

China Eyes the Hegemon

by Peter Hays Gries

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Concerned about foreign interference in “internal matters” (such as human rights, Tibet, and Taiwan), the Chinese government rarely comments on the domestic politics of other countries. But on November 1, 2004, on the eve of the U.S. presidential election, China’s vice premier Qian Qichen was quoted in the official *China Daily* as condemning U.S. “cocksureness and arrogance.” Qian, a former foreign minister and long-time foreign policy guru, lamented, “The Iraq War has destroyed the hard-won global antiterror coalition.” Long considered a moderate on policy toward the United States, Qian defined the Bush Doctrine as using “military force [to] rule over the whole world.” The timing of Qian’s sharp critique was also notable. If Beijing was hoping to influence the election, it clearly failed. But its willingness to take such a gamble suggests serious concerns about the Bush administration.

The Chinese leadership is not alone. The Chinese people also appear apprehensive about the Bush administration. In a mock election held in Beijing, Kerry won 430–117. And in Chinese cyberspace, the dominant sentiment was one of anxiety: How much more U.S. militarism can the world survive?

The Best of Times?

Coming less than a year after then-Secretary of State Colin Powell declared U.S.-China relations “the best they have been since President Richard Nixon first visited Beijing more than 30 years ago,” these Chinese critiques and concerns seem surprising.¹ Yet as recently as spring 2001, U.S.-China relations had been in crisis. When a U.S. EP-3 surveillance plane collided with a Chinese F-8 jet fighter that April, killing the Chinese pilot, Chinese president Jiang

¹ Colin L. Powell, “A Strategy of Partnerships,” *Foreign Affairs*, Jan./Feb. 2004, p. 32.

Zemin demanded an apology. Secretary Powell replied, “We have nothing to apologize for.”² It took two weeks to secure the release of the EP-3’s two dozen service people from China’s Hainan Island. The new Bush administration had just repudiated the Clinton administration’s China policy—that of a “strategic partner”—as too soft, and was developing a tougher, “strategic competitor” policy. Additionally, the Bush administration was pursuing a theater missile defense system in East Asia, which the Chinese understandably viewed as a threat to their deterrence capability. The combination of these new policies, coupled with the spy plane incident, made early 2001 arguably the worst of times in recent U.S.-China relations.

Then, 9/11 seemed to dramatically improve bilateral relations, firmly fastening a rocked relationship back to the security moorings that had been cast aside with the end of the Cold War. China quickly joined the U.S.-led war on terrorism, supporting the invasion of Afghanistan and even acquiescing to the Iraq War, notwithstanding that most Chinese viewed that war as setting a dangerous precedent for the violation of state sovereignty—a principle that the Chinese, concerned about Taiwan and Tibet, hold dear. U.S.-China security cooperation has extended to other arenas, as well. For instance, intelligence sharing has increased, and China has taken a leading role in resolving the North Korean nuclear issue.

Bush returned the favor. During Chinese premier Wen Jiabao’s state visit to Washington in December 2003, Bush called China a “partner in diplomacy” and publicly rebuked the push by the Republic of China’s Chen Shui-bian for a popular referendum on PRC missiles aimed at Taiwan. The decision to side with Beijing against Taipei represented a dramatic about-face for Bush, who had declared, after the release of the EP-3 crew, that he would do “whatever it takes” to defend Taiwan from Chinese attack. Compared to 2001, certainly, U.S.-China relations today appear decidedly back on track.

But amicable appearances can hide deeper and troubling realities. Chinese analysts are profoundly concerned about the recent exercise of U.S. power, which they view as an acceleration of a broader quest for “global hegemony.” Since the creation of the modern state system with the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, no single state—not even nineteenth-century England—has enjoyed the unrivaled military power that the United States does today. Yet no coalition of great powers has allied to balance against the United States, defying conventional international relations theory. This unprecedented situation has left all the major powers groping to redefine their policies toward the United States.

China is no exception. The Chinese are passionately debating the nature of U.S. power and refining the blend of balancing and bandwagoning in their policy toward it. The debaters share, however, a disturbing consensus:

² Colin L. Powell, “Question and Answers at Contact Group Ministerial Joint Press Conference,” Paris, France, Apr. 11, 2001, at <http://usembassy.state.gov>.

