CHAPTER 3

Reassessment and Renewal

Through high-level exchanges of visits, China has formulated goals and policies guiding its 21st-century-oriented relations with such big nations as the US, Russia, France and Japan.¹

—Jiang Zemin

The continued emergence of China as a great power that is stable politically and open economically, that respects human rights and the rule of law, and that becomes a full partner in building a secure international order, is profoundly in America’s interest and in the world’s interest.²

—Bill Clinton

We realize that we are not alone in the Asia-Pacific region. We realize that this vast region is an area where four great powers have overlapping interests. In this century, we have fought three wars in this region. And in the next century, we do not wish to repeat that.³

—Gen. John Shalikashvili

If war is ever imposed on China, its armed forces will certainly retaliate. Taiwan has been an inseparable part of China. The Taiwan issue is an internal Chinese affair to which the PRC favors a peaceful solution through reunification. But China cannot commit itself to the renunciation of the use of force as a final resort to halt foreign intervention or the independence of Taiwan.⁴

—Lt. Gen. Li Jijun

NEW TEAMS TAKE CHARGE

After Washington’s 1994 “Republican revolution” and mixed electoral outcome in 1996, change was inevitable. Among officials responsible
for “engaging” China, Joseph Nye had left. In January 1997, Madeleine Albright and William Cohen took over State Department and DoD, respectively. Both stressed continuity. Albright told Congress it was “absolutely essential for us to have this multi-faceted relationship with a country the size and importance of China...to have a policy where we think of isolating it is counterproductive to our national interests.” A series of high-level consultations had already been scheduled. Cohen, a just-retired Republican Senator, provided a bridge between the White House and Congress. His view that WMD proliferation was America’s “most serious problem” kept China high on the DoD agenda. Policymaking became better integrated. Albright, National Security Adviser Samuel Berger, and Cohen coordinated decisions at the White House “ABC meetings.” With Cohen’s links to the congressional majority, this proved helpful. In mid-January, Nye’s successor at DoD, Frank Kramer, met Beijing’s envoy on Taiwan, Wang Daohan, urging talks and highlighting DoD’s role in America’s China diplomacy.

Intelligence agencies monitored the capabilities created by China’s economic growth. DCI George Tenet said China was “determined to assert itself as the paramount East Asian power,” keen to be taken “as a serious player, both regionally and globally.” He noted Beijing’s purchase of Russian arms, and frictions with Washington “over issues of significant US national security interest.” The aftermath of Hong Kong’s transfer to China would bear scrutiny. Beijing’s nuclear forces and “strategic partnership” with Moscow required monitoring. The DIA analyzed China’s “threats” thus: America’s unipolar advantage would last until the world turned multipolar in 2010. Then, “strategic alliances between two or more major powers that directly challenged US security interests” could emerge. Accommodating China’s growing power was “the key long-term security issue in Asia.” Over the next 10–20 years, China would likely rise as “the pre-eminent Asian-Pacific regional power excluding the US.” Chinese assertiveness would cause tensions and, “in a worst-case scenario, China would view the US as a direct military threat.” Beijing would need a decade to integrate advanced capabilities; then, it would have “real potential for significant increases in military effectiveness.” This was a worrying prospect for the hegemon.

Meanwhile, Beijing announced Deng Xiaoping’s passing. Deng had been fading for years, but interpretations of his views still shaped policy. Acolytes led by Jiang Zemin had used Deng’s aura to rule China; now, they had to establish their own authority. Deng had refashioned post-Mao China, building on the Mao-Zhou tacit alliance