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The United States of America's China Policy under the Bush and Obama administration:

A Taiwanese case study

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Année académique 2019-2020
Master en sciences politiques, orientation relations internationales

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Alexander Hubert Frans Ballegeer

Acknowledgments

I would primarily like to thank my promotor Professor Atanassova. Without her fascinating course about geostrategy in the Asia-Pacific, I would not have discovered the interesting politics of this region. She did not only peak my interest, but she was also of prime importance for this thesis. Without Professor Atanassova's critical and lengthy feedback, I would have been unable to finalise this dissertation.

Secondly, I would also like to thank the entire staff of the Political Sciences Faculty of the UCLouvain. I am very glad that, according to a fairly new family tradition, I chose this university to finalise my last 2 years as a student. From day one until the end, I felt welcomed and in very capable hands. The last 2 years have offered me an entirely new understanding of politics, diplomacy and international relations. It has been an extraordinary experience. Even though Louvain-la-Neuve is only around 30 kilometres away from my home, it was also a surprisingly culturally enriching experience. I am now more convinced than ever, that even though Belgium has its cultural and political differences, its people also have an unmistakable shared identity.

Lastly, I would like to thank my parents for allowing me to study for 2 more years. Without their financial and moral support, all of this would have been impossible. Since the outbreak of Covid-19, I have been living back at home, which also must have been quite an experience for them. I would like to thank my mother for keeping me company throughout the days during this historic time. What would I have been without her cooking and the daily Rummikub tournament? I would also like to thank my father, not only for challenging me sportively, but also for the lengthy, yet interesting task of proof-reading this thesis.

Thank you.

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[List of abbreviations](#)

APEC – Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation

ASEAN – Association of Southeast Asian Nations

CIA – Central Intelligence Agency

DoD – Department of Defense

DoS – Department of State

DPRK – Democratic People’s Republic of Korea

FBI – Federal Bureau of Investigation

FPA – Foreign policy analysis

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NSA – National Security Advisor

NSC – National Security Council

PLAN – People’s Liberation Army Navy

PRC – People’s Republic of China

QDR – Quadrennial Defense Review

SecDef – Secretary of Defense

SecState – Secretary of State

TRA – Taiwan Relations Act

UK – United Kingdom

UN – United Nations

US – United States

USTR – United States Trade Representative

“It really depends upon how our nation conducts itself in foreign policy. If we're an arrogant nation, they'll resent us. If we're a humble nation, but strong, they'll welcome us. Our nation stands alone right now in the world in terms of power, and that's why we have to be humble.”¹

- Presidential candidate George Bush

“I am running for President of the United States to lead this country in a new direction - to seize this moment's promise. Instead of being distracted from the most pressing threats that we face, I want to overcome them... Instead of alienating ourselves from the world, I want America - once again - to lead.”²

- Presidential candidate Barack Obama

1. Introduction

If one wants to fully grasp the contemporary global political system, it is paramount to focus on the relationship between the established, yet dwindling, hegemon of the world's politics, the United States of America, and its future competitor for regional and even global influence, the People's Republic of China. The aim of this thesis will be to shine a light on the relationship between the 2 most influential countries of our contemporary political system. The one who shall become the most dominant will strongly influence the political constellation of the future.

In this master's thesis, I will research the United States' China policy under the presidency of George W. Bush and his successor Barack Obama. After all, the former's foreign policy is mostly known for his War on Terror. In Western media, his figure is quite often portrayed in a pejorative and simplistic manner. The latter's foreign policy is mostly known for his bin Laden raid. Unlike the former, President Obama is almost always portrayed positively.

Both presidents had to deal with China's rise and the increasing importance of the Asian region. In this thesis, I will outline the particular political policies of the 2 administrations concerning China. I will research whether the China policy of the US was consistent or whether there were significant changes. I will focus on the decision-making process and how changes took place. The aim is thus to make the American China policy between 2001 and 2017 clear. To further underscore my findings, I will also make use of a case study. I will research whether the China policy influenced the American weapon sales policy to Taiwan. I chose Taiwan given its particular history and relation with both the PRC and the US. The island is often portrayed as the most important apple of discord between the 2 countries. I opted for arms sales, given

¹ User Clip: George W. Bush on Humble Foreign Policy 2000, 2019 C-Span, 23 February 2020.

² Full text: Obama's foreign policy speech, 2008 The Guardian, 11 April 2020.

that they are at the core of the relation between the US and Taiwan and because they can be seen as an indicator of the bilateral relations.³ The website of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs states that:

“The Taiwan question has always been the single most important and most sensitive issue at the core of China-U.S. relations... Since the very beginning, the Chinese Government and people have struggled resolutely against the U.S. illegal invasion of Taiwan, which gave a serious blow to the U.S. for its ambitious plot to separate Taiwan from Chinese territory, and upheld China's sovereignty and territorial integrity.”⁴

I will consequently focus on the next research question: what influenced the decision-making process and creation of the China policy of the George Bush and Barack Obama administrations? As a follow-up question, I will research whether the China policy had a corresponding effect on the American weapon sales policy to Taiwan.

The aim is thus not to measure whether the policies were a success or what outcomes they produced. Due to the confined limits of this thesis, I will not research all the different aspects of the American China policy. I will only focus on the political approach of these 2 presidents, read diplomatic ties with China. This thesis will consequently not outline the economic or cultural part of the American China policy, even though one could justifiably argue that these are also important. To research the American political approach of the China policy, I will take a linear approach, focussing on high-level official exchanges between the US and China. I will equally look at particularly sensitive political issues. However, I chose not to pre-establish fixed subjects of interest. I believe this would create an overstructured thesis, which would make it impossible to add the appropriate nuances of each particular year.

To answer the research question, I will make use of FPA. I aim to fill a gap in the current FPA literature. Several books and articles have already been written on the character, beliefs and decision-making process of President Bush. One can think of the works of Kirtley and Greenstein. This literature has its merits, but it remains descriptive, given that it is not applied to particular policies.⁵ Other authors, such as Mitchell and Massoud, who do apply the theory, mostly focus on the Iraq War.⁶ Similarly, several publications make use of FPA to research

³ QINGMIN, Z., ‘The bureaucratic Politics of US Arms Sales to Taiwan’, *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 231.

⁴ *The Taiwan Question*, 2000 FMPRC, 23 February 2020.

⁵ KIRTLEY, B., ‘The Arbiter of Fate: The Presidential Character of George W. Bush’, HILLIARD, B., e. a. (ed.), *George W. Bush: Evaluating the President at Midterm*, New York, 2004; GREENSTEIN, F., *The Presidential Difference: Leadership Style from FDR to Barack Obama*, Princeton, 2009.

⁶ MITCHELL, D. and MASSOUD, T., ‘Anatomy of Failure: Bush's Decision-Making Process and the Iraq War’, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 5 (2009), 265-286.

President Obama. Exemplary hereof are Pfiffner and Wayne, they equally have not applied the theory on his policies.⁷ As Kaarbo argues, one of the most promising parts of FPA is its comparative possibilities. By comparing foreign policies across individuals and time, it becomes possible to explain the decision-making processes and policies of different administrations.⁸ An FPA-based comparison of the Clinton administration and the Bush administration's China policies has been made by Yang.⁹ However, an FPA-based comparative study, focussing on the China policies of President Bush and President Obama has not yet been published. This thesis will consequently aim to add value to current FPA research, by making a comparative analysis of the US' China policy under President Bush and President Obama.

In the second part of this thesis, after this introduction, I will focus on FPA theory specifically. This will make it possible for me to compare not just the different decision-making processes and China policies of the 2 presidents, but also the possible policy changes. In the third part of this paper, I will create a small historical background chapter to contextualise the Bush and Obama presidencies. In the fourth chapter, I will first research President Bush's character, complexity and advisors. Thereafter, I will apply this knowledge on President Bush's China policy. The fifth chapter follows the same structure, but focuses on President Obama. In both chapter 4 and 5, I will make use of a linear approach. At the end of these chapters, I will dedicate a smaller subchapter to the arms offers to Taiwan. Finally, there is a conclusion, outlining my findings concerning the American China policy between 2001 and 2017.

2. Foreign policy analysis

FPA is a subfield within international relations theory, founded in the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁰ The approach can best be understood in the context of the Cold War, which was a period of unusual predictability and apparent stability.¹¹ The arguably most significant scientific approach to make sense of the Cold War in terms of international relations theory was realism. However, FPA is a subfield that strongly questioned this dominance. In short, the realist approach focuses

⁷ PFIFFNER, J., 'Decision-making in the Obama White House', *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 41 (2011), 244-262; WAYNE, S., *Personality and Politics: Obama For and Against Himself*, Washington, 2012.

⁸ KAARBO, J., e. a., 'Foreign Policy Analysis in 20/20: A Symposium', *International Studies Review*, 5 (2003), 156-159.

⁹ YANG, E., 'Leaders' Conceptual Complexity and Foreign Policy Change: Comparing the Bill Clinton and George W. Bush Foreign Policies toward China', *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 3 (2010), 415-446.

¹⁰ HADFIELD, A. and HUDSON, V., 'North American and European Foreign Policy Analysis', BRUMMER, K. and HUDSON, V. (ed.), *Foreign Policy Analysis: Beyond North America*, Boulder, 2015, 139-147.

¹¹ HUDSON, V., 'Foreign Policy Decision-Making: A Touchstone for International Relations Theory in the Twenty-First Century', SNYDER, R., e. a. (ed.), *Foreign Policy Decision-Making: Revisited*, New York, 2002, 2-3.

on the state as both a rational and unitary actor. The anarchic system surrounding the state is the main guide to understand and predict its actions. Each state acts to obtain its national interests, the most important of which is survival. According to realism, one thus needs to research the relative power of a state on the international system to understand its foreign policy.¹² The relevance of this structural approach can however be questioned, when it comes to state interaction in Asia.¹³ The FPA approach fundamentally disagrees with the idea that the state is a rational and unitary actor.

Like other international relations theories, FPA can be described as: “a large tent, home to a wide range of substantive, methodological, and theoretical orientations”.¹⁴ I will make use of a narrow and psychologically based vision of FPA. Professor Valerie Hudson stated that:

“The single most important contribution of FPA to IR theory is to identify the point of theoretical intersection between the most important determinants of state behaviour: material and ideational factors. The point of intersection is *not* the state, it is human decisionmakers.”¹⁵

FPA in other words differs from realism in the fact that it stresses the role of the human decision-makers. This is an agent-oriented approach, that seeks to explain foreign policy decisions by individual acts and not by the acts of a unitary rational actor in a predetermined structure, such as realism. According to FPA research, one needs to take a closer look at domestic politics and open up the ‘black box’ of the state. After all, one can state that all interstate actions and reactions are grounded in the agency of human decision-makers.¹⁶ One can consequently only truly understand foreign policy behaviour by understanding decision-makers and their decision-making process.¹⁷

The aim of this thesis and FPA in general, is thus not to make pinpoint predictions or laws for interstate behaviour. What I will try to do is contribute to the understanding of the decision-making process of both these presidents.

¹² ALDEN, C. and ARAN, A., *Foreign Policy Analysis: New Approaches*, London, 2012, 3-4.

¹³ KHONG, F., ‘Foreign Policy Analysis and the International Relations of Asia’, PEKKANEN, S., e. a. (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the International Relations of Asia*, Oxford, 2014, 85.

¹⁴ KAARBO, J., ‘A Foreign Policy Analysis Perspective on the Domestic Politics Turn in IR Theory’, *International Studies Review*, 17 (2015), 191.

¹⁵ HUDSON, V. and DAY, B., *Foreign Policy Analysis: Classic and Contemporary Theory*, Lanham, 2020, 7.

¹⁶ KAARBO, J., ‘A foreign policy analysis perspective on After victory’, *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 2 (2019), 29.

¹⁷ BREUNING, M., *Foreign Policy Analysis: A Comparative Introduction*, New York, 2007, 165.

2.1. Foreign policy change

In this thesis, I will not only look at the different China policies of President Bush and Obama. I will also look at the possible changes of the policy during their presidencies. According to Charles Hermann, there are 4 different levels of foreign policy change. Firstly, there are adjustment changes. These changes are minor and they adapt the level of effort in a policy. However, the approach to the policy and the goals remain unchanged. Secondly, there are program changes, which lead to a different approach in methods and means to achieve the established goal. The third possibility is a foreign policy change in the problem or goal. This means that the initial goal or problem of the policy is replaced or abandoned. The last possibility is a change in international orientation, which is the most far-reaching possible change. This means that there will be an entire orientation change in the actor's approach to foreign policy. This consequently will influence not one single policy, but many different policies will be more or less simultaneously changed.¹⁸

According to Jakob Gustavsson, foreign policy change is not primarily caused by domestic and international environmental changes. He argues that the government of a state is not in itself capable of thinking, learning or seeing. The people within the government are responsible for changes. One could thus state that change is only made possible thanks the agency of individuals. The main reason for these changes are alterations in the beliefs of these individuals. Since it would be enormously time- and resource- consuming to investigate all the individuals involved in the decision-making process, one should focus on the primary decision-makers and influencers. All be it that this is a pragmatic approach, it is also the only feasible possibility.¹⁹

2.2. Leaders

Given the importance of agency, I will pay a lot of attention to the consecutive presidents of the US. It will become clear that they crucially influenced the American China policy. However, George Bush and Barack Obama were not a tabula rasa, when they held their office.²⁰ They were humans with their own history, personality, beliefs, experiences, style, emotions, etc. Each of these concepts and several others influenced their decision-making while performing their

¹⁸ HERMANN, C., 'When Governments Choose to Redirect Foreign Policy', *International Studies Quarterly*, 34 (1990), 6-7.

¹⁹ GUSTAVSSON, J., 'How Should We Study Foreign Policy Change?', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 34 (1999), 83-87.

²⁰ HUDSON, V., 'Foreign Policy Analysis: Actor-Specific Theory and the Ground of International Relations', *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 1 (2005), 10.

presidency. Leaders in other words vary and this has a profound impact on their policy implementation and goals. I shall thus research their beliefs and personalities.²¹

Beliefs are de facto what both of these men hold to be true. Leaders tend to unconsciously filter new information through pre-established beliefs, which will consequently tend to underscore the current policy.²² One could thus state that leaders act upon their subjective vision of the facts, which are filtered through their belief system. Foreign policy decisions are consequently not based on the objective reality.²³ However, beliefs as such are not set in stone, they are possible subjects to change. Core beliefs are unlikely to change, but when they occur it is mostly sudden and after a major event.²⁴ There are 2 fundamental conditions before a leader possibly changes his beliefs. Firstly, the leader must have access to new information and be sensitive to it. Secondly, the leader must be willing to alter his views and beliefs in reaction to this new information.²⁵

To research their personalities, I will make use of James Barber's model as a starting point. According to Barber, 3 main characteristics need to be considered to fully understand the personality of a decisionmaker. The most visible one is style. This decides the performance of the presidential roles of rhetoric, personal relations and homework. One could say that this is the manner in which the president fulfils his presidential tasks. Bush and Obama clearly had their particular stylistic differences. Secondly, is the concept of the president's world view. This is the way the leader sees and interprets the world around him. Lastly, there is character, this is the way the president orients himself towards life and his own merits. The character is built by experience, already from an early age onward. Using these 3 characteristics, it is possible to typify the presidents with the use of 2 baselines. The first one defines whether a president can be seen as active or passive, which influences whether the president invests a lot of energy and time into his presidential activities. The second baseline defines whether the president feels positive or negative about his occupancy. Does the president in other words enjoy the power, responsibility and job that he performs?²⁶ Barber believes that active positive presidents will generally produce the best possible foreign policy. The simplicity of this typology is why it has become such a successful approach.²⁷

²¹ HUDSON and DAY, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 63.

²² JERVIS, R., 'Hypotheses on Misperception', *World Politics*, 20 (1968), 459.

²³ HOLSTI, O., 'The belief system and national images: a case study', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 6 (1962), 244.

²⁴ MORIN, J. and PAQUIN, J., *Foreign Policy Analysis: A Toolbox*, Cham, 2018, 82-86.

²⁵ YANG 'Leaders' Conceptual Complexity and Foreign Policy Change', 418-420.

²⁶ BARBER, J., *The Presidential Character: Predicting Performance In The White House*, New Jersey, 1992, 4-9.

²⁷ MORIN, and PAQUIN, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 75.

I will also make use of Margaret Hermann's leadership trait analysis framework. This is arguably one of the most used methods of assessing leadership characteristics. She proposed to use up to 7 specific personality characteristics. However, due to the restraints of this master's thesis, I will only use one of these characteristics: conceptual complexity. This specific concept is particularly useful. Many researchers, such as Yacoov, Vertzberger and Preston, argue that it has a strong influence on a leader's decision-making, style of leadership, character and assessment of risk.²⁸ Conceptual complexity measures the intellectual methods of a leader to assess other people, policies, places, etc. Leaders with a high level of conceptual complexity tend to consider ambiguity in policies and are more flexible in their ideas, policy options and worldview. They will consequently be more open to a wider array of viewpoints and feedback. To make a decision, they often require a high level of information and subsequent time to analyse it. These types of leaders will consistently evaluate more information and take this information into account to review implemented policies. They will thus be more likely to change their policies, even without major policy setbacks.²⁹

Leaders with a lower conceptual complexity will look at the world in an either-or dimension. They will find it more difficult to perceive the issues at hand in an ambiguous manner. The world is seen in a stereotypical and highly structured and ordered way. In general, one can state that these types of leaders are prone to act dogmatically.³⁰ The advisors of these types of presidents will mostly be people with a similar belief system, while dissenting opinions tend to be interpreted as disloyalty. These types of leaders will thus be less welcome to input from alternative viewpoints and discrepant information. They will consequently find it difficult to adopt a flexible policy. They are more likely to follow their intuition and action is seen as preferable to thinking, information gathering and planning.³¹

One can conclude that for a leader with a low conceptual complexity the issue is either black or white. Leaders with a higher conceptual complexity consider the same issue to be a varying shade of grey. One must however take note that complexity does not equal intelligence

²⁸ VERTZBERGER, Y., *The World In Their Minds: Information Processing, Cognition, and Perception in Foreign Policy Decisionmaking*, Stanford, 1990, 134-135.

²⁹ COTTAM, M. and PRESTON, T., *Building Stronger Images of Leadership: A Framework for Integrating Image Theory and Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) into a More Powerful Tool for Analyzing Leaders-at-a-Distance*, 2007 All academic, 20 February 2020.

³⁰ SUEDELD, P. and RANK, A., 'Revolutionary Leaders: Long-Term Success as a Function of Changes in Conceptual Complexity', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 34 (1976), 170.

³¹ HERMANN, M., *Assessing Leadership Style: A Trait Analysis*, 2002 SSA, 20 February 2020.

or political sophistication. Both a high and low level of conceptual complexity have their merits and disadvantages, depending on the context.³²

2.3. Advisors and advising system

No matter how centralised the power is in a country, hardly ever a leader makes foreign policy decisions alone. Even though Bush and Obama were the heads of the executive power, they always relied on advisors and decisions were often made in a group setting. This equally applies to high-level foreign policy decision-making such as the China policy.³³ The use of advisors has 3 main goals. The most important and obvious reason is the fact that these advisors advise. They in other words give their opinion and ideas on the issue at hand. Secondly, a decision made in a group is always seen as more legitimate. Lastly, these advisors also offer the decision-maker a way to reduce the stress. The weight of the decision thus no longer solely falls on the shoulders of the president.³⁴ Given that these advisors thus extensively participate in the decision-making process, I will also take their presence into account.³⁵

One must keep in mind that there are different types of advisors and different types of advisory systems. One can after all make a clear divide between the immediate inner circle of advisors and the outer circle. Firstly, not all advisors have the same access to and influence on the president. Simply put, one can state that people with direct access, such as White House employees, have more influence on the president than people who don't have comparable level of access.³⁶ One must also keep in mind that most of these advisors are a part of a bigger bureaucracy. Organizations have turf and stakes at play. This turf can best be understood as the skill domain in which each particular organization believes that it has the primary expertise. Organizations want to apply their expertise and consequently influence the foreign policy decisions. Organizations often defend their own particular turf zealously, while simultaneously looking to add additional turf. A bigger turf will after all lead to a bigger budget, more personnel and a greater autonomy. When it comes to the China policy, it is not unlikely that the DoS and DoD will aim to push their particular view. The former however can count upon a significantly

³² PRESTON, T., *The President & His Inner circle: Leadership Style and the Advisory Process in Foreign Affairs*, New York, 2001, 9-11.

³³ TETLOCK, P., e. a., 'Assessing Political Group Dynamics: A Test of the Groupthink Model', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 63 (1992), 403.

³⁴ MORIN, and PAQUIN, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 106.

³⁵ REDD, S., 'The Influence of Advisers on Foreign Policy Decision-making: An Experimental Study', *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 46 (2002), 342-344.

³⁶ CHITTICK, W., *American Foreign Policy: A Framework for Analysis*, Washington, 2006, 397.

bigger staff and budget. This will be used to the DoD's advantage in its aim to influence the final decision.³⁷

Secondly, one must also keep in mind that there are different advisory systems. There are 3 main different types of organizing one's advisors: the collegial, the formalistic and the competitive approach. It would be wrong to suggest that one type is always more appropriate than the others. This should be judged depending on the circumstances of the issue and every one of these approaches has different upsides and pitfalls. The collegial system is characterised by a president who sits at the centre of an informal network of advisors. The emphasis here lies on teamwork and sharing information to come to a common decision. The second system is a hierarchical structure with a clear chain of command, aimed to create an orderly and efficient system. Lastly, the competitive system is built around a low level of cooperation. There is an atmosphere of competition, to vie for the leader's attention. This approach is mainly aimed to make creative and feasible solutions.³⁸

2.4. Congress

Historically, American foreign policy has been entrusted to Congress. This is no place for a historical analysis, but throughout time the presidential office and Congress have struggled for influence on foreign policy decision-making. In short, one can state that the president has successfully become the most important actor in foreign policy.³⁹ Most certainly President Bush enjoyed a clear increase in support and freedom in the aftermath of 9/11. That being said, there were still constraints on his powers. The Congress after all has the power to adopt laws and resolutions, to confirm nominations and to set fiscal policies. Cooperation between the executive power and legislative power has not always been simple and has often led to power games. These of course can influence policies. Most important for this thesis will be whether both actors can cooperate concerning the question of offering weapon systems to Taiwan.⁴⁰ Since the end of the Cold War, Congress has consistently been a voice of criticism on China. It is consequently often seen in China as an anti-China force, more interested in humiliation than in cooperation.⁴¹

³⁷ HUDSON and DAY, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 89-93.