Chinese analysts and commentators worry that U.S.-China relations are friendly today only because of 9/11 and the United States' involvement in Iraq. Fortune in the guise of Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden has, in their view, brought China a brief reprieve from America's wrath. Most doubt that America's preoccupation with the Middle East will last long and fear that it is only a matter of time before Bush administration "hawks" and "neocons" redirect their ire back at China. Unlike their American counterparts, Chinese analysts do not assume that America's hegemony is or will become benign. An American empire, many Chinese increasingly fear, will not just seek to contain China's foreign policies, but will also actively seek to recreate China's society and polity in its own image. To many Chinese, these are far from the best of times.

The Fifth Empire

How long can the common cause against terrorism persist? How powerful is the United States, and how long can it maintain its global preeminence? Chinese analysts worry that the high-intensity war on terror will not last, and that U.S.-China tensions will reemerge when the United States no longer needs China's help. Many console themselves, however, with the hope that American arrogance will lead to imperial overreach and decline.

Should we care about the foreign policy views of Chinese academics, pundits, and Internet "netizens"? China is a dictatorship, so the elite can construct China's foreign policy without regard to domestic opinion, right? Wrong. With the decline of communism as a legitimating ideology, the Chinese Communist Party is increasingly reliant upon its nationalist credentials to maintain its hold on power. But with the pluralization of Chinese society after a quarter century of "reform and opening," the Party no longer monopolizes nationalist discourse. More and more Chinese are claiming a nationalist right to express their views on China's foreign policy, and the CCP, fearful of losing their support, is paying careful attention to their views. So should we.

Unlike many analysts in Washington, most Chinese observers argue that 9/11 and terrorism have not altered the fundamental nature of the international system. From a neorealist "power-transitions" perspective, these Chinese analysts maintain that the United States will inevitably view China's "peaceful rise" as a threat and will therefore seek to obstruct it. For instance, Zhang Yebai of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' (CASS) Institute of American Studies has argued that all the war on terror has done is to "postpone [the] eastward shift" in the Bush administration's security strategy, the "spearhead" of which is unmistakably directed at China.³

³ Zhang Yebai, "An Analysis of the Eastward Shift in America's Security Strategy," *'9.11' hou de daguo zhanlue guanxi* [Great Power Strategic Relations After 9.11], Zhou Rongyao, ed. (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2003), pp. 95–96. All translations from the Chinese are my own.

Qinghua University hawk Yan Xuetong goes further, arguing that the “strategic contradictions” between China and the United States are becoming more prominent daily.⁴

The appeal of this power-transitions logic was evident during political scientist John Mearsheimer’s 2003 visit to China. Mearsheimer believes that a rising China will inevitably seek regional hegemony and threaten U.S. interests in Asia, leading to fierce U.S.-China security competition reminiscent of the old U.S.-Soviet confrontation. While Chinese pundits counter that China, as Zhou Yihuang put it, “has no intention to contend for hegemony,”⁵ Mearsheimer’s logic of China’s rise and America’s decline appeals to Chinese nationalist sensibilities. Samuel Huntington’s clash-of-civilizations argument, predicting an “Islamic-Confucian alliance” against the West, was similarly received in mid-1990s China, where nationalists denied any aggressive intent but delighted in Huntington’s fear of a rising and formidable China.⁶ Similarly, Paul Kennedy’s *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* is frequently cited in China today, reassuring Chinese nationalists of the inevitability of China’s rise and America’s fall.⁷

The “strategic contradictions” between China and the United States are not seen solely in structural terms, however; Chinese analysts also pay close attention to its emotional and ideological dimensions. “Some very powerful people in the Bush administration have a truly insane desire to contain China,” writes Beijing University’s Niu Jun.⁸ Where American analysts view “hegemony” as an objective status or position, in Chinese usage, U.S. “hegemony” (*baquan*) is a subjective attitude or desire akin to bullying.⁹ It is thus not surprising that Chinese analysts have paid close attention to the influence of neoconservatives on American foreign policy. A cover story on the “neocons” in a fall 2003 issue of the Chinese journal *World Affairs* involved a lengthy interview with five Chinese experts who agreed on three central points.

