

Egypt and China Discuss Mideast Intervention

by Mary Burdman

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, who “plays a subtle and important role in the Middle East region,” as China’s official news service Xinhua characterized it, paid his eighth visit to Beijing on Jan. 23-26. Mubarak went to China on the 45th anniversary of the two nations’ diplomatic relations “to revitalize strategic ties,” and as Israeli provocations against the Palestinian Authority worsened by the day. His discussions with China’s leaders prompted their unusually urgent statements on the threat posed to Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, and the danger of all-out war in the Middle East.

President Mubarak discussed his efforts to help resolve the Mideast conflict with his Chinese counterpart Jiang Zemin, emphasizing his efforts to put pressure on the United States to curb Israeli aggression. Spokesmen of both sides, following the talks between Mubarak and Jiang, and Mubarak and Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji, underlined that only through a just establishment of an independent Palestinian state could the crisis be resolved. The Chinese President said there must be an early settlement of the conflict, if terrorism is to be uprooted, and stated China’s continued support for the just national rights of Arab and Palestinian peoples. Jiang also stressed the importance of a growing role for Mubarak in Mideast affairs.

Egypt and China are each others’ most important partners in Asia and the Middle East, and political and economic relations have been growing rapidly in recent years. The official focus of the visit was economic agreements, including the inauguration of an Egyptian-Chinese business council, with 62 members from both countries. The agreements signed included one for cooperation in peaceful use of nuclear power, as well as for cooperation in petroleum, transport, and tourism.

On the political front, the focus was the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Mubarak denounced the idea of a “conflict of civilizations,” as a dangerous concept, and one which attempts to equate “resistance against occupation” with “terrorism.” Mubarak refuted Israeli claims about alleged weapons smuggling by the Palestinian Authority, and described Israeli aggression against Palestinians.

He also reiterated his call for convoking a United Nations-

sponsored international conference to combat terrorism, an issue he has been promoting for over 15 years. Beijing supported this proposal. Zhu Rongji especially praised “Egypt’s foreign policy of independence and non-alliance and supports the constructive role of Egypt in the Middle East and international affairs.”

President Jiang Responds

The impact of the talks was demonstrated in several public statements from Beijing. On Jan. 26, President Jiang responded, in a letter given prominent coverage by Xinhua and *People’s Daily*, to a Jan. 22 letter from President Arafat. In his letter, Arafat had appealed to China to use its influence, in cooperation with the international community, to advance efforts to stop the worsening situation in the Middle East and salvage the peace process. Arafat said that China is a major power with great influence in international affairs, and the Palestinian side highly appreciates China’s efforts on behalf of Mideast peace.

Arafat met with Wu Jiahong, director of China’s office in Palestine, and told him that Israeli military operations on Palestinian territory had “crossed all ‘red lines,’ ” and the situation in Palestine was in danger of getting out of control.

Jiang Zemin wrote that the Mideast situation is steadily deteriorating, and the Chinese government, as well as he personally, are gravely concerned. China opposes Israel’s military strikes and economic blockade against Palestine, and its acts that jeopardize the lives and property of Palestinian civilians, and is “particularly opposed” to Israel’s “ill-advised” restriction of Arafat’s freedom of movement.

China has noted the huge effort of the Palestinian side for a cease-fire, he wrote. He called for joint restraint and negotiations, and pledged China’s readiness to play a due role, with the international community, in easing the tension.

A commentary, very critical of Israeli policy and the failure of the United States to use its “considerable restrictive force” on Israel, was published in the *People’s Daily* on Jan. 25. President Mubarak “has sent 11 letters to U.S. President George W. Bush,” on just this matter, the commentary stated. “However, people do not see any effective actions taken by the United States.”

For the Arab world and Palestine, the key thing is unity, and to work for political negotiation to “gradually fulfill their desire for the establishment of an independent Palestine state.” Israel should understand that “the use of force not only cannot fundamentally solve the problem, but also Israel’s peace and tranquility will be out of the question. . . . Since Prime Minister Sharon has repeatedly declared his willingness to make ‘a painful compromise’ with Palestine in return for peace with the latter, then why doesn’t it try hard to replace military actions with peaceful means?”

