

US-China Relations: What America Needs from the Next President

actions with public indignation, it should come as no surprise when China's leaders seem to become entrenched and defensive.

While the next administration should certainly maintain high expectations of China and raise our concerns to its leaders privately, we also need to give China the respect it desires and deserves. A more conciliatory, patient and forgiving tone will ultimately go a long way to helping the US achieve its goals.

We need to congratulate China on positive moves such as its dialogue with the Taiwan leadership, its engagement with North Korea, its efforts to improve relations with the Vatican and other diplomatic achievements. The same goes for the three decades of increasingly open diplomatic relations that have extended peace and stability in Asia, and the economic reforms that have elevated hundreds of millions of Chinese people out of a state of abject poverty.

The next administration should acknowledge that China is going through an extended learning and maturing period that requires that the United States partner with China. The US took a leadership role in introducing China to the international institutions created post-World War II, such as the United Nations and World Trade Organization. We need to continue in this role. The world and the Chinese people have benefited from China's participation on the global stage. The Chinese are very clearly coming to appreciate what it means to be an active player in multilateral processes and a responsible international stakeholder, and we should encourage this.

Today, for a president to get China policy "right" the executive branch needs to discourage counter-productive, knee-jerk reactions on the part of the legislative branch. In recent years, Congressional attempts to set the agenda on US-China

affairs have forced the administration into pointless, one-sided discussions with China just to keep things on course. These disparate agendas have inhibited the Bush Administration and Congress from speaking with one voice.

The result has been a vacillating US-China policy ranging from subtle to actual threats of trade sanctions and containment. The lack of consistency in America's China policy has frustrated leadership in Beijing. Without a clear voice from the American side, they are suspicious about the direction of the relationship with the United States. All of this uncertainty puts US commercial interests in China at risk.

When the dust settles after the election, the people of the United States need a president who publicly shows appreciation when China takes positive steps, while delivering critical messages in private when necessary. We need a president who reflects and acts upon what is important to China, and seeks to play a helpful role in giving them the latitude to achieve what is important to the Chinese people.

We need a president who will build partnerships and mentor China on the issues of importance to Americans, and who will seek China's help to solve global concerns involving energy resources, climate change, and helping to manage rogue states. We do not need one who only blames China for being part of the problem.

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Getting elected is top priority right now for the Presidential candidates, but getting the relationship with China right should top the agenda of America's leadership, now and after the November election. China and the US are opening a new chapter in history. China has just completed a successful Olympics, a reflection of its continued growing stature and confidence on the world stage. Furthermore, the 30-year anniversary of China's opening up lies just a couple of months away. Following this historic milestone, either Barack Obama or John McCain will take over the policy helm in the US, charting the course of our China relationship and influencing the long-term economic development of each country and the world. (Read the candidates' own thoughts on the US-China relationship in *China Brief's* exclusive articles on pages 8-16.)

At this critical moment in history, we need a clear-eyed, realistic view of China that provides a foundation for future policy. What has too often been missing in US-China commercial and political relations are the right tone and tact to enhance an atmosphere of cooperation and mutual understanding. In our bilateral relations, the most important part is frequently not what we say, but rather how and when we say it. When we constantly draw attention to China's faults and treat the government's