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**Operationalizing Dissuasion of China:
Practicalities and Pitfalls**

Brad Roberts

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PREFACE

This analytical paper was prepared with financial support from the central research program of the Institute for Defense Analyses; it also draws on previous work sponsored by the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (as indicated). Earlier drafts of this paper benefited from critiques by the following individuals: Peter Almquist, Ronald Christman, Andrew Coe, Michael McDevitt, Evan Medeiros, Martin Neill, and Victor Utgoff. Some of the ideas elaborated here were first tested in conferences at Strategic Command and Pacific Command. The views reflected here are the author's personal views and should not be attributed to the Institute for Defense Analyses or any of its sponsors.

CONTENTS

PREFACE	iii
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	ES-1
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. THE LOGIC OF DISSUASION.....	3
A. The 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review	3
B. Conceptual Foundations of the QDR Vision	7
C. Dissuasion in the National Security Strategy.....	10
III. APPLYING THIS LOGIC TO CHINA.....	16
A. China’s Foreign Policy	16
B. China’s Military Policy.....	20
C. China’s Grand Strategy.....	22
D. What Strategic Crossroads?	23
IV. U.S. DEFENSE PLANNING AND DISSUASION	26
Approach #1: Impose Costs Aggressively.....	26
Approach #2: Prepare for the “Second Move Advantage”	30
Approach #3: Mix Competition and Restraint.....	32
Approach #4: Bet on Transformation	33
V. KEY RELATED POLICY QUESTIONS	34
VI. THE ROLE OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION	36
A. Chinese Reaction to Dissuasion.....	38
VII. CONCLUSIONS.....	42

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

U.S. military planners have returned to a theme first sketched out in the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review: dissuasion of China. They are now faced for the first time with the need to come to terms with how to plan forces and capabilities in ways that have the desired strategic effects.

But there is considerable uncertainty about just what those strategic effects might be. Since the 2001 QDR, little additional thinking appears to have been done on the means and ends of dissuasion—certainly much more time and effort have been invested in thinking through the requirements of deterrence and defeat. Moreover, since the 2001 QDR, 9/11 occurred, an event that had a significant impact on the thinking of the White House about the nature of the strategic relationship with the other major powers: what is possible and what is necessary, now and for the foreseeable future. Whereas the 2001 QDR emphasized the potential that rising powers might become peer U.S. adversaries, the 2002 *National Security Strategy* emphasized an historically unprecedented opportunity to put major power relations on a new footing based on common interests, common responsibilities, and increasingly common values. By this post-9/11 vision, dissuasion must be operationalized in a way that both discourages potential competition and encourages deeper cooperation.

In applying the logic of dissuasion to China, it is useful to distinguish between choices made and choices not (yet) made in China's foreign policy, military policy, and grand strategy. Dissuasion is not relevant to certain choices China has made, such as to defend its interests over Taiwan and to modernize its conventional and strategic forces accordingly. Dissuasion is relevant to China's future choices to depart from the guiding principles of its current foreign policy, to modernize its military forces for more ambitious purposes, and/or to exploit its growing economic weight by developing the hard and soft power tools for strategic, geopolitical peer competition with the United States. Deep uncertainty exists about the nature of China's future grand strategy. Various experts interpret the available evidence differently.

Is China in fact at a strategic crossroads? There are three possible answers, each with a different implication for dissuasion. No, it has already passed the crossroads and has chosen the path of peer adversarial competition, and dissuasion may help discourage it from investing more substantially for this purpose. No, it has already passed the

crossroads and has chosen the path of strategic partnership, and dissuasion may help encourage that partnership. Yes, China is at a crossroads, but it stretches out into the foreseeable future as new wealth makes new choices possible, and dissuasion may help ensure Beijing that no radical departures from current policies are necessary to secure China's vital, legitimate interests.

From the military planner's perspective, there are four basic alternatives for operationalizing a dissuasion posture. Each entails certain potential benefits, costs, and risks.

1. *Impose costs aggressively*: operationalize in a way that increases to China the costs of its military modernization and reduces the expected benefits. Target dissuasion campaigns on modernization efforts at both the conventional and strategic level. Hope that the cumulative effect will be a loss of Chinese confidence in the ability to rapidly reap the benefits of the revolution in military affairs. But recognize the risks. A primary one is that such a strategy may settle China's debate about America in a way Americans would not prefer, leading to changes in China's grand strategy contrary to U.S. aims.
2. *Prepare for the second move advantage*: operationalize in a way that enables the United States to out-compete China in any competition of China's choosing, but that does not actually implement targeted efforts until and if China actually chooses to compete in those ways. Offer restraint for restraint and bet on the dissuasive impact of the "responsive infrastructure."
3. *Mix competition and restraint*: operationalize in a way that tries to close out Chinese competitive efforts at the conventional level but acquiesces to compensatory efforts at the strategic level, on the argument that mutual vulnerability is tolerable.
4. *Bet on transformation*: Don't "target" China with dissuasion "campaigns" but work to "change the terms of military competition" in ways that promise to work to China's disadvantage when and if it chooses new forms of competition.

Choosing which of these strategies for operationalizing dissuasion requires more than an appreciation of their potential benefits, costs, and risks. It requires making some fundamental decisions on related matters—on which sharply different views seem to exist. The first of these relates to restraint: simply, is it in America's interest today to offer any restraint to other major actors in the security environment? The second question relates to missile defense: does America's national interest require that China's capacity to hold the United States vulnerable to a retaliatory strategic strike be closed out—or preserved? The third relates to regime survival in Beijing: is this an objective of the dissuasion strategy or not? One set of answers points only to the cost-imposing strategy, but other answers point to other choices.

Whichever posture is seen as best suited to the objectives of dissuasion, achieving the desired strategic effect vis-à-vis China will require more than simply investment in that posture. Dissuasion is not a problem for military planners alone. The *National Security Strategy* envisions the exploitation of all tools of national power in the service of U.S. objectives. Their effective integration is essential because mixed messages would harm the effort to communicate to Chinese leaders the way in which future American intentions are contingent on Chinese choices. Moreover, limited sampling of Chinese reactions to dissuasion suggests that Chinese experts are well prepared to mis-read and misinterpret U.S. intentions and plans for dissuasion. So far at least, it would seem that the bilateral U.S.-PRC strategic dialogue has been relatively un-strategic in character and this raises a question about how well it can serve the objective of strategic communication. This again underscores the value for U.S. security objectives of an improved interagency process.

I. INTRODUCTION

In its first *Quadrennial Defense Review* (QDR) in 2001, the Bush administration elaborated dissuasion as one of “the four key goals that will guide the development of U.S. forces and capabilities, their deployment and use” (the other three being assurance, deterrence, and defeat).¹ Although that QDR did not specify China by name as an object of U.S. dissuasion efforts, many subsequent statements indicated that China was intended to be a primary focus.² But there is little to suggest that progress has been made since then in applying the logic of dissuasion to the planning of U.S. military forces with a focus on China.³ With the 2005 QDR now under way, this question is back on the defense planner’s agenda. How best to deal with an emerging major power “at a strategic crossroads” is reportedly one of the four strategic problems against which various defense investment strategies will be tested.⁴ China has been explicitly identified as one such major power in public remarks by Douglas Feith, Undersecretary of Defense for Policy.⁵ Whatever impact the 2005 QDR makes on this challenge, the question of how to deal with China’s rising power seems likely to remain on the U.S. foreign and defense policy agenda for a long time to come. This underscores the value of clearly understanding dissuasion, both its promise and limits.

¹ *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, September 30, 2001, p. iii. Hereinafter referred to as QDR 2001.

² These references will be developed in the next section of this paper.

³ One indicator is the level of effort initiated by DoD in the defense analytic community. In contrast to a large body of work on defeating and deterring various types of adversaries, to this author’s knowledge only three projects on dissuasion have been undertaken. The Office of Net Assessment has funded work by the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments. See “*Dissuasion Strategy*” *Seminar—Final Report*, October 2003. The Advanced Systems and Concepts Office of the Defense Threat Reduction Agency has funded work at two institutions. The Naval Postgraduate School was funded to convene a day-long workshop on dissuasion, the results of which are posted at the website of the Center for Contemporary Conflict. And this author was funded to support OSD Forces Policy in the exploration of how to deploy the “New Triad” to have the desired dissuasive effect of China. See Brad Roberts, “China, Dissuasion, and the New Triad,” a briefing to OSD Forces Policy, February 2004. See also Richard L. Kugler, *Dissuasion as a Strategic Concept*, Strategic Forum No. 196 (Washington, D.C.: Institute for National Strategic Studies of the National Defense University, 2002).

⁴ See Greg Jaffe, “Rumsfeld Details Big Military Shift in New Document,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 11, 2005, p. 1 and Jason Sherman, “Rumsfeld Shifts QDR’s Direction, Broadens Focus on Terrorism, WMD,” *Inside the Pentagon*, February 10, 2005, p. 1.

⁵ As reported in the *Washington Post*, “Undersecretary of Defense Douglas J. Feith, in a speech to the Council on Foreign Relations in February 2005 [2005], warned that China was ‘facing a strategic crossroads’ and that ‘if it wants to continue to prosper, it will choose a benign path that will allow the world to accommodate its rise peacefully.’ Otherwise, he said, there would be ‘a truly gigantic problem in international affairs.’” See Glenn Kessler, “U.S., China Agree to Regular Talks,” *Washington Post*, April 8, 2005, pp. A-17, 19.

Toward this end, this paper proceeds as follows. It begins with a review of the objectives and tools of dissuasion. A good deal of confusion continues to pervade defense community thinking on the subject, so this review is rather thorough. The paper then explores specifically how the logic of dissuasion applies to the types of choices China's leaders face in the decade ahead. Dissuasion is not merely an abstract principle and its successful application requires an accurate notion of the kinds of choices that its targets confront. Next, the paper examines the role of U.S. defense planning in shaping those choices. Four alternative approaches are elaborated and assessed for their utility for the dissuasion effort. This assessment highlights the fact that each of the main U.S. options could result in unintended and undesired consequences. The paper then considers three key strategic questions for which senior policymakers must have answers before they can design and implement a dissuasion strategy. Before closing with a review of conclusions and implications, the paper considers the role of strategic communication strategies in supporting U.S. objectives, on the argument that achievement of the objectives of dissuasion requires an integrated military, political, and economic strategy.

II. THE LOGIC OF DISSUASION

Dissuasion remains a novelty in the defense community. Since the 2001 QDR first elaborated the objectives of “assure, dissuade, deter, and defeat,” the Defense Department has invested a good deal more time in thinking through the requirements of defeat and deterrence than of assurance and dissuasion.⁶ Thus it is hardly surprising that some defense planners have reduced dissuasion to the following basic shorthand: ‘Potential enemies will be dissuaded from challenging U.S. interests if deterrence is strong. Deterrence will be strong if the U.S. capacity for defeat is beyond challenge. Thus dissuasion equates with deterrence which equates with effective defeat capabilities. If we get the operational requirements of defeat in proper order, deterrence and dissuasion naturally follow.’ This is a convenient simplification. It is also a far cry from what the architects of dissuasion seem to have had in mind.

