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PERSPECTIVES ON CHINESE FOREIGN POLICY*

A cursory observation of Chinese foreign policy indicates a great deal of change in Beijing's international interactions in the past 34 years. From being an international outcast, China today is one of the five stars in the UN Security Council and the only Asian nation-state enjoying a veto power. It has an international status of being a 'candidate superpower' capable of orbiting satellites and possessing nuclear weapons which can reach both Moscow and Washington. China's international stature is unique in the sense that no nation-state in its contemporary history has withstood the threat of invasion, risked nuclear annihilation and maintained hostilities with both the superpowers as the People's Republic of China.

In retrospect, China was the closest ally of the Soviet Union in the 1950s. It was an active member of the Socialist bloc, and was alleged to have become instrumental in creating instability around the world through its advocacy of permanent revolution. Today, the two countries are at loggerheads and maintain a million troops across their borders and are poised to defend their disputed territories. Finally, this animosity had led China to terminate its 1950 Treaty of Friendship and Alliance with the Soviet Union in April 1980, and it continues to describe Moscow as a hegemonic power which is the greatest threat to world peace.

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On the other hand, China was locked in confrontation with the United States for more than two decades and they had tried to undermine each other's international positions. The United States had tried to evolve a system of bilateral and multilateral alliances around China's peripheries to contain "communist expansionism". China's response was defensive—articulated through Lin Biao's famous call for encircling the "cities" of the world by the rural areas". However, by the 1970s, the two countries had established diplomatic relations, extended scientific, cultural and commercial ties. China today enjoys a "most favoured nation" status bestowed upon it by the Americans and the United States ranks as the third most largest trading partner of China in the 1980s. Apart from this, both the countries have also found common ground on a wide range of international issues to converge their strategic outlook. China is seen internationally as a near ally of the United States in their pursuit against Soviet hegemonism and is recipient of Western arms. Analysts, therefore, see China as an independent factor in bringing about the most striking change in the post-World War II international system by being an ally to becoming an adversary of the Soviet Union in shifting the international balance of power, which even the technological as well as weapon systems superiority of the United States had failed to achieve.

However, the Chinese by contrast, usually maintain the continuity in their foreign policy, while examining the same record. To support their contention, they point out the constancy of a number of basic tenets in their foreign policy formulation. They feel that their foreign policy, to a large extent, is the result of their responses to both ideological consideration and persistent concern for security and independence from the external powers. Through this they have tried to project China as a country unique among the comity of nation-states, and at the same time they have also positioned China as basically a national-security state. An evidence to the continuity of both strands can be found in China's principled orientation in the global milieu. Beijing's ideological considerations are capsulized in its thematic exposition of principles like anti-hegemonism, international egalitarianism,

populism and anti-racism. On the other hand, China's stress on nationalism, self-reliance and mutual respect for state sovereignty, equality and territorial integrity are addressed to enhance the security and independence components of China's foreign policy goals.¹

The discussion that follows will try to examine the validity of both these strands against the actual foreign policy behaviour of China. For the purpose of analysis, this paper is divided into three sections. The first section will try to analyze the forces to which China's foreign policy was responding in its historical context. Following this, the second section will examine the continuity and change in Chinese behavioural persuasion in the world. Finally, the paper will examine the general prospect of Chinese foreign policy in the 1980s. By focusing the enquiry in this way, it is hoped that light may be shed not simply on the foreign policy developments but also on the way in which China formulates its foreign policy in general.

I

Despite China's assertion of itself as a developing socialist country belonging to the Third World, its foreign policy has continued to be defined largely by what it perceives as the imperatives of its relationships with the two superpowers. The centrality of the United States and the Soviet Union in China's international conduct, is a fact dictated by both history and the contemporary global milieu. These two superpowers have at different times represented themselves as a model for development, source of assistance and a threat to Chinese security interests. Both the United States and the Soviet Union were engaged in Chinese affairs at the outbreak of war with Japan from 1937 to 1945. At home, Chinese communists as well as the Kuomintang were competing with each other to gain support from Moscow and Washington, and this continued to be the diplomatic aspect of the Chinese civil war until it ended in 1949. But by 1950, national interests and ideology had produced Mao's alignment with Moscow, and the American

1. See Hu Yaobang "Report to the Twelfth National Congress of the CCP", *Beijing Review*, September 13, 1982.

budding support for Taiwan strained Sino-American relations, a situation which was reinforced by the outbreak of the Korean War in late 1950.

Security consideration had been the paramount factor in shaping the Sino-Soviet alliance in 1950, which aimed at protecting vulnerable China from a hostile American administration. But overt Sino-American tensions of the 1950s was also paralleled by a rising tide of covert Sino-Soviet feud, which spilled out into open conflict in the early 1960s. The atrophy of the alliance quickened anxieties about China's security and touched off sharp debates in Beijing, concerning China's policy towards the Soviet Union and its strategic posture in the event of further deterioration in Sino-Soviet relations.

A number of factors had contributed to the development of Sino-Soviet hostility in this initial period. The main arena of the split, however, was the ideological causation between the two communist powers and it was nevertheless Beijing's awareness of the incompatibility of the strategic interests of the two powers that led to the total destruction of the alliance they had formed a decade ago. Foremost among the causes of disruption between the two powers was the nature of their military relationship. In 1950 China fought a war in Korea in defense of international communism, though the supply of arms was made by the Soviet Union with a provision of repayment. The height of the Cold War, involved not only the basic security interests of China but also the entire prestige of the Socialist bloc, because if the war was lost to the Americans the story of the Post World War II international order would have been different. But in 1958, when China was involved in conflict over the Quemoy and Matsu islands with Taiwan, supported by the Americans, the Soviets had sidetracked in their commitment by proposing a joint naval fleet in the Pacific under Soviet control", which was rejected by China with the belief that it would encroach upon the Chinese latitude of freedom in deciding military matters concerning itself. The following year, Moscow withheld its promise to supply a sample of the nuclear bomb to China to pressurize

it to come to Soviet terms. Next, the Soviets first maintained an indifferent position, then obviously shifted their allegiance to the Indian position during the Sino-Indian conflict in 1962, which diluted the essence of the security aspect of the 1950 treaty. Finally, Moscow's signing of the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty with the United States and Britain in 1963 eroded whatever residual interests Beijing had in its strategic cooperation with the Soviet Union. In the Chinese view, it was final proof of the revisionist character of the Soviet leadership that had justified their "peaceful coexistence" with the Americans, against the combined interests of the Socialist bloc countries.

