Bush, Hu Strive To Manage Challenges
Confronting U.S.-China Relations

USAPC Interview with Prof. Robert G. Sutter

U.S.-China relations currently are beset by a broad range of economic, diplomatic, and security challenges. Chinese President Hu Jintao and President Bush proved unable to realize notable progress on these issues during Hu’s much-anticipated visit to Washington on April 20.

Prof. Robert G. Sutter of Georgetown University does not foresee major breakthroughs in U.S.-China relations in the near term owing to both countries’ intense preoccupations, both internal and external. He sees a period of “marking time,” which will enable the United States and China to confront these challenges in a constructive manner. As he also maintains in China’s Rise: Implications for U.S. Leadership in Asia (East-West Center Washington: 2006), notwithstanding China’s rise in Asia, the United States will continue to be the dominant power in the region for at least the next decade, if not longer.

USAPC: The summit of President Bush and Chinese President Hu Jintao on April 20 in Washington was long on symbolism but short on substantive breakthroughs. What did the meeting accomplish, if anything?

Sutter: The summit helped to keep U.S.-China relations constructive. For the past couple of years, the United States has pressed for Chinese cooperation on such issues as the bilateral economic imbalance, human rights, North Korea, Iran, and Sudan. But both leaders currently have other preoccupations, both internal and external, so U.S. officials really did not anticipate that China would give much ground on any of these issues.

The United States, for its part, has major military commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as being engaged in the broader war on terrorism. Consequently, Washington

U.S.-China Trade Talks Fail To Produce Desired Reforms

U.S. officials tried to put a positive spin on the 17th meeting U.S.-China Joint Commission on Commerce and Trade (JCCT) on April 11 in Washington. Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez said the meeting represented a “positive step forward on a number of key issues.” But he qualified this praise, saying the two sides “still have much work to do.”

For example, the Chinese government agreed to reopen its market to U.S. beef imports—but tied that promise to an as yet finalized inspection protocol. Beijing also said it would adjust its capital requirements for telecommunications service providers. However, the Chinese would not commit to an implementation plan.

Chinese officials announced a broad action plan to improve enforcement of intellectual property rights (IPR). But it remains to be seen whether China will implement these steps in a way that produces meaningful changes in its IPR situation. A summary of the JCCT outcomes is available at www.ustr.gov/.

Comments by key U.S. business

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In each issue, Washington Report will provide the names and contact information for selected executive branch officials with jurisdiction over economic, political, and security issues important to U.S.-Asia Pacific relations. This issue will focus on pertinent personnel from the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR).

Mailing Address:
Office of the U.S. Trade Representative
The Winder Bldg. (WBB), 600 17th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20506

Executive Office:

China Affairs:
Timothy P. Stratford—Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for China—WBB 314, 202.395.3900.
Audrey Winter—Deputy Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for China—WBB 401, 202.395.3900.
Terrence McCartin—Deputy Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for China Enforcement and Co-Chair of China Enforcement Task Force—WBB 411, 202.395.3900.

Japan, Korea, and APEC Affairs:
Wendy Cutler—Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for Japan, Korea, and Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Affairs—WBB 320, 202.395.5070.
John Neuffer—Deputy Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for Japan, Korea, and APEC Affairs—WBB 313, 202.395.5070.
Arrow Augerot—Deputy Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for Korea—WBB 314, 202.395.5070.

Southeast Asia, Pacific, and Pharmaceutical Policy:
Barbara Weisel—Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for Southeast Asia, Pacific, and Pharmaceutical Policy—WBB 400, 202.395.6813.
Jeri Jensen-Moran—Deputy Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for Southeast Asia and the Pacific—WBB 407, 202.395.6851

Official Washington

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cannot really afford to create a big problem with China—provided that China does not create a problem with us.
Both governments want to keep this important bilateral relationship more or less on an even keel, which meant that neither leader pushed too hard on any particular issue at the April summit.

USAPC: With respect to U.S. “preoccupations,” the Bush Administration’s public approval ratings now are quite low for various reasons. To what extent is the Chinese government taking advantage of this weakness and withholding progress on such issues as United Nations sanctions against Iran or pressure on North Korea to end its nuclear program?