A. The 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review

The 2001 QDR sketches out the core idea:

“Through its strategy and actions, the United States influences the nature of future military competitions, channels threats in certain directions, and complicates military planning for potential adversaries in the future. Well targeted strategy and policy can therefore dissuade other countries from initiating future military competitions. The United States can exert such influence through the conduct of its research, development, test, and demonstration programs. It can do so by maintaining or enhancing advantages in key areas of military capability. Given the availability of advanced technology and systems to potential adversaries, dissuasion will also require the United States to experiment with revolutionary concepts, capabilities, and organizational arrangements and to encourage the development of a culture within the military that embraces innovation and risk-taking. To have this dissuasive effect, this combination of technical, experimental, and operational activity has to have a clear strategic focus. New processes and organizations are needed within the defense establishment to provide this focus.”⁷

In Secretary Rumsfeld’s words, the objective is to convince others not to develop capabilities that might threaten the United States by making it “clear to them that they’d be throwing good money after bad.”⁸ Stephen Cambone, then Principal Deputy

⁶ On deterrence, the main driver of thinking was the process leading to the Joint Operating Concept on Deterrence. On defeat, the main driver has been capabilities-based planning and the defense planning scenarios. No counterpart processes have driven thinking about the requirements of assurance and dissuasion, except to a limited extent within Combatant Commands trying to plan for dissuasion.

⁷ QDR 2001, p. 12.

⁸ Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee, June 21, 2001.

Undersecretary of Defense for Policy and a key figure in the 2001 QDR, elaborated this notion more fully:

“We added a second objective, which is a bit different....We would like to dissuade potential adversaries from undertaking programs or courses of action that could or might threaten the United States, its interests, and those of our allies and friends....[I]t’s important, we think, that potential adversaries understand the range of capability that the United States can bring to bear...; the speed with which we can adapt...as a way of saying to them: look, there are things that you may wish to do, there are efforts you may wish to undertake, but you need to understand from the beginning, before you even start, that these are not going to be winning efforts. So don’t bother going down that course. Stay out of that area because you cannot succeed there. It’s a little different than the deterrent side, which presumes that an adversary has the capability in hand and that we are trying to prevent him from using [it].”⁹

The focus is on *future* competition. The targets are *potential* adversaries. Alas, the foreword to the QDR seemed to muddy these waters just a bit, with a summary of the goal of dissuasion as follows: “Dissuading adversaries from undertaking programs or operations that could threaten U.S. interests or those of our allies and friends.”¹⁰ By adding the concept of “operations,” and by dropping the term “potential,” the summary statement blurs the apparently intended distinctions between dissuasion and deterrence.

By what means are the objectives of dissuasion to be achieved? The paragraph-length citation above highlights the role of both strategy and action, including various actions related to the development of future U.S. forces. Elsewhere in the QDR, this concept is elaborated as follows:

“Creating substantial margins of advantage across key functional areas of military competition (e.g., power projection, space, and information) will require developing and sustaining a portfolio of key military capabilities to prevail over current challenges and to hedge against and dissuade future threats. Building upon the current superiority of U.S. conventional forces, this portfolio will include capabilities for conducting information operations, ensuring U.S. access to distant theaters, defending against threats to the United States and allied territory, and protecting U.S. assets in space. It will also require exploiting U.S. advantages in superior technological innovation; its unmatched space and intelligence capabilities; its sophisticated military training; and its ability to integrate highly distributed military forces in synergistic combinations for highly complex joint military operations.”¹¹

⁹ Stephen Cambone, “Developing the National Military Strategy in a New Security Era,” DFI International Air and Space Seminar Series, December 12, 2001.

¹⁰ QDR 2001, p. iv.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

It is useful to recall the context in which these concepts were developed. The 2001 QDR describes a security environment marked by the loss of certainty provided by the Cold War. Today's changed security environment "involves a great deal of uncertainty about the potential sources of military threats, the conduct of war in the future, and the form that threats and attacks against the Nation will take. History has shown that rapid and unexpected changes...can transform the geopolitical landscape."¹²

But the 2001 QDR also describes a set of key trends that will shape the emerging security environment. One relates to the potential for returning to a world in which a major power seeks to confront the United States as a peer adversary:

"Although the United States will not face a peer competitor in the near future, the potential exists for regional powers to develop sufficient capabilities to threaten stability in regions critical to U.S. interests. In particular, Asia is gradually emerging as a region susceptible to large-scale military competition....Maintaining a stable balance in Asia will be a complex task. The possibility exists that a military competitor with a formidable resource base will emerge in the region."¹³

In Asia, a number of countries have the potential to develop such a resource base but only one—China—seems to present the possibility of choosing an adversarial peer competition with the United States. Indeed, some readers interpreted the 2001 QDR as principally focused on the defense planning implications of China's rise.¹⁴

The 2001 QDR begins with a discussion of enduring national interests. First among these is U.S. freedom of action.¹⁵ China's rise is a potential barrier to that freedom of action. Dissuasion, it appears, is about shaping the U.S. military posture in a way that provides incentives to China's leaders not to develop military tools consistent with a peer adversarial relationship with the United States.

The dissuasion concepts elaborated in the 2001 QDR informed the development of other administration strategic documents. The *Nuclear Posture Review*, for example, reportedly echoed these themes:

"Systems capable of striking a wide range of targets throughout an adversary's territory may dissuade a potential adversary from pursuing threatening capabilities. For example, a demonstration of the linkage between long-range precision-strike

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁴ Thomas Donnelly of the American Enterprise Institute, for example, argued as follows: "Preparing for conflict with China underlay [sic] a good deal of the rationale behind the 2001 *Quadrennial Defense Review* and the program of 'transformation'." Donnelly, "Force Size and Strategy," AEI, September 2004.

¹⁵ QDR 2001., p. 2.

systems and real-time intelligence systems may dissuade a potential adversary from investing heavily in mobile ballistic missiles.”¹⁶

“The capacity of infrastructure to upgrade existing weapon systems, surge production of weapons, or develop and field entirely new systems for the New Triad can discourage other countries from competing militarily with the United States.”¹⁷

“Defenses can make it more arduous and costly for an adversary to compete militarily with or wage war against the United States. The demonstration of a range of technologies and systems for missile defense can have a dissuasive effect on potential adversaries. The problem of countering missile defenses, especially defensive systems with multiple layers, presents a potential adversary with the prospect of a difficult, time-consuming and expensive undertaking.”¹⁸

Similarly, key concepts were echoed in the *National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction*:

“A strong declaratory policy and effective military forces are essential elements of our contemporary deterrent posture, along with the full range of political tools to persuade potential adversaries not to seek or use WMD.”¹⁹

So too the *National Defense Strategy* issued in March 2005:

“Several key states face basic decisions about their roles in global and regional politics, economics, and security, and the pace and direction of their own internal evolution. These decisions may change their strategic position in the world and their relationship with the United States. This uncertainty presents both opportunities and potential challenges for the United States. Some states may move toward greater cooperation with the United States, while other could evolve into capable regional rivals or enemies. Over time, some rising powers may be able to threaten the United States and our partners directly, rival us in key areas of military and technological competition, or threaten U.S. interests by pursuing dominance over key regions.... Would-be opponents will seek to offset our advantages. In response, we seek to limit their strategic options and dissuade them from adopting threatening capabilities, methods, and ambitions.”²⁰

¹⁶ These citations are drawn from materials posted at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmdl/library/policy/dod/npr.htm>. These purport to be excerpts from the *Nuclear Posture Review*, a classified report submitted to Congress on December 31, 2001. Use here of the web-posted materials should not be taken as confirmation or validation of their contents. These excerpts have been widely used in published discussion of the NPR, however, and thus form the basis of the analysis here.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁹ *National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction* (Washington, D.C.: White House, December 2003), p. 3.

²⁰ *The National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, March 2005.

B. Conceptual Foundations of the QDR Vision

In the absence of fuller official elaboration of the concept of dissuasion, it is useful to understand the sources of thinking that seemed to inform its elaboration in the 2001 QDR.²¹ Professor David Yost has rightly argued that history is rich in examples of leaders acting to shape the international environment in ways that constrain potential adversaries, ranging from the efforts of the Roman empire to signal that it would quash rebellion at any cost, to the European balance of power system of the 19th century. But as he goes on to argue, “if dissuasion is defined broadly, as any measure or policy that might contribute to shaping the competition or persuading a potential adversary not to compete, one runs the risk of seeing dissuasion everywhere and classifying everything under the heading of dissuasion.”²² Four specific sources of thinking seem germane to the development of the logic of dissuasion in the 2001 QDR.

One source was the predecessor QDR of 1997—more precisely, the critique of it that developed in reaction. That QDR made no reference to dissuasion, although it did articulate a general goal of “shaping the international security environment in ways that promote and protect U.S. national interests.”²³ The Congress empanelled a group of experts to critique the 1997 QDR, called the National Defense Panel. It argued in favor of a “transformation strategy” that would have various virtues.

“It is this combination of technology, emerging military systems, new concepts of operation and force restructuring that often produces the discontinuous leap in military effectiveness characteristic of revolutions in military affairs....The end result would find the U.S. military having created strategic “options” on a range of military capabilities. These options could be used both to dissuade prospective competitors from undertaking aggressive military competition and, in the event dissuasion or deterrence fails, to exercise one or more of these options to prevail in such competition.”²⁴

Second, dissuasion draws on the competitive strategies concepts of the 1980s. Such strategies were conceived by Director of Net Assessment Andrew Marshall and embraced by Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger as a way to exploit “the long-term consequences for the Soviets of high levels of military expenditures or of possible trade-offs between individual programs the Soviets might be compelled to make, since

²¹ Here, as elsewhere in this paper, the author has benefited from a draft essay by David Yost of the Naval Postgraduate School, entitled “Dissuasion and Strategy: Questions and Challenges,” draft of September 3, 2004.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

²³ *Quadrennial Defense Review, May 1997*. See Section III, “Defense Strategy.”

²⁴ “A Transformation Strategy,” in *Transforming Defense: National Security in the 21st Century*, Report of the National Defense Panel, December 1997.

resources always are limited.”²⁵ As Weinberger argued, “We must develop thoughtful strategies based on areas of natural, sustainable U.S. advantage. Where possible, we should adopt strategies that make obsolete past Soviet defense investments.”²⁶

A third source of ideas is the thinking done a decade earlier—by some of the same people—in preparation of a Defense Planning Guidance. As they argued in 1992:

“Our first objective is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival...that poses a threat on the order of that posed formerly by the Soviet Union...We must maintain the mechanisms for deterring potential competitors from even aspiring to a larger regional or global role. An effective reconstitution capability is important here, since it implies that a potential rival could not hope to quickly or easily gain a predominant military position in the world.”²⁷

This concern about how to prepare for the possibility of renewed strategic rivalry was elaborated further by then Secretary of Defense Richard B. Cheney:

“Unfortunately, if you look at the historic record, we have never, ever gone through one of these periods and gotten it right. We’ve always screwed it up. Every single time when it’s happened previously we’ve been so quick to cash in the peace dividend, to demobilize the force, that within a very short period of time we find that our weakness in and of itself becomes provocative and tempts others to do things they shouldn’t attempt.”²⁸

The fourth source of thinking came from the so-called Blue Team. This group was described in 2000 as “a loose alliance of members of Congress, congressional staff, think tank fellows, Republican political operatives, conservative journalists, lobbyists for Taiwan, former intelligence officers and a handful of academics, all united in the view that a rising China poses great risks to America’s vital interests.”²⁹ Some members of this group found positions of responsibility in the Bush administration, including for the QDR. Reflecting a view of U.S.-PRC relations common among this group, Frank Gaffney has argued that “Where the relationship is going is, frankly, toward conflict....

²⁵ Andrew W. Marshall, “Strategy as a Profession for Future Generations,” in Andrew Marshall, J.J. Martin, and Henry S. Rowen, eds., *On Not Confusing Ourselves: Essays on National Security Strategy in Honor of Albert and Roberta Wohlstetter* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1991), p. 309.

²⁶ Caspar W. Weinberger, Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to the Congress for FY 1987*, p. 87.

²⁷ “Excerpts From Pentagon’s Plan: ‘Prevent the Re-Emergence of a New Rival,’” *New York Times*, March 8, 1992. The document was reported to be a classified draft Defense Planning Guidance for the Fiscal Years 1994-1999. This author has no basis for validating this excerpt.