The Sino-Soviet dispute, however, did not logically provide a rapprochement between China and the United States. China's suspicion of American moves to disrupt the Sino-Soviet alliance was established by the sharpened tension with Moscow on the one hand, and increasing American pressure in the Vietnam War, on the other. The American coercive diplomacy was at its pitch when it heightened the

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Vietnamese conflict in 1965 which virtually coincided with the repeated Soviet proposal of "joint action" in Vietnam against American imperialism under the Soviet command of both Chinese and Vietnamese armed forces. The proposal was again rejected by China. The Chinese rejection of the Soviet proposal was considerably influenced by its security implications to Beijing. Finally, it led to a break in party to party relations in 1966, thus leaving China to stand on its own.

Managing relations with both superpowers then became the priority area of Chinese foreign policy ; and the Chinese global posture was thus designed by the nature of its relations with both Moscow and

Washington. As China had to maintain hostilities with both the superpowers, its policy postures became more independent than it was before. Throughout the 1960s, as the war in Vietnam was coming closer to the Chinese border, Beijing regarded Washington as the most dangerous imperialist power and major threat to Chinese security. As relations with the United States continued to be frozen, (despite Ambassadors' talks in Geneva,) and those with Moscow was disrupted, Beijing tried to develop diplomatic ties with European countries and succeeded in establishing better relations with France and a number of other countries in the Third World in 1964.

In the sphere of security, China undertook several defensive measures, advocated a "people's war" and endorsed wars of national liberations throughout the world.²

The basic theme developed in Lin Biao's thesis was a familiar position Mao had clarified on several occasions, that China will not attack unless it is attacked. By strictly abiding to this defensive position, China made a radical attempt to mobilize the Third World countries to join in an international united front against both superpowers. This attempt, as noted before, was illustrated in "encircling the cities" of the world by the "rural areas" composed basically of countries that had aspired for greater independence, that were struggling for it and waging wars of national liberations.³ But this moral pursuit of the Chinese was short of its own physical presence in the areas of conflicts. Apart from certain adjacent areas (Vietnam) where China's presence was both moral and material, it had consistently advocated the theme of self-reliance for revolutionary success even while it endorsed 23 most prominent revolutionary and armed struggles in Asia, Africa and Latin American continents.⁴

2. For example, See Lin Biao, *Long Live the Victory of People's War*, (Beijing : Foreign Language Press, 1965).
3. *Ibid* ; and also see *Afro-Asian Solidarity Against Imperialism*, (Documents) (Beijing ; Foreign Language Press, 1964).
4. See Peter Van Ness, *Revolution and Chinese Foreign Policy*. (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1970).

China's concern for national security was, indeed, an interesting facet of the Cultural Revolution. Despite the factional struggles that created internal turmoils, the Cultural Revolution was Mao's way in searching for a manifest destiny for China in a period when it had to maintain dual adversary strategy relying basically on its own capability. For the Chinese, the rise of Soviet revisionism had changed the nature of international politics and they envisioned that the forces of imperialism and revisionism had directly counteracted the forces of nationalism and revolution. This situation had led China to perceive threat to its security from both within and without. Internally the primary threat was seen in terms of political subversion and it was argued that the most dangerous enemy, therefore, works within China. The fundamental premise of this thinking was that the domestic enemies were linked with the external foe (for example the Soviet Union), and thus should not be tolerated on the assumption that war with the United States had become inevitable. On the other extreme, it was also logically felt that the threat to China should be measured in military terms too. This argument then conceded that a militarily weak China could not take on two superpowers at a time. This led China to consider the option to negotiating with the rival powers. But a sense of defeatism in China prevented it from either patching up its differences with the Soviet Union or seeking *modus vivendi* with the United States. As subversion became the main threat to China in this context, it was but natural for Mao and his associates to struggle against revisionism in China through which Beijing had tried to delink it from the remnants of its Soviet connection.

However, the implications of the Cultural Revolution was adverse. First, China antagonized both friends and foes alike by encouraging Maoist insurgents to carry out armed struggles against the governments of Third World countries to create "storm centres of world revolution" throughout the world. Second, the recall of ambassadors from virtually every country, except Huang Hua from Cairo, closed a channel of communication and contact thus leading to chaos in China's foreign relations. Though China succeeded to some extent in eradica-

ting the alien revisionist influence from its bodypolitik, it had achieved it at a cost of destruction of the party edifice on the one hand, and strengthening the position of external foes towards which the movement was directed on the other. Fourth, both Soviet and the American positions in the domain of international politics were rather enhanced by the abrupt Chinese unleashing of world revolution. Finally, China's security situation did not improve as the effect of the cultural revolution severely damaged its relations with the Soviet Union and made direct armed confrontation between the two a possibility. Evidence to this can be found in the pattern of military deployment along the Sino-Soviet border, which rose from 11 Soviet Divisions in 1964-65 to 15 Divisions in 1968 and then to 21 Divisions in 1969 compared to 60 Chinese combat Divisions in 1968.⁵ Ultimately, in 1969 the two sides engaged in serious armed clashes over the Ussuri River and the North-West frontiers.

As a result, the Sino-Soviet border clashes led to a number of subtle changes in Chinese foreign policy in reference to the two super-powers. Though the 1969 armed conflict was a catalyst in China's strategic reassessment, there were, however, some other equally important factors that contributed in establishing the Chinese belief that the Soviet Union would become the prominent foe of China. First, there were three precedent factors in influencing the Chinese changing perception of international affairs. In 1968, the international financial crisis in the capitalist world, the Tet Offensive in Vietnam and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia initiated new strands in Chinese thinking. The contradictions within the imperialist countries and President Johnson's withdrawal from the candidacy of the Presidential election in March 1968 at the face of fresh setback in Vitenam, led China to assess that the United States had become a "spent force" already in its "death throes" and rapidly moving towards its inevitable doom. Meanwhile, China perceived the Soviet Union's ascendancy in the power game as evidenced by Moscow's August invasion of a

5. For detail see, *The Military Balance*, 1978-1979, (London ; International Institute of Strategic Studies, September 1978).

smaller power. The invasion of Czechoslovakia was apparently a crucial factor in shaping a revised Chinese estimate of Soviet intentions. For the Chinese, the Soviet military actions in Czechoslovakia was no less sinister than the American incursion in Vietnam. This led to the Chinese depiction of the Soviet Union as a "social-imperialist" power.⁶

Another Soviet move that was to profoundly influence Chinese attitude towards the Soviet Union was Moscow's declaration of the Brezhnev Doctrine of "limited sovereignty" for countries of the Socialist bloc, with its possible implication of a self-proclaimed Soviet right to do to China what had just been done to Czechoslovakia. The doctrine was denounced in China and Beijing defined it as Moscow's qualitative step towards imperialism hence becoming accomplice number one to the United States, ranking with the latter as a leading oppressor nation-state.

