

What China Expects —and Plans For

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It is, of course, a matter of judgment whether or not one believes the current international situation is, as the Chinese put it, one characterized by a great disorder on earth—"the wind sweeping through the tower heralds a rising storm in the mountains." But the general trends seem to be quite clear: a disintegration of the cold war coalitions, the emergence of nonsecurity issues as the essence of international politics, and a change toward new power configurations. In such a transitional context the current Chinese posture in international politics seems to be based on one of self-assured "providential statesmanship" exploiting all the possibilities in the "great disorder under heaven."

Politics is a process the style and direction of which are determined in part by conscious human choices and decisions. What makes the politics of resource control a distinctly new blend of politics is the emergence of a new and articulated consciousness of the value of natural resources. These are now seen as power resources of the highest importance, and by "power resource" I mean resources that could either generate or be converted into political power. The emergence of political mechanisms like OPEC to convert a power resource such as oil to actual political power has enhanced a universal appreciation for the potential value of natural resources as power resources. At the same time, as the value of natural resources sharply increases, the relative value of military capability as a power resource in international politics seems gradually to decrease. For example, for Japan today the military forces of the Soviet Union may seem less immediately threatening than the danger of oil cutoff from the Middle East.

There seem to exist at least two divergent modes of perceiving the nature and significance of the emerging politics of resource control. The first mode is to view the politics of resource control as a way to restore the stability and equilibrium shaken by the resource crisis and to maintain a status quo in regard to the present

distribution of power and wealth among the nations. This mode also exhibits a strong tendency to separate economic issues from political issues and, in that sense, to depoliticize the politics of resource control. The second mode of perceiving the nature of the politics of resource control, which is best exemplified by China, is to consider resource politics from a wider historical perspective and treat it as a part of a fundamental transformation of the world system. In this revolutionary mode of perception the politics of resource control is considered as the total politicization of all issues, including that of resource control, in order to destroy the existing world system and to inaugurate a new order for the world.

China considers that the ripening contradictions in world politics and world economy have reached the point of altering the very essence of power, namely, its resources, conversion mechanisms, and structure. The sharp increase in the ability of the Third World countries to politicize their natural resources and the corresponding slow decline in the value of military capability jointly characterize a new historical stage. It is interesting to note that, according to the Chinese view, both of these factors came into being mainly due to a change in the state of consciousness rather than a change in the objective reality. China fully expects that the armaments race between the two superpowers will continue; but the ever increasing military capability of the superpowers is meaningful perhaps only to themselves and has little relevance to the remaining world. In the meantime, new powers are generated, not on the basis of greater military capability, but on the strength of other factors, notably the politicization of natural resources. In short, looking from the Chinese perspective, the present condition of the world may permit revolutionary consciousness to overshadow military might. Hence the repeated citation of Mao Tse-tung's word that "The danger of a new world war still exists....But revolution is the main trend in the world today."

The outbreak of the Arab-Israeli war of October, 1973, and the resulting oil crisis, which were beyond China's expectations, have certainly boosted China's conviction in the correctness of its judgment on the general direction of world history. China seems to expect that the crisis will continue with a quickened

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pace and appears to hope for a coming power play on the part of the Third World countries which would include the nationalization of all foreign capital and enterprises in the Third World. What then are some of the specific strategies of China in the politics of resource control?

Although its ultimate goal is the single one of creating a new world order, we can consider separately the three strands in the Chinese strategy according to the three groups of states that the theory of intermediate zones has provided, namely, the Third World countries, the countries in the second intermediate zone, and the two superpowers.

The Chinese strategy for the Third World countries is not spectacular, since its chief aims are not any immediate victories but long-term projects of education, politicization, mobilization, and, perhaps, instigation. According to China, the Third World already has more than enough potential to be the central force to turn the wheel of history, and the only remaining problem is how to convert the potentiality into an actuality.

The main theme of the Chinese "education" for politicization of the Third World is to prevent the developing countries from ever separating economy from politics. "In the final analysis, political independence and economic independence are inseparable," in the Chinese view, and, therefore, "without political independence it is impossible to achieve economic independence; without economic independence a country's independence is incomplete and insecure." The most fatal disease which could strike the Third World countries is the illusion of achieving political independence through economic dependence.

China's "educational" strategy for the Third World is carried out chiefly through propagation of its own exemplary actions in economic development and international trade. Perhaps China could justly claim that she has proven the possibility of development without dependence on foreign aid and through the energy and wisdom of its own people, relying on its own capital and resources, and planning for its own needs and conditions. Whether the Chinese actions could in fact be taken by the Third World countries as exemplary or not is a problematic question. However, China seems to be convinced that these actions will earn at least the unanimous admiration of the Third World and eventually, as the politics of resource control gain more intensity, even a substantial following. China can be relatively relaxed on this matter, for her self-sufficient economy has very little investment in, or dependence upon, the Third World countries.

In the context of the theory of the intermediate zones and of the struggle between the superpowers and the Third World the status of the countries in the second intermediate zone (basically Japan and the European countries) appears somewhat

marginal. But the marginality of these countries could have two different meanings from the Chinese viewpoint. First, the recent energy crisis might have exposed the extreme vulnerability of the second world countries, and, consequently, their marginality makes them susceptible targets for both the superpowers and the threats and pressures of the Third World. As such, the European countries and Japan should be constantly reminded of their fragile position and encouraged to join hands with the main forces in the politics of resource control, namely, the Third World. Second, the marginality of the second world countries suggests their potential role as a balancer or their ability to tip the scale one way or another for a considerable period of time in the political process of resource control.