³⁸ BREUNING, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 89-90.

³⁹ CHITTICK, *American Foreign Policy*, 318-323.

⁴⁰ MORIN, and PAQUIN, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 128-131.

⁴¹ ZHU, Z., *US-China Relations in the 21st Century: Power transition and peace*, New York, 2006, 98-99.

2.5. Domestic actors

One must also keep in mind that the president is elected by the people and thus under pressure to act upon the public opinion. When there is a noticeable swing in public opinion, the president will generally aim to make a foreign policy, which is in accordance with this view. This is however by no means systematic or absolute. Added to this is the fact that the majority of the American public cares little about foreign policy, which also applies to the China policy.⁴² The factual influence of the public opinion on US foreign policy remains a contested subject. According to studies, it is at best modest.⁴³ The public is mostly able to set parameters within which the leadership has the freedom to set policies.

Intertwined with the public opinion, is the influence of the media. It has a powerful place in the US and it transmits information to both the leaders and the public opinion simultaneously. The media also has powerful agenda-setting capabilities, given its role in influencing public attention.⁴⁴ According to Professor Joseph Nye, the media is uniquely suited to pressure politicians, by their ability to impact the public opinion.⁴⁵ However, politicians remain free to ignore the media if they wish to do so.⁴⁶

Lastly, one must also acknowledge that there are interest groups. These are private associations of people, who aim to influence the president's decision-making.⁴⁷ However, their degree of influence constitutes one of the weak links of FPA, given that the literature on this subject remains underdeveloped.⁴⁸

3. Post-Cold War US-China relations

Here below, I will give a small overview of the history of the bilateral relations between the US and China since the end of the Cold War. This small chapter is meant to make it possible to contextualise the rest of this thesis.

In the decade after the Cold War, the US-China relations were thoroughly influenced by several particularly tense periods, which pushed the relationship in a new direction. The end date of the Cold War can be discussed upon, for this overview I argue that it was virtually over in 1989.

⁴² KAARBO, J., e. a., 'The Analysis of Foreign Policy in Comparative Perspective', KAARBO, J., e. a. (ed.), *Foreign Policy in Comparative Perspective: Domestic and International Influences on State Behavior*, Los Angeles, 2013, 13-15.

⁴³ JACOBS, L. and PAGE, B., 'Who Influences U.S. Foreign Policy?', *American Political Science Review*, 99 (2005), 117.

⁴⁴ SOROKA, S., 'Media, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy', *Harvard International Journal Of Press-Politics*, 8 (2003), 42-43.

⁴⁵ NYE, J. 'Redefining NATO's mission in the information age', *Nato Review*, 47 (1999), 13.

⁴⁶ NEACK, L., *Studying Foreign Policy Comparatively: Cases and Analysis*, Lanham, 2019, 130.

⁴⁷ ROURKE, J. and BOYER, M., *International Politics on the World Stage: Brief*, New York, 2004, 87.

⁴⁸ MORIN, and PAQUIN, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 75.

Upon entering the White House, President George H. W. Bush aimed to strengthen the engagement with China and create a more stable relationship. He was arguably the most knowledgeable president concerning China in history, given his prior positions as Director of the CIA and Chief of the US Liaison Office in the PRC.⁴⁹ As president, Bush Sr. wanted to encourage both economic and political progress in Asia, with China as his central focus. All of this should lead to a bilateral relationship that went beyond containment and cooperation against the USSR.⁵⁰ However, at the beginning of June 1989, protests were organised in hundreds of Chinese communities after the death of former General Secretary of the Communist Party Hu Yaobang. These protests evolved into demonstrations against inflation, corruption and the lack of democratisation. Eventually, the Chinese leadership decided to crush these protests violently, resulting in the death of thousands. All of this, generally known as the Tiananmen Square massacre, was televised by foreign cameramen, resulting in outrage all over the world.⁵¹

In the aftermath, President Bush Sr. aimed to keep communication channels to Beijing open. He wanted to insulate the bilateral relations, opting for a cooperative and pragmatist approach. However, the Tiananmen massacre would profoundly change the China policy on the long term. The US' favourable perception of China plummeted and it has still not recovered today. Overnight, one of the notable American Cold War successes became a failure.⁵² US media changed their opinion on China and remained permanently focussed on negative aspects. Hereafter, the country was no longer depicted as opening up, but as defiant and led by dictators. The belief that China would evolve towards political reform, like its Eastern communist counterparts, was abandoned. Instead came policies of either pragmatism or outright hostility. Certainly in Congress, the latter prevailed.⁵³ President Bush Sr.'s presidency thus became a pivotal moment. Hereafter, the 2 countries no longer easily set aside their ideological differences to cooperate.⁵⁴

In 1993, Bill Clinton became the new American president. To him, China was not a priority. He had fiercely criticised his predecessor repeatedly for cooperating with the "butchers of Beijing". Clinton initially focussed on human rights and economics, which led to difficult bilateral relations. However, under the pressure of strong business groups, he was soon forced

⁴⁹ BENVENUTI, A., 'US relations with the PRC after the Cold War', TAN, A. (ed.), *Handbook of US-China Relations*, Cheltenham, 2016, 63.

⁵⁰ GARRISON, J., *Making China Policy: from Nixon to G. W. Bush*, Boulder, 2005, 107-108.

⁵¹ COHEN, W., *America's Response to China: A History of Sino-American Relations*, New York, 2019, 240-241.

⁵² LAMPTON, D., *Same Bed, Different Dreams: Managing U.S.-China Relations, 1989-2000*, Berkeley, 2001, 21-22.

⁵³ SUTTER, R., *US-China relations: perilous past, uncertain present*, Lanham, 2018, 91-93.

⁵⁴ GARRISON, *Making China Policy*, 124.

to turn towards a more pragmatist approach.⁵⁵ In 1995, the Taiwanese President Lee was allowed to visit his alma mater in the US. China reacted heavily against it, with missile tests in the Taiwan Strait, mock beach landings and it equally recalled its US ambassador. Eventually, Clinton dispatched 2 aircraft carrier battle groups, to the waters off Taiwan. This crisis made it clear to Washington, that the bilateral relations had to be maintained consistently, with high-level attention. The military tensions paradoxically led to a more coherent engagement policy of the US.⁵⁶ The last period of heightened tensions under President Clinton was the result of the US bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, during the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia.

During his presidency, Clinton's China policy had become increasingly moderate and pro-engagement, intending to integrate China in the political world order. Nonetheless, in the last decade of the 20th century, the relationship between both countries had fundamentally changed. It had become clear that there was a steep value divide between both countries. The US media, population and Congress had become increasingly hostile concerning China.

4. President Bush's administration and China policy

"I could never have imagined what would unfold over my time in office. I knew some of the decisions I had made were not popular with many of my fellow citizens... I believe I got some of those decisions right, and I got some wrong. But on every one, I did what I believed was in the best interest of our country."⁵⁷

Here below, I will first take a look at the presidential figure George Bush. Thereafter, I will focus on his advisors and his advising system. Then I will explain how all of this came together in the China policy of the Bush administration. I will conclude this chapter with a subchapter focussed on the arms sales to Taiwan under the Bush administration.

4.1. The character and complexity of George Bush

George Walker Bush was born on the 6th of July 1946, in a wealthy and successful Texan family. The future president had a carefree and simple life growing up. Barbara Bush and George H. W. Bush loved their children unconditionally. His childhood was however marked by the tragic death of his little sister Robin. She died of leukaemia and the young George Bush often stayed at home to console his mother, instead of going out to play with others.⁵⁸ The death of his sister and the consequences instilled in him a fatalist vision, but with the important knowledge that an optimistic vision could overcome all sorts of future challenges. His parents

⁵⁵ ZHU, *US-China Relations in the 21st Century*, 112.

⁵⁶ SUTTER, *US-China relations*, 103.

⁵⁷ BUSH, G., *Decision Points*, London, 2010, 474-476.

⁵⁸ BUSH, *Decision Points*, 4-8.

had high hopes and expectations of their children and this outed itself in a certain counterreaction of George Bush. The most blatant and well-known example hereof is Bush's heavy drinking later in life.⁵⁹ In his memoirs, he described his decision to stop drinking, made with a "mean hangover" after his 40th birthday party, as one of the toughest decisions he ever made.⁶⁰ Throughout his youth, President Bush was given the values of his parents. Most important above all were a sense of duty, unpretentiousness and loyalty.

President Bush's leadership style as a president was influenced by his time as a university student at Yale and Harvard. At Yale, he had a particular interest in history, but he was a mediocre student at best. He described his own philosophy during those years as "work hard, play hard". He mostly spent his time with friends and occasionally getting in trouble. Later at a commencement address at Yale, he reflected about his university experience:

"And to the 'C' students, I say to you: You too can be president of the United States... If you are like me, you won't remember everything you did here... That can be a good thing."⁶¹

After one and half year as a pilot at the Texas Air National Guard, he decided to start a Master's of Business Administration at Harvard. He always was an outgoing person, looking for companionship and affirmation from others. After graduating, he formed a successful oil business with funds raised through his family connections. He also became involved in politics, during his father's presidential election campaign in 1988. These formative years and his job as managing partner of the Texas Rangers baseball team would heavily influence his presidential style and teambuilding decisions.⁶² After all, he learned that trusting others and delegating tasks can lead to success.

At the beginning of his presidency, Bush saw the world through the eyes of a Texan, surrounded by love, friends and sports.⁶³ To understand Bush's worldview, one also needs to look at his conceptual complexity and religion. Bush is a born-again Christian, who experienced a far-reaching spiritual transformation. He for example anchored his resolve to swear off alcohol in religious commitment.⁶⁴ This was not only necessary for his physical health but also for the health of his marriage. He stated in his memoirs: "I knew I could count on the grace of

⁵⁹ KIRTLEY, 'The Arbiter of Fate', HILLIARD, e. a. (ed.), *George W. Bush*, 22-23.

⁶⁰ BUSH, *Decision Points*, 2-3.

⁶¹ CHEN, E., *Bush Returns to Yale, Gives Graduates the Last Laugh*, 2001 L.A. Times, 25 February 2020.

⁶² GREENSTEIN, *The Presidential Difference*, 191-193.

⁶³ KIRTLEY, 'The Arbiter of Fate', HILLIARD, e. a. (ed.), *George W. Bush*, 23.

⁶⁴ DEN DULK, K. and ROZELL, M., 'George W. Bush religion, and foreign policy: personal, global, and domestic contexts', *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 9 (2011), 73-74.

God to help me change”.⁶⁵ Religion had always been a part of Bush’s life, but he wasn’t a believer. As a child, he went to church because it was mandatory and later in his life he simply wanted to avoid irritating his mother.⁶⁶ It was however thanks to the strength and support he found in Christianity that he was able to stop drinking and thus run for president. His Christian worldview clearly influenced his policy during his presidency, and also explains his tendency for taking action and trusting his gut. He thought his policies to be morally right and it gave him the confidence to deal with emergencies such as the terrorist attacks of 9/11. President Bush’s Christian world view was paired with the idea that the US had a special role to play in the world.⁶⁷ At his second inaugural address he proclaimed:

“America's vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one. From the day of our Founding, we have proclaimed that every man and woman on this earth has rights, and dignity, and matchless value, because they bear the image of the Maker of Heaven and earth... Today, America speaks anew to the peoples of the world: All who live in tyranny and hopelessness can know: the United States will not ignore your oppression, or excuse your oppressors. When you stand for your liberty, we will stand with you.”⁶⁸

He thus believed that the US should take a leadership role and that it has to defend moral values and confront evil. This became glaringly obvious after the tragic events of 9/11.

According to Barber’s typology, George Bush was a passive-positive president. These presidents generally have a superficial optimism, coupled with a low self-esteem.⁶⁹ They also look for the encouragement and affection from others. They put relatively little energy in the job, think of Bush’s delegative nature, but they nevertheless enjoy great personal satisfaction from it.⁷⁰

Keeping all of the above in mind, it can come as no surprise that Bush is often seen as a president with a relatively low level of conceptual complexity.⁷¹ When it comes to foreign policy, President Bush saw the world in a highly simplified way. A possible adversary was either black or white, or similarly good or bad. Countries were consequently easily labelled. A prime example hereof is his use of the term axis of evil, when he stated that “my job isn’t to try to

⁶⁵ BUSH, *Decision Points*, 2.

⁶⁶ BUSH, *Decision Points*, 30-31.

⁶⁷ CHOUDHURY, M., ‘The Sacred and the Secular: Influence of Religion on George W. Bush’s Foreign Policy’, *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations*, 19 (2015), 168-170.

⁶⁸ *President Bush's Second Inaugural Address*, 2005 NPR, 26 February 2020.

⁶⁹ COTTAM, M., e. a., *Introduction to Political Psychology: 3rd Edition*, New York, 2016, 33-34.

⁷⁰ BARBER, *The Presidential Character*, 8.

⁷¹ YANG, ‘Leaders’ Conceptual Complexity and Foreign Policy Change’, 438.

nuance. My job is to tell people what I think”.⁷² Even though Iran, Iraq and North Korea had completely different regimes and consequent goals, they were repeatedly portrayed as being identically threatening, evil and uncivilized. Bush’s policies were often marked by an ideological approach and characterised by the use of stereotypes. President Bush, who initially was not interested in foreign policy, was consequently not very sensitive to new information. This was after all often interpreted in his black and white vision.⁷³ Bush’s decision-making process was best summarised by his longest-serving press secretary Scott McClellan who said:

“President Bush has always been an instinctive leader more than an intellectual leader. He is not one to delve deeply into all the possible policy options...before making a choice. Rather, he chooses based on his gut and his most deeply held convictions.”⁷⁴

4.2. Bush’s advisors and advising system

Given his lack of experience and interest, Bush initially counted heavily on his advisors for foreign policy. Here above, I mentioned that leaders with a low level of conceptual complexity often have like-minded advisors and cabinet members. This was also the case for George Bush, who pieced together an impressively experienced and strongly ideologically driven foreign policy team. President Bush not only relied heavily on his advisors’ advice, but also on their execution of the agreed-upon policies. This is due to the earlier mentioned chairman-of-the-board leadership style he adopted throughout his years in the oil business and as the manager of the Texas Rangers. George Bush created a collegial system, where he sat at the centre of an informal network of advisors. The idea was to create a team, rather than a competition, that comes to common policy proposals. However, due to Bush’s extremely delegative nature, there were a lot of infights about foreign policy during his presidency. Bush’s dislike for conflict and controversy did not particularly help this difficult situation.⁷⁵

The initial foreign policy team can best be divided into 2 different camps. The first group, which initially was the most influential one, comprises hawks and/or neoconservatives, who are wary of what they perceived as the China threat.⁷⁶ First, I will explain on a basic level the idea behind

⁷² *Public Papers of the President of the United States*, 2002 US GPO, 27 February 2020.

⁷³ COTTAM, M. and PRESTON, T., *Image Theory and Leader Trait Analysis (LTA): An Integrated Analysis of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush*, 2007 All Academic, 26 February 2020.

⁷⁴ MCCLELLAN, S., *What Happened: Inside the Bush White House and Washington’s Culture of Deception*, New York, 2008, 127.

⁷⁵ COTTAM and PRESTON, *Image Theory and Leader Trait Analysis (LTA)*, 26 February 2020.

⁷⁶ WANG, C., *George W. Bush and China: policies, problems, and partnership*, Lanham, 2009, 30.

neoconservatism. Their worldview will make it clear why they were chosen by Bush to become his advisors.

Neoconservatism as such can be broadly interpreted, but there are some basics. Every American neoconservatist believes that the US has the moral purpose to change the world for the better. It is inspired by patriotism, exceptionalism but also by a strong necessity of promoting liberal democracy in other countries, if necessary with force.⁷⁷ Neoconservatism became increasingly popular after the Cold War and it argued for a foreign policy that focussed on changing substantial parts of the world in the image of the US.⁷⁸ This group argued that in the future, China would seek to expand its territory and influence and it would consequently challenge the US' interests. They also believed that the US had neglected its allies under Clinton. According to them, the US should work closely together with other major Asian democratic partners, such as Taiwan and Japan. The existing alliances should consequently be strengthened and the US should specifically take a firm stance to defend Taiwan.

SecDef Donald Rumsfeld, in office from 2001 until 2006, was one of the most influential hawks in the Bush administration. He was a very experienced man, who already served under the administrations of Gerald Ford and Richard Nixon.⁷⁹ His negative views on China were widely known and made clear by the 1998 report of the Commission To Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States, which he chaired. This commission accused China of being a significant proliferator of ballistic missiles, weapons of mass destruction and technology to states as Iran, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. The report also warned for future Asian conflicts, which could involve the US.⁸⁰

The second notable hawkish China advisor was the Deputy SecDef Paul Wolfowitz, who stayed in office from 2001 until 2005. He served as an ambassador to Indonesia and was the Assistant SecState for East Asia and Pacific Affairs. In 1997 he wrote an article, in which he warned the US about China's rise. He remarkably compared China with pre-First World War Germany. He stated that:

“In the case of China, there is the ominous element of its outsider status. To hark back to the last turning of a century, the obvious and disturbing analogy is the position of Germany, a country that felt it had been denied its "place in the sun", that believed it had

⁷⁷ RANDFIELD, S., *Bush and US Foreign Policy: Change or Continuity?*, 2012 E-IR, 27 February 2020.

⁷⁸ HAAR, R., 'Explaining George W. Bush's Adoption of the Neoconservative Agenda after 9/11', *Politics & Policy*, 38 (2010), 970-972.

⁷⁹ WANG, *George W. Bush and China*, 39-42.

⁸⁰ *Missile Proliferation Threats*, 1998 FAS, 27 February 2020.

been mistreated by the other powers, and that was determined to achieve its rightful place by nationalistic assertiveness.”⁸¹

A third example was Deputy SecState Richard Armitage. He held this position from 2001 until 2005 and balanced between the hawkish and pragmatist approach to China. He can be seen as the senior administration official with the most significant experience on East Asia. He served 3 tours of duty during the Vietnam war and served in the South Vietnamese embassy of the US when the country was overrun by North Vietnamese forces in 1975. He also held 2 high-level posts in the Reagan administration, where he was a key figure managing security relations with Japan and China. During the presidential campaign, he stressed that Asia’s challenges and security partners would become of crucial importance.⁸²

In 1999, together with Wolfowitz and 21 colleagues of the Heritage Foundation and the Project for a New American Century he signed a policy statement, calling for an end of the strategic ambiguity policy on Taiwan.⁸³ Wolfowitz, Armitage and their colleagues wanted the US to clearly state that they would come to the defence of Taiwan in case of a Chinese blockade or attack on the island.⁸⁴

The most influential person of this group was Vice President Dick Cheney.⁸⁵ During his 2 mandates, he was often portrayed as the most powerful vice president in the last decades. He had the biggest staff in history that worked exclusively for him, 14 of whom were dedicated to national security matters. He served a mediator role on foreign policy matters. Cheney was not particularly specialised in Asia, but he was very experienced, being President Ford’s Chief of Staff and also Bush Sr.’s SecDef. Before his vice presidency, he already had 38 years of experience inside the Washington decision-making process.⁸⁶ He mostly feared China’s increasing nuclear capabilities.⁸⁷ Cheney’s views on China were however remarkably pragmatist, certainly compared to his views towards Iraq. All in all, his ties with the Chinese government always remained rather friendly.⁸⁸

⁸¹ WOLFOWITZ, P., *Bridging Centuries: Fin de Siecle All Over Again*, 1997 TNI, 27 February 2020.

⁸² SCOBELL, A., ‘Crouching Korea, Hidden China: Bush Administration Policy toward Pyongyang and Beijing’, *Asian Survey*, 42 (2002), 346-350.

⁸³ WANLI, Y., ‘Breaking the Cycle?: Sino-US Relations under George W. Bush Administration’, LIDA, M. (ed.), *China’s Shift Global Strategy of the Rising Power*, Tokyo, 2009, 83.

⁸⁴ *Statement on the Defense of Taiwan*, 1999 MM, 27 February 2020.

⁸⁵ PFIFFNER, J., ‘The Contemporary Presidency: Decision-making in the Bush White House’, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 39 (2009), 366.

⁸⁶ HAAR, ‘Explaining George W. Bush’s Adoption of the Neoconservative Agenda after 9/11’, 975-976.

⁸⁷ CHENEY, D., *In My Time: A Personal and Political Memoir*, New York, 2012, 526.

⁸⁸ WANG, *George W. Bush and China*, 31-34.

The second group was formed by conservative pragmatists, who believed that the US shared certain interests with China and that the best foreign policy was built around a multilateral approach. The prime example hereof is SecState Colin Powell, who held office from 2001 until 2005. The pinnacle of his military career was his position as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under the presidency of Bush Sr. He served 2 tours in Vietnam and 1 in Korea in the early 70s. To appease the relations between the 2 countries, he stressed repeatedly in his speeches, that China was not an enemy.⁸⁹ His position was clearly juxtaposed to several of his colleagues and he often found himself facing the opposition of Rumsfeld. At his confirmation hearing he stated:

“A strategic partner China is not, but neither is China our inevitable and implacable foe. China is a competitor, a potential regional rival, but also a trading partner willing to cooperate in areas where our strategic interests overlap. China is all of these things, but China is not an enemy.”⁹⁰

Powell was often isolated in the Bush administration and he was never able to establish a close relationship with the president. He was thus part of the out-group, with a lower amount of actual influence on the president.

