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The United States of America and China

There is a crisis looming between the United States of America and the Peoples Republic of China. There are quite a few conflicts, with the controversy over Tibet and Taiwan being probably just the tip of the iceberg. It was hoped that the political climate would improve following the visit of U.S. President Obama to Beijing in November 2009, but this was probably indeed nothing but hope. China is seeking its role in the global structure – and, in doing so, it is increasingly provoking the U.S.A.. In the recent past, China has publicly offended the U.S. President twice: during his 2009 visit to the Middle Kingdom when Beijing gave him the cold shoulder, and at the climate summit in Copenhagen where it refused to accept a constructive solution. Obama's recent discussion with the Dalai Lama at the White House has probably been a calculated, but deliberate tit-for-tat response. It is to show China the yellow line, i.e. where its limits – still – are. Beijing will probably cancel some of the meetings with representatives of the U.S.A. – but will then probably return to the rules of procedure. This has been the ritual up until now. The relations between Washington and the Asian great power reminds one of a continued tug-of-war. Three decades after the recognition of the Peoples Republic of China – and the downgrading of Taiwan to secondariness – the U.S.A. is still having a downright difficult relationship with China. This becomes apparent by some particularly distinctive data: with the turn of the year 1979, Washington and Beijing officially establish diplomatic relations. The U.S.A. commits itself at the same time to maintaining nothing more than unofficial contacts with Taiwan which the Peoples Republic regards as a renegade province. U.S. President Jimmy Carter receives the Chinese Head of State, Deng Xiaop-

ing. Then, in 1989, sanctions were imposed against China. Because of the bloody suppression of the democracy movement at the Tienanmen Square in Beijing on the 4th of June, the U.S. government decides to impose a number of sanctions against China, primarily in the fields of arms trading, mutual visits of members of the armed forces, and nuclear cooperation. In 1993, Washington and Beijing resume the military cooperation; the presidents, Jinao Zemin and Bill Clinton, meet on the side of the Asian-Pacific Economic Forum in Seattle. Then, in 1996, the U.S.A. dispatches two aircraft carriers in consequence of military maneuvers/exercises conducted by the Peoples Republic of China in the proximity of the straits between the mainland and Taiwan. In 1997 – the first time after almost 20 years – a Chinese president pays a visit to the U.S.A.. Jiang Zemin and Bill Clinton agree on the resumption of the nuclear cooperation. In 1998, a U.S. president visits – for the first time after ten years – the Peoples Republic. Bill Clinton is received in Beijing. In 1999, China suspends the military cooperation when NATO bombed, inter alia, the Chinese embassy in Belgrade on 7 May during the Kosovo War. On 15 November, the two governments sign a bilateral agreement, however, which is to prepare China's admission to the World Trade Organization (WTO), which is then realized in late 2001. The collision of a Chinese fighter aircraft with a U.S. spy plane over the Chinese Sea on 1 April 2001 causes an open crisis. China releases the 24 U.S. crew members after a short while and turns over the plane itself a little later in summer. In May, U.S. President George W. Bush receives the Dalai Lama at the White House. On 21 February 2002 Bush visits China exactly 30 years after the historic visit of his predecessor in office, Richard Nixon. In 2007, the U.S.A. sues the Peoples Republic of China at the WTO for plagiarism and for placing restrictions on the trade with music, films, and books. U.S. President Barack Obama visits China in November 2009 where he is treated in an extremely cool way. China interrupts the military cooperation on 30 January 2010 because of an arms deal between the United States and Taiwan. It imposes sanctions against all U.S. defence industry companies which produce for Taiwan. In spite of China's protests, Washington then announced a visit of the Dalai Lama for 2 February 2010 which took place in not quite an official way, but with a clear signal in the direction of Beijing. In a certain respects it was already foreseeable with the announcement of the visit of the Dalai Lama that the government of the Peoples Republic of China would not let go of it if the incumbent U.S. President Barack Obama is to have talks with the Dalai Lama against the publicly ex-

pressed will of the Beijing government. On the other hand, it was hardly less clear that Obama himself would not allow to be dictated by Beijing as to whom he may or may not meet. In a statement of the Chinese foreign office it reads that the meeting between the Dalai Lama and the U.S. head of government has caused political damage. In plain language this means: think of something to bring about a reconciliation between us. The U.S.A. would now have to try to find a way to ease the tension in the relationship between the two great powers as the talks have led to a clearly perceptible strain. In his talks at the White House President Obama has assured the Dalai Lama of his intention to actively co-act in the protection of Tibet's culture and the compliance with the human rights. Just a day later, the U.S. ambassador in Beijing got an earful of respective criticism. In the same breath Beijing uses the public criticism to once again manifest that the upcoming weapon sales of the U.S.A. to China's neighbor Taiwan is a false political step. This is by and large the current situation. The relations were thus always characterized by ups and downs, but have always come together again. This cannot obscure the fact, however, that the future spheres of conflict are gradually looming on the horizon. China and the U.S.A. have so far been symbiotically interwoven. The years of the Chinese economic rise would not have been imaginable without the U.S.A.. The Chinese produce, the Americans consume. Beijing willingly finances the U.S. deficit. This has been maintained in a finely balanced equilibrium. But the financial crisis has destroyed this structure. Now there is a growing pressure on China to revalue its currency at last in order to no longer artificially reduce the price of its exports. America is worried about its jobs and China understands that it has to emancipate itself even more.

The financial crisis is just an actuator for a complex process, though. China's breaking away from the U.S.A. is acutely accompanied by all kinds of side effects: nationalism, protectionism, climate conflict, and disputes about weapon deliveries. But we are probably right at the beginning of a development in which the differences between the economic models and the social orders of the U.S.A. and China are being accentuated more and more distinctly. The political leadership in China is in quest of an independent role within the global structure. Skirmishes about Taiwan and Tibet are just the prelude for political divergences which are yet to occur within the course of China's emancipation process. The actual conflict between the superpower U.S.A. which is preoccupied with itself and a China which formulates its claim to power in gradually sharper and more distinct ways is still in store for us. ■