

## Archived Content

Information identified as archived on the Web is for reference, research or record-keeping purposes. It has not been altered or updated after the date of archiving. Web pages that are archived on the Web are not subject to the Government of Canada Web Standards.

As per the [Communications Policy of the Government of Canada](#), you can request alternate formats on the "[Contact Us](#)" page.

## Information archivée dans le Web

Information archivée dans le Web à des fins de consultation, de recherche ou de tenue de documents. Cette dernière n'a aucunement été modifiée ni mise à jour depuis sa date de mise en archive. Les pages archivées dans le Web ne sont pas assujetties aux normes qui s'appliquent aux sites Web du gouvernement du Canada.

Conformément à la [Politique de communication du gouvernement du Canada](#), vous pouvez demander de recevoir cette information dans tout autre format de rechange à la page « [Contactez-nous](#) ».

CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE / COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES  
CSC 29 / CCEM 29

EXERCISE/EXERCICE NEW HORIZONS

**Chinese Imperialism: American fear or Asian fact?**

By /par Lieutenant Colonel Russell Mann

*This paper was written by a student attending the Canadian Forces College in fulfilment of one of the requirements of the Course of Studies. The paper is a scholastic document, and thus contains facts and opinions which the author alone considered appropriate and correct for the subject. It does not necessarily reflect the policy or the opinion of any agency, including the Government of Canada and the Canadian Department of National Defence. This paper may not be released, quoted or copied except with the express permission of the Canadian Department of National Defence.*

*La présente étude a été rédigée par un stagiaire du Collège des Forces canadiennes pour satisfaire à l'une des exigences du cours. L'étude est un document qui se rapporte au cours et contient donc des faits et des opinions que seul l'auteur considère appropriés et convenables au sujet. Elle ne reflète pas nécessairement la politique ou l'opinion d'un organisme quelconque, y compris le gouvernement du Canada et le ministère de la Défense nationale du Canada. Il est défendu de diffuser, de citer ou de reproduire cette étude sans la permission expresse du ministère de la Défense nationale.*

Do not allow other men to snatch away your awesomeness... Those that oppose you, break with force. If you respect the people and are decisive, then all under Heaven will be peaceful and submissive.”<sup>1</sup>

T'ai Kung to King Wen  
*T'ai Kung's Six Secret Teachings*

In *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China*, Ralph Sawyer translates a compilation of great works from Imperial China. *T'ai Kung's Six Secret Teachings* is reputed to have preserved some of the oldest Chinese military thought – a rather incredible fact considering Chinese dynastic history dates to 2852 B.C.<sup>2</sup> The quotation above reveals two key themes that define the Chinese national character and view of the world which permeate this essay. The first theme suggests that China has a rightful place as the great power in Asia. T'ai Kung's words describe both the King and the state and this self-perception of 'awesomeness' continues to be an integral part of the Chinese psyche. Second, although Confucianism rejects military violence, the notion of defeating those who stand in the way of the goals of the state has enjoyed consistent reinforcement in the Chinese state, regardless of philosophy.<sup>3</sup> The assertion of this awesome nation upon its adversaries to ensure its rightful place in the world should be of growing interest

---

<sup>1</sup> Ralph D. Sawyer and Mei-chün Sawyer, *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China* (Boulder, Westview Press, 1993), 47.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. xix and 23. The work dates from the Warring States period 403 B.C. to 221 B.C. The author outlines Imperial China from the period of the Legendary Sage Emperors 2852 B.C. – 2255 B.C. through the Ch'ing or Manchu dynasty 1644 – 1911. It is interesting to note that Imperial China held a run of almost five thousand years and, in contrast, had less than one hundred years of communist rule. The recent move towards a more 'open' society has barely registered on the timescale from the Chinese historical context. The translator to *T'ai Kung's Six Secret Teachings* notes the debate over the exact date of this work and relates the reasons for the conclusion that this work preserves some of the oldest Chinese military thought.

<sup>3</sup> Modern opponents of the Chinese state included the Soviet Union before the collapse of the wall and more recently, the United States, which will be discussed further in this essay.

to anyone who is concerned with international relations and their impact on balance of power and military affairs.

As this new century begins to unfold, a renewed debate has sprung up regarding the nature of relations between states and cultures. Samuel Huntington's controversial work, *Clash of Civilisations*, was a departure from classical balance of power theory that dominated eighteenth and nineteenth century European politics. Huntington's view of a clash between the west and the rest can also be described in balance of power terms that would suggest the United States' emergence from the Cold War as the sole superpower will be challenged by other great powers that will unite to counter-balance the hegemonic position of the United States. The issue of interest is not so much whether the United States must confront a civilization or a band of states; where China is concerned it is both the largest Asian state and the largest "power"<sup>4</sup> in the Asian civilization. All nations must take notice of China and its regional and global posture.

