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The American Hegemonic Responses to the U.S.-China Mid-Air Plane Collision

Dexin Tian
Bowling Green State University - Main Campus

Chin-Chung Chao
University of Nebraska at Omaha, chinchuchao@unomaha.edu

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DEXIN TIAN

CHIN-CHUNG CHAO

Bowling Green State University

This paper examines the major documents of the American side concerning the U.S.-China mid-air plane collision incident, which occurred April 1, 2001. Through the hegemonic theoretical lens of Robert Cox's frame of action and via the research method of hermeneutics of the selected rhetorical artifacts, we aim to shed light on the understanding of the incident and provide insightful implications for handling similar international conflicts in the future. Our findings indicate that the United States has preserved the most resourceful material capabilities and established all the necessary human institutions to implement its shared notion of American hegemony all over the world. Seeing China as a strategic competitor, the Bush administration considers it its mission to gather Chinese military and government information via military surveillance planes and obligation to guard against the rise of China in the Asia Pacific in the name of maintaining world peace and regional stability. Should the United States continue with its current strategy of hegemonic primacy, similar crises may occur again in the Asia Pacific and potential conflicts of the same nature may arise elsewhere in the other parts of the world.

On April 1, 2001, a U.S. EP-3 Navy surveillance plane collided with a Chinese F-8 fighter jet "about 70 miles off the Chinese island of Hainan in international airspace" ("Navy Admiral," 2001, p. 1). Admiral Dennis C. Blair, Commander in Chief of the U.S. Pacific Command, made the accident public when he was addressing the media during a press conference. He recounted that the U.S. surveillance plane was on a routine operation in the South China Sea when one of two Chinese fighter jets intercepted the EP-3 surveillance aircraft and flew into the wing of the aircraft. Due to sufficient damage, the pilot of the EP-3 signalled a mayday in-flight emergency and landed safely at Lingshui Military Airport on the Hainan Island of P.R. China without Chinese authorization. Another U.S. source reported that 24 military personnel on board the EP-3 "were removed from the aircraft by the Chinese military personnel and detained in an undisclosed location" (Senate Resolution 66, 2001, p. 2).

Dexin Tian: **dexint@bgsu.edu**

Chin-Chung Chao: **chaoc@bgsu.edu**

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Immediately following the accident, both the U.S. and Chinese governments blamed each other for the collision. Admiral Blair (2001) stated, "Chinese fighters intercepted the aircraft, and one of them bumped into the wing of the EP-3 aircraft" ("Navy Admiral," 2001, p. 1). Zhu Bangzao, the then spokesman of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, announced, "by veering and ramming the Chinese jet at a wide angle, against flight rules, the U.S. surveillance plane caused the crash of the Chinese jet" (Chinese Foreign Ministry, 2001, p. 2). Besides blaming each other for causing the accident itself, the two governments also accused each other of violating international laws of air and sea and of infringing upon each other's territorial sovereignty. To the Chinese, the U.S. aircraft "violated the *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*, which stipulates that any flight in airspace above another nation's exclusive economic zone should respect the rights of the country concerned" (Chinese Foreign Ministry, 2001, p. 2). To the Americans, it was "in contravention of international norms" that "Chinese officials have boarded the [EP-3] aircraft and may have removed portions of the equipment" (Senate Resolution 66, 2001, p. 2).

From the plane collision on April 1, to the release of the U.S. crew on April 12, and to the return of the U.S. EP-3 aircraft in crates on July 3, 2001, a tug-of-war was launched over the responsibility for the collision. Several rounds of intense negotiations were conducted over the Chinese requests for an apology and reparations and the U.S. demands for the release of the 24 military personnel and the return of the EP-3 to the United States. Meanwhile, a number of official statements and diplomatic notes were publicly exchanged between the two countries and preserved as transcripts on several websites. Having downloaded all the relevant transcripts as artifacts for this study from U.S. Department of State websites and several mainstream news agencies, we intend to look into the major documents of the American perspective concerning the mid-air plane collision that occurred April 1, and the events that ensued through April 12, 2001. Before examining the artifacts through the hegemonic theoretical lens of Robert Cox's frame of action and via the research method of hermeneutics, we will seek the gap for our inquiries based on existing literature.

Literature Review

There have been four major categories of existing literature pertaining to our topic. The first category compares and contrasts media coverage of the incident in the two countries. For example, Zhang (2005) wrote his master's thesis by using news framing and found that mainstream Chinese and American media covered the plane collision incident in a similar time-series slant, depicting their own country as morally superior, blaming the opponent's country as the wrongdoer, and deliberately withholding unfavorable reporting. The major difference, however, is that U.S. media quoted from more diverse sources while the Chinese media relied more on governmental sources (pp. 47-48). In addition, Slingerland, Blanchard, and Boyd-Judson (2007) used grounded theory to interpret the importance of conceptual metaphors used in media accounts from *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post* in the United States and the *People's Daily, Jiangnan Times,* and *Tianjin Daily* in China. Their analysis of the discourse surrounding the 2001 collision reveals "a surprisingly high degree of similarity in conceptual metaphors used across the two cultures" (p. 53).