Among the nations of the second world the European countries seem to receive special attention from China in recent years, at least at the level of official pronouncement. It certainly does not indicate that Japan is unimportant in the Chinese global strategy. It may be, however, that China feels Japan is fairly well "under control" in the sense that the new relation China and Japan established in 1972 is holding steady and is continually reinforced by successive steps, such as the recent aviation agreement. Furthermore, Japan has only negative relevance to Chinese security, for Japan cannot possibly promote the Chinese security in any substantial manner, but can only undermine it, for example, by an alliance with the Soviet Union.

As far as the Eastern European countries are concerned, China could suppose that its frontal attack on social imperialism and on the imperialistic economic practices of the Soviet Union would strike certain responsive chords in Eastern European hearts. China seems to believe that, again in due time and when an appropriate opportunity arrives, the Eastern European countries will reject the superpower dominance, particularly the Soviet dominance.

From the Chinese perspective China and the Western European countries, either individually or collectively, share some definite common interests. Of those common interests a shared concern for security against the Soviet military threat is undoubtedly most immediate and obvious. The presence of even limited nuclear powers on both the Eastern and Western flanks of the Soviet Union would surely enhance the cause of containing the Soviet threat. Going beyond its security interests, China seems to detect in the Western European countries, particularly in France—Gaullist or not—a strong desire to check the influence of the superpowers in international politics and economy, and a hope to build a new system of power in world politics. China naturally welcomes these European sentiments, although there is absolutely no certainty that China and Western Europe share an identical design for the future world order. At this stage of the politics of resource control it might satisfy the Chinese objective if strong Western European countries rejected superpower hegemony.

It is in the strategy against the superpowers in the politics of resource control that the Chinese political finesse seems to show its best hand. By freely employing some of the age-old concepts deeply imbedded in the Western tradition of international law China attempts a steady erosion of legitimacy in the image of the superpowers in world politics. In the fight against the superpowers, China is relying on a double-edged sword. On one side, absolute sovereignty is continually proclaimed as the inalienable right of the nation-state and used against the superpower attempt to "internationalize" the world economy. On the other side, an international organization based on the principle of absolute sovereignty and equality of nation-states is envisaged as the main institutional vehicle to combat and destroy superpower domination.

China clearly believes that the new economic strategy of superpower domination will be carried out under the banner of "transnational corporations" and "international division of labor," and, therefore, absolute national sovereignty should be a battle cry against these "neocolonialist" and "neoimperialist" forms of the superpower domination. It is indeed an irony of history that China, which was kept out of the United Nations for twenty-two long years, is now viewing the United Nations as the chief instrument with which to wage an assault on superpower domination. When the principle of absolute national sovereignty is coupled with the principle of absolute equality among nations, and given the absolute majority on the basis of the "one nation, one vote" principle the Third World countries hold in the United Nations, China could build its case for making the United Nations the most legitimate forum to determine the future shape of world politics and economy. If the current trend continues it might just be possible, at least in the Chinese vision, that the United Nations, led by China, would one day clash with multinational corporations supported by the United States.

In both the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on Raw Materials and Development in the spring of 1974 and the United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea in the summer of 1974 the Chinese stand seemed to put a premium on a particular mode of international decision-making, namely, the participation of all countries "on equal footing." It is now quite clear that one of the prime strategies of China in the politics of resource control will be a steady pressure for inauguration of a *new* international law, a *new* international regime, a *new* international management, and indeed a *new* international politics. We may, therefore, rest assured that the Chinese will intensify their criticism of those organizations that do not conform to the equality principle, for example, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. We may also safely predict that Chinese criticism of the emphasis on "interdependence" will continue to be pronounced.

The Chinese understanding of the nature and course of the politics of resource control may be based on an excessive optimism; consequently, a number of serious obstacles to that eventual Third World victory China envisions have not been fully accounted for. The strength of the superpowers to check the upsurge of the Third World countries remains quite substantial, if not overwhelming. Even in terms of natural resources, the position of superpowers is "super" indeed. The United States, for example, will indeed be in a superpowerful position in terms of food. The Soviet Union has vast resources that will surely be explored and converted into enormous power and wealth, and the Soviet leadership may acquire some day the political skill to match the vast Russian resources. In any case, scientific and technological progress is at least as crucial as natural resources in determining the future course of the world; and the superpowers, particularly the United States, have a tremendous lead in this domain. There is no reason to believe that the European countries and Japan, who need both technology and resources, will necessarily join forces with the Third World against the superpowers.

Above all, the very nature of the Third World and the critical problems it faces today may yet prove to be an Achilles heel for the Chinese as they practice their politics of resource control. Not all of the Third World countries are resource-rich countries. Indeed, a substantial number of the Third World countries comprise the so-called Fourth World of underdeveloped and resource-poor countries, and the Chinese rhetoric for resource politics provides very little relief for the plight of these countries. Furthermore, most of the Third World countries, including those rich in natural resources, such as Indonesia, have committed themselves irrevocably to a path of development inseparable from the international economic process.

In most of the developing countries the question of natural resources is still considered primarily in terms of economic development, and it is simply unrealistic to assume that these countries would sacrifice ongoing development in order to protect their natural resources. As for the danger posed by the multinational corporations and foreign capital, most of the developing countries seem to feel quite confident about their ability to control those corporations and that capital and to protect their national sovereignties. In such a context the Chinese position may seem merely political rhetoric.

So China might be overly optimistic. It is not likely, however, that all the probable obstacles cited above could either singularly or collectively blur the Chinese vision for future history. The Chinese expectation is not one that could easily crack up because of an uncontrollable sense of urgency and imminence. China could prepare itself for a long wait and struggle, full of ups and downs. After all, it could continue to be the largest, and most viable, autarky in history, well suited to play the politics of resource control.