

Editorial

Even wilder lies about China

Following the setback which the British received at the NATO summit, we have been anticipating an hysterical counterattack against the Clinton administration, in particular. After all, the whole purpose of the push for the “New NATO” doctrine and the war in Kosovo, is to destroy the potential for an alliance among the United States, Russia, and China—an alliance in the tradition of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, which President Clinton has clearly indicated his predilection to establish.

The British-American-Commonwealth crowd did not disappoint us. Not only are they escalating in the Mideast theater, and making bellicose noises about a possible confrontation around North Korea, but once again, the so-called China threat has hit the front pages.

It’s a ludicrous story, built on the prejudices of uneducated Americans, many of whom don’t even seem to realize that Mao is dead. On the implicit assumption that there is an inherent state of conflict between China and the United States, scribblers for the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and other BAC press outlets (like Rupert Murdoch’s Fox TV) are now asserting, with no evidence, that alleged security breaches at the nation’s weapons labs have led to the transfer of nuclear secrets to the Chinese.

The “news” is simply a set of wild, undocumented assertions. “The People’s Republic of China has acquired the majority if not all of our most sophisticated nuclear technology,” wrote Fox TV mouthpiece Tony Snow, in a late-April column. “This is probably the most serious case of espionage in U.S. history,” Sen. Don Nickles (R-Okla.) asserted on May 2. Sen. Richard Shelby (R-Ala.), the chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, also told the press that the Chinese spying was “a lot worse than people ever imagined.”

Yet, there is no evidence at all that nuclear technology from the labs ever was transferred to the Chinese! All that is documented is: 1) classified files were transferred to unclassified computers at Los Alamos Labs; and, 2) the Chinese have nuclear capabilities. The causal link between these two is entirely the concoction

of those who have decided, in advance, that the Chinese are hostile thieves who stole the material.

In fact, one of the designs which the press insists on saying the Chinese stole from the United States, actually has been published in widely available scientific journals.

There is obviously no reason for anyone to assume that the Chinese could not have come up with competent designs for nuclear weapons on their own. And, their success is not only *not* a threat to the U.S. today—just compare the size of their arsenal, of 20 ICBMs, to the United States’ 580 ICBMs—but there is no reason to assume that it ever will be, if the United States does not adopt a hostile attitude toward China.

There is a broader question involved here on the matter of scientific research. There is a school of thought which argues that scientific breakthroughs must remain secret, as a matter of protection for our country. That is the imperial outlook, that of slavemasters and autocrats. On the other side, is the view of science which sees the development of knowledge as the “common patrimony” of all mankind.

By tradition, the United States, as the world’s premier republic, should be on the second side. The proper outlook was expressed by none other than leading U.S. nuclear scientist Edward Teller, a Hungarian émigré who worked in the U.S. Manhattan Project during World War II. Dr. Teller had been a leading adviser to President Reagan, during the period when the Strategic Defense Initiative was adopted, and still promotes the sharing of science for the common good of mankind.

Dr. Teller had another point as well. He has argued for 40 years that the massively restrictive classification policy of the U.S. government actually hurts U.S. interests more than the copying of knowledge by any other government could. In an atomic alphabet dictionary he wrote for his young son, Dr. Teller put it this way:

“S stands for secret; you can keep it forever.

“Provided there’s no one abroad who is clever.”