

CHINA THREAT—A VIEW FROM INDIA

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The Cold War has been won. America is the only superpower left. It is therefore proclaimed that history has ended.

Many Americans feel that it is time to sit back, relax and enjoy the richly deserved peace dividend.

The view from India (where I am a visiting Fulbright Scholar at Pondicherry University, 1999) looks very different. History has not ended. The new threat to security emerges from a resurgent China. Many Indians see China as an expansionist Asian power rapidly filling the vacuum created by the Soviet collapse. China is rapidly modernizing its armed forces. It has bought advanced weapons from the former Soviet Union. It has developed long-range missiles capable of hitting targets not only within Asia but also in distant United States. And, if reports of Chinese espionage (1999) of American nuclear facilities are to be believed, China has managed to miniaturize its nuclear arsenal. China now has the technical ability to fit multiple nuclear warheads onto a single missile tip.

China is perceived here as an exporter of dangerous arms around the globe. It has shipped sophisticated armaments to Pakistan, Iran and Libya. It is also a proliferator of nuclear technology. The Pakistani testing of nuclear bombs in May 1998 was aided by the Chinese know-how; the Pakistani bomb is modeled after a Chinese device. Pakistan is also the beneficiary of Chinese missile technology. India has fought three wars with Pakistan; it does not look kindly to Chinese arming of Pakistan with long-range missiles. The arms race in the Indian subcontinent is a direct result of the Chinese actions to extend its sphere of influence in South Asia.

China's assertion of sovereignty over the South China Sea is a direct threat to Taiwan and to its continued independence. China insists that Taiwan is a renegade province of Greater China. It ignores the fact that Taiwan has evolved into a separate and distinct cultural and political entity over the past fifty years. The crisis in Taiwan will come. It is only a matter of time.

China's repression of Tibet's Buddhist population is a well-documented fact. American political leaders are noteworthy only for their silence on the issue. Hollywood film stars such as Richard Gere have shown a deeper understanding of the plight of the Tibetan Buddhist minority and have publicized their cause. The American political establishment is silent on this issue. It does not wish to jeopardize growing economic ties with China and the benefits it accrues to big business.

China also continues to deal harshly with pro-democracy students opposed to the Communist dictatorship. The communist regime expresses no remorse for the deaths of students who perished in the Tienanmen Square massacre in 1989.

The view in India is that China will emerge as the Asian superpower in the next decade or two. India has reasons to fear. It fought an unsuccessful war with China in 1962. China continues to occupy large portions of Indian territory in the region of Kashmir and in the Northeast border of India near the state of Assam.

Instead of seeing the Chinese threat for what it is, the American Administration wants to enter into "a strategic partnership" with Beijing. The Administration hopes that a policy of engagement with China will lead to a kinder, gentler communist regime in Beijing. This is expected to lead to security for Taiwan, autonomy for Tibet, good neighborliness with India, and the right of free speech for pro-democracy students in China.

History does not bear out such optimism. Expansionist regimes cannot be sweet-talked into mending their ways. Prime Minister Chamberlain's appeasement of Hitler failed. George F. Kennan's policy of containment of the Soviet Union succeeded. The threat that China poses cannot be wished away. It will only get worse.

The United States will do well to support those Asian countries that can counterbalance the growing military power of China. India, Japan and Taiwan are such nations. The United States relations with India have not always been the friendliest. A greater Indo-American strategic partnership is called for. India is a pluralistic democracy. At times it is fractious, much like the political process in the U.S. India has a large pool of technically trained people. With a population nearing 1 billion, it is also a huge market

for the sale of American goods. India deserves greater recognition in the corridors of American power.

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