Sutter: China’s unwillingness to be more helpful on Iran, North Korea, and the economic imbalance suggests that Beijing is not above exploiting the Bush Administration’s political weakness to some degree.
But the Chinese leadership also is in a difficult position. Beijing’s contradictory foreign policy approaches complicate its efforts to address economic development and other domestic priorities. If the Chinese government does not appear somewhat willing to cooperate with the United States, it runs the risk of galvanizing anti-China sentiments in Congress and at the U.S. grass roots that could create problems.
Congressional opposition last year to the plans of CNOOC [China National Offshore Oil Corporation] to acquire Unocal is indicative of the periodic spasms of anti-China feeling that Beijing must manage carefully if it wants to ensure continued stable relations with the United States. From the Chinese government’s point of view, the Bush administration basically is holding the line against domestic forces trying to push U.S. policy in a more extreme direction.
Chinese leaders recognize that using confrontational tactics with Washington will not serve their interests. They are willing to take some steps—albeit not fundamental reforms—that help the Bush Administration to manage U.S. domestic tensions.

USAPC: The so-called Six-Party talks aimed at ending North Korea’s nuclear program have stalled and become a source of friction in U.S.-China relations. Is there another foreign policy challenge the two countries could take on that might serve as a model for diplomatic cooperation?

Sutter: That would depend on the issues we face. The Chinese are not prepared to confront the Western-led international community on Iran. Ultimately, I think Beijing will cooperate in some way or offer an agreement about how to deal with Iran’s nuclear program.

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Legislation:
Grassley, Baucus Introduce Bill To Tackle Currency And Trade Issues—On March 28, Senate Finance Committee Chairman Charles Grassley (R, Iowa) and Ranking Member Max Baucus (D, Montana) introduced the “U.S. Trade Enhancement Act of 2006.” They developed the bill as a WTO-legal alternative to the Schumer-Graham bill (see below). It would require the Treasury Department to work with the International Monetary Fund to resolve major currency imbalances with the dollar, among other provisions. It also proposes a range of “consequences” for nations that refuse to adopt policies that facilitate the fair valuation of their currency. The bill appears to be gaining support on Capitol Hill following what many regarded as a disappointing summit between President Bush and Chinese President Hu Jintao.

Schumer, Graham Announce Delay Of Vote On Chinese Currency Bill—After returning from a weeklong visit to China, Senators Charles Schumer (D, New York) and Lindsey Graham (R, South Carolina) announced March 28 that they would agree to delay a vote on their Chinese currency bill to no later than September 29. The controversial measure would impose 27.5 percent tariffs on all Chinese imports in retaliation for Beijing’s unwillingness to allow the yuan to appreciate against the dollar. Schumer agreed to give Beijing more time because he believes the Chinese realize that pegging their currency to the dollar “is not only bad for America, but bad for China as well.”

Bill To Reform Foreign Investment Reviews Advances—On March 30, the Senate Banking Committee unanimously approved a bill that would revamp the process by which an interagency panel—the Committee for Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS)—considers the possible national security impact of foreign purchases of U.S. companies. It would require tougher scrutiny of deals in which the acquiring company is owned by a foreign company. This bill will likely be the congressional vehicle for CFIUS reform.

Upcoming Hearings:

Congressional Watch
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groups echoed the off-the-record view of some U.S. insiders that this meeting did not produce reforms that will make a much of a difference in the near term. “Even as we recognized measured gains from today’s meetings, we expect future discussions with China to yield significant and consistent progress on systemic challenges that hinder American access to the Chinese market and impede competition,” said Myron Brilliant, Vice President for Asia of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

The JCCT was established in 1983 as a forum for high-level dialogue on bilateral trade issues. Washington uses the annual meeting as a forum to identify and resolve trade problems as well as to expand two-way commercial opportunities.

Subsequent actions taken by the U.S. government further suggest that the April 11th meeting disappointed American trade officials, who wanted and expected their Chinese counterparts to bring to the table more ambitious offers with respect to IPR protection, market access, and regulatory transparency.

On April 19, for example, the U.S. government presented to the World Trade Organization (WTO) a review of China’s efforts to adhere to the obligations it assumed upon acceding to the WTO in December 2001. The review was decidedly mixed. It said that China has made progress in implementing specific commitments required of a WTO member. By the same token, Beijing “has not fully embraced key WTO principles of nondiscrimination and national treatment nor instituted market mechanisms and made its trade regime more predictable and transparent.”

