The U.S.-China Relationship

"ONE CHINA" POLICY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND TRADE

Address by WARREN CHRISTOPHER, United States, Secretary of State
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Thank you for that very kind introduction. I am very pleased to have the chance to speak with you today about the United States and China.

There can be no doubt that the stakes in our relationship with China are tremendous. China's future will have a profound impact on the security and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region and the world. As Secretary of State, I have an important responsibility to develop our relationship in ways that will benefit the United States, as well as China and our allies and friends.

To reach this goal, we strongly support China's development as a secure, open, and successful nation that is taking its place as a world leader. China has an important and constructive role to play in the coming century — and we welcome it. The United States and China share many interests that can only be served when our two countries deal constructively and openly with each other. By deepening China's integration into the international system, we can best ensure that China's development as a strong and responsible member of the international community promotes our interests as well as its own.

We do not have any illusions about the difficulty of managing our relations during this period of dramatic change and transition in China. On some critical issues, we have deep differences. Our focus must be on the long term and we must seek to resolve our differences through engagement, not confrontation. We will do our part — but China, too, must do its part. Here at home, we must mend the consensus, frayed since Tiananmen, that has supported a constructive approach to China for almost a quarter century — an approach that has profoundly served our national interest.

President Clinton recognizes that Asia is more important to our interests than ever before. During the last three years, we have pursued a comprehensive strategy in Asia that has produced concrete benefits for each and every American. Today, Americans are more secure because we have invigorated our core alliances in Asia and maintained 100,000 troops in a region where we have fought three wars in the past half-century. We are more prosperous because we have opened markets among the fastest-growing economies in the world. Our trade with Asia has almost doubled since 1990. And we face a brighter future because we are cooperating with former enemies to build new ties across the Pacific.

China's evolution will play a central role in shaping that future. From North Korea to the Spratly Islands, China can tip the balance in Asia between stability and conflict. Its booming economy holds a key to Asia's continued prosperity and, increasingly, to our own. Its cooperation is essential to combating threats ranging from the spread of nuclear weapons to global environmental damage.

China's people have made dramatic progress in building a market economy and a more vibrant society. In roughly two decades, China has managed to quadruple its economic output — a monumental achievement by any measure. Millions of Chinese consumers have moved well beyond the "Four Musts" — a bicycle, a radio, a watch and a sewing machine — and now often own cellular phones and personal computers. The most revolutionary slogan of the last decade has been Deng Xiaoping's "socialism with Chinese characteristics" that "to get rich is glorious."

But these changes have also generated what historian Jonathan Spence calls "internal pressures that the rest of us can only guess at." Rising incomes and an easing of social controls have raised expectations. Economic advances have brought improved living standards for many, but left millions behind. Farmers flock to cities in search of better jobs — a restive "floating population" that numbers as many as 100 million. Population growth and pollution strain China's natural resources.

China's leaders face these complex challenges at a time of political transition. Confronted with the worldwide collapse of communism and the passing of the Deng Xiaoping era, they are turning to nationalism to rally their country and legitimize their hold on power. This, in turn, has prompted fears that an increasingly nationalistic China might exert its growing power and influence in ways that challenge the security and prosperity of its Pacific neighbors.