²⁸ Remarks by Secretary of Defense Richard B. Cheney to the editorial board of the San Diego Union, reported November 12, 1991.

²⁹ Robert G. Kaiser and Steven Mufson, “‘Blue Team’ Draws a Hard Line on Beijing,” *Washington Post*, February 22, 2000, p. A-1. See also “The Pillsbury Factor,” *Oriental Economist*, August 2002.

In many ways this is a time not dissimilar to... the 1930s.”³⁰ Some of their thinking is reflected in the work of University of Chicago political scientist John Mearsheimer, who has argued as follows on China:

“Expect China to attempt to dominate Japan and Korea, as well as other regional actors...[and] to develop its own version of the Monroe doctrine, directed at the United States....[T]he United States has a profound interest in seeing Chinese economic growth slow considerably in the years ahead....American policy has sought to integrate China into the world economy and to facilitate its rapid economic development, so that it becomes wealthy and, one would hope, content with its present position in the international system. This U.S. policy on China is misguided. A wealthy China would not be a status quo power but an aggressive state determined to achieve regional hegemony....Structural imperatives of the international system, which are powerful, will probably force the United States to abandon its policy of constructive engagement in the near future.”³¹

In sum, the 2001 QDR set out a few key ideas about the means and ends of dissuasion. Some associated public statements by U.S. officials at the time added some perspective to the intent of the QDR authors on this particular question. But subsequent Defense Department documents have done little to clarify or elaborate the concept. The March 2005 *National Defense Strategy* includes only a brief review of dissuasion, as cited above. The *National Military Strategy* of 2004 adds nothing at all on dissuasion. This is in contrast to a steady stream of efforts by senior administration figures, including the president, to redefine the debate about deterrence and its place in national strategy. Accordingly, the defense community has generally paid little attention to the concept of dissuasion. To the extent interested members of the defense community have sought to interpret and apply the logic of dissuasion, they have generally done so through the filter of their prior familiarity with one or more of the supplemental sources of ideas noted above. This has amplified confusion over the logic of dissuasion.

This confusion is important for at least two reasons. The first of these relates to the unfinished intellectual business of dissuasion. The four key goals elaborated in the 2001 QDR beg some basic questions: Is it possible to pursue all four goals (assure, dissuade, deter, defeat) simultaneously—or are there not trade-offs to worry about? How do deterrence and dissuasion interact? Many in the defense community are inclined to equate dissuasion and deterrence very closely. Are there priorities among them and if so, what should they be? Is it possible to have strong and effective dissuasion of China and strong and effective deterrence at the same time? Is it possible to dissuade China while at

³⁰ Cited in *ibid.*

³¹ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (London: W.W. Norton, 2002), pp. 401-402.

the same time assuring U.S. friends and allies? Might U.S. dissuasion strategies somehow alarm U.S. allies in East Asia or Russian strategic planners? Is it possible to dissuade China while also persuading Taiwan not to take steps toward *de jure* independence, as opposed by U.S. policy? Moreover, to the extent dissuasion is a strategy for hedging against an unwelcome future, it must come to terms with the risk inherent to hedging strategies: that hedging might help bring into being the circumstance it is intended to avoid by motivating the very behaviors by others it intends to discourage. How might a hedging posture toward China have this effect? This is important unfinished business.

The second reason that the lingering confusion is important is that it masks some subtle but potentially significant differences in thinking about dissuasion between the 2001 QDR and the 2002 *National Security Strategy* (NSS).³²

C. Dissuasion in the National Security Strategy

The 2001 QDR and the 2002 NSS reflect strikingly different visions of the world. This is hardly surprising, given the dramatic events of 9/11, their impact on national leadership, and the president's personal effort to articulate and communicate key principles of national purpose in the new environment. The result is a document that differs from the QDR in many ways: in its basic view of the security environment, in the priorities it sets for the U.S. military, in expectations for major power relations, and in the desired role of international cooperation in shaping the security environment. How significant these differences might be when it comes to operationalizing dissuasion is an open question—to be explored further below.

In characterizing the security environment, the 2001 QDR emphasizes uncertainty, whereas the 2002 NSS emphasizes a clear and present danger:

“New deadly challenges have emerged from rogue states and terrorists....The nature of motivations of these new adversaries, their determination to obtain destructive powers hitherto available only to the world's strongest states, and the greater likelihood that they will use these weapons of mass destruction against us, make today's security environment more complex and dangerous....We must be prepared to stop rogue states and their terrorist clients before they are able to threaten or use weapons of mass destruction.”³³

³² *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: White House, September 2002).

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

In public remarks at the time intended to elaborate the thinking behind the strategy, then national security advisor Condoleezza Rice expanded on the significance of this point:

“The fall of the Berlin Wall and the fall of the World Trade Center were the bookends of a long transition period...It will take us years to understand the long-term effects of September 11th. But there are certain verities that the tragedy brought home to us in the most vivid way. Perhaps most fundamentally, 9/11 crystallized our vulnerability. It also threw into sharp relief the nature of the threat we face today. Today’s threats come less from massing armies than from small, shadowy bands of terrorists—less from strong states than from weak or failed states. And after 9/11, there is no longer any doubt that today America faces an existential threat to our security—a threat as great as any we faced during the Civil War, the so-called “Good War,” or the Cold War. President Bush’s new *National Security Strategy* offers a bold vision for protecting our Nation that captures today’s new realities and new opportunities.”³⁴

In characterizing priorities for the U.S. military, the 2001 QDR emphasizes military transformation to protect U.S. freedom of action over the longer term, whereas the NSS emphasizes the proactive use of American power in the shorter term—indeed, now:

“In the new world we have entered, the only path to peace and security is the path of action...We will defend the peace by fighting terrorists and tyrants. We will preserve the peace by building good relations among the great powers. We will extend the peace by encouraging free and open societies on every continent.”³⁵

As Rice elaborated:

“[The NSS] calls on America to use our position of unparalleled strength and influence to create a balance of power that favors freedom...Defending our nation from its enemies is the first and fundamental commitment of the Federal Government. And as the world’s most powerful nation, the United States has a special responsibility to help make the world more secure.”³⁶

These different emphases are not incompatible. But they illustrate the different perceptions that informed the two documents and set the stage for a quite different vision of the major powers. Whereas the QDR emphasizes the possible reemergence of a peer competitor, the NSS saw an “historic opportunity:”

“Today, the international community has the best chance since the rise of the nation-state in the seventeenth century to build a world where great powers compete

³⁴ Condoleezza Rice, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, Wriston Lecture, Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, October 1, 2002.

³⁵ From the presidential cover letter to the NSS.

³⁶ Rice, “A Balance of Power that Favors Freedom.”

in peace instead of continually prepare for war. Today, the world's great powers find ourselves on the same side—united by common dangers of terrorist violence and chaos. The United States will build on these common interests to promote global security.... We will strongly resist aggression from other great powers—even as we welcome their peaceful pursuit of prosperity, trade, and cultural advancement.”³⁷

As Rice elaborated:

“What none of us should want is the emergence of a militarily powerful adversary who does not share our common values. Thankfully, this possibility seems more remote today than at any point in our lifetimes. We have an historic opportunity to break the destructive pattern of great power rivalry that has bedeviled the world since [the] rise of the nation state in the 17th century. Today, the world's great centers of power are united by common interests, common dangers, and—increasingly—common values. The United States will make this a key strategy for preserving the peace for many decades to come.”³⁸

There are some further differences between the 2001 QDR and the 2002 NSS of note for the topic of this paper. The QDR emphasizes cooperation with others, especially friends and allies, to contend with emerging threats, and it is difficult to find any reference to cooperation with China. The NSS, on the other hand, emphasizes cooperation with others, including especially the major powers—and China—to defend and extend the peace. The QDR suggests that the rise of other powers is likely to be a significant constraint on the exercise of American power. The NSS, on the other hand, welcomes such a rise, so long as it is consonant with the pursuit of common interests and common responsibilities. “We welcome the emergence of a strong, peaceful, and prosperous China.”³⁹

This thinking obviously reflected the fact that the NSS was largely a product of the 9/11 and its aftermath, whereas the 2001 QDR was largely a product of the pre-9/11 setting. It may also have reflected the influence of the national security advisor on the president and of the team of campaign advisors, the so-called Vulcans, of which she was leading member.⁴⁰ In an article in *Foreign Affairs* during the 2000 election campaign, Rice made a case for “a disciplined and consistent foreign policy that separates the important from the trivial” by emphasizing the national interest as a guide to shaping

³⁷ From the presidential cover letter to the NSS.

³⁸ Rice, “A Balance of Power that Favors Freedom.”

³⁹ *National Security Strategy*, p. 27.

⁴⁰ Elaine Sciolino, “Bush's Foreign Policy Tutor: An Academic in the Public Eye, *New York Times*, June 16, 2000, p. 1. See also Nicholas Lemann, “Without a Doubt: Has Condoleeza Rice changed George W. Bush, or has he changed her?” *New Yorker*, October 12-21, 2002, pp. 164-179.

power relationships and especially great-power politics.⁴¹ On those relationships, she argued:

“The most daunting task right now is to find the right balance in our policy toward Russia and China....China is not a status quo power....Some things take time. U.S. policy toward China requires nuance and balance. It is important to promote China’s internal transition through economic interaction while containing Chinese power and security ambitions. Cooperation should be pursued, but we should never be afraid to confront Beijing when our interests collide.”⁴²

Once in office, she argued that “our differences with Beijing should be put in a larger context.”⁴³ She also appears to have been the motivating force within the Vulcans for the notion that great-power rivalry is a thing of the past, as first embraced by the president in his June 2002 remarks at West Point, where he argued that “we have our best chance since the rise of the nation-state in the 17th century to build a world where the great powers compete in peace instead of prepare for war.”⁴⁴

With these contrasting emphases between the 2001 QDR and the NSS, it is hardly surprising that the NSS has a somewhat different logic of dissuasion. To be sure, the NSS echoes some of the main themes. “Our forces will be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States.”⁴⁵ As the president argued at West Point, where he first publicly introduced some of the major themes in the NSS, “America has, and intends to keep, military strengths beyond challenge.”⁴⁶ But the presidential focus is not so much the military investment decisions of potential adversaries, as it is the commitment of the political leadership of China and other states to the “new balance of power” he seeks post-9/11. The president has set out an ambitious effort to “develop agendas for cooperative action with the other main centers of global power.”⁴⁷ As the NSS describes it, “We are forging new, productive international partnerships and redefining existing ones in ways that meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.”⁴⁸ The presidential vision seems much more hopeful about the present and future of

⁴¹ Condoleeza Rice, “Promoting the National Interest,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 75, No. 1 (January/February 2000), pp. 45-62.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ “Bush, Rice Optimistic on China,” *Washington Post*, July 13, 2001, p. A-22.

⁴⁴ George W. Bush, Remarks by the President at the 2002 Graduation Exercise of the United States Military Academy at West Point, June 1, 2001.

⁴⁵ NSS, p. 30.

⁴⁶ Bush, remarks, June 1, 2001.

⁴⁷ NSS, Chapter VIII.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

strategic partnership with China, and seeks to channel China's rise by pursuing an expanding agenda of cooperative action. This contrasts with what seems to be a more pessimistic DoD view, which seems more certain of China's path to peer adversary and more interested in obstructing China's rise.

In short, the president seeks not only to discourage future peer adversarial military competition, but also to motivate deeper partnership today in pursuit of common interests, common responsibilities, and increasingly common values. Dissuasion strategies must serve both purposes. All of the tools of national power are to be focused on this end, including military ones.