⁴ Yan Xuetong, “Trends in Strategic Relations among the Great Powers,” *ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵ Zhou Yihuang, “Will China’s Rise Trigger Sino-US confrontation?” *Zhongguo jingjibao* [China Economic Times], Dec. 26, 2003, at <http://english.peopledaily.com>.

⁶ Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993. For a collection of Chinese responses to Huntington’s argument, see *Wenming yu guoji zhengzhi: Zhongguo xuezhe ping Hundingdun de wenming chongtulun* [Civilizations and International Politics: Chinese Scholars Critique Huntington’s Clash of Civilizations Thesis], Wang Jisi, ed. (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1995).

⁷ Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987). In their popular anti-American diatribe, *Surpassing the USA: The End of the American Myth*, authors Xi Yongjun and Ma Zaizhan declared Kennedy’s book to be “most profound.” See *Chaoyue Meiguo: Meiguo shenhua de zhongjie* (Harbin: Neimenggu daxue chubanshe, 1996), p. 7.

⁸ Niu Jun, “Lengzhanhou Meiguo dui Taiwan zhengce de yanbian ji qi yuanyin” (Changes in U.S. Taiwan Policy after the Cold War and their Origins), *Great Power Strategic Relations*, p. 327.

⁹ Wang Jisi, “The Logic of American Hegemony,” *Meiguo yanjiu* [American Studies] (Beijing) 2003, no. 3, pp. 7–8.

First, the neocons favor unilateralism and military power over multilateralism and diplomacy. The magazine's cover design—a U.S. flag composed of an aircraft carrier for the stars and U.S. missiles for the stripes—reinforces the point. Second, neoconservatism involves a blend of idealism and offensive realism that sees democracy as the panacea for terrorism, China, and other global problems. According to Qin Yaqing, vice president of China's School of Foreign Affairs, Bush first began searching for enemies upon taking office, and the “neocons” acted as his guide.¹⁰ That even a respected moderate like Qin has such a malevolent view of Bush's intentions is reflective of broader Chinese fears about U.S. preeminence. Third, since neocons view China as a latent but inevitable empire, they necessarily advocate a policy of containment.

Current U.S.-China cooperation, therefore, is not likely to last long. But what is the nature of U.S. power? Men Honghua of the CCP School's Institute for International Strategy maintains that the Chinese “must be clear about American power and not get carried away by dreams of American decline.” The unipolar moment, Men argues, will persist: “The west wind is prevailing over the east wind.” China, in this view, is not likely to catch up with the United States soon.¹¹

Men Honghua is the exception that proves the rule, however; most Chinese analysts have convinced themselves that the current U.S. position of global preeminence cannot last long. In his 2003 potboiler *The End of the Fifth Empire*, Lei Sihai, whose surname means “Thunder,” maintains that if the Soviet Union was the “Fourth Empire” following the Third Reich of Nazism, the United States today can be called the “Fifth Empire.” Fortunately for Lei, a yin-yang dialectic ensures that the more the United States pushes for unipolarity, the more the world will counter with multipolarity.¹² More sophisticated Chinese academic accounts largely concur about the imminent demise of the American empire. For instance, Xin Benjian of the Chinese Academy of Military Sciences argues that international opposition and economic and moral costs doom the Bush administration's “dream” of a “new Roman empire” to failure.¹³

The invasion of Iraq was generally seen in China as a turning point in the rise and fall of the American empire. Zhou Guiyin of the Nanjing School of

¹⁰ “Who is Leading America's Foreign Policy? The Strengths and Limits of Neoconservatism,” *Shijie Zhishi* [World Affairs] (Beijing) No. 20, Oct. 16, 2003.

¹¹ Men Honghua, “Debate over American Grand Strategy after the Cold War and its Meaning,” in Hu Angang and Men Honghua, eds., *Jiedu Meiguo dazhanlue* [Decoding U.S. Grand Strategy] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 2003), p. 18.

¹² Lei Sihai, *The End of the Fifth Empire (Diwu diguo de zhongjie)* (Beijing: Shishi chubanshe, 2003).

¹³ Xin Benjian, “The Reemergence of the American Neoconservatives and the Bush Administration's ‘Neo-imperialist Grand Strategy’,” *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* [World Economics and International Politics] No. 10 (2003), p. 32.

