

CFR Report on China Counters Neo-Con Aims

by William Jones

The release on May 22 by the New York Council on Foreign Relations of a report on “China’s Military Power,” was a shot across the bow of those neo-conservative warriors who aim at provoking a conflict with China over Taiwan. The report was the work of a 60-man task force headed by Carter Defense Secretary Harold Brown and Adm. Joseph Prueher, former commander of the U.S. Pacific Command and ambassador to China. The Task Force itself ranged from real China-bashers like Michael Pillsbury—who has spent much of his career “exposing” how Chinese military theoreticians see the United States as the “enemy image”—to old “China hands” like J. Stapleton Roy, an ambassador to China under Bush “41.”

The report reiterates the consensus among military observers that “China is a regional power, and the Task Force does not envisage China becoming a globally committed military power in the next two decades.” In other words, any threat to U.S. national security interests coming from China—if ever—will be about two decades down the road, and no cause for any drum-beating by those who can’t live without a clear “enemy image.” “China’s military modernization of the P.R.C. is two decades behind the United States,” Brown told a CFR forum.

Fending Off a Taiwan Crisis

The report’s thrust is quite clear regarding the all-important issue of Taiwan, the only real issue that might possibly be deemed a potential cause of military conflict between America and China: “Any conflict across the Taiwan Strait would have an extremely adverse impact on the strategic landscape in Asia, regardless of the military outcome. Therefore, the most critical aim of U.S. strategy in the cross-strait situation must be to deter and minimize the chances that such a crisis will occur.”

“Taiwan is fundamentally a political issue,” the report continues, “and any effective strategy must coordinate military measures designed to deter, with diplomatic efforts, so as to reassure both China and Taiwan in a credible fashion that their worst fears will not materialize. For U.S. policy toward Taiwan, this means providing Taiwan with the weapons and assistance deemed necessary for the creation of a robust defense capability and not making a deal with Beijing behind Taipei’s back,” the report continues. “For U.S. policy toward China, this means maintaining the clear ability and willingness to counter an application of military force against

Taiwan while also conveying to Beijing a credible U.S. commitment not to support Taiwan's taking unilateral steps toward de jure independence."

The "China wonks" at the neo-conservative Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) spent the first eight months of the Bush Administration "prepping" for a new relationship with Taiwan, bringing Taiwan independence advocates including the wife of Taiwan's President Chen Shui-bian, to Washington. Indeed, arms sales to Taiwan did increase under Bush, even beyond Taiwan's limited financial means for purchasing them. On March 11, 2001, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz met privately with Taiwan's Defense Minister, Tang Yiau-ming, during a Florida conference. This unprecedented high-level meeting raised an outcry from China. On April 9, 2001, a gaggle of Republican congressmen formed a "Taiwan Caucus."

At the beginning of his tenure, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld announced that he would review the U.S./China military-to-military exchanges, warning that he would only reinstate those he deemed to be of benefit for the United States. The downing of the U.S. EP3 reconnaissance plane patrolling off the Chinese coast in June 2001, served to shut these exchanges down entirely for a time—might it have been avoided if Rumsfeld had not suspended the exchanges?

Ironically, the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, which ultimately provided a means for the "chicken-hawks" hood-winking of President Bush into a war on Iraq, threw a monkey wrench into many of their own well-laid plans as regards China. The quick reaction of the Russian leader, Vladimir Putin, offering his help to the United States in its "war on terror," led to the Administration seeking a multilateral reaction to the attacks. This necessitated seeking collaboration with China on the issue. While the neo-cons made some early noises about links between al-Qaeda and China, those arguments proved even more ridiculous than their attempts to tie Iraq to al-Qaeda. With China becoming a collaborator in the "war on terror," the AEI neo-cons pushing their Taiwan independence card were reined in.

Obviously, some of the more conservative task force members were not happy about the emphasis of the report. Two of the worst China-bashers, Michael Pillsbury and Adm. Michael McDevitt from the Center for Naval Analysis, issued dissenting remarks. Pillsbury wanted to put off any evaluations of Chinese intentions and capabilities in the military field until it becomes democratic and therefore "transparent"; i.e., he wishes to remain on a war footing until there is "regime change" in China. Pillsbury writes, "Until the Chinese government is transformed into an elected, democratic regime, pervasive Chinese military secrecy will prevent the development of any real confidence about some fundamental issues of Chinese military intentions and capabilities."

Immediately after the CFR report was issued, the "chicken-hawks" began to squawk. On May 23, Heritage Foundation China-hawk John Tkacik labelled it a "feel-good" report. "It doesn't jibe with a Pentagon report last year,"

Tkacik complained. "And it's a mistake to underestimate the Chinese ability to amass a high-quality military force close to their shores." One of Heritage's former "experts" on the Chinese military, Richard Fisher, who now works out of Frank Gaffney's Center for Security Policy, commented, "the basic purpose of the report is to convey that there is not yet enough Chinese power to threaten American security interests at this time. But China doesn't need American-level military technology to beat us to the punch in Taiwan."

While effectively fending off the primary arguments of the neo-con China-bashers in their attempt to put in place a new anti-China policy, the report, however, falls short of giving a positive thrust to a U.S./China relationship.

The Importance of High-Tech

The most obvious path to putting those relations back on track would move in the direction of the proposals made by Lyndon and Helga Zepp-LaRouche for a decade, for a Eurasian Land-Bridge policy of "corridors of development" throughout the Eurasian landmass. Such a policy would both be an opportunity for American investment, and produce the greatest rate of growth for the Chinese economy—in particular in the vital western areas of the country.

The skittishness in the report as regards high-tech investment in China—its insistence, for example, that the embargo on the sale of military hardware to China should be kept in place—could be self-defeating. More importantly, the report skirts the broader issue of so-called "dual-use technologies." It was precisely this, in particular the area of satellite and rocket technology, which the China-bashers effectively used against the Clinton Administration in order to sabotage Clinton's attempt at creating a "strategic partnership" between the United States and China through increased trade.

While Admiral Preuher, in reply to a question from *EIR* on this issue, said that there would have to be built up a "modicum of trust before making a decision on such trade," he admitted that the neo-con claims that Loral's cooperation with China in the 1990s had led to advances in Chinese rocket development, were bogus. "Chinese rocket development was largely indigenous," Prueher said. "The 'theft' of missile secrets [widely reported on the basis of these erroneous claims] was not very well expressed in the press," he said.

Importantly, China's role in warding off a burgeoning U.S. confrontation with North Korea has made it a key player in preserving peace. A senior Bush Administration official commented on May 21, "We wouldn't have had talks with the North Koreans in Beijing without the Chinese. And they know they have a role to play there. There are a lot of positive things happening in our relationship with China," the official said. "On every issue, we are in touch with the Chinese. And there is some room for thinking that we are moving closer to each other, perhaps substantially."

A substantial relationship, for this Administration, requires the chicken-hawks be plucked from the positions of responsibility which they have grabbed.