The third factor which became a catalyst for Beijing to completely reassess its strategic imperatives, was the military dimension of Sino-Soviet relation itself. The March 1969 military conflict, along with a threat of a preemptive nuclear strike made the security threat to China from the Soviet Union a reality.

Finally, the clash accompanied by Moscow's declaration of its intention of building a "collective security system of Asian states" to cordon China, became a decisive factor that injected the latitude of Soviet threat that the Chinese felt difficult to reconcile with.

The situation then produced enough rationale for the Chinese leadership to make a significant shift in its perception of the threat emanating from the Soviet Union as more acute compared to the level of threat maintained by the United States.⁷ Security consideration, thus, constituted a major thrust which China took to redefine its foreign policy in the 1970s. After the 136th ambassadorial level talks in

6. See Premier Zhou Enlai's speech in *Peking Review*, (Beijing Review), August 28, 1968.

7. For example see, Linda D. Dillon, Bruce Burton and Walter C. Soderaund, "Who was the Principal Enemy : Shifts in Official Chinese Perceptions of the Two Super Powers, 1968-1969, *Asian Survey*, May, 1977.

Warsaw in February 20, 1970, and a secret trip to Beijing by the US National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger, China initiated three basic approaches in its foreign policy that (in Nixon's words), almost "changed the world". First, China welcomed President Nixon to Beijing and reached an accommodation by signing the Shanghai Communiqué on February 27, 1972 incorporating a veiled strategic consensus to oppose "hegemony" of any power (meaning the Soviet Union) and to work together to establish a peaceful environment in the world. The rationale in this policy lay in the need to curb the temptation of the Soviet Union to attack China by creating a new global alignment. Second, the Sino-American rapprochement led to a moderation in China's radicalism and opened a modest approach towards reestablishing normal relations with the countries of the Third World. This period witnessed a decline in China's support for the wars of national liberation and increased the level of governmental contact with the countries around the world, irrespective of their sociopolitical systems. Simultaneous efforts were also made by China in support of the non-aligned group's demand for the formation of a new international economic order. Third, by completely redirecting the economic policy adopted during the cultural revolution, China began to resume active trade transaction with the rest of the world and gradually advanced towards an economic integration with the Western industrial countries.

On balance, Chinese foreign policy after the Cultural Revolution was also seen to have been dominated by its security concern.⁸ Its relations with the United States, therefore, could best be defined as China's aim at (1) eliminating any threat of a two-front-war involving Beijing with more than one adversary ; (2) trying to deflect any political or military pressure against China by seeking to prevent encirclement by its adversaries ; (3) and gaining practical strategic cooperation with one superpower against the other, who has, in Chinese words, become both a "ferocious and aggressive"⁹ adversary of China.

8. See Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years*, (New Delhi; Vikas, 1979).

9. See the "Frankfurt Documents" of July 1973 for the Soviet contingency Planning to attack China in *Asia Research Bulletin*, September 1977 ; also see Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, (New Delhi : Vikas, 1982),

China's resumption of diplomatic relations with Japan in 1972 and change in Chinese standard position regarding US-Japan security ties through its endorsement are certain points in this case.¹⁰ Along with this, Chinese efforts to establish diplomatic relations with countries far and near from its border, by clearly stating that under the existing circumstance—the potential of threat from the Soviet Union—it tacitly approves of continuing security relations with these countries on its peripheries and the United States.¹¹

In the light of the above discussion what can be said is that the policy shifts required the Beijing leadership to redefine its strategic world view. The factor that became decisive in the strategic assessment was the nature of threat confronting China. The overall term in which the Soviet Union was judged by the Chinese leadership in this period was Moscow's "aggressive intents" compared to that of the relative decline in the US power. This led the Chinese leaders to conclude that the United States could no longer be a potent and a committed rival to the Soviet Union. Such an assessment was based on the geopolitical context of the fall of Saigon in 1975 when the US had to make its last retreat from Southeast Asia.¹² In their final analysis, the Chinese leaders suggested that even if the United States is dangerous "upto a certain point" it would be wrong to treat both superpowers as equivalent threats, because while the United States is on the defensive, the Soviet Union has gone into the offensive with a view to "intruding on US vested rights", thus becoming a more dangerous superpower.¹³

The most dramatic strategic assessment espousing the above view was put to an international audience by Deng Xiaoping himself while addressing the UN General Assembly's Sixth Special Session in 1974,

10. See "Quarterly Chronicle and Documentation", *China Quarterly*, June 1975.

11. See *Ibid.* September and December 1975.

12. For example see Kenneth Liberthal, "The Foreign Policy Debate in Peking as seen through Allegorical Articles, 1973-1976", *China Quarterly*, September 1977.

13. See Deng Xiaoping's talks to a Visiting Japanese Delegation in *Asahi Shimbun*, August 24, 1975.

where he analysed China's global posture in terms of the Three Worlds doctrine.¹⁴ Under the framework of the Three Worlds principle China tried to revitalize the concept of a united front of countries against the expanding Soviet threat. Along with this, the principles laid therein could also be interpreted as China's dismissal of the concept of the world led by Socialist and Capitalist camps, thereby trying to decimate the role which could be effectively played by the Soviet Union throughout the Socialist camp. The basic significance of this concept to the Chinese leadership is that by declaring itself to be a member of the Third World, they have succeeded in pulling China out from the cocoon of isolation. Likewise by de-recognizing the existence of the Socialist camp, China may have apparently notified the Soviet Union that the latter's doctrine of "limited sovereignty" could not be applicable in the Chinese context, because both in theory and practice

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China adheres to the conception of "socialism in one country". Thus Deng in his speech identified the two superpowers as forming the First World, the other industrialized countries including Japan in Asia as the Second World, the rest of the developing countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America as the Third World. The central theme of the Three Worlds doctrine, therefore, is the view that the important conflict in the world which is likely to determine change in the immediate future is no longer in the first instance the conflict between the forces of socialism and that of Capitalism. Deng Xiaoping rather maintained that the most significant conflict was that of the two superpowers' struggle for world hegemony and the struggle of other countries

14. See *Peking Review*, April 12, 1974.

in the world to resist them. Thus China proposed to align itself with the countries of the Second and Third World in order to oppose the suppressive behaviour of the superpowers.

