

Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

**DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE**

01 July 1986

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**China: More Receptive to a USN Ship Visit** [redacted]

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**SUMMARY**

In our judgment, a number of developments since last year have improved the atmosphere for finessing the nuclear issue that scuttled last year's negotiations on a USN port call to Shanghai: US-China military cooperation continues to develop; Beijing has grown impatient with Gorbachev's "smile" diplomacy; Deng and the reform leadership are no longer on the defensive the way they were a year ago; and the Chinese have hosted an increasing number of visits by other Western navies since last spring. We believe, however, that negotiations are unlikely to be easy. Chinese sensitivity to real or apparent infringements on their national sovereignty could still prove to be a major stumbling block. Moreover, Beijing may balk at adjusting the UK formula, especially at a time of increased tension over US defense ties to Taiwan. [redacted]

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] Office of East Asian Analysis. Information available as of 01 July 1986 was used in its preparation. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Foreign Affairs, China Division, OEA, [redacted]

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**Chinese Goals**

We believe China seeks three objectives in its military relations with the United States:

- To expand its access to advanced US military technology
- To exert leverage with Moscow by fostering the appearance of limited military cooperation with the United States
- To learn more about the concepts of modern war through working level contacts with US military personnel. [Redacted]

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Some within the Chinese leadership such as Deng Xiaoping and Zhang Aiping may see hosting a US ship visit as helping to promote these objectives. The Chinese military, in particular, recognizes that access to Western military technology in general depends on fostering good bilateral ties with the United States, including between our military forces. In addition, we believe Beijing sees a USN port call as creating doubts in Moscow about the extent of US support if the Soviets threatened to apply military pressure on China. [Redacted]

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The Chinese are achieving much of what they want without a US ship visit, however, and will continue to unless the United States makes a port call a litmus test. Beijing has had considerable success in acquiring Western military technology over the past year [Redacted] In recent months, moreover, the United States has agreed to sell China artillery plant upgrades and 55 avionics packages for F-8 fighter aircraft. Complementing these anticipated transfers have been Chief of Naval Operations Watkins' April trip to China and PLA Chief of Staff Yang Dezhi's visit to the United States in May. [Redacted]

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**Positive Factors in 1986**

**Foreign Ship Visits: Room for One More.** To avoid overdependence on US military ties and technology and to deflect conservative criticism at home that the PLA is moving too far, too fast with the United States, Beijing also has increased its military contacts with other Western powers [Redacted] This year, the Chinese have already hosted naval visits by Dutch, Swedish, and Italian ships. And British and Australian ships are expected to pay port calls this summer. [Redacted]

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In our view, these visits facilitate a USN ship visit by making it appear to be merely one in a series of "friendly" visits by foreign navies. Characterizing it in this way, Beijing could mollify domestic conservatives and deflect Soviet criticism somewhat while still demonstrating goodwill toward the United States. 

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**Sino-Soviet Relations Static.** We believe the state of Sino-Soviet relations enhances the prospects for a US ship visit. Unlike last year, Beijing sees no opportunity for improvement in its political relations with Moscow, and indeed has tired of what it has termed Gorbachev's "smile diplomacy." Over the past few months the Chinese have resumed their sharp criticism of Soviet policies while continuing to improve bilateral economic ties. Although China last year was concerned about the impact of a port call on chances for gains with the Soviet Union, now Beijing is more concerned about keeping Moscow from using growing Sino-Soviet economic contacts as a lever with Washington. It is highly conceivable to us, as well, that China would want to balance a high level Soviet visit--a Soviet first deputy premier reportedly is scheduled this fall--with a USN ship visit or other such visible sign of growing military ties with the United States. [redacted]

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**Calmer Waters at Home.** The domestic atmosphere in China also appears to be more propitious for a USN ship visit now than it was last year. The conservatives,