This review of the logic of dissuasion points to two basic challenges for defense planners. The first derives from the fact that dissuasion remains underdeveloped conceptually and doctrinally. In the language of effects-based defense planning, administration leaders seem to know that they want some strategic effects related to future Chinese intentions, but there are various ideas at play about whether those effects are short or long term, military or political, operational or strategic. Defense planning isn't made any easier if the answer is "all of the above." To try to operationalize a concept that remains poorly developed risks making planning choices based on potentially idiosyncratic interpretations.

The second challenge derives from the apparent differences in the pre- and post-9/11 visions. People in the defense community seem not sure what to make of this difference. Some see a distinction without a difference, and argue that White House and DoD leadership are in full agreement about the concepts, means, and ends of dissuasion, and dismiss apparent differences as too subtle to be relevant. Others in the defense community see a meaningful distinction in the pre- and post-9/11 visions but describe this as a natural evolution and express confidence that DoD implementation strategies will accord with the post-9/11 vision. Still others in the defense community see a meaningful distinction but argue that the presidential vision is essentially "above our pay grade," focused as it is on all of the tools of national power, not just military tools. This latter view runs the obvious risk of leading to planning choices that the architects of the NSS might see as contrary to their purposes—i.e., as insufficiently promising in delivering the desired strategy cooperation, now and later.

In the analysis that follows, this paper does not favor one vision over the other. Instead, it attempts to highlight the ways in which alternative visions might shape alternative force planning decisions, and to explore the possible consequences, intended and otherwise, of different choices.

III. APPLYING THIS LOGIC TO CHINA

How might this theory of dissuasion be applied to China? What are the future competitions that the United States might want to persuade China not to initiate? How are these different from competitions for which deterrence is relevant? What does it mean to seek a sustainable U.S. advantage and how can this be done without incentivizing further forms of unwelcome competition by China? From what types of competitions can China *not* be dissuaded?

Answering these questions requires setting aside one of the most widely held beliefs among America's China watchers. That belief is simply that we know what kind of China is coming. Many of America's China watchers believe that China is destined to be America's peer adversary—after all, goes Mearsheimer's argument, there are “structural imperatives of the international system” that make the competition for hegemony inevitable.⁴⁹ Many others take a nearly opposite view, believing that China is destined to be a modern version of the old Middle Kingdom, prospering from the international status quo and not geopolitically adventuresome. Dissuasion implies a different view: the China to come is uncertain and many of its most important choices about its international role lie somewhere in the future. Dissuasion reflects the hope that the tools of American power can be used to shape the China to come. It reflects also the desire to look beyond the potential flashpoint in Taiwan to the “larger context” referred to by Condoleezza Rice.

In what sense is China at the strategic crossroads mentioned by Undersecretary Feith? How do we distinguish between choices already made and those not yet made, for which U.S. dissuasion strategies might be relevant? For purposes of this analysis, it is useful to distinguish three levels of decision-making: foreign policy, military policy, and grand strategy.

A. China's Foreign Policy

In the realm of foreign policy, China's leaders have pursued a largely consistent line over the last three decades. As China embarked on its reform and modernization effort in the mid-1980s, Deng Xiaoping set out a handful of key precepts to guide China's emerging world role.⁵⁰ The main trends in world politics, he asserted, were not toward major war and armed confrontation with China's ideological enemies, but instead

⁴⁹ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 402.

⁵⁰ See chapter 1, “Getting To Tiananmen,” in Robert L. Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen: The Politics of U.S.-China Relations, 1989-2000* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003).

were toward peace and development. In this context, China could focus inwardly on the challenges of development while at the same time building partnerships with its neighbors aimed at enhancing international stability and bolstering market economics. China leadership transition of 2003, with Jiang replaced by Hu Jintao as part of a more far-reaching generational turnover in the upper echelons of the Chinese Communist Party, seems not to have had an impact on this basic foreign policy perspective. Hu has continued to emphasize the dominant trends toward peace and development, China's desire for a stable international environment, the primary focus on domestic reform and modernization, and the utility of partnerships with others in accomplishing Chinese aims. Moreover, as a central theme in its own imprint on Chinese foreign policy, this new leadership team has sought to reassure its neighbors—and the United States—that it recognizes historically founded fears about the rise of a major power and that it sees the next two decades as a transition period in which China will both signal and demonstrate its commitment to rising peacefully.⁵¹

In the assessment of two U.S. analysts, China “has embraced much of the current constellation of international institutions, rules, and norms as a means to promote its national interests.”⁵² China's leaders have supported many U.S. initiatives in the global war on terrorism, including even the use of military measures in response to failed states.⁵³ They have also continued to welcome foreign direct investment in China, which grew by another \$61 billion in 2004.⁵⁴ They are playing a central role in the effort to persuade North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons. They have improved their compliance with their international treaty obligations, including to the World Trade Organization.⁵⁵ In the American vernacular, China's leaders are acting to signal their commitment to China's emergence as a status quo power

Accordingly, then-Secretary of State Colin Powell argued in winter 2004 as follows:

⁵¹ Evan Medeiros, “China's ‘Peaceful Rise.’”

⁵² Evan S. Medeiros and M. Taylor Fravel, “China's New Diplomacy,” *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 2003).

⁵³ Banning Garrett and Jonathan Adams, *U.S.-China Cooperation on the Problem of Failing States and Transnational Threats*, Special Report No. 126 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2004).

⁵⁴ Morrison, *China's Economic Condition*.

⁵⁵ On nonproliferation, see Lora Saalman and Jing-dong Yuan, *Practical Steps for Improving U.S.-China Cooperation on Arms Control and Nonproliferation*, Fifth U.S.-China Conference on Arms Control, Disarmament, and Nonproliferation (Monterey, Calif.: Center for Nonproliferation Studies of the Monterey Institute, 2005). For data on compliance in the economic realm, see *U.S.-China Trade: Observations on Ensuring China's Compliance with World Trade Organization Commitments*, Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission by Loren Yager, Director of International Affairs and Trade, U.S. Government Accountability Office, February 4, 2005, GAO-05-295T.

“U.S. relations with China are the best they have been since President Richard Nixon first visited Beijing more than 30 years ago. This is not just because the September 11 attacks led us to shuffle priorities....Neither we nor the Chinese believe that there is anything inevitable about our relationship any longer—either inevitably bad or inevitably good. Instead, we now believe that it is up to us, together, to take responsibility for our common future....We seek a constructive relationship. Indeed, we welcome a global role for China, so long as China assumes responsibilities commensurate with that role.”⁵⁶

Vice President Richard Cheney echoed this assessment in March 2005: “Generally, the relationship [with China] is in pretty good shape. That does not mean that we agree on everything.”⁵⁷

One thing the two countries do not agree on is nonproliferation. Over the last two decades, China has brought its nonproliferation practices into closer alignment with international treaty norms and with U.S. preferences. There was a time when China’s leaders believed that a general diffusion of high-leverage military capabilities was in the interests of international stability, because it weakened the capacity of the major powers to intervene in the affairs of others. But this has given way to a perception among China’s current leadership that WMD proliferation is destabilizing. Accordingly, China has over the last decade joined the relevant treaty regimes and offered its support to efforts by the United Nations Security Council to deal with challenges to those regimes. But China’s performance of its nonproliferation obligations continues to fall short of U.S. expectations. There are too many continuing reports of the exports of technologies and materials to proliferators that somehow the authorities in Beijing have been unable to prevent.⁵⁸ Some observers interpret these behaviors as suggesting a hidden foreign policy agenda, one aimed not at cooperation with the United States but at creating regional hot-spots to keep American attention and power focused away from China.⁵⁹ Others interpret them as signs of a growing pluralization in the Chinese policymaking process, in which some actors exploit their freedom of political maneuver at the expense of higher-level national policies.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Colin L. Powell, “A Strategy of Partnerships,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 1 (January/February 2004), p. 32.

⁵⁷ As reported in Jim VandeHei, “Cheney Defends Bush Appointments,” *Washington Post*, March 23, 2005.

⁵⁸ CRS report forthcoming.

⁵⁹ Mohan Malik, citation forthcoming.

⁶⁰ Citation forthcoming.

These arguments underscore that China's foreign policy practices are not fully aligned with U.S. preferences and that performance cannot improve.⁶¹ Important complaints remain about China's respect for various treaty obligations in the economic and security realm. Significant doubts remain about its willingness to pressure Pyongyang to finally abandon nuclear weapons. There is little doubt that China is emerging as a significant competitor for international energy resources.

There is little doubt that China seeks to increase its influence in Asia at the expense of the United States.⁶² But here too is a fundamental choice already made by China's leadership: the choice not to contest the presence of U.S. military forces in East and Central Asia. This is apparently a choice made in the context of a broader debate about the purposes of the United States in the world after the Cold War. The key tenets of Deng Xiaoping foreign policy noted above have not been without their dissenters and debate over those tenets grew especially intense in the 1990s.⁶³ The dissenters have focused on what they perceive to be the increasing willingness of the United States to use military power in the absence of the constraints imposed by a counterbalancing state, as well as its pursuit through ballistic missile defense and homeland defense of unfettered freedom of action, or what they termed "Absolute Security." In the 1990s, they were evidently trying in part to come to terms with the revelation that any military action against Taiwan would necessarily involve confrontation with the United States, a perception driven home by the U.S. response to the PLA's missile firings over Taiwan in 1994. Some pressed aggressively for U.S. disengagement from the region. In their view, the international landscape was marked by trends toward power politics and hegemonism. China's "new security concept," unveiled in the July 1998 defense white paper, was intended in part to signal China's "dissatisfaction and frustration with the unfolding international system."⁶⁴

Not surprisingly, Deng's successor, Jiang Zemin tried to fudge this debate by noting competing trends toward peace and development on the one hand, and power politics and hegemonism on the other, with the former dominant.⁶⁵ Jiang's successor,

⁶¹ For further analysis of these themes, see the annual reports of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission (Washington, D.C.).

⁶² Robert Sutter, "China's Rise in Asia: Bumps in the Road and Unanswered Questions," *PacNet 12*, March 17, 2005 (an electronic newsletter published by Pacific Forum CSIS, Honolulu, Hi.).

⁶³ See David M. Finkelstein, *China Reconsiders Its National Security: The Great 'Peace and Development Debate' of 1999* (Alexandria, Va.: CNA Corporation, 2000).

⁶⁴ David Finkelstein, "China's 'New Concept of Security'," in Stephen J. Flanagan and Michael E. Marti, editors, *The People's Liberation Army and China in Transition* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, 2003), p. 199.

⁶⁵ Finkelstein, *China Reconsiders Its National Security*. See also China's Defense White Paper of 2002.

Hu, has very much emphasized the peace-and-development theme. The December 2004 Defense White Paper noted again both themes, arguing that the “tendencies of hegemonism and unilateralism have gained new ground, as struggles for strategic points, strategic resources and strategic dominance crop up from time to time.”⁶⁶ But some recent Chinese commentary has suggested that unipolarity and a long-term American military presence in East Asia are in China’s interest, so long as they are not exploited by Washington in service of a strategy of encirclement and containment of China.⁶⁷

In sum, China’s foreign policy today reflects a choice to cooperate with its neighbors and the United States to promote international stability and regional security. It also reflects a choice to not contest the U.S. presence in Asia at this time. At a future time, China might choose differently—it might choose to challenge the United States and to confront its neighbors, politically and otherwise. Such choices would seem to be driven by developments in its grand strategy, as discussed in further detail below.

