

# Clinton continues dialogue with China

by William Jones

In a milestone in the Clinton administration's policy of "strategic engagement" with the People's Republic of China, Beijing's minister of national defense and vice chairman of the Central Military Commission, Gen. Chi Haotian, concluded a 14-day visit to the United States on Dec. 18. Minister Chi was accompanied by a delegation consisting of senior military leaders from the People's Liberation Army General Staff and Logistics Departments, Navy, Air Force, and Strategic Rocket Forces, as well as the commander of the Guangzhou Military Region Command. In addition to his meetings in Washington, which included a visit at the White House with President Clinton, Minister Chi also visited military facilities in New York, Virginia, Alabama, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and Hawaii.

Planned as a return visit in response to the October 1994 visit of Defense Secretary William Perry to China, the visit of the Chinese defense minister had to be postponed in 1995, when Chinese-U.S. relations deteriorated rapidly in the aftermath of a private visit to the United States by Taiwanese President Li Teng-hui. Under intense Republican pressure, President Clinton granted President Li a visa to the United States to attend an alumni reunion at his alma mater, Cornell University. Congressional Republicans, led by Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Jesse Helms (N.C.), quickly utilized the presence of President Li to transform the visit into a major political manifestation. Foreseeably, this led to some tough rhetoric from Chinese leaders and a cooling of U.S.-Chinese relations—precisely the goal which Helms and his cohorts had hoped to accomplish.

In March 1996, extensive discussions were held between U.S. National Security Adviser Anthony Lake and his Chinese counterpart, Liu Haoqui, in Williamsburg, Virginia. As a result of these discussions, U.S.-Chinese relations got back on track, although not before they came to a rather ugly military demonstration in the Straits of Taiwan, in the midst of the Taiwanese elections. Probably encouraged by the visit of President Li to the United States, the elections were characterized by heightened talk of Taiwanese independence. When the Chinese responded by conducting practice missile firings near the coast of Taiwan, the United States felt it necessary to station aircraft carriers in the Straits of Taiwan. Lake made a followup visit to Beijing in July 1996, during which he

indicated that the United States would no longer be averse to an exchange of state visits with China.

Through a commitment to maintaining diplomatic "engagement" with the Chinese leaders, the U.S.-China relationship was brought back on track. Following the preliminary meetings between Liu and Lake, Secretary of State Warren Christopher met in New York in September 1996 with his Chinese counterpart, Qian Qichen, and then went to Beijing in November for further discussions.

The military-to-military dialogue that was launched with Secretary Perry's visit to China in October 1994, and of which the visit of Minister Chi is an integral part, is aimed, on the one hand, at creating the type of contact that would permit the de-escalation of potential conflict before it started, or, as a senior administration official put it, would create a mechanism that would "permit both sides to raise and discuss issues without disrupting the entire relationship." The People's Liberation Army represents a force in its own right in China, and any "engagement" with Chinese leaders on the diplomatic plane would have to involve the respective country's military establishment in order to be successful. The particular goals that the United States hoped to achieve with these initial visits involve both "regularizing communication between forces operating in the same area" and "establishing a regular path and period of dialogue between the United States and China in the defense realm" at senior levels.

## Wide-ranging discussions

The visit of Minister Chi to the United States, a visit which had been postponed or cancelled twice, was his first, although previous Chinese defense ministers have travelled to Washington at various times. Speaking together with Secretary Perry at the Pentagon, Minister Chi commented, "To develop friendly relations and cooperation between our two countries not only serves the fundamental interests of the two countries, of the two peoples, but they're also of great importance to the maintenance of peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region and in the world as a whole. It is precisely with this desire that we have come to the United States." Among the topics on the agenda were U.S. nuclear nonproliferation concerns, Asia-Pacific regional security, and stability on the Korean Peninsula.

On Dec. 9, Minister Chi met for 20 minutes with President Clinton. Also present were Vice President Al Gore, National Security Adviser-designate Sandy Berger, Secretary Perry, U.S. Ambassador to China Jim Sasser, and Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Walt Slocombe. According to NSC Press Spokesman David Johnson, who briefed the press following the meeting, President Clinton told the defense minister "that he views our engagement with China as a way to further our cooperation where we can on areas, for example, such as nonproliferation, and to address our differences where they exist on issues such as human rights."

