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THE COMING CONFLICT WITH CHINA
BY
RICHARD BERNSTEIN* AND ROSS H. MUNRO**

Review by
Amy Click

According to a poll conducted in six Chinese provinces by the China Youth Research Center, 90 percent of Chinese youth think the United States tries to dominate China on specific issues, 96 percent of Chinese college students are of this same opinion.¹ It is this “love/hate” relationship² among the Chinese that concerns the authors of the *Coming Conflict with China*.

The actors on the world stage were once discernable. Countries knew their enemies and their friends. The United States knew that communist countries were the enemy and democratic countries were friends. However, with the end of the Cold War the balance of power (if it can be called a balance rather than forced cooperation) shifted with the mighty force of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and the end of the Berlin Wall.

In the New World, the concern for countries is not the Cold War “Domino Effect” but centuries old concerns of nationalism. Countries across the board are concerned with new fear that neighbors, may in the next century, have the man power coupled with the will power to overtake and dominate countries that in the old scheme of things would have never pondered such questions.

* Richard Bernstein has been Time’s bureau chief in Beijing, for the United Nations, and in Paris. He is now a book critic for the New York Times. *The Coming Conflict with China* is his fourth book. He lives in New York City.

** Ross Munro is director of the Asia Program at the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia. He was formerly a journalist in Asia. He has been Time Magazine’s bureau chief in Hong Kong, Bangkok, and New Delhi. He has also been the Beijing correspondent for the Toronto Globe and Mail

1. Jinn Min, *Chinese Youth: Love/Hate Relationship with the United States*, China Focus, Aug. 1, 1996, available at WL 11751455.

2. See *id.*, in the China Focus article *supra*, coins the term “love /hate” relationship to describe the relationship between the United States and China.

In *The Coming Conflict with China*, Richard Bernstein and Ross Munro discuss these new concerns facing the nations of the world. The authors focus on relations with China, both in terms of their Asian neighbors and the United States. The book focuses mainly on the new role China is taking on the world stage. The authors point out, that while the United States has overlooked Chinese indiscretions³ and granted the country Most Favored Nation status, in the new scheme of things the United States should review carefully its policy toward China. Bernstein and Munro lay out a plan for future dealings with China, involving a firmer stance on the part of the United States when dealing with China. In this same vein, they criticize the Clinton administration for what they feel is a too weak stand on Chinese foreign policy.

This review will focus on the view China has taken regarding the United States and some of the theories espoused by Bernstein and Munro, regarding the next century. The authors of the book cover many other topics in the course of the text, which will be left to the reader to review in depth.

I. STRATEGIC PARTNERS TO SUSPICIOUS ENEMIES

Ironically, Newsweek lists China as the number one tourist destination by the year 2020.⁴ However, Bernstein and Munro do not paint such a "rosy" picture for the future of relations between the United States and China. While the authors would possibly agree that such a tourist boon might be possible in the coming century, they would probably foresee a foreboding message in the influx of tourists. That message being that China is preparing to enter the world stage as a major power, and the steps the Chinese are taking may not always be advantageous to the United States World position.

The authors begin their analysis of the situation in a manner that pervades their thinking and theorizing throughout the book. "Only a decade or so ago, in the mid-1980's, the two giants of the Pacific saw each other as actual and future strategic partners, each of them interested in an alliance of necessity with the other to prevent the domination of Asia by the Soviet Union. But by the early 1990's, conflict came to dominate the relationship."⁵ Of course, now that the Soviet Union cannot be considered an open threat, the authors contend that China is harboring intentions of

3. Indiscretions such as China's stance on human rights.

4. Tara Weingarten NEWSWEEK, Apr. 6, 1998 (citing the World Tourism Organization). By the year 2020, China will "rack up" 137.1 (millions) in tourist visits. The United States is expected to have some 102.4 (millions) in tourists visits by the same year

5. RICHARD BERNSTEIN & ROSS H. MUNRO, *THE COMING CONFLICT WITH CHINA* 3 (1997).

becoming dominant in Asia, and therefore the “new” American enemy. Bernstein and Munro use the term “aggressive” to describe the actions taken by the Chinese, and “naive” to describe the way in which the United States is responding to the situation.⁶ While this may seem a cynical way in which to describe the two countries, the authors make the point that the United States has three times been involved in major wars in Asia.⁷ Each time the United States has become involved, it has been to prevent a single power from gaining ascendancy within the region.⁸ The authors feel that there is little question that China will begin to stretch its wings toward ascendancy in the next decade.⁹

