



Outline

U.S.-China Relations (UCR) Series Outline

July 5, 2011

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The rise of China has recently drawn much attention from the international community. This is in part because of the widespread perception that there might be fundamental changes in the international order as the United States experiences relative decline following the Global Financial Crisis while China maintains its nearly double-digit economic growth. At the same time, this structural change has coincided with a more “assertive China” in 2010. (Swaine 2010) This derived from a series of conflicts between the United States and China over diverse issues: human rights, arms sales to Taiwan, the Dalai Lama’s visit to Washington, appreciation of the Chinese currency. In this regard, there is a growing concern over the possibility of a hegemonic war breaking out between the two global powers in line with the arguments of power transition theory; “when a revisionist (or dissatisfied) latecomer overtakes an erstwhile leader of the international system, major war would occur.” (Chan 2007, 2 ; Kugler and Lemke 1996, 7-10)

History tells us that these concerns are valid. Changes in “structure” have always brought about changes in the “process.” (Nye 2000, 34-35) The rise of Germany in late 19th century and early 20th century led to two world wars. The Cold War-era began with the Korean War and the end of the Cold War has not brought about the “End of History” (Fukuyama 1993) yet. Rather all the problems that had been contained due to ideological divisions burst out and various levels of actors came to the center of international politics. An outcome of this was the 9/11 terrorist attacks. In coping with the post-September 11 era, the United States pursued “unilateral internationalism,” as it went to war in Afghanistan and then Iraq. This move, however, resulted in the United States suffering from a legitimacy crisis in the international community. Furthermore, the Financial Crisis of 2008 precipitated a decline in U.S. material capability. If China succeeds in sustaining its growth and addressing its domestic challenges, the world may face another change in the structure of international relations. Still, it is uncertain to what extent this structural change would bring about a change in process.

It is evident that this structural change will be an immense challenge for South Korea. Throughout history, the two Koreas were placed at the center of structural change in international politics during the Cold War. Similarly, since 2008 South Korea is at the center of an ongoing structural change between two great powers again, the United States and China. With the ROK-U.S. alliance, South Korea is dependent on the United States in terms of foreign affairs and security. On the other hand, South Korea has a high trade dependence on China. Already, China’s share in South Korea’s total exports to foreign countries exceeded twenty-five percent in 2010. Given the situation that exports account for nearly fifty percent of South Korea’s Gross Domestic Product, it is not difficult to assume the importance of China for its economy. In this



regard, if acute conflict persists between the United States and China, Seoul will face a very difficult choice.

In this respect, the ideal strategy for South Korea would be to forge an “asymmetric network strategy” between the United States and China, embracing the two great powers simultaneously. (*EAI Commentary* No.17 2011/2/ 15) This network strategy is a more complex and delicate foreign policy compared to a “dual hedging strategy” (Heginbotham and Samuels 2002) as it puts emphasis on the qualitative difference between network with U.S. and China: “dense network” and “connected network.” (Ha 2011, 14-16) Even so, this strategy shares the same risk with the dual hedging strategy; ambivalence to the two targets cannot be accepted and rejected by the United States and China in the end. In the short-term, this risk could be overcome through effective diplomacy, but it is not a solid strategy that can be sustained for long. Thus, in the long-term, it would be safer for Seoul to play a role as a bridge to link between the two targeted countries. The strategic weakness of South Korea in having a high asymmetrical interdependence with both the United States and China could actually work in its favor as it would have more room than any other country to mediate between the two.

Accordingly, it is critical for Seoul to understand the core independent variable that effects negatively on U.S.-China relations and therefore respond preemptively. In order to solve the complicated bilateral challenges between the United States and China, it is important to identify the fundamental factors that cause distrust among the two countries. In understanding those factors, Seoul could engage in mediating diplomacy.

In this context, the East Asia Institute initiated the U.S.-China Relations (UCR) series in 2011 with the hope that a more in-depth study of U.S.-China relations would provide a greater understanding of the key issues. The UCR series project is divided into the following publications:

UCR Statement Factsheet This brings together all the official statements made by the United States and China will be collected daily and categorized according to specific issues. Additionally, key remarks will be extracted from each statement and presented as a ‘Quote.’ This UCR Statement Factsheet will be released every month and follow-up the official positions of the United States and China on current issues.

UCR Briefing These briefings will analyze UCR Statement Factsheets and summarize what has happened during the period in narrative form. UCR Briefing will focus on critical factors and issues in understanding the present and future of U.S.-China relations.

UCR Watch Based upon public opinion data, the UCR Watch examines public perceptions of the power gap between the United States and China and major issues in the bilateral relationship. In tracking the trends in public opinion, UCR Watch seeks to understand what are the main factors driving public perceptions in U.S.-China relations. ■



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- The East Asia institute, an Asia Security Initiative core institution, acknowledges the MacArthur Foundation for its generous grant and continued support.

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