Secondly, one should also add Condoleezza Rice to this group. She was initially the president's NSA, however she took over Powell's position and became SecState from 2005 until 2009. Rice is around the same age as Bush and they developed a close personal relationship, based on their interest in sports. Rice was not an Asia expert, but she had a pragmatic foreign policy vision. She believed that the US should do everything to avoid conflict with China over Taiwan. The US should also try to encourage economic liberalization and stand strong on security issues. That being said, Rice was more unpredictable, since she desired regime change in China.⁹¹ Her views towards China, while still pragmatist, were less favourable than Powell's. In 2000 she published an article stating:

“What we do know is that China is a great power with unresolved vital interests, particularly concerning Taiwan and the South China Sea. China resents the role of the United States in the Asia-Pacific region. This means that China is not a "status quo" power but one that would like to alter Asia's balance of power in its own favor. That alone makes

⁸⁹ SCOBELL, 'Crouching Korea, Hidden China', 349.

⁹⁰ *Confirmation Hearing by Secretary-Designate Colin L. Powell*, 2001 U.S. DoS, 27 February 2020.

⁹¹ GARRISON, *Making China Policy*, 166-169.

it a strategic competitor, not the "strategic partner" the Clinton administration once called it."⁹²

Lastly, one must also keep in mind that Bush's father also served as an unofficial senior foreign policy counsellor. As the former president and ambassador in China, he informally weighed in on the China policy. He can consequently also be added to the pragmatist group.⁹³

After researching President Bush's foreign policy advisors, one can conclude that he managed to gather an impressive and experienced team. However, there was almost no specific China experience. In stark contrast to the lacking China expertise, was the omnipresence of Japan and Taiwan experts.⁹⁴

4.3. Bush's China policy: consistently inconsistent

Hereabove, I have focused on FPA theory, the personality of George Bush, his advisors and his advisory system. Here below, I will research how the abovementioned information influenced the Bush administration's China policy. The infights and different approaches to China quickly became clear during the first period of tension between China and the US.

During his presidential campaign, Bush talked about the need for a more humble foreign policy in general.⁹⁵ China as such was not of prime importance during the debates of the presidential campaign in 2000.⁹⁶ He however strongly denounced President Clinton's engagement policy towards China. According to Bush, it was inappropriate and naïve to describe China as a strategic partner. He also stated that he would focus on the most important US allies in Asia: Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.⁹⁷ It was clear that if Bush would become the new president, he would adopt a hard-line policy on China.

George Bush was inaugurated on the 20th of January 2001 and he indeed held his promise by adopting a tougher China policy from the get-go. One must keep in mind that this was a president, who lost the popular vote and barely had a majority in Congress.⁹⁸ It was important for Bush to face what he perceived as a threatening state, while strengthening his

⁹² RICE, C., 'Promoting the National Interest', *Foreign Affairs*, 79 (2000), 56.

⁹³ SCOBELL, 'Crouching Korea, Hidden China', 349.

⁹⁴ WANLI, 'Breaking the Cycle?', LIDA, (ed.), *China's Shift Global Strategy of the Rising Power*, 85.

⁹⁵ LEFFLER, M., '9/11 in Retrospect: George W. Bush's Grand Strategy, Reconsidered', *Foreign Affairs*, 90 (2011), 34.

⁹⁶ YANG, J., 'Sino-US and Cross-Strait Relations under the Post-'11 September' Strategic Settings', *Journal of Contemporary China*, 11 (2002), 658.

⁹⁷ *Larry King Live South Carolina Republican Debate*, 2000 Cable News Network, 28 February 2000.

⁹⁸ POMPER, G., 'The 2000 Presidential Election: Why Gore Lost', *Political Science Quarterly*, 116 (2001), 201.

domestic position. This was crucial if he wanted to be able to win the mid-term elections in 2002 and eventually the 2004 presidential elections.⁹⁹ The tougher policy became immediately clear, when the new president held courtesy calls with virtually all the major leaders of the world, except with the Chinese President Jiang Zemin.¹⁰⁰ Much of the early China policy was heavily influenced by Bush's hawkish advisors, given the president's lack of interest in foreign policy. Rumsfeld for example immediately suspended all pre-scheduled Sino-US military exchanges. Each one of them had to be individually reviewed. The DoD consequently cancelled several upcoming visits of Chinese military officers and US military personnel was no longer allowed to travel to China. This de facto meant that almost all previous communications between the Pentagon and the Chinese military were terminated. Rumsfeld explained this decision by stating:

"I don't think we ought to be so eager for military-to-military-contact that we end up providing things to another country that they don't provide to us, or where the value is not roughly comparable."¹⁰¹

In other words, the new administration sent a clear message: China's priority for the US will be significantly lowered. Instead, the Bush administration would work closely together with its Asian allies. Wolfowitz and Armitage for example visited several Asian countries bordering China, to find support for a possible future missile shield. Amongst them were even countries such as Russia and India.¹⁰² It is no coincidence that the last time China became significantly less of a priority was under President Reagan. Bush not only looked up to this former president, he almost mentioned him 40 times in his memoirs, but there was also the importance of Armitage. He had been a part of Reagan's administration, where he then also argued for devaluing the relations with China.¹⁰³

The consequent mistrust and tensions in the first months of the new administration eventually erupted in the EP-3 reconnaissance plane incident. This became the first major foreign policy crisis for Bush, which also made it clear that force wasn't always the appropriate reaction against China.¹⁰⁴ On 1 April 2001, an air collision took place between a US EP-3 plane and an intercepting Chinese F-8 fighter jet at about 104 kilometres south-east of China's Hainan island. As a result hereof the Chinese fighter jet crashed, leading to the death of its pilot. The

⁹⁹ YANG, 'Sino-US and Cross-Strait Relations under the Post-'11 September' Strategic Settings', 659-660.

¹⁰⁰ COHEN, *America's Response to China*, 267.

¹⁰¹ SHAMBAUGH, D., *Modernizing China's Military: Progress, Problems, and Prospects*, Berkeley, 2003, 336.

¹⁰² YANG, 'Leaders' Conceptual Complexity and Foreign Policy Change', 440.

¹⁰³ SUTTER, *US-China relations*, 120.

¹⁰⁴ RANDFIELD, *Bush and US Foreign Policy*, 28 February 2020.

heavily damaged American plane on the other hand made an emergency landing on China's Lingshui airbase.¹⁰⁵

Within a matter of hours, the US government decided to unilaterally go public with the news, whilst immediately demanding the return of the plane and its crew as swiftly as possible. The following days President Bush made a handful of statements, trying to lay the blame on China, while pressuring the country into releasing the 24 crew members. The initial goal of the Bush administration was to make the incident a public matter to gain support. This was a completely different approach compared to the Clinton administration, who had downplayed similar incidents as much as possible. The previous administration always opted to at least consult the Chinese prior to these sorts of announcements. Bush on the other hand stated:

"I am troubled by the lack of a timely Chinese response to our request for this access... Failure of the Chinese government to react promptly to our request is inconsistent with standard diplomatic practice, and with the expressed desire of both our countries for better relations."¹⁰⁶

"We have allowed the Chinese government time to do the right thing. But now it is time for our servicemen and women to return home... This accident has the potential of undermining our hopes for a fruitful and productive relationship between our two countries."¹⁰⁷

These messages meant to make clear to the world that the US was victimized and that it consequently should under no circumstance apologise to China. The latter was depicted as the aggressor, that refused to respect the American crew and plane. The loss of the Chinese pilot however received little to no attention. These statements also implied vague threats to China if they would not swiftly return the EP-3 plane and its crew. The Bush administration could count upon the bipartisan support of the American Congress.¹⁰⁸ Many congressmen of both parties publicly declared their displeasure about China.¹⁰⁹ The Congress and the American popular opinion as such thus demanded strong actions against China.¹¹⁰ This eventually resulted in added pressure on the administration to act assertively.

¹⁰⁵ AVRUCH, K. and WANG, Z., 'Culture, Apology, and International Negotiation: The Case of the Sino-U.S. "Spy Plane" Crisis', *International Negotiation*, 10 (2005), 339.

¹⁰⁶ *Statement by the President*, 2001 The White House: George W. Bush, 4 March 2020.

¹⁰⁷ *Statement by the President on American Plane and Crew in China*, 2001 The White House, 4 March 2020.

¹⁰⁸ SHENG, L., 'Bush's New China Policy: Air Collision, Arms Sales and China-U.S. Relations', *Pacific Focus*, 16 (2001), 57-73.

¹⁰⁹ HAYES, J., *Constructing National Security: U.S. Relations with India and China*, New York, 2013, 145-154.

¹¹⁰ QINGGUO, J., 'Learning to Live with the Hegemon: evolution of China's policy toward the US since the end of the Cold War', *Journal of Contemporary China*, 14 (2005), 402.

However, pressuring the Chinese did not yield any results, because China held the most important cards: the crew and the plane.¹¹¹ The Chinese consequently repeated time and time again that the American airplane, by landing on a Chinese airport, entered its territory without permission and that it wanted a clear apology. President Bush, advised by his father, understood that a new approach had to be taken.¹¹² He dropped his public antagonistic approach and requested the pragmatic SecState Powell to find a diplomatic solution to the problem.¹¹³ The hawkish SecDef Rumsfeld, whose troops were held by the Chinese, was specifically demanded not to take a public role.¹¹⁴ As a result hereof Powell publicly declared on the 4th of April that: “We regret the Chinese pilot did not get down safely, and we regret the loss of life of that Chinese pilot.”¹¹⁵ Four days later Powell for the first time stated that he felt sorry for the loss of the Chinese pilot. It was however a letter, handed over by the US ambassador to China Joseph Prueher, to the Chinese Foreign Ministry that led to a breakthrough. The letter stated:

“Both President Bush and Secretary of State Powell have expressed their sincere regret over your missing pilot and aircraft. Please convey to the Chinese people and to the family of pilot Wang Wei that we are very sorry for their loss... We are very sorry the entering of China's airspace and the landing did not have verbal clearance...”¹¹⁶

This letter was quite particular due to its complex linguistic compromise. It had after all been worked out in behind-the-scenes bilateral negotiations and aimed to reconcile 2 juxtaposed positions. The US still refused to accept any responsibility for the plane incident. However, it de facto deliberately invited China to make a (mis)translation of the text. The administration thus offered the possibility for an ambiguous interpretation of the letter. As a result hereof, the Chinese media translated the American “very sorry” as “apology” and “deep regret”.¹¹⁷ After 11 days, the American crew was released and flown back home. In the end, both sides kept blaming the other, while satisfying their own population.¹¹⁸

The initial approach of the crisis can best be understood as a Cold War-style approach to the crisis. Bush’s principal advisors after all had been formed by the Cold War. Public

¹¹¹ GARVER, J., ‘Sino-American Relations in 2001: The Difficult Accommodation of Two Great Powers’, *International Journal*, 57 (2002), 300.

¹¹² SCOBELL, ‘Crouching Korea, Hidden China’, 358.

¹¹³ RANDFIELD, *Bush and US Foreign Policy*, 4 March 2020.

¹¹⁴ GARRISON, *Making China Policy*, 170.

¹¹⁵ Powell: ‘We regret’ Chinese pilot's loss, 2001 CNN, 4 March 2020.

¹¹⁶ Letter from Ambassador Prueher to Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Tang, 2001 The White House, 4 March 2020.

¹¹⁷ SHEPPERD, T., *Sino-US relations and the role of emotion in state action: understanding post-Cold War crisis interactions*, Basingstoke, 2013, 115-145.

¹¹⁸ YEE, A., ‘Semantic Ambiguity and the Hainan Negotiations Joint Deflections in Two-Level Bargaining’, *China: An International Journal*, 2 (2004), 79-82.

opinion and Congress equally added domestic pressure on the administration to take a tough stance against China. Even though the crisis made it clear that a confrontational China policy was counterproductive, and that the pragmatic approach from Powell led to a success, the Bush administration did not change its policy.¹¹⁹ This lays in line with Bush's low conceptual complexity, which leads to a more rigid interpretation of politics. Already a couple hours after the release of the crew, President Bush again adopted a strong position, stating that the US would: "ask the tough questions about China's recent practice of challenging United States aircraft operating legally in international air space."¹²⁰ A month later, President Bush met with the Dalai Lama, a highly controversial figure since China branded him as a separatist.¹²¹ The pentagon's QDR of 2001, which was almost entirely written before 9/11, clearly underscored this point of view:

"The potential exists for regional powers to develop sufficient capabilities to threaten stability in regions critical to U.S. interests. In particular, Asia is gradually emerging as a region susceptible to large-scale military competition... The possibility exists that a military competitor with a formidable resource base will emerge in the region."¹²²

Even though the report did not specifically mention China, it was clear that it alluded to one specific country. One can consequently safely state that the China policy of the Bush administration's first 9 months adopted a hawkish position. This was mainly due to Bush's pre-established belief of China as a strategic competitor. He was further strengthened in this view by his experienced advisors, who he listened to closely, given his lack of foreign policy experience and interest.¹²³

At the end of the summer something happened that Charles Hermann would describe as a change in international orientation. This meant that Bush's entire foreign policy in general was influenced and consequently changed more or less simultaneously. The event that caused all of this was the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. As a result hereof, Bush's beliefs about the world changed fundamentally.¹²⁴ The president, who up until that point was not interested in foreign policy, came to see the world in a more pessimistic way.¹²⁵ Bush's views

¹¹⁹ SHENG, 'Bush's New China Policy', 64.

¹²⁰ *Remarks by the President Upon the Return From China of U.S. Service Members*, 2001 The White House, 5 March 2020.

¹²¹ SCOBELL, 'Crouching Korea, Hidden China', 359.

¹²² *Quadrennial Defense Review Report: 2001*, 2001 Archive Defense, 5 March 2020.

¹²³ MANN, J., *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet*, New York, 2004, 255.

¹²⁴ ROBISON, S., 'George W. Bush and the Vulcans: Leader-Advisor Relations and America's Response to the 9/11 Attacks', SCHAFFER, M. and WALKER, S. (ed.), *Beliefs and Leadership in World Politics: Methods and Applications of Operational Code Analysis*, New York, 2006, 11-112.

¹²⁵ RENSHON, J., 'Stability and Change in Belief Systems: The Operational Code of George W. Bush', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 52 (2008), 835-838.

were altered in a manner that he saw the world as more conflictual and hostile towards the US.¹²⁶

The shocking events influenced the China policy profoundly. Prior to the terrorist attack, the most important challengers for the US were seen in a traditional manner. None of the high-ranking officials in the Bush administration considered terrorism or radical Islamism as a priority.¹²⁷ The September 11 attacks made it however painstakingly clear that the US faced a much more immediate threat than China.¹²⁸ The enemy no longer was attached to another state. Individuals, no matter their nationality, became a threat to the state.¹²⁹ China as such simply became a less urgent matter and the focus switched to anti-terrorism and the states that offered terrorists a safe haven. To several neoconservatists this offered the opportunity that they had been waiting for since the 1990s. The 9/11 attack allowed Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz and others to promote their agenda about Iraq and the Middle East in general. For Bush too, he who always craved for recognition, this was an opportunity. This would be his possibility to go into the history books as the man who liberated the Middle East. It is no coincidence that he often articulated his admiration for Reagan who strived for the liberation of Eastern Europe. This could make him an American hero as well. One must also stress Bush's low conceptual complexity and Christian views.¹³⁰ This was a question of doing the right thing and making sure that good would triumph over evil.¹³¹

The administration believed that if the US wanted to tackle this problem, it would need a certain support from other states. Relations with other states, such as China, were consequently readjusted and improved in the following years.¹³² China actively took the opportunity to try and improve its ties with the US.¹³³ President Zemin was one of the first foreign politicians to telephone the White House and offer his sympathy and support. The PRC also supported several counterterrorism resolutions in the UN Security Council, provided information on Islamic groups and it allowed the FBI to set up office in Beijing. The country

¹²⁶ REHNSON, J., 'Stability and Change in Belief Systems: The Operational Code of George W. Bush from Governor to Second Term President', WALKER, S., e. a. (ed.), *Rethinking Foreign Policy Analysis: States, Leaders, and the Microfoundations of Behavioral International Relations*, New York, 2011, 181.

¹²⁷ LEFFLER, '9/11 in Retrospect', 33.

¹²⁸ WANG, *George W. Bush and China*, 30.

¹²⁹ TURNER, O., *American Images of China: Identity, power, policy*, New York, 2014, 139.

¹³⁰ HAAR, 'Explaining George W. Bush's Adoption of the Neoconservative Agenda after 9/11', 978-985.

¹³¹ MAZARR, M., 'George W. Bush, Idealist', *International Affairs*, 79 (2003), 503-515.

¹³² YANG, 'Sino-US and Cross-Strait Relations under the Post-'11 September' Strategic Settings', 669.

¹³³ VAN NESS, P., 'China's Response to the Bush Doctrine', *World Policy Journal*, 21 (2004), 40-41.

also pledged funds towards the reconstruction of Afghanistan and it played an instrumental role in encouraging its ally Pakistan to support the American actions in Afghanistan.¹³⁴

This did not go unnoticed in Washington and the general tone of the White House became more cooperative. From one day to the other Beijing became a partner instead of an adversary.¹³⁵ Bush consequently decided to make his first trip to China in October of that year, where he attended the APEC summit. This was the first presidential foreign visit after 9/11, resulting in dissent within the US about the need to attend an economic conference in China. Here, he stated for the first time that his administration aimed for candid, cooperative and constructive relations with China.¹³⁶ Bush wanted to personally show his determination to improve US-China relations. In February 2002, Bush visited China again, which was unusually quick. This sent a significant message.¹³⁷ It was also 30 years after Nixon's visit, which initiated the normalisation of Sino-US relations. Throughout the 13 months after 9/11, President Bush had no less than 4 different meetings with President Zemin, but he equally met several times with Jiang's successor-designate Vice President Hu Jintao. During these meetings, the US showed a willingness to meet the Chinese importance of symbolism and summitry.¹³⁸ Exemplary hereof was a meeting in 2002 between President Bush and President Zemin, at the personal Bush Ranch in Texas. Here President Bush stated once more that:

“The United States seeks and is building a relationship with China that is candid, constructive and cooperative. We will continue building this relationship through contacts at many levels in months to come, including a new dialogue on security issues.”¹³⁹

One can state that the Bush administration's approach to China became increasingly pragmatically driven instead of ideology inspired. The 9/11 attacks after all led to a change in Bush's beliefs, who became more involved in foreign policy. He saw it as his task to protect the US from terrorism. The administration consequently no longer deemed China as the main threat. Previous sticking points, such as arms proliferation and Taiwan, received less attention.¹⁴⁰ That being said, differences remained within the administration. The DoD most notably only slowly started to resume high-level contacts with China. Rumsfeld clearly still felt

¹³⁴ TAYLOR, B., 'US-China relations after 11 September: a long engagement or marriage of convenience?' *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 59 (2005), 181-182.

¹³⁵ ROY, D., 'A Late Honeymoon for Bush and China: Enjoy it While it Lasts', *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, 30 (2003), 81-83.

¹³⁶ QINGGUO, 'Learning to Live with the Hegemon', 403.

¹³⁷ ZHU, *US-China Relations in the 21st Century*, 113.

¹³⁸ SUTTER, R., 'Bush Administration Policy Toward Beijing and Taipei', *Journal of Contemporary China*, 12 (2003), 485-487.

¹³⁹ *President Bush, Chinese President Jiang Zemin Discuss Iraq, N. Korea*, 2002 The White House, 6 March 2002.

¹⁴⁰ GARRISON, *Making China Policy*, 171.

wary about China's military build-up. Formal senior interactions, such as bilateral talks at the level of the Undersecretary of Defense, only resumed at the end of 2002.¹⁴¹

North Korea became another important impetus for further cooperation. In 2003, Kim Jong-il withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, instigating a new crisis. The withdrawal was made worse due to the Bush administration's focus on the threat of weapons of mass destruction to the American national security. China, as a historic partner of the DPRK for weapons, food and energy was uniquely suited to bring the 2 countries together. Despite the US' and China's numerous differences, both, for their own particular reasons, had a strong interest in keeping the Korean peninsula free from nuclear weapons. The Bush administration, who would invade Iraq only a couple of months later, needed China, to be able to cope with the DPRK. Handling both the Iraq War and a resurgent North Korea at the same time was deemed far from desirable. As a result hereof, Beijing hosted tripartite talks between the US, China and the DPRK. It later presided over the Six-Party Talk mechanism in order to have a joint effort to resolve the situation.¹⁴² The North Korean nuclear issue became another factor that promoted the need for constructive and cooperative bilateral US-China relations.¹⁴³ This resulted in repeated praise towards Beijing from the Bush administration. Powell even described the ties as "the best they have been since Nixon".¹⁴⁴ During a conference on China that year Powell even referred 11 times to his "Chinese friends".¹⁴⁵ After the APEC meeting of 2003, the leaders of the 2 countries held a bilateral meeting and a conference where Bush stated:

"We talked about our mutual desire to wage and win the fight against terror. We spent time, of course, talking about North Korea. We have a mutual goal, and that is that the Peninsula be free of nuclear weapons. I want to thank the President for leading the Beijing talks."¹⁴⁶

President Bush consequently no longer focused on the differences between both countries, but the interests that brought them together. A month later already, the Chinese Premier Wen was greeted with a 19-gun salute, when he visited the US. One can consequently state that the intergovernmental ties were at an all-time high level for the Bush administration. Even though

¹⁴¹ SUTTER, *US-China relations*, 123.

¹⁴² BLANCHARD, J., 'US-China relations under Bush and Obama: Fill in the blanks or it's the structure, stupid?', *Issues and Studies*, 49 (2013), 43-45.

¹⁴³ WANLI, 'Breaking the Cycle?', LIDA, (ed.), *China's Shift Global Strategy of the Rising Power*, 89.

¹⁴⁴ BENVENUTI, 'US relations with the PRC after the Cold War', TAN (ed.), *Handbook of US-China Relations*, 72.

