



Who forgot China?

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The post-9/11 world has been a mixed bag for the Chinese. The U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and the deployment of forces to Central Asia renewed fears of American encirclement and upset a decade of careful diplomacy. Beijing's efforts to negotiate security and stability along its continental border--a prelude to greater activity in maritime Asia--seemed all for naught.

But then came the invasion and, more significantly, the occupation, of Iraq. The U.S. military, which had seemed entirely invincible, now seemed to be bogged down in an interminable quagmire. The Bush administration, which had campaigned for office in 2000 by casting China as a "strategic competitor," reversed course 180 degrees under the winds of the

"global war on terrorism." Arms sales to Taiwan, once a priority for the White House, have been all but cancelled, while the plucky democrats of Taipei have been reviled by President Bush and his lieutenants as independence-obsessed troublemakers. From Beijing, the future looks better than it has for some time. China is a great power, not only in its own mind but increasingly in the minds of the rest of the world.

The Chinese can barely contain their self-satisfaction these days, and Beijing's recently-released white paper, *China's National Defense in 2004*, is a 36-page-wide smirk. Consider this passage: "The trends toward world multipolarization and economic globalization are deepening amid twists and turns. New changes are occurring in the

balance of power among the major international players, with the process of their realignment and the redistribution of their interests accelerated."

Granted, this is hardly a ripping read--but within the refined art of the defense brief, this is equivalent to a middle-finger salute. The argument is essentially that the United States is a slipping superpower, leading to a "multipolar" world in which Beijing's interests will be given great weight. The paper goes on to note that "the developing countries"--meaning most importantly China--"have become important players in promoting a multipolar world and"--I guess the Chinese have little ear for irony--"democratized international relations."

To be sure, in the Chinese view, "tendencies of hegemonism and unilateralism"--that means us--"have gained new ground, as struggles for strategic points, strategic resources and strategic dominance crop up from time to time." Not satisfied merely with attempting to transform the greater Middle East, "the United States is realigning and reinforcing its military presence in [the Asia-Pacific] region by buttressing military alliances and accelerating deployment of missile defense systems."

Thus, Beijing frets, Japan is on the verge of restoring its old imperial ways at Washington's urging, "stepping up its constitutional overhaul, adjusting its military and security policies and developing the missile defense system for future

deployment." But the biggest threat remains the separatists on Taiwan. Beijing is alarmed in particular by the "vicious rise" of Taiwanese president Chen Shui-bian and Taiwan's yearning for freedom. The Bush administration needs a good talking to, especially regarding arms sales, for "U.S. action does not serve a stable situation across the Strait."

The "Chinese people" are resolutely opposed to all "separatist activities in whatever manifestation" and "to arms sales to Taiwan or entrance of any form with Taiwan by any country in the world." Lest the message be unclear: "We will never allow anyone to split Taiwan from China through whatever means. Should the Taiwan authorities go so far as to make a reckless attempt that constitutes a major incident of 'Taiwan independence,' the Chinese people and armed forces will resolutely and thoroughly crush it at any cost."

Them's fighting words. No doubt, the chorus of American Sinologists will argue that such rhetoric is par for the course with Beijing. But China's language is both unmistakably blunt and coursing with a self-confidence that reflects the successes of Chinese strategy over the past several years. As one very savvy and experienced U.S. East Asia expert--and one not known for particularly bellicose views--recently told me, Beijing is "kicking our asses all over the region."

And alas, it's true. If the Bush administration is serious about

preserving American hegemony, it needs to devote greater attention in its second term to balancing against China's rise in Asia, rather than simply appeasing it. Witness the weak response by the State

Department to Beijing's recent passage of an "anti-secession" law that provides the legal "justification" to attack Taiwan. Trading Taipei for Baghdad isn't much of a deal.

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