B. China’s Military Policy

China’s leaders have made a fundamental military choice: to prepare for a time when one of its red-lines on Taiwan is crossed and it must use military means to address the situation. Since the mid-1990s, preparing for this contingency has been understood in China as entailing the need to prepare for the likelihood of confrontation with the United States. There is no doubt that the modernization of Chinese military proceeds with a central focus on the requirements of success in the Taiwan Strait, including success in deterring and if necessary defeating U.S. forces deployed in support of Taiwan.⁶⁸ They have chosen to modernize China’s military forces with the hope of “leapfrog development” of the revolution in military affairs—with Chinese characteristics.⁶⁹ On the strategic side, they have chosen to upgrade capabilities “for deterring the enemy from using nuclear weapons against China, and carrying out nuclear counter-attacks and precision strikes with conventional missiles.”⁷⁰ But this is not to say everything that needs saying about choices made and not made in China’s military policy.

⁶⁶ *China’s National Defense in 2004*, from Chapter 2, “National Defense Policy.”

⁶⁷ As described in *ibid.*

⁶⁸ For more on the current modernization of the People’s Liberation Army see *FY04 Report to Congress on PRC Military Power* and China’s 2004 Defense White Paper, *China’s National Defense in 2004* (December 27, 2004).

⁶⁹ “Leapfrogging” evidently entails “the coordinated development of firepower, mobility and information capability” as the core of a PLA effort to the “transition from mechanization and semi-mechanization to informationalization.” See chapter 2, “National Defense Policy,” in *China’s National Defense in 2004*.”

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

China's leaders have also made some choices about how much to invest in military modernization. With the advent of Deng Xiaopeng's foreign policy four decades ago, military modernization dropped to fourth place in the list of "four modernizations." In the 1990s, as China's economy began to grow more rapidly, increased resources flowed to the Chinese military, though the rate of increase did not generally exceed the rate of increase in the size of the overall economy.⁷¹ China's current leadership has obviously continued the modernization of China's military—though not, apparently, with significantly increased resources.⁷² China's leaders might yet make a choice to invest at a significantly higher level in military modernization—though there are significant institutional, political, and demographic barriers to continued economic development.⁷³

Such a choice to dramatically increase military investment would necessarily entail a choice of another kind apparently not yet made—to develop a military posture enabling sustained power projection well beyond the Taiwan strait, whether in the broader maritime environment or into regions of growing economic or other importance to Beijing. Such ambitions have been oft discussed in China's military literature, but there is little evidence that they have so far been adequately resourced. Taiwan remains the focal point of China's military modernization. Of course, military forces constructed for the cross-strait power projection mission may have utilities elsewhere in China's security environment.

It also appears to be the case that the modernization of China's strategic forces proceeds on the basis of a basic leadership choice: to modernize in a way that preserves the viability of China's retaliatory forces in the face of developments in U.S. ballistic missile defenses. In combination with improving U.S. strategic strike capabilities, these defenses call into question the ability of China's nuclear forces to survive a first strike and retaliate effectively through the U.S. defensive shield. In the eyes of Chinese leadership, such an ability is essential to inducing the desired restraint by the United States in time of crisis over Taiwan. Their conviction to maintain the viability of this deterrent reflects the fundamental choice of many decades ago to acquire nuclear

⁷¹ As DoD has reported, "China was able to sustain double-digit increases in the announced defense budget from 1990 to 2002 and a 9.6 percent increase in 2003." See *FY04 Report to Congress on PRC Military Power*, Department of Defense, 2004. For data on comparable growth in Chinese GDP, see Wayne M. Morrison, *China's Economic Conditions*, CRS Issue Brief for Congress (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, March 2005).

⁷² *FY04 Report to Congress on PRC Military Power*.

⁷³ Morris Goldstein and Nicholas R. Lardy, *What Kind of Landing for the Chinese Economy?* Policy Briefs in International Economics No. PB04-7 (Washington, D.C.: Institute for International Economics, 2004) and Nancy E. Riley, *China's Population: New Trends and Challenges*, Population Bulletin (Washington, D.C.: Population Reference Bureau, 2004).

weapons and escape a world in which China is vulnerable to nuclear coercion. Accordingly, Chinese strategic force modernization appears to be scaled so as to keep pace with developments in the U.S. posture—and not to go any faster, as this would appear to legitimize further unwelcome developments in that U.S. posture. In considering Chinese military policy choices not yet made, it is important also to have in mind the possibility that China’s leaders might choose to modernize China’s strategic forces with a more ambitious goal than simply preservation of the very modest deterrent capability in being.⁷⁴

C. China’s Grand Strategy

When it comes to China’s grand strategy, the choices made and not (yet) made are much less easy to define. The nature of China’s grand strategy remains a subject of intense international debate. The potential impact of China’s increasing wealth and power on its foreign and defense policies are a made of deep interest—and concern. Uncertainty about such matters derives in part from the secrecy that prevails in China’s political system and indeed in its strategic culture, where it is seen as useful for deflecting attention from vulnerabilities and for masking operational stratagems that may be called into play.⁷⁵

Some American observers see China’s leaders as already having made the following basic grand strategy choices: to maximize China’s power, both hard and soft; to exercise regional hegemony, including through military power projection; and to join America as a globally dominant power in the 21st century and indeed to counterbalance U.S. influence globally.⁷⁶ As evidence, they tend to cite China’s proliferation policies, its preparations for military confrontation with the United States, and its occasional diplomatic dabbling in the Persian Gulf and other areas of strategic interest to the United States, including the Panama Canal. By this view, China’s current foreign policy is

⁷⁴ Brad Roberts, “Dissuasion and China: The New Triad and the Future of China’s Strategic Forces,” final project briefing, Institute for Defense Analyses, February 2004.

⁷⁵ See for example Caroline Ziemke’s case study on China that explores the impact of strategic personality and culture on the international behavior of states (Institute for Defense Analyses, forthcoming).

⁷⁶ For various perspectives on the debate identified here, see the following items: Ross H. Munro, “China: The Challenge of a Rising Power,” in Robert Kagan and William Kristol, *Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunity in American Foreign and Defense Policy* (San Francisco, Calif.: Encounter Books, 2000), pp. 47-73; Michael Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, 2000); Bill Gertz, *The China Threat* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Times, 1999); Robert G. Kaiser and Steven Mufson, “‘Blue Team’ Draws a Hard Line on Beijing,” *Washington Post*, February 22, 2000, p. A-1; Michael Swaine and Ashley J. Tellis, *Interpreting China’s Grand Strategy: Past, Present, and Future* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2000); Avery Goldstein, “The Diplomatic Face of China’s Grand Strategy: A Rising Power’s Emerging Choice,” *China Quarterly*, No. 168 (December 2001), pp. 846-855.

merely a ruse and its military preparations for Taiwan are merely a first step in its coming effort to contain American military power by military means. The only choice not yet made relates then to how much to spend to make this vision a reality.

Other observers see China's leaders as already having made a different set of basic grand strategy choices: to develop to "normalcy," to return to China's rightful place as an influential but not globally dominant power, and to support the status quo so long as it protects China's interests in peace, stability, and domestic reform—a status quo defined in terms of the existing distribution of military power internationally plus international norms and institutions. As evidence, they cite three to four decades of clear if uneven movement in China's foreign policy toward international norms and U.S. preferences and the still limited scope of China's military modernization. They tend to see China's egregious proliferation policies as a matter of the distant past, and they tend to interpret China's military modernization as aimed at not losing Taiwan rather than at acting preemptively. By this view, China's foreign policy is a much more accurate reflection of its grand strategy than suggested by the first camp above, on the argument that it reflects China's real interests in the real world of the 21st century. The choices not yet made relate then to possible departures from these choices when and if they are not seen as meeting China's national interests.

D. What Strategic Crossroads?

So let us return now to the main question: is China at a strategic crossroads? There are three basic possibilities to consider, each with a different implication for dissuasion.

The first is that China has passed the crossroads and is decisively if also somewhat secretly on the trajectory to long-term peer competition with the United States. In this case, dissuasion is aimed at disabusing China's leaders of the hope that they can pursue military modernization in a way that allows them to leapfrog into a situation of rough military equivalency with the United States. By this logic, the only remaining important strategic question for China's political leadership is how much of China's national wealth it might choose to spend in service of this objective. Dissuasion's objective ought be to impress upon them the high long-term cost of competing with the United States in this way with the hope that, over time, this erodes their willingness to invest and indeed erodes the intent to confront.

A second possibility is that China has passed the crossroads and is decisively on the trajectory to deeper partnership with the United States. The central question for

China's leaders must be whether the "new balance of power" sought by President Bush well serves China's national interests. Will the "just peace" he envisions in the 2002 NSS, and the associated bold use of American power in service of American values, work to the advantage or disadvantage of China—and its current regime? By this logic, the primary objective of dissuasion ought to be to reinforce the principles that have guided China's foreign relations since the end of the Maoist era, and to discourage future departures from them. The risk for U.S. policymakers is that they will compete with China in ways that strengthens the case of the dissenters to China's current foreign and military policies, thus increasing the risk of future policy reversals in Beijing.

The third possibility is that China's strategic crossroads lies somewhere in the future. By this logic, China's most important choices are not yet made. What will it do with its rising power? What instruments of its power, hard and soft, will it construct? China's future choices down this trajectory seem likely to be the function of many factors, of which U.S. dissuasion strategies are only a part. The personalities and preferences of individual leaders will matter, as will the development of a political system of checks and balances allowing a broader testing of ideas. The "security dilemma" will also contribute something—real restraints on China's ambitions as it has to contend with the likely or possible reactions to its increased power from its regional neighbors. Experience along the way will likely count for something as well—will the consequences of economic, political, and military choices already made be interpreted as positive or negative for China's interests? How will China's leaders come to understand both the costs of competition and the benefits of cooperation? Dissuasion seems relevant to both.

If China is in fact on this third trajectory, American leaders must take care to understand how American actions are interpreted in Beijing, given what those interpretations might imply about future choices by Beijing to depart from U.S. policy preferences. How the United States operationalizes dissuasion will also say something to China's leaders about America's future orientation to China's national interests. As noted above, the political debate in China about America's grand strategy and thus about the nature of China's future security environment is not fully settled. What America must China contend with? One that, in the words of the *National Security Strategy*, "welcomes a strong China," or one that seeks to encircle and contain China—and then confront it in ways aimed at regime removal? Whether decision-makers in Beijing perceive Washington as a friend or foe of China's security—with the obvious exception of Taiwan—will be critical in determining China's future foreign and defense policy

choices. Whether decision-makers in Washington put the Taiwan dispute at the center of the U.S.-PRC relationship will significantly influence Beijing's ability to also look to the larger context (but by no means, of course, the only influence).

Whichever of these three possibilities comes closest to the truth, one over-arching conclusion is warranted. Dissuading China from modernizing its military forces to gain military advantages for cross-strait operations is not possible. That choice has been made. The cross-strait issue is a problem for deterrence, not dissuasion. Moreover, it may well not be possible to deter China from military actions if the red-lines articulated in its Defense White Paper are crossed.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ See chapters 1 and 2, "The Security Situation" and "National Defense Policy" in *China's National Defense in 2004*.

IV. U.S. DEFENSE PLANNING AND DISSUASION

Defense planners do not have the luxury of waiting for theoretical debates to “mature” or for clarity about China’s grand strategy—rather, they must plan and invest now and make mid-course corrections later as warranted. Based on analogous experience, they have some sense of how to operationalize deterrence and defeat. But how might they proceed now to operationalize dissuasion of China?

Capabilities-based planning seeks in part to explore risks associated with different force planning options and strategies and the trade-offs among them across the array of challenges and threats in the emerging security environment. A risk trade-off methodology can be utilized also to explore alternative approaches to defense planning for dissuasion of China. The following analysis sketches four such approaches and considers the potential benefits and risks of each.