However, in practice, it has become China's central task to check the spread of Soviet influence. The geopolitical context in which China had to develop its relationship with the United States had, in fact, set limits to China's policy of positive neutrality towards Washington. If China's actual foreign policy behaviour is examined, it will be clear that, given the context of Beijing's immediate security need, the Chinese leaders will give priority to the nations of the Second World rather than the Third World. Theoretically, though China considers both the superpowers as adversaries, in practice, it has subtly incorporated its partial alignment with the United States and supports US positions in most conflict situations where Washington's and Moscow's interests clash. By 1977, Deng's strategic imperatives as announced in 1974 was fully endorsed by the highest level of Chinese decision making apparatus, through the publication of an essay by the editorial department of the *People's Daily* entitled, "Chairman Mao's Theory of the Differentiation of the Three Worlds as a Major Contribution to Marxism-Leninism."¹⁵

— However, China's expanding economic, political and even strategic cooperation with the United States, Japan and the Western European countries coupled with China's conflicts with Third World countries like Albania, Afghanistan, Angola, Cuba, Laos and Vietnam (as their foreign policy orientation was either neutral or closer towards the Soviet position) and have all coincided with the steady decline in China's references to the Three World thesis. In the late 1970s China rather activated its relations with industrially developed countries signing a Treaty of Peace and Friendship with Japan in 1978, fully normalizing its relations with the United States on January 1, 1979, and associating itself with Western European countries by reaching several agreements on economic cooperation, particularly in relation to

15. See *Peking Review*, November 4, 1977,

technology transfer.¹⁶ Nearly 66 percent of China's foreign trade in the year 1978 was with highly developed countries of the world, including the trade center like Hong Kong.¹⁷ This was done on the assumption that the Third World countries could not serve China's two basic needs : economic development associated with China's programme of "four modernizations" and security from the Soviet Union. Also the expansion of the Soviet Union and its allies that continued was exemplified by the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea in December 1978 after securing the Soviet guarantee through a treaty the same year, raise the spectre of Soviet threat and Moscow's motive of encirclement in China. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 introduced a need for reaching a closer strategic bond with the United States and the Western European countries than ever before. Thus it was logical for China to put less emphasis on the importance of the Third World in its global policy the sharp decline of which was clearly evident in the *People's Daily* coverage of the New International Economic Order, a conceptual link between China and the Third World in global politics.¹⁸ Instead, China seemed more concerned with preserving the existing international strategic balance against the threat posed by the Soviet Union. In this context, China's punitive war against Vietnam (in the backdrop of Deng's US visit in 1979), can be seen in the light of its self-righteous judgement to take action in order to prevent further expansionism of the pro-Soviet forces in the world. Meanwhile, China seemed to have dropped the United States from its list of hegemonic powers, leaving in that category only the Soviet Union and such states as Cuba and Vietnam aligned with the former.

16. See *Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 6, 1978 ; *Times of India*, October 24, 1978 ; In 1978 Hua Guofeng travelled to N. Korea, Romania, Yugoslavia and Iran. To balance it Deng visited Japan, Nepal, Burma, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. In 1978 China's trade with Japan was 24.1%, W. Europe 18.4%, U.S. 5.8%, Developing Countries 18.3%, see *China : International Trade*, Washington, U.S.A. 1978.

17. See *China : International Trade*.

18. For example the scanning of the 52 issues of 1980's *Beijing Review* suggest such a conclusion.

In the 1980s, China is once again piqued with a more dreadful problem of reassessing its role in the world. An article published in the *Guangming Daily* suggested about the continuing strategic ambivalence in fixing priority for national security. Against the background of the Soviet incursion in Kabul, the article highlighted the classical security dilemma in determining priority on whether to emphasise on land-border defense in Sinkiang or funnel efforts on coastal defense which were both vital routes of incursion upon Chinese sovereignty in the past. The article was favourably disposed towards the point of strengthening of defense measures in the West (land border) because in the present state of affairs, it argued, if the invasion occurred the present Sino-Soviet "borders are useless" and "our (Chinese) army will be surely defeated".¹⁹

The *People's Daily*, on the other hand, argued that the "straight line" policy of China's united front alliance with the West could not serve its purpose of achieving "unity against hegemony" of the Soviet Union basically because of the complexities of interests of the countries pursuing their policies in the world.²⁰

Such an assessment clearly indicates the pressure of the international system which China had to absorb while formulating its foreign policy. Along with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the coming of a new administration in Washington were the background against which China had to cast its foreign policy. Though China felt comfortable with the Reagan administration's militant position against the Soviet Union that pledged to match Moscow with Rapid Deployment Forces in the strategic areas of the world and decided to install the Pershing—II and Cruise Missiles in the European theatre, China also felt itself bullied by Washington through its intention to upgrade relations with Taiwan. The controversies that ensued between China and the United States over Taiwan in the years 1981 and 1982 strained their

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19. Yang Dongliang, "A Tentative Analysis of Debate Over Coastal Defense Versus Land Border Defense", *Guangming Daily*, February 10, 1981.
 20. Zhang Mingyang, "Multipolarization of the World and Unity Against Hegemony" *People's Daily*, January 2, 1981.

relations to the extent of a Chinese threat to downgrade Sino-US relations,²¹ which otherwise was based on strategic consensus against the Soviet Union. The content of the controversy was the US adoption of the "Taiwan Relations Act" and decision to sell FX-fighter aircrafts to Taipei to which China responded with a charge of "interference" in Beijing's internal affairs and demanded that the US should agree to fix a timetable to halt the sale of arms to Taiwan.²² However, in early 1982, the United States expressed moderation in its relations with China and promised not to sensationalize the Taiwan issue. Subsequently, China and the United States issued a joint communique (popularly called Shanghai-II) in which the United States pledged to maintain fundamental policy towards China.²³

