

What Kerry Should Tell China

How the U.S. secretary of state can win friends and influence Beijing.

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SHANGHAI — On April 13, when John Kerry pays his first visit to China as the U.S. secretary of state, North Korea will be at the top of his agenda, with Iran's nuclear program and cyberattacks also extremely important.

Kerry will likely urge China to rein in Pyongyang, enforce sanctions against Iran, and cooperate on curtailing cyberterrorism. But for Washington to maximize the gains from Kerry's visit, it has to accord China's interests more respect.

North Korea worries both countries. The more the rest of the world sanctions Pyongyang, the more aggressively it acts, which invites more sanctions. Although North Korea's threat of nuclear attacks against the United States is not credible, this cycle of action and reaction could escalate the situation well beyond initial intentions. Tensions on the Korean Peninsula are now the highest they've been since the end of the Korean War in 1953. On April 7, Chinese President Xi Jinping **said**, "No one should be allowed to throw a region and even the whole world into chaos for selfish gain." While he didn't name any particular country, his message was clear: China is losing patience with North Korea, while the United States needs to be responsible with its military, in this case and elsewhere. China is particularly concerned about the U.S. "rebalancing" or "pivot" to Asia, which in Beijing's view has made the region more unstable.

For China, Iran is less worrisome than North Korea. Although Iran has refused to stop enriching uranium, it insists its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes, and it allows limited access to its nuclear facilities. China, the United States, and the international community should let Iran account for its past nuclear activities while restraining its uranium enrichment to civil programs. Meanwhile, the United States should allow Iran to keep its economic ties with the rest of the world.

Then there is cybersecurity. Faced with what they claim to be a growing cyberthreat, China and the United States seem to have very different responses: The Pentagon in January **announced** that it will be increasing the size of its cybersecurity force fourfold

over the next several years, with an eye toward China, while Beijing has **declared** that its military does not yet launch any cyberattacks at all. Both sides **claim** to be increasingly attacked by the other side. Instead of arguing endlessly over whether an attack from a Chinese IP address means Beijing intentionally launched the assault, the two countries could discuss how to protect crucial infrastructure while collaborating on investigating and punishing cross-border hacking.

Beijing, meanwhile, has a concern of its own to share with Kerry: U.S. rebalancing. Washington may think that what it views as China's arrogance since the 2008 financial crisis prompted its Asia pivot, but Beijing sees in the pivot a U.S. plan to contain China and infringe upon its legitimate maritime rights.

Disagreement between China and the United States is nothing new. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the United States has prevented mainland China from unifying with Taiwan. Over the last few years, however, as it began pivoting to Asia, the United States has shifted its position on the Diaoyu Islands, which Japan took illegally from China between 1894 and 1895 and which the United States illegally "reverted" to Japan in 1972. The U.S. government long maintained an ambiguous view on the islands, but with its Asia pivot, Barack Obama's administration has more clearly stated to defend them as Japanese territory. Adding to Beijing's suspicions, the Philippines, against the backdrop of the U.S. pivot, has increasingly tried to claim China's Huangyan Island (which the Philippines calls the Scarborough Shoal) as its own.

Beijing must urge the United States to be honest and respect historical facts in Asia. If Kerry asks China to abide by international law and be a responsible stakeholder, China would agree completely, as China's possession of the islands of Taiwan, Diaoyu, and Huangyan have nothing to do with violating any international law. However, the United Nations Charter prohibits any country from infringing upon another's sovereignty -- therefore the Pentagon should end its weapons sale to Taiwan. Being a responsible stakeholder does not mean allowing Japan to steal China's Diaoyu Islands.

I'm not arguing that China should wait to work together with the United States and its allies to tackle North Korean and Iranian nuclear issues, and buttress cooperation on cybersecurity, until the two countries resolve the island issues. Nevertheless, Kerry should not seek cooperation without respecting China's reasonable expectations.