This massive force should be of concern to every nation, but is of particular interest to Canada because immigration to Canada in the past three decades has transformed the cultural make-up of our nation<sup>5</sup> and has placed Asia, with China as its centrepiece, in the forefront of our future: "Asia is not merely a hyphenated part of the

---

<sup>4</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and The Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 218.

<sup>5</sup> Canada's ethnocultural portrait: The changing mosaic (Ottawa, Statistics Canada, 2002) [<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/analytic/companion/etoimm/canada.cfm>], 12 April 2003. It is interesting to note that, prior to 1970, Hong Kong and China did not appear in the top eight nations as country of origin for immigrants to Canada. In the 1970's both appear at the bottom of the list and represented less than 10 percent of the immigrants to Canada. By the 1980's Hong Kong and China combined made up 13 percent of all immigrants to Canada and in the 1990's The People's Republic of China held the number one spot, while total immigrants rose, so did the portion that were of Chinese ethnic origin. China now accounts for more than seventeen percent of all immigrants in the period 1901 – 2001, when combined with Hong Kong immigrants during the same period. The United Kingdom led all immigrants to Canada through 1961.

Canadian identity, but has emerged as an essential element in Canada's social, political and economic life."<sup>6</sup> As part of the West, Canadians must decide whether to fear a more influential and assertive China or welcome this Asian fact.

Having established that China's international relations merit serious reflection by the world in general, and Canada in particular, it becomes important to look at the past and project into the future with whatever knowledge can be gleaned from historical perspective and a reasoned assessment of present indicators for future behaviour. In the new world order emerging in the twenty-first century, China demonstrates a renewed confidence in exerting its will in Asia that will cause increased friction, perhaps even conflict, with the United States. Modern Chinese imperialism need not be a western fear, but is already becoming an Asian fact. This statement has enormous implications for Canada and for international relations all over the world and will be shown to be the only path that China can take in the twenty-first century.

History suggests a confrontational future for China and a sampling of historical trends will be used to demonstrate China's propensity to break American containment in Asia in general and South-East Asia in particular. Chinese international relations will be examined to provide political, economic and social indicators of their most probable future courses regarding relations with the United States. Chinese military capabilities will be reviewed to provide the reader with a sense of force available to break its opponent in Asia. Three key arguments will be presented to support the case for Chinese

---

<sup>6</sup> David B. Dewitt, *Perspectives on Asian Peace and Security in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Toronto, Canadian Consortium on Asia Pacific Security, 2002), 9. The author also highlights that the vast majority of new citizens are Asian, our second largest paper in circulation in western Canada is in written Mandarin and Canada-Asia trade flow is now second only to Canada-United States trade.

assertion in Asia: that China views itself as the Asian leader; that the United States is conducting a program of engagement in Asia that is viewed by China as a form of containment; and that several factors are coalescing that will cause China to break out of its perceived containment, most notably its growing need for oil. A look back at Chinese imperial history could occupy much more space than is available for this discussion. However, a sense of scale and proportion can be established and some recent historical examples found to describe Chinese imperialistic tendencies and demonstrate how they will impact China's affairs with the United States.

Authors frequently use the term 'Imperial China' to describe the period stretching from 2852 B.C. to 1911 A.D.<sup>7</sup> Imperialism is defined as the "policy of dominating other nations by acquiring dependencies."<sup>8</sup> Although history shows us that China has developed a long tradition of imperialistic dynasty, in the past century Beijing has reshaped imperialism to suit its needs. China does not want to impose its way, nor to conquer by invasion, other Asian countries. Rather, it aims "to ensure that no country in the region will act without first taking China's interests into prime consideration."<sup>9</sup>

Recent examples where this consideration straddled the line between outright military acquisition and primacy of consideration include the return of Hong Kong and then Macau to Chinese rule in the 1990's.<sup>10</sup> Countries such as Singapore and Myanmar fall perilously close to the Chinese ideal of prime consideration. There is, then, some

---

<sup>7</sup> Ralph D. Sawyer and Mei-chün Sawyer, The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China (Boulder, Westview Press, 1993), xix. The term Chinese Dynastic Rule has also been used in lieu of Imperial China.

<sup>8</sup> The Pocket Oxford Dictionary (New York, Oxford University Press Inc., 1996), 440.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Bernstein and Ross H. Munro, The Coming Conflict with China (New York, Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1997), 11 and 18.

recent historical evidence to suggest regional imperialism, although of a subtle nature, rather than the more traditional military acquisition, with one notable exception: Taiwan. Taiwan remains non-negotiable from a Chinese perspective, although the United States seems equally compelled to adopt a contrary point of view and to put military arms in place to ensure its position is clearly understood.<sup>11</sup> This keeps Taiwan on the list of possible military re-occupations by China and places Taiwan squarely at the centre of the most likely future conflict between the United States and China.<sup>12</sup>

Another factor tied to China's history and bound to its future is its relationship with Central Asia. Beijing is already busy reforging a modern day "Silk Road"<sup>13</sup> centred on the flow of consumer goods from China to Central Asia and the flow of oil from Central Asia to China. The issue of oil will be revisited later in this essay.