¹⁴⁵ *Remarks at Conference on China-U.S. Relations*, 2003 U.S. DoS, 10 March 2020.

¹⁴⁶ *President Bush Meets with President of China*, 2003 The White House, 8 March 2020.

structural problems remained in the bilateral relations, both countries managed to cooperate concerning North Korea.

The year 2004 led to the continuation of the stable bilateral relation. The military ties between both countries further improved, with for example the visit of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Richard Meyers to China. This was the highest-ranking US military officer to visit the PRC since 1997. He met his Chinese counterpart and they held bilateral meetings regarding Taiwan and the DPRK. Meyers was also the first foreign official to visit the Chinese space program control centre.¹⁴⁷ Most notably, Vice President Cheney also visited China. Even though he was a hard-liner within the administration, he too mainly focussed on the common grounds between the 2 countries.

In 2004, there were also new presidential elections. Once again Asia did not form a particular issue during these elections and President Bush managed to win convincingly against Senator John Kerry.¹⁴⁸ His victory also meant a strengthening of the Republican majority in Congress. This result was to the relieve of the Chinese leadership, who were content with the bilateral relations under the Bush administration.¹⁴⁹

The 4 years after 9/11, de facto the whole first Bush administration, the American public opinion, the media and Congress remained sceptical, yet largely uninterested in China.¹⁵⁰ The general public was preoccupied with the Afghan and Iraqi wars and terrorism. In Congress, the president benefited from strong Republican leadership and discipline. During his first term, the Bush administration managed to pass around 80% of the legislation he supported through Congress. This is the highest success rate since Lyndon Johnson in the 1960s.¹⁵¹ That meant that Congress was generally kept in line and supportive of the administration's foreign policy. It consequently proposed almost no China critical legislature.¹⁵² That being said, there were times that Congress voted laws to pressure the president into taking a stronger position against China. Exemplary hereof is a measure voted by the House of Representatives in 2004, that called on the Pentagon to start having high official exchanges with the Taiwanese military. The

¹⁴⁷ GLASER, B., *A Familiar Pattern: Cooperation with a Dash of Friction*, 2004 CC, 8 March 2020.

¹⁴⁸ WANG, George W. *Bush and China*, 25.

¹⁴⁹ GLASER, B., *Slips of the Tongue and Parables*, 2005 CC, 9 March 2020.

¹⁵⁰ SUTTER, 'Bush Administration Policy Toward Beijing and Taipei', 488.

¹⁵¹ DUN, D., 'Quacking like a duck? Bush II and presidential power in the second term', *International Affairs*, 82 (2006), 104.

¹⁵² SUTTER, *US-China relations*, 126.

aim of the program should be to: “improve Taiwan's defenses against the People's Liberation Army of the People's Republic of China”.¹⁵³

The year 2005 brought important changes in the Bush administration, which further underscored the often conflicted nature of the US' China policy. It also made clear that the initial foreign policy dominance of the neoconservatists had ended. Several hawkish advisors such as Wolfowitz and Armitage resigned. However, most notably the pragmatist SecState Powell resigned. During the first Bush administration, he was always part of the out-group, nevertheless he had an important impact on the relationship with China. This became clear during the EP-3 crisis, when he urged for stronger cooperation.¹⁵⁴ In January 2005, the pragmatist Condoleezza Rice was sworn in as the new SecState. Unlike her predecessor, she was a part of the in-group. Like many others of the Bush administration, she did not prioritise China in the foreign policy. For example, in her inauguration speech, she only mentioned China once and it was the last stop in her first Asia tour.¹⁵⁵ Her vision of China is best summarised by one of her speeches:

“Even China must eventually embrace some form of open, genuinely representative government if it is to reap the benefits and meet the challenges of a globalizing world... China is a new factor, knowing that China has the potential for good or for bad... it is our responsibility to try and push and prod and persuade China toward the more positive course... democratic alliances like the United States and Japan that bring not just a strength, economic and other strengths, but bring democratic values to the core of this region.”¹⁵⁶

She thus clearly had a pragmatist vision, stressing the good that could come from cooperation with China. However, she also focused on the importance of the US' traditional allies and the eventual need for drastic democratic change in China's domestic politics. Together with her came a new Deputy SecState Robert Zoellick. He was the former USTR and he would only be Deputy for one year. Nonetheless, his realist vision had an important influence on the Bush administration's China policy.

Contrary to these pragmatist appointments, John Bolton became the new permanent representative of the US to the UN. His hawkish positions and controversial opinions on China

¹⁵³ *Providing for consideration of H.R. 4200, National defense authorization act for fiscal year 2005*, 2004 Congress, 8 March 2020.

¹⁵⁴ *The Bush reshuffle: Changing the guard*, 2004 Economist, 9 March 2020.

¹⁵⁵ *Opening Remarks by Secretary of State-Designate Dr. Condoleezza Rice*, 2005 U.S. DoS, 10 March 2020.

¹⁵⁶ *Remarks at Sophia University*, 2005 U.S. DoS, 10 March 2020.

were well-known. He for example wrote several articles in the Taipei Times, criticizing China, the American Taiwan policy of ambiguity and he also advocated for recognizing Taiwan once again. He believed that others had to act upon China's politico-military and economic emergence.¹⁵⁷ Although he would only hold the position for 1 year, due to too many doubts in Congress on his suitability for the position, his appointment and support from the Bush administration made once again clear that there were strong confrontational fractions within the administration.¹⁵⁸

Even though China and the US improved their relations, several underlying differences and issues remained throughout the Bush administration.¹⁵⁹ From 2005 onwards, it became ever more clear that these differences in the bilateral relations came back to the surface. It was after all impossible to play them down for ever. The relations between Washington and Beijing remained on a cordial level, but periodically issues flared up between both capitals, given the fact that none of the underlying issues, such as human rights, Taiwan and economic concerns, were resolved. That being said, the White House was still entangled in the Middle East and was unable and unwilling to make any important policy change towards China.¹⁶⁰

The year 2005 also brought with it increasing domestic pressure on President Bush. The War on Terror did not go as planned and later in the year there was hurricane Katrina. The poor handling of both situations led to increased pressure on the administration. It also revived stronger congressional, media and public pressure on Bush's approach to China concerning mostly economic interests and China's relations with perceived rogue regimes.¹⁶¹ There was thus a surge in domestic criticism on China, which had been muted after 9/11. Exemplary was the congressional pressure that forced the state-owned China National Offshore Oil Company to abandon all hope to buy the medium-sized American oil company UNOCAL.¹⁶² Due to domestic pressures, the Bush administration also started cracking down on China's neglect of intellectual property rights theft. In comparison with the first Bush term in office, several high officials started to openly criticise China's intellectual property rights violations. The USTR even put China as one of the world's worst offenders of international copyrights laws on its

¹⁵⁷ BOLTON, J., *Surrender is Not an Option: Defending America at the United Nations and Abroad*, New York, 2008, 436.

¹⁵⁸ WANG, George W. *Bush and China*, 38.

¹⁵⁹ GARRETT, B., 'Sino-American Relations in the Era of Globalization: A Framework for Analysis', *Journal of Contemporary China*, 15 (2006), 409.

¹⁶⁰ WANG, George W. *Bush and China*, 35-39.

¹⁶¹ SUTTER, *US-China relations*, 126.

¹⁶² GUO, S. and GUO, B., *China in Search of a Harmonious Society: Challenges Facing Chinese Political Development*, Washington, 2008, 85.

Priority Watch List.¹⁶³ Congress and business lobbies pressured the Bush administration to demand China to revalue its currency.¹⁶⁴ The latter consistently undervalued its renminbi in relation to the dollar, to easily export to the US, while hampering American exports to China.¹⁶⁵

In 2005, SecDef Rumsfeld visited China for the first time. It made once again clear that there was a duality in the administration's notion of China. On the one hand, Rumsfeld recognized the importance of the cooperation with China. He however questioned its military investments on the other hand. Rumsfeld found support in the CIA, which equally warned against China's military build-up.¹⁶⁶

It was Deputy SecState Zoellick who held the most important policy influencing speech. He explained to the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations that the US' policy would change from bringing China into the international system, to urging it to become a responsible stakeholder. Zoellick stressed the fact that China might have gained the most from all countries of the existing international system. As a result of its rise in economic, political and military power, China was no longer a weak, humiliated country.¹⁶⁷ The US did not seek to contain China, but it wished to cooperate with a "confident, peaceful, and prosperous China" to face the challenges of the 21st century. He explained that:

"Responsible stakeholders go further: They recognize that the international system sustains their peaceful prosperity, so they work to sustain that system. In its foreign policy, China has many opportunities to be a responsible stakeholder."¹⁶⁸

Even though Zoellick expressed the administration's wish to cooperate several times, he also made it clear that China had to change significantly. The country had to accept its responsibilities that came with the status of a great power. It should no longer only make use of the advantages given to it, by the international system, but it should start pulling its weight. China should consequently make an end of its protectionist economic system, start pressuring North Korea, it should cooperate with Asian states and not try to dominate them, etc. Zoellick stated that: "China's pledges... are welcome, but the results are not yet evident. China needs to fully live up to its commitments".¹⁶⁹ It is consequently clear that Zoellick stressed that China

¹⁶³ BLANCHARD, 'US-China relations under Bush and Obama', 50-51.

¹⁶⁴ ZHU, *US-China Relations in the 21st Century*, 140

¹⁶⁵ COHEN, *America's Response to China*, 273-274.

¹⁶⁶ *Global Intelligence Challenges 2005: Meeting Long-Term Challenges with a Long-Term Strategy*, 2005 CIA, 11 March 2020.

¹⁶⁷ WEI, D. and RU, S., 'Trend in Bush's China Strategy Adjustment', *Contemporary International Relations*, 15 (2005), 4.

¹⁶⁸ ZOELLICK, R., *Whither China? From Membership to Responsibility*, 2005 U.S. DoS, 11 March 2020.

¹⁶⁹ ZOELLICK, *Whither China*, 11 March 2020.

should no longer just make promises, but start acting upon them. Lastly, Zoellick, like his colleague SecState Rice, advocated for opening up the Chinese society.

The last 2 years of the second Bush administration, 2006 and 2007, were marked by a clear continuation of the duality of the China policy, which remained of a relatively low priority for the Bush administration. The 2006 QDR described the Bush administration's policy as follows:

“The United States’ goal is for China to continue as an economic partner and emerge as a responsible stakeholder and force for good in the world... The pace and scope of China’s military build-up already puts regional military balances at risk. China is likely to continue making large investments in high-end, asymmetric military capabilities...”¹⁷⁰

In general, the administration was satisfied with the cordial relations and President Bush called the relations ‘the best ever’ in December 2006. Even the military ties improved, mostly due to the resignation of SecDef Rumsfeld, who was held to blame for the poor results in Iraq.¹⁷¹ His successor Robert Gates, a pragmatist, favoured cooperation and enhanced military contacts. He consequently delivered less confrontational speeches in public than his predecessor.¹⁷² The 2 countries also created a hotline between their ministries of defence. Together with his Chinese counterpart, Gates also announced an agreement to increase military-to-military exchanges on all levels. Lastly, China was for the first time invited, and present, to observe an exercise run by the US Pacific Command. China consequently sent a delegation to visit the naval operation Valiant Shield 2006.¹⁷³

In 2006 there were midterm elections, which were convincingly won by the Democrats. They reconquered the majority in both houses of Congress. This led to extra pressure on the bilateral relations with China, since the Democrats wanted the US to take a tougher line on human rights, Tibet and trade malpractices in general.¹⁷⁴ As a result hereof there were several dozens of bills voted in Congress, dealing with intellectual property rights and the renminbi exchange rate.¹⁷⁵ Simultaneously, the Bush administration and several domestic interest groups kept emphasizing the need for China to become a responsible stakeholder.

As mentioned before, the underlying issues remained, which consequently led to intergovernmental problems throughout these 2 years. The 2006 QDR for example warned: “the

¹⁷⁰ *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, 2006 Archive Defense, 11 March 2020.

¹⁷¹ CHITRA, R., ‘Who Lost Iraq?’, *U.S. News & World Report*, 141 (2006), 38-47.

¹⁷² GLASER, B., *China Signals Irritation with U.S. Policy*, 2008 CC, 11 March 2020.

¹⁷³ MINNICK, W., ‘Interested Observers Chinese Military Delegation Visits Guam To Watch U.S. Naval Exercise’, *Defense News*, 21 (2006), 4.

¹⁷⁴ SUTTER, *US-China relations*, 126.

¹⁷⁵ WANLI, ‘Breaking the Cycle?’, LIDA, (ed.), *China’s Shift Global Strategy of the Rising Power*, 95-97.

United States, its allies and partners must also hedge against the possibility that a major or emerging power could choose a hostile path in the future”.¹⁷⁶ It goes without saying that China is the unnamed emerging power that could become hostile. One can thus conclude that Bush and his advisors remained wary of China. Even though the country was no longer the primary threat, it was still perceived with suspicion.

A first example hereof, was the test of a Chinese anti-satellite weapon without any previous warning. It took the Chinese Foreign Ministry almost a week to respond to the questions, asked by several countries. The Deputy Under SecDef Lawless stated that such a test: “poses dangers to human space flight and puts at risk the assets of all space-faring nations”.¹⁷⁷ He also mentioned that it illustrates a “more confident and increasingly assertive posture than when the U.S.-China Commission was established in 2000”.¹⁷⁸ Vice President Cheney also stated that this offensive weapons system and the fast-paced military build-up were inconsistent with China’s stated goal of a peaceful rise.¹⁷⁹ A second example of the recurring tensions was the refusal of entry into Hong Kong of the American aircraft carrier USS Kitty Hawk in 2007, while their family members were already ashore, waiting to celebrate Thanksgiving.¹⁸⁰ Not much later, 2 American minesweepers were equally not allowed to enter, even though they were seeking refuge from a storm. The reason for these denials was twofold. Firstly, there were US arms sales to Taiwan. Secondly, a meeting between President Bush and the Dalai Lama, where the latter received the US Congressional Gold Medal.¹⁸¹ President Bush’s speech at the ceremony was influenced by his Christian beliefs and contained barely concealed criticism on China. He stated:

“The freedom of belief is a yearning of the human spirit, a blessing offered to the world, and a cherished value of our nation. It’s the very first protection offered in the American Bill of Rights ... And that is why I will continue to urge the leaders of China to welcome the Dalai Lama to China.”¹⁸²

I thus conclude that there are clear moments of change in the China policy throughout Bush’s presidency. Before 9/11, hawkish advisors and neoconservatists, who saw China as a strategic

¹⁷⁶ *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, 2006 Archive Defense, 15 May 2020.

¹⁷⁷ GLASER, B., *Old and New Challenges: ASAT Test, Taiwan, and Trade*, 2007 CC, 11 March 2020.

¹⁷⁸ *2007 Report to Congress of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, 2007 USCC, 11 March 2020.

¹⁷⁹ NEUNECK, G., ‘China’s ASAT test – A warning shot or the beginning of an arms race in space?’, SCHROGL, K. (ed.), *Yearbook on Space Policy 2006/2007 New Impetus for Europe*, Vienna, 2008, 2015.

¹⁸⁰ COHEN, *America’s Response to China*, 278.

¹⁸¹ *U.S. Congressional Gold Medal Ceremony Acceptance Speech*, 2007 Dalai Lama, 12 March 2020.

¹⁸² *Speech by President George Bush*, 2007 Dalai Lama, 12 March 2020.

competitor, dominated the policy. They had far going influence, given President Bush's lack of interest in foreign policy. The initial policy was consequently one of confrontation and suspicion. This became glaringly obvious in the initial handling of the EP-3 crisis. After 9/11, fundamental changes took place in the Bush administration's foreign policy. Bush initially aimed to become a domestic president, but the terrorist attacks had a fundamental impact on his beliefs. He now saw himself as the leader who should take upon himself to tackle evil. This meant that handling terrorism and the axis of evil became a critical factor in his foreign policy. As a result hereof, the ties with China were markedly improved and strengthened. China was after all one of the major countries that pledged to support the War on Terror. The actual partnership was however paper-thin.¹⁸³ Not everyone immediately supported this change, which led to infights within the administration. The best example hereof were the differing public statements and actions of Rumsfeld and Powell. During his first administration, Bush could count upon strong domestic and congressional support. Despite the improved bilateral ties, none of the root problems were resolved.

One could state that in the second term it remained in the interest of both countries to downplay disagreements and broaden cooperation.¹⁸⁴ China simply wasn't a priority for the administration. Most top-level attention was given to the urgent needs of war in the Middle East and the administration consequently aimed to avoid unnecessary tensions. However, there were repeated disputes with China, since the underlying disagreements were never handled. Certainly Congress, dominated by the Democrats after the 2006 mid-terms, and business interest groups started pressuring the president to take actions against Chinese economic misconduct. The Zoellick speech of 2005 influenced the rest of the administration's policy towards China. The Bush administration hereafter repeated over and over that China should accept its responsibilities as a responsible stakeholder. The Bush administration made it clear that China's promises were inadequate and that actual action had to be taken. The years after 9/11, the suspicion of China's rise as such did not disappear, it however became less important and the country was no longer perceived as the primary threat. There was consequently a permanent duality in the China policy of the Bush administration.

¹⁸³ GURTOV, M., 'Northeast Asia Policy Under George W. Bush: Doctrine in Search of Policy', *North Korean Review*, 1 (2007), 74.

¹⁸⁴ BENVENUTI, 'US relations with the PRC after the Cold War', TAN, (ed.), *Handbook of US-China Relations*, 73.

4.4. Case study: the Bush administration's arms sales to Taiwan

Taiwan has a long and complicated history, dominated by outside forces influencing the small island.¹⁸⁵ For this thesis one must first have a basic understanding of the situation at the start of the 21st century.

The China-Taiwan issue, is a direct result of the Chinese civil war, resulting in the establishment of the ROC in 1949. In the following decades, Washington supported Taiwan as a bastion of freedom, against the communist tyranny.¹⁸⁶ This led to the signing and ratification of a Mutual Defense Treaty in 1954.¹⁸⁷ However, the American policy shifted in the 1970s, with the first visit of an American president to communist China in 1972. It was Nixon who set in motion the normalisation of the bilateral relations, which eventually led to the establishment of full diplomatic relations with the PRC in 1979.¹⁸⁸ To do so, Washington had to terminate its formal diplomatic ties with the ROC, end the 1954 US-ROC Mutual Defense Treaty and remove all its troops from Taiwan.¹⁸⁹

Since then, the relationship between Taiwan and the US is managed via the TRA. The most important parts of the TRA are the security Sections 2 and 3.¹⁹⁰ These do not legally require the US to defend Taiwan in case of a security threat. They do however allow for the possibility to intervene if need be. It also allows the president and the Congress to sell defensive weapons to ensure Taiwan's security against possible threats, which de facto means China.

The US however equally signed 3 US-PRC Joint Communiqués. There is the 1972 Shanghai Communiqué, the 1979 Normalization Communiqué and the 17 August 1982 US-China Joint Communiqué. In these statements, the US recognized the PRC as the sole legitimate government and it acknowledged Beijing's position that there is only one China and Taiwan is a part of it. The US also vowed to never pursue a policy of "two China's" neither a "One China, One Taiwan" policy. It recognised that the whole Taiwan issue is for the Chinese themselves to solve peacefully.¹⁹¹ Lastly, the US promised China that it did not seek a long-term policy of arms sales. The US would reduce its sales gradually and finally even quit altogether.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁵ GOLDSTEIN, L., *Meeting China Halfway: How to Defuse the Emerging US-China Rivalry*, Washington, 2019, 47-50.

¹⁸⁶ DITTMER, L., 'Bush, China, Taiwan: A triangular analysis', *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 10 (2005), 21-22.

¹⁸⁷ ONG, R., *China's Strategic Competition with the United States*, New York, 2010, 63.

¹⁸⁸ GRINTER, L., 'Handling the Taiwan Issue: Bush Administration Policy toward Beijing and Taipei', *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, 29 (2002), 4-5.

¹⁸⁹ HICKEY, D., 'US Policy Toward Taiwan: Time For Change?', *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, 40 (2013), 176.

¹⁹⁰ *Taiwan Relations Act*, 2020 AIT, 14 March 2020.

¹⁹¹ HICKEY, D., 'Continuity and change: the administration of George W. Bush and US policy toward Taiwan', *Journal of Contemporary China*, 13 (2004), 461-462.

¹⁹² *U.S.-PRC Joint Communiqué (1982)*, 2020 AIT, 14 March 2020.

One can thus solely conclude that the American policy, inherited by Bush and Obama was thoroughly ambiguous. The aim hereof was to make sure that both sides would not risk war, given the US' unclear involvement in the matter.¹⁹³

As mentioned above, the Bush administration started with a tough China policy, moving away from President Clinton's approach that saw a potential strategic partner in China. Bush wanted to immediately clarify the US' policy towards Taiwan.¹⁹⁴ He made an end of his predecessors "three no's". He did not support Clinton's idea of no Two Chinas, no declaration of independence by Taiwan and no US support for Taiwan's admission to organisations requiring statehood.¹⁹⁵ Bush also depicted Clinton as unwilling to do enough for the Taiwanese defence, even though the arms sales had risen dramatically during the Clinton administration in comparison with his predecessor President Bush Sr.¹⁹⁶

Bush's willingness to support Taiwan was made clear shortly after the earlier mentioned April 2001 EP-3 crisis. At the end of that same month, he announced his decision to offer to sell the biggest arms package, totalling around 4 billion USD, to Taiwan since the 1992 sale of 150 F-16 fighters under his father.¹⁹⁷ One must keep in mind that this is an American offer and not a sale as such. The process of arms sales between both countries is a complicated matter and several arms sales were rejected due to the political process in Taiwan itself.¹⁹⁸

This arms package was particularly notable due to its size, technological sophistication and given the offensive nature of some of the offered weapons, which went directly against the 1982 Sino-US communiqué.¹⁹⁹ The weapons offered were of all different kinds, but some are particularly noteworthy. Firstly, there were the 4 Kidd-class missile destroyers. Even though the Bush administration deferred the decision on the Aegis system which was requested by Taiwan and heavily protested against by China, the proposed Kidd-class destroyers were still very capable ships. They would be the most powerful ships in the entire Taiwanese navy, and outclass the 4 Russian made Sovremenny destroyers recently acquired by China and most of

¹⁹³ ZHONGQI, P., 'US Taiwan Policy of Strategic Ambiguity: A dilemma of deterrence', *Journal of Contemporary China*, 12 (2003), 387-388.

