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Summary

On October 25, 2002, President Bush and China's President Jiang Zemin met in Texas for an official state visit. Initially largely symbolic, the meeting became a vehicle for bilateral consultations on North Korea's unexpected announcement weeks earlier that it was trying to develop nuclear weapons in violation of its agreement to the contrary under the U.S.-North Korea Agreed Framework of 1994. While the meeting appeared to result in no new initiatives, the PRC did emphasize it had long supported a non-nuclear Korean peninsula. The meeting also ended without a PRC announcement that it would support a U.S. resolution condemning Iraq in the United Nations.

The Bush Administration and China Policy

U.S. relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC) have improved notably since the Bush Administration assumed office promising to toughen U.S. policy toward the PRC. The Bush White House has broadened the focus of U.S. policy in Asia, de-emphasized U.S.-PRC relations, and notably increased and clarified its support for Taiwan, an island the PRC regards as part of China.¹ The purposeful pragmatism behind this approach has lowered the temperature in what had been an increasingly heated American political debate over the direction of U.S. China policy. Many have argued that by reducing the priority it gives to U.S.-China relations, the White House has effectively reduced the leverage Beijing has in the U.S. policy process. While it remains receptive to Sino-U.S. dialogue, the White House has let it be known that it is willing to ignore the views of the PRC – and occasionally of U.S. allies – in pursuit of U.S. interests. To date, after the acrimonious clash over the collision of military aircraft in 2001, Beijing has

¹ The PRC objects strenuously to most American overtures and arms sales to Taiwan. Cognizant of these PRC views, past U.S. presidents have taken pains to shroud any U.S. actions on the Taiwan issue in deliberate, "strategic ambiguity." Beginning in 2001, Bush Administration policy toward Taiwan has begun to be referred to as one of "strategic clarity."

responded to this approach with a marked reduction of anti-American tones in its own policies. While the PRC continues to object to U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, visas for Taiwan officials, and sanctions on PRC companies, its objections are notably reticent and appear crafted to avoid disrupting U.S.-PRC relations. Chinese and U.S. officials in the last year have been able to meet and cooperate on a wide range of issues even in the midst of continuing real differences on Taiwan, human rights, and other issues.

In this environment, the Bush Administration has held two official U.S.-China state visits. Each was preceded by a unique and unexpected event which ultimately affected the meeting's agenda. The first state visit in February 2002 originally was scheduled immediately to follow the October 2001 Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting in Shanghai, which President Bush attended. Although the APEC meeting did proceed as scheduled, the White House postponed the U.S.-China state visit itself because of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Anti-terrorism cooperation became a focus of the rescheduled visit, which took place in February 2002.

By the February visit, policy changes in the Bush Administration and the anti-terrorism cooperation of post-September 11 had already led to an improved atmosphere in Sino-U.S. relations. The week before the visit, one PRC press account referred to U.S.-China relations as "back on the healthy development track and ...looking positive."² The visit included discussions about terrorism; human rights; the status of Taiwan; proliferation; national missile defense; and North Korea, with President Bush reportedly stressing U.S. concerns that China's weapons sales to unstable Middle East regimes have increased the prospects that weapons of mass destruction could fall into terrorists' hands.³ In keeping with its policy of "lower expectations," the Bush White House did not emphasize reaching specific agreements on these issues for the two presidents to sign.⁴

U.S.-PRC State Visits

George W. Bush Administration

Pres. Jiang Zemin to U.S. – Oct. 2002

Pres. Bush to PRC – Feb. 2002

Clinton Administration

Pres. Clinton to PRC – June 1998

Pres. Jiang to U.S. – Oct. 1997

G. H. W. Bush Administration

Pres. Bush to PRC – Feb. 1989

Reagan Administration

Pres. Li Xiannian to U.S. – July 1985

Pres. Reagan to PRC – April 1984

Ford Administration*

Pres. Ford to PRC – Dec. 1975

Nixon Administration*

Pres. Nixon to PRC – Feb. 1972

* before official U.S.-PRC relations were established

There were similarly low expectations for the second state visit, scheduled for October 25, 2002, at President Bush's ranch in Crawford, Texas. The primary agenda for the discussions was expected to be bilateral cooperation on the U.S.-led anti-terrorism

² Ruan Zongze, "Sino-U.S. ties back on healthy track," *Chung kuo jih pao (China Daily)*, February 11, 2002, p. 4.

