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Defense Estimative Brief

Chinese Views on the Visit of the Secretary of Defense

~~(S)~~ Beijing will regard the visit of the Secretary of Defense as an opportunity to project an image of continuing close US-China friendship. As in the case of Secretary Weinberger's trip to China in 1983, which set the stage for initiating the military relationship, and his 1986 visit, which provided new impetus to these ties, the Chinese will want the forthcoming visit to prepare the ground for further progress.

~~(S/NF)~~ During the Secretary's visit, the Chinese will seek to offset possible negative US reaction to improvements in Sino-Soviet relations. In order to do this, they may suggest new ways to advance the US-China military relationship. For example, they may express a greater willingness to use Foreign Military Sales (FMS) in military upgrade programs. Accordingly, they also will be responsive to suggestions by the Secretary regarding avenues to further improvements. Moreover, the Chinese quite likely will be expecting that their suggestions of impending normalization of Sino-Soviet relations will exert a degree of leverage on the United States to be more forthcoming in meeting their requests for advanced technology transfers, particularly in the military sphere.

~~(S/NF)~~ We believe the Chinese have reassessed their foreign policies with a view toward accomplishing the full normalization of their relations with Moscow, a step that probably will be symbolized by a summit meeting within the next year. As occurred during Secretary of State Shultz's recent discussions in Beijing, the Chinese leaders will probably hint broadly at the possibility of further improvement of Sino-Soviet relations in order to prepare the US leadership for such an eventuality and to gauge the level of US concern, if any. They will be looking for ways to assuage US uneasiness and will be carefully assessing the Secretary's reactions.

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~~(S/NF)~~ Even though Beijing is committed to an independent, non-aligned foreign policy, the Chinese view their bilateral ties with the United States as their most important external relationship, not only because of common strategic concerns, but because of China's need to ensure continued access to advanced Western technology. Beijing also considers its relations important for ensuring good relations with other Western nations and Japan, which are sources of high technology for China's economic modernization.

~~(S)~~ Chinese leaders will be prepared to discuss a broad range of security issues with the Secretary. They will be particularly interested in any remarks the Secretary may make regarding his recent discussions with Soviet leaders in Moscow and on the dialogue now taking place between US and Soviet military leaders.

~~(S/NF)~~ On specific issues the Chinese quite likely will reinforce many of the themes they expressed in discussions with Secretary Shultz in Beijing. For example they probably will:

-- request US support for Chinese efforts to provide launch services for Western-made satellites, specifically with reference to their desire to launch an Australian (US made) satellite;

-- try to deflect any US pressure for dialogue on the subject of proliferation of nuclear or chemical weapons or ballistic missile systems;

-- defend their arms sales policy as "prudent and responsible" and repeat their insistence, however implausible, that their arms sales are designed to strengthen the self-defense of recipient countries, promote regional stability, and avoid interference in the internal affairs of other countries;

-- repeat without elaboration what may become new symbols for regulating and evaluating US-China relations, namely, the "three obstacles": Taiwan, technology transfers, and the trade balance (the three T's).

Arms Sales

~~(S/NF)~~ Based on their evasive answer to the Secretary of State's proposal to discuss arms sales as a special issue, we believe the Chinese will be reluctant to be drawn into any

