

## **Imperative of US-China peace**

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After sharply criticizing China during the campaign, President Donald Trump has embraced his Chinese counterpart. But who knows how long his expressions of goodwill will last.

Dominant powers rarely give way graciously. Great Britain only reluctantly accepted America's rise and refused to similarly yield to the emerging German giant on the European continent. The U.S. has ringed China with bases and forces.

Conflict often results during power transitions. It took two world wars to sort out Britain's and Germany's roles.

The U.S. and People's Republic of China have yet to come to blows, but escalating tensions before Trump took office highlighted the dangers of estrangement. Washington continues to insist on running the globe, but Beijing is in no mood to kowtow to America.

Since the end of the Cold War the latter has been the most aggressive nation on earth. However, Washington has grown used to battling military midgets such as Iraq. And most of these conflicts ended unsatisfactorily, sometimes even embarrassingly.

Backing into war with the PRC would be far worse. China possesses nuclear weapons—far fewer than in America's arsenal, but enough to loose mass death and destruction on any nation targeted. The People's Liberation Army would be no pushover, and the PRC is far too big to conquer, occupy, and remake.

Nor is the international climate conducive for American dominance. The Obama administration managed to reverse Richard Nixon's great strategic opening to the PRC and pushed Russia and China together against the U.S. America's allies and Beijing's neighbors are not enthused about the potential for conflict.

Worse, even victory in war would only set the stage for future conflict, just as the Versailles Treaty ending World War I proved to be but a truce for a generation. Beijing and Washington need to peer into the future, however darkly, and choose a different course.

The U.S. should learn from Great Britain's policy toward the rabidly nationalistic rising giant on the North American continent. After fighting two wars with its one-time colonists, Britain wisely chose peace.

London settled border disputes despite America's unreasonable demands; accepted an arbitrary diktat excluding European powers from Latin America; ignored American maritime violations of neutral rights during the Civil War; and accepted U.S. naval parity and eventual superiority. The resulting international partnership endures today.

Unfortunately, the incoming Trump administration originally veered toward conflict. The president-elect almost triggered a trade war, assumed that Beijing could be bullied into imposing regime change in Pyongyang, and challenged the PRC with U.S. encouragement of Taiwanese independence.

Campaign adviser and former CIA Director James Woolsey proposed "a grand bargain in which the U.S. accepts China's political and social structure and commits not to disrupt it in any way in exchange for China's commitment not to challenge the status quo in Asia." However, that's no deal from the PRC's standpoint.

Despite Chinese insecurities, there's little in practice that Washington can do to overthrow the quasi-fascist regime which currently governs China. And for a rising power which may eventually match U.S. economic and military strength to complacently accept permanent American dominance along its border would be intolerable.

Imagine London insisting that residents of the U.S. acquiesce to British naval patrols up the East Coast. Britain dictating American behavior toward Cuba and other nearby territories. British military bases in Mexico, Canada, and throughout the Caribbean. Public debates in London about the potential for war with the U.S. America's reaction would not have been polite.

Washington has been almost frivolously courting conflict. There is no clash of fundamental interests. Beijing is not threatening to invade America or seize America's Pacific possessions. There is no danger of military domination of Eurasia.

The U.S. has legitimate interests in East Asia, but they are limited. Free navigation, which the PRC has not threatened. Commercial cyberwar, which apparently has been tamed by agreement. Abusive trade practices, though the U.S. is no economic virgin.

Violation of human rights, but Washington ignores equal crimes in Saudi Arabia, Central Asia, Egypt, and other "friendly" states. Security of allied nations, though Beijing has threatened the independence of no state other than Taiwan, which historically was controlled by China. And North Korea, but Washington's containment strategy long has discouraged Chinese action against Beijing's sole military ally.

None of these cases warrant the possibility of war.

When Chinese President Xi Jinping visited President Trump changed his tune, offering almost obsequious praise of his guest. But America's mercurial chief executive could return to a policy of bluster and provocation. Peaceful relations are a must. The security of America and its allies is at stake.

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