

would start a whole new round of troubles. The *Financial Times*, while calling Morocco's invasion "ill-advised," called Spain's an "act of folly."

Did they have a point? It depends how you look at it. Spain's insistence on continuing to claim a tiny chunk of Africa may weaken its position in negotiations over the British possession of Gibraltar, which abuts its territory. But Spain also would have run a big risk by doing nothing. Fernando Arias Salgado, Spain's ambassador to Morocco, worried that Morocco was releasing a trial balloon, hoping to threaten Spain's two large African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. He was right. Benaissa upped the ante in a press conference in Paris on Friday, warning that negotiations should begin on the status of Melilla; and Moroccan soldiers have taken to blocking pedestrian (but not tourist) access to Ceuta, whose economy depends on Moroccan shoppers.

Morocco is one of the more trustworthy nations in the Islamic world. That's not saying much, but the country does have a large, educated middle class and a semi-free press. France has deep economic ties with it. Spain rerouted an energy pipeline from Algeria through Morocco out of neighborly spirit not long ago (and has disavowed any intention of now seeking economic sanctions against Morocco). The Bush administration is interested in negotiating a far-ranging free-trade treaty with Morocco, of the sort negotiated with Chile after NAFTA. Most important, Morocco is cooperating in the war against al Qaeda. Perhaps because of this, Mohamed VI and his government believe they can get away with trying to shake concessions loose from the West.

The recapture of Perejil was a Spanish mission; the country sought no help or endorsement either from NATO or from any of its allies. This was exactly the sort of unilateral mission that "Europe," when regarding the United States, professes to deplore. But it has been met with

unconditional support from NATO and widespread approval within Spain. As such, this military and diplomatic success, though miniature in scale, is a standing rebuke to the multilateral, post-national, Kantian utopianism that is the prevailing style of European Union diplomacy.

This ought to raise questions among the Europeans, whose "dialogue"-based foreign policy leaves them almost wholly defenseless against what Ana Palacio calls the

politics of *faits accomplis*. What if next time Morocco, aiming its appeal to native nationalists, sends a much larger force, with heavy weaponry? Spain has answered that question in spades—it will fight, and it will prevail. But what if Morocco, aiming its appeal at the "European human rights community," decides to occupy Perejil with a gang of children throwing stones? That is Europe's question to answer—and the answer is shrouded in doubt. ♦

China Without Illusions

Washington wakes up to Beijing's intentions.

BY TOM DONNELLY

FIVE YEARS AGO, anyone calling China a strategic problem was dismissed as looking for some new "cold war" enemy to fight. And when President Bush initially characterized the People's Republic as a "strategic competitor," Washington's old foreign policy hands collectively clucked their disapproval at such a rash idea.

But what was once controversial has now become almost conventional. The recent release of two major government studies indicates a new mainstream opinion on China. Two weeks ago, the Pentagon published its *Annual Report on the Military Power of the People's Republic of China*, a document mandated by Congress. The report is a thorough account of the improvements in Beijing's capabilities and delivers an insightful analysis of Chinese security and military strategy.

The other new report is perhaps more important. The massive tomes issued by the U.S.-China Security Review Commission—yet another

congressional initiative—are just the sort of bipartisan product that, in Washington, represents a summary of respectable opinion. Yet the report pulls no punches: "[The United States and China] have sharply contrasting worldviews, competing geostrategic interests, and opposing political systems." Increasing economic ties "have not softened China's egregious behavior on human rights nor changed its strategic perceptions that the U.S. is its principal obstacle to growing regional influence." That's from the first paragraph of the executive summary.

More stunning still is the commission's challenge to the premise of American China policy throughout the Clinton years, which is still the formal position of the Bush administration: that trade with China would have an inevitable liberalizing effect. This policy is just a "hypothesis," in the Commission's reckoning, and the panel notes that American trade has helped to strengthen the PRC militarily as well as economically. "The Commission does not believe that anyone can confidently forecast the

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future of China and the U.S.-China relationship, and contends that while we may work and hope for the best, our policymakers should prepare for all contingencies.”

This is not how senior officials thought about Beijing during the 1990s as they tried to build a strategic partnership. President Clinton, champion surfer of public opinion in the post-Cold War, dot-com decade of good feelings, looked forward to “working with China and expanding areas of cooperation.” Beijing would help “advance fundamental American interests and values.” Clinton eagerly sought summits with Chinese leader Jiang Zemin and looked forward to an emerging world order where China was “not only playing by the rules of international behavior, but helping to write and enforce them.”

