

Despite shared generalizations about the relative importance of intentions, as distinct from capabilities, the mutual distrust was possibly even more palpable at the 4-5 March 2002 Fourth Conference as the US was in the midst of pulling out of the AMB Treaty. As the two sides searched for a “New Strategic Framework”, they debated arms control issues, referencing two competing paradigms of international security. The two sides could not agree on the substance of what constitutes a threat. Moreover, the Americans rejected a “one-size fits all” approach to deterrence and reiterated the new importance of dealing with “rogue states”. They criticized the Chinese for “an implicit hierarchy of non-proliferation concerns based on geographic proximity.” While the Conference proceedings reported that US and Chinese officials appeared “to be moving toward ‘professionalizing’ negotiations on arms control and non-proliferation topics”,<sup>30</sup> the latter criticism failed to take into account how China’s response to its neighbours and particularly how Chinese participation in the ASEAN Regional Forum had already facilitated a new Chinese political interest in professionalism and multilateral cooperation.

The Fourth Conference was reportedly an improvement over the Third, as the two sides “actively discussed the value of specific reassurance and confidence-building measures.”<sup>31</sup> Notwithstanding such reassurance, each side disparaged the other’s strategic thinking as hopelessly out-of-date. In dealing with “rogue states” that were thought to be armed with WMD, the US was not going to be tied down by apparently antiquated Cold War doctrine about nuclear force structure. The Americans were frustrated by the Chinese inability to comprehend the changing modalities of deterrence in the light the changing range of threats to national security.

For their part the Chinese, while they, with certain reservations, were prepared to accommodate US emphasis on the international war on terrorism, reiterated the contrast between old and new security concepts. The Americans were apparently mired in the confrontational politics of the Cold War era. While the Americans used to accuse the Chinese of Cold War polemics, it was now the Chinese turn to decry US “polemics”.

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<sup>30</sup> Evan S. Medeiros and Phillip C. Saunders, comp., “Building a Global Strategic Framework for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”, Fourth US-China Conference on Arms Control, Disarmament and Nonproliferation, Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies, 2002, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Fourth US-China Conference, op. cit., p. 14.