Bernstein and Munro lay out a purposeful reason and plan of action for dealing with this “new threat.” The authors’ point out that after floundering for more than a century, China is now taking up the great power role that it believes to be its historic legacy.¹⁰ These ambitions are fired by what Bernstein and Munro call “a nationalism of historic aggrievement and thwarted grandeur, a nationalism that is strange and therefore little understood in the more satisfied and complacent West.”¹¹ It is this lack of understanding of the historic wounds felt by China that may, in the next century, allow China to slowly advance to a place of dominance “right under the nose” of the United States and other western countries. The authors also point to the role the United States has played in Asia for at least one hundred years. The consistent goal of the United States in Asia has been to prevent any single country from dominating the region.¹² Since the authors feel that this is precisely what China intends to do; they predict that the interests of the United States and China are on course for collision¹³

Interestingly enough, as Asia out paces Europe in strategic and economic importance,¹⁴ this collision may prove disastrous. The point of impact for the collision, may be the balance of power that has been in place within Asia since World War II.¹⁵ This balance of power was carefully set in place with the occupation of Japan by the United States and the installation of Douglas MacArthur to “democratize” the region. Once set in place, this equilibrium has been overseen by the United States since the

6. *See id.*

7. *See id.* at 4.

8. *See id.*

9. *See id.*

10. *See* BERNSTEIN & MUNRO, *supra*, note 7 at 4.

11. *See id.*

12. *See id.* at 5.

13. *See id.*

14. *See id.*

15. *See id.*

end of World War II.¹⁶ These factors combine, along with the situation in Hong Kong¹⁷ and Taiwan,¹⁸ to allow the leader's of China to identify the United States as China's chief adversary in the world.¹⁹

II. NEVER HEGEMONY

Fear of hegemony,²⁰ once reserved for the Soviet Union, now is one of the biggest fears of the Chinese regarding the United States.²¹ The Chinese feel even a small loss of Chinese culture will lead to dominance within China by American culture. One Chinese author is quoted by the authors as saying, "When we were students, we yearned for American novels and movies. "But today we find that country rather disgusting."²² This opinion could be very telling to the future of relations between the United States and China. Chapter Two of *The Coming Conflict with China*, deals quite fully with the topic of hegemony and the Chinese fears about dominance by other countries.

III. CONCLUSION

As stated supra, *The Coming Conflict with China*, deals effectively with the kaleidoscope of issues that are involved in any debate about Chinese/American relations. Taking, in turn, the enemy status of the United States, criticism of the Clinton administration for its stance with China, and what the authors call the "New China Lobby," the authors present a well organized and well-thought out analysis of the possible issues that the two countries are facing and the extent to which they may become magnified in the next century. In the book's conclusion, the authors present their view of how the United States should deal with China in the coming century.

As a reader who came of age during the fall of the Soviet Union and the Berlin Wall, at times I felt the authors were searching for enemies.

16. See BERSTEIN & MUNRO, *supra* note 7, at 5.

17. It remains to be seen how the recent "reunification" with China will effect Hong Kong and its relations within the World.

18. See BERNSTEIN & MUNRO *supra*, note 7 at 6. China may make advances to retake Taiwan, as it views the area as part if it's national territory. Taiwan has been the center of controversy within China, since the Nationalist loss in the Chinese Civil War. Upon their loss, Chiang Kai-shek and the remnants of the Nationalist party fled to Taiwan and set up a nationalist government under the leadership of Kai-shek.

19. See BERNSTEIN & MUNRO, *supra* note 7, at 8.

20. Hegemony is defined by the American Heritage Dictionary as "the predominant influence of one state over others."

21. See BERNSTEIN & MUNRO, *supra* note 7, at 8.

22. See *id.* at 10.

They seem to believe America must have an enemy. While I agree, that with the end of the Cold War, the United States and other countries, must begin to reevaluate those who might be new enemies; I do not feel this entails "looking behind every door" and every action to determine if there is an underlying threat to the United States. I do however agree with the authors that on some level, China may become a threat to the interests of the United States. I do hope, however, that we have learned hard lessons from former involvement in Asia and the United States will take a hard look, if at some future point, China provokes the United States into a military situation.

The great value of this book is in the issues raised by Berstein and Munro. They are thought provoking and insightful. No matter how you feel about China, or as I have stated, about "searching for enemies" this book gives the reader "food for thought" about the possibilities for the future of Chinese/American relations.