In his meetings at the Pentagon later in the day with Perry,

also attended by Sasser and Slocombe, Chi reiterated China's concern about U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, and about the tensions that occurred in March of last year, expressing objections to U.S. carriers being deployed to the area. "The secretary stressed that we have a one-China policy," said a Pentagon briefer, "and that we—that the key to that policy, the driving thrust of that policy, is to achieve a peaceful resolution of all issues involving Taiwan and China, under the roof of the one-China policy."

The two sides also touched upon the issue of the U.S.-Japanese Security Agreement, an agreement which had caused some concern in China. Secretary Perry explained that the agreement was a step toward continued stability in the Asia Pacific region. "He said that it was a defensive agreement," said a Pentagon spokesman, "and stressed again that the good relationship between the U.S. and Japan, and the strong security relationship between the two countries has really been key to providing the stability that's fueled—or at least allowed—the economic growth in Asia to take place over the last 10 or 15 years."

A visit to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, requested by Minister Chi, who is an ardent student of military history, was cancelled due to bad weather. He did, however, visit several military installations, including the Sandia Weapons Laboratory in New Mexico. There he was given a tour of Sandia's Cooperative Monitoring Center, where he was shown some of the equipment they use for monitoring arms agreements. He also visited the Robotics Manufacturing Science and Engineering Laboratory (RMSL), where he viewed some of the robotics equipment used for operating in hazardous environments. He was then given a tour of the National Atomic Museum at Sandia, a museum that gives a history of the development of the atomic bomb, as well as the history of peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

As a result of Minister Chi's visit, it was agreed that the United States and China would institutionalize bilateral defense consultative talks, the first of which is to take place in Washington in the fall of 1997. The two sides also agreed to several visits of senior U.S. and Chinese military leaders in the first half of 1997. The two sides affirmed their shared interest in a peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue. Chi also indicated that China would continue to play a constructive role in working to maintain a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula, and would help to encourage a dialogue between North and South Korea—one of the issues that has been of prime importance for the Clinton administration. In addition, China agreed to continued port calls at Hongkong by U.S. naval vessels after July 1997, when Hongkong reverts to Chinese sovereignty, a request that had been of great interest to the United States.

## **GOP sniper attacks**

Already, at the point when the Chinese defense minister arrived, the Conservative Revolutionists were sharpening

their lances to joust with President Clinton's policy of "engagement" with China. Minister Chi had a breakfast meeting on Capitol Hill on Dec. 10 with legislators, a meeting that was boycotted by all Republican legislators except one. Two Republican legislators did, however, attend a dinner arranged by Perry for Chi at the National Defense University.

The Gingrich Republicans are intent on throwing a monkey wrench into the Clinton "strategic engagement" policy. In the discussion following a presentation by Minister Chi at the National Defense University, one Navy officer set off some fireworks with a question on the events at Tiananmen Square in 1989. Chi answered the question quite directly, saying that "such things would not happen again," but also, repeating the standard Chinese response to questions on Tiananmen, that nobody died at the square itself, but that the clashes occurred outside the area of the square itself.

The next day, the *Washington Times* ran a front-page article with a picture of Chi and the headline, "Chinese Leader Defends Action at Tiananmen." A week later, on Dec. 18, a hearing of the Human Rights Subcommittee of the House International Relations Committee was called by Rep. Chris Smith (R-N.J.), dealing with Tiananmen Square and the comments made by Chi, at which various representatives of Amnesty International were allowed to vent their spleen against the Chinese government. Smith himself attacked administration policy as "aggressive appeasement." Neither the administration nor the Chinese embassy sent witnesses to the hearing, which was undoubtedly viewed as a provocation.

In addition, the Republican scandal-mongering against the White House was given an added twist, when an Asian-American fund-raising contact, Charles Yan Lin Trie, is said to have taken the head of a Chinese arms conglomerate with him as a guest to a White House reception. This served the dual purpose of allowing the Gingrich Republicans to attack President Clinton for accepting "foreign funds," as well as undermining his China policy.

## **'Engagement' deemed the wiser policy**

President Clinton, however, wisely insists on steering a stable course in the U.S. relationship with the Chinese government, deeming "engagement" rather than "confrontation" to be a wiser policy for creating a strategic relationship with China in the 21st century. Following the visit of the Chinese defense minister, President Clinton met with Chinese President Jiang Zemin's national security adviser, Liu Haoqiu, on Dec. 19. Liu also spent eight hours at Blair House on Dec. 18, speaking with newly appointed National Security Adviser Sandy Berger, discussing the entire gamut of U.S.-Chinese relations, with a person with close access to the President. Liu was given a tour of Blair House, which will be the official residence of President Jiang when he comes to Washington on an official visit.