2-14-2009

China in the U.S. Annual Threat Assessment

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/chinabeatarchive

Part of the Asian History Commons, Asian Studies Commons, Chinese Studies Commons, and the International Relations Commons

http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/chinabeatarchive/426
News agencies have been reporting widely on the content of the U.S. intelligence community’s annual threat assessment, delivered Thursday by Dennis Blair (director of U.S. national intelligence) and peppered with language that hearkens back to the Bush era (of a whole four weeks ago, but, still, anyone else tired of references to the U.S. as the “Homeland”?). News stories have focused on the primacy given to the economic crisis in the report and the analysis of threats in the Middle East and what the report calls an “arc of instability” from South Asia through the Middle East. However, the report also contains several pages on China specifically (pp. 22-23), as well as mentions of China’s impact in Africa (pp. 34-5), its role in cyber attacks (p. 39), and Chinese environmental security (p. 45).

The full report is available at the website of the Director of National Intelligence. Below are excerpts of the included material on China.

From the section on China:

We judge China’s international behavior is driven by a combination of domestic priorities, primarily maintaining economic prosperity and domestic stability, and a longstanding ambition to see China play the role of a great power in East Asia and globally. Chinese leaders view preserving domestic stability as one of their most important internal security challenges. Their greatest concerns are separatist unrest and the possibility that local protests could merge into a coordinated national movement demanding fundamental political reforms or an end to Party rule. Security forces move quickly and sometimes forcefully to end demonstrations. The March 2008 protests in Tibet highlighted the danger of separatist unrest and prompted Beijing to deploy paramilitary and military assets to end the demonstrations.

These same domestic priorities are central to Chinese foreign policy. China’s desire to secure access to the markets, commodities, and energy supplies needed to sustain domestic economic growth significantly influences its foreign engagement. Chinese diplomacy seeks to maintain favorable relations with other major powers, particularly the US, which Beijing perceives as vital to China’s economic success and to achieving its other strategic objectives. But Beijing is also seeking to build its global image and influence in order to advance its broader interests and to resist what it perceives as external challenges to those interests or to China’s security and territorial integrity.

Taiwan as an area of tension in US-China relations has substantially relaxed since the 2008 election of Ma Ying-jeou. The new Taiwanese President inaugurated in May has resumed dialogue with Beijing after a nine-year hiatus, and leaders on both sides of the Taiwan Strait are now cautiously optimistic that a new period of less confrontational relations has begun. Many outstanding challenges remain, however, and the two sides eventually will need to confront issues such as Taiwan’s participation in international organizations. Beijing has not renounced the use of force against the island, and China’s leaders see maintaining the goal of unification as vital to regime legitimacy.

On the modernization of the PLA:

Preparations for a possible Taiwan conflict continue to drive the modernization goals of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) and the Chinese defense-industrial complex. It will likely remain the primary factor as long as the Taiwan situation is unresolved. At the same time, we judge that China over the past several years has begun a substantially new phase in its military development by beginning to articulate roles and missions for the PLA that go well beyond China’s immediate territorial interests.
• For example, China’s leaders may decide to contribute combat forces to peacekeeping operations, in addition to expanding the current level of command and logistic support.

• China’s national security interests are broadening. This will likely lead China to attempt to develop at least a limited naval power projection capability extending beyond the South China Sea. This already has been reflected in Beijing’s decision in December to participate in anti-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia.

**Missile Capability.** China continues to develop and field conventional theater-range ballistic and cruise missile capabilities that can reach US forces and regional bases throughout the Western Pacific and Asia, including Guam. China also is developing conventionally armed short- and medium-range ballistic missiles with terminally guided maneuverable warheads that could be used to attack US naval forces and airbases. In addition, counter-command, control, and sensor systems, to include communications satellite jammers, are among Beijing’s highest military priorities.

**Counterspace Systems.** China continues to pursue a long-term program to develop a capability to disrupt and damage critical foreign space systems. Counterspace systems, including antisatellite (ASAT) weapons, also rank among the country’s highest military priorities.

**Nuclear Capability.** On the nuclear side, we judge Beijing seeks to modernize China’s strategic forces in order to address concerns about the survivability of those systems in the face of foreign, particularly US, advances in strategic reconnaissance, precision strike, and missile defenses. We assess China’s nuclear capabilities will increase over the next ten years.

**And on Africa:**

China’s presence has grown substantially over the past decade. Total bilateral trade between China and the continent has increased from less than $4 billion in 1995 to $100 billion in 2008, but the EU and US still remain far larger economic partners for the region. China’s objectives are to secure access to African markets and natural resources, isolate Taiwan, and enhance its international stature, all of which it has made progress on. Nevertheless, China’s role has generated local resentment as Chinese firms are seen as undercutting African competitors in securing commercial contracts and falling short of standard local labor practices. Moreover, there is little discernible evidence of Chinese investments being used to incorporate Africa into the industrial “global value production chains” that are becoming the hallmark of integrative trade and FDI flows, especially in manufacturing in other regions of the world.

**On cyber attacks:**

We assess that a number of nations, including Russia and China, have the technical capabilities to target and disrupt elements of the US information infrastructure and for intelligence collection. Nation states and criminals target our government and private sector information networks to gain competitive advantage in the commercial sector.

**On the environment:**

China’s high incidence of chronic disease stemming in great part from heavy tobacco use threatens to slow economic growth by incapacitating workers and incurring heavy health-care costs. The health effects of environmental degradation are an increasing source of discontent in China.