

Zhu visit boosts frayed U.S.-China partnership

by William Jones

The much anticipated visit to the United States by Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji on April 6 to April 15, could not have come at a more appropriate time. Not only did he prove to be a most excellent ambassador of the Chinese people to America; indeed, he showed a remarkable facility for taking his case directly to the American Congress and to the American people. Visiting Los Angeles, Denver, Chicago, New York, and Boston, Zhu received an extraordinarily warm reception from the hundreds of businessmen, farmers, stock brokers, academics, and ordinary citizens with whom he spoke. And always he spoke straight from the heart, departing from any written comments (to the extent he had any) about a minute into his speeches.

The decision to allow Zhu to come to the United States had not been taken lightly by the Chinese leadership. The British-instigated war operations in the Balkans had been met by a strong Chinese rebuke. Wary of this breach of national sovereignty, the Chinese leadership, including the Premier himself, had serious misgivings about the wisdom of his trip at this time. This would have been the second major diplomatic casualty of the decision to launch an air war against the Serbs, following the mid-air cancellation of Russian Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov's U.S. trip in March. In the end, the decision was made that Zhu should go.

U.S.-China relations, so carefully cultivated by President Clinton, culminating in the successful exchange of state visits by the two countries' leaders, with Chinese President Jiang Zemin visiting Washington in 1996 and President Clinton's visit to China last year, have been frayed by a cascade of vituperative allegations from Congressional Republicans against the Chinese government, ranging from the alleged theft of nuclear secrets to allegations of illicit transfer of funds to U.S. political figures to influence U.S. policy. Some of

the "Cold Warriors" around Jesse Helms's Senate Foreign Relations Committee, with the demise of the Soviet Union, have been looking for a new "enemy image," and they have turned their focus on China. A special congressional committee headed by Rep. Christopher Cox (R-Calif.) is due to issue a report that supposedly documents a myriad of instances of transfers of technology that allegedly hurt U.S. national security interests.

Indeed, the same elements who—unsuccessfully—tried to railroad President out of office in independent counsel Kenneth Starr's "Monicagate" operations, are now focussing on the President's China policy, trying to stir up a racist paranoia among their constituents to undermine one of the linchpins of the Clinton foreign policy: the attempt to build a constructive and strategic partnership with China in the 21st century. Driving a wedge between the U.S. and China, and the U.S. and Russia, is the aim of the authors of the Balkan war.

The new 'enemy image'

The most serious attack on the U.S.-China relationship has been allegations of transfer of militarily sensitive technologies through the agreements under which U.S. satellites were launched on Chinese Long March rockets. The report of the Cox committee, which is still classified, contains allegations of wide-ranging technology transfers to China through the satellite cooperation, which supposedly have damaged U.S. security. This report is clearly aimed at sabotaging U.S. high-technology exports to China, but it is precisely in the high-tech field where China would receive the greatest economic benefits from U.S. imports, and the U.S. economy would most greatly benefit, including reducing its trade deficit with China.



Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji on April 9, addressing the U.S.-China Forum on Environment and Development at the U.S. State Department.

Catalyzed by the Chinese decision to go ahead with the Zhu visit and no longer hamstrung by the Starr witch-hunt, President Clinton has begun to retake the initiative on China policy. On the eve of the Chinese Premier's visit, he gave a major foreign policy speech reaffirming his commitment to a policy of "constructive engagement" with China. At the Mayflower Hotel on April 7, the President said, "Our long-term strategy must be to encourage the right kind of development in China—to help China grow at home into a strong, prosperous, and open society, coming together, not falling apart; to integrate China into the institutions that promote global norms on proliferation, trade, the environment, and human rights. We must build on opportunities for cooperation with China where we agree, even as we strongly defend our interests."

Clinton warned against attempts to make of China a new "enemy image." "But as the next Presidential election approaches, we cannot allow a healthy argument to lead us toward a campaign-driven Cold War with China," he said, "for that would have tragic consequences: an America riven by mistrust and bitter accusations; an end to diplomatic contact that has produced tangible gains for our people; a climate of mistrust that hurts Chinese Americans and undermines the exchanges that are opening China to the world."

The White House was intent on making a very high-profile affair out of Zhu's visit, who had assumed office last spring. He was to receive all the trappings of a state visit, although he is only the head of government, not the head of state,

a clear sign of how important the administration considers the relationship.