#### 1985: Running Aground on the Nuclear Shoal

Chinese Communist Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang asserted at a press conference on 10 April 1985 that the United States had assured China that no nuclear-capable vessels would be involved in a proposed USN ship visit to China. By putting Beijing on record as claiming that the United States had compromised its longstanding policy of neither confirming nor denying ("NCND") the nuclear capability of USN vessels, Hu put the United States in the position of having to suspend negotiations with China to maintain credibility with US allies. [redacted]

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Hu's motivations for making this assertion are not fully clear. It is possible he misspoke on the record, but we cannot rule out he knew exactly what he was doing. In any case, the fact that ship visit talks lingered on until the following month suggests that the Chinese leadership had not made a final decision on the matter at the time of Hu's press conference. Circumstantial evidence and press reporting suggests that the ship visit became entangled with other issues, including fighting over personnel changes at the September party meeting, how to respond to Gorbachev's call for better relations, and Chinese concern about increased military cooperation between Moscow and Pyongyang. We believe that in the end Deng came down on Hu's side both to demonstrate confidence in his anointed party heir and as a concession to conservative critics of reform who also were arguing for greater flexibility toward Moscow. [redacted]

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who we believe were pressing hardest for greater balance in Chinese foreign policy, suffered a political defeat at the September party meetings and have been relatively quiet in 1986. We are less certain about the state of play within the Chinese

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bureaucracy, which split over the handling of the USN ship visit. Both the Ministry of National Defense and the Navy--which want greater access to Western technology and Western military doctrine--strongly favored the visit. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, however, reportedly had serious reservations. [Redacted]

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When taken together with Beijing's more sober view of Gorbachev and the fact that Beijing has already reached an agreement with the British navy, we judge Deng's renewed political strength should make China more receptive to a USN ship visit sometime this year. [Redacted]

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Two considerations temper our optimism, however. We do not dismiss the Chinese leadership's deep sensitivity to perceived slights to China's sovereign rights and dignity, especially on an issue such as determining what weapons a foreign ship can bring into China. We believe Beijing will press for, and may insist on, face-saving conditions on the nuclear capability issue that Washington would find unacceptable. Historical memories of Western gunboats plying China's rivers and patrolling the Chinese coast remain vivid. [Redacted]

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The UK formula-- an expression of "awareness" of China's policy on foreign nuclear-capable ships--could also complicate possible efforts by Deng to finesse the issue with the United States. Having already agreed to what they probably consider to be a compromise with London, Chinese leaders could balk at making further concessions to accommodate Washington, calculating that differences over this issue are highly unlikely to jeopardize other elements of US-China military relations. In fact, some within the Chinese leadership could point to US willingness to go ahead with recent arms sales to make a case for not going beyond the British formula. [Redacted]

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- 2 - C/OEA/CH, Room 4G32
- 1 - C/OEA/CH/FOR, Room 4G32
- 1 - C/OEA/CH/DEV, Room 4G32
- 1 - C/OEA/CH/DEF, Room 4G32
- 1 - C/OEA/CH/DOM, ROOM 4G32
- 1 - OEA/Production Officer, Room 4G48
- 1 - D/OEA, Room 4F18
- 1 - DDI, Room 7E44

**Others**

- 1 - LCDR Robert W. Maggi, OPS-612, Room 4E475, Pentagon
- 1 -  DIA DB-2B2, Room C2-814, DIAC
- 1 - Karen Stelberg, Chief, NOIC/04, Room 1650, Suitland
- 1 -  Chief, B72, Room 25040, NSA

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**Department of State**

- 1 - James Lilley, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary  
Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Room 6208,
- 1 - Richard Williams, Director, Office of Chinese Affairs,  
Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Room 4318
- 1 - Robert Drexler, Director, Office of Regional Affairs,  
Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Room 4310
- 1 - Louis G. Sarris, Director, Office of Analysis for East  
Asia and the Pacific, Bureau of Intelligence and  
Research, Room 8840



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1 - Mark S. Pratt, Director, EA/RA/Taiwan Coordination,

Room 5206

1 - Douglas Paal, S/P, Room 7330



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