The second category studies the plane collision incident from the linguistic point of view. In an article entitled "Semantic Ambiguity and Joint Deflections in the Hainan Negotiations," Yee (2004) revealed the significance of semantics and translations in facilitating the resolution of the Hainan incident. To him, the Chinese usually regard it as a morally correct attitude to formerly apologize rather than simply to say sorry for an accident, especially for one involving injuries or deaths even if one is not necessarily legally wrong. In contrast, the Americans could say "sorry" for either something they have done wrong or for any loss of property or human life even though they themselves have not been involved. To them, the term "apology" implies legal responsibility. If they had apologized in this case, they would have to carry the legal and diplomatic obligations and stop all surveillance flights near the Chinese coast. Thus, the words "very sorry" in Ambassador Prueher's letter to the Chinese Foreign Minister were translated as "deep regret," which sounds very close to an apology to the Chinese ears. According to Yee, it is the semantic ambiguity and linguistic flexibility of the languages and translations that facilitated successful shifts in the two-level negotiations over the Hainan plane collision crisis. By the same token, Cheng (2002) explored the stances, intentions, and ideologies of the United States and China by analyzing the if-clause utterances in nearly 100 news stories covering the spy plane incident. He concluded by saying that "news leaves many things unsaid as in diplomatic discourse or political discourse" (p. 309).

The third category takes the legal and real-political perspective. For instance, after examining the arguments of both China and the United States over the incident against the *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*, Donnelly (2004) found that both countries' interpretations of the international law and responses to the incident were "frequently founded on realpolitik rather than by any regard for a strict adherence to the international law" (p. 1). Comparing and contrasting the citations of both countries of the UN Convention, Sheng (2001) also noted that the U.S. legal standing was weakened according to the UN provisions. To him, the U.S. surveillance plane, which was "collecting information to the prejudice of the defense or security of the coastal state," is not equal to and much more serious than the "freedoms of navigation and over-flight" as cited by the U.S. side (p. 10).

Finally, there is the category of literature that analyzes the incident from the perspective of bilateral relationships. For example, Yang (2001) stated that it was within expectations for the Bush administration to reset China as a strategic competitor rather than a strategic partner, but "the mid-air collision between a U.S. EP-3 surveillance plane and a Chinese interceptor surely caught the world by surprise" (p. 14). He concluded that U.S.-China relations are marked and balanced by exquisite complexity; the two countries could be military rivals despite the fact that they are major trading partners with breathtaking potentials. As another example, Sheng (2001) explained that the United States sends out approximately 200 reconnaissance flights near China's coast every year, which China often sends its own planes to intercept. The U.S. planes will leave after several close encounters with and various warnings from the Chinese. There have been quite a number of mid-air incidents similar to the one under discussion between the two countries, with a reported number of more than 20 in year 2000 alone. During the Clinton administration, each country chose to downplay the incidents and deal with the issue of airspace incursion behind the scenes. However, to illustrate a different policy than that of the Clinton administration, the Bush administration ignored the value of quiet diplomacy and disclosed the news of the 2001 mid-air plane collision unilaterally. Sheng remarked that it was dangerous for the United States

to treat China "as a 'strategic competitor' and corner China by repeated pushes, as the Bush administration has so far been doing" (p. 27).

Having summarized the relevant literature, we find it necessary and meaningful to pursue research on the U.S.-China mid-air plane collision incident from a different perspective — that of looking into the nature of the doctrine that the Bush administration has been pursuing and the ramifications of such a pursuit. Mailloux (1985) once emphasized that it is important to be aware that our "acts of persuasion always take place against an ever-changing background of shared and disputed assumptions, questions, assertions, and so forth" (p. 631). By putting the analysis of the plane-collision incident into a larger dynamic, historical background, we intend to explicate the motivation behind the American responses to this particular incident with the hope to elucidate the pattern that the United States has been following on similar occasions and the possible consequences for the parties involved. Given that we are now living in a post-9/11 climate, our study of the U.S. responses to an international standoff situation (the mid-air plane collision incident came only four months before 9/11) will not only shed light on the understanding of the incident itself, but also provide insightful implications for the involved parties to take necessary precautions against the occurrence of and appropriate steps to handle similar international conflicts in the future.

Theoretical Framework

There has been burgeoning scholarship with regard to the doctrine the Bush administration has been implementing in terms of U.S.-China bilateral relations. In fact, during his 2000 presidential campaign, Bush was advised to advocate "the use of American power to advance its national interests, the building and strengthening of alliances, and firmness in dealing with potential U.S. foes" (Yuan, 2003, p. 53). Upon coming into office, the Bush administration prioritized "strengthening its relationships with key allies in Asia" while seeking to adopt "a China policy that characterizes the rising power of East Asia, if not as a 'strategic competitor' across the board, then certainly as a 'military competitor with a formidable resource base'" (p. 39). According to Amin (2006), one of the five objectives of the United States in this project is "to ensure the subordination of other major states and to prevent the constitution of any regional blocs that might renegotiate the terms of globalization" (p. 10). Layne and Thayer (2007) also indicated very clearly that the Bush administration "has embraced containment of China as an alternative to engagement" as a result of the impact of neoconservative intellectuals on the grand strategy of the administration and the establishment of the Bush Doctrine (p. 72).

