

## ***We Have Seen the Enemy, and It Is China***

By John Gershman

It is by now virtually conventional wisdom that the Rumsfeld Review will highlight Asia as the critical area of strategic focus and military operations for the Pentagon. China will be pegged as the only likely “peer competitor” around which U.S. strategic doctrine in the first quarter of the 21st century will be oriented. China also lies at the center of the ongoing efforts involving missile defense and the proposed “revolution in military affairs”—both of which are areas of interest for the head of the Pentagon’s Office of Net Assessment, Andrew Marshall.

### **China as a Threat**

The reorientation of U.S. strategy toward Asia in general and China in particular is foreshadowed in another report in which Marshall had a major role: *Asia 2025*. In that report a team of working and retired defense officers and academics assembled by Marshall developed five alternative scenarios (Unstable China, Strong China, the New South Asian Order, Asia Realigns, and the New Sino-Indian Condominium) for Asia.

In *Asia 2025* China is projected to be a threat whether it is strong or weak, stable or unstable: “A stable and powerful China will be constantly challenging the status quo in Asia. An unstable and relatively weak China could be dangerous because its leaders might try to bolster their power with foreign military adventures.”

The key strategic lessons underlined in the *Asia 2025* study are: the emergence of China as the greatest regional threat to U.S. interests, the need to address the lack of forward operating bases in South and Southeast Asia if Washington is to remain a key player in these regions, the emerging strategic potential of

India, and the need to prevent a China-India alliance at all costs. A more active U.S. diplomatic and military effort to strengthen ties with India is the corollary to preventing a Sino-Indian alliance. Strengthening bilateral alliances with Korea, Australia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Japan become central to limiting China’s exercise of its power in the South China Sea and the western Pacific.

Notably, these scenarios are independent of whether China becomes democratic or successfully manages the transition to a market economy with broad-based growth. The U.S. has decided to plan for a future where China is an enemy.

### **Missile Defense**

The strategic review will undoubtedly reinforce the stated policy goal of deploying national and theater missile defenses (NMD and TMD respectively). Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld has already cited China as a major reason to move ahead with NMD deployment, independent of implications for the ABM Treaty. In addition to China’s concern that an NMD program might eliminate China’s small strategic nuclear deterrent, China is concerned about U.S. plans for TMD. The major Chinese concern is TMD’s potential application to Taiwan. A second Chinese concern is the impact of TMD in East Asia. Currently, the U.S. and Japan are collaborating to develop TMD to protect Japanese targets (including U.S. bases) against regional missile attacks, most specifically from North Korea. U.S.-Japan TMD collaboration exacerbates Chinese fears that both countries seek less constraint to act against China. The strengthening of the “U.S.-Japan Defense Guidelines,” which conspicuously fail

to define the geographic boundaries within which events could lead to joint U.S.-Japan military operations, underscores this Chinese perception.

## The Revolution in Military Affairs and Force Restructuring

The second component likely to be found in the strategic report is a concentration on combating “asymmetric warfare” as outlined, among other places, in *Unrestricted Warfare* by Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, and published by the Chinese People’s Liberation Army Literature and Arts Publishing House (Beijing) in February 1999. Since 1996 the Pentagon has identified asymmetric warfare as central to China’s strategic posture toward the United States. Combating it will involve increased emphasis on high-tech weapons, “homeland defense” strategies, and information warfare.

Marshall has been critical of U.S. weapons—such as tanks and aircraft carriers—that could be vulnerable to missiles and other high-tech threats. Also threatened under this security framework are aircraft, such as the FA-18, F-22, and Joint Strike Fighter, which are relatively short-range and would be of little use in most of the Asian conflict scenarios under consideration. One solution, it is argued, could be a greater shift toward long-range, precision weapons, as well as technology that would give the U.S. control of information on the battlefield. This would enable the U.S. to use its technological prowess to blind and disable an opponent’s command and communications capabilities.

The strategic posture to combat China’s emerging power was described as “congame,” but in fact it leans more toward contain-

ment than engagement once one factors in the impact of missile defense. This proposal for a new cold war with China is not as dramatic a departure from the Clinton era practice (as opposed to articulated policy) as one might think. While economic integration with China still remains an important component of the U.S. policy agenda, congame planning builds on trends since the mid-1990s in Pentagon strategic thinking and war-gaming sessions that have focused upon China as the major threat to U.S. interests.

For example, a secret government war game held earlier this year was set in 2005 and had China attacking Taiwan, seeking to reunify it with the mainland. Washington jumped in on Taiwan’s side. But the Pentagon’s sleek array of wonder weapons came up short. Three aircraft carriers had to stay so far offshore—out of range of Chinese anti-ship missiles—that their jets couldn’t even reach mainland China. Japan and South Korea, leery of attack by Chinese ballistic missiles, refused to let U.S. fighter jets use their airfields. With no bases on the Asian mainland, Army troops sat out the war. The only effective American weapons were smart bombs dropped by B-2 bombers and long-range cruise missiles launched from afar. This war game likely prefigures the agenda for restructuring U.S. forces to meet the “China threat” under the strategic review.

## Current Situation

Is China a threat? Let’s review the current situation: The U.S. defense budget is roughly 7 times that of China’s. Even more than during the cold war, the Pacific is an American lake, and U.S. strategic doctrine intends to keep it that way. China is at least two decades away from being

able to deploy a fully functional carrier with aircraft. Although worrisome, the 17.7% increase in China’s official, 2001 defense budget is more of a political signal to the U.S. and Taiwan than an indication of substantially improving Chinese military capabilities. While there are legitimate national security concerns regarding proliferation that involve China, China has been a valuable partner in promoting confidence-building measures and negotiations on the Korean peninsula.

There are several main dangers with the new congame approach. First, managing the tensions within the strategy prove impossible and the strategy effectively becomes containment. Through a self-fulfilling prophecy, U.S. strategic doctrine creates the enemy for which it was designed. This reinforces hard-liners within China and launches a vicious circle of arms races, increasing tension, and decreasing security.

Second, with the exception of advocating stronger ties with India, the approach emphasizes strengthening the museum of cold war-era alliances in the region and de-emphasizes multilateralism. This will undermine efforts to bring China into greater compliance with the norms of the missile technology control regime. Unsurprisingly for an administration opposed to arms control, this approach flies in the face of the need to engage China (and other countries) in verifiable, multilateral agreements to control and reduce weapons of mass destruction and their delivery vehicles.

Third, this approach fails to address the root causes of some of the likely conflicts, such as access to adequate energy resources, which is a major element in many of the war game scenarios. Prevention, through provision

of alternative energy sources, would be far preferable—and a less expensive approach.

In short, the major danger to peace and security in Asia remains a reinvigorated U.S. unilateralism and militarization of U.S. policy in the region. These developments have already been foreshadowed in the opposition to South Korean president Kim Dae-Jung's sunshine policy, the recent approval of sales of submarines

and the briefing involving the PAC-3 to Taiwan, and the initially combative stance the Bush administration took during the spy plane imbroglio.

This is not a *fait accompli*, however. There will be a vicious internal debate among and between the Defense Department, the branches of the armed services, and Congress over the priorities outlined in the strategic review. Then there will be ongoing battles between the forces of greater

containment and those of engagement within the administration. What is not in doubt are the stakes of the debate.

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