International Relations argued in the summer 2003 issue of *International Survey* that the United States committed a strategic blunder by attacking Iraq, failing to match means and ends: “History repeatedly shows that military victories do not guarantee the realization of political objectives.” Iraq, in Zhou’s view, was a diplomatic defeat for the United States, leading to a decline in its soft power.¹⁴ Public intellectual Liu Xiaobiao goes further, asserting that “America’s sun is not bright.” With the protracted postwar occupation, “the real crisis of American civilization has begun.”¹⁵

Chinese analysts, in sum, are extremely worried about the capabilities and intentions of an emerging American empire. Many cope with their anxiety by denial, convincing themselves that American power preeminence cannot last, and that China’s sun will rise as America’s sets.

Between Balancing and Bandwagoning

What policy should China adopt toward the United States? While many Chinese have convinced themselves that U.S. power preeminence cannot last, they do grudgingly acknowledge the world system’s current unipolar nature. This view represents a dramatic shift from the early 1990s, when many Chinese held out hope for a multipolar international system. To that end, Beijing deployed a strategy of resistance to American power that included elements of *balancing*—policies such as alliances of the weak that seek to counter the dominant power. During 1990s summits with Russian and other world leaders, Chinese sought and often produced joint declarations of opposition to “hegemonism” (read, U.S. power) and unipolarity. But Sino-Russian and other nascent alliances never fully materialized, and President Putin’s decision to ally with the United States following 9/11 brought to an end this phase of Chinese diplomacy.

While some elements of resistance remain, Chinese strategy today has largely shifted away from balancing and towards *bandwagoning*—policies that seek to support the dominant power. Recognizing U.S. power preeminence—the *People’s Daily* even declared at the beginning of the Iraq War that the “American empire” was stepping up its fourth and final stage of seeking “global domination”¹⁶—Chinese have chosen to ally themselves with the United States against global terrorism and did not join France, Germany, and Russia in opposing the war. The Bush administration’s decision to exclude those countries from initial Iraqi reconstruction contracts shows that the costs of unsuccessful balancing

¹⁴ Zhou Guiyin, “The Iraq War and the Failure of American Grand Strategy,” *International Survey* [Guoji guancha] No. 5 (2003), pp. 16–23.

¹⁵ Liu Xiaobiao, “On the Second Anniversary of 9.11: The Rise and Fall of American Imperialism,” *Waitan huobao* [The Bund], Sept. 11, 2003, at <http://news.sina.com.cn>.

¹⁶ “American Empire Steps up Fourth Expansion,” *People’s Daily*, Mar. 11, 2003.

efforts can be high, which affirms China's decision to move away from overt balancing.

Despite this shift of strategy, China continues to pursue more limited strategies to curb U.S. power. These include *bargaining*, *binding*, and *buffering*. The United States may have unrivaled power today, but in a complex and interdependent world it still requires the support of other nations to achieve certain goals. The world system may be unipolar in the military domain, but it is multipolar in the economic realm, with the EU and Japan balancing U.S. economic power. And newly emergent transnational groups, such as terrorists, further undermine U.S. unipolarity. As Joseph Nye has noted, the paradox of America's power today is that while its military preeminence guarantees that nothing can be accomplished in the world without its participation, the complex interdependence of today's world ensures that the United States can accomplish very little alone, either.¹⁷ This situation allows the less powerful to *bargain* with the powerful. Bargaining frequently takes the form of logrolling, as when the United States agreed to add the East Turkestan Islamic Movement to the State Department list of terrorist organizations in exchange for China's support for the war on terror. This decision helped to legitimize Beijing's often brutal treatment of the Uygur minority in China's northwest Xinjiang Province. China also bargains with the more powerful United States through a divide-and-conquer strategy that takes advantage of transparent U.S. interest-group politics. For instance, during sensitive WTO negotiations in 1998, the U.S.-China Business Council served both its membership and China when it pressured the Clinton administration to accept a deal that Beijing wanted. Threatening to withhold cooperation is another source of bargaining leverage for China—one that China frequently uses in the UN Security Council.

China also seeks to *bind* American power by delimiting its exercise within international institutions. China has become an increasingly strong advocate of the UN—not just because its permanent membership in the UN Security Council gives it frequent bargaining leverage over the United States, but also because an active UN binds the unilateral exercise of American power. Chinese and American attitudes towards the UN have thus come a long way from the days of the Korean War, when the United States led a UN force against the Chinese. Today, it is China, not the United States, that appears to be the bigger UN advocate.