Then, what exactly is the Bush Doctrine? And what can we draw from it? According to Jervis (2003), there are four components in the Bush Doctrine:

> *A strong belief in the importance of a state's domestic regime in determining its foreign policy, and the related judgment that this is a time of great opportunity to transform international politics; the perception of great threats that can be defeated only by new and vigorous policies (most notably preventive war); a willingness to act unilaterally when necessary; and, as both a cause and a summary of these three elements, an*

overriding sense that peace and stability require the United States to assert its primacy in world politics. (p. 365)

In fact, the Bush Doctrine is consistent with the standard patterns of international politics and with much previous American behavior in the Cold War. Since the beginning of the Second World War, American leaders knew that the U.S. would emerge as the prime architect of a new world order. Historically, both liberals and conservatives strongly believe that the U.S. is a revolutionary country, founded on the principles of freedom, equality, and progress, which have universal applicability. After emerging as the only winner from the Cold War bipolarity, and experiencing a short period of post Cold-War multi-polarity, the U.S. became what the French Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine called a "hyperpower" (Ikenberry, 2001, p. 1). As a hyperpower, the U.S. regards it as its destined obligation to guard American interests, regardless of overriding international concerns, and to maintain world stability even if it has to go against international consensus. Such a unilateral position "has been most prominently associated with the neoconservatives within the George W. Bush administration" (Snow, 2007, p. 42).

Furthermore, Jervis (2003) indicated that the essence of the Bush Doctrine is "the establishment of American hegemony, primacy, or empire" (p. 376). To this end, the U.S. is required "to act in ways that others cannot and must not" which is "not a double standard, but what the world order requires" (p. 376). In the case of China, Washington does not think that China has any justifiable basis for regarding the American military presence in East Asia as threatening to its interests. To guarantee its national interests, the U.S. has divided the globe into different regions and established a military command to take the responsibility for each. The American strategic objective is to "establish Washington's military control over the entire planet" and insure "privileged access to all of the world's natural resources, and to compel subaltern allies, Russia, China and the whole third world to swallow their status as vassals" (Amin, 2006, p. 12).

Thus, we can see an apparent hegemonic feature in the Bush Doctrine and in the China policy of the Bush administration. Now the point is: How do we conceptualize hegemony theoretically and how can we apply it to the analysis of the U.S. responses to the mid-air plane collision incident in the selected artifacts? The word "hegemony" originates from the Greek word "hegemonia" meaning "leader" and gradually gives place to the idea of dominance or domination (Smith, 1998, p. 162). Hegemony as a concept refers to "political leadership based on the consent of the led, a consent which is secured by the diffusion and popularization of the world view of the ruling class" (Bates, 1975, p. 352). In international relations, hegemony is used to "connote the predominant position of the most powerful state in the international system or the dominant state in a particular given region" (Faiz, 2007, p. 1).

The modern usage of hegemony as a concept comes from the Italian Marxist and social theorist, Antonio Gramsci. As Strinati (1995) noted, Gramsci used "hegemony" to mean the ability of a dominant class to exercise power by winning the consent of its subjects. Consent is produced and reproduced by the hegemony of the ruling class in society. In the context of the developed West, consent is maintained not merely via coercion, but more importantly through "the negotiated construction of a political and ideological consensus which incorporates both dominant and dominated groups" (Strinati, 1995, p. 165). The consensus is achieved via the process by which the dominant classes propagate their values and ideology by means of social institutions such as mass media, religious organizations, and schools. As a

result, the dominant values and ideology are so ingrained in people's minds that they not only limit people's vision but also enable that ideology's growing importance.

In his *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci (1971) posited that a dominant party, in hegemonic conditions, can "exercise a balancing and arbitrating function between the interests of their group and those of other groups, and succeed in securing the development of the group which they represent with the consent and assistance of the allied groups" (p. 148). The spirit of Gramsci's argument is echoed in President Bush's speech to the graduating cadets at West Point in 2002: "America has, and intends to keep, military strengths beyond challenge — thereby making the destabilizing arms races of other eras pointless, and limiting rivalries to trade and other pursuits of peace" (as cited in Art & Jervis, 2007, p. 423). This means that the U.S. intends to keep an unchallengeable military power by using its force on behalf of others so that other countries need not to develop their own military establishments. It also implies that, as the sole superpower in the world today, the Untied States does not want to see the return of the world to the traditional multi-polar balance of power politics.

Gramsci was a revolutionary strategist who instructed others to temper their pessimism of the intellect with an optimism of the will. Lipsitz (1988) noted that Gramsci "called for 'a war of position,' in which aggrieved populations seek to undermine the legitimacy of dominant ideology, rather than just a 'war of maneuver' aimed at seizing state power" (p. 146). From an opposite angle, Stuart Hall, as Lipsitz further noted, emphasized that the dominant groups must not only win the 'war of maneuver' to rule over resources and institutions, but also win the 'war of position' so as to make their triumphs and dominant ideologies legitimate and even necessary in the eyes of the aggrieved (p. 147).