Even as Washington opinion takes a harder stand on Beijing, however, there are many for whom hope springs eternal. For example, the lone dissenter among the Security Review commissioners is William Reinsch, a principal architect of and apologist for the Clinton administration’s China and trade policies. The majority report, Reinsch argues, “adds to the level of paranoia about China.” The best Reinsch can say is that China “is a work in progress” and that American policy should strive for détente. His fellow commissioners “fail to understand that U.S. and Chinese geopolitical interests in the region will inevitably diverge regardless of what kind of government China has.”

Still, the speed at which the pendulum has swung is remarkable; Reinsch’s rhetoric sounds like a tinny echo from the détente days of the Cold War, when the Soviet Union would last forever and Russia was impervious to democracy. But with the increasing evidence of China’s international ambitions and an American foreign policy establishment that now chooses to recognize the implications, there is little prospect for any “engagement” that shrinks from confrontation, let alone any long-term “partnership.”

The Security Commission makes

an overwhelming case that “China’s leaders view the United States as a partner of convenience, useful for its capital, technology, know-how and market,” but that they regard America “as China’s long-term competitor for regional and global military and economic influence.” In sum, Beijing seeks to unseat the United States as the preeminent power in East Asia and, eventually, to undermine its sole superpower status.

The Commission also defines a useful set of “benchmarks” against which to measure Chinese behavior: its proliferation activities; relations with “terror-sponsoring states” like Iran, North Korea, and Iraq; the expansion of Chinese long-range missile forces; policies toward Taiwan; and the pursuit of “asymmetric warfare capabilities and modern military technology that could menace American military forces.” But most important, the panel recognizes the main issue is “whether the Communist party maintains its monopoly of political power or shares it with the Chinese people.” In other words: *It’s the regime, stupid.*

By the Pentagon’s standards, most of the military indicators of Chinese behavior are already flashing red warning lights. Using a “net assessment” approach that goes beyond a simple “bean count” of planes, ships, missiles, tanks, or troops, the Pentagon report looks at the relative strength of Chinese forces, particularly across the Taiwan Strait—the scenario that represents the most likely source of a major conflict between the United States and Beijing.

The Pentagon report acknowledges that China may not choose a full-blown invasion of Taiwan: “Beijing’s primary political objective in any Taiwan-related crisis, however, likely would be to compel Taiwanese authorities to enter into negotiations on Beijing’s terms and to undertake operations with enough rapidity to preclude third-party”—meaning American—“interventions.”

This is already a near-nightmare, says the Pentagon. The report concludes that the Chinese military’s

“offensive capabilities improve as each year passes, providing Beijing with an increasing number of credible options to intimidate or actually attack Taiwan. Should China use force, its primary goal likely would be to compel a negotiated solution on terms favorable to Beijing. Such an approach would necessitate a rapid collapse of Taiwan’s national will, precluding the United States from intervening.” This scenario is no fantasy. A fair reading of the report, which is authoritative in its reference to Chinese military writings and material developments, makes clear how shaky past assumptions about China have been.

Though the center of opinion about China has come a long way in a short time, it remains unclear whether the administration or Congress is really ready to take the kinds of steps needed to prepare for unhappy “contingencies.” Though President Bush regards China as a competitor, it’s not clear how much of the policy-making bureaucracy agrees. For example, most of the government is uninterested in the United States organizing a NATO-like coalition of East Asian democracies to counter Beijing’s ambitions in the region, or in the United States allying itself more closely and more practically with Taiwan. Though Defense Secretary Rumsfeld has committed himself to “transforming” U.S. forces, in part to prepare for conflict across the Taiwan Strait, it is unclear that these changes can be accomplished in time to catch up to the rapid changes in Chinese capabilities.

In addition, one wonders whether the events following September 11 will put further strains on relations with China. Both the Security Commission and Pentagon studies were written with the presumption that conflict with China would be focused on East Asia—and that it was the only major war, hot or cold, on the horizon. But the war on terrorism and the presence of American military forces in Central, South, and Southeast Asia is a new and powerful wild card in the game. Once again, accepted strategic wisdom may soon be out of date. ♦