China has also become an ardent supporter of a new Asian regionalism. Initially wary of ASEAN and other regional fora that it viewed as efforts to balance or bind Chinese power in Asia, China has recently pushed hard for an active ASEAN+3 (the Southeast Asian nations plus China, Japan, and South Korea) that could *buffer* against American influence. At minimum, an independent Asian order would increase China's autonomy from U.S. influence: for example, more vibrant regional trade would reduce China's dependence on

¹⁷ Joseph Nye, *The Paradox of American Power* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

the U.S. market. Optimally, a Sino-centric Asia would increase China's leverage in dealings with the United States. Xu Jian of the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), a foreign ministry think tank, is blunt: "Increasing regionalism is an important way to restrain American hegemonism."¹⁸

These Chinese strategies to curb U.S. power ironically overlap considerably with the strategies that American liberals advocate to shape a rising China into a peaceful, status-quo power. "Engaging" China and promoting trade, legal reforms, and China's participation in international institutions, liberals argue, will increase the likelihood that China will democratize and emerge as a U.S. partner over the course of this century. Chinese analysts have a point when they maintain that for many American liberals, "engagement" is merely a means to the end of "containment." But it is clear that China plays the same game, seeking to constrain the exercise of American power through bargaining, binding, and buffering policies. For instance, just as the United States uses its bilateral alliances in Asia to constrain China, China uses its seat in the UN Security Council to constrain the United States. Both Washington and Beijing, in other words, frequently treat each other as giant Gullivers to be tied down by tiny Lilliputians.

"New Thinking" on Japan

The remarkable Chinese debate over the "new thinking" on Japan reveals both Chinese fears of U.S. hegemony and the limits of a Chinese strategy to buffer U.S. power through a new Asian regionalism. The debate was touched off by Ma Licheng's provocative article, "New Thinking on Relations with Japan," in the final 2002 issue of the influential *Strategy and Management* (Beijing).¹⁹ Ma, a well-known liberal, expressed shock at the pervasive anti-Japanese sentiment being expressed in Chinese communications on the Internet and argued that it was creating a backlash in Japan that was damaging to China's national interest. Ma's solution is simple: "We need the generosity of a great and victorious nation, and do not need to be excessively harsh with Japan." Arguing that "the apology question [from World War II] has been resolved," Ma urges both Chinese and Japanese to "overcome parochial views" and "look forward" in the bilateral relationship.²⁰ Chinese cyber-nationalists were furious. Internet chatrooms cursed Ma as a "traitor" for

¹⁸Xu Jian, "The Iraq War and the Great Trend of World Events," *Guoji wenti yanjiu* [International Studies] (Beijing) No. 4 (2003), p. 26.

¹⁹Later, in fall 2004, *Strategy and Management* was closed following the publication of a controversial article on North Korea. But embarrassing episodes such as the 2003 debate over the "new thinking" on Japan discussed here likely contributed to the journal's falling out of favor with the political elite.

²⁰Ma Licheng, "New Thinking on Relations with Japan," *Zhanlue yu guanli* [Strategy and Management], No. 6 (2002), p. 47.

being soft on Japan; he even received death threats.²¹ He has since taken early retirement from his job in Beijing and moved to Hong Kong.

Shi Yinhong, an advocate of Realpolitik at People's University in Beijing, bravely came to Ma's defense, arguing in a subsequent *Strategy and Management* article that *rapprochement* with Japan was indeed in China's interest. Unlike Ma, however, Shi views Sino-Japanese relations primarily from the perspective of geopolitics—the broader international balance of power. “It will be extremely beneficial to China,” Shi wrote, “if, through improving relations with Japan, China can improve its security environment and its diplomatic position.” Viewing U.S. power preeminence as “historically unprecedented,” Shi worries that the United States will utilize its hegemonic status to obstruct China's rise. He therefore advocates a cool, dispassionate realpolitik reminiscent of Henry Kissinger's. Just as Kissinger proposed that the United States seek rapprochement with China to balance against the Soviets in the early 1970s, Shi proposes that China seek rapprochement with Japan to balance against the United States today. This “diplomatic revolution,” he argues, would greatly benefit China.²² U.S. hegemony is so dangerous, in Shi's view, that Chinese must put aside their historical grievances and reconcile with Japan.