Based on Gramsci's idea of hegemony and in response to the crisis of Marxism, Laclau and Mouffe (2001) defined hegemony as a discursive strategy of combining principles from different systems of thought into one coherent ideology. To them, hegemony functions as a political logic of articulation, in which a particular social force in the form of a particular class, group, or political party represents or stands in for the whole. In his book *Laclau and Mouffe: the Radical Democratic Imaginary*, Smith (1998) noted, "Laclau and Mouffe's theory of hegemony provides many valuable theoretical formulations" (p. 164). Following the Gramscian tradition, Laclau and Mouffe argued that a political authority establishes its dominant ideology through the organization of consent, which refers to the promotion of popular identification in every political project in the cultural dimension. As the social force gains authority, its dominant ideology gradually becomes the hegemonic discourse or framework through which "more and more identifications become possible, as more and more subject positions are reconstructed with reference to its logic" (p. 171).

While Brewer (2001) clarified the above process of identification or categorization in terms of group-based social identity, McHoul and Rapley (2001) used the concept of "cultural dopism" to describe social identification as "a shift towards the perception of self as an interchangeable exemplar of some social category and away from the perception of self as a unique person" (pp. 118-119). In the concept of group-based social identity, self is perceived as an integral or interchangeable part of a larger group or social unit. In "cultural dopism," self is categorized as the "product of a mechanistic and depersonalized cognitive machinery" (p. 428). Thus, as a result of the hegemonic discourse or dominant framework, self

is forged into group identification as a shared category membership for the common interests of the group. Actually, McHoul (2007) used the theory of membership categorization and analyzed the media coverage of an incident that occurred in 2003, involving two American fighter pilots firing on a friendly British convoy by mistake, to offer insights into the nature of specific social identities.

For our study, we intend to adopt Robert Cox's theory of hegemony as our theoretical framework. According to Faiz (2007), Cox developed the theory of hegemony by drawing upon Gramsci's notion and put his thought of hegemony in the global context as follows:

> *Successive dominant powers in the international system have shaped a world order that suits their interests, and have done so not only as a result of their coercive capabilities, but also because they have managed to generate broad consent for that order even among those who are disadvantaged by it* (p. 2).

To Cox, countries like the U.S. are dominant powers in the international system that have successfully globalized their hegemonic ideas such as free trade all over the world, including China. The idea of free trade or free market based on neo-liberalism is so widely accepted today in the world that even many adversely affected countries treat the idea as common sense. Building upon the critical formulation of Robert Cox, Beeson and Higgott (2005) regarded hegemony as "the ability of some power or authority in a system to 'lay down the law' about external relations between states in the international system" (p. 1174). To them, Cox's discussion about the interplay among ideas, material capabilities, and institutionalization can be adopted to crystallize the dynamic process, in which the U.S. interests and values are reflected in a rule-governed, normatively-informed post-war international order.

To clarify the changes in the world order, Cox (1981) proposed his idea of the "frame of action" based on historical materialism, which comprises ideas, material capabilities, and institutionalization. "Ideas" are those shared notions or thought patterns of the nature of social relations and those of collective images of social order held by different groups of people. As the ideas are historically conditioned, they can predict behaviors when conflicts arise between states, such as negotiation, confrontation, or war. "Material capabilities" refers to material conditions composed of technological and organizational capabilities and natural resources, which can be productive and destructive potentials. "Institutionalization" is a means of stabilizing and perpetuating a particular order through human institutions. Such institutions reflect the power relations and the collective images that are consistent with these power relations. These institutions are a combination of ideas and material power which, in turn, impact the development of ideas and material capabilities (p. 137). In this paper, we will use Cox's "idea," "material capabilities," and "institutionalization" as our theoretical framework to interpret the American responses to the U.S.-China mid-air plane collision incident.

Research Method

To analyze the selected artifacts, we adopt the qualitative research method of hermeneutics. According to Byrne (2001), the assumptions of hermeneutics are that "human beings experience the world through language, and language provides both understanding and knowledge" (p. 1). Hermeneutics can

be used for the interpretation and understanding of texts derived from stories, interviews, participant observations, letters, speeches, or other relevant written documents and personal experiences. While interpreting the denotative and connotative meanings of the texts, hermeneutics also emphasizes the historical and socio-cultural influences on the interpretation. To this end, the texts are usually closely examined in connection to their relevant contexts for the generation of themes or patterns as research findings, which reflect the knowledge of the phenomenon under study.

A "theme" in our case refers to a relevant issue, opinion, or understanding. According to Owen (1984), three criteria are required for the generation of a theme. The first criterion is occurrence, which means that at least two parts of a report have the same thread of meaning even though the meaning was indicated with different wording. The second is the repetition of key words, phrases, or sentences, which is an extension of the first criterion in that it is an explicitly repeated use of the same wording. The third is forcefulness, which refers to the underlining of words or phrases in a written report or vocal inflection, volume, or dramatic pauses in a recording. When generating the themes, the two authors in this study separately read the transcripts of the selected artifacts thoroughly and repeatedly to determine the common themes and patterns in order to achieve validated evidence for data analysis.

