

WORLD: China

New Reports Detail The China Threat

BY J. MICHAEL WALLER

For the first time, an official policy document clearly states that Beijing's military buildup against Taiwan is a clear and present danger to U.S. interests in the Pacific.

The Bush administration's ambiguous China policy got a kick in the pants recently when the Pentagon and the bipartisan, congressionally chartered U.S.-China Security Review Commission issued separate reports describing Beijing's looming military threat to U.S. national interests. Both reports — mandated by Congress at the end of the Clinton era to evaluate China's growing military power — ratified the long-stated views of U.S. national-security analysts that Beijing has been using cash from American consumers and investors to bankroll an ambitious military buildup that ultimately may be used to attack the United States.

Both reports begin by warning that the United States has a poor understanding of the Chinese military and Beijing's intentions because intelligence and analysis on China is sketchy. And that alone is sending shock waves through the foreign-policy, defense and intelligence establishments.

"The Pentagon report specifically, but the China Commission report as well, question a key tenet upon which America's peaceful relations with China have been based since the early 1970s," says Richard D. Fisher, a China military expert with the Jamestown Foundation. "The fundamental tenet being that America expects China to peacefully settle its differences with Taiwan. This

expectation is included in two of the major communiqués between the United States and China, and is enshrined as policy in the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act. The Pentagon has very likely started a major debate within the U.S. government by questioning for the first time China's willingness peacefully to resolve its differences with Taiwan."

That's a big development. Neither report says it explicitly, but both issue observations and conclusions that bury the argument of the George H.W. Bush and Clinton administrations that the "People's Republic [of China] is our partner." Political shenanigans on the China Commission, and fears in some quarters of the present presidential administration that the Pentagon report would offend Beijing, made supporters of the missions of these reports fear that neither would be objectively written or, if they were, that they ever would see the light of day.

The Communist Chinese government has complained loudly. In his first Washington news conference, Chinese Embassy spokesman Xie Feng actually accused the Pentagon and the congressional commission of lying, warning that

Wake-up call: Should Bush revise U.S. policy on Beijing in light of the Pentagon and China Commission reports?



WIN McNAMEE/REUTERS



ADRIAN BRADSHAW/ZUMA

Marching orders: Chinese hegemony is the *modus operandi* for the tough People's Liberation Army.

"I thought it exceeded expectations," Fisher says. "Knowing about the degree of dissension among the members of the China Commission, it was a pleasant surprise. It produced useful and solid observations and recommendations."

Congress created the commission at the instigation of national-security conservatives a year after requiring the Pentagon's annual reports on Chinese military power, at the end of Clinton's term in 2000. The idea was to get the White House and the public to confront "the national-security impacts of the bilateral trade and economic relationship between" the United States and China. Congress, according to a commission document, "wanted the commission to evaluate whether our economic policies with China harm or help United States national security and, based on that assessment, to make recommendations in those areas that will improve our nation's interests" in regular annual reports.

It seemed the commission would remain in security-oriented hands until liberal Republican Sen. James Jeffords of Vermont defected and kicked the Senate to Democratic control. That put Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Robert C. Byrd (D-W.Va.) in control of much of the commission's staffing. Famous for channeling taxpayer money to his home state and to his friends, Byrd promptly installed old cronies at top levels of the commission staff. These included longtime staffer C. Richard D'Amato, who had no public record of expertise on China but who had just wrapped up work with another congressional commission, that one on the trade deficit. D'Amato became commission chairman, with Republican Michael Ledeen of the American Enterprise Institute as vice chairman.

Congressional sources tell *INSIGHT* that the Democratic majority pushed many conservative commissioners aside — even the only recognized academic sinologists among them — and allied with Chamber-of-Commerce-type Republicans who tended to place commercial interests ahead of national security. They doled out research and writing grants to few specialists considered tough on China.

Commission leaders even shortened the organization's name to "U.S.-China Commission," taking out the words "Security Review" — an illegal act, some insiders cautioned, since the name was

the reports could endanger bilateral relations and world peace. Claimed Xie, "The threat to Sino-U.S. relations, the threat to world peace, doesn't lie in China but rather in these people who have fabricated this China threat."

