

## **Remarks on the Changing Triangle: the U.S., China, and Taiwan**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The transformation currently underway in China reflects the ongoing working out of two large historical processes – the disposition of the post-1912 Manchu Empire and the creation of a satisfactory social, political, and economic order to govern what emerges. Because these processes, in progress for many decades, have bequeathed a legacy of violence and destruction, the restoration of stable and satisfactory order will take time. The United States should seek to exercise a constructive influence by promoting social, economic, political, and cultural ideas, which propel China toward greater cosmopolitanism and sophistication.

*Keywords: China; Taiwan; United States*

## REMARKS

Early in his tenure as President Kennedy's Secretary of State, in the midst of one of those periodic flare-ups of what was then known as the Berlin Problem, Dean Rusk was asked whether he wanted to be remembered as the Secretary of State who had solved the Berlin Problem once-and-for-all. No, Rusk, said, his ambition was far more modest: to be remembered as but another in the long line of Secretaries of State who had inherited the Berlin Problem from his predecessor and passed it on to his successor.

By 1961, Mr. Rusk had learned something about intractable problems from his prior service. He had the misfortune to be Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs at the time of the establishment of the Communist regime in China. And worse misfortunes were to await him, for he served during the Vietnam War, a problem which *he* was able to bequeath to his successors, just as Messrs. Byrnes, Stetinius, Marshall, Acheson, Dulles, and Herter had passed on Berlin to him.

The Berlin Problem, at long last, is no longer with us. But so hardy are the remaining perennials of international affairs we barely notice. The late-1940s, it seems, was quite a seedtime for such problems that are still with us: Kashmir, Palestine, Korea, Yugoslavia, Indonesia, Cambodia, and our very own Taiwan. And we can go back even further, for are not these problems in one-way or another the detritus of World War I, the remains of empires long gone: the Ottomans, the Hapsburgs, the Hohenzollerns, the Romanovs and the Aisin Gioro, the Manchu imperial clan, whose empire ended in 1912? Back then, would anyone have imagined that some Americans would be gathered in St. Louis, Missouri, to ponder what to do with *that* estate?

What will become of it? To borrow Chou En-lai's assessment of the effects of French Revolution, it's too soon to tell.

After all, among the U.S., China, and Taiwan, it is only the United States about whose shape and government we can speak of with some reasonable assurance. We have, today, a fair idea of what the United States has come to look like, though it is a fairly recent creation, so far as history goes. Hawaii became a state in 1959, a mere 2,000 miles off the American mainland. Yet it became part of the U.S. because it very much wanted to be. Today, though by heritage, it is Polynesian and Japanese and Chinese, it feels quite at home inside the Union. On the other hand, there is Puerto Rico, European-Christian, yet more than a little confused about its connection to the mainland. So it is some kind of something; should we call it a self-governing autonomous region, even though it fields its own Olympic team?

Most countries are like that. They are very recent creations, their borders moving around, and different sorts of people sometimes inside, sometimes outside. In the twentieth century, Germany was all over the map; for many other European peoples, changes of sovereignty were so routine as sometimes to be noticed only in the official names of places in the postal gazetteer. The South Asian subcontinent is still trying to work this out, as is most of Africa for that matter. Remember: between 1607 and 1776, we Americans could not get to a satisfactory place for ourselves inside the British Empire, so we fought against it for eight years. Then, we couldn't agree among ourselves on the organization and governance of our vast territorial holdings, and the result was a civil war.

In this respect, China is like other places in modern times -- like Russia or India or Germany or the United States -- caught up in the questions, first, of what belongs inside and what stays outside and, second, how what stays inside is to be organized and governed. Yet of all these places, China has actually had the hardest time, the most violent, the most unpredictable and, still, maybe, even the most unsettled yet.

These two questions are still a long way from resolution in China, and for the Chinese. Moreover, cataclysmic violence associated with them is still so recent, still so shaping and influential a force in China's society and politics that, unhappily, the notion of a peaceful resolution contends with the living memory of violence that dominates the consciousness of all Chinese alive today, or of their parents.

The violence is part-and-parcel of two great issues better, two ongoing processes, that have been working themselves out since the collapse of the imperial system in 1912, and neither one is anywhere close to a stable resolution. The first is the transmogrification of the Manchu empire into a new political entity, a Chinese Republic if you like, and an acceptable resolution about what belongs inside that Republic, and what belongs outside. It is not self-evident that every place that ever was a part of that empire wishes to be, or ought to be, or even can be, a part of that Republic. For centuries, deciding what would be inside and outside of the Empire was internationalized and violent and complicated; deciding what will devolve into the Republic, and what will settle elsewhere, has shown itself comparably destructive and dangerous.