We have made a purposeful selection of ten artifacts from the U.S. side, [see Note at the end of the paper] and there are three reasons for our selection. First, the mid-air collision took place near the coast of China. To this day, there has been no definite answer as to which side was responsible for the collision. As Donnelly (2004) remarked, "it is almost impossible for any conclusions to be drawn from the widely differing accounts of the collision" (p. 29). How the United States, as represented in this case by the President, the Commander in Chief of the Pacific Command, the Senate, and the Secretary of State, responded to this incident attracted extensive attention across the world, thus providing a significant research topic for communication scholars. Second, President Bush, who "was facing the most complex crisis in his presidency of fewer than 100 days" (Cheng, 2002, p. 312), had to choose whether to handle China as a strategic competitor as advocated by those neoconservative hardliners around him or a strategic partner from the legacy of the Clinton administration. Since the U.S. had and still has the strongest military power in the world whose "annual defense expenditure is more than the rest of the world combined" (Layne & Thayer, 2007, p. 61), President Bush's choices and the responses of the Bush administration on the incident offer a core issue of study in international communication. Finally, the decision to analyze the artifacts of just the American side is determined by the accessibility of the required documents or transcripts and the space of the present paper.

Critical Analysis

Having made clear the hegemonic theoretical framework and the research method of hermeneutics, we can now analyze the selected artifacts through the hegemonic theoretical lens of Cox's ideas, material capabilities, and institutionalization. While analyzing the transcripts of the official U.S. responses to the mid-air plane collision and subsequent U.S.-China negotiations, we will also refer to some relevant responses from the Chinese side and other parties from different parts of the world for the purpose of clarifying our argument.

Shared Notions

As discussed earlier, "shared notions" refers to those ideas or thought patterns in the nature of social relations and the collective images of social order held by different groups of people. Since the Communists came into power in 1949 in Mainland China, China has been on the radar screen of the U.S. foreign policymakers and political strategists. The U.S. policy toward China during all of the three post-Cold War administrations has maintained an unwillingness to "countenance China's emergence as a peer competitor" on the one hand, and a willingness to "give China the opportunity to integrate itself into the American-led international order on Washington's terms" (Layne & Thayer, 2007, p. 70) on the other. When the Bush administration came into office in 2001, China was regarded as a strategic competitor as advocated by the neo-conservative hardliners around President Bush. To the hardliners, there have been several indicators of the rising China as a revisionist power. First, China's economy has been growing at an average annual rate of 9% for two decades. Second, China has become a serious challenge to the regional balance of power with its double-digit increases in defense expenditures, imports of advanced Russian weapons, and modernization of its army. Third, China has been affecting the American image by its assertiveness in handling international affairs. Thus, the best strategy for the U.S. is "to contain or constrain China before it becomes too powerful and therefore too costly to do so" (Yuan, 2003, pp. 54-56).

With the above China policy, the U.S. has made clear its fundamental interests as "the prevention of the rise of any single power in the Asia Pacific that can challenge and even pose a threat to U.S. national security and access to the region's expanding markets" (Yuan, 2003, p. 45). To this end, the U.S. has been annually conducting about 200 intelligence-gathering missions by the U.S. Navy and Air Force ranging from undersea platforms to ground and satellite antenna systems. The purpose is to capture military and government communications along the Chinese coastline. The EP-3 plane that collided with the Chinese F-8 fighter jet was a U.S. Navy surveillance plane on a routine intelligence-gathering mission.

Against this background, the official U.S. responses in the selected artifacts reveal three major notions. First, we find the American officials demanding immediate release of the crew and the return of the plane and instructing the Chinese in the expected etiquette under such circumstances. Second, to the Americans, the Chinese have violated international norms by retaining the U.S. crew and plane, boarding the U.S. EP-3 aircraft, and removing portions of the equipment. Third, American officials maintain that they have done nothing wrong, thus, there is no reason for the Chinese to ask for an apology. To be specific, our thorough examination of the selected artifacts against the above historical background manifests the following findings.

First, on demanding immediate release of the crew and return of the plane, President Bush clearly stated on April 2, "our priorities are the prompt and safe return of the crew, and the return of the aircraft without further damaging or tampering" ("Statement A," 2001, p. 1). U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell remarked on April 3, "we will continue to impress upon the Chinese that they need to move quickly

to return the crew to its unit, the crew to its families and to return the plane to its United States base" ("Powell," 2001, p. 2). On April 5, the U.S. Senate also called for the release of the plane and crew:

> *It is the sense of the Senate that the government of the People's Republic of China should immediately release the crew members of the EP-3 into the custody of the United States military or consular officials, and allow them to leave the country and return the EP-3 aircraft and all its equipment to the possession of the United States.* ("Senate Resolution 66," 2001, pp. 2-3)

With regard to instructing the Chinese side in the expected etiquette under such circumstances, Admiral Blair said to the press on April 1:

> *If a Chinese aircraft had been 70 miles off of Kaneohe here in Hawaii … we would have gotten the pilot right to a telephone, say here's a phone, call home, tell them you're okay and we would have been in contact with the Chinese government saying, 'What do you need to help?' And we would have stayed out of the aircraft and away from it, because we recognize that it is what international rules say.* ("Navy Admiral," 2001, pp. 2-4)