¹⁹⁴ TAO, W., 'U.S. Think Tanks and Taiwan Policy', TAO, W. (ed.), *The US Policy Making Process for Post Cold War China The role of US Think Tanks and Diplomacy*, Singapore, 2018, 77.

¹⁹⁵ GRINTER, 'Handling the Taiwan Issue', 7.

¹⁹⁶ DICKSON, B., 'New Presidents Adjust Old Policies: US-Taiwan Relations under Chen and Bush', *Journal of Contemporary China*, 11 (2002), 649.

¹⁹⁷ WANG, *George W. Bush and China*, 53.

¹⁹⁸ KAN, S., 'Taiwan: Major U.S. Arms Sales Since 1990', *Current Politics and Economics of Northern and Western Asia*, 23 (2014), 540; KASTNER, L., e. a., 'Mostly Bark, Little Bite? Modeling US Arms Sales to Taiwan and the Chinese Response', *Issues & Studies*, 49 (2013), 113.

¹⁹⁹ DEANS, P., 'Bush's China policy: Understanding the first hundred days', *The RUSI Journal*, 146 (2001), 78-81.

the other Chinese destroyers. Secondly and thirdly, the US offered to sell 8 diesel-powered submarines and 12 P-3C anti-submarine patrol aircraft.²⁰⁰ The submarines were particularly delicate, since they were perceived as potentially offensive weapon systems. This goes directly against the earlier mentioned 1982 communiqué with China. The Bush administration consequently became the first in history to offer offensive weapon systems to Taiwan. Referring to the increase of the PLAN's spending, the Bush administration argued that China could impose a blockade on Taiwan. It thus claimed that the weapons were necessary to allow Taiwan to face this possible danger. Adding insult to injury to China, was the fact that it barely possessed any anti-submarine capabilities at that point of time. Taiwan on the other hand did possess these capabilities, which were further strengthened by the offer of the P-3C aircraft. These were among the best anti-submarine weapons in the world, which would strongly increase Taiwan's capabilities in anti-submarine warfare. It also offered Taiwan the possibility to devastate China's overseas trade routes and to attack Chinese shipping in East Asian waters.²⁰¹

One must keep in mind that this was not a decision made solely by the Bush administration. The arms package offer was the result of strong bipartisan congressional cooperation. The Democratic House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt stated that:

"I fully support providing Taiwan with assistance and equipment necessary for its self-defense... I have serious questions regarding the Bush Administration's decision not to provide destroyers equipped with advanced command and control systems to Taiwan."²⁰²

He in other words thought that the US should go further and he consequently urged the administration to also sell the, by China dreaded, Aegis weapons system. All of this was further strengthened by strong lobbying of the weapons industry and Taiwan itself.

Only days later on the 24 April 2001, Bush declared in an interview that the annual review of Taiwan's arms requests would be suspended.²⁰³ In the future, decisions would be made on a case by case basis. The administration hereby aimed to make an end to the months of speculation and lobbying before the decision and the annually recurring increase in tensions between the US and China. However, this de facto meant that Taiwan's future weapon requests would be treated just like any other ally, which sent a highly symbolic gesture.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁰ HICKEY, 'Continuity and change', 466.

²⁰¹ SHENG, 'Bush's New China Policy', 74-75.

²⁰² *House Leader Gephardt Statement on the Taiwan Arms Sales*, 2001 Washington File, 14 March 2020.

²⁰³ MILBANK, D., *Bush to Drop Annual Review Of Weapons Sales to Taiwan*, 2001 Washington Post, 14 March 2020.

²⁰⁴ DICKSON, 'New Presidents Adjust Old Policies', 651.

One day later, Bush ignited a storm of controversy when he responded on the question whether the US had the obligation to defend Taiwan: “Yes, we do... and the Chinese must understand that. Yes, I would”.²⁰⁵ Thereafter he clarified that the US would do “Whatever it took to help Taiwan defend herself” in case of a Chinese attack.²⁰⁶ These statements immediately led to a shock to many and a storm of consternation, with people questioning whether Bush had de facto made an end to the decade-old ambiguity policy. However, a couple of hours later, in a CNN interview, the president stressed that he supported the One China policy and that he opposed a Taiwanese independence declaration.²⁰⁷ He stated:

“I think it’s important for people to also note that mine is an administration that strongly supports the one China policy, that we expect any dispute to be resolved peacefully... I’m willing to help Taiwan defend herself, and that nothing has really changed in policy, as far as I’m concerned. This is what other presidents have said, and I will continue to say so.”²⁰⁸

Added to this new interview were several statements of the DoS, strongly emphasizing that the Bush administration did not aim to change the US’ Taiwan policy. However, the fact remained that the Bush administration sent contradictory comments and support for Taiwan was abundantly clear in the aftermath of the EP-3 crisis.

As mentioned above, soon thereafter the terrorist attacks of 9/11 took place. The improved ties with China also impacted the Taiwan policy. Both countries after all understood that they had no interest in letting the Taiwan issue get out of control.²⁰⁹ The following 7 years became a prime example of American ambiguous Taiwan policy.

The Bush administration for example pleased China, by making several strong statements on Taiwan and even sometimes clearly denounced the Taiwanese President Chen Shui-bian. This was due to the latter’s growing radicalism towards de jure independence. Chen’s aspirations led to a strong increase in cross-strait tensions; moreover, they were equally far from appreciated by the Bush administration.²¹⁰ After all, the administration did not want to get dragged into an unnecessary conflict with China, while it already had Iraq, Afghanistan,

²⁰⁵ HICKEY, ‘Continuity and change’, 469.

²⁰⁶ TAYLOR, ‘US-China relations after 11 September’, 186.

²⁰⁷ WANG, *George W. Bush and China*, 55.

²⁰⁸ KAN, S., *China/Taiwan: Evolution of the “One China” Policy—Key Statements from Washington, Beijing, and Taipei*, 2014 FAS, 14 March 2020.

²⁰⁹ YANG, ‘Sino-US and Cross-Strait Relations under the Post-’11 September’ Strategic Settings’, 665.

²¹⁰ ATANASSOVA-CORNELIS, A., ‘Shifting Domestic Politics and Security Policy in Japan and Taiwan: The Search for a Balancing Strategy between China and the US’, *Asia-Pacific Review*, 20 (2013), 65.

North Korea, Iran and the War on Terror to deal with.²¹¹ However, Chen consistently ignored messages from the White House, requesting him to back off and stop provoking China. Bush consequently sought to distance himself and he declared that:

“The United States government's policy is one China, based upon the three communiqués and the Taiwan Relations Act. We oppose any unilateral decision by either China or Taiwan to change the status quo. And the comments and actions made by the leader of Taiwan indicate that he may be willing to make decisions unilaterally to change the status quo, which we oppose.”²¹²

This sent a clear message to the world while the Taiwanese President aimed to hold a referendum on independence. To underscore his message, the speech was given next to the PRC's Prime Minister Wen Jiabao in the White House.²¹³ The American aim to curb Chen's move towards independence was strongly appreciated in China. A series of statements by high-ranking American officials followed up Bush's speech.²¹⁴ The strongest statement, signifying the administration's irritation, was made by SecState Powell while in Beijing.²¹⁵ He stated that:

“There is only one China. Taiwan is not independent. It does not enjoy sovereignty as a nation, and that remains our policy, our firm policy... it is our policy that clearly rests on the Three Communiques. To repeat it one more time: we do not support an independence movement in Taiwan.”²¹⁶

Notwithstanding the foregoing, the Bush administration remained a strong supporter of Taiwan, even if the relations with the incumbent Taiwanese president were difficult. There was for example an increase in military bilateral cooperation. There came less restrictions on US military officers travelling to Taiwan, leading to an increase in active-duty military representatives in Taiwanese defence programs. Both countries' militaries also created a hotline to deal with possible crises. The Taiwanese Defense Minister Tang Yao-ming also attended a US-Taiwan Defence Summit in Florida, where he met with Deputy SecDef Wolfowitz.²¹⁷ The latter there publicly declared the US' commitment to help modernize the Taiwanese military, something which wasn't done in years by a senior DoD official.²¹⁸ Throughout the whole Bush

²¹¹ BROOKES, P., 'Why Bush Acted on Taiwan', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 166 (2004), 23.

²¹² *President Bush and Premier Wen Jiabao Remarks to the Press*, 2003 The White House, 15 March 2020.

²¹³ ZABOROWSKI, M., *Bush's legacy and America's next foreign policy*, Paris, 2008, 88.

²¹⁴ SUTTER, R., 'The Taiwan Problem in the Second George W. Bush Administration-US officials' views and their implications for US policy', *Journal of Contemporary China*, 15 (2006), 419.

²¹⁵ DENG, B., 'US Taiwan Policy during the George W. Bush Administration (2001-2009)', *Cadernos Argentina Brasil*, 7 (2018), 7.

²¹⁶ KAN, *China/Taiwan*, 15 March 2020.

²¹⁷ TAYLOR, 'US-China relations after 11 September', 186.

²¹⁸ WANG, *George W. Bush and China*, 61.

presidency, there was a clear increase in senior-level exchanges between both countries.²¹⁹ In 2003, the Pentagon also designated Taiwan as a major non-NATO ally.²²⁰ Two years later, the US and Japan even declared together that they: “Encourage the peaceful resolution of issues concerning the Taiwan Strait through dialogue”.²²¹ Taiwan became one of the common strategic objectives of the US and Japan, which was clearly against Chinese interests, because of their troubled relations with both Japan and Taiwan.

So where does this leave the weapon sales to Taiwan after the first offer of 2001? Quite remarkably, the Bush administration only offered a second arms sales package in October 2008, near the end of Bush’s mandate. This time, it was stressed that it was not a package, but that 6 of the 8 pending weapons programs were approved. All of this resulted from the change in the Bush administration’s China policy. It sought to avoid unnecessary tensions as much as possible. Even though the offer was around 6,5 billion USD, most of what was included in the deal, was already a part of the 2001 offer.²²² There were once again some notable weapons systems offered in these new programmes. The administration for example allowed the sale of 30 Apache helicopters and around 330 PAC-3 missiles. Peculiarly, the administration decided to break up this deal into 2 parts, excluding 3 of 7 firing units and around 50 missiles. This was generally seen as an arbitrary decision, which only increased the costs for Taiwan.

However most noteworthy, were the systems that the administration did not offer for sale, which would have doubled the total value of the offer of 6,5 billion USD. First, the Bush administration refused to offer a weapon system that it had previously approved: diesel-powered submarines.²²³ The administration thus backtracked its earlier offer of offensive weaponry, made prior to 9/11. Secondly, since 2006 Taiwan also tried to request new F-16 C/D fighters. However, the administration refused to even accept the formal request for these fighters up to 4 separate times. It was argued that Taiwan’s defence budget did not contain the necessary funds. However, the refusal was also connected to the administration’s opposition to President Chen’s policy towards independence and the need for Beijing’s cooperation concerning possible nuclear proliferation in the DPRK and Iran.²²⁴ Many congressmen did not appreciate this refusal. The Republican presidential candidate John McCain for example thought that it had taken the administration too long to come up with an offer and equally stated:

²¹⁹ KAN, ‘Taiwan’, 68-71.

²²⁰ HICKEY, ‘US Policy Toward Taiwan’, 182.

²²¹ *Joint statement: U.S.-Japan security consultative committee*, 2005 MOFA Japan, 15 March 2020.

²²² BLANCHARD, ‘US-China relations under Bush and Obama’, 40.

²²³ MCNEIL, K., ‘Long-Delayed Arms Sales to Taiwan Announced’, *Arms Control Today*, 38 (2008), 29-30.

²²⁴ KAN, ‘Taiwan’, 85-86.

“I urge the administration to reconsider this decision, in light of its previous commitment to provide submarines and America's previous sales of F-16s.”²²⁵

One can conclude the Bush administration's weapons offers to Taiwan were influenced by the administration's China policy. Prior to 9/11, the Bush administration offered a weapon package, that for the first time in history included offensive weaponry. During the EP-3 crisis, bipartisan congressmen even threatened China with the possibility of selling more advanced weaponry. After 9/11 however, the Bush administration changed its approach, postponing such a package right until the very end of his mandate. This was the result of the change in the administration's China policy. Avoiding tensions became the new goal with regard to China, which had a corresponding result on the sensitive triangular relations between the US, Taiwan and China. However, the suspension of the annual review of Taiwan's arms requests did not lead to the desired depoliticization of the process. Several observers instead questioned the administration's late announcement of weapons offers and the seemingly arbitrary decisions.²²⁶

5. President Obama's administration and China policy

“No matter how imperfect our efforts, no matter how expedient ignoring such values may seem, that's part of defending America. For the fight against extremism and intolerance and sectarianism and chauvinism are of a piece with the fight against authoritarianism and nationalist aggression. If the scope of freedom and respect for the rule of law shrinks around the world, the likelihood of war within and between nations increases, and our own freedoms will eventually be threatened.”²²⁷

Here below, I will follow the same structure as the previous chapter on George Bush. I will first focus on the character and complexity of Barack Obama. Thereafter, I will take a closer look at his advisors and his advising system. All of this will be used to explain the Obama administration's policy towards China. I will conclude this chapter by researching the arms package offers for Taiwan.

5.1. The character and complexity of Barack Obama

Barack Obama was born on the 4th of August 1961, in a racially mixed family. He was the child of a white American mother and a black Kenyan father. Both of them had substantial intellectual abilities, coupled with great dreams and aspirations. Obama's family history is however of a

²²⁵ KESSLER, G., *Obama Commends Taiwan Arms Sale*, 2008 Washington Post, 18 March 2020.

²²⁶ KAN, 'Taiwan', 115.

²²⁷ *President Obama's Farewell Address*, 2017 The White House: President Barack Obama, 23 March 2020.

complicated nature, which also had an important influence on his character development. His mother, Ann Dunham, met and married Barack Obama Sr. in Hawaii, a state heavily influenced by Asian culture. The marriage did not last, given that Obama Sr. moved away in 1965 to study at Harvard University. He later returned to Kenya, where he met his third wife, with large ambitions for an important government position in Kenya. This would however turn out in a big disappointment, leading to heavy drinking and his eventual premature death. His mother on the other hand remarried an Indonesian student and in 1967 the family moved to Indonesia. Here, Obama would live for 4 years, until he was sent back to his grandparents in Hawaii, to have an American education. After 3 years, his mother re-joined the family in Hawaii. That same fall, at the age of 13, Obama headed out to Los Angeles, to start his studies at Occidental College.²²⁸ Obama later said about his teenage years:

“The constant, crippling fear that I didn’t belong somehow, that unless I dodged and hid and pretended to be something I wasn’t, I would forever remain an outsider, with the rest of the world, black and white, always standing in judgment.”²²⁹

His unorthodox childhood consequently led Obama to search for his roots and identity. These were important for his self-understanding and sense of belonging. It also meant that he grew up in a multicultural setting. He had roots in white America and Africa, but also in Asia and Hawaii. He also studied across the Eastern, Midwestern and Pacific regions of the US.²³⁰

As a student already, Barack Obama was an active and ambitious, yet cautious person. He managed to attend a series of elite high schools and universities thanks to scholarships and loans. After college, he studied at Columbia University and obtained a bachelor’s degree in political science. Hereafter, he started working at the New York Public Interest Research Group, which introduced him to politics. From there on, he went to Chicago to work shortly as a community organizer. Thereafter, Obama wanted to improve his academic career and he started as a law student at Harvard Law School in 1988. During his time at Harvard, he became the first Afro-American to become the president of the Law Review. He left the university with a book contract and a certain public recognition. Obama started working at a Chicago law firm, and he later taught at the University of Chicago Law School. In 1996, he was elected at the Illinois State Senate and within only 12 years, he would become the president of the US.²³¹

²²⁸ RENSHON, S., ‘Psychological Reflections on Barack Obama and John McCain: Assessing the Contours of a New Presidential Administration’, *Political Science Quarterly*, 123 (2008), 397-399.

²²⁹ OBAMA, B., *Dreams from my Father*, New York, 1995, 111.

²³⁰ WINTER, D., ‘Philosopher-King or Polarizing Politician? A Personality Profile of Barack Obama’, *Political Psychology*, 32 (2011), 1062.

²³¹ RENSHON, ‘Psychological Reflections on Barack Obama and John McCain’, 401.

Obama's beliefs and style are the product of his search for identity and his studies. He strongly believes in the positivity of communal values. A part of this, are his Christian beliefs. According to Obama, faith and beliefs can bring people together, teach morality and instil a certain tradition. He however strongly opposes to a dogmatic view of Christianity.²³² He also trusts in constitutionalism and legalism. According to Obama, the constitution is the groundwork of American democracy. Given Obama's past, he also developed a pragmatic view on politics. It is more important for a politician to focus on doable issues, than to focus on subjectively optimal solutions. The use of compromise, to find a common ground for all the involved parties, is the cost of living in a democracy. He consequently has a high level of willingness to compromise in his policies. As such, he does not believe in extremes and he is even strongly against it. He for example stated:

“Whenever we dumb down the political debate, we lose. For it's precisely the pursuit of ideological purity, the rigid orthodoxy and the sheer predictability of our current political debate, that keeps us from finding new ways to meet the challenges we face as a country.

It's what keeps us locked in “either/or” thinking.”²³³

Obama thus thinks that American politics must overcome strict partisanship and move towards pragmatic cooperation as much as possible.²³⁴ As a result hereof, his views are generally moderate and he rarely supports a policy of extremes. He believes that extremists rigidly use their beliefs and apply them, no matter the circumstances. This leads to an overly narrow view, overconfidence and a strong resistance against everything that might challenge the extremist's beliefs.²³⁵ This view also applies to Obama's foreign policy vision. Unlike President Bush, he is not convinced by the idea of American exceptionalism. According to Obama, the idea of exceptionalism can also be applied to Belgium, or any country for that matter.²³⁶

Barack Obama is a highly intelligent individual and rational thinker. His legal training not only influenced his views, but also his decision-making. Rationality as such is of prime importance for his decisions, which often leads to a long decision-making process. Obama believes that emotions should not be a part of the decision-making process, which makes him the polar opposite of his predecessor. Obama specifically mentioned that: “You've got to make

²³² WAYNE, *Personality and Politics*, 35-37.

²³³ OBAMA, B., *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*, New York, 2006, 40.

²³⁴ WALKER, S., ‘Quantum Politics and Operational Code Analysis: Theories and Methods’, WALKER, e. a. (ed.), *Rethinking Foreign Policy Analysis*, 77.

²³⁵ WAYNE, *Personality and Politics*, 44-47.

²³⁶ HOROWITZ, I., ‘Legalism as an Executive Ideology: Foundations of Barack Obama's Leadership Style’, *Perspectives on Political Science*, 39 (2010), 162.

decisions based on information and not emotions”.²³⁷ He consequently demands as much information as possible and ample time to sort through it, before making a decision. This often results in a careful and cautious approach to issues, instead of bold and unexpected moves.

Based on those findings, I conclude that Obama fits the active-positive description of Barber’s model.²³⁸ According to the latter, these presidents are the best suited for the job. Like Obama, they are driven to achieve results.²³⁹ These presidents are active in the job and also enjoy it. Obama was the epitome of an active president, which led to micromanagement. Many foreign policy decisions that generally would be taken at a lower level in other presidencies, were personally taken by Obama.²⁴⁰ He always wanted as much information as possible, leading to a lower reliance on advisors than for example Bush.²⁴¹ Active-positive types tend to have a flexible view and consequently adapt their policies more easily. These presidents also use a rational way to understand politics, which is an asset, but it can also lead to problems, given that they do not take the irritational actions of others into account.²⁴²

From the information hereabove, it becomes clear that President Obama had a very high level of conceptual complexity.²⁴³ One can state that he was the antithesis of President Bush, concerning conceptual complexity. Unlike his predecessor, President Obama did not see the world in a simplified manner, others were not easily labelled as either bad or good. Obama for example stated:

“This idea of purity and you’re never compromised and you’re always politically woke and all that stuff, you should get over that quickly. The world is messy. There are ambiguities.”²⁴⁴

Leaders with a higher conceptual complexity are more eager to find more information before making a decision. Obama consequently tended to request not only information, supporting his views, but also dissenting opinions.²⁴⁵ Obama’s tendency to question his policy meant that it

²³⁷ ACHENBACH, J., *In His Slow Decision-Making, Obama Goes with Head, Not Gut*, 2009 USPP, 23 March 2020.

²³⁸ DEAN, J., *Predicting the Nature of Obama's Presidency*, 2008 Findlaw, 23 March 2020.

²³⁹ SUEDFELD, P., e. a., ‘Two Years of Ups and Downs: Barack Obama's Patterns of Integrative Complexity, Motive Imagery, and Values’, *Political Psychology*, 32 (2011), 1030.

²⁴⁰ KLEIN, E., *The Amateur: Barack Obama in the White House*, Washington, 2012, 198.

²⁴¹ ELKATAWNEH, H., *Bridging Theory and Practice Leadership: Barack Obama*, 2016 SSRN, 23 March 2020.

²⁴² BARBER, *The Presidential Character*, 10.

²⁴³ SUEDFELD, e. a., ‘Two Years of Ups and Downs’, 1019.

²⁴⁴ JABALI, M., *Barack Obama thinks 'woke' kids want purity. They don't: they want progress*, 2019 The Guardian, 26 March 2020.