Like Ma before him, Shi quickly came under heavy and sustained attack. One of Shi's first and most ferocious critics was the *People's Daily's* Lin Zhibo, who ridiculed Shi's core argument that rapprochement with Japan could lead to a balancing alliance against the United States: “U.S.-Japan relations are like those between a master and a servant,” Lin asserted. “There is no way that Japan will improve Japan-China relations to counterbalance the United States.”²³ Pang Zhongying, a well-known political scientist, similarly argued in *World Economics and International Politics* (Beijing) that the geopolitics of the “new thinking” is misguided. “There is no way to insert a wedge between Japan and America,” Pang contended. The U.S.-Japan alliance has only strengthened under the Bush and Koizumi administrations, he noted, calling the idea of allying with Japan against America (*lianRi kangMei*) farfetched.²⁴

²¹ For instance, “Liufeng3000” wrote “Ma Licheng, don't let me see you, because if I do, I will kill you” on the public NetEase BBS (<http://bbs.netease.com>, link no longer active) on Sept. 27, 2003. Twelve netizens clicked “I agree”; none clicked “I disagree.” The CCP indirectly monitors NetEase and other Chinese electronic bulletin boards. These netizens cannot be dismissed as mere “puppets” of the Party; but the Party can be seen as allowing the expression of such views.

²² Shi Yinhong, “Sino-Japanese *Rapprochement* and the ‘Diplomatic Revolution,’” *Zhanlue yu guanli* [Strategy and Management], No. 2 (2003), pp. 72–74.

²³ Lin Zhibo, “Questioning the ‘New Thinking on Japan Policy,’” *KangRi zhanzheng yanjiu* [Journal of the War of Resistance Against Japan], No. 3 (2003), p. 216.

²⁴ Pang Zhongying, “Increasing Cooperation or Confrontation?” *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* [World Economics and International Politics], No. 9 (2003), pp. 16–17.

As if to underline the futility of seeking rapprochement with Japan to balance against the United States, summer/fall 2003 witnessed a series of popular anti-Japanese activities across China that brought Sino-Japanese relations to an alarming low. In June, Internet activists organized the first ever mainland Chinese boat trip to the contested Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands east of China and south of Japan. In July, popular nationalists organized a Web-based petition to deny Japan a Beijing-Shanghai high-speed rail link contract. In August, rather than celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the 1978 normalization of Sino-Japanese relations, Chinese and Japanese diplomats spent much of the month doing damage control after a mustard-gas incident in Qiqihar, in China's northeast, in which one Chinese died and dozens were injured. Over a million Chinese "netizens" then added their names to a second petition demanding that Japan resolve the issue of chemical weapons left from the war. In September, the revelation of a sex orgy involving hundreds of Japanese businessmen and Chinese prostitutes in the southeast city of Zhu Hai sparked another flurry of anti-Japanese invective on the Internet. And in October, a risqué skit by three Japanese students and one of their Japanese teachers at Northwestern University in Xian led to a 7,000-person strong demonstration on campus that included the burning of a Japanese flag. The east, northeast, southeast, and northwest: anti-Japanese protests seemed to be everywhere.

Sino-Japanese acrimony thus presents a real check on the development of an Asian regionalism that could buffer U.S. power. Zhang Yunling, director of the CASS Institute for Asia-Pacific Studies, openly acknowledges that big differences in economic structure, political mistrust, and security concerns in northeast Asia are impeding the development of an Asian regionalism. "China and Japan are far from close partners," Zhang concedes, preventing regional cooperation from taking a fast track.²⁵

China and the Hegemon

How will the United States exercise its unprecedented power? Whether it chooses liberal hegemony, emphasizing multilateralism and persuasive forms of power, or imperial hegemony, favoring unilateralism and more coercive forms of power, will have a great impact on China and the other great powers as they formulate their policies toward the United States.