Despite the policies of engagement now pursued by China, East Asia, and the United States as they face their mutual future, there is little confidence within the region that a future confrontation can be avoided without some sort of compromise by China. The areas of compromise are unfortunately in those realms most sensitive to China's tragic modern history and strategic culture.<sup>14</sup>

China's culture is imprinted in its national view of the world. It is the longest running, continuous civilization in the world today and for most of that time it has been one of the

---

<sup>10</sup> Richard Bernstein and Ross H. Munro, The Coming Conflict with China (New York, Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1997), 5.

<sup>11</sup> Frank Carlucci, Robert Hunter, and Zalmay Khalilzad, Taking Charge: A Bipartisan Report to the President-Elect on Foreign Policy and National Security (Virginia, RAND, 2001), 10. according to the report, the United States sees the need to balance its forces against those who are not currently allies and they include China as not allied and East Asia as a critical region where balancing must occur.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 72. The authors suggest further that China could occupy Taiwan and will also likely re-assert regional hegemony in East Asia – influence and power projection that could look a lot like imperialism.

<sup>13</sup> Roy Allison and Lena Johnson, Central Asian Security: The New International Context (Washington, D.C., Brookings Institution Press, 2001), 153.

<sup>14</sup> Samuel S. Kim, China and the World: Chinese Foreign Policy Faces the new Millennium (Colorado, Westview Press, 1998), 189.

major players. It sees no reason why this should change.<sup>15</sup> This presents obvious challenges in its relations with the rest of the world.

“China is too big to be ignored, too old to be slighted, too weak to be appeased, and too ambitious to be taken for granted.”<sup>16</sup> Perhaps this one phrase sums up Chinese international relations in terms of the factors that shape how Beijing deals with the world. Dr. Brzezinski goes on to explain that China is already a major regional player and the sheer size of the nation has an effect on the entire region.<sup>17</sup> As a civilization in its own right, China has a sense of its place in the region and the world and it wants to provide a counter-balance to the United States but is “not strong enough to contest at this time either America’s global primacy or its preponderance in the far Eastern region.”<sup>18</sup> This fact has not succeeded in curbing China’s “growing and even arrogant self-confidence.”<sup>19</sup> Western and regional Asian fear is perpetuated by the size and weight of dealings with China, while China feels its ability to lead the region is hampered by the United States’ regional containment of Chinese ambitions. This duality has yet to be reconciled in China’s international relations:

China’s image as an emerging great power whose dynamic economy is supporting an ever-increasing military capability... contrasts sharply with Beijing’s perception of China as a weak power with serious domestic development problems demanding the highest priority in resource allocation.”<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Scobell, The Rise of China: Security Implications (United States Army War College, 2001), 1.

<sup>16</sup> Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, The geostrategic Triad: Living with China, Europe and Russia (Washington, D.C., The CSIS Press, 2001), 3.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Samuel S. Kim, China and the World: Chinese Foreign Policy Faces the new Millennium (Colorado, Westview Press, 1998), 172.



Unlike the Cold War Soviet Union that was blessed with a powerful armed forces but cursed with a weak economy, China has opted to build a strong economy, largely in the past decade, through a policy of “opening up.”<sup>21</sup> China now has the world’s second largest Gross Domestic Product<sup>22</sup> and this dramatic economic wealth and power has been used to modernize and grow its armed forces.<sup>23</sup>

The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) has undergone a shift from organizing and equipping based on a protracted war of attrition to operations based on speed, mobility, and lethality.<sup>24</sup> Much as occurred in the West, “quality and readiness had to replace sheer numbers.”<sup>25</sup> The result was that a leaner, meaner PLA began to emerge, along with a new system of recruiting, promotion, and professional military education with the aim of building “a younger, better-educated officer corps, competent in the demands of modern, combined arms, joint service warfare.”<sup>26</sup>

The PLA Navy has an offshore-capable navy and is developing a ‘blue water’ navy, with an initial operating capability to be established no later than 2050. This ambitious goal will require fleet replenishment ships, improved amphibious warfare capabilities and naval aviation capability. It will also require one or more aircraft carriers and China has learned through two Gulf Wars, a Balkan War and a war on terrorism in

---

<sup>21</sup> Roy Allison and Lena Johnson, Central Asian Security: The New International Context (Washington, D.C., Brookings Institution Press, 2001), 152.