Second, the Americans continuously stated that the U.S. surveillance aircraft "was on a routine operation in the South China Sea. It was 70 miles off the Chinese island of Hainan in international airspace . . . The airplane itself, military aircraft of all countries in situations like this, has sovereign immunity" ("Navy Admiral," 2001, p. 1). Therefore, Secretary Powell said, "I have heard that they are investigating something. I don't know what there is to investigate. Our plane was flying over international water and international air space" ("Powell," 2001, p. 2). The U.S. Senate also warned the Chinese side not to infringe on U.S. sovereign immunity and violate the international law, which "recognizes both the right of the crew of an aircraft in distress to land safely on foreign soil and the inviolable sovereignty of an aircraft in distress that has landed on foreign soil" ("Senate Resolution 66," 2001, p. 2).

Third, it has been China's post-Cold War security policy to maintain a relatively stable and peaceful environment for economic development and building comprehensive national strength, protecting territorial integrity and achieving reunification with Taiwan, and upholding regional security cooperation through dialogues and consultation. Therefore, when the plane-collision incident occurred, China clearly stated its primary principles that "the most urgent matter for the U.S. side is not to table all manner of requests, but to make a thorough review of the incident, apologize to the Chinese side and respond to China's concerns and demands" ("Chinese Foreign Ministry," 2001, p. 4).

In response, Secretary Powell remarked on April 3, "I have heard some suggestion of an apology, but we have nothing to apologize for. We did not do anything wrong. Our airplane was in international airspace" ("Powell," 2001, p. 2). Then the Chinese reiterated its request through its ambassador to the U.S., Yang Jiechi: "Our side has said it very clearly that the U.S. side should share all the responsibility and apologize to the Chinese side" ("CNN," 2001, p. 2). The U.S. knows fully well that in diplomacy, an apology means accepting diplomatic or legal responsibility, whereas expressing regret does not; therefore,

we read all sorts of "regrets" instead of a single "apology" in the selected artifacts. For instance, Secretary Powell told the press on April 3, "unfortunately, it apparently was fatal for the pilot of the Chinese plane and I regret that," ("Powell," 2001, p. 2). Again on April 4 he said, "we regret that the Chinese plane did not get down safely, and we regret the loss of the life of the Chinese pilot" ("Secretary of State," 2001, p. 1). In addition, the U.S. Senate expressed "its regret at the damage and loss of life occasioned by the accidental collision of the two aircraft" ("Senate Resolution 66," 2001, p. 2). In an April 11 letter from Ambassador Prueher to China's Minister of Foreign Affairs, we still read words like "sincere regret" and "very sorry" instead of an actual apology for the collision:

> *Both President Bush and Secretary of State Powell have expressed their sincere regret over your missing pilot and aircraft. Please convey to the Chinese people and to the family of pilot Wang Wei that we are very sorry for their loss.* ("Letter from Ambassador Prueher," 2001, p. 1)

To analyze the shared notions in the American responses, we may first refer to a series of questions the Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesman Zhu Bangzao asked, including:

> *Why does the U.S. side frequently send its military surveillance planes on spy flights over sea areas close to China? Why did the U.S. warplane make an abrupt turn and ram the Chinese jet in violation of operation rules? Why did the U.S. plane intrude into China's airspace and land at a Chinese airport without approval from the Chinese side?* ("Chinese Foreign Ministry," 2001, p. 4)

We know from earlier discussions that, in line with its hegemonic grand strategy, the U.S. keeps sending its military surveillance planes on spy flights over sea areas close to China to capture military and government communications along the Chinese coastline in order to guard against the rise of China in the Asia Pacific. In specific legal terms, the mid-air plane collision occurred 70 miles southeast of China's Hainan Island, which is within China's 200-nautical-mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Although the *1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea* (UNCLOS) stipulates the freedom of over-flight in the EEZs of a country, it also clearly states that in the EEZs, "States shall have due regard to the rights and duties of the coastal State and shall comply with the laws and regulations adopted by the coastal State" (Donnelly, 2004, pp. 29-32). It is true that the U.S. EP-3 plane was over-flying China's EEZs at the time of the collision, but it was not showing "the due regard" and it was violating "the laws and regulations" of China by flying over China's EEZs and collecting Chinese military and economic information at the same time.

Furthermore, the Chinese made public those photos showing that the nose of the U.S. plane had been knocked off, the propeller on its left wing was damaged, and the antenna on the left wing of the U.S. plane had been knocked backwards instead of forward while the paint from the Chinese jet fighter was found on the front instead of at the back of the propeller of the U.S. plane (Sheng, 2001, p. 3). Although it was an emergency landing, the American plane entered China's territorial space and landed at a Chinese military airport without prior approval from the Chinese side. Nevertheless, the U.S. does not intend to shoulder any diplomatic or legal responsibilities in the plane collision incident because it has to continue

with its future surveillance missions along China's coastline to implement its shared notion of the hegemonic primacy.