Approach #1: Impose Costs Aggressively

The Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA) has elaborated an approach to dissuasion that plans and postures U.S. forces in ways that increase the cost to China of specific programs of military modernization and also to reduce their expected benefits.⁷⁸ Those costs might be economic, diplomatic, or military in character. Reduction of the expected benefits would focus on convincing China’s leaders that the capabilities they seek are not survivable, cannot be used effectively because of superior defenses, or will simply be obsolete when fielded because the United States will have taken steps to change the very nature of military competition. CSBA envisions a combination of U.S. measures with the aim of making a dramatic impact on China’s cost/benefit calculus, though it leaves to policymakers the choice of how comprehensive and ambitious such an effort might be.

Operationalizing this strategy would involve designing and implementing a series of force transformation or modernization campaigns targeted on specific Chinese capabilities at both the conventional and strategic levels. At the conventional level, for example, CSBA suggests that China’s on-going modernization of its attack submarine force could be countered with an aggressive U.S. effort to improve its ability to conduct anti-submarine warfare operations in shallow water environments. Similarly, China’s efforts to field a high-technology air defense system could be blunted with continued U.S. advances in stealth technologies and improved stand-off attack capabilities.

⁷⁸ “*Dissuasion Strategy*” Seminar—Final Report.

At the strategic level, it should be possible to significantly blunt the expected coercive benefits of China's missile modernization effort through the deployment of ballistic missile defenses for the protection of the United States, Taiwan, and others in East Asia. Similarly, China's efforts to ensure a survivable second-strike nuclear missile force could be blunted by improved effectiveness of U.S. intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities and by improved strategic strike, both nuclear and non-nuclear.⁷⁹

In support of this cost-imposing strategy, sanctions and other economic tools could be exploited to influence China's cost-benefit calculus. CSBA suggests also the possible utility of steps for "intensifying existing internal security and stability challenges facing the government including ethnic strife, growing tensions between economics 'haves' and 'have nots,' and control over the flow of information into and within its borders."⁸⁰ The United States would seek the cooperation of friends and allies in East Asia and elsewhere in order to make such measures effective—and to signal the scale advantage America enjoys in such a competition because of its alliance relations in the region.⁸¹

This approach would focus dissuasion on the military investor—the PLA decision-maker with the freedom to allocate the marginal "defense dollar" against competing priorities. It would hope to induce that investor to spend money where he has little hope of gaining new leverage and at the expense of other capabilities. Over time, the cumulative effect might be a loss of confidence in the ability to "leapfrog" into "the RMA with Chinese characteristics."

This strategy for operationalizing dissuasion seems to accord well with the concepts of the 2001 QDR. But how might it relate to the concepts of the 2002 NSS? To be more precise, how might it translate into the desired positive impact on political intentions for cooperation in the "new balance of power." The "competitive strategies" notion, noted above, is suggestive in this regard. Drawing on the Soviet experience in the 1980s, this notion suggests that the cumulative effect of rising military costs and declining military advantages might ultimately persuade the political leadership to abandon geopolitical and strategic competition, as communist leaders in Moscow did in the mid to late 1980s.

⁷⁹ CSBA has provided some additional examples, citing China's efforts to develop cruise missiles, radio-frequency weapons, space-denial capabilities, anti-navy capabilities, and tailored-yield nuclear weapons. See *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

This seems like a poor analogy for the current circumstance. China of the current decade is not the Soviet Union of the 1980s. The Soviet Union was nearing fiscal bankruptcy. It had passed into ideological bankruptcy. Its leaders lost the willingness to use force in Eastern Europe to maintain control of events. China today faces many economic challenges but has increasing fiscal resources that could be used for military affairs. Socialism has not passed completely into ideological bankruptcy in China; in any case, Chinese nationalism remains a potent force for consolidating support of the state. And if the Tiananmen bloodletting in 1989 is still a relevant indicator, the leadership has not lost the will to use force to maintain control. In the Soviet case, the external pressures associated with the competitive strategies approach clearly combined with mounting internal crisis to accelerate fundamental change; in the Chinese case, it is far from clear that the internal factors have mounted to so precarious a place for the regime or that external pressures might not have the opposite of the intended effect, decelerating rather than accelerating political reform.

In fact, an aggressive cost-imposing strategy could work against the NSS objectives. Recall the debate among China's leaders about the nature of U.S. intentions vis-à-vis China's rising power and their suspicions that the United States does not welcome China's rise but seeks to contain it. The aggressive cost-imposing strategy could be read in Beijing to signal a U.S. choice to encircle and contain China as a response to its rising power—a choice that has not been made in U.S. strategy. How? A focused effort to negate China's efforts to maintain a viable strategic deterrent in the face of the New Triad could be interpreted in China as signaling American intent to overturn the strategic status quo and the principle of mutual vulnerability as a cornerstone of stability among the major powers—something Beijing seems deeply committed to preserve. A focused effort to deny China's effort to “leapfrog” could be interpreted in China as signaling American intent to deny China effective options to defend its interests by conventional military means. In combination, these could be interpreted in China as foreshadowing a U.S. effort to exploit its new freedom of maneuver at China's expense, whether in the Taiwan strait or elsewhere. In this regard, it is useful to bear in mind the conviction of many Chinese that China's position of weakness has often been exploited, not least early in the nuclear era when the United States enjoyed a one-sided advantage and employed nuclear threats in order to coerce China while also using conventional forces along its periphery—and while hostile to the values of its leadership. Chinese experts and leaders are prepared to believe that Washington has a secret plan—indeed, an instinct—for coercing China. Steps to operationalize dissuasion that confirm this fear are

likely to erode China's cooperation in the war on terrorism and in nonproliferation of such value to the United States, while also increasing the risks of a countervailing Chinese cost-imposing strategy on those U.S. interests.

Moreover, the cost-imposing strategy imposes costs upon China for military modernization even in the absence of its choice to compete militarily for peer advantage. In this scenario, the United States treats China as a strategic competitor even in the absence of a Chinese choice to compete in this way. This would seem to work against the arguments of those in Beijing who believe in the benefits for China of cooperation with the United States. Others would argue that Washington's assurances that it "welcomes a strong China" are merely a ruse to pacify China's leaders while America prepares for confrontation. If those arguments prevail in Chinese foreign and defense policymaking, significant departures in those policies could result..

There are some other potential consequences of the aggressive cost-imposing strategy that deserve consideration. It is useful here to recall the possible trade-offs among dissuasion, assurance, deterrence, and defeat.

An aggressive, across-the-board cost-imposing strategy may also weaken deterrence in the short term. For example, it may reinforce the belief of those in Beijing who argue that "early war is better than later war." In their view, Beijing should seek a military resolution to the Taiwan issue sooner rather than later, on the argument that time is not on its side in the US-PRC military competition.

The aggressive cost-imposing approach may also work against the assurance of U.S. friends and allies in East Asia. Those friends and allies seek to avoid a situation of increasing hostility between China and the United States, knowing that in such a world they would face the uncomfortable circumstance of being recruited by Washington into a containment strategy openly aimed at China. Some allies might seek to distance themselves from the United States, or at least from some important regional U.S. policy preferences, if they perceive an intensification of arms racing between China and the United States *in combination with* a perception that the U.S. cost-imposing strategy is largely to blame. They would certainly have misgivings about the economic and political costs to them of being drawn into a U.S. effort to sanction and weaken the Chinese economy.

Such a strategy may also work against dissuasion of Russia. With the New Strategic Framework and the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT), the Bush administration has sought partnership with Moscow in moving away from mutual assured

destruction as a cornerstone of the strategic relationship and in reducing reliance on nuclear weapons. It has proceeded with U.S. nuclear reductions and with planning for the New Triad in ways aimed at protecting the ability to reconstitute nuclear forces if Moscow chooses not to continue the reductions process or otherwise seeks to gain new nuclear advantages. For the near term, this reconstitution ability depends heavily on rapid redeployment of existing warheads and weapon systems; over the longer term the emphasis will shift to a flexible infrastructure capable of producing new warheads and weapons in timely fashion (assuming the necessary investments are made). The challenges of dissuading Russia and China are not entirely separable. Conceivably, a cost-imposing strategy aimed at denying China a survivable second-strike nuclear force could motivate China to respond with a substantial increase in the number of deployed nuclear strike systems. This in turn would likely be met with stepped up U.S. efforts to deploy compensating strike and defense capabilities. Surveying this unfolding PRC-U.S. competition for strategic leverage, decision-makers in Moscow could well anticipate a substantial increase in the Chinese nuclear threat as well as the future deployment by the United States of a missile defense effective enough to negate a small Russian nuclear strike force. This might fuel a Russian decision to take additional steps to restore its nuclear forces, including its theater missile force, and the United States would then find itself in a complicated three-sided search for nuclear stability.⁸²

Approach #2: Prepare for the “Second Move Advantage”

The central notion here would be to impress China with an American ability to out-compete it in any competition of China’s choosing—but to offer restraint in exchange for China’s choice not to compete.⁸³ Rather than impose costs across a broad array of PRC military modernization projects, this strategy would emphasize the threat to impose costs if such modernization is seen to promise significant new operational advantages for the PRC. The dissuasive effect would derive from the threat of competition rather than the competition itself. A U.S. choice to refrain from competition would be contingent upon the choice by Beijing not to modernize in ways that significantly alter existing capability balances.

⁸² For a further exploration of these questions, see Brad Roberts, *Tripolar Stability: The Future of Nuclear Relations Among the United States, Russia, and China* (Alexandria, Va.: Institute for Defense Analyses, 2002).

⁸³ CSBA describes this as a possible approach but does not explore how it might be operationalized as a central organizing principle.

Operationalizing such a strategy would entail an increased U.S. emphasis on a responsive infrastructure capable of rapidly turning advanced R&D projects into fielded new capabilities in response to strategic warning of threatening Chinese preparations. As with the cost-imposing strategy, this approach would be operationalized at both the conventional and strategic levels.

At the conventional level, the United States is highly unlikely to choose to inhibit its pursuit of transformation out of deference to a choice to offer restraint toward China. But the how it transforms, and toward what end, remain open questions. The cost-imposing strategy emphasizes campaigns of modernization focused on specific PRC force investments. In the “second move advantage” approach, such campaigns might focus instead on the irregular, catastrophic, and disruptive challenges (identified in the 2005 *National Defense Strategy*) but be designed to be rapidly adaptable if China prepares to field significant new power projection capabilities.

At the strategic level, preparing for the second move advantage would entail proceeding with the New Triad in a way that leaves open the question of whether it might at some future time be more directly “pointed at” China with the aim of negating the value of its deterrent force against the United States, when and if China’s own modernization threatens the strategic status quo. “Pointing the New Triad at China” would entail tailoring global and theater strike systems for preemptive strike on China’s military forces and tailoring missile defenses in the region and globally to eliminate China’s capacity for both first strike and retaliation. Preparing to “point” in this way would put the burden of operationalization on the infrastructure leg of the New Triad, where the U.S. would cultivate the capabilities in the nuclear weapons complex but also in the infrastructures for non-nuclear strike and for missile defense to enable the necessary future flexibility.

This second strategy for operationalizing dissuasion contrasts with the first in various additional ways. The focus of this dissuasion strategy would be China’s political leaders, not its military ones. The strategy would be communicated to them as one that premises U.S. restraint on PRC restraint in its military and foreign policies. Economic tools would be employed as a way to demonstrate the benefits of cooperation. The role of cooperation would be work with China on common interests and responsibilities as opposed to work with others for the containment of China.

Such a strategy may have the political effect of reassuring China’s political leadership that no significant departures are necessary from current policy to protect

China's interests. This would not eliminate the Taiwan flashpoint or PLA preparations for war across the strait, but it might make it more difficult for military leaders to win significant new resources from political leaders.