Few major agreements

Given the atmosphere in Washington, even Premier Zhu was reticent about making the trip at this time. Speaking at the joint press conference with President Clinton on April 8, Zhu said, "To tell you the truth, I was really reluctant to come. Two days before my departure from China to the United States, I received two Congressional delegations from the United States, one headed by [Sen. Craig] Mr. Thomas [R-Wyo.], the other by [Sen. William] Mr. Roth [R-Del.]. All together, more than 20 senators and congressmen were at the meetings. I said to them, as the current political atmosphere in the United States is so anti-China, I really lack the guts to pay the visit to the United States at present. And they told me that you should go; we welcome you, because we Americans like your new face." Zhu jokingly remarked that in the present climate his "new face" would perhaps be turned into a "bloody face."

There had, however, been some promising signs coming from U.S. representatives. A major trade delegation, led by Commerce Secretary William Daley, had been to China at the end of March and had concluded some important trade agreements. During his trip, Daley underlined that the administration's policy toward China was "broader than the anti-China attitudes" exhibited by the U.S. Congress.

However, the political atmosphere has induced a certain

amount of caution in the administration. The night before the official state visit began, Premier Zhu, residing at the Blair House across the street from the White House, was invited to a late-night session with the President at his residence. President Clinton has traditionally met informally with visiting leaders prior to the arrival ceremonies on the South Lawn of the White House. Although the White House hasn't said much about that discussion, which lasted two and a half hours, Zhu was made to understand that the administration, wary of winning Congressional acceptance for the larger trade package, was not prepared to back China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) at this time.

Although China would have to make significant economic sacrifices to join the WTO, Premier Zhu, feeling that this would accelerate much needed foreign investment, is committed to China joining the WTO as quickly as possible. In addition, it is important to China that it enter the WTO before Taiwan, which is also intent on membership in the trade organization. WTO membership would bring with it permanent most-favored-nation trade status, avoiding thereby the annual debates in the U.S. Congress over human rights that accompany that decision. In the last few weeks of negotiations with the U.S. trade representative, China has indeed gone a long way in opening up its markets, including allowing the import of significant amounts of agricultural products which China itself produces, including citrus products from California and wheat from the Pacific Northwest. Although China will not benefit from these concessions, it is felt that the political "goodwill" thereby attained will have beneficial results in the long run—from increased trade with the United States.

'Good dispositions'

At the official arrival on April 8, President Clinton harkened back to the Revolutionary War period, when the relations with China were first established. "Your visit is an important event in the long relations between our people, a relationship that spans nearly the entire history of the United States," Clinton said. "Before this city even existed, even before our Constitution was signed, China granted our newly independent nation equal standing with the powers of Europe. At the dawn of a new century, we now recognize that our interests coincide on many issues and diverge on some others, but that we have a fundamental responsibility to speak with candor and listen with an open mind. And certainly we can agree that China and the United States can best achieve our hopes in the next century if we continue to build a constructive strategic partnership, a relationship that allows us to make progress on the issues that matter to our people." Premier Zhu responded: "The United States is the strongest and the most prosperous country in the world, while China is the largest potential market in the world. . . . So the close cooperation between these two countries will bring splendid hopes to the people in the world for closer

cooperation in economic, trade, culture, scientific fields, and also for bringing about more prosperity and the solidarity of the world people."

Clinton returned to his theme at the state dinner at the White House. "Since 1784, Chinese and Americans have shared a lively dialogue over how to achieve common cause in the countless pursuits that animate great nations," he said. "Thomas Jefferson took care to promote what he called 'good dispositions' between the United States and China. Abraham Lincoln, in his first annual message to Congress, predicted our extensive trade with China. And, of course, Franklin Roosevelt made it America's purpose to join with China in defense of freedom."

But the Premier himself took center-stage to present his case to the American people—and he did so superbly. With dead-pan humor and his razor-sharp wit, he seemed to win the hearts of all to whom he talked, including the President himself, who elicited some mirth from both the Chinese and

'Technology is the common heritage of mankind'

During a press conference with President Clinton in Washington on April 8, Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji was asked to respond to allegations that China stole nuclear weapons secrets from U.S. laboratories. Zhu replied that neither he nor Chinese President Jiang Zemin knew of any espionage. "As a senior engineer, I've been in charge of the industry in China for more than 40 years, and I have never known any of our most advanced technology came from the United States," Zhu said.

The Prime Minister's broader point was that "technology development, or technologies, are the common heritage, or common property of mankind, and in scientific inventions, actually all roads lead to Rome." He named some of the scientists who have led Chinese space and nuclear programs, stating that although they had studied abroad, what they brought back to China with them was not secret pieces of paper, but their brains.