³ Prior to the February state visit, Members of Congress stressed the importance of anti-terrorism, economic and security relations, Taiwan, and human rights. See *Congressional Record* statements of Senator Larry Craig (Feb. 14, p. S849); Rep. Janice Schakowsky (Feb. 14, p. E168); and Rep. Steve Rothman (Feb. 14, p. E182).

⁴ Preparation for official Sino-U.S. visits in the Clinton Administration focused heavily on such agreements, referred to as "deliverables."

campaign, with the U.S. focusing in particular on receiving further assurances that the PRC would not use its position on the Permanent U.N. Security Council to veto a United Nations resolution against Iraq, a primary goal of the Bush Administration. Still, many considered the visit to be more symbolic than substantive – a valedictory tour for President Jiang, who is scheduled to retire as PRC President in March 2003.⁵ Once again, however, the scheduled state visit was preceded by the unexpected – the North Korean revelation earlier in October 2002 that it had a secret nuclear weapons program in violation of its 1994 agreement to the contrary. This revelation raised expectations that policies toward North Korea would be at the center of the Bush-Jiang meeting.

Background to North Korea's Nuclear Pledges. Concern about a North Korean nuclear program led to the U.S.-North Korean Agreed Framework of 1994. Under that agreement, North Korea suspended the operations and construction of nuclear reactors and a plutonium reprocessing facility, and it stored nuclear fuel rods it had removed from one of the reactors in May 1994. The United States promised to facilitate the construction in North Korea of two light water nuclear reactors (LWRs) and financed shipments of 500,000 tons of heavy oil to North Korea annually. Before North Korea receives nuclear components for the LWRs, it is to come into full compliance with its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and its 1992 safeguards agreement with the IAEA. Except for the facilities designated in the Agreed Framework, any other North Korean nuclear activities were to fall immediately under the 1992 safeguards agreement. (See CRS Issue Brief IB91141, *North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Program*, and CRS Issue Brief IB98045, *Korea: U.S.-Korean Relations—Issues for Congress*.)

But on October 4, 2002, North Korea revealed to U.S. officials that it was conducting a secret uranium enrichment program to produce nuclear weapons. U.S. intelligence agencies reportedly had gained information on this secret program since 1997.⁶ Uranium enrichment contrasts with the plutonium production and reprocessing that is the basis of the nuclear facilities covered under the Agreed Framework.

China-North Korea Relations. The PRC is a critical factor in the international reactions to the secret North Korean nuclear program. China and North Korea have a mutual defense treaty under which if either party is “subjected to the armed attack by any state or several states jointly...the other Contracting Party shall immediately render military and other assistance by all means at its disposal.” China also was a major source of food and oil in the 1990s as the North Korean economy deteriorated.

PRC leaders long have stated that they seek peace and stability on the Korean peninsula, a non-nuclear Korea, and reconciliation between North and South Korea. Although China keeps much of its diplomacy toward North Korea a secret, it is known that China extended selective diplomatic assistance to the United States and South Korea in the 1990s regarding North-South talks, South Korea's admission to the United Nations, the U.S. proposal for U.N. economic sanctions against North Korea in June 1994, and the U.S.-South Korean proposal of April 1996 for four party talks. Still, the PRC appears to

⁵ The first meeting between the two leaders was in mid-October 2001, in conjunction with the Shanghai meeting of the Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum.

⁶ Gertz, Bill. U.S. saw signs of N.Korea's work to enrich fuel for nukes. *Washington Times*, October 18, 2002, p. A1.

set limits on cooperation with the United States and South Korea if that cooperation may endanger Chinese political influence in North Korea or threaten the stability of the North Korean regime. Reported PRC food shipments of nearly one million tons annually and substantial fuel shipments in the late 1990s appear to reflect these concerns and objectives.⁷ China has played reluctant host to starving and malnourished North Koreans who cross into Manchuria, and has resisted granting them refugee status to avoid encouraging a much larger refugee outflow and destabilizing the Pyongyang regime.⁸ China has supplied North Korea with technology for its longer-range missile program.⁹ It also apparently provides air routes for North Korean air shipments of missiles and other weapons and technology to Middle East and South Asian countries.

