U.S., China Make No Progress in Missile Talks

Despite a warming of relations between Washington and Beijing since the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States, recent efforts by the Bush administration to resolve U.S. allegations of Chinese noncompliance with a November 2000 missile proliferation agreement have apparently produced no dividends.

Attempting to lay the groundwork for an October 19 meeting between Presidents George W. Bush and Jiang Zemin at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Shanghai, the two countries held missile proliferation talks October 10-11 in Beijing.

Despite pressure for a deal, the meeting yielded no progress. During an October 12 press conference, State Department spokesman Richard Boucher noted that the administration is “disappointed” that China “was not in a position to provide authoritative assurances” that it is fully implementing the November 2000 deal.

Under that agreement, Beijing pledged not to help states develop “ballistic missiles that can be used to deliver nuclear weapons.” In exchange, Washington said it would waive sanctions on certain Chinese entities and resume processing applications for U.S. companies to launch satellites on Chinese rockets, which it had stopped processing in February 2000.

Although the United States waived the sanctions following the agreement and resumed processing applications, it has not approved any applications for the export of satellites for launch. For that to happen, Washington would have to waive two sets of sanctions, one imposed for the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown and the other imposed in September for missile technology transfers to Pakistan by a Chinese firm. (See ACT, September 2001.) It is unlikely that Washington will waive the latter set of sanctions without an agreement on Chinese adherence to the November 2000 deal.

During an October 17 briefing en route to Shanghai, Secretary of State Colin Powell laid out in some detail what Washington is expecting from China. Beijing needs to address U.S. concerns over missile-related contracts signed prior to the November 2000 accord; make progress on missile-related export controls; and fulfill requirements, which remain undisclosed, that would allow the United States to waive the September sanctions in order to permit satellite exports for launch, Powell said.

At the Shanghai summit, Bush and Jiang discussed non-proliferation, but that dialogue did not produce any reported results. “Proliferation is an area where there remain differences” in the Chinese-U.S. relationship, a White House official remarked during an interview.

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