But here too there may be unintended and unwelcome consequences. This approach may work against the assurance of U.S. friends and allies—at least, of those friends and allies who might worry that the United States is appeasing a rising power and not acting to protect their interests in security vis-à-vis China. And too much U.S. restraint may weaken deterrence of China over Taiwan, by suggesting timidity in the face of rising Chinese power and/or a lack of competence against the types of new capabilities that China may develop covertly.

Approach #3: Mix Competition and Restraint

The central notion here would be to clearly segregate the conventional and strategic levels and to compete aggressively at the former while exercising restraint at the latter. This strategy would seek the benefits of the cost-imposing strategy at the conventional level, as elaborated above—namely, a cumulative loss of confidence in its efforts to “leapfrog.” And it would seek the benefits of the mutual restraint strategy at the strategic level, acquiescing to Chinese efforts to compensate for weaknesses in the conventional balance with steady improvements to its strategic posture, on the argument that such efforts do not materially affect the existing mutual vulnerability.

Operationalizing this strategy would involve implementation of the campaigns at the conventional level specified in approach #1 and of restraint at the strategic level specified in approach #2. Political and economic tools could be expected to play a strong supporting role, but also a complex and sometimes ambiguous one.

Such an approach may have the desired effect of eroding China's confidence in the strategic fruits of its conventional military modernization effort. It might also ultimately have the benefit of discouraging China's military leaders from “pouring good money after bad” in the search for advantage across the Taiwan strait. But by not denying China the benefit it seeks in its limited nuclear deterrent force, this strategy may have the affect of assuaging Chinese fears of U.S. nuclear coercion. This ought to reinforce their current willingness to seek cooperative strategies with the United States for regional and global problems.

This mixed approach might not have some of the risks associated with the prior approaches. It would seem to entail fewer risks for the assurance of allies, by suggesting

that the United States will not allow the military competition over Taiwan to somehow spoil the strategic relationship. And it would seem to entail fewer risks for the dissuasion of Russia, by allaying its concerns about a PRC-U.S. offense-defense arms race.

But there are risks in the mixed approach. One is that China might succeed in covertly developing rapid break-out capabilities for a significantly more robust strategic posture. Another is that China might conclude that it must exploit that posture in a confrontation over Taiwan before its window of opportunity closes as America responds to improvements in China's strategic forces.

Approach #4: Bet on Transformation

The central notion here would be to pursue the advantages of force transformation as a general virtue for the U.S. military and without particular focus on China, on the bet that such transformation promises significant asymmetric advantages of America's own in any future confrontation with a near-peer adversary. Operationalizing this strategy would involve proceeding aggressively with transformation of U.S. conventional and strategic forces but without tailoring them into campaigns focused on specific Chinese military modernization efforts.

Such a strategy might go far toward "changing the terms of the military competition" as suggested above and thus pay significant dividends for the dissuasion effort. But the dividends of this effort may well be a decade or two or more away. Moreover, to the extent Chinese military leaders perceive U.S. force transformation as aimed at rogue and non-state adversaries of the United States, wishful thinking may take over. They may conclude that there is nothing in that transformation, however bold the vision and rapid the progress, that promises war-winning improvements in a U.S. posture that they want to believe cannot call into question their ability to project force across the Taiwan Strait, to prevail in timely fashion against local forces, and to deal with the U.S. role through extended deterrence.

This review of alternative approaches illustrates the different core concepts that might guide the planning of U.S. force postures for the dissuasion of China and how they might be integrated with other tools of policy. It also highlights the fact that each alternative has potential benefits and risks, especially when viewed in the broader assure-dissuade-deter-defeat construct. These are abstract approaches, aimed at illustrating these potential benefits and risks.

V. KEY RELATED POLICY QUESTIONS

Choosing among these alternatives is not simply a matter of choosing which approach promises the most benefits and the fewest risks. Choosing requires also making some choices of a fundamental kind about the nature of the strategic relationship that the United States seeks with China. This analysis explores three such choices.

The first of these relates to regime change in Beijing: is regime change a possible objective of U.S. dissuasion strategies and indeed of possible U.S. military action in time of confrontation over the Taiwan Strait? The competitive strategies approach of the 1980s was very much focused on regime change and it is reasonable to ask whether its application in today's different strategic context might hold out similar promise. But the desire for regime change through the application of military pressure would appear inconsistent with the vision elaborated in the *National Security Strategy*: of a China with which the United States has common interests, common responsibilities, and increasingly common values. Rather, the strategy seeks to change China's internal political structures by giving China's leaders incentives for cooperation and reform, in combination with disincentives to competition.

The second choice relates to BMD: should America's emerging ballistic missile defenses be capable of negating the value to China of its nuclear deterrent against the United States or should it be structured in a way that tolerates continued mutual vulnerability? The American debate on BMD has been much clearer about posturing for the rogue states and for Russia than for China. The Bush administration is committed to deploying a defense that will effectively negate any strategic leverage the rogues might seek through nuclear-tipped missiles without threatening the viability of Russia's deterrent force. There appears to be little agreement in the body politic about whether America's interests are better served by negating or protecting the viability of China's deterrent against the United States.⁸⁴ This question has generated some intense debate but so far has proven unnecessary to answer, as the technologies to implement a decision to negate even small missile forces are not yet in hand.

The third question relates to restraint: is restraint of any kind in America's interest in the face of China's rising power or is restraint simply a form of appeasement? Some in the U.S. strategic community accept restraint as necessary and even sometimes a virtue, but others do not. Their thinking tends to draw on the critique of democracy first

⁸⁴ Brad Roberts, *China-U.S. Nuclear Relations: What Relationship Best Serves U.S. Interests?* (Alexandria, Va.: Institute for Defense Analyses, 2002).

made by Alexis de Tocqueville, who was concerned in part with the potential deficiency of democracy in regard to the conduct of foreign policy. He argued that democracies are responsive to public instinct and except in moments of populist outrage, the instinct is for peace and domestic tranquility; thus democracies are averse to war, except when utterly compelled by circumstance.⁸⁵ One result, goes the argument, is that rising challengers are not met until much too late in the game, when the challenger's ambitions have been nourished by the feckless procrastinations of democratic powers. Thus if democracies are to succeed in the game of power politics they must clearly see their temptation to appease and resist it at every turn. As two pundits closely linked to the Bush administration have argued, "it is the appeasers who wind up leading us into war."⁸⁶ Deference to the interests of other powers can thus be interpreted as a form of appeasement and an abandonment of the responsibility to use power to shape the international system.⁸⁷

Answers to these questions are beyond the purview of this paper. But the choice of how to operationalize dissuasion of China will either explicitly or implicitly draw on thinking about these three fundamental questions. If restraint is anathema, if mutual vulnerability is unacceptable, if regime change in Beijing is a high U.S. military priority, then the only logical strategy for operationalizing dissuasion is the first—to aggressively impose cost. If, however, the United States is willing to take some risks in these various matters, the other options are more appropriate.

⁸⁵ "It is especially in the conduct of their foreign relations that democracies appear to me decidedly inferior to other governments....Foreign politics demand scarcely any of those qualities which are peculiar to a democracy; they require, on the contrary, the perfect use of almost all of those in which it is deficient." Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), p. 234.

⁸⁶ William Kristol and Robert Kagan, "A National Humiliation," *Weekly Standard*, April 16, 2001.

⁸⁷ This paragraph is drawn from Brad Roberts, *American Primacy and Major Power Concert: A Critique of the 2002 National Security Strategy* (Alexandria, Va.: Institute for Defense Analyses, 2002), p. 72.

VI. THE ROLE OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

Force posture planning alone seems unlikely to achieve the objectives of dissuasion. As the preceding analysis has illustrated, military tools must be coordinated with economic and political ones with the hope of reinforcing chosen national objectives. Because dissuasion is a strategy aimed at signaling something about future *American* intentions (to address a future challenge), it seems that a strategic communication strategy ought to play a significant role in clarifying those intentions.

In the case of approach #1, the requirements for a strategic communication strategy would seem to be fairly minimal. In a strategy aimed at imposing costs, the costs would speak for themselves. On the other hand, there would likely be an important mixed-signals problem to address—unless somehow the processes of economic integration are disrupted, the signals from U.S. economic and political actors that China is a valued partner could run at cross purposes to the intended signals from the military planner. Moreover, because of the potential negative repercussions of the cost-imposing strategies on the assurance of friends and allies (including Russia), explaining to them the virtues and wisdom of the cost-imposing strategy would be a significant requirement.

In the case of approaches #2-4, the requirements for a strategic communication strategy would be more significant. To varying degrees in these postures, the United States would be offering China a tacit bargain—restraint for restraint. In approach #2, where the United States prepares for the second move advantage, the message to China must be “don’t take the first move and we won’t need to take the second.” In approach #3, where the United States competes aggressively at the conventional level but not at the strategic level, the message to China must be “don’t compensate for conventional disadvantage by initiating an arms race at the strategic level, where we can out-race you to any advantage you may seek.” In approach #4, where the United States bets on transformation, the message to China must be “if you abandon our vision of the *National Security Strategy* and act to undermine the peace we are laboring to defend, preserve, and extend, you will have made yourself our enemy and the focal point of our military posture.” In other words, the mutual and contingent character of any restraint accepted by the United States must be clearly communicated to China if there is to be any hope of linking the means and ends of dissuasion.

In the Chinese political system, strategic communication starts at the top. This is the business of summits and on-going high-level exchanges. But once the top-down framework is established, bottom-up processes can reinforce and amplify top-level

messages. From the U.S. perspective, this puts a burden on a coordinated interagency process that infuses political, economic, and military-to-military contacts with a consistent set of messages. The need for an interagency process that more effectively supports U.S. security objectives has already come into focus for defense planners. There is also a growing recognition of the importance of coordinating U.S. actions with those of its allies and partners abroad. This is as important on dissuasion as on deterrence, defeat, and assurance.

The reciprocal, contingent character of the restraint embodied in postures 2-4 echoes the type of restraint historically codified in arms control agreements. In present circumstances, it is difficult to imagine a formal arms control mechanism that would express in legal or political language the understandings implicit to postures 2-4. This is not to say that arms control plays no role in the U.S.-PRC strategic relationship—indeed, the membership of both countries in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, and the Chemical Weapons Convention provide a context for joint action against WMD proliferation and for the joint responsibilities referred to in the *National Security Strategy*. Whether informal diplomatic mechanisms might somehow support the objectives of dissuasion remains largely unexplored. The case for a formal mechanism is that it might contribute clarity to the intended bargain, including a clear understanding of the consequences of the failure to live up to the bargain, while also enhancing the perception of predictability among interested bystanders (i.e., friends and allies). The case for an informal mechanism is that it would enhance the flexibility to respond to changing circumstances. The New Strategic Framework pursued by the Bush administration with Russia offers one potential mechanism or model, although China is conspicuous by its absence from any discussion of that Framework.⁸⁸ The strategic stability dialogue pursued with China in the wake of U.S. withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty has offered a venue for possible further exploration of the means and ends of dissuasion, although it is difficult to find evidence that this dialogue has contributed anything significant to development of the bilateral strategic relationship.⁸⁹ The bilateral U.S.-PRC dialogue announced in spring 2005, to be led on the U.S. side by Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick, may make a significant contribution.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Roberts, *Tripolar Stability*.

⁸⁹ This conclusion is drawn from interviews with members of the Bush administration and with Chinese experts conducted in autumn 2004.

⁹⁰ Glenn Kessler, "U.S., China Agree to Regular Talks," *Washington Post*, April 8, 2005, pp. A-17, 19.

