



DEFEATING TERRORISM

STRATEGIC ISSUE ANALYSIS



Coalition Partners: China

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Conclusions:

- Reactivate mil-mil ties with China across the board with a more comprehensive pro-active approach to promote our long-term war on terrorism. The existing “case by case” review of activities should be discarded.
- Place the topic of counterterrorism prominently on the agenda in mil-mil exchanges.
- Stress the importance of calm and stability in the Taiwan Strait and Korean Peninsula.

At a minimum, China’s tacit support or at least nonopposition is crucial to the eventual success of the war on terrorism because Beijing holds one of the permanent seats on the U.N. Security Council. China’s active participation in the war is not essential. In fact, the United States should probably not expect much in the way of substantive Chinese support.

Officially, Beijing has offered supportive rhetoric for America’s war on terrorism and has shared intelligence with the United States. Some Chinese analysts see the events of September 11, while tragic, as heralding a brighter future for U.S.-China relations. These analysts see significant potential for U.S.-China cooperation on counterterrorism efforts, which can contribute to an improvement in overall bilateral relations. Other Chinese analysts, however, expect that the United States will single-mindedly and unilaterally pursue its war on terrorism, which will result in a deterioration in relations.

Context.

China’s leaders are very concerned about ethno-religious terrorism in their own country—especially from Islamic extremists seeking greater autonomy or independence from China in the western region of Xinjiang. Xinjiang shares an extended land border with central Asian states (including a short stretch with Afghanistan), Pakistan and Kashmir.

Beijing is also concerned about other “separatist” movements seeking independence in places such as Tibet and Taiwan. These are all seen as constituting serious threats to national security, and China’s leaders are extremely sensitive to the point of paranoia about internal security. The issue of “separatism” tends to be on the agenda alongside the subject of “terrorism.”

During his visit to Shanghai to attend the Asia-Pacific Economic Conference (APEC) meeting on October 20-21, President Bush got a qualified statement of support for the war from his Chinese counterpart. The first ever

face-to-face meeting between the two national leaders went as well as could be expected. The Chinese did not want the issue of terrorism to monopolize the agenda or for President Bush to upstage the Chinese leader.

China's Strategy.

President Jiang told President Bush on October 8 that China supports efforts to combat terrorism but cautioned him to keep civilian casualties limited. However, as the U.S. and coalition forces continue to conduct limited military operations in Afghanistan against the Taliban and al Qaeda, Beijing has heavily censored Chinese media reports of the war. China has sealed its approximately 50 mile-long border with Afghanistan and provided a small amount of humanitarian assistance for the resettlement of Afghan refugees. For now, the Chinese government is also denying visas to passport holders of countries in the Arab world and Southwest Asia, and Chinese airlines and travel agents are declining to sell air tickets to these same individuals.

China's main objectives are to:

- Prevent terrorist acts and defeat secessionist movements in China;
- Maintain good relations with the United States;
- Ensure stability in Central Asia and cordial relations with the states of the region;
- Secure a stable supply of foreign energy resources;
- Continue economic growth which entails smooth entry into the World Trade Organization (China formally joins the WTO next month).

Prognosis.

As time goes on, Beijing could begin to express publicly reservations or condemna-

tion, although Chinese leaders may privately be pleased that terrorist organizations that also pose a threat to China are being destroyed or greatly weakened.

However, if the United States pursues operations beyond the current limited U.S./coalition military action in Afghanistan, there will likely be strong official Chinese condemnation. China fears that the United States might undertake extensive military operations against other states in Southwest Asia or the Middle East (e.g., Iraq) or establish a long-term military presence in the region. This would damage U.S.-China relations and result in closer ties between China and Russia. Both countries would redouble their efforts to oppose U.S. actions via the United Nations and the recently established Shanghai Cooperation Organization (composed of Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan).

Recommendations.

The United States should not expect much actual support from China and should probably be satisfied with no vocal opposition to the war on terrorism.

Nevertheless, Beijing could make some useful contributions, although Washington should not expend valuable political capital in pursuit of these. If the United States does seek substantial help from China in the war, Washington should anticipate Beijing insisting on a significant quid pro quo (e.g., regarding Taiwan). The United States should avoid going down this road. Instead, Washington should play up Beijing's sense of its status as a great power and Beijing's desire to be treated like a distinguished member of the community of nations.

If efforts in Afghanistan take place under U.N. auspices (once the Taliban is toppled), China may be willing to provide token military units for peacekeeping or

humanitarian relief activities in Afghanistan. At the very least, China may be willing to offer some humanitarian aid. This Chinese involvement might be of considerable value in stressing the broad nature of the antiterrorism coalition and be useful in improving mil-mil relations between the People's Liberation Army and other armed forces (including U.S. military).

The United States should make every effort to ensure that bilateral relations with China improve. To this end we should:

- Reactivate mil-mil ties with China across the board with a more comprehensive pro-active approach to promote our long-term war on terrorism. The existing "case by case" review of activities should be discarded;
- Place the topic of counterterrorism prominently on the agenda in mil-mil exchanges;
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