

Innovative Philosophy of China's New Diplomacy

By SHEN DINGLI



Chinese President Xi Jinping and his U.S. counterpart Barack Obama during their second round of meetings at Rancho Mirage, California on June 8, 2013.

A new trend has been apparent in China's official exchanges with foreign countries since the new government took office in March, evident in arrangements for official visits by heads of state. It is clear that Chinese diplomacy possesses more confidence, personality and flexibility than ever before.

Achieving a more enterprising balance and "keeping a low profile while doing something" is at the core of the new diplomacy. China has reached a consensus with Vietnam on important issues concerning China's territorial

integrity and the stability of surrounding areas. Both sides will carry out joint patrols in agreed regions and maintain calm in waters where accord has yet to be reached. China has demonstrated a strong national will with respect to the sovereignty over Ren'ai Reef (the Second Thomas Shoal), and actively striven to settle disputes through peaceful means. Moreover, despite the tension on the Korean Peninsula in March and April this year, China still firmly advocates cooperation and dialogues. Chinese leaders have demonstrated a clear stand, having actively coordinated with major coun-

tries and cooperated with surrounding regions. Related dialogues have not been successfully kick-started.

Agendas for Chinese leaders' state visits reflect the new diplomatic philosophy. Chinese President Xi Jinping's two foreign visits earlier this year imply that the new leadership has three diplomatic priorities. Its initial focus has been on big countries, including Russia and the United States. It also encompasses developing nations, notably the three African countries President Xi visited on his first tour in March. President Xi's June visit to North and Latin America moreover included stops in three developing countries, in addition to the U.S. Neighboring states, such as Russia, appear to be the third diplomatic target priority. India and Pakistan, the first two stops on Premier Li Keqiang's first official visit, are among the important nations surrounding China.

That China attaches great importance to emerging economies, especially the BRICS, is clear. The visits earlier mentioned covered Russia, India, and South Africa – all BRICS countries. Russia, India and Pakistan moreover are both important developing countries and all-weather strategic partners of China. Southeast Asia, the first destination of new Foreign Minister Wang Yi, also constitutes an important region in China's vicinity. The new diplomacy, therefore, inculcates balance among major, developing and surrounding countries.

The new trend in Chinese diplomacy not only embodies greater flexibility and confidence, but also puts more emphasis on dialogue and mutual trust. With regard to high-level diplomatic exchanges, the Chinese government is diversifying its methods of communication to ensure greater practicability and effectiveness. As an ancient oriental civilization and

a land of courtesy, China has set high standards for the President's foreign visits as well as for receiving foreign heads of state. Recently, however, pragmatic measures have been taken according to specific situations, coordinating the form and content of international exchanges in a more flexible way. The recent meeting between President Xi and President Obama shows that both countries place greater value on the quality of meeting than mere formality.

The meeting created a valuable opportunity for Chinese and U.S. leaders to exchange ideas face-to-face. Both countries value the quality of discussion and whether or not consensus can be reached on certain issues through talks. The Annenberg Estate meeting between Xi and Obama heralded a new type of regular high-level meetings between the two presidents. Such informal surroundings bring to mind that of 11 years ago between former Chinese president Jiang Zemin and former U.S. president George W. Bush at Bush's private ranch in Crawford, Texas. No matter where or how the two sides meet, the nature of diplomacy will not change. Both sides seek more bilateral or multilateral cooperation in efforts to control the endless differences between China and the U.S. through discussion of regional and global issues.

On one hand, China's new diplomacy possesses greater practicability and effectiveness; on the other, its goal is still to propel cooperation and resolve conflicts. There is widespread interest in the content of the meeting. For China's part, this involves its sovereignty and core interests. The two parties exchanged ideas on U.S. policy intentions regarding its "rebalancing" in the Asia-Pacific region, and China's related concerns. In-depth discussions were also conducted about regional and sub-regional issues, including the stability of the Korean Peninsula, trilateral relations among China, U.S. and Japan, the South China Sea issue, the Iranian nuclear issue, and Syria. On global governance, important topics like balance of global trade and finance and climate



Visiting Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at the signing of cooperation agreements between the two countries on May 20, 2013. Photos by Xinhua

change were also discussed.

China has raised the proposition regarding construction of a new relationship between the world's great powers. Certain consensus was reached at the Annenberg Estate meeting. According to mainstream U.S. public opinion, China's peaceful development is acceptable as long as China adheres to international law and does not challenge the international order mainly controlled by the United States. According to this rationale, the United States must also discuss with China's new administration issues regarding international rules and hegemonic stability, especially the three related to China's overall intentions and actions.

First is China's information security strategy. China has declared that its network was not established with the intention of attacking the United States. Will it work with the United States to map out international rules on network security? Second is China's space strategy. China opposes the United States' militarization of outer space, but can China make its own space development strategy more transparent? Third is China's maritime strategy. China has identified

the South China Sea islands and the surrounding waters as its core interests in the South China Sea. Can China define "surrounding?" And can China and the United States find a way to work together on China's East China Sea islands dispute with Japan to avoid confrontation and achieve win-win results?

The United States' concerns are directly opposite those of China. American doubts about the development direction of the rising China are likely to trigger Chinese concerns regarding America's strategic intent towards China. On the issue of information security, the United States' network attack technology is unsurpassed globally. The Prism Program recently disclosed by former CIA operative Edward Snowden reflects the threats the United States poses to other countries' network security. In terms of maritime strategy, the United States' "return to the Asia-Pacific" strategy has engendered

growing arrogance among Japan's right-wing politicians. The Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo has gone so far as to declare that there exists controversy on the definition of "invasion," which has embarrassed the United States. The U.S., therefore, should be urged to address these problems through dialogue in hopes that the White House will make policy adjustments to stabilize the region.

Against this complex diplomatic backdrop, the distinct personalities of China's new leaders have garnered attention and praise from around the world. When Premier Li Keqiang visited India, he spoke and made speeches in English on many occasions, resulting in more direct communication. He commented that his regard for India began with his first visit there 27 years ago – a touching statement which underscores the successful new diplomacy undertaken by China's leaders. ■

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