²⁴⁵ YANG, ‘Leaders’ Conceptual Complexity and Foreign Policy Change’, 424-426.

was more likely that his policies were the subject of change. In other words, President Obama required less fundamentally opposing information to change his policies.

5.2. Obama's advisors and advising system

Similarly to his predecessor, President Obama did barely have any foreign policy experience.²⁴⁶ He had seated for 2 years in the US Senate and could only point out that he visited several countries in the past. The new president was confident in his decision-making and rational thinking, he nevertheless acknowledged this shortcoming. Obama too consequently sought for experienced foreign policy advisors. In an interview he stated:

“It's exhilarating. It's challenging. You know, I find that the governance part of it, the decision-making part of it actually comes pretty naturally. I think I've got a great team. I think we're making good decisions.”²⁴⁷

The creation of Obama's team was influenced by the flaws of his predecessor's administration. Bush managed to create a system, where he was able to make decisions quickly and decisively. He also inspired loyalty in his advisors and delegated a high amount of authority to them. However, as the Iraq war made clear, the president also seemed to be trapped in a bubble of information. His advisors were mostly echo chambers, who did not offer a wide range of alternative information and possibilities.²⁴⁸ Bush did not create systematic deliberation over policy alternatives, leading to several policy failures.²⁴⁹

The book *Team of Rivals*, written by Doris Goodwin, inspired Obama's advising system. She wrote about Abraham Lincoln, who filled his cabinet with powerful competitors.²⁵⁰ The new president mostly admired Lincoln's cunningness to obtain the expertise he needed from people with completely different views.²⁵¹ President Obama consequently assembled a competitive advising system, filled with foreign policy experts with differing views, whom he encouraged to debate in front of him. He listened to his advisors, questioned them and eventually tried to come to a consensus-based decision. This way, he would be provided with the broadest available information, making it possible for him to analyse several options.²⁵²

²⁴⁶ SINGH, R., *Barack Obama's Post-American Foreign Policy The Limits of Engagement*, London, 2012, 29.

²⁴⁷ *Transcript: President Obama, Part 1 Transcript Of Steve Kroft's March 20 Interview With President Barack Obama*, 2009 CBS, 26 March 2020.

²⁴⁸ RUDALEVIGE, A., ‘The Structure of Leadership: Presidents, Hierarchies, and Information Flow’, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 35 (2005), 353-356.

²⁴⁹ PFIFFNER, J., ‘The First MBA President: George W. Bush as Public Administrator’, *Public Administration Review*, 67 (2007), 17.

²⁵⁰ GOODWIN, D., *Team of rivals: the political genius of Abraham Lincoln*, New York, 2005, 12.

²⁵¹ RUDALEVIGE, A., *Rivals, or a Team? Competitive Advisory Institutions and the Obama Administration*, 2009 SSRN, 26 March 2020.

²⁵² ROCKMAN, B., e. a., *The Obama Presidency: Appraisals and Prospects*, Washington, 2011, 177.

Argumentation in the beginning and consensus in the end was meant to avoid falling in the trap of groupthink, while simultaneously avoiding infights. This however also meant that Obama's decision-making process often tended to take longer than originally planned.²⁵³ It required a lot of energy and effort of the president, his advisors and high officials of the executive power.²⁵⁴ In an interview, President Obama summed up his decision-making process as follows:

“... being able to pull together the best people and have them work as a team; insisting on analytical rigor in evaluating the nature of the problem; making sure that dissenting voices are heard and that a range of options are explored; being willing to make a decision after having looked at all the options, and then insisting on good execution as well as timely feedback, so that you have to correct the decision that you make, that you are able to do so in time; being able to stay calm and steady when the stakes are high. You know, all those things are, I think, principles I try to apply in any circumstance.”²⁵⁵

Obama's need for control and active involvement in the decision-making, led to a high level of centralization during his mandates. Assistant SecState for East Asian Affairs Campbell stated that:

“The Obama administration marked a period of remarkable centralization in the White House for policymaking, along with a tendency to diminish other actors as merely “implementers” of White house-developed strategies.”²⁵⁶

The differences between Bush's and Obama's administration are striking. Bush filled his administration with Asia experts, however none of them were particularly knowledgeable about China. On the contrary, the Obama administration was filled with China-relevant experience.²⁵⁷ As mentioned above, Obama built an advising system around people with opposing views. However, when it comes to China, many advisors had a similar view. The Bush administration could easily be divided between hawks and doves, neoconservatists and pragmatists. As a consequence hereof, there were infights and public inconsistencies under Bush's mandates. Obama's Asia team was determined to avoid this kind of divisiveness, resulting in noticeably less contradicting public statements.²⁵⁸ To substantiate the above, I will

²⁵³ WAYNE, *Personality and Politics*, 52-57.

²⁵⁴ PFIFFNER, ‘Decision-making in the Obama White House’, 260.

²⁵⁵ WALSH, K., ‘‘Never 100 Percent Certain’ on Every Course of Action’, *U.S. News & World Report*, 146 (2009), 22.

²⁵⁶ CAMPBELL, K., *The Pivot: The Future of American Statecraft in Asia*, New York, 2016, 30.

²⁵⁷ LAMPTON, D., ‘The United States and China in the Age of Obama: looking each other straight in the eyes’, ZHAO, S. (ed.), *The rise of China and transformation of the US-China relationship: forging partnership in the age of strategic mistrust*, London, 2014, 24.

²⁵⁸ CHRISTOFFERSEN G., ‘Chinese Views of US Foreign Policy under the Obama Administration’, MAASS, M. (ed.), *The World Views of the Obama Era: From Hope to Disillusionment*, Cham, 2017, 214.

focus on 4 people of the Obama administration, that were instrumental in the creation of the China policy.

Firstly, there was Jeffrey Bader, senior director for Asia at the NSC from 2009 until 2011. It is in this capacity that he became the principal advisor to Obama on Asia.²⁵⁹ He had a large influence on the creation and implementation of the administration's initial China policy. Within the administration, he was arguably the most experienced on China. In the 3 previous decades, he worked on the Asia policy and more specifically China in different capacities. He learned Chinese and spent most of his career at the DoS, the NSC and the USTR. During all of this time, he had been a part of several important decisions influencing the US-China bilateral ties. Bader strongly believed in America's role as a global leader. He thought that the Bush administration's approach of China as a responsible stakeholder had its merits and he consequently didn't want to completely reverse the US' policy toward East Asia.²⁶⁰ He was an outspoken supporter of cooperation with China. In 2007 he for example co-authored an article that stated:

"China has generally pursued foreign policies designed to promote peace and stability. Its stated policy of "peaceful development" has been matched by action ... We have been most effective with China when we have grounded our diplomacy on recognition of its status as a great power and the expectation that it would adhere to international norms..."²⁶¹

All in all, Bader was brought into the administration, based on his shared view with Obama about Asia. His job was to strengthen America's relationships with Asia, more specifically with China.²⁶²

The second crucially important advisor was Deputy SecState James Steinberg. Like Bader, he too was a part of the foreign policy team during the presidential campaign and he too left office in 2011. Obama handpicked Steinberg himself for the position, without the consultation of SecState Clinton. Together with Bader, he had the most influence on the creation of the administration's China policy. He had a good relationship with Obama, which increased his direct access to the president. Like Bader, his task was to strengthen the US' ties with Asia

²⁵⁹ Jeffrey A. Bader Senior Fellow - Foreign Policy, John L. Thornton China Center, 2020 Brookings, 27 March 2020.

²⁶⁰ BADER, J., *Obama and China's rise: an insider's account of America's Asia strategy*, Washington, 2012, xiii-xix.

²⁶¹ BADER, J. and BUSH, R., *Contending with the Rise of China Build on Three Decades of Progress*, 2007 Brookings, 27 March 2020.

²⁶² WANG, C., *Obama's challenge to China: The pivot to Asia*, London, 2017, 47-50.

and China in particular. He understood that Obama had to avoid souring the relation with China during the presidential campaign already, like others had done in the past.²⁶³

The third notable advisor to Obama was Tom Donilon. Initially, he was the Deputy NSA. In 2010, he was promoted to NSA, thanks to his excellent connections with Obama, until 2013, when he opted to resign.²⁶⁴ Donilon's influence was omnipresent in foreign policy, given that he had everyday contact with the president. Already as the Deputy, he outclassed the NSA James Jones, who never managed to gain an insider status, nor have a connection to Obama.²⁶⁵ Donilon did not focus on Asia policy speciality, but given his extensive foreign policy reach, he also had his say on the administration's China policy. His influence noticeably increased after 2011, when several men with extensive China expertise, such as Bader and Steinberg, left the administration.²⁶⁶ In general, Donilon thought that the US should pay more attention to China and other emerging countries. His views on China were more confrontational than Bader's and Steinberg's.

The last notable actor with regard to China was Obama's former opponent Hillary Clinton, who became the SecState until 2013, when she resigned to prepare for the next presidential elections.²⁶⁷ Given the earlier rivalry, the choice of Clinton for such a public office, was quite noticeable. Obama chose her because of her fame, discipline, political capital and foreign policy experience.²⁶⁸ She had some China-related experience dating back to her time as first lady and she generally had a more critical view of China than Obama. In the past, and during her campaign, she often stressed China's infringement of human rights. In 1995, she for example gave a speech in Beijing at the World Conference on Women, where she tied women's rights into the larger issue of human rights. She stated:

“Let me be clear. Freedom means the right of people to assemble, organize, and debate openly. It means respecting the views of those who may disagree with the views of their governments. It means not taking citizens away from their loved ones and jailing them,

²⁶³ WANG, *Obama's challenge to China*, 44-45.

²⁶⁴ Thomas Donilon Chairman of the BlackRock Investment Institute, 2020 Blackrock, 28 March 2020.

²⁶⁵ WARSHAW, S., 'Obama's National Security Cabinet: The Fight to Survive White House Micromanagement', CONLEY, R. (ed.), *Presidential Leadership and National Security: The Obama Legacy and Trump Trajectory*, New York, 2018, 95-97.

²⁶⁶ WANG, *Obama's challenge to China*, 50-51.

²⁶⁷ WARSHAW, 'Obama's National Security Cabinet', CONLEY, (ed.), *Presidential Leadership and National Security*, 105.

²⁶⁸ LIZZA, R., 'Obama: the Consequentialist', MCCORMICK, J. (ed.), *The Domestic Sources of American Foreign Policy: Insights and Evidence*, Lanham, 2012, 432.

mistreating them, or denying them their freedom or dignity because of the peaceful expression of their ideas and opinions.”²⁶⁹

Clinton however never managed to truly influence the Obama administration’s China policy, unlike the other advisors here above. She never developed a good relationship with White House advisors and preferred cooperating with SecDef Gates. However, due to her high profile, she became influential in the implementation of the policy. Clinton gave extra legitimacy to the policy and she became the face of the 2011 pivot.²⁷⁰

5.3. Obama’s China policy: learning from the past?

In the pages hereabove, I have focused on the character and decision-making of President Obama. I have also looked at his most important advisors and officials concerning the China policy. Here below, I will outline the decision-making process of the policy during the Obama presidency. I will explain the reasoning behind it and the changes throughout the administration.

The presidential elections of 2008 were focused on domestic themes. The anxiety surrounding the economic crisis overshadowed the public’s concerns about all other issues.²⁷¹ With regard to China, Obama already briefly outlined his views in a senatorial speech. He stated:

“It is critical the U.S. do all it can to ensure that China’s rise is peaceful and its trade practices fair, and under those conditions, the United States should welcome China’s continuing emergence and prosperity.”²⁷²

On the 20th of January 2009, Barack Obama was inaugurated as the 44th president. The new president, advised by Bader and Steinberg, thought that the US’ foreign policy was fundamentally unbalanced. Obama believed that the US had spent too much time and money, focussing on the Middle East. Instead, he wanted to pay more attention to Asia, and China in particular.²⁷³ Added to this, was Obama’s personal connection and interest in Asia, given his childhood in Indonesia and Hawaii.²⁷⁴ He consequently announced himself as the first Pacific president.²⁷⁵ Several of the experienced members of the new administration, such as Steinberg, Donilon and Bader, remembered their initial China policy failure under President Clinton, who

²⁶⁹ Hillary Rodham Clinton Remarks to the U.N. 4th World Conference on Women Plenary Session, 2020 American Rhetoric, 27 March 2020.

²⁷⁰ WANG, *Obama’s challenge to China*, 34-35.

²⁷¹ TURNER, *American Images of China*, 149.

²⁷² Visit of Vice Premier Wu Yi, 2007 Congress, 28 March 2020.

²⁷³ CHOLLET, D. *the Long Game: How Obama Defied Washington and Redefined America’s Role in the World*, New York, 2016, 52-56.

²⁷⁴ CLINTON, H., *Hard Choices*, New York, 2014, 37-40.

²⁷⁵ KITCHEN, N., ‘The Obama Doctrine: Détente or Decline?’, *European Political Science*, 10 (2010), 33.

denounced the Chinese leadership as the “Butchers of Beijing”, only 3 years after the Tiananmen Square massacre.²⁷⁶ They wanted to avoid making the same mistake as Clinton and Bush, who both had initially expressed hostile views towards China.

Instead, the new administration reasoned that an accommodating policy from the start would lead to a welcoming Chinese response.²⁷⁷ The initial goal was thus to further improve the bilateral relations, which were relatively good when Obama entered the White House.²⁷⁸ The administration aimed to respect China’s sensitivity over particularly difficult issues. China’s cooperation was thought to be essential, if the administration wanted to tackle several crucial issues, such as the global financial crisis, climate change, Iranian and North Korean nuclear weapons proliferation, etc.²⁷⁹ Bader reasoned that China was the third-largest economy at the time, the largest emitter of greenhouse gases, the only country with a significant relationship with the DPRK and a major investor in Iran’s energy sector.²⁸⁰ As a result hereof, Obama and his administration extended a cooperative hand in 2009. The new administration did everything possible to convey the message that they were ready to recognise China’s growth in influence. The Bush definition of “cooperative, constructive and candid” bilateral relations was immediately changed to “positive, constructive and comprehensive”. This was to the liking of Beijing, given that the term candid implied a relation filled with differences.²⁸¹

The year 2009 consequently brought with it several examples of the Obama administration’s goal for improved cooperation. Firstly, in February Clinton started visiting foreign countries. She opted to first visit Asian countries, one of them China, to make clear that they were of prime importance for the new administration. It also set the tone of American accommodation to China. During her visit, Clinton made it clear to the Chinese leadership that the new administration would not let human rights issues interfere with more important issues such as security matters and the economic crisis.²⁸²

Secondly, there was the creation of the Strategic and Economic Dialogue. This dialogue became the first important turf battle within the new administration, between SecState Clinton

²⁷⁶ SANGER, D., *Confront and Conceal: Obama's Secret Wars and Surprising Use of American Power*, New York, 2012, 370-380.

²⁷⁷ MANN, J., *The Obamians: The Struggle Inside the White House to Redefine American Power*, New York, 2012, 177.

²⁷⁸ SUTTER, R., ‘The Obama Administration and China: Positive but Fragile Equilibrium’, *Asian Perspective*, 33 (2009), 99-100.

²⁷⁹ GARRISON, J. and WALL, M., ‘The Rise of Hedging and Regionalism: An Explanation and Evaluation of President Obama's China Policy’, *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, 43 (2016), 52.

²⁸⁰ BADER, *Obama and China's rise*, 9.

²⁸¹ GLASER, B., *A Good Beginning Is Half Way to Success*, 2009 CC, 21 March 2020.

²⁸² ZHAO, S., ‘Shaping the Regional Context of China's Rise: how the Obama administration brought back hedge in its engagement with China’, *Journal of Contemporary China*, 21 (2012), 372.

and Treasury Secretary Geithner. The turf battle resulted in a name change of the Strategic Economic Dialogue's, which was adapted to Strategic and Economic Dialogue. Unlike the previous administration, this was however not a battle between hawks and doves. This turf battle, was Clinton's successful attempt to gain influence and broaden the dialogue. It also led to an elevation of the importance of the bilateral ties.²⁸³ No longer the dialogue was solely used for economics, but the new administration also added political and security issues.²⁸⁴ This improvement of the dialogue was the hallmark of the new administration's efforts to upgrade the bilateral relations.²⁸⁵ Bader later recalled:

"This mechanism was unknown in U.S. relations with any other country in the world and therefore indicated the particular importance that the Obama administration attached to China."²⁸⁶

Possibly most telling of the administration's willingness to avoid tensions was its approach to the Dalai Lama visit. Since 1991, the Tibetan spiritual leader had met with Presidents George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush each time he visited the US. However, Obama became the first US president in 18 years that refused to meet him. He postponed the meeting for a year, given that it threatened the administration's search for Chinese cooperation.²⁸⁷ This decision wasn't well received domestically, nor in the American press. American citizens started criticising the new policy, questioning whether it was not too accommodating towards China.

The engagement policy did however not lead to greater Chinese accommodation. Instead, China's demands and assertiveness only increased. The open hand offered by the American president was seen by the Chinese leadership as a sign of weakness and proof of China's increase in power. Exemplary hereof was the visit of President Obama to China, which meant to show the administration's respect for China. It was the first time an American president visited China during his first year in office.²⁸⁸ However, the visit made the Chinese leadership' unwillingness to reciprocate the Obama administration's search for further cooperation glaringly public.²⁸⁹ China respected none of the administration's requests. Obama's visit and contact with the Chinese population was heavily restricted. The centrepiece was

²⁸³ MANN, *The Obamians*, 175-176.

²⁸⁴ WANG, *Obama's challenge to China*, 62.

²⁸⁵ SANGER, *Confront and Conceal*, 380-385.

²⁸⁶ BADER, *Obama and China's rise*, 22.

²⁸⁷ BADER, *Obama and China's rise*, 50.

²⁸⁸ LI, C., *Assessing U.S.-China relations under the Obama administration*, 2016 Brookings, 30 March 2020.

²⁸⁹ GARRISON and WALL, 'The Rise of Hedging and Regionalism', 53.

supposed to be a public town hall appearance, with 1500 Chinese attendees.²⁹⁰ Obama was however only allowed to speak with Chinese students, off-campus and with Chinese officials to relay the students' questions. The Chinese leadership equally promised to live stream Obama's speech nationally. Instead, it was only broadcasted regionally, with delay and without translation.²⁹¹ A joint statement was released, where the US signalled its understanding of China's core interests. It equally described the mutual partnership as strategic. A much-desired term by Beijing, which was previously saved for US allies.²⁹²

However, once again there was heavy criticism within the American press. Similarly to earlier press coverage, the trip received a negative response, criticising the accommodating stance towards China. Within the Pentagon too, several officials complained that the joint statement had allowed too much leeway for China, concerning Taiwan. The joint statement focussed 3 different times on the respect for China's sovereignty and territorial integrity.²⁹³

Lastly, there was the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Change Conference. The Obama administration had made climate change one of its priorities. According to Obama, China and the US should cooperate, just as they had done to minimise the financial crisis. An effective international agreement was deemed impossible without the cooperation of the world's leading emitter of greenhouse gases. It however turned out disappointingly, given that China was all but ready to commit to substantially lower its emissions. Bader stated: "The Chinese delegation had been unhelpful, at times ornery and even destructive, pitting developing countries against developed countries...".²⁹⁴ During the crucial plenary session of the 20 key delegations, the Chinese Premier refused to attend. Instead, he sent a midlevel official to negotiate with Obama and other world leaders. This official however had no decision-making power and had to call Premier Weng for instructions. Near the end of the conference, President Obama had to find out via another delegation that there was a new meeting between China, Brazil, India and South Africa. It was only by interrupting this meeting, that eventually a watered-down version of a deal was signed. All in all, China's behaviour at the conference made it clear that it wanted to publicly refuse to cooperate and that it did not accept America's vision. China's behaviour seemed to be aimed at belittling the US and Obama.²⁹⁵

²⁹⁰ BADER, *Obama and China's rise*, 57.

²⁹¹ MANN, *The Obamians*, 181.

²⁹² ZHAO, 'Shaping the Regional Context of China's Rise', 372.

²⁹³ *Joint Press Statement by President Obama and President Hu of China*, 2009 The White House, 31 March 2020.

²⁹⁴ BADER, *Obama and China's rise*, 63-64.

²⁹⁵ WANG, *Obama's challenge to China*, 63-65.

At the end of 2009, it became clear to some in the Obama administration that the initial optimism of cooperation with China was unfunded. Seeking for cooperation and avoiding thorny issues, did not yield results. Added to this, was the consistent negative press coverage of the administration's China policy. American business communities, long time advocates of engaging with China, also became gradually more annoyed with China's trade policies. They were not given fair access to China's market. Theft of intellectual property and insistence on sharing intellectual property in return for market access cost the American companies billions of dollars. As a result hereof, lobbies demanded reciprocity of market access and they found a willing partner in the American Congress.²⁹⁶

The year 2010 would prove to be more difficult than the previous one. Under domestic pressure, Obama no longer refused to meet with the Dalai Lama and in February, they had their first meeting in Washington. As expected, this led to strong criticism from Beijing.²⁹⁷ There was also the sinking of the South Korean warship the Cheonan, resulting in a dramatic increase in tensions between North and South Korea.²⁹⁸ According to a joint investigation by the US, Australia, the UK and Sweden, there was only one possible attacker: North Korea. However, despite requests from Obama, the Chinese President Jintao refused to condemn the DPRK.²⁹⁹ China's leadership did not acknowledge the DPRK's responsibility, blocking a strong condemnation of the country by the UN Security Council. Obama hereupon stated:

"This is a situation in which you have a belligerent nation that engaged in provocative and deadly acts against the other. And I think it is very important that we are clear about that... And so when they adopt a posture of restraint, I understand their thinking. But I think there's a difference between restraint and wilful blindness to consistent problems."³⁰⁰

This was an unusually blunt remark for Obama to make, in which he targeted China's lack of cooperation. The sinking of the Cheonan and the Chinese refusal to cooperate led the administration to launch a series of joint military exercises with South Korea.³⁰¹ Not much after, Pyongyang decided to shell the South Korean administered island of Yeonpyeong, leading to the death of 4 civilians. As a response, the Obama administration sent the USS George

²⁹⁶ COHEN, *America's Response to China*, 287.