For the past 40 years, nuclear scientist Edward Teller, who worked in the Manhattan Project during World War II and later designed the hydrogen bomb, has led a campaign to end the U.S. government policy of needlessly classifying millions of pages of scientific work. He has stressed that such classification hampers collaboration among scientists, does not provide security, and keeps information developed by the nation's weapons laboratories from industry and the American public.

American press, when it was noticed during their joint press conference, that he was nonchalantly chatting with the Premier during the translation of a question, obviously noting how it was getting late, and how they should probably conclude the press conference in order to make it on time to the state dinner.

Although Zhu was obviously disappointed at the failure to achieve all he hoped to achieve with regard to China's entry into the WTO, he was effectively taking his case to Congress and to the American people. On his second day in Washington, he met with a bipartisan group of 12 Congressmen to discuss the U.S.-China agricultural agreement which was to be signed at the end of the week. Speaking to supporters at a dinner at the Willard Hotel sponsored by a number of U.S.-China organizations, Zhu said, "My impression was that all of them approved of the agricultural agreement. As for the other outstanding problems that I described, they seemed to know nothing very much about them. So as I see it, if we were

to make public the agreement that we had reached with the American side, Congress would support it." Zhu was so successful in his "lobbying" among business and political layers, that he received an unexpected call from President Clinton while he was in New York, who assured him that the United States would support Chinese WTO membership before the end of the year. The White House had been bombarded by angry calls and e-mails from business leaders and congressmen furious at administration delay on the issue.

After the Washington leg of his trip, Premier Zhu then went to Chicago. There, he visited the Mercantile Exchange, and also visited a farm, underlining the benefit to American farmers of an agreement which had been signed that same day by the Chinese Trade Minister in Washington.

On his second day in Washington, which Zhu referred to as a "terrible day," he met with Vice President Al Gore to discuss cooperation on environmental issues. Here he encountered the other side of the "China bashers." Gore made a

In his 1987 book *Better a Shield Than a Sword*, Dr. Teller recounts that the roots of classification lay in the fear during World War II that the Germans would advance their work on a nuclear bomb if American scientists published their research on nuclear fission. Soon after the publication of the work of German scientists Otto Hahn and Fritz Strassman in 1939, that they had discovered the process of nuclear fission, the U.S. government introduced comprehensive secrecy practices.

There have been heroic efforts to replace secrecy in science with collaboration, Teller reports. The most prominent was the 1954 Atoms for Peace conference. President Eisenhower decided that whether the Soviets participated or not, the United States would share its information on the peaceful uses of atomic energy.

"We gave away a lot of information at the First Atoms for Peace Conference," Teller says, "and we accomplished a lot. Soviet scientists were delighted to present their achievements. . . . With secrecy on reactor designs lifted, schools of nuclear engineering were established. Industries hired the graduate engineers, and a dozen years later nuclear reactors competed with coal, oil, and gas in generating electricity.

"Under present rules, research done in our national laboratories cannot be fully shared with civilian industries. When we fail to expose people to problems they could help solve, we remain unaware of the loss. We now have millions of classified documents. We also have falling productivity. Rapid progress cannot be reconciled with central control and secrecy. The limitations we impose on ourselves by restricting information are far greater than any advantage others could gain by copying our ideas."

Many years ago, Teller wrote an atomic alphabet dictionary for his young son, which sums up his view:

"S stands for secret; you can keep it forever.
Provided there's no one abroad who is clever."

Secrecy is not compatible with science

"Today, secrecy has become a terrible destructive force in our society," Teller writes. "My postwar efforts to reverse the process have not affected its devastating spread. I am unhappy that I had anything to do with its beginnings."

In 1993, Teller saw some fruit of his multi-decade campaign. He helped convince then-Energy Secretary Hazel O'Leary to declassify documents on laser fusion. The secrecy was hampering international cooperation, and placed American researchers at a disadvantage, he argued. Because other nations do not classify laser fusion research, the only victims of the U.S. policy were American scientists.

The accusations that Chinese-American scientists have passed on nuclear weapons secrets to China, has created an atmosphere in the nation's scientific laboratories resembling a police state. Computers containing classified data have been shut down for weeks, while employees attend "security" briefings, and new employees will go through lie detector tests. Scientists at Los Alamos and Lawrence Livermore National Labs have stated that this is not an atmosphere conducive to creative scientific work.

Edward Teller, this nation's senior nuclear weapons specialist, believes that "secrecy is not compatible with science, but it is even less compatible with democratic procedure."—*Marsha Freeman*

point to assert his own particular brand of “China policy.” China, however, is not the small nation of Malaysia, which Gore had run over the coals at the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in Kuala Lumpur in October 1998, so Gore’s message was framed somewhat more diplomatically—but it was the same: “Engagement for engagement’s sake has never been our policy,” Gore said. “Our engagement with China must be consistent with our values as Americans. It must put a priority on the pursuit of human rights and democracy. It must protect American security. It must ensure that expanded trade is fair trade.” Gore’s commitment to “engagement” seemed downright menacing.