Beijing's delicate balancing act on North Korea faces a new test with the revelation of Pyongyang's secret nuclear weapons program. The White House, especially since the September 11 terrorist attacks, has intensified pressure on North Korea to dismantle core elements of its military power: missiles, weapons of mass destruction, and conventional forces. The Bush Administration's initial reaction to North Korea's admission was to: (1) rely on diplomacy, making no immediate, dramatic moves such as terminating the Agreed Framework; (2) call on North Korea to dismantle the secret program in line with its previous international nuclear agreements and immediately allow the IAEA to establish full-scope safeguards over the program under the 1992 North Korea-IAEA safeguards agreement; (3) reject any new agreement to amend or replace the U.S.-North Korean Agreed Framework that would reward it for its secret nuclear program; (4) seek a common diplomatic front with other governments, including China, to pressure North Korea to give up the secret nuclear program.

Implications of October 25, 2002 State Visit for U.S. Policy

Most observers believe that on symbolism, the Jiang visit to the Crawford ranch fulfilled its expectations. The informal atmosphere of a meeting at the U.S. President's own ranch provided a unique setting that added to Jiang's stature and suggested a close and relaxed friendship. The PRC leader's motorcade was reported to have bypassed successfully the various demonstrations of both welcoming and protesting groups that had come to town for the occasion, including student groups, followers of Falun Gong, Chinese dissidents, and Tibetan activists. The two presidents met for 90 minutes, then held a brief press conference. On substance, however, the meeting proved uneventful. No initiatives or new agreements were announced, and two leaders' press conference remarks reflected that the common ground they share is counterbalanced by continuing differences in their national agendas.¹⁰ President Bush described the discussions as having focused primarily on the Iraqi threat, the North Korean nuclear admission, global

⁷ Mann, Jim. U.S., China Are Awkward Aid Partners for N. Korea. *Los Angeles Times*, September 10, 1997. p. A7. Platt, Kevin. Beijing Juggles Trade, Ideology Over Two Koreas. *Christian Science Monitor*, March 21, 1997. p. 6.

⁸ Glosserman, Brad and Snyder, Scott. Borders and Boundaries: The North Korean Refugee Crisis. *PacNet 21*, May 24, 2002.

⁹ Gertz, Bill. Technology Transfers a concern, U.S. says. *Washington Times*, July 21, 1999. p. A4.

¹⁰ Full text at [<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/10/20021025.html>].

terrorism, human rights, and a peaceful resolution to the Taiwan issue. President Jiang emphasized the importance of continued U.S.-China dialogue, counter-terrorism cooperation, and economic cooperation.

North Korea's Nuclear Program. A key issue for the Administration apparently was whether to request or press China for commitments similar to those the Administration sought from U.S. allies, Japan and South Korea. Some U.S. officials reportedly wanted President Jiang to call specifically for a dismantlement of the secret nuclear program. Some Defense and State Department officials also reportedly wanted China to cut food and oil aid to North Korea.¹¹ However, President Bush followed a more general approach. He did not ask President Jiang to call for a verified dismantlement of the secret nuclear program and North Korean adherence to its international nuclear agreements. He did not raise the issue of reducing Chinese aid to North Korea.¹² As in the February 2002 state visit, Bush also did not raise the issue of North Korean refugees. In the joint press conference, President Bush voiced a general desire to cooperate with China. But he did not discuss future prospects for such cooperation, stating that “this is a chance for the United States and China to work very closely together to achieve that vision of a...nuclear-weapons-free [Korean] Peninsula.”