The Pentagon report meanwhile is the product of intense wrangling between two strains within the Department of Defense (DoD). These are the go-along-to-get-along attitude of some of the "Clintonized" flag officers and research institutes (see "Clinton Undead Still Haunt Pentagon," June 17), and the more real-world policy shop led by Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Douglas J. Feith. Administration sources say the National Security Council held up its publication for half a year.

The DoD report smashed the conventional wisdom that China would be far from able to conquer Taiwan. "Previously, the whole debate over the threat to Taiwan had been cast through the lens of whether the PLA [People's Liberation Army] could invade or not invade," Fisher says. "This was always a straw-man argument because nobody would ever take seriously the prospect of an all-out, D-Day-style invasion, so the liberal side of the argument would always discount the threat to Taiwan. The Pentagon report does a great service by introducing the notion of the PLA's development of a

range of coercive strategies and military options to use against Taiwan. There are operations, short of an all-out invasion, that are designed to produce a political outcome, such as a surrender by Taiwan's leaders after a rapid, two- to three-day blitzkrieg assault."

For the first time, an official U.S. government policy document states that Beijing's military buildup against Taiwan presents a threat to U.S. allies in the region. The Pentagon report says, "The PRC's ability to exercise coercive military options presents challenges not only to Taiwan but also to other potential adversaries, such as the Philippines and Japan." Fisher notes, "This is the first time any U.S. government statement has cast China's military as a threat to the region, much less as a threat to U.S. allies in particular."

The report also crystallizes a growing concern about Russia's massive weapons proliferation to China (see "PRC Arms Itself to Wage War on U.S.," Aug. 12). "The Pentagon's emphasis on the degree to which Chinese-military modernization stems from Russian assistance is indicative of the administration's emerging focus on the Russia-China strategic relationship," says Ilan Berman, vice president for policy at the American Foreign Policy Council. "This is definitely a positive development."

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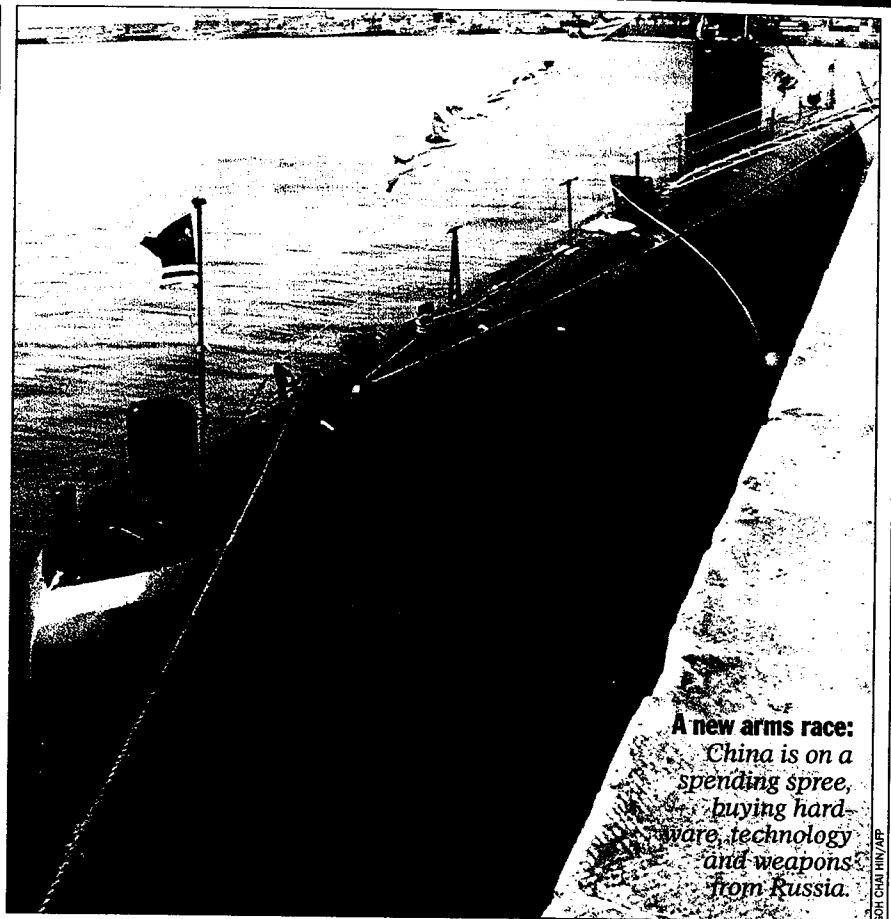
spelled out by federal law. Commission letterhead, staff business cards, the Website banner and even the site address (www.uscc.gov) all reflected the soft-soap name change.

