

April 25, 2001

A New China Policy

President Bush deserves much credit for the handling of the spy plane crisis. However, he has received significant criticism from some of his own political supporters for saying he was "very" sorry for the incident. This seems a "very" small price to pay for the safe return of 24 American military personnel. Trade with China though should be credited for helping to resolve this crisis. President Bush, in the diplomatic handling of this event, avoided overly strong language and military threats, which would have done nothing to save the lives of these 24 Americans.

This confrontation, however, provides an excellent opportunity for us to reevaluate our policy toward China and other nations. Although trade with China, for economic reasons, encouraged both America and China to work for a resolution of the spy plane crisis, our trading status with China should be reconsidered. What today is called free trade is not exactly that. Although we engage in trade with China, it is subsidized to the tune of many billions of dollars through the Export/Import Bank- the most of any country in the world.

We also have been careless over the last several years in allowing our military secrets to find their way into the hands of the Chinese government. At the same time we subsidize trade with

China, including sensitive military technology, we also build up the Taiwanese military while continuing to patrol the Chinese border with our spy planes. It's a risky, inconsistent policy.

The question we must ask ourselves is how would we react if we had Chinese airplanes flying up and down our coast and occupying the air space of the Gulf of Mexico?? We must realize that China is a long way from the US and is not capable, nor is she showing any signs, of launching an attack on any sovereign territory of the United States.

Throughout all of China's history she has never pursued military adventurism far from her own borders. That is something that we cannot say about our own policy. China traditionally has only fought for secure borders predominantly with India, Russia, Japan, and in Korea against the United States, and that was only when our troops approached the Yaloo River.

It should not go unnoticed that there was no vocal support from any of our allies for our spy missions along the Chinese coast. None of our allies bothered to condemn the action of the Chinese military aircraft, although it technically was the cause of the accident. Don't forget that when a Russian aircraft landed in Japan in 1976, it was only after many months we returned the plane to Russia--in crates.

Although there is no doubt that we technically have legal grounds for making these flights, the question really is whether or not it is wise to do so or necessary for our national security. Actually a strong case can be made that our national security is more threatened by our patrolling the Chinese coast than if we avoided such flights altogether. After a half a century it's time to reassess the need for such flights. Satellite technology today gives us the ability to watch and to listen to almost everyone on earth. If there is a precise need for this type of surveillance for the benefit of Taiwan, then the Taiwanese ought to be involved in this activity, not American military personnel. We should not feel so insecure that we need to threaten and intimidate other countries in order to achieve some vague psychological reassurance that we're still the top military power in the world. This is unnecessary and may well represent a weakness rather than strength.

The Taiwan Relations Act essentially promises that we will defend Taiwan at all costs and should be reevaluated. Morally and constitutionally a treaty cannot be used to commit us to war at some future date. One generation cannot declare war for another. Making an open-ended commitment to go to war, promising troops, money and weapons, is not permitted by the Constitution.

It is clear that war can only be declared by a Congress currently in office. Declaring war cannot be circumvented by a treaty or agreement committing us to war at some future date. If a previous treaty can commit future generations to war, the House of Representatives, the body closest to the people, would never have a say in the most important issue of declaring war.

We must continue to believe and be confident that trading with China is beneficial to America. Trade between Taiwan and China already exists and should be encouraged. It's a fact that trade did help to resolve this current crisis without a military confrontation.

Concern about our negative trade balance with the Chinese is irrelevant. Balance of payments are always in balance. For every dollar we spend in China those dollars must come back to America. Maybe not buying American goods, as some would like, but they do come back and they serve to finance our current account deficit.

Free trade, it should be argued, is beneficial even when done unilaterally, providing a benefit to our consumers. But we should take this opportunity to point out clearly and forcefully the foolishness of providing subsidies to the Chinese through such vehicles as the Export/Import Bank. We should be adamantly opposed to sending military technology to such a nation, or to any nation for that matter.