The impact of this fresh controversy over Taiwan led China once again to reposition itself in its relationship with Washington. All available evidence suggest that China was poised for a change in 1981. In the preceeding two years (1979 and 1980), China had conspicuously dropped any reference to the Three World's theory,²⁴ but rather consistently argued in favour of a "much common viewpoint on the matter of global strategy" between China and the United States. In the same vein, the identical strategic viewpoint reached with the United States was much publicized by arguing that it was more logical for China's self-defensive mechanism to achieve consensus with the United States. The strategic partnership with America was also claimed to be "good news for all the Third World peoples who cherish their own independence, freedom and international security."²⁵ And in this period the Sino-US relations logically reached its highest form from detente to entente, when the two countries, without any formal treaty or even a

21. See *New York Times*, September 14, 1981.

22. See *International Herald Tribune*, May 15, June 22, 1981 ; and *Far Eastern Economic Review*. November 20, 1981.

23. See China-US Joint Communique issued on August 17, 1982. *Beijing Review*, August 23, 1982.

24. See China's UN General Assembly Addresses, *Beijing Review*, October 12, 1979 and October 6, 1980.

25. See *People's Daily*, June 8, 1980.

public pronouncement, agreed on a joint intelligence project to monitor Soviet nuclear tests in Central Asia.²⁶ Along with this, China and the United States followed parallel strategies on a number of geostrategic issues in the international forum: the Ogaden war (Horn of Africa) the Kampuchean representation issue in the UN, the Indo-China conflict, the Middle East conflict, and Afghanistan, to name a few.

However, a measure of caution was hinted by China on June 1981 while it adopted a "Resolution" and attempted to detach itself from the excessive identification with the United States.²⁷ At the Cancun Conference in October 1981, China revived its emphasis on the New International Economic Order. It supported Saudi Arabia's eight-point plan for peace in the Middle East, voiced for the independence of Namibia, but also denounced the racist regime of South Africa, condemned Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights and vetoed the election for a third term of the UN Secretary-General Waldheim and insisted on a Third World Candidate. All these efforts were made to assert China's independent position in the world and in due support to the Third World position. At the 36th, 37th and 38th Sessions of the UN General Assembly, China recreated an atmosphere to align itself with the Third World by repeatedly reiterating the Three Worlds doctrine with an advocacy for the cause of the Third World.²⁸

Despite this, China's obsession with the Soviet threat has nowhere been compromised while pursuing an "independent policy" in its approach to decimate its pro-US image in the 1980s. Both tangible and intangible power considerations have remained the main axis of its foreign policy through which it has tried to promote its policy goals. Chinese leaders do not hesitate to concede that Chinese security is

26. *New York Times*, December 8, 1980; *International Herald Tribune*, June 19 and 22, 1981; and *Far Eastern Economic Review*, November, 27, 1983.

27. See "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People's Republic of China, June 2, 1981" *Beijing Review* July 6, 1981.

28. See *Beijing Review*, October 5, 1981, October 11, 1982 and October 10, 1983

integrated with the security situations in the international milieu, the preservation of which, they argue, should be the world's agenda for the 1980s. Thus, at the 36th session of the UN General Assembly, the Chinese vice-foreign minister Zhang Wenjin had reminded the world that "aggression and expansionism" by the Soviet Union has remained a "major threat to world peace". In the same breath, he described the Soviet "peace offensive" advocated by the 26th CPSU Congress in early 1981 as a camouflage under which it aspires to extend its "military offensive."²⁹

However, it was at a time when China was not even on talking terms with Moscow. But to indicate that China's foreign policy had really become independent, Beijing resumed its official dialogue with the Soviet Union which had been suspended since Moscow's invasion of Afghanistan in December 27, 1979. Since October 1982 to the present,

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both Beijing and Moscow have sat together to resolve their difficulties in reaching agreement to normalize relations for the fourth time. The major stumbling blocks in the path of normalization, as China demanded and Soviet Union had so far declined to offer, are the three pre-conditions put by Beijing : reduction and withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Mongolia and the Sino-Soviet border ; withdrawal of Soviet support to Vietnam's presence in Kampuchea ; and withdrawal of Soviet armed forces from Afghanistan. A fourth Chinese concern is the installation of SS-20 missiles (Proposed withdrawal from the West if START succeed) to the Far East. Moscow, however, is not forthcoming in any of the issues mentioned. Aside from some improvement in trade and visitors exchange, there is little indication that

29. See *Beijing Review*, October 5, 1981.

much advance had been made. Sino-Soviet trade in 1983 was estimated at US\$ 800 million, a figure almost double compared to past years. In 1984, it is expected to reach \$1.8 billion. But this has had little effect on China's wide range of commercial and economic transactions with the West.³⁰ Thus, there is little meeting ground between China and the Soviet Union, despite China's efforts in striving for a balance between the two superpowers. Beijing knew that the Soviet overtures were meant to exploit the troubles between China and the United States. The cooling of China's relations with the West, in general, had also provided opportunity for Beijing for a slight warming up in its relations with Moscow. But the preconditions which Beijing has put for the "real and fundamental improvement in Sino-Soviet relations"³¹ would be a hard pill for Moscow to swallow. The basic intention of China's negotiation this time seems to be to rectify the American stand on Taiwan and remind them of the importance of China in their strategic partnership against the Soviet Union. Precisely speaking, what it implied is that the Sino-American mutuality of interests loom larger than other factors in international politics, at least, for the decade of the 1980s.

Due to this very reason and despite China's reassertion of a more independent position, it has not allowed the "self-reliant" posture to conflict with China's need for assistance and cooperation with Western countries. The opening towards the Soviet Union and its seeking better relations with the Third World countries are only reminders to the West of China's options which can be used for the furtherance of its national interests if China's sensitivities are disregarded by the Western world.

30. See *Strategic Survey*, 1982-1983, (London: International Institute of Strategic Studies, 1983); For some Varied estimates see *Economist*, October 24, 1981. For Visitors exchange see *International Herald Tribune*, July 10, 1982.