President Jiang stated China's traditional positions without making any firm commitments regarding future actions. He reiterated that China desired a nuclear weapons free Korea and that the issue of the secret program should be “resolved peacefully.” A Chinese Foreign Ministry statement said the issue should be “solved through dialogue as soon as possible.”¹³ President Jiang added a little more specificity in his speech at Texas A & M University, stating “We stand ready to keep in touch with the U.S., cooperate more closely with each other in search for a fair and reasonable solution to these problems.”¹⁴ Following the summit, the Chinese Foreign Ministry indicated one Chinese approach. Foreign Ministry spokesman Kong Quan declared at the APEC summit in Mexico that “We emphasize that the Korean peninsula should be nuclear-free” and that “We will use various means to express our position...This includes exchanges with North Korea where we will make clear our position”¹⁵

Administration officials voiced disappointment that President Jiang did not speak out strongly against North Korea. They also, however, stressed a long view of the issue running well into 2003, saying that developing U.S.-China cooperation was a longer term process. Given that Chinese diplomacy toward North Korea usually operates in secret, U.S. officials expressed the hope that China would exert “back door pressure” on North Korea. (This expectation was highlighted by a pre-summit report that U.S. officials asked

¹¹ N. Korea ‘Confession’ ...Will U.S. Let Japan Keep Negotiating? *The Nelson Report*, October 17, 2002.

¹² Bush's APEC Message to UN...Iraq War is ‘On’, With Or Without You. *The Nelson Report*, October 28, 2002. Curl, Joseph. Bush, Jiang agree on N. Korea. *Washington Times*, October 26, 2002. p. A1.

¹³ Statement by Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman reported in *Xinhua* (Beijing), October 25, 2002.

¹⁴ Agence France Presse (Hong Kong) report, October 25, 2002.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, October 28, 2002.

China to warn North Korea against re-opening the nuclear facilities shut down under the Agreed Framework.¹⁶) They also asserted that future U.S. policy would further increase pressure on North Korea and that economic sanctions were a future option: an indication that North Korea likely would be a high priority issue in China-U.S. relations in 2003.¹⁷ But in the interim, the October 2002 visit suggests that the United States is prepared to postpone any stronger reaction on North Korea while it pursues its top priority – dealing with Iraq.

U.S. Campaign Against Iraq. In press conference statement, President Bush said he had received renewed assurances that the PRC supported Iraq's strict compliance with existing U.N. Security Council regulations. But the President said nothing about China's response to a primary U.S. goal – to assure that the PRC would not use its veto in the U.N. Security Council to oppose a resolution demanding that Iraq fully divest itself of weapons of mass destruction or face military action. President Jiang did not address on China's view on this question, although some have speculated that the PRC may abstain from such a U.N. Security Council vote, as it did in the case of the Persian Gulf War.

Taiwan. The visit produced nothing new on the issue of Taiwan. Both sides reiterated long-held views. President Bush stated that “our one China policy, based on the three communiques in [sic] the Taiwan Relations Act, remains unchanged,” and he stressed the peaceful resolution of differences between Taiwan and the PRC. President Bush also said that the United States was “making it clear that we do not support Taiwan independence” – a somewhat more assertive formulation than he has used previously. President Jiang described the exchange of views on Taiwan as “frank” – generally diplomatic-speak for disagreement – and said he had described his government's “basic policy of peaceful reunification and one-country, two systems.”

Human Rights. Like Taiwan, human rights is a perennial topic in U.S.-China dialogue. President Bush commented on human rights in Tibet and religious freedom throughout China, and he stressed that the anti-terrorism campaign should not be an excuse to persecute ethnic minorities in China or repress legitimate political dissent – a view that has commonly accompanied U.S.-China talks on anti-terrorism since September 11. President Jiang also addressed human rights, saying that the PRC's human rights record was constantly improving and was better now than at any time previously. He also said that in addition to economic growth, the PRC's policies were designed to foster democracy and rule of law.

Future Meetings. While Vice-President Cheney has agreed to accept an invitation to visit China extended by his counterpart, Vice-President Hu Jintao, at the moment no further presidential summits are scheduled. It is possible, however, that if President Jiang retires from that office in March 2003, as expected, the Bush Administration will schedule another round of state visits with the PRC's new President, expected to be Hu Jintao.

¹⁶ Sanger, David E. U.S. to Withdraw from Arms Accord with North Korea. *New York Times*, October 29, 2002.

¹⁷ Allen, Mike and DeYoung, Karen. Bush Seeks China's Aid to Oppose N.Korea. *Washington Post*, October 26, 2002. p. A18. Sanger, David E. and Weiner, Tim. U.S. and 2 of Its Allies Warn North Korea on Atomic Arms. *New York Times*, October 27, 2002. p. NE1.