It is interesting to note that recent reports reveal that missiles, coming from Israel and financed by American foreign aid, were seen on the fighter plane that caused the collision. It should be equally clear that arming the enemies of our trading partners doesn't make a whole lot of sense either. For American taxpayers to continue to finance the weaponry of Taiwan, and to maintain an open commitment to send our troops if the border dispute between Taiwan and China erupts into violence, is foolhardy and risky.

Don't forget that President Eisenhower once warned that there always seems to be a need for a "monster to slay" in order to keep the military industries busy and profitable. To continue the weapons buildup, something we are always engaged in around the world, requires excuses for such expenditures- some of these are planned, some contrived, and some accidental.

When we follow only a military approach without trading in our dealings with foreign nations, and in particular with China, we end up at war, such as we did in the Korean War. Today, we

are following a policy where we have less military confrontation with the Chinese and more trade, so relations are much better. A crisis like we have just gone through is more likely to be peacefully resolved to the benefit of both sides. But what we need is even less military involvement, with no military technology going to China and no military weapons going to Taiwan. We have a precise interest in increasing true free trade; that is, trade that is not subsidized nor managed by some world government organization like the WTO. Maintaining peace would then be much easier.

We cannot deny that China still has many internal moral, economic and political problems that should be resolved. But so do we. Their internal problems are their own. We cannot impose our views on them in dealing with these issues, but we should be confident enough that engaging in free trade with them and setting a good example are the best ways for us to influence them in coming to grips with their problems. We have enough of our own imperfections in this country in dealing with civil liberties, and we ought not to pretend that we are saintly enough to impose our will on others in dealing with their problems. Needless to say we don't have the legal authority to do so either.

During the Cuban missile crisis a resolution was achieved under very dangerous circumstances. Quietly, President Kennedy had agreed to remove the missiles from Turkey that were pointed at the Soviets, making the point that American missiles on the Soviet borders was not unlike the Soviets missiles on the American borders. A few months later, quietly, the United States removed these missiles, and no one suffered. The Cold War was eventually won by the United States, but our national security was not threatened by the removal of those missiles.

It could be argued that the fact that our missiles were in Turkey and pointed at the Soviets was more of a threat to our national security because that motivated the Soviets to put their missiles in Cuba. It would do no harm to our national security for us to quietly, in time, stop the potentially dangerous and unnecessary spy missions that we have pursued for over 50 years along the Chinese border.

James Bamford recently wrote in *The New York Times* of an episode that occurred in 1956 when Eisenhower was president. On a similar spy mission off the Chinese coast the Chinese Air Force shot down one of our planes, killing 16 American crewmen. In commenting on the incident President Eisenhower said, "We seem to be conducting something that we cannot control very well. If planes were flying 20 to 50 miles from our shores we would be very likely to shoot them down if they came in closer, whether through error or not."

We have been pursuing these missions near China for over 50 years. It's time to reconsider the wisdom and the necessity of such missions, especially since we are now engaged in trade with this nation.

Bellicose and jingoistic demands for retaliation and retribution are dangerous, and indeed are a greater threat to our national security than relying on satellite technology for gathering the information that we might need. A policy of peaceful, non-subsidized trade with China would go a long way to promoting friendly and secure relations with the Chinese people. By not building up the military arsenal of the Taiwanese, Taiwan will be forced to pursue their trade policies and investments with China, leading to the day where the conflict between these two powers can be resolved peacefully.

Today, it looks like there's a much better chance of North and South Korea getting together and solving their dispute than was the case in the 1950s, when we sent hundreds of thousands of troops and millions of bombs to resolve the conflict, which was unsuccessful.

We should have more confidence that peaceful trade is a much stronger weapon than all the military force that we can provide. That same argument can be made for our dealings with Vietnam today. We did not win with weapons of war in the 1960s, yet we are now much more engaged in a peaceful trade with the people with Vietnam. Our willingness over the past hundred years to resort to weapons to impose our will on others has generally caused a resentment of America rather than respect.

It is now time to reassess our entire foreign policy of military worldwide intervention. Staying neutral in world conflicts while showing a willingness to trade with all nations anxious to trade with us will do more to serve the cause of world peace than all the unnecessary and provocative spy missions we pursue around the globe.