

What we can learn from Ping-Pong Diplomacy

By Robert Lawrence Kuhn

The 50th anniversary of “Ping-Pong Diplomacy” between China and the US arrives at an apt moment for reflection. Consider the parallels between then and now. Then, as now, there was little trust, even hostility. Public opinion in each

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I am afraid that US-China relations today are even worse than they were in 1971. Then, the confrontation was passive, with neither side much involved with the other. Today, the confrontation is active, given the multiple points of contact, friction, flash and potential conflict – from technology to borders to geopolitics to claimed interference in domestic affairs. Competing global narratives, spun by the US and China, tell stories of opposing political systems and divergent characterizations of human rights.

So we have work to do – those of

us on both sides who believe that good US-China relations is in the best interest of the American and Chinese people and critical for the peace and prosperity of the entire world.

What can we learn from the historic success of Ping-Pong Diplomacy? Here are some principles:

- Think outside the box – don’t rely on traditional ways of diplomacy alone.
- Think small – when big breakthroughs are not possible, try small ones, even if they seem insignificant.
- Find commonalities – seek areas that ordinary people can understand.
- Explore public diplomacy – encourage people-to-people exchanges, such as in healthcare.
- Maintain momentum – build on small successes.
- Lighten up – everything need not be taken so seriously.

Now for my own story of Ping-Pong Diplomacy. It was my first trip to China in January of 1989. I was invited by the State Science and Technology Commission for a conference on reform. My guide was a bright, energetic young man named Zhu Yadan (Adam).

Adam was fluent in English and not at all intimidated by our strange group of American investment bankers. After giving my lecture (new-venture financing and entrepreneurial risk), I decided to pursue an ambition that differed from the officially mandated visits to the Beijing Opera and the Great Wall.

I wanted to play Ping-Pong with the legendary Chinese. I had played well as a child and in college, but I hadn’t picked up a paddle in years. Every time I saw Adam in the Diaoyutai

State Guesthouse, I beseeched him that I wanted to play Ping-Pong, and every time he replied that my schedule had been set by the authorities and no deviations were allowed. I kept bugging Adam, who tried to avoid me, not argue with me, so whenever he saw me coming, he headed off in the opposite direction. Frustrated, I ambushed him in the lobby: “If you won’t take a risk to satisfy someone who has traveled 7,000 miles to help your country free of charge, there’s no hope for entrepreneurship in China.”

The next day, while I was attending a lecture, Adam snuck up behind me and whispered, “Wait 10 minutes, then walk slowly out the back; look for a small black car.” Feeling more like a spy than a would-be Ping-Pong player, I ambled out into the parking lot, trying to appear inconspicuous. I walked over to an old car. Suddenly, the door swung open and Adam, who was crouching furtively in the back seat, pulled me into the car as though I were being kidnapped.

Off we drove to the People’s University (of China), where waiting for me, to my horror, were three of China’s national team players and one of the national coaches. To make matters worse, a hundred or so students had gathered to witness the Beijing debut of this American “champion.”

“Do you know Jack Smith [I forgot his real name]?” one of the Chinese players asked me. “He’s No.1 in the US. I beat him 21-4.”

Well, the best I can say is that I wasn’t a total embarrassment. The Chinese players kindly allowed me



an increasing number of points per game – five, then eight, then 11 (games were still 21 points). All the Chinese students were rooting for me, and like Rocky Balboa, I began believing in myself. I turned to the translator and said with mock menace, “Please tell my Chinese friend that in the next game I’m now going to get 13 points.” To which I got a swift, smiley reply, “Please tell my American friend that he’s now going to get zero points.”

My opponent then announced to all that if I got three points in the next game, he would crawl under the table to shake my hand. The story ends as Rocky I did; I lost, of course, but I had my dignity. I did get those three points – one of which I actually earned – and, true to his word, under the table the Chinese national player crawled, to the unbridled delight, with applause and laughter, of the Chinese students. Adam Zhu would become my long-term business partner. Here’s to more Ping-Pong Diplomacy!

The author is chairman of The Kuhn Foundation and recipient of the China Reform Friendship Medal (2018).
opinion@globaltimes.com.cn

Chinese Coast Guard are civilized law-enforcement model in S.China Sea

By Zong Haihe

After the enforcement of China’s Coast Guard Law, some foreign institutions and individuals made a fuss about provisions on the use of force. They argued that with the help of this law, the Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) will now use force recklessly, threatening the personal safety of fishermen from other countries and affecting regional stability. However, the truth is unlikely to be covered by lies. Based on the actual cases, CCG can be regarded as a model of civilized law enforcement in the South China Sea.

At the end of November 2016, tropical storm Tokage raged in the South China Sea. A Philippine fishing boat sank in the lagoon on Huangyan Is-

land. Two fishermen fell into the water, one of whom collapsed and needed immediate rescue. The CCG braved the huge storm, and overcame difficulties to arrive at the island. As soon as the two fishermen were transferred to the CCG vessel, the CCG arranged doctors onboard to treat them. They were provided with meals and spontaneously offered personal clothes and daily necessities. On December 2, China handed over these two fishermen to the Philippines at the agreed place. The Philippines was deeply grateful to China for its good deeds.

On Friday, a Vietnamese fishing boat intruded the waters under the jurisdiction of China. After being warned by the CCG many times, it made frequent

dangerous actions, instead of leaving. Finally, it struck at a CCG vessel and sank. The CCG quickly released a boat to rescue rather than doing nothing. Without any casualties, all the eight Vietnamese were rescued and returned home safely.

On June 10, 2020, a similar case took place again. A Vietnamese fishing boat fled at a high speed in waters under Chinese jurisdiction in an attempt to evade the boarding inspection of CCG. During the process, the Vietnamese fishing boat swerved suddenly and collided with the CCG vessel, causing itself to roll and sea water to pour in. Three fishermen fell into the water. CCG immediately rescued the fishermen, and at the same time helped them repair their boats.

There are many other similar cases. As the largest law-enforcement force in the South China Sea, CCG has fully demonstrated its professional and civilized quality in the process of law enforcement. It has fully protected the legitimate rights and interests of the objects of law enforcement. Unfortunately, some people turn a blind eye to these facts. They make up all kinds of lies: such as “violent law enforcement,” “no respect for human life” and “forced confession.”

Indeed, in recent years we have witnessed severe clashes between the maritime law-enforcement forces of some countries and the fishermen of other countries.

According to incomplete statistics by some scholars, dur-

ing the first nine months of last year, one person died and four others were missing in the fishing conflict between Indonesia and Vietnam.

With the Coast Guard Law, China’s maritime law-enforcement activities will be more scientific and standardized. When and what enforcement measures should be adopted are clearly written down. It is believed that the actions of the CCG can stand the test of and respond accordingly to questions from the outside world.

The author is a current affairs commentator. opinion@globaltimes.com.cn

Page Editor:
yujincui@
globaltimes.com.cn