<sup>22</sup> CIA World Factbook 2002 [<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/Factbook/geos/ch.html>] 21 November 2002.

<sup>23</sup> See Annual report on the military power of the People’s Republic of China. (Washington, United States Government, 2002) for discussion of China military build up and the Russian factor. As is clear throughout the document, Russian arms sales to the People’s Republic of China permeate all service components and include key force multipliers such as air-to-air refuelling.

<sup>24</sup> Samuel S. Kim, China and the World: Chinese Foreign Policy Faces the new Millennium (Colorado, Westview Press, 1998), 179.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 179.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 179.

Afghanistan that “carriers are synonymous with global power status”.<sup>27</sup> The *Varyag* (ex-Riga) has found its way into China and, although there is much speculation about whether it will come out of military shipyards converted to a floating casino or an integral part of the PLA Navy’s East Sea Fleet, there is no doubt that it is helping expand the database of carriers for China to use for its own construction program. It is only a question of how quickly the capability will manifest itself in a military context.<sup>28</sup> However, where East Asian navies are concerned, the regional benchmark belongs to the Japanese Maritime Self Defence Force (JMSDF) as the region’s largest navy (63 major surface combatants, 17 subsurface vessels and the best technology). The JMSDF operates an air arm that deploys cutting edge anti-sub and anti-ship warfare weapons in 100 aircraft and 99 armed helicopters.<sup>29</sup> China can and does view the JMSDF along with the United States Navy (USN) to present a severe constraint on its regional ambitions, particularly with respect to the protection of water passage for its energy imports. Beijing has resorted to a bigger stick to offset this balance of power issue.

China’s Nuclear policy in the 1990’s sought “a far larger number of increasingly accurate strategic weapons”<sup>30</sup> including theater nuclear weapons (180) and additional Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM) and Intermediate Range missiles (IRBM). In seeking to modernize in 1991, an old enemy provided the golden opportunity to gain technology through cooperation with Moscow.<sup>31</sup> This cooperation is consistent with

---

<sup>27</sup> Richard Fisher, Jr., *China’s Carrier of Chance* (Washington, The Jamestown Foundation, 2002), 3.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 1. The *Kyiv*, sister ship to the *Varyag*, is already working as a casino for China’s entertainment industry and the smaller *Minsk* was converted in China as a floating museum. All three contribute to the China knowledgebase required to build its own carrier fleet.

<sup>29</sup> Samuel S. Kim, *China and the World: Chinese Foreign Policy Faces the new Millennium* (Colorado, Westview Press, 1998), 185.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 180.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 181.

mutual needs and a shared desire to balance United States hegemony.<sup>32</sup> While Russia gained hard currency, China gained a large measure of the technology it desires, a fact that makes many in South-East Asia nervous. “Beijing understands that within the region China is perceived as the most likely power to disturb the peace in the coming century.”<sup>33</sup> Compounding this regional paranoia is the United States view highlighted by the Director of Defense Intelligence Agency’s testimony before the U.S. Congress in 1997: “China is one of the few powers with the potential – political, economic and military – to emerge as a large-scale military threat to U.S. interests within the next 10 – 20 years.”<sup>34</sup> This is exactly what China would like to accomplish on the path to regaining regional leadership and world power status.

China seeks to re-establish itself as the Asian leader and has enjoyed success in inner Asia. An expanding Chinese sphere of influence seems as inexorable as the changing seasons. While it modernizes and grows its military, it seeks to establish leadership in much the same way that the United States has pursued a policy of regional engagement. It sits as a permanent member to the United Nations Security Council and uses its veto power to establish positions that counter-balance those of the United States, particularly where its interests are concerned. In States in condemning Al Qaeda and lent its support to the war on terrorism, it has been steadfast in its refusal to e

---

<sup>32</sup> Andrew Scobell, The Rise of China: Security Implications (United States Army War College, T001), 3.

<sup>33</sup> Samuel S. Kim, China and the World: Chinese Foreign Policy Faces the new Millennium (Colorado Westview Press, 1998), 178.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 188.

culture impels Beijing to reject an international system dominated by western states such as the United States<sup>35</sup> and to seek new models that favour China.

China used 1997 agreements with Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as a “brand new model” for regional security in contrast to the bilaterals of the United States, but most South East Asian nations want the U.S. to stick around as a hedge against growing Chinese military power.<sup>36</sup> The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) engages China in security dialogue through the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). “None [of the members of ARF] see any imminent military threat from China, all see the intervening years - a decade or more – before Beijing’s armed forces have the capability to sustain military operations far from China’s mainland as a period they can use to alleviate Beijing’s potentially aggressive intentions.”<sup>37</sup> The clock is ticking for ASEAN while China’s economic and military strength continue to build. Beijing may one day lead ASEAN, but it has not yet come to dominate this forum. It has enjoyed more success in other areas.

