

Constantly Yielding To American Demands Is No Solution

By Wang Jisi, Director, Institute of American Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

The Global Times (huanqiu shibao), Beijing
September 3, 1999

Summary

- Experiences of dealing with the Americans tell us that we Chinese like to talk about abstract principles and the Americans tend to make specific demands.
- Instead of always responding with yes or no to demands made by others, we will be better served if we make our own international arrangements according to our own national interest and let others respond to our arrangements.
- When we discuss international problems, the most frequently used word adopted by us is “relations.” But we have failed to see that “relations” are just a means, the real aim is “interest.”

It seems to me that the current discussion in the Global Times about China’s diplomacy, especially about Sino-American relations, has generated more agreements than disagreements. For example, we all agree that the United States is the most important country in our foreign relations, and that we should maintain both our unyielding spirit and our cooperative attitude toward the United States. When it calls for harmony, we should be amicable toward the United States; when it calls for a fight, we should not hesitate to fight. We also agree that within the Sino-American relationship, there is limited space for improvement, yet an all-out confrontation between China and the United States will still be unimaginable and should be avoided as much as is possible. In foreign relations, we should be principled as well as be flexible: maintain our righteousness, keep in mind our interests and proceed with caution. We must keep strengthening ourselves, as only formidable strength can effectively contain hegemonism; we should develop good relations with neighboring countries like Russia, taking advantage of the internal bickering within developed countries in the West, and so on. But we have been talking about these points for the last ten or twenty years, only the perspectives of various authors are slightly different.

Experiences of dealing with the Americans tell us that we Chinese like to talk about abstract principles and the Americans tend to make specific demands. For many years, the Americans have made one demand after another to us, such as demands to open up the Chinese market, stop the dumping of Chinese goods in the American market, protect intellectual property rights, prevent weapons proliferation, enhance military “transparency,” improve human rights, deal with Tibet, religion, and immigration, etc., etc. The Americans have been making endless trouble in our bi-lateral relationship: before

one problem is solved, they make an issue out of another matter. We can safely say that the United States is by nature a bully (or to use their own language, they have an “enterprising spirit”). But we Chinese like to carry out peaceful diplomacy of self-defense. We can always say that this pattern of impact-response in the Sino-American relationship is determined by the fact that the United States is a stronger nation than China. But it is ridiculous to conclude that unless the Americans change their nature and until China develops enough strength to challenge the United States, we should just tolerate and quietly accept the current pattern in which Americans make endless trouble and we busily respond to U.S. demands.

It is true that we need to bear the flag of justice and righteousness and uphold principles, policies and strategies. But what we need more now is strategic planning on a deeper level and the specific analyses and specific counter-tactics based upon such strategic planning. Speaking of “counter-tactics,” I am now reminded of the title for this series of discussions that contains the word “counter-tactics.” Why does China always have to “counter” others? Why can’t we take the initiative and make some proposals first to let our opponent “counter” us?

In the final analysis, diplomatic strategy is determined by national interests and national goals of various kinds. Our national interests and goals are domestic political stability, economic development, national unification and territorial integrity. Even among these core interests and goals, there are some dilemmas that arise from mutual conflicts and frictions. Beyond these core interests and goals, there are different layers and different priority orders. (By the way, I would recommend to the readers a great book by Mr. Yan Xuetong, entitled *An Analysis of China’s National Interests*.) In our international struggles, it takes specific measures, not abstract principles, to decide on what issues we should be adamantly unyielding and on what issues we should make compromises. And if we make a compromise, what should we get in return?

Diplomatic strategy requires long-term planning and laying out specific proposals and initiatives to the international community. Those proposals and initiatives should be beneficial as well as practical. For example, we have opposed enhancing the military alliance between the United States and Japan after the Cold War. But what kind of U.S.-Japanese relationship is acceptable to us or more beneficial to us? What is to be done to make that acceptable U.S.-Japanese relationship a reality? Instead of always thinking whether we should say yes or no to a proposal brought forth by other countries, we should take the initiative to bring forth proposals of our own for international arrangements and let others figure out how to respond to our ideas. After all, we are growing stronger and stronger as a major nation in the world, far more qualified than other countries to establish international mechanisms such as the “ASEAN Regional Forum.” It will be beneficial to us if we delivered our own proposal, and tried to host several conferences discussing regional security and economic cooperation. Not wanting to be a leader does not equal not taking initiative to do something.

To formulate a diplomatic strategy requires thorough understanding of our opponent, especially the understanding of its domestic politics, its economic and social trends. We

often say that “*the United States*” thinks this way and “*the United States*” does things that way. As a superpower, the United States of course has its collective will. But its policies are results of fights and compromises between the American governmental leadership and various interest groups representing many layers of American society. Even within the American governmental leadership, there are many internal differences among various factions and bureaucratic departments. To be sure, there are some people in America who would feel uncomfortable unless China is mired in chaos and backwardness. We should figure out clearly who these people are, what interest groups they represent, and why chaos in China is beneficial to them. (I don’t believe that these people are anti-China for the sake of the U.S. national interests). Only by doing so can we plan how best to fight them, how to devise methods to isolate them and make them unpopular. In the meantime, there are many business groups in the United States that have investment ventures in China and are doing business with China. These people do not hope to see China entangled in major chaos or suffer from economic depression, because that will harm their business interests. Therefore they want to see stability in the Sino-American relationship. When some American Senators and Congressmen engage in anti-China tirades, they don’t care at all about China. All they care about is how to use the China issue to get them in the spotlight, to get more votes from their constituents. But when they discover that their congressional districts can actually benefit from U.S.-China trade, they may also change their attitudes, at least temporarily. In the American media circle, some people, in order to spin hot topics, deliberately fan anti-China sentiments, making up rumors to confuse the masses. But even within the same media outlet, be it newspaper or TV station, you may at times also find fair and objective comments. So, when dealing with the Americans, we have many opportunities and bargaining chips.

Diplomatic strategy is comprised of politics, national security, economy, culture, social development and many other areas. We cannot simplistically label countries by putting them into different categories according how politically close to us each country may be. We may label certain countries as our enemies or friends, based upon politics and national security. But these labels become meaningless when applied to many other areas. Even from the perspective of politics and security, we still have to analyze it case by case. For example, China and India both oppose the United States when it comes to being pressured on the human rights issue by a hegemon. Yet on the issue of nuclear proliferation in South Asia, China and the United States have similar positions. In the realms of international trade, investment and finance, there are more complicated standards. Deng Xiaoping has given us the great strategic objective for our country to become a member of the mid-level developed countries by the middle of the 21st century. We obviously don’t want to be a developing country forever. To speak boldly, those “rules of the game” that are beneficial to the developed countries may do more harm than good to us right now, but years later these rules may become very beneficial to us as well. When we discuss international problems, the most frequently used word adopted by us is “relations.” We often speak of China’s “relations” with the United States, Europe, Japan, Russia and the neighboring countries, but which relations come first, which second? How should we put relations with certain country on our priority list? It seems that we have rarely considered what interests we are after in Asia, Europe, the Middle East, the

Americas, in certain international organizations, and in arms controls and international finance. As if once we took good care of “relations” and made friends, our interests will be naturally served. Yet when the United States makes demands on us, they seldom care about “relations.” The United States will make its demands whether relations are good or bad. Other countries have seen our weakness in stressing “relations,” and have conspired to take advantage of us. They talk about friendship on the one hand, but demand concessions from us on the other. On the world stage, cultivating “relations” is necessary. But cultivating relations is merely a means. The ultimate aim is to pursue our interests, rather than cultivating relations at their expense.