A. Chinese Reactions to Dissuasion⁹¹

It is difficult also to find evidence that the concept of dissuasion has been communicated to interested Chinese observers. On the basis of interviews conducted during three visits to China in 2004, this author finds almost no familiarity with the concept among experts in China's analytical community, think tanks, and key governmental institutions. Very few Chinese experts who are otherwise conversant with Sino-U.S. security issues understand the problem that dissuasion is intended to address or the potential contributions of military planning to objectives other than deterrence and defeat. This was true even among that small community conversant with the Bush administration's 2001 QDR and *National Security Strategy*. But this is not to imply that there is zero familiarity or interest. It is useful to think of two categories of Chinese reactions to dissuasion. Some interpret the concept through the filter of their own prior understanding of Bush administration strategy and see in it confirmatory evidence of their prior beliefs. Others have sought to set aside preconceptions to try to come to terms with dissuasion in its own right.

Let's begin with the first category. Some Chinese interpret dissuasion through what they perceive to be America's quest for "Absolute Security"—the unfettered freedom of action mentioned above. Many Chinese experts see the United States as bent on global hegemonic dominance, now that the strategic counterweight of the former Soviet Union is gone. These analysts see the main impulses of the Clinton and Bush administrations in largely similar terms. They define absolute security as a state in which the United States enjoys "freedom from attack and freedom to attack," to cite the language of *Joint Vision 2020*.⁹² They see the United States as moving aggressively to maximize its hard power and to keep the rest of the world in awe and/or fear of that power. From this perspective, dissuasion is another statement of America's intention to maintain that hard power advantage and it is intended to induce fear among those whom Washington deems its enemies. It is confirmation that America intends to escape once and for all the balance of power—including even limited mutual vulnerability.

⁹¹ This section summarizes the results of the research project noted above. The project was sponsored by the Advanced Systems and Concepts Office of the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, the purpose of which was to identify Chinese reactions to dissuasion. An effort was made to canvas a broad cross-section of experts interested in Sino-U.S. security affairs. The result was broad-based but undoubtedly not comprehensive. There was limited but important access to officials in addition to experts in the academic and analytical communities. No official with whom this author interacted reported any effort by a U.S. government official to elaborate to them the concept of dissuasion.

⁹² *Joint Vision 2020*, Department of Defense, 2000.

Other Chinese interpret dissuasion in terms of what they understand of the 2001 QDR. Among China's political-military elite, that QDR was closely studied and widely interpreted as signaling America's increasing focus on and planning for military confrontation with China. It was also seen as confirming the control of U.S. defense planning by the "Blue Team" mentioned above. These experts are aware that the QDR led to a reallocation of U.S. strike forces in the Pacific to China's disadvantage in time of conflict. By their reading of the QDR, dissuasion is intended to help recreate the strategic imbalance of the 1950s, a time that they remember for the nuclear threats over Quemoy, Matsu, and Korea emanating from Washington and for which they, as a non-nuclear state, had no reply. In their view, the position of U.S. advantage intended in dissuasion would be used by the United States in the same way that it used its previous unilateral nuclear advantage to coerce China. Chinese experts currently debate the degree to which the Blue Team might have lost control of U.S. policy after 9/11, and accordingly will read the 2005 QDR looking for indicators.

The 2002 Nuclear Posture Review was less widely read than the 2001 QDR by Chinese experts, but it was well studied by a few. In general, they see it as signaling developments in the U.S. posture that will drive further changes in China's own strategic posture and may alter its modernization strategy. They see it also as signaling an increased willingness of the United States to use nuclear weapons for political and operational purposes in a Taiwan contingency. In this light, dissuasion is seen as "coercive, even threatening, like the rest of the NPR" (in the words of one retired general).⁹³

In sum, these commentators generally have looked through the filter of their beliefs about the QDR, NPR, and what else they understand of the Bush administration's worldview as they seek to understand dissuasion. They tend to see the notion of dissuasion as confirming whatever they may already have come to believe about the strategic orientation of the Bush administration. But others look a bit further.

Some of those others are closely associated with the effort to elaborate the "peaceful rise" theory for China's new leadership. As noted above, this is the concept by which China signals its commitment to emerge as a status quo power by deepening its engagement with existing international institutions, processes, and norms over the next two decades. This group seems to have done some thinking about whether or how to

⁹³ For more on China's reactions to the 2002 NPR, see Brad Roberts, *China's View of the U.S. Nuclear Threat: A Post-NPR Survey* (Alexandria, Va.: Institute for Defense Analyses, 2004). FOUO.

compete with the United States over the coming two to three decades, leading them to conclude that “it is too much trouble to compete with or replace the United States as #1.” In the view of one influential Chinese expert on America, “if dissuasion helps convince the United States that China won’t be a major military competitor, then this helps to achieve the basic objective of ‘peaceful rise’—reassurance of Washington. But it’s a waste of American money.”

There is some concern in this camp about the possible negative impact of dissuasion on the processes of internal reform. By this view, China is moving down an uncharted pathway toward its future emergence as a modern, normal state and society in a process that puts economic reform first and political reform second—and this process is being led by a Communist Party elite that sees itself as under a great deal of domestic pressure. To the extent dissuasion is intended to add international pressure to this domestic pressure, it may work against the objective of continued reform in China, goes the argument, by inducing even deeper caution among the leadership group.

Analysts in China’s nuclear community also have probed a bit beyond the conventional Chinese wisdoms about U.S. policy and strategy. Many experts in that community (as elsewhere in the Chinese policy and analytical communities) believe that the United States wants to tempt or trick them into an arms race. In their view, Washington used just such a trick to cause the collapse of the Soviet Union. Some see dissuasion as being promoted by the same people who promoted Star Wars, and they are adamant about not being “tricked in the way the Soviets were.” Moreover, they believe that China does not need to win an arms race to have the strategic posture necessary to its purposes. They are deeply skeptical, moreover, that the United States would ever move away from deterrence as the dominant concept in U.S. nuclear planning (thus rejecting the assure-dissuade-deter-defeat catechism). In the words of one member of China’s nuclear weapons laboratory community: “Labels may change but the strategy never does.”

A couple of analysts in this group express concern about the impact on China’s strategic interests of Russia’s reactions to U.S. dissuasion strategies. They worry that Russia might modernize a larger than planned nuclear force in response to America’s “responsive force” and recreate the theater forces currently banned by the Treaty on Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces.

Lastly, some Chinese experts advocate a broader Sino-U.S. strategic partnership. They seem open to the possibility that the vision of dissuasion embodied in the *National*

Security Strategy, with its explicit focus on deepening partnership and mutual restraint, can provide the foundation for a new strategic relationship that transcends mutual assured destruction. They are interested in further dialogue on how this might be so. In the words of one expert, “We can see the threatening side of dissuasion clearly enough but we are not very familiar with the softer side.” They ask: “What’s in it for China?” They worry about how China’s efforts to modernize its forces in ways they see as aimed at maintaining stable, asymmetric deterrence might induce political reactions in Washington that work against deeper strategic cooperation.

These Chinese reactions to dissuasion are catalogued here not to imply that they predict official-level reactions to the future U.S. dissuasion posture. Rather, they illustrate the challenges of an effective strategic communication strategy. The targets of dissuasion seem largely ignorant of its objectives. Perhaps this is as it should be, given the possibility that dissuasion might engender responses the United States considers unhelpful. In earlier times, Chinese experts bristled at the notion of China being “shaped” (as in the “shape, respond, prepare” from the 1994 QDR) and of being somehow led to evolve peacefully. On the other hand, to the extent that some have formed impressions of the means and ends of dissuasion, their misperceptions are likely to be a barrier to the effective pursuit of U.S. objectives. How to integrate the various tools of national policy and power in pursuit of those objectives remains largely unexplored.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Operationalizing dissuasion invokes a series of questions that have gone largely unexplored and un-debated by the U.S. policy community. Force planning for dissuasion cannot proceed very far in the absence of such thinking and debate. But neither can it wait for all of the analytical pieces to come fully together—an unlikely circumstance in any case, given the very different instincts about China at play in the defense community.

As a first-order question, military planners must decide whether the White House vision of dissuasion is “above their pay grade” or not. Adhering closely to the vision of the 2001 QDR eases the challenges of planning for dissuasion, but it is unlikely to produce a result that is fully consistent with the vision of the *National Security Strategy*, whose authors ask that operationalization of dissuasion not just discourage China from initiating future military competitions but also protect and deepen partnership now and over the longer term.

Second, posturing for dissuasion only makes sense if one believes that it is possible to shape China’s rise. America’s debate on China is dominated by people who have already made up their minds about the future China. Some see China’s emergence as America’s next peer adversary as largely inevitable; others see a near inevitability in China’s emergence as a power whose economic and security interests make it deeply committed to the status quo. Dissuasion is based on a different view—that the China to come is not foreordained. By this view, Washington can use its power to provide the mix of incentives and disincentives that increase the likelihood that China’s emergence will be consonant with the vision of common interests, common responsibilities, and increasingly common values.

Third, dissuasion is not intended to be pursued in isolation from assurance, deterrence, and defeat, and the Sino-U.S. relationship cannot be fully isolated from other important U.S. relations in the region. This points to the necessity of a complex balancing act.

Fourth, dissuasion is not simply a logical consequence of a posture tailored to meet the operational requirements of “defeat” in wartime. Neither is effective deterrence, for that matter.

Fifth, the tools of dissuasion can be combined in various ways for various effects. Each combination considered here has potential unintended and negative consequences. Cost-imposing strategies may settle China’s leadership debate about the United States in

the wrong way, leading to new types and levels of competition. This may weaken cross-strait deterrence if it causes China's leaders to conclude "better early war than later war." Success in closing off China's pursuit of advantage through "the RMA with Chinese characteristics" may lead to compensatory developments that are less amenable to targeted dissuasion strategies. These could take place in its strategic posture, for example, or in its portfolio of Assassin's Mace activities and/or its proliferation practices. This raises a fundamental question about which pathway for Chinese force modernization best serves U.S. interests.

Sixth, formulating a posture with long-term viability requires answering some fundamental questions about regime change, BMD, and American restraint. Unless some measure of consensus is found around those answers, future American policy seems likely to prove inconsistent and wavering, which would nourish a Chinese hope that dissuasion, and other current policy concepts as well, might be abandoned as soon as a new administration arrives in Washington.

Seventh, any dissuasion strategy that involves a tacit or explicit bargain for restraint puts a large burden on the integration of the tools of policy and on an effective strategic communication strategy. At present, these seem poorly developed.

Lastly, there are many barriers to progress in operationalizing dissuasion. Defense planners have had to contend with many significant distractions from the 2001 QDR framework (9/11, GWOT, and Iraq among them). But there are other factors of note. One is the fact that very different assumptions and beliefs about China's future continue to percolate just beneath the surface impression of support for the vision and agenda embodied in the *National Security Strategy*, which some in the defense community frankly see as a bluff, aimed at buying time while Washington is preoccupied with other distractions. This hints at the acrimony that colors discussion of these matters within the defense community. The debate about America's defense strategy toward China is increasingly dominated by the extremes, who typically hold the views of the opposing camp in contempt. This has obstructed reasoned testing of new ideas. This also works against the measures of bipartisanship sufficient to a sustained, consistent American approach to China over the coming decades of its rise.

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14. ABSTRACT The 2005 QDR brings with it questions about how to operationalize dissuasion in U.S. military planning. Doing so requires coming to terms with continued confusion about the means and ends of dissuasion. Especially important will be balancing the desire to discourage military competition by China with the desire to encourage strategic partnership. Operationalizing dissuasion can be done in a variety of ways, with at least four different organizing principles: (1) aggressively impose costs and reduce benefits, (2) prepare for the second move advantage, (3) mix competition at the conventional level with restraint at the strategic level, and (4) bet on transformation. Each has potential benefits, costs, and risks. But none can succeed without an effective strategic communication campaign that effectively integrates the interagency process in support of a consistent set of U.S. "messages" to Beijing.					
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