31. See Strobe Talbot, "Reflections of a China Hand", (Interview with Richard Nixon), November 1, 1982.

II

The overall historical record suggests that China's major preoccupation in the past 34 years has been with military-security problems, and the Chinese leadership conception of how best to deal with them. Though this focus is strictly limited to the single factor analysis and tends to negate the importance of many other factors pertinent to the foreign policy of China, yet the primacy of the security concern in China's dealings in the international arena is highlighted by the fact that some of the most important shifts which the Chinese call tactical manoeuvre—in Beijing's foreign policy have clearly run counter to China's ideological interests even though they have always been rationalized in ideological terms. There is also a possible pitfall in looking at China from the strategic perspective only. The limitation thus imposed by this perspective is that this might seem to imply that China's policy actions can be understood in terms of rational actor model of the Chinese leadership assessment of the prominent threat to Beijing's security and all the possible strategies to cope with the problem. As it is well known, China, in reality, is not a unitary rational actor in international affairs. China's leaders have differed over security problems and the policies emanated therefrom, especially in relation to the superpowers which were of varied emphasis under the period reviewed.³² However, to discuss the leadership factionalism falls beyond the purview of this paper.

An examination of official Chinese foreign policy since 1949 and even before indicates about China's overriding foreign policy concern in dealing with major adversaries. In part, this reflects the modern history of China. It was China that was a victim of repeated military aggression from alien powers from the Opium Wars of 1840s through

32. See for example, Warner Levi, "Ideology, Interest, and Foreign Policy", *International Studies Quarterly*, March 1970; Kenneth Liberthal, "The Foreign Policy Debate in Pakistan as seen through Allegorical Articles, 1973-1976", *China Quarterly*, September 1977, and Thomas M. Gottlieb, *Chinese Foreign Policy Factionalism and the Origins of the Strategic Triangle* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, September 1977).

the Sino-Japanese War of 1930s and 1940s. For virtually all of the period under review, China has been at least one major power as actual and imminent threat to its basic security interests. China has identified one of the major powers in the contemporary world as posing the main threat. It was Japan in the 1930s through 1945, then replaced by the United States from at least 1950 to the late 1960s, and the Soviet Union from the late 1960s to the present. Such an identification of the principal enemy led the Chinese leaders to focus their attention on the task of deterring or combating the power of the major enemy. Throughout the period China has been in a position of military inferiority vis-a-vis the adversary power and has been acutely aware of it. China's fundamental approach was, therefore, to build up its own power and capability by simultaneously trying to strengthen its own position and weaken that of its main adversary by employing united front (balance of power) strategies and tactics. In such a context, while China's strategies have been essentially defensive in the military sense, its policies have often been offensive in a political sense, i.e. championing revolutionary struggles around the world.

A major continuity in Chinese foreign policy throughout the period is its concern with its security and sovereignty. It is not surprising, therefore, that Chinese leaders would assign high priority to its security concern by saying that: "we do not tolerate any encroachment in China's dignity or interests," and suggesting that "having suffered aggression and oppression for over a century, the Chinese people will never allow themselves to be humiliated as they were before".³³

A second continuity is the consistent image the Chinese leaders have had of the underlying nature of the international system. It is the image in which China sees itself pitted against more stronger adversary. The notion of protracted struggle which Mao formulated during the civil war years in China argues for making efforts to reverse the original imbalance between the inferiority and superiority power structure of the rival countries. Within this context, China sees the rise of

33. See Hu Yaobang, "Report to the Twelfth Party Congress", Beijing Review, September 13, 1982.

a hegemonic power, the formation of the united front of the weaker powers against the predominant power, makes a determined resistance to the intent of the hegemon and then cause the hegemon's decline into passivity. Interestingly, Chinese leaders base their strategic assessment to determine the hegemonic power and formulate strategies to cope with

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it on the basis of a set of questions in relation to the constellations of contemporary power configuration around the world. The salient features of the Chinese strategic assessments are very few in number and are indeed equated with Beijing's security interests. The key aspects of Chinese questions are: which are the major powers in the world and what are their national attributes? Which of the powers are ascendant, descendant and generally stable? What are their strategies for global domination? And what united front can be mobilized against the hegemonic power?

Again, this analytical procedure suggests that the Chinese leaders have always placed the security of the country in a global context and tended to see their country's security concern in terms of the global strategies of the hegemonic power at a particular time. Thus according to the Chinese leaders, once the Americans lost their bid to control Asia and the world and the fall of Saigon in 1975 made their final retreat from their global involvement, the United States was prepared to come to terms with China. Similar is the view of the Chinese leaders about the Soviet threat to China as a part of Moscow's global strategy. China feels that Moscow is not only content with striving for gaining overall superiority over the United States, its military offensives are also motivated by a desire for world domination. China sees the

Soviet movements in the southern areas of the world as part of its grand strategy to conquer the world. Along with it, China also feels that the Soviet offensives in West Asia, Africa and the Southeast Asia as Moscow's design to isolate China as well as check the flow of strategic mineral resources to the much needy countries of Western Europe and Japan in order to check the growth of their power.³⁴

Amidst this continuity in Chinese strategic outlook, Beijing's international behaviour also suggests that there have, indeed, been several changes in Chinese foreign policy. The ups and downs in China's international conduct as expressed sometimes by its intensity of involvement in world politics, and sudden self-imposed isolation during the Cultural Revolution, and then expanding its contact with the external world all indicates the changing dimension of Chinese foreign policy. It then suggests, as noted earlier, that China's foreign policy does not operate within the frame of reference of a rational actor model. The changes in Chinese foreign policy, however, has been continuously influenced by the priorities as determined by the mode of leadership that commands power in China. Thus the school of thought which determines the policy outlooks in the domestic context, also equally influences the Chinese international conduct. Interestingly, the leadership that frames policies in China, be it radicals or moderates, are equally concerned over the preservation of China's security and national independence. The "self-strengthening" campaigns of late 19th. century, which today is called "four modernizations" in China, has remained the centre of controversy among the Chinese leaders. Some suggest relations with the external world is necessary if China is to strengthen itself to the point that it could prevent foreign aggression and remain independent. Others are skeptical of the first view because they feel that extensive contacts with

34. For example see, *Renmin Rebao's* Special Commentator's article, "Soviet Military Strategy for World Domination", *Beijing Review*, January 28, 1980 ; Zhou Zirong, "Expansionist Soviet Global Strategy," *Ibid*, June 22, 1981, and Dhruva Kumar, "China : Struggle to Defeat the Camel in a Desert Race, "*Nepal Tribune*, July-August 1982.

the external world would contaminate Chinese society, disrupt the Chinese social fabric and would make China dependent, thus lead it to compromise its sovereignty. The "red versus expert" issue in China which had mired the Chinese politics until 1976 had revolved around these two types of arguments.