In East Asia, Beijing seeks what it has achieved in inner Asia: the status and consequent influence of a principal rule-maker in determining the region’s post-Cold War security architecture.”<sup>38</sup> A good leader is also a good neighbour and in this regard Sino-Indian relations have been normalized and a Chinese presidential visit to New Delhi in 1996 culminated a series of confidence building measures (CBM).<sup>39</sup> China also maintains

---

<sup>35</sup> Samuel S. Kim, China and the World: Chinese Foreign Policy Faces the new Millennium (Colorado, Westview Press, 1998), 188.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 187.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 177.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 188.

<sup>39</sup> Roy Allison and Lena Johnson, Central Asian Security: The New International Context (Washington, D.C., Brookings Institution Press, 2001),. 175.

a paternal relationship with Pakistan and at a Stanford University Conference in Palo Alto, California, January 4-5, 2002, the Conference felt that “China will likely maintain its long-standing relationship with Pakistan. Pakistan is weak and values support from China, while China values having a friendly [and pliable] neighbour.”<sup>40</sup> It is perhaps this notion of China as a friendly neighbour that has been the most perplexing challenge to the United States’ ability to dominate the Asian region. The friendly ‘veneer’ masks a somewhat more sinister Chinese agenda that is the real cause for American concern.

“[As for the United States] for a relatively long time it will be absolutely necessary that we quietly nurse our sense of vengeance... We must conceal our abilities and bide our time.”<sup>41</sup> A transformation in the relationship between the United States and China occurred in the 1990’s:

Beijing’s perception that its relationship with Washington had been transformed from Cold War cooperation to post-Cold War contention was confirmed in the fall of 1992 when the United States sold 150 F-16 [aircraft] to Taiwan. Selling such a large number of advanced fighters was viewed as a breach of the 1982 Sino-American agreement limiting U.S. arms sales to Taiwan and as a signal of Washington’s intent to use its new status in the world to seek ‘hegemony’ through ‘power politics’.<sup>42</sup>

Partly in response to China’s recent sabre-rattling approach to United States engagement in Asia, the United States seeks to prevent the spread of Islamic radicalism, to contain Russia and to contain China.<sup>43</sup> There are generally three key flashpoints that arise in any discussion of American containment of China: the Taiwan Strait, the Korean Peninsula

---

<sup>40</sup> Debra R. Little, The South Asia 2020: Future Strategic Balance and Alliances (United States Army War College, 2002), 4.

<sup>41</sup> Richard Bernstein and Ross H. Munro, The Coming Conflict with China (New York, Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1997), 3.

<sup>42</sup> Roy Allison and Lena Johnson, Central Asian Security: The New International Context (Washington, D.C., Brookings Institution Press, 2001), 173.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* 166.

and the South China Sea. It is the Taiwan Strait that “is the most likely scenario for a direct confrontation between the United States and China.”<sup>44</sup> Relations between U.S. and China further deteriorated in 1995 - 1996 and China views the United States as continuing to exercise sole power status in Taiwan; the 1996 dispatch of 2 carrier battle groups into the Taiwan area drove this fact home and served to reinforce the Chinese perception of United States hegemony in the Asian region.<sup>45</sup> “Taiwan and the South China Sea represent extremely intense issues of sovereignty for China [and] Beijing does face a complex security infrastructure embracing all the major states of East Asia.”<sup>46</sup> All of these flashpoints are seen to varying degrees to be manageable, including Taiwan. What is less certain is the impact of oil on relations between the United States and China.

China has fostered a Central Asian connection and has pipeline agreements that continue to bring energy into western China. In contrast, until quite recently, the United States viewed Turkey as its best partner for engagement in the Central Asian region. It looks to establish pipelines that flow from the region to Turkey not China.<sup>47</sup> It is here that the real flashpoint could undermine United States hegemony and force a Chinese breakout from its traditional ‘stay at home’ approach to politics and military influence. As the United States looks to the energy of the Central Asian region the key issue often discussed but seldom raised to the level of public consciousness, where China is concerned, is the fact that “...it is through energy resources that the United States usually

---

<sup>44</sup> Andrew Scobell, The Rise of China: Security Implications (United States Army War College, 2001), 3.

<sup>45</sup> Roy Allison and Lena Johnson, Central Asian Security: The New International Context (Washington, D.C., Brookings Institution Press, 2001), 174.