“As for the United States, since it has openly expressed its agreement to the establishment of a Palestine state, then it

Mahathir: Malaysia Was Not 9/11 'Launch Pad'

Malaysian Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad responded to an FBI report that Malaysia was a "launch pad" for the Sept. 11 attacks, by pointing to the fact that only the United States itself could have been the launch pad for such a sophisticated operation. "These people were training in the U.S. all the time, and then they planned in America how to hijack American planes, at what time, which plane, which building. All that was

done in America, not done in Malaysia," said the Prime Minister. He said the terrorist suspects had been travelling all over the world, including to Switzerland.

Newsweek reported that the FBI claims that a Malaysian, Yazid Sufaat, met with two of the accused 9/11 pilots, and financed Zacarias Moussaoui, now on trial in U.S. Federal court as the "20th hijacker." Dr. Mahathir said that he doubted that Sufaat, who is under detention in Malaysia for suspicion of domestic terrorism activities, was involved in the planning of the Sept. 11 attacks, and asked those who have information to provide it. "Let's see the evidence. It is very easy to say that he had done it, but did he do it in Malaysia, did he plan everything? I doubt it. . . . It's too sophisticated an operation," he said.

should take follow-up actions. The United States has considerable restrictive force to deal with Israel. It should let the Palestinian people really see that there is hope for the establishment of an independent Palestine state with East Jerusalem as the capital through peaceful means," as the only solution to resolve the conflict, and to solve "the problem of extremist organizations of Palestine and Israel." The commentary also called for the international community to "extend more realistic and effective support to Palestine."

On Jan. 29, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Kong Quan said that Arafat's leadership must be maintained. The authority of Arafat, who symbolizes the just cause of the Palestinian people, would help revive peace talks, Kong said. There were also reports in the Tel Aviv daily *Yediot Ahronot*, that a reception in Beijing to mark ten years of Chinese-Israeli ties, ended up as an insult to the Israelis. The reception was sharply downgraded in size and importance, and, interestingly, the room was decorated with the flag of Norway—site of the Oslo peace talks—rather than of Israel. Among other strains in Chinese-Israeli relations, is that Israel unilaterally (but under heavy U.S. pressure) had cancelled a contract to sell Phalcon reconnaissance aircraft to China in 2000. China has demanded some \$1 billion in compensation, but nothing has been arranged.

China's Other Regional Ties

China is also developing other regional relationships. King Abdullah II of Jordan paid his second state visit to China on Jan. 17-21. Abdullah emphasized the importance of an independent Palestinian state, and discussed economic development, a critical issue for Jordan amidst the world depression and the Israel-Palestine conflict. Moroccan King Mohammed VI will pay a state visit to China on Feb. 4-9.

Iraq and Sudan are also of central importance. On Jan. 28, Zhu Rongji stated China's opposition to any arbitrary

expansion of "anti-terrorist" military action, in his discussions with visiting Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz. Aziz was on his way to Russia for further talks.

Zhu Rongji, repeating statements by diplomatic *éminence grise* Vice Prime Minister Qian Qichen, said there should be no double standards in the fight against terrorism, and called for an early resolution of the Iraq issue, on the basis of relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

The strategic context of these talks, was described in China's *Outlook Weekly* on Jan. 16. The most serious issues for China's economic development, are the danger of deflation, which is much more serious even than falling exports; the financial problem posed by the falling Japanese yen; and the issue of strategic resources, endangered by the U.S. "war on terrorism," stated the author, a deputy director of an institute of the national cabinet's think-tank, the Development and Research Center of the State Council.

The real purpose of the U.S. war against Afghanistan, nominally against terrorism, "is to make the presence of its military force felt in Central Asia," according to the views of insightful analysts, the article states. "This has posed a real threat to the source and channels of China's strategic resources."

In addition, China's oil interests in such nations as Sudan are endangered. In the mid- and late-1990s, China carried out a policy of developing external oil resources. This included a "successful" investment "in some sensitive countries such as Sudan."

However, the article notes, the United States, "in the name of anti-terrorism, has made a public declaration that any state or government, which ever supported terrorist activities, will be on the list of being hit. Sudan is probably on the list. Voices grow stronger recently in the U.S., urging expansion of the sphere of its military strikes. This has created highly unstable factors in external areas important for China's resources."