Yet somewhere along the way, as experts wrote studies and provided testimony, the facts fell into place. Human-rights and labor concerns of liberals found fertile ground among the national-security-minded conservatives and vice versa. Remarkably, the widely bipartisan group of 12 commissioners, with just a single exception, found what many more-assertive analysts had argued all along. Their final product became a primer for a broad-based rethinking of how the United States should deal with China's regime.

The commissioners wrote that U.S. intelligence collection and analysis on China continues to be poor; that U.S. leaders have a "limited understanding" of Chinese official goals because "the U.S. government has dedicated insufficient resources to collect, translate and analyze Chinese writings and statements"; that "attempts to build crisis-management and confidence-building measures between the United States and China have failed"; that Beijing "sees the United States as a hegemonic power" and a "superpower in decline"; that the PRC "is dedicating considerable resources toward preparing for potential conflict with the United States, especially over Taiwan"; and Chinese leaders believe that, "despite overwhelming U.S. military and technological superiority, China can still defeat the United States by transforming its weakness into strength and exploiting U.S. vulnerabilities through asymmetric warfare, assassin's-mace weapons, deception, surprise and pre-emptive strikes."

The sole dissenting commissioner was William A. Reinsch — a former Clinton undersecretary of commerce and now a business lobbyist who has pushed for relaxing or lifting sanctions against rogue nations such as Iraq, the Sudan and Cuba that have been identified by the State Department as terrorist regimes. Reinsch complained, "The commission majority has bent over backward to avoid describing the Chinese as a 'threat'; yet the belief that they are permeates every chapter" of the report. Reinsch's dissent thus underlined the commission's accomplishment.

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A new arms race:
China is on a spending spree, buying hardware, technology and weapons from Russia.

Commissioner Waldron's Grave Warning

Commissioner Arthur Waldron, a professor of international relations at the University of Pennsylvania and a key figure in shaping the U.S.-China Security Review Commission report, wrote an addendum offering his own concerns to expand on the document's final draft:

"The wide-ranging purpose of China's military buildup must be recognized. It is not a response, as is sometimes suggested, to U.S. support for Taiwan and other Asian friends. Rather, the buildup should be understood as aimed at excluding the U.S. from Asia, and establishing the ability to threaten and coerce neighboring states ranging from Mongolia to Japan to India. This conclusion is supported not only by evidence of China's capabilities, but also widely available statements of Chinese intent. If Taiwan did not exist, today's China would still pose serious security issues to all Asian states.

"Money gained through trade with the U.S. must not be permitted to strengthen China's military and security apparatus. Current measures are entirely inadequate. A massive strengthening of counterintelligence is required; scrutiny must

be imposed on Chinese access to U.S. capital markets, with real sanctions. U.S. companies should be forbidden to do business with army and security-related Chinese entities. Foreign companies helping China's military and security apparatus ... should be denied any participation in U.S. government procurement or development programs.

"With respect to China's proliferation behavior, we have all the evidence we need: China is a major source of advanced weapons to terrorist-sponsoring and other dangerous states. What is required is firm action.

"Far more work is required, both from the commission and from government, on China's role (or lack of role) in international terrorism. Beijing's close connections to terrorist-sponsoring states provide ample reason for concern. ...

"U.S. intelligence operations with respect to China are inadequate and often misguided. Thorough reform is required, along the lines suggested by the Congressionally-mandated Tilelli report, which the CIA did not implement."

— JMW