But no matter the geographical shape of this thing, whatever comes to be included inside will be big and populous, and therefore the organization and governance of that vast entity will be difficult, contentious and not very predictable. We may be accustomed to an ageless China, but the China we know, or think we know, is quite a recent creation. One great theme of Asia's history and of the world's history, in the twentieth century is, precisely, the creation of China out of the Manchu empire. Though that empire came to be governed from Beijing, there was more to that empire than China alone. To the historic core, the Manchus had added Manchuria, Mongolia, Chinese Turkestan (that is, east Turkestan, or Xinjiang, "New Territories" as the Chinese style it, amounting to several hundred thousand square miles) and Tibet, and some other things also. So, when the Republic of China in 1912, and the Peoples Republic of China in 1949, took claim to this real estate, China was twice as large as it had been in 1644, the last year of the Ming dynasty. The fundamental claim is a long way from acceptance, which is why the current government in Beijing is so concerned with it.

Generally speaking, the ninety percent of the population that is Han Chinese lives in the eastern half of the country, more or less. The western part is relatively underpopulated, and people who are not Chinese, Turkish peoples, Kazakhs, Kirghiz, inhabit huge tracts of it.

Xinjiang is a conspicuous example. It was hard enough for the Manchus to hold onto it. During the early republic, the far northwest China was *de facto* independent; the PRC quite brutally established its sway, and still uses considerable brutality to hang on to region. In recent years, dozens of resisters to Beijing's rule have been executed; PLA presence has been expanded, and Han Chinese have been moved in from other regions. The point is that, regardless of how one assesses the merits of conflicting claims, claims are in conflict. Moreover, keeping Xinjiang inside informs much of China's relations with the Islamic

world, for this is a complex international matter. Islamicism is a potent political force, as China itself knows, having promoted it during the Afghans' war against the Soviet Union. Those who might provoke such sentiments against Beijing in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkey, Russia, not to mention some in the newly independent countries once part of old Soviet central Asia, are the object of Beijing's assiduous and careful courtship. Let us remember: in the 1930s and 1940s, when the peoples across China's borders inside the old USSR were having a hard time of it, staying as far away from all of that made sense. On the other hand, today, with the USSR defunct, one's Turkic kinsmen across the border have states of their own, whereas overbearing, brutal, Beijing-based rule persists. These divisions are arbitrary and accidental, not rooted in consistent moral reasoning and, as such, are a permanent structural problem for Beijing, and Beijing knows it.

We can say same about Tibet. Beijing sent military forces into the region in 1950 to re-establish Chinese rule, armed resistance persisted for a decade, and the status of the area is far from settled. It, too, is an international matter and is an issue in Beijing's relations with influential publics in Europe and North America. And, if this were not enough, Beijing also propounds a definition of China which includes many places which several other countries think of as parts of *themselves* India, or Japan (the Senkakus) or the various maritime and land boundary questions involving Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia.

At the same time, this unsettled issue of what belongs inside China is inseparably linked to another question concerning the Manchu patrimony: how is this huge and varied piece of real estate, with its range of peoples and topography and history, going to be organized and governed? It is not a unique sort of problem in the world, but just because Russia and South Asia and Africa are all convulsed by it, doesn't make it any less significant in understanding contemporary China.

Just as ageless China turns out to be a constantly shifting place of frequently redrawn boundaries, fatalistic China, at least so far as politics is concerned, is an equally gossamer concept. Political issues in China are taken very seriously and throughout the country's history they have been prone to resolution not by reason, but by violence. The supposed achievement of unification of the country under the Communists in 1949 scarcely created civil peace, for political violence, now called The Great Leap Forward or the Cultural Revolution, or the Criticize Confucius and Lin Piao Campaign continued in a new form.

It is therefore important to say: the last twenty years have seen the longest period of relative civil peace inside China in the past two centuries, but one must hasten to emphasize the qualifying *relative*. Without offering a too-long and depressing list, let me offer one case. A dozen years ago, perhaps two thousand people were massacred in the central square of the capital city. We are appalled by it, to be sure, but it is somehow routinized into our thinking. And yet there is not another capital *in the world*, which has seen such a thing within anyone's memory.

In sum: given the simple fact that we are from a stable and predictable understanding about either the shape or China or of its governance, or of its future shape, or of its future mode of governance, can we be surprised that the future of Taiwan (itself another Manchu

add-on to China) and its relation either to the Chinese mainland or to the United States remains problematical?