²⁹⁷ GLASER, B., *The Honeymoon Ends*, 2010 CC, 31 March 2020.

²⁹⁸ HUR, M., 'Revisiting the Cheonan sinking in the Yellow Sea', *The Pacific Review*, 30 (2017), 348-350.

²⁹⁹ MANN, *The Obamians*, 244.

³⁰⁰ *Remarks by President Obama at G-20 Press Conference in Toronto, Canada*, 2010 The White House, 31 March 2020.

³⁰¹ INDYK, M., e. a., *Bending History: Barack Obama's Foreign Policy*, Washington, 2012, 45.

Washington to the Yellow Sea. This aimed to make clear to the DPRK that the US would react against provocations. It also meant to encourage China to pressure the North Korean leadership, if it wanted to avoid similar American counteractions in the future.³⁰² China however saw this as a threat to its interests and fiercely objected against it.³⁰³

There was also an increase in territorial disputes between China and several neighbouring countries. In the East China Sea, the most notable dispute concerned the long-standing disagreement on the Senkaku Islands. In short, one should know that the islands are administrated by Japan, but equally claimed by China. Japan however refuses to acknowledge the latter's arguments. In 2010, this led to a crisis when a Chinese fishing boat, operating in the waters of the Senkaku Islands, collided with the Japanese Coast Guard.³⁰⁴ The drunk Chinese captain was consequently arrested.³⁰⁵ This led to a sharp increase in tensions and a strong Chinese retaliatory response. There was a stark drop in Chinese tourism, Beijing also suspended high-level talks and 4 Japanese employees in China were arrested.³⁰⁶ Lastly, Beijing also halted all export of rare earths shipments to Japan, officially because of environmental reasons.

In the South China Sea, there are similar long-standing territorial disputes between China, Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia, the Philippines and Brunei.³⁰⁷ China however became increasingly forceful in imposing its claims on the South China Sea. It argued that it had a historic right on all the territory within the nine-dash line. In 2010, China became rhetorically more confrontational, officials for the first time stated that the South China Sea was a core interest, alongside other traditional issues such as Tibet.³⁰⁸ China also started conducting naval exercises, to intimidate other claimants.³⁰⁹

Officially, the US had a neutral stance and it was not directly involved in any of these issues. However, these incidents had a spillover effect and they equally increased tensions in the US-China relations. The increased assertive Chinese behaviour led to several Asian countries requesting Washington to reassert its role as power-balancer in the region.³¹⁰ The US

³⁰² WANG, *Obama's challenge to China*, 87-89.

³⁰³ ZHAO, 'Shaping the Regional Context of China's Rise', 379-380.

³⁰⁴ PATALANO, A., 'Seapower and Sino-Japanese relations in the East China Sea', *Asian Affairs*, 45 (2014), 38-39.

³⁰⁵ HOOK, G., 'Japan's Risky Frontiers: Territorial Sovereignty and Governance of the Senkaku Islands', *Japanese Studies*, 34 (2014), 13.

³⁰⁶ HAFEEZ, S., 'The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands Crises of 2004, 2010, and 2012: A Study of Japanese-Chinese Crisis Management', *Asia-Pacific Review*, 22 (2015), 77-78.

³⁰⁷ *Explained: South China Sea dispute*, 2019 SCMP, 1 April 2020.

³⁰⁸ YOSHIHARA, T. and HOLMES, J., 'Can China Defend a "Core Interest" in the South China Sea?', *The Washington Quarterly*, 34 (2011), 45.

³⁰⁹ YAHUDA, M., 'China's New Assertiveness in the South China Sea', *Journal of Contemporary China*, 22 (2013), 452.

³¹⁰ SANGER, *Confront and Conceal*, 380-385.

and these Asian countries had similar concerns about Beijing's future military and political goals.³¹¹ Several Asian countries were thus willing to improve bilateral relationships, most notably former adversary Vietnam.

On the 23rd of July 2010, SecState Clinton attended the annual ASEAN meeting, to discuss security issues. Most often during these meetings, all concerned parties try to avoid conflicts as much as possible. However, this meeting was held in Hanoi, and the Vietnamese leadership pressed the issue of China's increasing assertiveness. Soon several other Asian states supported Vietnam, demanding a multilateral approach to resolve the territorial disputes. At the end of the day Clinton too held a speech, in her memoirs she recalls:

"We supported the multilateral approach being proposed, in accordance with international law and without coercion or the threat of force... The United States was prepared to facilitate this process because we saw freedom of navigation in the South China Sea as a national interest."³¹²

The Chinese leadership saw Clinton's speech as a strategy of the Obama administration to reassert influence and to undermine China's relations with its neighbours.³¹³ Clinton's suggestion to hold multilateral cooperation went directly against China's one-one-one strategy, which made it easier for China to make use of its size and influence, and was also seen as deeply embarrassing.³¹⁴ As a result hereof the enraged Chinese Foreign Minister Yang left the conference for one hour.³¹⁵ When he came back, he held a 25 minutes response, which culminated in a warning for the other Asian states: "China is a big country, and other countries are small countries, and that's just a fact."³¹⁶

All in all, 2010 was filled with tensions between China and the US and it consequently led to a change of mind within most officials of the Obama administration. The Obama administration did not strongly adapt its policy, but the approach started to become tougher and one could consequently describe the bilateral relations as rocky.³¹⁷ This gradual change in policy lies in line with Obama's high conceptual complexity and his disapproval of rigidity. Confrontations between the 2 countries became omnipresent, regarding almost any possible

³¹¹ WOMACK, B., 'The Spratlys: From Dangerous Ground to Apple of Discord', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 33 (2011), 380.

³¹² CLINTON, *Hard Choices*, 60-70.

³¹³ GLASER, B. and BILLINGSLEY, B., *Tensions Rise and Fall, Once Again*, 2010 CC, 1 April 2020.

³¹⁴ WANG, *Obama's challenge to China*, 73-76.

³¹⁵ COHEN, *America's Response to China*, 289.

³¹⁶ MANN, *The Obamians*, 246.

³¹⁷ FRIEDBERG, A., 'Bucking Beijing: An Alternative U.S. China Policy', *Foreign Affairs*, 91 (2012), 49-52.

subject. Added to this, was the increasing pressure from Congress, voting laws that defined China as a currency rate controller.³¹⁸

The next year, 2011, marked several important policy changes. After 2 years, the Obama administration officialised its final Asia strategy. The team responsible for China also underwent a crucial change. Several important initial policy creators left the administration. Firstly, the US ambassador to China, Jon Huntsman resigned. Secondly, Deputy SecState Steinberg and the director of East Asian Affairs at the NSC Bader, which both had a big impact on Obama's initial China policy, resigned. Both men consistently argued in favour of strengthening cooperation with China. As a result of these departures, there was not a single high-ranking China specialist within the DoS, the NSC or the DoD.³¹⁹

Those who replaced the China specialists were specialised in other areas of Asia. Assistant SecState for East Asian Affairs Kurt Campbell gained the most influence after the departure of the China specialists. He was one of the only senior Asia officials that didn't leave the administration in 2011. Campbell was a Japan specialist, who favoured closer ties between America and Asia-Pacific countries, such as Japan, Indonesia, South Korea and Vietnam. He was generally more hawkish on Chinese issues.³²⁰ It was no coincidence that with Campbell's rise and the departure of Bader and Steinberg, the Obama administration adopted a tougher China policy. Obama too embraced a tougher line on China. One must keep in mind that as a president with a high conceptual complexity, it is not surprising that he changed his policies after being confronted with disappointing results.

A crucial moment for US-China relations happened in the second half of 2011, when the Obama administration unveiled its pivot to Asia, which was largely thought out by the DoS and more specifically Campbell.³²¹ SecState Clinton was the first official to use the term pivot to Asia in an article in the magazine *Foreign Policy*.³²² She wrote:

“... the United States stands at a pivot point... In the next 10 years, we need to be smart and systematic about where we invest time and energy, so that we put ourselves in the best position to sustain our leadership, secure our interests, and advance our values. One

³¹⁸ NI, F., *China-America relations: review and analysis*, Beijing, 2012, 155.

³¹⁹ WANG, *Obama's challenge to China*, 81-82.

³²⁰ WANG, *Obama's challenge to China*, 46.

³²¹ HOSSEINI, H., e. a., 'Obama's "Pivot to Asia" Policy (2011-2016): the Case of China', *Journal of World Sociopolitical Studies*, 2 (2018), 642.

³²² MISHRA, M., 'Maritime Military Context of the US Rebalance: Strategic Basis and Prognosis', *Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India*, 10 (2014), 56.

of the most important tasks of American statecraft over the next decade will therefore be to lock in a substantially increased investment... in the Asia-Pacific region.”³²³

The pivot to Asia was a long-term plan, to realign the focus of US foreign policy. In 2011, the US’ military involvement in the Middle East scaled down, leaving room for a reorientation towards Asia.³²⁴ According to Donilon, the pivot to Asia was built around 5 pillars: closer coordination with US treaty allies in Asia, deepening cooperation and building capacity with the region’s emerging powers, building a constructive relationship with China, increasing engagements with Asia’s multilateral organisations and building an economic architecture that benefits the people of the Asia-Pacific.³²⁵

This was not an entirely new policy towards Asia or China. However, for the first time these policies were combined in one overall strategy.³²⁶ The pivot was thus not a fundamentally different strategy. According to Charles Hermann’s description, it was a program change. It was largely a continuation of America’s long-standing policies. The goals as such did not change, but there was a different approach in means to achieve them.³²⁷ With the pivot, the administration aimed to reappportion attention and resources to Asia.³²⁸ For the first time, there was a comprehensive and multidimensional strategy, aimed at improving American influence in the region. The term pivot was later replaced by rebalance, given the linguistic suggestion that there would be a complete move away from the Middle East and Europe.³²⁹

There were 4 main reasons why the Obama administration deemed this pivot necessary. Firstly, it recognised the greater weight of Asia’s economic power in the global economy.³³⁰ Secondly, it was a reaction against China’s military build-up and increased assertiveness. Thirdly, it meant to reassure the US’ regional allies that America would remain engaged in the coming decades. Lastly, it offered an answer to domestic pressure, which was increasingly important due to the upcoming presidential elections.³³¹

³²³ CLINTON, H., ‘America’s Pacific Century’, *Foreign Policy*, 189 (2011), 57.

³²⁴ LIEBERTHAL, K., *The American Pivot to Asia*, 2011 Foreign Policy, 3 April 2020.

³²⁵ *Complete Transcript: Thomas Donilon at Asia Society New York*, 2013 Asia Society, 3 April 2020.

³²⁶ WANG, *Obama’s challenge to China*, 88.

³²⁷ JOHNSON, J., *The US-China Military and Defense Relationship during the Obama Presidency*, Cham, 2018, 4.

³²⁸ CHRISTOFFERSEN ‘Chinese Views of US Foreign Policy under the Obama Administration’, MAASS, *The World Views of the Obama Era*, 215-216.

³²⁹ ZHAO, S., ‘A New Model of Big Power Relations? China-US strategic rivalry and balance of power in the Asia-Pacific’, *Journal of Contemporary China*, 24 (2015), 388.

³³⁰ KELLY, R., ‘The ‘pivot’ and its problems: American foreign policy in Northeast Asia’, *The Pacific Review*, 27 (2014), 491.

³³¹ DE SANTIS, H., ‘The China Threat and the “Pivot” to Asia’, *Current History*, 111 (2012), 212.

The pivot was largely put forward at 2011's APEC meeting in Hawaii. The location meant to send a message about the US' intentions to increase engagement with the Asia Pacific region. President Obama made clear in his opening statement that the region would now be a priority. The speech also reflected the increased influence of China-wary advisors. Obama stated that:

"The United States and other countries, I think understandably, feel that enough is enough... I mean, we try to set up rules that are universal, that everybody can follow, and then we play by those rules. And then we compete fiercely. But we don't try to game the system. That's part of what leadership is about. China has the opportunity to be that same type of leader... But that requires them to take responsibility..."³³²

The Chinese leadership initially looked at the pivot and Obama's tougher public statements with suspicion. This would only worsen, given that the most visible part of the pivot would become the security and military pillar. Beijing consequently feared that the Obama administration would do everything to prevent China's rise. A couple of days after APEC, Obama visited Australia. Here, Obama gave a speech to the Australian parliament, making clear that his administration aimed to strengthen its military presence in the region. To underscore this, a bilateral agreement was reached to send marines to Australia in the future.³³³ The next year, 250 marines would begin a 6-month rotation for joint training with Australian troops.³³⁴ Eventually, this number would grow up to 2500 marines.³³⁵ Even though Obama did not directly criticise China, many remarks contained barely hidden criticism. He for example said:

"We stand for an international order in which the rights and responsibilities of all nations and all people are upheld. Where international law and norms are enforced. Where commerce and freedom of navigation are not impeded. Where emerging powers contribute to regional security, and where disagreements are resolved peacefully... history shows that, over the long run, democracy and economic growth go hand in hand. And prosperity without freedom is just another form of poverty..."³³⁶

Lastly, in November 2011, Obama became the first American president to attend the East Asia Summit. Here, Obama aimed to strengthen the multilateral diplomacy pillar of the

³³² News Conference by President Obama, 2011 the White House, 3 April 2020.

³³³ HARKINS, G., *There Are Now 2,500 US Marines in Australia After Years of Buildup*, 2019 Military, 3 April 2020.

³³⁴ ETZIONI, A., 'The United States' Premature Pivot to Asia', *Society*, 49 (2012), 395.

³³⁵ COSSA, R. and GLOSSERMAN, B., *A Pivotal Moment for US Foreign Policy?*, 2012 CC, 3 April 2020.

³³⁶ *Remarks By President Obama to the Australian Parliament*, 2011 The White House, 3 April 2020.

pivot. Despite several remarks of the Chinese leadership not to talk about the South China Sea disputes, Obama encouraged the participants to do so.³³⁷

One can consequently state that 2011 brought an important change. The Obama administration became more vocal and tougher concerning China. Since 2009, there had been voices, such as Campbell, in the DoS and DoD, arguing for a tougher policy. After the resignation of Bader and Steinberg, they managed to become more influential. Their rise in importance was partially made possible by China's increased assertiveness. That being said, while proclaiming the renewed attention for the Asia Pacific, the administration equally tried to ensure China that the pivot did not threaten its interests.³³⁸ As a consequence hereof, the pivot did little to directly worsen the relations between the 2 countries.³³⁹

In 2012, the bilateral relations were largely influenced by domestic politics in both China and the US. Obama had to face Mitt Romney in the presidential elections, while the Chinese President Jintao prepared to hand over power to his successor Xi Jinping. As a result hereof, both countries aimed to avoid big ruptures in their bilateral relationship, while sending tough messages to impress their domestic populations.

China as such was not of prime importance during the 2012 elections. Instead, the American people focussed on issues such as healthcare and Afghanistan. However, the Obama administration's China policy was contested by the Republican opposition, that argued that Obama was too soft.³⁴⁰ Mitt Romney for example accused China several times of cheating and not following the established economic rules.³⁴¹ Obama aimed to counteract these accusations as much as possible, by toughening his policies. Exemplary hereof was his State of the Union Address. Unlike in previous years, China was mentioned several times:

“And I will not stand by when our competitors don't play by the rules. We've brought trade cases against China at nearly twice the rate as the last administration and it's made a difference.”³⁴²

Xi Jinping also visited the US in 2012. At the time, he was still the Chinese vice president, but he was expected to become the Chinese leader within a year. The visit aimed to

³³⁷ *Fact Sheet: East Asia Summit, 2011* The White House, 3 April 2020.

³³⁸ WANG, *Obama's challenge to China*, 95.

³³⁹ CAMPBELL, *The Pivot*, 26.

³⁴⁰ TURNER, *American Images of China*, 155.

³⁴¹ PALMER, O. and SWAINE, M., *Mitt Romney's China Policy*, 2012 CEIP, 4 April 2020.

³⁴² *Remarks by the President in State of the Union Address*, 2012 The White House, 4 April 2020.

build good connections with the upcoming leader.³⁴³ Xi consequently met with Obama, Biden and Clinton. On the other hand, the visit also showed the duality of the US-China relations, when Biden held a welcoming toast filled with criticism on China.³⁴⁴

To further underscore this duality, one can take a look at 2 other high-level visits. On the one hand, there was Donilon's visit to Beijing, the first NSA to visit China in 8 years. Doing so, the Obama administration attempted to show its commitments to China and to smooth over the bilateral relations. On the other hand, there was also Clinton's Asia tour. Her visit highlighted the US' commitments to countries such as Japan, Vietnam, Mongolia, etc. Clinton's speeches were marked with human rights promotion and barely hidden criticism on China. She praised the Asian democracies, while condemning non-democratic Asian states. She concluded that human rights and support for democracy were at the heart of the current Asia policy.³⁴⁵ This clearly differed from Clinton's 2009 message to the Chinese leadership, when she stated that these topics would not stand in the way of security issues.

By the end of 2012, Obama's China policy significantly differed from the initial policy. It had become clear that the Chinese leadership did not accept Obama's policy of improved cooperation. Beijing interpreted the initial policy as weakness and consequently acted more assertive. That being said, Obama's policy changed steadily and culminated in the rebalance towards Asia. This meant to be a comprehensive and multidimensional strategy, without specifically targeting China. However, given the visibility of the military part of the rebalance, it led to strong suspicion within China. At the 2012's Shangri-La Dialogue SecDef Panetta for example emphasized that:

"Over the next few years we will increase the number and the size of our exercises in the Pacific... And by 2020 the Navy will reposture its forces from today's roughly 50/50 percent split between the Pacific and the Atlantic to about a 60/40 split between those oceans. That will include six aircraft carriers in this region, a majority of our cruisers, destroyers, Littoral Combat Ships, and submarines."³⁴⁶

At the end of 2012, it became clear that both countries were only able to cooperate to a certain degree. Strategic distrust continued, because of several unresolved issues. As a result hereof, Obama's initial policy of cooperation de facto returned to a centralist position, that had been at

³⁴³ *Press Briefing on the Upcoming Visit of Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping to the United States*, 2012 The White House, 4 April 2020.

³⁴⁴ WANG, *Obama's challenge to China*, 98-99.

³⁴⁵ *Remarks to the International Women's Leadership Forum*, 2012 U.S. DoS, 4 April 2020.

³⁴⁶ *Remarks by Secretary Panetta at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore*, 2012 U.S. DoS, 4 April 2020.

the core of the US' China policy for decades.³⁴⁷ One can state that Obama's policy changed to a dual-track policy of engagement where possible, while hedging toward China.³⁴⁸

The year 2013 led to new changes in the Obama administration's China team, much to the appreciation of Beijing. Campbell, seen in Beijing as a hard-line anti-China figure, resigned. SecState Clinton, who was equally perceived as having anti-Chinese sentiments, also resigned to prepare herself for the 2016 presidential elections. She was replaced by John Kerry. Lastly, SecDef Panetta went on retirement. There were equally crucial changes in China, with the once-in-a-decade leadership change. Xi Jinping became the new Chinese president.³⁴⁹ Obama's views on China and his strategic objectives however remained the same.³⁵⁰ All of this did thus not lead to crucial changes in the policy and one can state that the second Obama administration's China policy did not fundamentally change hereafter.³⁵¹

One of the most notable events of 2013, was the Sunnylands Summit from the 7th until the 8th of June. An informal meeting between Obama and Xi, designed to improve the personal relations between the 2 leaders. During these intensive talks, both leaders discussed a wide range of topics for an extended time.³⁵² Despite the optimism after this meeting, it soon became clear that the bilateral relations would not improve. Both the US and China would stick to their respective foreign policies.

In November 2013, China for example declared an air defence identification zone over large parts of the East China Sea, including the Senkaku Islands. Beijing demanded that any aircraft within this zone would report its flight path to China.³⁵³ This led to a strong Japanese verbal reaction, but also a sharp US response. It after all went directly against the interest of 2 US allies: South Korea and Japan. It equally challenged the US' policy of freedom of navigation. The Obama administration feared that if unchallenged, Beijing would surely act similarly in the South China Sea.³⁵⁴ As a result hereof, several high-ranking US officials almost instantaneously condemned the Chinese action. SecDef Hagel for example stated:

"We view this development as a destabilizing attempt to alter the status quo in the region... This announcement by the People's Republic of China will not in any way

³⁴⁷ ZHAO, 'Shaping the Regional Context of China's Rise', 384.

³⁴⁸ GARRISON and WALL, 'The Rise of Hedging and Regionalism', 56.

³⁴⁹ HARDING, H., 'Has U.S. China Policy Failed?', *The Washington Quarterly*, 38 (2015), 97.

³⁵⁰ COSSA, R. and GLOSSERMAN, B., *Continuity Prevails for Better and for Worse*, 2013 CC, 4 April 2020.

³⁵¹ WANG, *Obama's challenge to China*, 114-117.

³⁵² GLASER, B. and VITELLO, J., *Sizing Each Other Up at Sunnylands*, 2013 CC, 4 April 2020.

³⁵³ HUANG, D., *Asia Pacific Countries and the US Rebalancing Strategy*, New York, 2016, 57-60.

