

China Endorses Iran's 'Dialogue Of Civilizations'

by Mary Burdman

Chinese President Jiang Zemin has just completed a two-week tour of five nations, conducted, as China's Vice Foreign Minister Yang Wenchang stated on April 22 in Tehran, "against a complicated international background following the Sept. 11 terror attacks on New York and Washington." Jiang first visited Germany, China's key partner in Europe; Libya; Tunisia; Nigeria; and lastly, Iran—one of the three nations targeted by U.S. President George W. Bush as part of the alleged "axis of evil."

Thus, Jiang visited one of the nations Washington has identified as its enemy-image, on the eve of Vice President Hu Jintao's visit to the United States. Libya, also, is not a favorite of Washington's, and, in almost the same time period, Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji was in Turkey and Egypt. Cairo is China's key partner in the Middle East and Africa. As Zhu Rongji noted in Ankara, Turkey's capital, Turkey is the bridge to Europe for the new Silk Road.

In Germany, Jiang was blunter than usual, denouncing those who would try to solve global issues "single-handedly"—a reference to Washington's self-proclaimed "full spectrum dominance" policy. In Iran, Jiang publicly stated opposition to the growing U.S. military presence in Central and West Asia. This encompasses both the immediate U.S. military threat to Iraq, and the longer-term potential threat posed to Iran, and China itself, by the U.S. forces in Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan.

The Iranians made clear that Jiang's visit was of great importance, not only to enhance bilateral cooperation, but, even more so, to promote strategic cooperation among Iran, China, and India. Iranian leaders stressed China's economic growth, and its role as a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

The visit is certainly raising hackles in Washington. The bugaboos of Harvard Prof. Samuel Huntington, author of *Clash of Civilizations*, a book of geopolitics with a mass-populist flavor, are the "Confucian-Islamic" cultures, which he attacks as the enemies of what he claims is the "European, Christian, Protestant, English culture" of the United States.

Chinese Vice Premier Qian Qichen, who accompanied Jiang, recently ridiculed Huntington's basic tenet, that rapid economic and population growth (especially in nations he hates) *must* lead to "expansionism." Qian Qichen pointed out that the often-cited examples of Japan and Germany resorted to expansionism when they were "plagued by economic cri-

sis." After World War II, both nations achieved remarkable economic growth, yet were not "expansionist." "Cause-effect methods," Qian wrote, can lead to an "extreme view."

Culture and Economic Development

Cultural relations, economic development, and energy were leading issues that Jiang and Zhu Rongji discussed with their hosts. The ancient Silk Road, which centuries earlier had linked China with Western Asia and Europe, was a constant theme. In addition, Iranian President Mohammad Khatami has emphatically urged the "Dialogue of Civilizations" as the basis for resolving international issues and conflicts.

Energy, especially oil, is also of growing concern. In a conference in Beijing on April 18 on strategic oil and gas resources, Resources Minister Tian Fengshan said that China has listed petroleum, food, and water as three strategic resources with a great impact on maintaining economic and social development. Government think-tanks have made an assessment of the potential impact of the Sept. 11 attacks and subsequent U.S. war on Afghanistan on China's energy resources, Tian Fengshan said. The conclusion is, that if China becomes too dependent on imports, its "economic and political security will be affected." China has cooperated with Sudan and Venezuela in oil development, but the vulnerability of both these nations is clear. Now, China wants to expand its overseas oil exploration to Russia, Indonesia, and other nations.

Jiang was in Germany on April 8-13. He had been invited by Germany's President Johannes Rau to commemorate 30 years of diplomatic ties. The substance of bilateral discussion was kept quiet, but it is clear, that without Germany as the western terminus, there will be no modern Silk Road. Speaking in Berlin—where, he noted, many leaders of the Chinese revolution had lived and studied in the 1920s and 1930s—to the Foreign Policy Association on April 10, Jiang stressed the "uncertainty about the future" among many nations. After two catastrophic world wars and the Cold War, the world population has been "all long for lasting peace." Yet, "no fundamental change has been made in the unreasonable and unfair international political and economic order."

Now, the "international situation is undergoing the most penetrating changes since the end of the Cold War." Multi-polarization is "the important foundation for promoting world peace and development," Jiang said, and all countries, no

matter their size, wealth, or power, “are all equal members of the international community.” No one should try to deal with issues “single-handedly”; there should be “no double standards” in dealing with terrorism; and “no other political agenda having an impact on world and regional stability and development should be promoted in the name of counter-terrorism.” In the “current complex and volatile international situation,” cooperation between China and Europe, especially Germany, must grow.