Indeed, people on Taiwan are far from united on the simplest of terms -- whether Taiwanese and Chinese are one and the same thing, or whether they are different, and whether, if different, how they are different. To be sure, there is a much improved system for debating and resolving these and related questions, better than the system of martial law and enforced fantasizing that existed until 1987 (yes, till that recently) but people on Taiwan, even if feeling secure about the stability of their internal arrangements (though one can wonder about that) still crave reassurance, and do not get as much as they would like.

Taiwan figures substantially in the questions about the shape and governance of China, and certainly in the internationalization of those questions, for its future presents strategic issues for the United States, *no matter who* governs the place, *no matter how* the issues between Taiwan and the mainland are resolved.

Which brings us to the Bush Administration, and how it figures in this. Like Secretary Rusk and his inheriting of the Berlin Problem with which I began this talk, Secretary Powell could, I suppose, thank all his predecessors since 1950 who have managed to pass on the Taiwan problem to him, more or less intact. Indeed, quite a lot has happened since then, but the deep structure of the Taiwan problem has not changed very much at all. What has changed is that Asia as a whole, and China, and Taiwan, indeed, the world, has become far more agreeable places today than they were then.

That astonishing violence, which characterized the history of Asia in the twentieth century, is much abated today. Extraordinary violence, war everywhere, internal war, external war became so commonplace that we did not then, nor do we now, appreciate the combined horror of the events. We are therefore not well prepared for what we see today which, to put it cautiously, is something beginning to resemble peace. In this fundamental respect, the situation faced by President Bush and his administration is very different from that faced by their predecessors.

This peace -- and let us cautiously call it that -- is a necessary pre-condition for further improvements and for that very reason, its origins, like the origins of war, are worthy of careful study. Where did this peace come from? More precisely, what is the connection between the greater internal peace inside China and the greater peace, internal and external, throughout the region? China constantly threatens violence and employs violence in shaping itself as a geographical expression and as a political system. How much of that can China's internal arrangement *and* the regional system take? If the former breaks down, what happens to the latter?

Now: if we connect these two things in this way, that is, if we try to get to some understanding of the relationship between what goes on inside China and what goes on outside, our new Administration will ponder how to bring our influence to bear on *both* these matters. We well understand how to maintain military forces and security relationships sufficient to deter the use of military force by China outside of its own borders. And it is essential that we continue to do that, even if it remains demanding and expensive to do so. But deterrence alone is not enough. For though deterrence can often guard against the catastrophic breakdown of regional peace in one way, it cannot guard against a catastrophic breakdown of civil peace inside China, itself a threat to peace in the region.

To be sure, this is a novel problem; we have little in our experience to instruct us about how to shore up peace inside China, so all the more should we think it through carefully. For but one example, we need a clearer view of what we mean by One China, and therefore, what we mean by a One-China policy. The geographical constitution of China, and the capital-C political Constitution of China are problems for us, whether we want them to be or not because these proverbial internal affairs are too deeply enmeshed in international relationships involving us and many other countries and societies and religions and philosophies and multinational companies and trans-national-non-governmental organizations, not to mention our old friend, the Balance of Power. In fact, our own concern with what is to be inside of China and how that inside of China is to be governed is in every way the equal of that of the government in Beijing and the peoples of China generally.

What, then, should our attitude be toward the existing arrangements and structures inside the country? Do we support them and subsidize them? Or do we try to dissolve them? Do we continue to repair to abstractions like human rights and democracy, or do we propound our own, more specific, sense of proper and peace-preserving geographical and political Constitutions for this vast region of the world? After all, current Beijing policy in Xinjiang/Turkestan bids fair to promote widespread violence and instability throughout Central Asia, an area of increasing strategic significance. Deterrence will serve in coping with familiar problems of the sort we see today in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Straits. But deterrence, after all, is designed to cope with a conscious kind of expansionist ambition; it is not designed to cope with the violence or chaos that can result from the sustained application of bad government.

In this respect, Beijing is quite right to be concerned with the implications for itself of conflicts in the Balkans or in Chechnya or in Kashmir but, thus far, it seems to be drawing all the wrong conclusions. We, ourselves, need to be far more plain and explicit in saying that the current Constitution of China, in both its forms, is not working, and cannot work, and that is not only China's problem. In fact, I have a sense that the leadership in Beijing somehow senses this, but cannot imagine another arrangement, let alone figure out how to get to it. But, as all of us know, the last time this happened, in the nineteenth century, the transition from the dysfunctional to the new was impossibly difficult and that the issues that arose then have not been satisfactorily resolved to this day.