³⁵⁴ COHEN, *America's Response to China*, 292.

change how the United States conducts military operations in the region... The United States reaffirms its longstanding policy that Article V of the U.S.-Japan Mutual Defense Treaty applies to the Senkaku Islands.”³⁵⁵

Added to this, 2 B-52 bombers flew over the South China Sea, without prior warning to Beijing.³⁵⁶ This sent a clear message: the US would not respect the new Chinese rules. Soon after, South Korea and Japan also sent planes on a similar path, in defiance of Beijing.³⁵⁷

If anything, the last 3 years of the Obama administration proved to be a continuation of the dual-track China policy. Obama managed to cooperate with Xi on several important issues. This was made clear by the extensive high-level visits of both US and Chinese officials. Arguably, the most important diplomatic success was the Obama administration’s successful attempt to gain Chinese support on climate change in the 2015 Paris Accords.³⁵⁸ Similarly, in 2015 the US and China managed to cooperate in a multilateral setting about Iran’s nuclear program.³⁵⁹ Military-to-military contacts equally improved to a certain degree. The PLAN for example sent troops to RIMPAC in 2014 and 2016, the world’s largest naval exercise, hosted biannually by the US.³⁶⁰

However, consistent underlying key constraints in the bilateral relations resulted in recurring tensions. The most tense issues were connected to China’s ever-growing assertive actions against US allies in the East and South China Sea. Xi made it clear that he wanted an Asia for Asians, suggesting that he sought to exclude the US from Asian security issues.³⁶¹ The Obama administration became more vocal, defending Japan’s interests. Obama for example stated for the first time himself that: “... our treaty commitment to Japan’s security is absolute, and Article 5 covers all territories under Japan’s administration, including the Senkaku Islands”.³⁶² Acting upon this, the following year the US replaced the ageing Japan-based aircraft

³⁵⁵ *Statement by Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel on the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone*, 2013 U.S. DoD, 5 April 2020.

³⁵⁶ LOFFLMANN, G., ‘The Pivot between Containment, Engagement, and Restraint: President Obama’s Conflicted Grand Strategy in Asia’, *Asian Security*, 12 (2016), 96.

³⁵⁷ WANG, *Obama’s challenge to China*, 128.

³⁵⁸ CHRISTENSEN, T., ‘Obama and Asia: Confronting the china challenge’, *Foreign Affairs*, 94 (2015), 35-36.

³⁵⁹ BJERRE-POULSEN, N., ‘Here we See the Future: The Obama Administration’s Pivot to Asia’, ASHBEE, E. and DUMBRELL, J. (ed.), *The Obama Presidency and the Politics of Change*, Cham, 2017, 320.

³⁶⁰ PANDA, A., *With 5 Ships and 1,200 Personnel, China Expands RIMPAC 2016 Naval Delegation*, 2016 The Diplomat, 5 April 2020.

³⁶¹ GLASER, B. and VITELLO, J., *Summit Provides Renewed Momentum for Better Ties*, 2015 CC, 5 April 2020.

³⁶² *Joint Press Conference with President Obama and Prime Minister Abe of Japan*, 2014 The White House, 5 April 2020.

carrier USS George Washington, with the modern USS Ronald Reagan. The navy also added other new ships, to boost the 7th fleet.³⁶³

The same could be said about the South China Sea. Here too several clashes took place of Chinese vessels against Philippine and Vietnamese ships. This culminated in a, US-supported, international arbitration case initialled by the Philippines against China.³⁶⁴ Since 2014, China also started massive reclamation projects and the construction of artificial islands in the South China Sea. To protect these islands, China armed them with surface-to-air and anti-ship missiles, which further militarized the area.³⁶⁵ The US consequently supported its traditional South Asian allies and strengthened military cooperation with other countries. The US for example signed the Joint Vision Statement of Defence Relations with Vietnam, held military trainings and it ended its long-standing weapons embargo against its former adversary.³⁶⁶ The US' vision of regional security and freedom of movement was repeated time and time again, to the frustration of Beijing. The US also started clearly denouncing Beijing's actions in the South China Sea. SecDef Carter for example stated:

“China has reclaimed over 2,000 acres, more than all other claimants combined...and more than in the entire history of the region. And China did so in only the last 18 months... with its actions in the South China Sea, China is out of step with both the international rules and norms that underscore the Asia-Pacific's security architecture, and the regional consensus that favors diplomacy and opposes coercion.”³⁶⁷

All in all, one can conclude that Obama's China policy went through a fundamental change during his presidency. Obama, who felt a great personal connection to Asia initially aimed to cooperate as much as possible with China. Advisors such as Bader and Steinberg further advocated for this policy, given the failures of earlier administrations' initial tough policies. China was seen as a crucial partner in many of the foreign policy priorities of the new president. However, due to its assertive behaviour, it became clear to the administration that China perceived the US as a dwindling power and that it was unwilling to further cooperate. Obama,

³⁶³ TUNSJO, O., *The return of bipolarity in world politics: China, the United States, and geostructural realism*, 2018, New York, 159.

³⁶⁴ ZHANG, F., 'Assessing China's response to the South China Sea arbitration ruling', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 71 (2017), 440-441.

³⁶⁵ TURCSANYI, R., *Chinese Assertiveness in the South China Sea Power Sources, Domestic Politics, and Reactive Foreign Policy*, Cham, 2018, 50-53.

³⁶⁶ KOLMAS, M. and KOLMASOVA, S., 'A 'pivot' that never existed: America's Asian strategy under Obama and Trump', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 32 (2019), 69.

³⁶⁷ *IISS Shangri-La Dialogue: "A Regional Security Architecture Where Everyone Rises"*, 2015 U.S. DoD, 6 April 2020.

with his high conceptual complexity and dislike of rigid policies, swiftly understood that some sort of change was required. As a result hereof, the US-China relations settled back in a more centralist position. After the resignation of several initial key China advisors, the administration's policy became tougher. The 2011 rebalance towards Asia, largely thought out by the more China-wary Campbell, did not lead to a fundamental change in the administration's China policy. However, the policy led to an increase in American troops and diplomatic activity in Asia.³⁶⁸ This highlighted several other underlying sources of tensions with China, most visibly in the East and South China Sea. The rebalance was equally accompanied by a tougher rhetoric on China. However, officials repeated time and time again that the rebalance was not aimed against China.³⁶⁹ Despite this, the latter became increasingly assertive and concerned of the US' actions in Asia, resulting in bilateral relations that were rockier when Obama left the White Office in 2017, than when he entered in 2009.³⁷⁰

5.4. Case study: the Obama administration's arms sales to Taiwan

During the Bush administration, Taiwan was arguably the most important source of tensions between Washington and Beijing. The opposite was true for the Obama administration, when tensions between China and Taiwan were remarkably low. One could even argue that the cross-strait relations were at an all-time high. This was however not the result of the Obama administration's policy towards China or Taiwan, but because of a leadership change in Taiwan.

Between 2008 and 2016, Taiwan elected Ma Ying-jeou as their president. Unlike his predecessor, Ma wanted to strengthen cooperation with mainland China and he consequently articulated a policy, respecting the 3 noes: no unification, no independence, no use of force.³⁷¹ This resulted in an increase in communication between the authorities of Taiwan and China. Both sides of the strait agreed that they would focus primarily on economic matters, postponing sensitive political issues relating to sovereignty.³⁷² This led to a historic Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement between Taiwan and China.³⁷³ After a decade-long bid, Taiwan was also allowed an observer status as "Chinese Taipei" at the World Health Assembly. Ma's cooperation with China equally relieved pressure on US-China relations.

³⁶⁸ POMFRET, J., *The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom: America and China, 1776 to the Present*, New York, 2016, 618-621.

³⁶⁹ ETZIONI, A., *Avoiding War with China: Two Nations, One World*, Charlottesville, 2017, 111.

³⁷⁰ COHEN, P., *America's Response to China*, 295.

³⁷¹ CHEN, P., e. a., 'A Farewell to Arms? US Security Relations with Taiwan and the Prospects for Stability in the Taiwan Strait', DITTMER, L. (ed.), *Taiwan and China: Fitful Embrace*, Oakland, 2017, 225.

³⁷² HICKEY, D., 'Rapprochement between Taiwan and the Chinese Mainland: implications for American foreign policy', *Journal of Contemporary China*, 20 (2011), 237.

³⁷³ LIAO, N. and LIN, D., 'Rebalancing Taiwan-US Relations', *Survival*, 57 (2016), 149.

Like Bush, the Obama administration's arms sales policy towards Taiwan was influenced by its China policy. The Obama administration supported the moderation of the cross-strait tensions. As a result hereof, Taiwan became much less of a spotlight issue. That being said, China warned the Obama administration in 2009, that arms sales to Taiwan had to stop.³⁷⁴ Unlike Bush, Obama and his officials initially seldomly corroborated their cross-strait policy.³⁷⁵ As mentioned above, the China policy in 2009 focussed on engagement, while avoiding thorny issues. One of the examples hereof was the delay of the Dalai Lama meeting in 2009. Obama used a similar tactic regarding arms sales to Taiwan. In 2008, President Bush and the Congress had offered a weapons package. This allowed President Obama to postpone the decision and avoid unnecessary tensions.³⁷⁶

However, 2009 largely led to disappointing results. The initial cautious policy did not yield satisfying results, which culminated in a show of disrespect to Obama at the Copenhagen climate change summit. The following month, in January 2010, Obama notified Congress of a proposed arms sales of 5 major programs, worth 6,4 billion USD.³⁷⁷ That being said, this offer was limited to items previously approved by Obama's predecessor. The 2010 offer contained the remaining PAC-3 missile defense systems, which were broken up into 2 parts by the Bush administration. The Obama administration also offered to sell Black Hawk helicopters, Harpoon anti-ship training missiles and Osprey-class minehunters.³⁷⁸ Like the late Bush administration, the Obama administration refused to advance the submarine design program, and it equally did not accept Taiwan's formal request for F-16C/D fighters. According to Bader, the arms sales had 3 goals. Firstly, to provide Taiwan with the possibility to withstand a Chinese attack until US assistance would be able to turn the tide. Secondly, to show US commitment to Taiwanese security. Lastly, to demonstrate US credibility to friends and allies in the region.³⁷⁹

The arms package offer was a clear confirmation that the Obama administration would continue the decades-old strategy of strategic ambiguity. It also proved the administration's break from its earlier China policy, which aimed to prevent tensions at all costs.³⁸⁰ The Obama administration expected some backlash, which was mostly seen as theatrical and ritualistic.³⁸¹ The strength of China's unprecedented threats however surprised many in the administration.

³⁷⁴ MANN, *The Obamians*, 178.

³⁷⁵ TAO, 'U.S. Think Tanks and Taiwan Policy', TAO, (ed.), *The US Policy Making Process for Post Cold War China The role of US Think Tanks and Diplomacy*, 86.

³⁷⁶ BADER, *Obama and China's rise*, 71.

³⁷⁷ LAWRENCE, S., and MORRISON W., *Taiwan: Issues for Congress*, 2017 FAS, 8 April 2020.

³⁷⁸ KAN, 'Taiwan', 115.

³⁷⁹ BADER, *Obama and China's rise*, 71.

³⁸⁰ WANG, *Obama's challenge to China*, 68.

³⁸¹ BADER, *Obama and China's rise*, 76.

China responded tougher than ever before, which lied in line with its more assertive behaviour. However, China's threats did not match its policy. The country threatened for the first time to impose sanction on the US companies that were involved in the arms sales to Taiwan.³⁸² In reality, these sanctions were never implemented.³⁸³ China did suspend all military-to-military exchanges for 11 months, leading to the cancellation of several high-level meetings.

That being said, the Obama administration saw it as an obligation to offer Taiwan arms deals. This point of view did not fundamentally differ from previous administrations. SecDef Gates for example stated about the arms sales and the consequent Chinese reactions:

“Finally, because China's accelerating military buildup is largely focused on Taiwan, U.S. arms sales are an important component of maintaining peace and stability in cross-strait relations and throughout the region... Only in the military-to-military arena has progress on critical mutual security issues been held hostage over something that is, quite frankly, old news. It has been clear to everyone now ... that interruptions in our military relationship with China will not change United States policy toward Taiwan.”³⁸⁴

This made it clear that the US remained supportive of Taiwan, despite possible Chinese reactions. The administration consequently decided to offer another arms deal, worth 6 billion USD in September 2011. Obama remained careful to minimise possible damage to the bilateral relations.³⁸⁵ The offer consisted of spare parts, upgrading the Taiwanese F-16A/B's and the continuation of training Taiwanese pilots.³⁸⁶ Like Bush, Obama too refused to accept Taiwan's letter of request for the F-16 C/D's, which is the first step in the foreign military sales process.³⁸⁷

China criticised once again the arms sale offer, but it also led to discontent within Taiwan.³⁸⁸ Obama did not offer F-16C/D planes, nor submarines.³⁸⁹ The decision was equally contested within the US. There was domestic pressure on the Obama administration to sell more advanced weaponry to Taiwan.³⁹⁰ Prior to the arms offer, Lockheed Martin had warned the government that it would possibly close its production line if the administration would not offer

³⁸² ZHAO, 'Shaping the Regional Context of China's Rise', 379.

³⁸³ GLASER, *The Honeymoon Ends*, 31 March 2020.

³⁸⁴ *Secretary of Defense Speech*, 2010 U.S. DoD, 8 April 2020.

³⁸⁵ SINGH, *Barack Obama's Post-American Foreign Policy*, 158.

³⁸⁶ KAN, 'Taiwan', 117.

³⁸⁷ *2011 Report to Congress of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, 2011 USCC, 9 April 2020.

³⁸⁸ TAO, 'U.S. Think Tanks and Taiwan Policy', TAO, (ed.), *The US Policy Making Process for Post Cold War China The role of US Think Tanks and Diplomacy*, 156.

³⁸⁹ CABESTAN, J., 'Recent Changes in Taiwan's Defense Policy and Taiwan-USA Relations', *East Asia*, 31 (2014), 346-347.

³⁹⁰ SUTTER, *US-China relations*, 223.

the new plane types.³⁹¹ Within Congress, there were also several voices, across both parties, demanding Obama to sell the more advanced F-16's. Exemplary hereof was a bipartisan letter to Obama, written by the Democrat Senator Robert Menendez and the republic Senator John Cornyn. The letter was supported by 45 senators and it stated that:

“We are deeply concerned that further delay of the decision to sell F-16s to Taiwan could result in closure of the F-16 production line... Without new fighter aircraft and upgrades to its existing fleet of F-16s, Taiwan will be dangerously exposed to Chinese military threats, aggression and provocation, which pose significant national security implications for the United States.”³⁹²

A similar bipartisan letter was drafted within the House of Representatives, signed by 181 members.³⁹³ After the decision not to sell the upgrade planes, Senator Cornyn concluded that:

“...today's capitulation to Communist China by the Obama Administration marks a sad day in American foreign policy, and it represents a slap in the face to a strong ally and long time friend.”³⁹⁴

Thereafter, arms sales to Taiwan were halted for 4 years. This was partly due to Taiwan's stagnating defence budget, but also because the Chinese missile threat stabilised. In 2015, the Obama administration made its latest arms offer to Taiwan.³⁹⁵ This time the package was fairly modest, worth 1,83 billion USD, and once again solely filled with defensive weaponry.³⁹⁶ The package consisted out of old frigates, amphibious vehicles, Stinger missiles, etc.³⁹⁷

One can conclude that the arms sales under President Obama were influenced by the administration's China policy. Unlike under the previous administration, Taiwan was not of prime importance for the Obama administration. Between 2009 and 2017, the Obama administration was a lot less vocal about Taiwan than its predecessor. Initially, Obama wanted to avoid all possible tensions with China, leading to the postponement of arms sales in 2009. The administration did however see arms sales as an obligation under the TRA. It

³⁹¹ CONN, H., *U.S. Arms Sales to Taiwan Accomplishes Little More Than Pushing China's Buttons*, 2011 IPS, 8 April 2020.

³⁹² *Menendez Urges President Obama to Expedite Sale of Military Aircraft to Taiwan*, 2011 Menendez Senate, 8 April 2020.

³⁹³ *Two U.S. Senators Sponsor Bill to Sell F-16 C/D Fighters to Taiwan*, 2011 U.S. DoD, 8 April 2020.

³⁹⁴ *Cornyn Statement on Obama Administration's Reported Decision Not to Sell F-16s to Taiwan*, 2011 Cornyn Senate, 8 April 2020.

³⁹⁵ O'HANLON, M. and STEINBERG, J., *A glass half full?: rebalance, reassurance, and resolve in the U.S.-China strategic relationship*, New York, 2017, 39.

³⁹⁶ *Factbox: U.S. arms sales to Taiwan in past decade*, 2019 Reuters, 9 April 2020.

³⁹⁷ *Section 2: China and Taiwan*, 2016 USCC, 9 April 2020.

consequently offered arms packages in 2010, 2011 and 2015. It was no coincidence that the first offer was made only one month after China's demeaning behaviour towards Obama at the Copenhagen summit. The toughening of the administration's China policy was accompanied by a policy of arms offers. These arms deals were however always of a defensive nature. During his administration, Obama stood under fierce domestic pressure to offer Taiwan F16 C/D fighter jets. Such sale was advocated by producer Lockheed Martin and bipartisan members of Congress.

6. Conclusion

In this thesis, I researched the China policy under President Bush and President Obama, making use of FPA. I came to the conclusion that both presidents had entirely different characters, conceptual complexities and different advising systems.

According to Barber's typology, one can state that President Bush was a passive-positive president. He enjoyed great satisfaction from his job as a president, while simultaneously investing relatively little energy. Bush had a low conceptual complexity, resulting in a clearly defined world, other countries were either good or bad. This all comes together, if one looks at his collegially formed advising system. President Bush managed to gather an impressive and experienced team, that mostly consisted out of neoconservatives. However, concerning China, there was no specific experience.

President Obama on the other can be described as an active-positive president. He too enjoyed his presidency. Unlike Bush, who liked to delegate a high amount of authority to his advisors, Obama was highly involved in the decision-making and implementation of his policies. Obama had a very high level of conceptual complexity. Unlike President Bush, who described himself as a gut player, President Obama thought that emotion should be avoided in the decision-making process. Obama had a rational decision-making process and he saw the world in different shades of grey. Policies were consequently revised when they did not bring desired outcomes. It is thus no surprise that Obama opted for a different advising system than Bush. Where Bush wanted like-minded people surrounding him, Obama chose people with different points of view, to be able to hear all different sorts of arguments.

The substantial differences between both presidents were also reflected in their China policies. President Bush initially adopted a hard-line policy. Given his initial disinterest in foreign policy, the policy was largely influenced by neoconservative advisors such as SecDef Rumsfeld and his

Deputy Wolfowitz. Bush, in his black and white vision, thought of China as a strategic competitor and possible threat.

Obama on the other hand came into the White House with a completely different vision. Given his childhood experience of living in Indonesia and Hawaii, he felt particularly close to Asia. President Obama and his advisors wanted to learn from the past and avoid tensions with China. Unlike previous administrations, Obama's most important Asia advisors, Bader and Steinberg, both advocated for a policy of cooperation. Chinese help was thought to be crucial if the administration wanted to successfully reach several policy goals. In 2009 the Obama administration consequently did everything in its power to show China its willingness to cooperate.

President Bush did not settle on a hard-line China policy. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 led to a fundamental change in Bush's policies. Standing up against terrorists and countries providing safe haven became his absolute foreign policy priority. As a result hereof, ties with China strongly improved after 9/11. That being said, infights within the administration remained between those who wanted to further improve bilateral relations and the more influential group who remained wary of China. After all, both countries managed to cooperate to a certain degree, but the underlying problems remained. The year 2005, brought a new change in the policy. From then on, the administration consistently emphasized the need for China to become a responsible stakeholder. The country had to not only accept the benefits of the international system, but also its responsibilities. Simultaneously, the Bush administration faced domestic and congressional criticism, demanding a tougher China policy. Cooperation with China around terrorism remained of marginal importance and China became not much of a priority for the Bush administration. The administration mainly concentrated its efforts on the Middle East. All of this led to a permanent duality in the China policy. There was on the one hand a certain suspicion and fear for China's rise. On the other hand, problems with China were to be avoided, given that it was no longer perceived as the primary threat.

This duality was represented in Bush's arms sale policy to Taiwan. His first and most noteworthy arms offer consisted out of highly advanced weapon systems. Most importantly, Bush became the first president ever, to offer offensive weapon systems for sale. However, after 9/11, Bush's vocal support for Taiwan was scaled down. This was due to the poor relations with the Taiwanese President Chen, who aimed for Taiwan to become de facto independent. The Bush administration also did not needlessly want to add another issue on the foreign policy agenda.

For President Obama, his initial China policy in 2009 and 2010 led to disappointing results. China did not react favourably to Obama's policy of engagement. It did not lead to Chinese accommodation, but to an increase in China's demands and assertiveness. Beijing saw Obama's engagement policy as a sign of weakness and proof of China's power increase. Obama, with his high conceptual complexity, understood that a change towards a tougher policy was needed. In 2011, the Obama administration launched the pivot to Asia, shortly after the resignation of the initial China advisors Bader and Steinberg. Their resignation led to the increase of importance of more China wary advisors such as Campbell. One of the pivot's pillars was to build constructive relations with China. However, the other pillars also led to an increase in American military and diplomatic presence in Asia, resulting in more tensions with China. Obama's policy consequently became rather centralist for most of his presidency.

Obama's policy of weapons offers to Taiwan mirrored his broader China policy. During the Obama presidency, the cross-strait relations were at an all-time high, because of the new Taiwanese President Ma. The first year, Obama decided to postpone the issue of weapons sales. This was related to the China engagement policy, which aimed to avoid all tense issues. However, hereafter his administration changed this cautious policy, towards a more supportive position, but only to a certain degree. Obama never offered offensive weapons, nor did he offer F-16 C/D fighter jets, much to the dislike of Congress and Lockheed Martin.

Surprisingly, both presidents, despite their differences, ended up with a similar policy towards China. The Bush-era started with a firm, hawkish China policy, mainly due to the influence of neoconservative advisors. This however changed after 9/11, when a common ground was created between the 2 countries. President Obama started his first term with a warm and cooperative China approach. However, it soon became clear that this policy did not yield the expected results. Obama consequently understood that change was necessary. The most notable difference between the two administrations' China policy was eventually the level of attention given to China. The Bush administration's high-level officials were mainly preoccupied with the War on Terror, while the Obama administration increased high-level government attention to China. Despite everything, it is fair to conclude that the US' China policy at the beginning of 2017 was relatively comparable to what it was at the beginning of the millennium.

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