Only after the ascendancy of moderates in 1978, was consideration of economic cooperation with most advanced countries of the West made a prerequisite for the rapid modernization of China's agriculture, industry, science and technology and defence in order to ensure China's security and sovereignty in a hostile world.

A second change in China's international interactions in the past 34 years has been its shifts from alliance with the Soviet Union in the 1950s to partial alignment with the United States at present. Strategically, this shift involved a fundamental redefinition of China's friends and foes in the current situation. Similarly, this change in the adversary relations has led China to reorientate its foreign economic policy from concentration upon the Socialist bloc countries in the 1950s to gradual economic integration with the capitalist world, as evidenced by China's joining of the World Bank and the flow of foreign trade in the recent past.

Third, a rise in China's international status in the recent period has made an important change in its foreign policy orientation. For example, China had very limited contact with the outside world in the 1950s, except from the socialist countries a few Third World nation-states had diplomatic ties with Beijing. It had no formal voice in the international forums like the United Nations. After its seating in the UN in 1971, Beijing established diplomatic relations with 124 countries and expanded its role in the international organization.³⁵

But one query which still remains unresolved and has been touched upon at several points in this paper is : Is Chinese foreign policy

35. See *China Official Annual Report*, 1981, Hong Kong ; Kingsway International Ltd. 1981. The resumption of diplomatic relation with Angola in January 12, 1983 makes the number of countries having diplomatic relations with China 125 . *Beijing Review*, January 24, 1983.

independent the way it has claimed it is? Linked with this several other questions come to mind : Has China struck the balance between the two superpowers and striven for an equidistant relationship in the 1980s ? Why does it so happen that China's improved relationship with one superpower curtails its relationship with another ? Does it mean that China, despite being the weakest of the three, is a prime balance in the strategic game ?

These questions should be seen in the light of principle and practice of China's foreign policy which, indeed, is orientated towards the search for security. In the year 1982, Chinese commentaries had repeatedly stressed the need to secure a rightful place for China in the world; a reiteration reminiscent of Mao's 1949's "China has stood up" theme.³⁶ Hu Yaobang, the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party in his report to the 12th Party Congress, asserted that "China never attaches itself to any big power or group of powers, and never yields to pressure from any big power."³⁷ Similarly, Deng Xiaoping, in his opening speech to the same Congress pointed out that China "value(s) even more (its) hard-won independence and sovereign rights. No foreign country can expect China to be its vassal or expect it to swallow any bitter fruit detrimental to its own interests."³⁸

Three important issues appear to have influenced China's assertive independence in its foreign policy pursuation in 1982. As noted elsewhere the first was the Sino-American brickbat over Taiwan. Second, the controversy over school text-books' revision in Japan sparked emotionalism in China. Third, the question of China's sovereignty over Hong Kong and the British reaffirmation of the validity of the Opium Wars treaties infuriated the Chinese sense of nationalism. All the issues have a link with China's past, and remain sensible in the history of Beijing's efforts towards national integration. The perceived insults which Beijing received from the United States, Japan and the

36. For example see Huan Xiang, 'Adhere to Independent Foreign Policy', *Beijing Review*, November 15, 1982.

37. See *Beijing Review*. September 13, 1982.

38. See *Ibid.* September 6, 1982.

United Kingdom could have been the reason for the evocation of assertive responses duly aimed at achieving equitable dealing at the bargaining table.

But China also recognizes that the issues upon which it had strained relations with these three countries are seldom vital to the survival stakes of either of the parties in conflict. Thus, apart from public acrimony and accusations, the endeavour made by China to resolve disputes with the concerned countries are a case in this point. Though the Chinese feel that they should have a free hand in dealing with external powers, they are acutely aware of the fact that in the context of their country's weakness, relative hostile relations with Moscow and the latter's military pressure along the border³⁹, any sweeping change in their policy posture could be detrimental to the interests of the country.

Compared to the problems that have mired China's relations with the US, Japan and the United Kingdom, its problem with the Soviet Union even today is different in nature and content. China feels that its historical animosity with the Soviet Union is to stay, whereas differences with the United States are of tactical nature which can be resolved with "Mutual trust" and without any harm to the interests of both countries.⁴⁰

Consideration of this fact must have led the Chinese leaders to send positive signals to Washington before they resumed their border talks with the Soviet Union in October 1982.⁴¹ As said by Deng in 1977,

39. According to the former U.S. Secretary of Defence, Harold Brown, the Soviets are allocating about 20 percent of their total defence efforts to the Far East. See Franklyn D. Holzman, *The Soviet Economy*, (Headline Series No. 260). September-October 1982, and Michael Weisskopf, "Troops on Chinese Soviet Border Reflect Icy Relations of Two Nations", *International Herald Tribune*, October 23, 1981.

40. See Interview with Deng by Earl W. Foell in *China Official Annual Report*, 1981, op. cit. and *Beijing Review*, February 19, 1982.

41. The visits of Nixon in September and Kissinger in early October to Beijing was used by the Chinese leaders to assure the American Government that there is "no need for concern" about the Sino-Soviet talks. See *Time*, November 1, 1982.

it thus appears that China's disagreement with the Soviet Union is "absolute and unending."⁴² Subsequent negotiations in March and September 1983 ended in a standstill. Chinese authoritative statements then revealed the fact that the Sino-Soviet relations were never "correct" and there was "no plain sailing" even during the 1950s.⁴³ The message of the publication of this article was clear. "No substantial progress" had stemmed from the three rounds of talks, according to Hu Yaobang, and he did not expect any breakthrough in China's relations with the Soviet Union in the near future.⁴⁴

If seen from this vantage point, the visit to Beijing by the US Defense Secretary Casper Weinberger in the immediate aftermath of Mikhael Kapitsa's (who had led the Soviet delegation for the third round of negotiation to Beijing) departure seems significant. The visit appears to have reinforced the Sino-US strategic consensus reached during January 1980 visit of former Defense Secretary Harold Brown, and strengthened it to the point of exchanging military related information between the two countries. The wide ranging talks that Weinberger held with the Chinese leaders encompassing the dual-use technology transfer and economic assistance for enhancing China's programme of "four modernizations" had amply demonstrated, on the one hand, the importance of Sino-US relations and indicates China's failure in reaching any concord with the Soviet Union, on the other. This increasing military dimension of Sino-American relations also indicates the fact that, despite China's assertive independence in its foreign policy, its security aspect is intricately meshed with that of the United States in the Cold War II. Significantly, Weinberger's visit also suggested that the Taiwan issue could play a dwarf in the strategic game of the two giants.