<sup>46</sup> Roy Allison and Lena Johnson, Central Asian Security: The New International Context (Washington, D.C., Brookings Institution Press, 2001), 175.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 167. The flow to Turkey would be from Central Asian states to Azerbaijan, then Turkey.

attempts to control the world.”<sup>48</sup> Clearly China resents the United States containment policies in the Asian region. In this century energy issues may be more important to China than Taipei’s submission to Beijing.<sup>49</sup>

Whether it is about safe passage through the South China Seas, the subservience of Taiwan or secure energy sources, a comprehensive assessment of China’s external interests should consider both capability and intent.<sup>50</sup> Observers note that “China... views the United States as the single most important barrier to be overcome as it seeks its rightful place in the world.”<sup>51</sup> To counter this perceived threat, China is developing the capability and demonstrating its intent to use it. As reported to the United States Congress last year, “Beijing’s military training exercises increasingly focus on the United States as an adversary.”<sup>52</sup> Still, it is difficult to find evidence today that would confirm a capability that is ready to be deployed in force against America. To understand the true nature of China’s imperialist tendencies, one must look ahead and remember the past that frames the sense of time for a nation such as China. America the nation is less than three hundred years old and has a habit of looking, at best, ten to twenty years ahead. China sees much farther into the twenty first century. China had noted American containment of its goals and ambitions but, as it entered the twenty-first century, “Beijing has made it clear that [it is] today more secure from major external threats than at any time since the early nineteenth century.”<sup>53</sup> This new confidence is driven by several factors that lead it

---

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 173.

<sup>49</sup> Taipei is the capital of Taiwan.

<sup>50</sup> Andrew Scobell, The Rise of China: Security Implications (United States Army War College, 2001), 2.

<sup>51</sup> Samuel S. Kim, China and the World: Chinese Foreign Policy Faces the new Millennium (Colorado, Westview Press, 1998), 178.

<sup>52</sup> Annual report on the military power of the People’s Republic of China (Washington, 2002), 1.

<sup>53</sup> Samuel S. Kim, China and the World: Chinese Foreign Policy Faces the new Millennium (Colorado, Westview Press, 1998), 166.

to conclude that it will soon (in Chinese terms - this century) be able to break out of the American containment of the late twentieth century. What factors will cause China to expand its borders?

The traditional scenario would involve the military re-occupation of Taiwan. What most analysts seem to miss is that Taiwan is not a new issue and while the United States provides some arms support to Taiwan, it is careful not to go so far that China would intervene militarily. China, on the other hand, has seen that Taiwan for the moment continues to acknowledge its link to China and a situation has evolved, not unlike the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, where a balance has occurred. The United States will not abandon its Taiwan partner in the Pacific, but neither will China. A similar standoff has occurred in Korea for more than fifty years. A far more practical and dangerous scenario has a direct link to the opening quotation that suggested “respect for the people” could bring peace and submission to the nation.<sup>54</sup> China wants peace and submission but has struggled with internal strife and social upheaval during a period of rapid economic development that could spawn an entirely different volume of material. One of the most pressing issues to ensure the stability of the nation looms large, however, and that is national energy consumption.

Dr. Dewitt notes the results of a study at the Economic Research Institute for Northeast Asia: “The growing consumption of energy in Asia will be among the leading factors affecting global energy demand from 2000 to 2020.”<sup>55</sup> China became a net energy

---

<sup>54</sup> Ralph D. Sawyer and Mei-chün Sawyer, The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China (Boulder, Westview Press, 1993), 47.

<sup>55</sup> Dewitt, David B. Perspectives on Asian Peace and Security in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Toronto: Canadian Consortium on Asia Pacific Security, 2002.



importer in 1993 and annual crude imports in 2002 were up more than 15 percent over the previous year.<sup>56</sup> China's energy needs are expected to double by 2010 and double again by 2020.<sup>57</sup> This will put additional pressures on its relations with Central Asia and on the security of its sea lanes of communication (South China Sea) with oil producing nations:

As China's economy grows and the country becomes more of a maritime power with increasing reliance on imported oil, Beijing may become more assertive in protecting the supply of oil. Along with this growth will be greater potential to threaten its neighbours. With the exception of Taiwan and the South China Sea, China does not seem to be focussed on outright expansion. However, it does seem eager to cultivate patron-client relationships – reminiscent of imperial China's tributary system – with a number of states including North Korea, Burma (Myanmar), and Pakistan.<sup>58</sup>

It is the notion of tributary states and the need for oil that will finally push China to break out of what it sees as United States' containment within the region. Central Asian oil and oil transport routes through the South China Seas present the key flashpoints, particularly in light of recent incursions by the United States into Afghanistan, a nation bordering China, and Iraq, a nation with plenty of oil and bilateral agreements with China.<sup>59</sup> This only serves to reinforce what Chinese energy security analysts view to be “a competition with the United States for Middle Eastern oil.”<sup>60</sup> China's energy and sovereignty concerns first attempt to avoid direct confrontation with the United States.

---

<sup>56</sup> Zhou Yonggang, Gulf crisis challenges China's oil strategy. (Sinofile Information Services, 18 Feb 2003), [[http://www.sinopolis.com/Archives/TOPSTORY/ts\\_030227\\_01.htm](http://www.sinopolis.com/Archives/TOPSTORY/ts_030227_01.htm)] 23 April 2003, 1.

