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## China's Plan to Lead the Globe

BY ERIC MARGOLIS

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As tensions in the South China Sea between the US and China continue to rise, the US Navy and Air Force are quietly gearing up to fight a war in the disputed region.

If necessary, that is. Both sides say they don't want any military confrontation on China's extensive coastal waters, but both are acting as if a military conflict is increasingly likely.

Optimists say that a peaceful resolution of China's rise as a great power is achievable. The economies of the two powers are so enmeshed that a war sounds unthinkable.

Such is the thesis of an important new book just out, "The China Dream," by Professor General Liu Mingfu, a leading Chinese military thinker and commentator who speaks with the voice of China's military.

US-China trade accounted for \$579 billion last year. Beijing holds \$1.2 trillion of US Treasury securities, thus financing a big part of America's massive trade deficit. China claims its low-cost exports to the US saved American consumers \$600 billion in recent years.

China only wants its place in the sun, say its strategists, using the same words as German strategists did before World War I. It's time for a multi-polar world. The age of American World

Empire is over, writes Liu Mingfu, words that will not endear him to Republican hawks and neoconservatives.

Pessimists retort that Britain and Germany fought two world wars even though they were major trading partners. History is replete with examples of rising powers eventually going to war with the status quo powers resisting their rival's economic and military growth. The Franco-British-Russian alliance against Germany prior to World War I is a perfect example.

One need not be a swami to see that China's surging power will soon clash with that of the American hegemon. The battle lines are already drawn: China's aggressive claims to the South China Sea – viewed by the US Navy as an American lake. Taiwan. Tensions over Burma. Korea. China's access to the open seas.

According to Prof. General Liu, the days of America's world domination, or hegemony, as he terms it, are just about over. By 2030, China will be the world's largest economy in absolute terms (today it rivals the US in purchasing power parity), regaining the geopolitical primacy it formerly enjoyed until the 1500's when it was the world's leading economic power.

The US must find a way to accommodate China's growing power, a point also made for many years by this writer. A policy of containment is not likely to work unless India becomes a principal participant. My first book "War at the Top of the World" deals with the scenario of a future India-China war in the Himalayas, Karakoram and Burma. India has been very cautious in joining any American-sponsored alliance against China.

Liu writes that America must quietly cede some of its power to China in the same manner that the British Empire did to the United States after 1900. The United States and China must share power and jointly rule the world as benign hegemons.

He insists that China has no territorial ambitions and never will. "China suffered 470 foreign invasions within 65 years from 1840 to 1905," asserts Liu, though incursions would be a more accurate term. During this period, China was raped and pillaged by the western colonial powers and Japan. Hatred of Japan seethes throughout Liu's book, as it does among most Chinese.

One could argue that China's annexation or 'reunification' of Tibet and Sinkiang were aggressions. China considers them part of historical China, along with truant province Taiwan.

Liu points out that China never invaded or seized its smaller neighbors Korea, Burma, Thailand, or Laos.

Instead, China's emperors always preferred to dominate without aggression so that its smaller neighbors respected the will of China and acted respectfully – rather as the United States in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with Latin America. China, writes Liu, wants peace and prosperity in order to keep growing its economy. China remains an inward-looking colossus, content to be the Middle Kingdom.

America, according to the undiplomatic Liu, is a paranoid giant, afraid of the outside world and addicted to the need for enemies abroad. “Americans feel lost without any enemy.” Washington’s occupation and despoliation of so many countries, notably in the Muslim world, generates endless enemies and a war psychosis. America, he claims, is a half-democracy: democratic at home but promoting dictatorships abroad. He seems to believe that China is as democratic at home as the US – a claim that defies reality.

Liu asserts that China is devoted to peaceful relations, non-interference in other nations, and the desire to help build world prosperity, not just its own power or political system. What’s more, Liu modestly asserts, China should lead world development since Chinese are more intelligent and cultured than any other people and heirs to a 5,000-year history!

Interestingly, Liu depicts the 1950 Korean War as a major victory for China because it showed that an Asian nation could fight off the world’s greatest military power. He claims that the US did not invade North Vietnam out of fear of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army after its bloody experience in Korea.

Will Washington back off and allow China to be the master of Asia? It seems highly doubtful. But unless some kind of modus vivendi is found, a military confrontation is likely to follow, one that the US might very well lose. China would be fighting virtually at home or just off its coast. The US, by contrast, would fight thousands of miles across the Pacific from its distant bases. The US might even win, but China would undoubtedly come back for more.

The “China Dream” thesis has been actively taken up by China’s communist leadership. But two things might derail China’s rise to world domination. First, China’s history is replete with example of internal strife, civil wars, and regionalism. This “Chinese curse” could come back to haunt Beijing.

Second, as I read Liu’s panegyric to Chinese greatness and peaceful humanism, I kept recalling Lord Acton’s wise maxim about absolute power corrupting absolutely. It happened in Washington, and there’s no reason why it might not occur in Beijing.