Shortly thereafter, the U.S. Trade Representative’s Office (USTR) released its statutorily mandated “Special 301” report. This report requires USTR to identify countries that deny adequate and effective protection for IPR. The April 28 report singled out China for “priority watch.” This means that China’s IPR regime may be subject to investigation under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, which could result in the imposition of punitive trade sanctions on Chinese imports.

Finally, at press time the Treasury Department was poised to issue its twice-annual report that analyzes international exchange rate policies. In previous years, Treasury did not cite China as a currency manipulator—an omission that fanned protectionist fires in Congress. Although in July 2005 China abandoned its eight-year policy of pegging the yuan to the dollar, experts say the new regime still lacks sufficient flexibility. Thus, in the wake of the less-than impressive JCCT meeting, Treasury officials are under intense political pressure to cite China as a currency manipulator and call for negotiations. ♦
I am very pessimistic, however, about the extent to which China will use its energy-related and other leverage with North Korea to move the Six-Party talks forward. This is not an issue on which there will be a big breakthrough.

Frankly speaking, I think we should get used to the fact that we will not have big breakthroughs with China in the near term. We are marking time. Beijing recognizes that the Bush administration is not in a strong position. Chinese leaders therefore are reluctant to offer commitments or make a deal with Washington for fear that such agreements would not serve China’s longer term interests—particularly if the party in power changes in 2008.

We could use negative terms and describe this as a period in U.S.-China relations of “stagnation” or “marking time.” Alternatively, we could use positive language and say this period is a time to “consolidate our relationship.” At the bottom line, though, things are not bad. Both sides are trying to manage the challenges confronting the bilateral relationship in a constructive manner.

And these challenges will intensify. The bilateral trade deficit will continue to increase and U.S. business will continue to complain about China’s inadequate enforcement of intellectual property rights (IPR) and market access restrictions. The contradictions in China’s foreign policy also undoubtedly will increase.

For example, on the one hand, China will endeavor to rise peacefully, but on the other hand, it will also continue...

Hughes Says Increased Exchanges Are A Key Element Of ‘Transformational Public Diplomacy’

On May 3, Karen Hughes, Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, outlined her vision of “transformational public diplomacy” to a House Appropriations subcommittee. She said that implementing the new approach is “fundamentally changing the way we do business” in various areas. Chief among these are international exchange programs. President Bush’s FY07 budget request includes an additional $48 million to enable more exchanges “because we know they work,” she said. “People who come [to America] make up their own minds about us and almost always go home with the . . . more positive view of our country.”

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USAPC: Some regional analysts contend that China seized the opportunity presented by the post-9/11 shift
of U.S. diplomatic and strategic priorities to expand its economic and political influence in Asia. Do you think the United States is losing out to China in Asia?

Sutter: The record shows that the Chinese long have been trying to outmaneuver the United States so that eventually there will be an Asian order in which the United States plays a less prominent role. However, Beijing is not prepared to do very much right now to affect that outcome. The Chinese government’s actions right now are aimed at maintaining stability, pursuing economic development, reassuring neighbors that China’s intentions are peaceful, and creating an atmosphere that excludes Taiwan as an independent nation.

If you look at the balance of influence in the region, yes, China definitely has enhanced its position. With the exception of Japan, and of course, Taiwan, the policy elites and citizenry of most Asian countries have welcomed China’s cooperative approach.

However, Asian government officials that I frequently interview take a more calculated, pragmatic view of China’s “charm offensive.” They understand that it is in their countries’ interests to cooperate with China where possible, encourage positive Chinese behavior, and pursue economic opportunities with China, recognizing that such ties also have a downside.

In that context, the United States remains important to Asian nations. It remains important (1) as a security guarantor and (2) as a trading and investment partner. On the security side, the United States is still willing to do the job. It does not want their territory. Asian leaders want this kind of guarantee because there still is a great deal of uncertainty and some acrimony between and among the regional governments.

Moreover, Asian nations are uncertain about what to do in the post-Cold War environment, so most of them hedge. They certainly want to develop better relations with a rising China, but they do not want to be under China’s sway. The United States looms very important in this hedging strategy.

On the economic side, although China has emerged as a center of intra-Asian trade, regional governments also have come to understand that so much of intra-Asian trade depends on good trade and economic relations with the United States. They recognize that not only has the

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United States been willing to absorb a $600-700 billion trade deficit with world exporters, notably in Asia, but this imbalance also is essential for their economic well being.