U.S. Policy Criticized

Jiang’s visit to Iran on April 18-22 was only the second by a Chinese head of state since 1979. The official reason for the visit was to return that of President Khatami, who went to China in 2000. But there was much more on the agenda. Tehran took measures to ensure that there would be a substantial response from Beijing on U.S. backing for Israel, its pressure on Iraq, and its moves into Central Asia.

On April 20, Jiang was received by Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the head of the Expediency Council and former President of Iran. According to the official Tehran media, Rafsanjani said that Iran has chosen China as one of its strategic allies, and called upon China to take part in oil and gas projects in Iran.

Jiang addressed the issue of the U.S. military presence in Central Asia, the Caucasus, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, stating that U.S. interference is creating regional tension. Rafsanjani said that regional powers, including China, should adopt measures to promptly end the U.S. presence in the region. He also condemned U.S. support for Sharon.

Jiang responded that China opposes U.S. “bullying tactics” and its military presence in the region. He criticized U.S. double standards. Jiang also accused Israel of “not having implemented UN resolutions,” and called for its immediate withdrawal from Palestinian territories. He criticized “U.S. support for Israel’s policies.” According to IRNA, Jiang said that protecting the developing countries against U.S. pretensions is top on China’s agenda, and that China wants a sustainable peace in Afghanistan. Jiang met with President Khatami, and also Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei.

In answer to the “Clash of Civilizations” gang running Washington policy, Jiang told Khatami that China supports the initiative for a dialogue among different civilizations that he is leading, and that China is ready to take an active part. This, Jiang said, is how to develop relations among civilizations; this will enable all nations to treat each other as equals. China is ready to cooperate with Iran and other countries to create a new and just political and economic world order.

Khatami said that Iran attaches special importance to ties with China; Jiang responded that both are nations with ancient civilizations, which had established relations through the Silk Road 2,000 years ago, and contributed to the development of world civilization. Now, both are developing countries which share similar views on many important inter-

national and regional issues.

Of particular interest, was the report of the two leaders’ discussion on Iraq. Both sides said that the “legacies of the Gulf War”—i.e., the economic sanctions and continued bombing of Iraq by the United States and Great Britain—should be properly settled as soon as possible, on the basis of the relevant resolutions by the UN Security Council. Both supported Iraq’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, and Khatami stated his opposition to any nation interfering in Iraq by force. The pressure on Iraq, Jiang said, has “triggered crises from time to time, seriously affecting the security and development of the Gulf region.”

Both sides expressed deep concern about the Israeli military strikes against Palestine and the siege of President Yasser Arafat. War-torn Afghanistan, they said, urgently requires reconstruction.

Iran’s religious leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, was particularly outspoken. Asia, he said, has a broad capacity to develop regional cooperation. It was he, who emphasized the importance of fostering cooperation among Iran, China, and India. The United States, he said, is taking advantage of its political and military power. “This has posed a great threat to all countries and for this reason the international community is required to oppose Washington’s wrong stance in order to save the future of humanity.” The European states have stayed clear of the United States over Palestine and they no longer support the U.S. stance on the Middle East.

Jiang responded that there are worldwide objections to U.S. hegemonic policies. China, he said, thinks “that terrorism should be dealt with on the basis of valid evidence, and the international campaign against terrorism should not breach international regulations or [be] carried out unilaterally.”

The Iranians later emphasized the particular success of Jiang’s discussions with Ayatollah Khamenei.

Vice Foreign Minister Yang Wenchang also said that Jiang’s tour had been a “complete success.” The Chinese official media were somewhat more circumspect in their coverage of Jiang’s talks in Tehran, omitting, for example, his references to the U.S. military in Central Asia. At the same time, the press was enthusiastic in its accounts of the warmth of Jiang’s reception in Iran.

Jiang made clear Beijing’s views on leading international issues, and to discuss ways to safeguard world peace and stability with leaders in all five nations. China also signed 23 new cooperation documents.

Vice President Hu Jintao, on his first stop, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on his way to the United States, told the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute on April 24, that “China views all nations as equals, irrespective of their size. It opposes the strong lording it over the weak, and the big bullying the small. . . . Big countries should respect the interests of small and medium-sized Asian countries, treat them as equals and act constructively for Asia’s stability and prosperity.” Hu’s approach, when he meets U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney, will likely be quiet, but also firm.