

Cornering the Dragon

By Conn Hallinan | February 22, 2005

When newly appointed CIA Director Porter Goss recently warned that China's modernization of its military posed a direct threat to the U.S., was it standard budget time scare tactics? Or did it signal the growing influence of hard-liners in the Bush administration who want to "contain" China and re-institute the Cold War in Asia?

A day later, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld delivered a similar message to the Senate Armed Services Committee. Rumsfeld claimed that within a decade the Chinese navy could surpass the U.S. Navy, and that China was "increasingly moving their navy further from shore."

The 2005 Quadrennial Defense Review will reportedly take a similarly alarmist view of China's military.

The CIA and Pentagon assessments offer nothing particularly new in their military analysis of China. However, both specifically excluded any mention of U.S.-China cooperation around North Korea or last year's CIA analysis that growing economic ties between China and the U.S. made military conflict less likely.

"It is a little surprising," James Steinberg, former national security advisor in the Clinton administration told the *Financial Times*, "that it [the CIA assessment] didn't say anything about the enormous emphasis China places on a stable international environment and constructive relations with the U.S."

But not so surprising if the long battle between those in the Republican Party who favor engagement with China has begun to tip in favor of those who advocate confrontation and encirclement.

As *Nation* defense correspondent and Hampshire College Professor Michael Klare pointed out back in 2001, this division in the GOP goes back to the earliest days of the Cold War. For some two decades the hard-liners, with their close ties to Chang Kai Shek, dominated U.S.-China policy. But lured by the potential of China's markets, and anxious to widen the Sino-Soviet division, the engagement wing of the party seized the initiative with Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's trip to China in 1971, establishing relations with Peking.

The old confrontationist "China lobby" was hardly dead, however. Using the immense wealth of the Scalife, Olin, and Carthage foundations under the umbrella of the highly influential American Enterprise Institute (AEI), the "lobby" recruited a group of well-placed, powerful political figures.

AEI members include neo-conservative icons like Lynne Cheney, Charles Murry, Michael Novak, Irving Kristol, Ben Wattenberg, Frank Gaffney, and Michael Ledeen.

The AEI is closely aligned with the Project for a New American Century (PNAC), the group that successfully lobbied for "regime change" in Iraq and argues that it is a strategic necessity for the U.S. to control the world's oil supplies.

PNAC, the brainchild of AEI's Kristol, includes among its members Vice President Dick Cheney,

"It is a little surprising that it [the CIA assessment] didn't say anything about the enormous emphasis China places on a stable international environment and constructive relations with the U.S."



Foreign Policy In Focus (FPiF)

www.fpi.org
A Think Tank Without Walls

Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, former State Department officials Richard Armitage and John Bolton, and other leading administration figures like Elliot Abrams, Richard Perle, and Zalmay Khalilzad, presently U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan.

The confrontationist's goals are much the same as they were in the opening years of the Cold War: ring China with military bases, support Taiwanese independence, and, in Kristol's words, "Work for the fall of the Communist Party oligarchy in China."

In short: corner the dragon.

Recent events suggest that the confrontationist wing is back in the driver's seat.

Containment Redux?

Goss's and Rumsfeld's characterization of China contradict last year's conclusions of the administration's Independent Task Force on Chinese Military Power headed up by former defense secretary Harold Brown and retired admiral Joseph Prueher. The panel found that while China is modernizing its military, it is 20 years behind the U.S., and that "the balance between the United States and China, both globally and in Asia, is likely to remain decisively in America's favor beyond the next 20 years."

China's military budget is less than one tenth that of the U.S. and it does not have a massive arms industry, preferring to purchase submarines, destroyers, aircraft, and high performance anti-aircraft missiles from Russia and Israel. In spite of Rumsfeld's grim forecast, the Chinese navy is designed for defending its territorial waters, not projecting force elsewhere. While the U.S. has a dozen aircraft carriers, China has one, and an old obsolete Soviet one at that.

While China has deployed large numbers of intermediate range ballistic missiles facing Taiwan, most observers see this more as an attempt to intimidate

the Taiwanese than as a prelude to invasion or a threat to U.S. forces in the region. The missiles are far too inaccurate to pose a military threat, on top of which Taiwan has become so central to China's economy that any actual attack on the island would be an act of economic suicide.

Jonathan Pollack, director of the Strategic Research Department of the U.S. Naval War College, told the *New York Times* that while China did have the largest standing army in the world and was in the process of modernizing, "I don't see these capabilities as the leading edge of a more comprehensive, long-term plan to either supplement U.S. military power in the Western Pacific or challenge U.S. power on a global scale," adding, "Let's not make them out to be 10 feet tall."