Chinese Premier Zhou Ziyang's January 1984 visit to Washington essentially expressed the fact that Beijing's "major difference" with

42. See Deng Xiaoping's Speech to the Third Plenum of the Tenth CCP Central Committee, July 1977.

43. See Wu Xiuquan, Sino-Soviet Relation in the Early 1950s, "Beijing Review" November 21, 1983.

44. See Hu's Talks with Nakasone in Tokyo, *Ibid*, December, 5, 1983.

the United States over Taiwan does not shield it from testifying to a new pro-American tilt in Chinese foreign policy. The thorny Taiwan issue remained untouched in Zhou's main address at the White House. Instead, emphasis was laid on the need of strategic cooperation between China and the United States by clearly stating that these two countries share responsibility in preserving world peace.⁴⁵ Taiwan was merely mentioned in major speech and Zhou contained himself by suggesting that China is "in a state of man-made division."⁴⁶ It was typical for China to express that only "a small number of pro-Taiwan elements" had tried to torpedo Sino-US ties thus the "bright prospects" of China's relations with the United States can not be averted.⁴⁷

Premier Zhao's visit, on the other hand, also laid the ground work for active cooperation between China and the United States in the areas of their mutual interests. Washington responded to Zhao's bid for more US technical cooperation, even in the field of high technology exports that could have military applications. In Washington, both leaders renewed the landmark 1978 bilateral and scientific, technological exchange agreement, under which 300 joint research projects in 21 different fields have taken place.⁴⁸ Since the liberalization of the US sale of dual-use technology in 1981, it is reported, that there has been a dramatic rise in the US high technology sales to China. Last year, the total value of sales of US high technology rose to US \$ 1 billion compared to US \$ 350 million in 1982. It is also estimated that the sales will reach \$ 3.5 billion in 1984.⁴⁹ In the same vein, the Sino-US bilateral trade has registered a notable advance from \$ 95.9 million in 1972 to \$ 4.3 billion in 1983.⁵⁰

45. See Premier Zhou's White House Speech on January 10, 1984, *Beijing Review*, January 16, 1984.

46. *International Herald Tribune*, January 14-15, 1984.

47. See *Ibid*, January 18, 1984.

48. See *Newsweek*, January 16, 1984.

49. See *Far Eastern Economic Review*, March 8, 1984.

50. *Newsweek*, January 16, 1984.

Premier Zhao's visit also explored the area of cooperation on nuclear trade between the two countries which is expected to be formalized during the forthcoming visit to Beijing by the US President Ronald Reagan. Along with this China also announced to sign contracts worth \$ 1 billion with the Western countries.⁵¹

On balance, what can be clearly visualized from the facts mentioned above is that both domestic needs such as the "four modernizations" of which defense development is the integral part and the international situation in which China considers the Soviet Union as its most dreadful enemy China's foreign policy has contained an element of real-politik.

III

In conclusion, what can be said is that China's strategic imperatives still dictates it to maintain a closer bond with the United States in its global competition with the Soviet Union. The "irresistible historical trend" set by the Sino-US relationship formed more than a decade ago is here to stay. There are certain compulsions to not only maintain but also reinforce China's ties with the United States. First, as the Sino-Soviet relations are still in a blind alley, China's American connection seems a better bet to conduct its global policy of anti-hegemonism. The Soviet encirclement efforts which have not yet declined have become a constant factor which China can not ignore at present by expressing undue flexibility towards Moscow. Second the recent reactions of Mongolia and Vietnam on their bilateral relationship with Moscow and Kampuchea clearly indicate the fact that China is not going to have its own way in Sino-Soviet negotiations. Third, the bullying to which Moscow has subjected the Chinese (as was shown during the Andropov funeral) appears to have expressed that the Soviets are apparently unwilling to take the necessary steps for reconciliation in the absence of a comprehensive political settlement with China. Finally, by proposing the three preconditions for a

51. See *International Herald Tribune*, January 16 and 30, 1984,

comprehensive settlement, Beijing apparently has resisted a settlement with Moscow because of its fear of status inconsistency even if it did normalize relations with Moscow. Probably, with good reason, Beijing is aware of the fact that a complete normalization with Moscow, at present, provides it little leverage as the true Soviet term for normalization involve a semi-satellite status for China. To return to the status of 1950s is unthinkable for the Chinese leadership.

What is more, it remains to be seen whether China will seek a balanced approach in its foreign policy pursuation or whether it will find more points of meeting with Washington than with Moscow. China admits that its foreign policy will be based more on its judgement of the international situation, rather than on what is called "geometrical equidistant" diplomacy. This means that China's strategic assessment of the international situation is to influence its foreign policy behaviour in the days to come. China feels that the "rough balance of forces" between the United States and the Soviet Union, which came into existence during the 1970s, probably will be maintained in this decade.⁵²

Thus, at least, in this decade there is not going to be any major shift in China's foreign policy, despite arguments over Taiwan appeared to have made China cautious and uncertain. And yet, for all the talks of distancing itself from both the superpowers, China sincerely feels that this could be not its preference. Even if China presents the United States as one of the two hegemons, its leaders are insisting that there had been no essential change in the Chinese strategic assessment of the Soviet Union as not only China's principal enemy but also its only enemy. As the events of January 1984 underlined, it can be safely assumed that China preferred its US ties more realistically than what its principle dictates. Finally, the weight of China on the side of the West can be relied on as long as its leaders feel that this policy is in their country's interest.

52. See Zhang Zhen and Rong Zhi, "Some Observation on Soviet Detente", *Beijing Review*, October 18, 1982; Xing Shugang, Li Yunhua and Liu Yingna, "Changing Balance of Soviet-US Power", *Ibid*, May 9, 1983.