regimes. Currently, under Congressional pressure, the U.S. administration is hanging China’s entry into the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Sanction-oriented approach make China’s moderate leaders vulnerable to the criticism of conservative ones within the Communist Party of China (CPC) and thus compel the moderate leaders to take an assertive stance against the U.S. This, in turn, appears to hurt the progress of the “comprehensive engagement” policy.

Understanding the behaviour of the Congress towards China may be attributed to the perceptions of the school of confrontation and destabilisation mentioned earlier. This may be explained in this way. An important characteristics of the US constitution is the careful separation of powers between the President and the Congress--the check and balance system in which none of the branches is dominant over the other.

But often a particular international environment that poses challenge to America's vital interest, then President's personality helps him overcome Congressional pressure in foreign policy making process. During the Cold War, bipartisan consensus on foreign policy prevailed as the Congress felt obliged to rally around the President to strengthen his hand in handling Soviet threat. Also personality of some presidents like Kennedy, Nixon (during the first term), Reagan and Bush helped them overcome Congressional critics of foreign policy--indeed in all public policy. But the change in the international system after the fall of Soviet Union has brought a major shift in the relationship between the two branches of decision-making process—the President and the Congress. With the end of the Cold War, bipartisan consensus is gone. Congressional criticism of President Clinton's China policy can be explained from this perspective of change in the international system. Clinton's strong personality that comes from his popularity has been helping him in continuing his China policy. But check and balance system does not make it always easy for him. The system often compels him to heed to Congress dominated by the Republicans--conservative in character who have strong anti-China feeling.

Fundamentally, the disagreement between the President and the Congress lies in the nature of their constituencies. The view from the White House, national in scope, and the view from any Congressional office, responsive to pressure from one district or one state, and most importantly to the pressure of different competitive interest groups can never converge at one point. In the United States, Congress members represent the interests of different lobby groups that make compulsions for them to differ with the President on issues that go against the interests of the lobbies they represent. For example, when the President takes initiative to renew MFN status to China, it is opposed by the lobbies of human rights groups along with other pressure groups who opposes China on various charges. Thus, Clinton's policy often comes to be captured by a host of special interest groups with the result of a fragmented policy towards China.

CONCLUSION

Any relationship between or among countries gets strengthened in an environment of harmony of interests. U.S.-China relations since the 1970s are not an exception to this reality. Despite the existence of some troubling issues, Clinton's China policy complemented by a more realistic vision of Chinese leadership has further strengthened the relationship between the two countries in recent years. But the question that looms large: will the U.S. current China policy be able to maintain its continuity? The question is very pertinent in the context of the coming presidential election in the United States. As China is a factor in US politics, it may be argued that Clinton Administration will slide into a tougher stance in order to protect presidential aspirant Al Gore from charges of being "soft" on China. Lingering of China's entry into the WTO may be understood from this perspective of the U.S. domestic politics. However, an election can only hinder the progress of the U.S. policy, but it cannot be the determinant of the future long-term relationship between the U.S. and China. There are some facts that create optimism about the continuity of the U.S. China policy.

It is true that Congressional opposition to China policy often triggers irritation in the U.S.-China relations. However, it is also evident that Congress cannot always oppose the policy. In the Congress, critics of China policy also represent the interests of America's business community. As a result, although the U.S. is lingering China's entry into the WTO, every year, it has been continuing the extension of MFN status to China. For example, Republican-dominated Congress fuelled the "anti-China wave" during the spring of 1997, but did not obstruct the annual extension of China's MFN trading treatment. Despite intense debate, the extension was passed by the House of Representatives by a vote of 259 to 173. In this regard, the statement of House majority leader Dick Armey(R-TX) may be worth mentioning: *"In my heart I would like to oppose MFN status for China as a way of expressing the deep repugnance I feel toward the tyranny of Beijing. But, intellectually, I believe that continued normal trade relations are best for the peoples of*

China."²⁵ "What he did not mention was the intense lobbying effort brought to bear on Congress by the American business community, as well as by Hong Kong and Taiwan (whose economic interests would be directly threatened by revocation)."²⁶

In fact, since the normalisation of Sino-U.S. relations in the 1970s, long-standing troubling issues have marred the U.S. relations with China only occasionally. But as the troubling issues are far away from ideological orientation and there is a moderate regime in Beijing with a realist outlook about the world, both sides are aware of the need of easing tensions in a realistic way keeping their productive relationship in continuation. Most importantly, the U.S. policy, in strategic terms, has been witnessing continuity over the successive regimes. Republican presidential candidates, including the Junior Bush, are out in force lashing Clinton as soft on China. Clinton also did the same when he ran against the Senior Bush in 1992 presidential election. The fact is that once in office, every President since Richard Nixon has come round to the same realisation: If not engagement, what? Should it be a confrontational policy? That has hardly been a practical choice. Since normalisation, there has been little difference between the basic ways the Republicans and Democrats have approached the rising power of the world's most populous country, pursuing the effort to foster political reform and global stability by encouraging China's economic development. Thus, it is unlikely that an election victory of a presidential candidate, a Republican or a Democrat, will bring any basic change in the U.S. policy towards China.

²⁵ Cited in David Shambaugh, *op. cit.*, p.244.

²⁶ *Ibid.*