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Look What China Could Do If It Changed Tactics
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When President Jiang Zemin rose to power in 1989, Beijing had several foreign policy objectives: stabilize relations with the United States following the June 4 Tiananmen tragedy; secure the peaceful return of Hong Kong; promote Taiwan's reunification with the mainland; expand China's involvement in the international economy; and create a more tranquil regional environment through improved relations with Japan, Russia, the divided Korea Peninsula, India, and Southeast Asian nations.

To a remarkable extent, progress has been made in most of these areas. But increasingly many of Beijing's objectives are encountering severe difficulties; its strategies are producing responses that are negative from China's own perspective.

In its key relationships, Beijing's strident rhetoric has intimidated no one, but rather generated needless animosity. Taiwan feels increasingly alienated from the Mainland, not closer to peaceful reunification. The Sino-American relationship appears fragile and involves a complex mixture of cooperation and contention. Growing numbers of influential Japanese view China as a potential threat to their security. China's closest strategic partner today is an unreliable and weak Russia.

Above all, the entire region seems on the precipice of an arms race that will prove costly and unwinnable by any of the participants, including China. And China's weapons acquisitions, deployments, and sales are a primary (though not the only) factor in stimulating the region's interest in theater missile defense, and in the case of South Asia, nuclear proliferation.

China's foreign policies need considerable adjustments for it to sustain its progress of the past decade. Indeed, a greatly altered approach to global and regional security issues that accommodated the interests of its neighbors would not only advance China's interests but cease to drive Taiwan, Japan, the Koreas, and the Southeast Asian countries into the American military embrace. Innovative policies would place the United States on the defensive.

Imagine, for example, what would happen if Jiang informed Clinton that China does not care whether the United States intends to develop and deploy a national missile defense system. Jiang could continue: "We believe the system will not work, so waste your money if you wish. In any case, we will not deploy additional inter-continental ballistic missiles or improve the systems that we do have. We have no interest in being lured into an unwinnable nuclear arms race with you, and in any case, we wish to avoid a nuclear exchange with the United States. We would rather concentrate on developing modern conventional weapons. We naturally would welcome cooperation with the United States in developing our own national missile defenses against 'states of concern,' including shared satellite early warning, as you do with the Russians."

With respect to Taiwan, a Mainland declaration of a moratorium on the emplacement of additional missiles and missile launchers aimed at Taiwan would elicit positive and reciprocal responses from Taipei. Beijing could couple this announcement with an invitation to Taipei to begin serious discussions on arms control measures, so the two sides could avoid the dangerous build-ups that now loom ahead, and to resume dialogue on other issues without preconditions. It could also relax its opposition to Taiwan's participation in international organizations, even dangling possible support for Taiwan's membership in the United Nations – as one part of a Chinese delegation. The newly-created entity, "China," would enjoy the Security Council seat, and the "PRC, China," and "Taiwan, China" would sit next to each other in the General Assembly as representatives of one China. Beijing has come close to this formula in its recent statements that "one China" does not necessarily mean the only PRC.

Similarly, Beijing's posture toward Japan need not be short sighted and counterproductive. Imagine Tokyo's warm response if Beijing vigorously supported Tokyo's membership in the Security Council, agreed to trilateral security talks with the United States, ceased hectoring Japan about its record and historiography about World War II, and endorsed the U.S.-Japan military alliance and forward deployment of U.S. forces – as long as both Japan and the U.S. agreed that they would not become militarily involved in the defense of a Taiwan that declared independence.

Realistically, the likelihood of Jiang and his associates adopting such measures is minimal, even though there are some signs of fresh thinking at the margins in Beijing. Domestic political calculations, pressure from elements of the military, aspirations for national greatness along conventional lines, and fears that the United States and Taiwan would take advantage of a diplomatically agile non-militaristic China discourage embarking on a path that we believe would actually serve Chinese interests – and deprive America's extremists on left and right of the enemy they are intent on creating.

Without bold adjustments in its strategies, China seems headed for a dead-end. The prospects for a peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue are dimming. The risks of a coalition of forces forming against China are growing.

If Jiang Zemin and his colleagues can envision a different path to national greatness and reorient China's strategies, they will enhance China's prospects for a tranquil and prosperous 21st century. The world's leaders, for their part, can encourage this strategic shift by laying out for their Chinese counterparts both the perils of its current strategies and the

specific security and political gains China would secure from changing them.

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