

President Clinton counters the China-bashers

by Jeffrey Steinberg

On March 10, President Bill Clinton sent a letter to China's Prime Minister Zhu Rongji, formally inviting him to Washington for consultations beginning on April 8. The President's letter upgraded the long-planned trip by the Chinese Prime Minister to a full state visit.

The significance of the President's action is twofold: First, it means that he, President Clinton—not Vice President Al Gore—will be conducting the lion's share of the discussions. Second, it is the most direct response from the White House to the efforts by some Congressional Republicans and elements in the media to wreck the "strategic partnership" between Washington and Beijing that has been carefully nurtured by the two governments for the past several years.

Over the past month, since the Senate acquitted the President on the impeachment charges, the same "Get Clinton" forces who were behind that travesty, have been trying to lynch the President over his "soft on China" policies, and to launch a new McCarthyite "red scare" over alleged Chinese espionage at U.S. weapons laboratories.

The "New Cold War" push against China was launched via the release of a study by a special Congressional committee, chaired by Rep. Chris Cox (R-Calif.), on alleged Chinese theft of U.S. defense technologies *during the 1980s*. For the first half of March, the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal* have been spewing out a steady stream of propaganda, all based on the militarily preposterous thesis that China poses a new "strategic military threat" to the United States. Such "X Committee" (the Israeli apparatus spying on the United States) enemies of Clinton as Frank Gaffney of the Center for Strategic Policy, have been screaming for months that the *real* crime for which President Clinton should have been impeached was his sell-out of U.S. national security to Beijing. A book by two former Republican Con-

gressional staffers, *The Year of the Rat*, has been peddled for months by every Clinton-bashing outfit linked to the neo-conservatives and the Christian Right. So, the seeds of the latest Clinton-bashing, China-bashing effort have been germinating for months—planted long before the President was exonerated by the U.S. Senate.

President defends partnership

Travelling in Central America during the second week of March, President Clinton took on the China-bashers, during a press conference on March 11, at the close of a regional summit in Antigua, Guatemala.

Asked if he had been covering up Chinese espionage in the United States in order to "further your policy of engagement," the President aggressively responded, "If you realize how China is growing, both economically and the size of their population, this affects the welfare of every person in Central America—whether the United States and China are at odds in a conflict or have a constructive relationship that has honest disagreements, where nobody is under any illusions that the facts are different than they are, I would argue that our efforts to have an honest and open policy with China, so that they don't think that we have made a decision in advance to try to contain and limit them in their economic growth and their development as a nation, has paid dividends."

Citing cooperation from China on a number of weapons non-proliferation treaties as evidence of the success of the administration's approach, the President added, "I do not believe we would have had the cooperation we have had in trying to limit the impact of the Asian financial crisis, which has plunged tens of millions of people from the middle class into poverty in Asia, and represents the biggest short-term threat to democracy and to stability in Asia. I do not believe

these things would have occurred if we had not had an open, candid, honest relationship with China, aware of all the facts.”

On the same day that the President was speaking in Guatemala, the Defense Department stated that there were no plans to scale back the military-to-military exchanges with China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA).

Furthermore, on March 9, Commerce Secretary William Daley briefed reporters in Washington on a March 28-April 1 trade mission he will undertake to China, with a delegation including representatives from several Cabinet departments, as well as a large number of industrialists, such as representatives from Raytheon, Lockheed Martin, and Westinghouse. Secretary Daley stated that his “primary goal in China is to expand the role U.S. exports play in modernizing China’s infrastructure.”

Berger weighs in

It is no coincidence that the Clinton-bashers seized upon the release of the Cox report to call for the firing of Clinton’s National Security Adviser Sandy Berger, on the spurious grounds that he failed to move fast enough on “evidence” that the Chinese were stealing missile secrets from Los Alamos National Laboratory. In mid-March, two GOP Presidential candidates, Pat Buchanan and Steve Forbes, demanded that Berger be sacked.

As *EIR* has reported, Berger is the one member of the Principals Committee, the Cabinet-level national security policy team, who remains loyal to the President.

Appearing on “Meet the Press” on March 14, Berger aggressively defended his actions and the President’s policy of engagement with China, noting that “most countries are engaged in efforts to obtain American sensitive information by clandestine means. The world is not a playpen here.”

The March 15 *New York Times*, reporting on China’s nuclear arsenal, noted that China’s nuclear doctrine is a “minimal deterrent”—just enough to retaliate with one or two missiles after an attack by a major adversary. China’s ICBMs are extremely vulnerable to attack; they are in fixed sites, and because they still use liquid fuel that must be stored outside the rocket, it takes an hour or more to fire such a missile.

Paul Godwin, an expert on Chinese forces who recently left the U.S. National War College, is quoted by the *Times* saying: “This is not an offensive force.”

A column by Robert Scheer in the March 16 *Los Angeles Times* noted that the W-88 warhead which the Chinese supposedly learned to build by stealing the design from the United States, is one that the United States mounts atop a Trident submarine missile. “No one in the media or Congress has stopped to ask just what the Chinese would or could do with such a weapon,” Scheer wrote, pointing out that the Trident—of which the Chinese have none—was built as part of a war-fighting capability against the Soviet Union to ensure that the United States would have a retaliatory capability after a Soviet first strike.

“China is a half-century behind the U.S. in the deployment of an intercontinental nuclear weapons arsenal, possessing a mere 20 unreliable, liquid-fueled, land-based, nuclear-tipped missiles to wave at our 10,000 super-modern weapons deployed on land, air and sea,” Scheer said.

Appearing on NBC on Sunday, March 14, Rep. Norman Dicks (D-Wash.), the ranking minority member on the Cox Committee, responded to a question from host Tim Russert about the “serious damage done to our national security by the leaks at Los Alamos.”

“Let me put it this way,” Dicks said. “Today the United States still has overwhelming nuclear and conventional superiority over China. We have 18 Trident submarines, 50 MX missiles, 500 Minuteman IIIs, and three intercontinental bombers that can reach China. They possess less than two dozen ICBMs with the capability of reaching the United States. I mean, we went against Russia for 20 years with nuclear parity. We have overwhelming superiority here, and I think we deter the Chinese from even considering an attack against the United States. So I think we have to keep this thing in proportion, not panic.”

Not fooled

The Chinese government has demonstrated an acute understanding of the factional dimensions of the fight in Washington. On March 15, Prime Minister Zhu Rongji, in a press conference at the close of a session of the National People’s Congress in Beijing, lamented that “Sino-U.S. relations have been victimized by the internal struggle in the United States. I don’t think my visit to the United States will bring me into a minefield, but I do expect to encounter an unfriendly atmosphere there,” which, he said, would be countered by the “warm handshake” he expects to receive from President Clinton.

The same day, *China Daily* charged, “A witch-hunt is on. And it has been worked up to frenzy. . . . This time the target is not the President of the United States. It is a potential ‘strategic partner’ . . . China.”

Despite Clinton’s actions to cool the frenzy, some Republican diehards in Congress remain committed to sabotaging the “strategic partnership” at all costs. Richard Shelby, chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, on March 15 called for a ban on scientific exchange programs with foreign governments by U.S. weapons labs, pending the outcome of the Congressional probe of the China spy scare.

Belatedly, American high-tech corporations—the main losers in the China-bashing—have begun to flex their lobbying muscle against the new “red menace” efforts of the GOP and the media. On March 15, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that all of the major U.S. electronic and aerospace companies have formed a new lobby, to pressure every member of the House and Senate to end the unilateral sanctions policies against China and other major potential trading partners, lest what remains of the U.S. high-tech industrial base collapse.