



Diverging paths hurt U.S. and Europe

by Bates Gill and Robin Niblett

Divergent U.S. and EU approaches toward China's dramatic political and economic rise carry the danger of misunderstandings not only across the Atlantic, but also with China, and could have negative economic and security consequences in the near and long terms.

A resurgence in American China-bashing over the past six months reflects a combination of concerns: competition with China's economy, China's accelerating military modernization, and Beijing's expanding diplomatic and economic presence around the world. These factors foster a rare bipartisan consensus on Capitol Hill, one that the White House has been wary to challenge.

In contrast, on Monday, Prime Minister Wen Jiabao of China and members of his government welcomed Prime Minister Tony Blair of Britain and other European Union leaders to the eighth EU-China summit in Beijing. This summit marked another important step in the solidifying strategic relationship between Europe and China.

The EU has already become China's leading trade partner, and China is the second-largest destination in the world for EU exports. But these statistics obscure the scope and depth of the EU-China dialogue. The summit in Beijing bolsters an ever-deepening set of EU-China relations that includes work on a new and wide-ranging Framework Agreement to further formalize political relations; strengthened scientific and technology cooperation; collaboration on labor, tourism and migration issues; and a specific effort aimed at climate change and energy supply security. EU-China cooperation on space is already far along, as China is a major partner in the development and deployment of the Galileo navigation system.

U.S. policy makers are only now waking up to these developments. Instead, over the past year, U.S. attention on the EU-China relationship has focused almost exclusively on preventing EU governments from lifting their 1989 arms embargo against China.

Greater scrutiny of European trade with China in high-technology, defense-related and dual-use items is certainly warranted, and U.S. concerns have forcefully supported those in Europe who have advocated a more measured approach to military-technical relations with China. Moreover, with the shelving earlier this summer of EU plans to lift the embargo, EU officials and their U.S. counterparts have belatedly established a formal EU-U.S. dialogue on Asia and China.

But U.S. interest in engaging substantively with Europe on China-related issues is half-hearted at best. The administration appears primarily intent on educating Europeans about the security risks that China poses to Asia, a

region across which the U.S. extends important security guarantees and maintains significant numbers of deployed forces. It seems far less interested in discussing the objectives, merits, successes, and failures of recent U.S. and European approaches.

For their part, Europeans are equally wary about consulting with the U.S. on their policies toward China. This has been evident in the economic sphere, where Europeans have balked at suggestions that they jointly tackle the Chinese government's frequent failure to protect the intellectual property of Western investors and exporters into China.

This ambivalence extends also to the political level, where many Europeans believe that the U.S.'s confrontational attitude toward China will create a self-fulfilling prophecy of Chinese militarism. Overall, Europeans are still sore over the trashing they received from Congress and the White House during the arms embargo uproar earlier this year.

But such distrustful standoffishness by both sides serves the interests of neither. Separately, neither U.S. critical detachment nor European engagement efforts have been successful in inducing positive steps from China in critical areas, like ratifying the UN Convention on Civil and Political Rights, halting the passage of the antiseccession law aimed at Taiwan, or pursuing less mercantilist trade and technology policies.

Instead, Chinese leaders continue to take advantage of divergent U.S. and EU approaches toward China, deftly playing one side off the other.

Both the United States and European nations have a shared strategic interest to integrate China beneficially into the international trading and security system, and bring about the kind of domestic social and economic development in China which will make it a more stable, open, and prosperous partner. The absence of a strong trans-Atlantic dialogue regarding China threatens not only rifts in U.S.-EU relations, it also enables Beijing to persist with policies that run counter to U.S., EU and even Chinese long-term interests.

U.S. and European leaders need to put as much effort into understanding their respective policies toward China as they are putting into their bilateral discussions with China.

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