<sup>57</sup> China's Oil and Gas Import Strategy to 2020. Houston: Emerging Markets Online, 2003. [<http://www.emerging-markets.com/PDF/ChinaOilGasStrategy.PDF>] 23 April 2003, 2.

<sup>58</sup> Andrew Scobell, The Rise of China: Security Implications (United States Army War College, 2001), 2.

<sup>59</sup> Erica Strecker Downs, China's Quest for Energy Security (Virginia, RAND, 2000), 49.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* 47. The author further suggests that China is courting diplomatically, those states seeking allies other than the United States (for example, Iraq and Iran).

These concerns first manifest themselves in neighboring states.<sup>61</sup> Of these, one of the more likely candidates is Kazakhstan as the thirteenth largest oil-producing nation in the world.<sup>62</sup> China seeks stable borders through increased trade across the border regions of neighbour countries in Central Asia and Russia.<sup>63</sup> Russia is China's other oil producing neighbour, but is too strong for direct confrontation and would be a better candidate as an ally than as a tributary nation. Diplomacy, and a collapsed Soviet Union, enabled China to achieve a key objective regarding three of its border states: the withdrawal of Russian troops from Afghanistan, Mongolia and Vietnam.<sup>64</sup> Chinese influence was on the rise in the 1990's and, while not achieving a tributary relationship with Russia, the Sino-Russian relationship slowly warmed. China has reversed its opposition to development of Siberian oil fields in light of the limited influence the United States would have in this region and the fact that an oil pipeline into China would avoid the sea routes dominated by the United States.<sup>65</sup> After the Cold War balance of power vacuum that left the United States as the sole superpower, China has created a new struggle and a somewhat paranoid race for power that will, at best, be escalatory and, at

---

<sup>61</sup> China has fourteen neighbour states, including Russia, Mongolia, North Korea, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos. Two of these are major oil producers – Russia and Kazakhstan. Mark Burles in Chinese Policy Towards Russia and the Central Asian Republics, notes that, in the longer run, although not a direct border state, Azerbaijan, with oil reserves estimated to be at least comparable to the North Sea (if not twice as large) will be of interest as well.

<sup>62</sup> Mike Dowling, The Electronic Passport to Oil and O.P.E.C. available from [http://www.mrdowling.com/607-oil.html] 23 April 2003. A table in the article also highlights that China is the eleventh largest oil producing nation.

<sup>63</sup> Mark Burles, Chinese Policy Towards Russia and the Central Asian Republics (Virginia, RAND, 1999), 11-22. The author highlights Russia then the Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. It is suggested that Russia remains a higher priority because of its conventional military strength, relative to Central Asia, but that this trade is small in comparison to Japan or the United States for example. In fact, Russia was China's eighth largest trading partner in 1997, according to the publication.

<sup>64</sup> Mark Burles, Chinese Policy Towards Russia and the Central Asian Republics (Virginia, RAND, 1999), 5-6.

worst, lead to a direct confrontation between the world's two largest military powers. As the United States continues its policy of containment, China fears American hegemony and continues its arms build up and readiness for conflict with the United States.<sup>66</sup> There appears to be no factor at present capable of breaking this self-fulfilling cycle and oil is compounding the stress between two large powers, thirsty for the same energy resources.

In the new world order emerging in the twenty-first century, China demonstrates a renewed confidence in exerting its will in Asia that will cause increased friction, perhaps even conflict, with the United States. Chinese confrontation with the United States is growing and its regional assertion in Asia is inevitable. History shows that China possesses an extremely longstanding, culturally entrenched self-view that places it at the centre of Asia.

Imperial China reinforced its self-view and fostered an expectation that China would lead, not follow, in its political dealings. Whether one adopts a balance of power view or a civilizational view of world politics, China seems to be on a path that will confront the United States in this century. Canada and the rest of the world should carefully assess the kind of response that will be necessary when these two powers collide; Canada has strong cultural ties that are growing due to our rising Asian demographics, which are in turn being nurtured by Canadian immigration policy.

---

<sup>65</sup> Mark Burles, Chinese Policy Towards Russia and the Central Asian Republics (Virginia, RAND, 1999), 6.

<sup>66</sup> Samuel S. Kim, China and the World: Chinese Foreign Policy Faces the New Millennium (Colorado, Westview Press, 1998), 188. One argument, that U.S. can deter the Chinese was the topic of an interesting paper by Abram Shulsky, Deterrence Theory and Chinese Behaviour, Virginia, RAND, 2000). Shulsky makes notes that recent historical attempts to deter the Chinese failed in four important instances; Korea 1950, Taiwan 1954-55, India 1959-62, Cambodia 1978-79. Three examples of relative success are discounted by the author as working for reasons that had little to do with deterrence of the Chinese. He goes on to conclude that future deterrence will be a very difficult approach to take with China.