On the other hand, our new President begins his term not at the beginning of, nor even in the middle of, but at the end of a period of great violence, chaos, and war in Asia. To the credit of his predecessors, they somehow steered us and the rest of the world through all of that, Presidents Truman, Johnson, and Nixon seeing their political careers destroyed in substantial part precisely because they stayed the course in Asia. Yet their very successes occasion a new and demanding agenda.

If President Bush's father could imagine a Europe whole and free after the end of the Cold War in the West, what should his son imagine as conceivable consequences of improved circumstances in the East? For after the collapse of great empires or at the end of tumultuous periods of war, violence, chaos, and disruption, thoughtful people often contemplate a new mega-system, a new grand arrangement, a New World Order, to borrow a phrase once again from the first President Bush. President Wilson put forward such a grand scheme after World War I, but it didn't work. Yet, after World War II, peoples in

Europe, with the support of the United States, propounded new arrangements for the governance of their continent, and these have proceeded successfully, albeit with fits and starts, overcoming the enormous threat from the Soviet Union's counter-system, and now still evolving as our European friends use the luxury of peace to argue strenuously about the European Union and the common currency and a common security policy and their relations with us through NATO.

It is this respect that it is time to think of how the fledgling peace and haltingly emerging unity in Asia can be consolidated. No, the institutions of post-World War II and post-Cold War Europe directed to the resumption of civilized life on that continent cannot be applied in any reflex-like fashion in Asia. But the *idea* behind it, the idea of searching for concrete ways to inform and direct and conduct the resumption of civilized life -- normal life, as lived in normal countries -- to borrow phrases that are common in Central And Eastern Europe today -- can now come forward. And, in fact, there is some talk and some action, whether in the expansion of the Association of Southeast Asian States, or in discussions about free trade areas and currency unions.

What about China? It has always had an enormous role in whatever goes on in Asia. Indeed, at times it has played a large role in preserving the peace of the region, for whatever one makes of the internal upheavals in the various countries of Asia throughout history, *interstate* war, when compared to Europe, was in fact very rare.

The Chinese had a theory of peace, a well-developed idea that we might call *Pax Sinica*. Of course, like many things derived from traditional Chinese political philosophy (and traditional Chinese theories about the natural world, for that matter) it did not fit in very well with the modern world. In particular, traditional Chinese diplomacy was not the stuff of coalition building or of give-and-take, but became over time hectoring and overbearing. It presupposed that conflicts among states were resolved by the creation of a hierarchy among states, an arrangement which further presupposed ideological uniformity of a Confucian kind in key places like Japan, Korea, and Vietnam.

*Pax Occidensa*, if we want a comparable tag for the theory of peace that grew up in the Western world, was different; these days, it seems to be expressing itself with terms like trans-national and global, terms which derive from even older ones like universal and cosmopolitan and ecumenical. These are powerful notions and jumbled as they may be, they have great purchase, for there is underway in the world now a new wave of trans-national institution-building, whether it's the World Trade Organization, or the expanding European Union, or the proposed International Criminal Court, or the Western Hemisphere Free Trade Area. *Pax Occidensa* may be a theory of peace, but movements associated with it have unsettled domestic politics and international relations all over the world. Even so, Americans on balance seem comfortable with it, or at least with the idea that people can have meetings and write constitutions. We have done that nationally and in each of our states with great and enduring success.

There is going to be, and there has to be, some role for China in this activity of post-war consolidation and institution building. In fact, China wants some role for itself in this new thing because to be forever outside it is to be consigned to perpetual backwardness and, therefore, to inconsequential oblivion, in other words, to stay on the road that China was on in the middle of the nineteenth century. Therefore, things inside China will have to

change more far more than they already have, in order for the country to connect itself to the New World now under construction.

It is that change which, finally, brings me to my last point, a point that has very much to do with the creation of peace inside China and in the world. I make this point as a reminder, a reminder especially to myself, that even the expensive and painstaking work of defense and deterrence and security is not all we need to do. Yes, war comes from somewhere, but it does not actually originate in seminars at war colleges or schools of international affairs or studies in think tanks. No, the discussion of war and the planning for war are not themselves the causes of war.

Instead, conservatives like me are supposed to look at things from a different angle. For conservatives like my Republican friends and me, politics is *supposed* to be a trailing indicator, not a leading indicator. When we see politics, including even high strategic politics, we are *supposed* to direct our attention to what is transpiring prior thereto, in culture and in ideas. It is Chairman Mao and people like him -- The Left, in other words -- who have argued that politics trumps everything. It was the Great Helmsman and his henchmen and his idolizers who brutally, but futilely, tried to place politics in command. And yet the analyses among conservatives, and our accompanying program, including particularly our China policy, actually rehearses the more mechanistic view of things we criticize our liberal friends for.