Material Capabilities

To Cox, "material capabilities" refers to material conditions composed of technological and organizational capabilities and natural resources, which can be productive and destructive potentials. Being the only superpower in the world, the U.S. is in possession of and intends to maintain cultural, economic, and military dominance all over the world. As Monton (2005) stated:

> *The Bush Doctrine follows a period of enormous material expansion . . . . The United States ended the 1990s at the top of a unipolar distribution of power, commanding a greater share of world capabilities than any state in modern international history. U.S. economic dominance is surpassed only by its own position immediately following World War II. U.S. military dominance is even more asymmetrical.* (p. 142)

Endowed with such a favorable capitalist environment, bountiful natural resources, and sufficient human talents, the U.S. raises the most powerful army and has its military presence all over the world. As Posen (2003) noted, "one pillar of the U.S. hegemony is the vast military power of the United States" (p. 5). The specific plane involved in the collision is an example that can showcase the U.S. material capabilities militarily. The EP-3 spy plane is equipped with a distinctive saucer-shaper antenna on its underbelly and is packed with electronic devices. It is capable of monitoring Chinese military activities by intercepting, tracking, and recording a wide variety of communications such as telephone, radio, radar transmissions, and even electronic mail. Equipped with the electronic surveillance gear, it can also hear and see into Mainland China as a treasure trove of military intelligence.

It is now easy to understand why the U.S. side cared so much about the Chinese boarding the EP-3 and obtaining hardware and software information. For instance, Admiral Blair showed his concern by saying, "the airplane itself, military aircraft of all countries, has sovereignty immunity. That is, no other country can go aboard them or keep them. They are in sovereign-immune territory" ("Navy Admiral," 2001, p. 2). The U.S. Senate also asked the Chinese side to "return the EP-3 aircraft and all its equipment to the possession of the United States without any further boarding or inspection, or removal of equipment" ("Senate Resolution 66," 2001, p. 3).

However, on September 4, 1976, a Soviet MIG-25 military plane was flown to Japan. On that occasion, the U.S. believed that there was a right to examine the aircraft. Despite Soviet protests, American and Japanese intelligence officials disassembled the plane to study it for over two months before they returned the plane to the Soviet Union in packing crates because that type of military plane was a mystery to the West at that time (Donnelly, 2004, p. 40). If this cannot be considered a double standard, the norm the U.S. is observing manifests at least that the right belongs to the side that has more power.

Now the point is whether the U.S. will use its power or material capabilities, especially military capabilities, for productive or destructive potentials. Beeson and Higgott (2005) indicated that the U.S., under the Bush administration, is moving from a benign hegemony to a selfish one, thus attracting more enmity and resistance (p. 1185). Currently, the American strategy is to maintain a status quo in East Asia, but China, as a rising power, may clash with this American strategy of primacy. Unless the U.S. and Chinese interests can be accommodated, there is great potential for future tension between the two sides. Nevertheless, as Layne and Thayer (2007) pointed out, "whether Washington and Beijing actually come to blows depends largely on what strategy the United States chooses to adopt toward China" (p. 73).

Institutionalization

 "Institutionalization" refers to a means of stabilizing and perpetuating a particular order through human institutions. Human institutions are a combination of ideas and material capabilities. Closely linked to Gramsci's notion of hegemony, institutions provide ways to deal with conflicts and anchor hegemonic strategies in the representation of diverse interests and universalization of policy (Cox, 1981, p. 137). Since the end of World War II, the U.S. took the lead in establishing the core institutions of the global capitalist and political system. The global capitalist system, according to Leatherman and Webber (2005), "rests on the outward projection of the national hegemony of the dominant social classes of the United States and their protection through national security strategies" (p. 9).

In the Asia Pacific, the use of military force is the main instrument in the current U.S. drive for hegemony. To this end, the Bush administration claims for itself the right to take preventive actions against any potential adversaries. China is on the list of the three major potential adversaries of the U.S., and the Bush administration has set a strategic goal of constraining the country. To implement such ideas or shared notions of primacy, the U.S., as mentioned earlier, has been carrying out hundreds of intelligence gathering missions each year by its Navy and Air Force to capture military and government communications along the Chinese coastline.

When the collision occurred April 1, 2001, Admiral Blair expressed his expectation on the same day that the Chinese should give back the U.S. spy plane so that "we can repair the plane, our people can return, and we can go on about our business" ("Navy Admiral," 2001, p. 2). President Bush regarded the U.S. naval maritime patrol as "a routine surveillance mission in international airspace over the South China Sea" ("Statement A," 2001, p. 2). After the 24 crew members were finally released April 12, 2001, President Bush praised the crew in his welcome speech by saying that "they represent the best of American patriotism and service to their country." He also emphasized, "reconnaissance flights are part of a comprehensive national security strategy that helps maintain peace and stability in our world" ("Welcome Speech," 2001, p. 2).

All this reveals that the U.S. side considers it normal and routine to use military planes to spy on other countries and that the U.S. will continue with such military operations because they are carried out with the intention to maintain world peace and stability. Thus, barely two weeks after the plane collision standoff concluded, the U.S. resumed its military surveillance along the Chinese coastline. In addition, the Bush administration decided to offer Taiwan the largest arms package in a decade; including four Kidd-

class destroyers, 12 P-3C Orion aircraft, and eight diesel submarines as a diplomatic gesture of revenge (Yang, 2001, p. 14).