The Bush administration has always had a somewhat schizophrenic approach to China, with one faction preaching engagement, the other confrontation. Early in his first term, Bush warned that the U.S. would do "whatever it took" to defend Taiwan, changed the designation of China from "strategic partner" to "strategic competitor" ...

defend Taiwan, changed the designation of China from "strategic partner" to "strategic competitor," and initiated a campaign of aggressive military surveillance which ultimately led to the downing of a Navy EP-3E spy plane on Hainan Island.

On the other hand, the administration has encouraged trade, welcomed China to the World Trade Organization, and up to recently, muted its rhetoric on Taiwan. Late last year, then Secretary of State Colin Powell warned Taiwan not to seek independence and that U.S. policy favored its "peaceful reunification" with China.

Trade and Powell notwithstanding, however, any close examination of the administration's actions vis-à-vis China suggests the engagement wing is in eclipse.

A central goal of the confrontations has been to deploy an anti-ballistic missile shield (ABM) in Asia,

which the administration is now in the process of doing. So far it has enlisted Japan and Australia in this effort, and is wooing India as well. While the rationale for the ABM is alleged to be North Korea, the real target is China's 20 Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs).

The strategy of ringing China with U.S. military bases is also well underway. Besides its traditional bases in Japan and South Korea, Guam has become, according to Pacific Commander Admiral William Fargo, a "power projection hub," that will play an increasing role in Asia, with "geo-strategic importance." The island already hosts B-52s, fighter planes, nuclear attack submarines, and the high altitude spy drone, the Global Hawk. Since Guam is a U.S. colony acquired during the Spanish American war, the military does not need permission for the buildup, as it would in Japan or Korea.

The U.S. is also attempting to build bases in Southeast and South Asia. While Indonesian authorities deny the story, the *Singapore Times* reports that the U.S. is presently negotiating to open a naval base on Sulawesi Island. It is also strengthening military ties to Thailand, Singapore, India, Sri Lanka, and Malaya.

The encirclement has also spread to Central Asia, an important source of oil and gas for China. The U.S. presently has bases in Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan, and military ties with Uzbekistan, according to Rumsfeld, are "growing stronger by the month."

Several of these countries border China.

The Chinese response has been to increase their military budget, particularly in response to the U.S. ABM system. "Once the United States believes it has a strong spear and a strong shield," Sha Zukang, a leading Chinese arms expert told the *New York Times*, "it could lead them to conclude that no one can hurt

the United States and they can harm anyone they like anywhere in the world."

The Chinese currently have 20 CSS-4 ICBMs, but appear to be increasing that force to between 75 and 100 missiles, as well as upgrading the CSS-4's guidance systems. It is also only a matter of time before China puts multiple warheads (MIRVs) on their missiles, a deeply destabilizing move. MIRVing is a cost-effective way to overwhelm an ABM system, but one that can also tempt an adversary to launch a first-strike attack.

China is also deploying missile-firing submarines to offset the U.S. buildup in the Taiwan Straits.

The "containment" policies of the hawks have not damaged the growing Chinese economy—now the world's third largest—or shaken the grip of the Chinese Communist Party. But they have accelerated an arms race in the region, fueled growing nationalist

movements in both China and Japan, and raised the stakes of any potential clash over Taiwan.

The last time the "China Lobby" tried to contain China, it was a country devastated by World War II and its own civil war. Today it is a nuclear-armed giant, whose economic growth has lifted economies from Tokyo to Rio de Janeiro. Americans need to ask themselves: Is it really a good idea to push that dragon into a corner?

(Conn Hallinan is a foreign policy analyst for Foreign Policy In Focus and a lecturer in journalism at the University of California, Santa Cruz.)

FOR MORE ANALYSIS FROM FPIF:

Nepal—Nursing the Pinion

By Conn Hallinan (February 15, 2005)

<http://www.fpif.org/commentary/2005/0502nepal.mil.html>

J'accuse: War Crimes & Iraq

By Conn Hallinan (November 4, 2004)

<http://www.fpif.org/commentary/2004/0411warcrimes.html>

Indonesia: U.S. Underwriting Terrorism?

By Conn Hallinan (September 15, 2004)

<http://www.fpif.org/commentary/2004/0409indonesia.html>

Published by Foreign Policy In Focus (FPIF), a joint project of the International Relations Center (IRC, formerly Interhemispheric Resource Center, online at www.irc-online.org) and the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS, online at www.ips-dc.org). ©2005. All rights reserved.

Foreign Policy In Focus

"A Think Tank Without Walls"

Established in 1996, Foreign Policy In Focus is a network of policy analysts, advocates, and activists committed to "making the United States a more responsible global leader and global partner." For more information, visit www.fpif.org.

Recommended citation:

Conn Hallinan, "Cornering the Dragon," (Silver City, NM & Washington, DC: Foreign Policy In Focus, February 22, 2005).

Web location:

<http://www.fpif.org/commentary/2005/0502dragon.html>

Production Information:

Writer: Conn Hallinan

Editor: John Gershman, IRC

Layout: Chellee Chase-Saiz, IRC

