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SINO-U.S. RELATIONS

A 'cold war' in the making

By MINEO NAKAJIMA

The collision between a U.S. surveillance plane and a Chinese fighter jet over the South China Sea reflects an emerging pattern of confrontation between the United States and China — a development I noted in this column even prior to that incident.

International attention is focused on whether the U.S. aircraft — which made an emergency landing on Hainan Island — will be returned with its equipment intact and how the mishap will affect U.S.-China relations. More importantly, however, the latest episode is a manifestation of the Sino-American "cold war" that has shown signs of intensifying over the past several years.



The Bush administration is shaping a tough China policy that sees that communist state as a rival, not a partner. This is a departure from the collaborative policy pursued by the Clinton administration. The policy shift was anticipated when Condoleezza Rice, a China skeptic, was appointed national security adviser to President George W. Bush.

China poses a problem for the U.S.: Its vast market offers lucrative business opportunities, but it presents basic problems in the fields of human rights and democracy. Washington has tried to strike a balance of sorts between the two as the occasion demanded. Now, however, the Bush administration is about to abandon this double-track policy.

It should be noted, moreover, that Bush is well informed on China policy as well as the Taiwan problem. His father, former President George Bush, is a close friend of former Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui.

China, meanwhile, is working out a long-term strategy, as well as immediate tactics, to fight U.S. "unilateralism." President Jiang Zemin in his New Year's speech to the Chinese people expressed strong opposition to "hegemonism." This Chinese attitude toward the U.S. is evident in Beijing's tough stand against the

U.S. national missile-defense program. China's anti-NMD strategy will likely become more aggressive with support from countries such as Russia, North Korea and Vietnam.

The latest National People's Congress, which convened last month, highlighted China's efforts to build up its weapons arsenal. This year's defense spending will rise more than 17 percent. The Chinese military is deploying short-range missiles along the coast and is also developing long-range missiles that can reach the U.S. mainland.

These efforts are aimed partly for the use of force, if need be, against independence movements in Taiwan, and for

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cracking down on democratic and religious movements at home, particularly the Falun Gong spiritual cult. The arms buildup is also proof that China is trying to establish its own global strategy through military expansion.

Seen in this light, U.S.-China relations are entering a new period of confrontation — a new Sino-American cold war. In this situation, the Taiwan problem is of critical importance. The U.S. will oppose any Chinese military intimidation of democratic Taiwan. As a result of its commitment to defend the island republic, the U.S. will probably decide soon to sell it sophisticated arms, including mis-

sile-equipped Aegis destroyers and radar systems. With China dead set against the sale, the pattern of U.S.-China confrontation will become more conspicuous.

The question for Japan is what stance it should take: what security contributions it should make to Japan-U.S. relations. Japan will have to clarify its position on security issues, including the right of "collective self-defense." Unlike the Clinton administration, the Bush administration clearly gives top priority to the Japan-U.S. alliance, so it will balance policy toward democratic Japan with that toward Communist China.

Thus, Japan's Taiwan policy will also become critically important. In this regard, it is notable that Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori, during a recent visit to Washington, said in effect that Japan must attach importance to Taiwan. He is the first Japanese prime minister to make such a statement.

Mori has a good understanding of the Taiwan problem, which dates back to his college days. While at Waseda University, he studied Chinese and Chinese culture under a conservative Sinologist rather than attending lectures by scholars sympathetic to Maoist thoughts and the Great Cultural Revolution.

The prime minister seems determined to pave the way for a visit to Japan by former Taiwan President Lee, who is expected to stop over here — partly for a medical checkup — en route home from a trip to an institute established in his name at New York's Cornell University. It is also significant that at the Boao Forum held on Hainan Island in late February, former Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone met Jiang.

Lee was prevented, for political and other reasons, from attending the Asia Open Forum held in Matsumoto last autumn, in spite of Mori's good offices. I hope Lee can come this time and Japan will conduct more self-assertive diplomacy toward China. This stance is essential at a time when the U.S. and China are waging a new cold war.

Mineo Nakajima is president of Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. This article was translated from the Sankei Shimbun's Seiron column of April 5.