But U.S. words and actions alone will not directly determine foreign responses. Perceptions of the nature and purpose of U.S. power will be every bit as important as U.S. policies themselves in shaping foreign strategies. As George W. Bush stated during his first presidential campaign, "Our nation

²⁵ Zhang Yunling, *East Asian Cooperation: Progress and Future* (Beijing: World Affairs Press, 2003), p. 10.

stands alone right now in the world in terms of power. And that's why we've got to be humble. . . . If we're an arrogant nation, they'll view us that way, but if we're a humble nation, they'll respect us."²⁶

Five years later, Chinese analysts are skeptical. They have paid close attention to the Bush administration's foreign policy rhetoric and behavior since 9/11 and do not see U.S. hegemony as necessarily benign. Chinese analysts worry that many in the Bush administration view the world in good vs. evil terms—and place China in the latter camp. In the analysts' view, neocons display a pronounced disregard for international laws and institutions. The American Enterprise Institute's David Frum and Richard Perle, for example, argued in 2004 that “the United Nations is more likely to restrain us than help us in our war against terrorism.”²⁷ In China, President Bush's choice of Condoleezza Rice to succeed Colin Powell as secretary of state was not encouraging, either. In a 2000 *Foreign Affairs* article, Rice stated that “China is not a ‘status-quo’ power but one that would like to alter Asia's balance of power in its own favor. . . . The security problem is obvious. China will do what it can to enhance its position, whether by stealing nuclear secrets or by trying to intimidate Taiwan.”²⁸ And during her January 2005 confirmation hearings, she framed the U.S.-China relationship in moral terms—as involving “considerable differences about values.”²⁹

Bush's own words have also generated apprehension. Bush's post-9/11 ultimatum to the world that “you're either with us or against us” in the war on terror was met with great concern by many Chinese analysts, who see China's interests as requiring independence. In Chinese eyes, Bush's “axis of evil” formulation similarly revealed a Bush administration propensity to view international affairs as a Manichean contest. Given that China is not a Christian nation, many Chinese fear that the Bush administration will never view godless China as fundamentally on the side of the good. Contrary to Bush's 2000 profession of humility, Chinese analysts overwhelmingly see the Bush administration's foreign policy as arrogant, not humble. Indeed, their greatest fear is that once the situation in Iraq stabilizes (or responsibility for its problems can be passed off to its new government), the Bush administration will turn its attention to China, perhaps expanding the axis of evil to include it.

On the Taiwan issue, for example, Bush's rebuke of Chen Shui-bian, while welcome, was widely seen by Chinese observers as tactical, arising from a need to stabilize East Asia while the United States is engaged in the Middle East. Bush's true feelings on the issue, Chinese analysts maintain, were

²⁶ “The Second Presidential Debate,” Oct. 11, 2000, at www.pbs.org.

²⁷ David Frum and Richard Perle, “The Big Test for the Contenders,” *New York Times*, Jan. 21, 2004.

²⁸ Condoleezza Rice, “Promoting the National Interest,” *Foreign Affairs*, Jan./Feb. 2000.

²⁹ “Confirmation Hearing of Condoleezza Rice,” *New York Times*, Jan. 18, 2005.

revealed in his 2001 declaration that he would do “whatever it takes” to defend Taiwan. Similarly, when Bush called the Republic of China the “Republic of Taiwan” in April 2002, Chinese interpreted it not as a careless mistake, but as a Freudian slip revealing Bush’s desire for an independent and democratic Taiwan. More recently, in his second inaugural address in 2005, Bush stated, “The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world.” Chinese analysts fear that China is the unstated object of Bush’s “freedom vs. tyranny” vision of world politics.

Americans need to understand these Chinese fears and find ways to calm them. While Americans naturally view their country’s hegemony as benign, they must recognize that their country’s unprecedented military power is inherently threatening to the rest of the world. Even traditional allies like France and Germany have been alarmed by the recent unilateral exercise of U.S. military power. China has far more reason to be concerned. While many Americans may view the French and Germans as annoyances, they view China very differently, as a latent threat. Although China does not even remotely approach power parity with the United States, many Americans perceive China as a viable challenger to America and believe that the burden is on China to prove that it is a satisfied, status-quo power. American observers’ talk of “China’s rise” and a “China threat” may appeal to Chinese pride, but it also generates profound concerns in China about whether the United States will follow the historic pattern of dominant but declining powers’ initiating preventive wars against rising challengers. While these may appear from an American perspective to be the best of times in U.S.-China relations, therefore, there is little doubt that Chinese today are increasingly wary of the hegemon.