The Chinese military continues to modernize in precisely those areas that are required to project power well beyond its borders: ICBM and IRBM technologies and inventories; more and better air forces; more and better sub-surface vessels; and ocean-going, 'blue water' vessels that could challenge the United States in the latter half of this century. The strong Chinese economy will fund the military tools that China uses to assert its leadership beyond its borders. Rapid growth in demand for oil highlights the need for more energy and more secure energy transportation and only limited means to avoid direct competition with the United States for this non-renewable resource. These factors, perhaps more than traditional flashpoints such as Korea or Taiwan, are bound to provide the impetus for China to break out of containment by the United States in the East Asian region and to challenge the sole superpower beyond 2050. Fortunately, it will take time for China to build a credible capability. Unfortunately, China has a very long planning horizon and has demonstrated the intent to use that capability when the time is right. Let us all hope that when that time comes, cooler heads prevail and diplomacy manages China's growing assertiveness in a peaceful manner.

## **Bibliography**

Annual report on the military power of the People's Republic of China. Washington: United States Government, 2002.

China's Oil and Gas Import Strategy to 2020. Houston: Emerging Markets Online, 2003. [<http://www.emerging-markets.com/PDF/ChinaOilGasStrategy.PDF>] 23 April 2003.

CIA World Factbook 2002. [<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/Factbook/geos/ch.html>] 21 November 2002.

Canada's ethnocultural portrait: The changing mosaic. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2002. [<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/Products/Analytic/companion/etoimm/canada.cfm>] 12 April 2003.

The Pocket Oxford Dictionary. New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1996.

Allison, Roy and Johnson, Lena. Central Asian Security: The New International Context. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001.

Barnett, A. Doak. China Policy: Old Problems and New Challenges. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1977.

Bernstein, Richard and Munro, Ross H. The Coming Conflict with China. New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1997.

Boutilier, James A. Standing into Heavy Seas: The New Maritime Environment in Northeast Asia. Toronto: Canadian Consortium on Asia Pacific Security, 2002.

Brzezinski, Zbigniew K. The geostrategic Triad: Living with China, Europe and Russia. Washington, D.C.: The CSIS Press, 2001.

Burles, Mark. Chinese Policy Towards Russia and the Central Asian Republics. Virginia: RAND, 1999.

Carlucci, Frank, Hunter, Robert and Khalilzad, Zalmay. Taking Charge: A Bipartisan Report to the President-Elect on Foreign Policy and National Security. Virginia: RAND, 2001.

Dewitt, David B. Perspectives on Asian Peace and Security in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Toronto: Canadian Consortium on Asia Pacific Security, 2002.

Dowling, Mike. The Electronic Passport to Oil and O.P.E.C. available from [<http://www.mrdowling.com/607-oil.html>] 23 April 2003.

- Fisher, Richard Jr. China's Carrier of Chance. Washington: The Jamestown Foundation, March 2002. [[http://china.jamestown.org/pubs/view/cwe\\_002\\_006\\_003.htm](http://china.jamestown.org/pubs/view/cwe_002_006_003.htm)] 15 Apr 2003.
- Huisken, Ronald. QDR 2001: America's New Military Roadmap: Implications for Asia and Australia. Canberra: The Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, 2002.
- Huntington, Samuel P. The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996.
- Kim, Samuel S. China and the World: Chinese Foreign Policy Faces the new Millennium. Colorado: Westview Press., 1998.
- Little, Debra R. The South Asia 2020: Future Strategic Balance and Alliances. United States Army War College, 2002.
- Purcell, Victor. The Chinese in Southeast Asia. London: Oxford University Press, 1965.
- Sawyer, Ralph D. and Sawyer Mei-chün, The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China. Boulder: Westview Press, 1993.
- Scobell, Dr. Andrew. The Rise of China: Security Implications. United States Army War College, 2001.
- Shulsky, Abram. Deterrence Theory and Chinese Behaviour. Virginia: RAND, 2000.
- Strecker Downs, Erica. China's Quest for Energy Security. Virginia: RAND, 2000.
- Tzu, Sun. The Art of War. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971.
- Yonggang, Zhou. Gulf crisis challenges China's oil strategy. Sinofile Information Services, 18 Feb 2003. [[http://www.sinopolis.com/Archives/TOPSTORY/ts\\_030227\\_01.htm](http://www.sinopolis.com/Archives/TOPSTORY/ts_030227_01.htm)] 23 April 2003.
- Zhao, Suisheng. Power Competition in East Asia: From the Old Chinese World Order to Post-Cold War Regional Multipolarity. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998.