China is rising in a regional setting in which the United States still dominates. Security and economics are the foundation of U.S. leadership in Asia, and the United States will continue to be the dominant power there for at least the next 10 years, if not longer.

USAPC: The Chinese do not appear uncomfortable with the protracted nature of the Six-Party talks and the fact that the stalemate basically enables North Korea to continue developing its nuclear capabilities.

Do you think the Chinese are willing to tolerate a nuclear North Korea in the short term as a means of building goodwill that, hopefully, will lead to the dismantlement of the program in longer term?

Sutter: Yes, I do. I think that has always been their view. China has priorities when it comes to North Korea, and stability seems to be more important than de-nuclearization. The Chinese agreed to participate in the Six-Party process primarily because they were concerned about a U.S.-led war. They saw the talks as a way to manage a nuclear North Korea in a way that maintains stability on the peninsula.

In truth, we have been living with a nuclear North Korea for several years, and I think we will have to get used to it. If North Korea proliferates, however, that would be disastrous. The United States would feel compelled to take strong actions against Pyongyang, which would threaten to destabilize Northeast Asia and cause a real crisis in U.S-China relations.

But short of evidence of North Korean proliferation, I think China is prepared to live with the current uneasy balance. Beijings’ actions suggest that stability remains the top priority and it is willing to live with the consequences of that policy.

Robert G. Sutter is a Visiting Professor of Asian Studies at the School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University. An expanded version of this interview is available at www.usapc.org/Resource-Blog/sutter.pdf
Thomas Says U.S.–Korea FTA Could Serve As A Model For Japan Accord

House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bill Thomas (R., California) said April 3 that recently launched negotiations to conclude a Korea-U.S.Free Trade Agreement (KORUS) could serve as a model for FTAs with other modern developed countries in Asia and elsewhere. “A Korea FTA would serve as an example to Japan, in particular, that ‘this is what you can do to restructure your economy.’ It would also disprove critics who charge that the United States can only do FTAs with ‘developing countries,’ like Oman,” Thomas said. The influential lawmaker delivered the keynote address at a program entitled, “The Future of U.S. Trade Policy” sponsored by the Washington, D.C.-based American Enterprise Institute.

Thomas said that “emotion rather than analysis” is driving the trade debate on Capitol Hill this year, citing the brouhaha that ultimately forced Dubai Ports World to give up its management stake in six U.S. ports in order to complete is acquisition of British shipping company P&O. He also was pessimistic that Congress would renew presidential Trade Promotion Authority (TPA), which expires in mid-2007.

TPA is essential for U.S. trade negotiations. It enables the president to seek an “up-or-down” vote from Congress on trade agreements without allowing amendments that could unravel what are often delicately crafted accords.

Nevertheless, the Bush Administration must find a way to salvage its free trade agenda in 2006, Thomas urged. The best way to do that, he proposed, is to declare the WTO talks a failure and focus instead on concluding as many bilateral FTAs as possible by the end of the year. The United States and the European Union have “irreconcilable differences” on trade that will impede the successful conclusion of the WTO round, according to Thomas. Washington should “stop being an enabler.” and “announce its separation” from Brussels on trade, he said.

In the same get-tough vein, Thomas urged the White House to press for expeditious conclusion of a U.S.–Thailand FTA. The talks, launched in June 2004, stalled last year owing to disagreements about trade in agriculture, pharmaceuticals, and other issues. The White House should give the Thai government a deadline and if Bangkok misses it, redirect U.S. energies to concluding potentially more fruitful FTAs with Korea and Malaysia, Thomas said.

The United States and South Korea formally will launch FTA negotiations June 5-9 in Washington. The Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) has promoted the accord as a “win-win proposition” for both countries. Two-way trade could increase from the current $73 billion to as much as $93 billion, USTR says. The agency also has high hopes for a U.S.–Malaysia FTA, which it views as key to advancing the broader Enterprise for ASEAN Initiative. Officials cite private-sector studies that predict the FTA could double two-way trade—now $44 billion—in only five years.

### Status of U.S.-Asia Pacific Free Trade Efforts

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*Formally known as Enterprise for ASEAN Initiative

FTA—Free Trade Agreement
TIFA—Trade and Investment Framework Agreement
WTO—World Trade Organization
GSP—Generalized System of Preferences

Source: Office of the U.S. Trade Representative
United States Asia Pacific Council

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Mark Borthwick
Director

Barbara Wanner
Project Coordinator

Liz Dom
Program Associate

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