Besides the governmental role in the institutionalization of the U.S. notion of primacy, the crew members, the mainstream media, and a large portion of the general public in the U.S. have also demonstrated their identifications with the authority and played roles in safeguarding the U.S. hegemonic ideology. For instance, when the crew members realized that they had to land their spy plane on a Chinese airstrip, they began implementing the classified destruction plan by erasing computer memory units that recorded the day's mission, shredding the computer floppy disks containing various encryption codes, and smashing various eavesdropping and cryptographic code machines. During the U.S.-China standoff, as a result of the plane collision, most of the mainstream American media "functions as an arm of the U.S. national security apparatus," presenting to TV viewers and newspaper readers "American spy flights on the edge on the Chinese mainland as defensive, while the Chinese monitoring of these flights as aggressive and provocative" (Martin, 2001, p. 4). As for the general public, there are some relevant poll results during the U.S.-China standoff. For example, 69% of Americans thought the U.S. should continue with military surveillance flights off the Chinese coast ("Newsweek Poll," 2001, p. 4); 61% of Americans approved of the way George W. Bush was handling the mid-air collision situation ("Gallup Poll," 2001, p. 5); and 54% of Americans thought the U.S. should not officially apologize to China ("Gallup Poll," 2001, p. 5).

Thus, we can see that the U.S. strategy of hegemonic primacy has been deeply-rooted and extensively consented to by citizens in all walks of life in the U.S. Just as Smith (1998) wrote, hegemonic strategies are particularly effective during a crisis. By adopting a specific system of narration as a framework, the dominant political force manages to hegemonize the social. As a result, the hegemonic discourse functions as the political glue that holds individuals and social groups together in opposition to the enemy bloc. In the process, more and more subjects become open to innovative political discourses and begin to identify with the network of social structures (p. 165). Hunt (2007) correctly summarized that "if ever the term 'hegemony' was appropriately applied, it is to what the U.S. became in the latter half of the 20th century and now remains" (p. 314). By putting in place the ideological, material, and institutional prerequisites, the U.S. claims itself as the paramount global power on guard against any potential challenges.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the major documents of the American side concerning the U.S.-China mid-air plane collision from April 1 to April 12, 2001. We have made a purposeful selection of ten artifacts for this study from U.S. official statements, a Senate resolution, the President's welcome speech, and Secretary Powell's briefings and remarks at press conferences during the standoff. Via the hegemonic theoretical lens of Cox's ideas, material capabilities, and institutionalization, we have analyzed the selected artifacts by using the rhetorical method of hermeneutics. Our findings are twofold, as follows:

First, as a shared notion, the essence of the Bush Doctrine is to establish American hegemony, primacy, or empire all over the world. To this end, the U.S. has been making use of its power to advance

American national interests by means of building and strengthening alliances and by taking a firm stance in dealing with potential enemies. Washington does not allow Beijing to regard the American military presence in East Asia as a threat, yet, at the same time, intends to constrain China due to its huge size, steady economic growth, and military ambitions. Seeing China as a strategic competitor, the U.S. considers it its mission to gather Chinese military and government information via military surveillance planes. Interpreting international laws in line with its hegemonic grand strategy, the Bush administration contends that the U.S. is privileged and obliged to guard against the rise of China in the Asia Pacific in the name of maintaining world peace and regional stability.

Second, to maintain cultural, economic, and military dominance all over the world, the United States has both preserved the most resourceful material capabilities and established the necessary human institutions. An example of the material capabilities is its military presence in all parts of the world with an annual expense twice as much as that of the rest of the world combined. The human institutions have been manifested in the Bush administration's grand strategy, the support of the Senate and other governmental organs, and the average 60% approval and consent of the U.S. notion of primacy in the public opinion poll.

Although the 12-day U.S.-China standoff came to an end in a peaceful manner, the U.S. side soon resumed its military surveillance missions along the Chinese coastline. As discussed earlier, material capabilities can be used for either productive or destructive potentials. If the U.S. continues with its current grand strategy of hegemonic primacy, similar crises may occur again in East Asia, and conflicts may arise elsewhere, in other parts of the world. Future research may either focus on the study of the Chinese responses or on a comparative study of the responses of both sides.

Note: The artifacts for analysis and interpretation in this study include the following:

- U.S. Navy Admiral Description of the Aircraft Incident in South China on April 1
- Statement by the President on American Plane and Crew in China on April 2 [Statement A]
- Statement by the President Calling for Prompt Release of Crew and Return of Plane on April 3 [Statement B]
- Powell April 3 Briefing on U.S.-China Aircraft Accident
- Secretary of State Powell Expresses Regret over Loss of Chinese Pilot on April 4
- Senate Resolution 66 Calling for Release of Plane and Crew on April 5
- Remarks by Secretary of State Powell Expressing Regret over Loss of Chinese Pilot on April 4
- Letter from Ambassador Prueher to China's Minister of Foreign Affairs on April 11
- Powell at Contact Group Joint Press Conference on April 11
- Welcome Speech of the President for the U.S. Service Members on April 12, 2001

The websites from which these artifacts are downloaded are highlighted in the References.

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