For example, when I read about the discussions inside China's war colleges or about China's growing military budgets or about the deployment of its military forces, I like to think I worry about them in a way that a reasonable man ought to worry about them. And so I want my political leaders to see to our security arrangements with other countries, to the maintenance and to the improvement of our own military forces, to the development and deployment of effective defenses against ballistic missiles, to initiatives in homeland defense and counter-terrorism, and to all the other things that practical and reasonable people *must* do in today's world.

But the main worry to me is not so much what we can see and observe, whether with our eyesight or our satellites, but rather what lies beneath what we are seeing. *That* is hard to figure out, and even if we could figure it out, it may be infinitely harder to deal with.

To explain what I have in mind, I'm going to take off from the analogy that is often drawn between rising China and the rise of Germany and Japan in the last century, and the problems the world had in dealing with them. Yes, China's situation these days resembles that of Germany and Japan, Japan especially, in that the pace of the transformation from the old to the new is rapid, mind-boggling, and hugely disruptive in every respect. In important structural ways, the transformation inside China in the past twenty years resembles what happened in Japan between, say 1910 and 1930 -- rapid urbanization, rapid economic growth, societal dislocation of every sort including, well, rapid Americanization, in the sense that consumer products, and life styles, and popular culture and even high culture fell under the spell of the up-to-date.

We now know that Japanese intellectual and artistic and cultural life did not handle the stress very well at all. Many Japanese began to develop, and then to become obsessed about, ultimately dangerous and destructive notions about themselves and who they were and how they ought to live in the world and how they ought to relate to the world. And for the rest of the world, need I say the Western world in particular? the usual work of defense,

deterrence, and diplomacy proved to be quite inadequate. To borrow a word from contemporary teen-speak, we were clueless. Yet none of the danger signs were in any way secret or concealed or classified. They were right out in the open if, of course, we had bothered to learn how to read Japanese, and if we had repaired to a genuinely *conservative* way of thinking about these things.

You see, if I had come to St. Louis in 1930 and reported to you that, for one example, the German philosopher Martin Heidegger was acquiring a following in Japanese intellectual and academic circles, and that we ought to be concerned about it, I can't imagine what my audience would have made of it. And yet we know today that precisely such tortuous ways of thinking about the meaning of modern life fed dark ruminations in the Japan, ruminations about meaning and culture and authenticity and forgetfulness and memory and modernity and the *volk* (read "race".) And, somehow, all that then gave rise to a political program and then to propaganda. In the end, this process decisively shaped Japan's view of itself and drove it off the rails. *That* is what started the Great Pacific War. So, for me, my concern about China is not so much that it is rising but rather what it is going to make of itself in this process of rising.

For to look at China today is to see a blizzard of competing concepts and ideas and to hear a spirited and cacophonous debate about them. It is a great culture's effort, a traditional culture's effort, to make some sense of the creative destruction that is making China into a modern country. This confusion and commotion is not confined to China alone, but has spilled out into the whole Chinese world -- to Hong Kong and Taiwan, to Singapore and Southeast Asia, and to the more distant Diaspora in North America and Europe. The regime in *Beijing* knows that this discussion is out of control. It can participate in it if it likes, but it cannot control it.

The single most important thing that the administration in *Washington* can do is to insinuate itself and other Americans and American ideas and good ideas form all over the world into that debate, whether about politics or poetry, economics or aesthetics. For, at the end of the day, *this* is the discussion which will inform China's decision for war or peace -- its discussion about itself, their discussion about *themselves*, not about *ourselves*, a discussion about what China once was, what it is now, what it is becoming, what it could all too easily happen to it (again) if it is not careful. There are reasons for optimism, but history also teaches the opposite. Great and accomplished peoples -- can we say civilized peoples like the Germans and the Japanese? -- in the course of modernizing themselves somehow went off the track and ended up in some other place, where they routinely committed acts of inexplicable monstrosity. Bad ideas will do that.

China is a great and civilized country, with a history of tolerance and cosmopolitanism and ecumenism and universalism, and with a deep appreciation of beautiful things, but its history also shows a capacity for surreal and destructive madness, whether it's the Taiping Rebellion of the mid-nineteenth century or the Great Leap Forward of the mid-twentieth. Chinese people are trying to figure out what to make of both aspects of that history, and what to do with their capacities. In the meantime, while we argue among ourselves about what Americans should do about China, we should pay attention to what Chinese think *they* should do about it.