China’s real needs

At the Willard, Zhu was intent on underlining that the agricultural agreement, the only major agreement signed during his visit, did little to help China in its economic development. Zhu referred to how a major deal with Hughes Electronics, for the launching of Hughes satellites on a Chinese rocket, had been derailed as a result of allegations of “sensitive” technology transfers, based on an investigation of an earlier failed launch of a Hughes satellite. “If the U.S. were to categorize every exportable thing as having potential military applications and refused to sell us anything, as in the recent case of the Hughes satellites, which were denied to us, then how can we possibly go about trying to balance the trade imbalance? So if you don’t want to sell us computers, you don’t want to sell us satellites, all you want to sell us is wheat and citrus?” he asked. “Well, we can live eating wheat and citrus products, but we can’t live much better. So, if we are to narrow the trade balance between China and the United States and to expand the volume of trade, this is going to require efforts from both sides.”

Zhu made clear how the concessions China had made in its attempt to join the WTO would bear a heavy cost for China. “To this end, we have truly made very, very major concessions. . . . But why we’ll be willing to make such concessions is because after so many years of our policy of reform and opening up, we have gotten to the point where at least we have the capacity to withstand the shock that entry into the WTO will bring to us.”

Zhu was clear that there are limits to what China would be prepared to accept in the way of rapid market-opening. At the Willard, he had warned, “This kind of opening up cannot happen too quickly. We have to go about it step by step, because otherwise we may very well wind up with the kind of turbulence that we saw in the Southeast Asian countries over the last couple of years.” For those who wanted to push harder to get China to permit a greater investment ratio and to lower even further their customs tariffs, Zhu had warned them, “These are all possible, but in a few years’ time. If you want too much, too soon, in the end you may wind up with nothing.”

In an interview with the MacNeil-Lehrer Hour on April

9, Zhu focussed on the major problem facing a U.S.-China partnership. “There definitely is an anti-China current existing in the United States right now,” he said, “and therefore this constitutes a rather significant obstacle to developing that friendly cooperative relationship that Presidents Jiang and Clinton spoke about, and not only is it an obstacle, but there is a danger in backtracking in this relationship.”

Zhu expressed China’s grave concern over the illegal NATO operations in Kosovo. “On this subject our President, Mr. Jiang Zemin, has repeatedly stated the Chinese position,” Zhu said, “namely, that we object to taking military action in the former Yugoslavia because this is interference in their internal affairs. We strongly feel that the only correct way is to go back to a political negotiation, because a political discussion will be the only method which will bring about a resolution to this problem.” Zhu warningly referred to the Balkans as “the Tinder Box of Europe.”

Nuclear theft?

In his public meetings in Los Angeles, Washington, Chicago, New York, and Boston, Zhu was asked about allegations of Chinese “theft” of nuclear secrets. Denying knowledge of any such espionage, Zhu underlined the universality of science and the absurdity of trying to slap political controls on scientific creativity. “Technology development, or technologies, are the common heritage, or common property of mankind, and in scientific inventions, actually all roads lead to Rome,” he said. “In the areas of missile and nuclear technologies, indeed, we have learned from foreign countries. Well, in the area of missile technology, the pioneer in China is Mr. Qian Xuesen, who returned from the United States. And in terms of the nuclear technology, the pioneer in China is Qian Sanqiang, who returned from the lab of Madame Curie of France. But I can assure you that when they returned back, they didn’t bring back even a piece of paper; they just brought back with them their brains!”

At the Willard Hotel, Zhu underlined the common interests of China and the United States. “China is not an enemy of the United States, nor is it a potential adversary. We are friends, and we should be friends for a long time to come. PBS asked me today, ‘Is China a threat to the United States?’ And I answered, ‘Well, why should you be afraid of China? Your President Clinton said that China only has 20 to 30 nuclear weapons, whereas the United States has about 6,000 of them. So who is China going to threaten?’ ” Zhu said. “The Chinese people love peace, and we have always been in the position of being invaded by others rather than invading others. And I can truly speak for all 1.25 billion Chinese when I say that the Chinese people earnestly want to become friends with the United States. And there is no way we will become enemies of the United States.”

This, perhaps on one condition: that the American people don’t allow the proponents of a new “Cold War” in either party to make of China their new “enemy image.”