

## **STRENGTH GAP IS THE REALITY**

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### Summary:

- China still is a Third World country with limited assets; China still cannot match up to developed countries in terms of economic strength, science and technology and defense capabilities.
- Be less concerned with others' business, take care of our own country—this should be the guideline for our actions for a relatively long time to come.
- Diplomatically, we must insist on maintaining the dignity and status of our country as a major power; but in the meantime, we also must go along with international trends and tides.

Confronted with provocations posed by the United States and NATO, what should China do? The editors and correspondents from The Globe Times have earnestly invited me to say a few words on this topic. Despite my repeated refusals, I am afraid that I can no longer shirk my duty to make some comments and fulfill my civic responsibility as a citizen of my country.

### **Give China an Appropriate Place in the World**

When we begin any endeavor, it is very important to have a clear sense of our place in our surroundings. If we failed to do this, we would become dislocated or disoriented, which would inevitably result in big trouble. In the past, Chairman Mao once had a theory regarding how the world was demarcated into three worlds. It's been 20-30 years since Chairman Mao's theory was first promulgated; yet, in retrospect the world hasn't changed that much fundamentally. With the exception that the Soviet Union has disintegrated and that Russia has become a secondary power, all countries seem to have stayed in the same categories that Chairman Mao once put them in.

In recent years, many new methods of ranking countries have been invented. For instance, some organizations in Europe have been ranking countries by competitiveness in science and technology. Using the new methods, China's rankings have been disappointingly low—usually behind 20 to 30 countries in the world. China has yet to produce a Nobel Prize winner; our innovativeness and competitiveness in science and technology are quite weak. We seem to be making great progress on the economic front. But if calculated according to per capita income, our ranking quickly slips downward to lag behind 60-70 countries in the world.

The British journal, Jane's Defense Weekly, is the most authoritative publication on defense and military matters. Each year it publishes a large volume of research reports, routinely ranking countries around the world by their strengths. Unfortunately, according to this publication, China's military is top ranked only by its size. Our People's Liberation Army is ranked behind over a dozen or even over 20 countries by the quality of its equipment and its combat capabilities. By the statistics of 1994, China's defense budget is only about 2-3% of that of the United States, 18.3% of that of Great Britain, 18.6% of that of the France and 13.9% of that of Japan. The total sum of our defense budget places us behind some 20 countries in the world. Furthermore, the per capita share of our defense budget probably places us somewhere between 60th and 70th from the bottom among all the countries in the world.

The above analysis provides a basic understanding of China's real strength in science and technology, economy and defense, from which we can draw the following conclusions: China still is a Third World country, with meager existing assets, unmatched with developed countries in economy, science and technology and the military. If compared with a superpower like the United States, we lag behind at least 20 years, if not 30 years, in some key areas. Without money, it is difficult to strengthen defense and the military. Our entire annual defense budget of several billion or close to 10 billion RMB (yuan) is just about the budget for a bureau under the U.S. Defense Department. Such a pitifully small defense budget is further divided into 3 equal parts—one for feeding the army, one for maintaining daily operations, and one (only one!) for weapons R&D.

### **Be Less Concerned with Others' Business, Remain Vigilant on Our Own Doorstep and Focus on Self-Strengthening**

The backward will be punished. This harsh reality forces us to develop. All the words we want to utter can be summarized by what Comrade Deng Xiaoping has told us: "We shall hide our wisdom and never let it be revealed." We should focus on self-strengthening, never stick our head out to be revealed. In the 1950's we vowed to "Surpass England and Catch up to the United States" Looking back to the past half century, which of these countries have we surpassed? Neither! Not only have we not surpassed England, we have also seen a widening gap in some areas. This proves that we have much room for improvement; that all-out campaigns to "surpass and catch up" will likely end up with all-out failures. Take the issue of strengthening the military as an example. Who does not want to strengthen our military? But do we have the money for it? What about the level of our technology? Are our engineering skills good enough? When we come down to the specifics, we find out that there are many problems. Things are much more complicated than one may think. Therefore, we must adopt a pragmatic approach, a strategy of step-by-step development, catch up in some areas, but not others; concentrate on what we are good at, and strike at the weakest link. This new approach and strategy must be carried out effectively and implemented thoroughly.

Be less concerned with others' business, be vigilant at our own doorstep, strengthen ourselves while waiting for future opportunities. "We shall hide our wisdom and never let it be revealed." This should be the guideline for our actions for a relatively long time in the

future. Who are we? How good are we? What kind of talents do we have? We should be clear about all these. In fact, this is still the question of where we should place ourselves in the world. After the outbreak of the Kosovo war, many comrades rushed to suggest that China should send a volunteer army to Kosovo to fight along side the Yugoslav army against NATO troops and to provide Yugoslavia with weapons and material aid. These suggestions are sincere and genuine, but they remind me of our past actions of arming and supporting Albania, our “socialist lamp in Europe.” What has happened to those who we have aided in the past? Some have abandoned us; others have turned their guns toward us. Who is to blame for this? No one but ourselves. The United States now minds everybody’s business in the world: it is a rich country, the “leader of the world,” the police of the world. But we don’t have to and are unable to do what the United States does. We should strengthen ourselves, enhance our national cohesiveness, increase the comprehensive national power and fighting capability of our military. If you become a really formidable strong power, who can bully you?

Our country desires peace, hoping to establish and maintain friendly relationships with all countries based upon the “Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence.” This is a long-term strategic goal. But when our sovereignty, territorial integrity and national dignity are challenged and violated, we will never give up our principles. We ought to make our national interest the supreme objective, around which we deal with various foreign and domestic issues. We also ought to know that the threats of regional wars are still in existence; the world is not yet peaceful. Therefore we must enhance the civic consciousness of national defense. When we advocate peace and development, we cannot simply think of doing business and making money, and forget about national defense and building a strong military. Economic development and defense development must go in tandem. This is the only way by which our comprehensive national power can be enhanced. The thinking that we should develop the economy first, defense second is dangerous. Equally dangerous is the thinking that economic development makes money, but defense development spends money. We are facing an international environment that is complex and fickle. We must enhance our defense and military power, and give it sufficient emphasis.

### **Diplomacy: Big Stick and Principles at the Same Time:**

The former U.S. president, Theodore Roosevelt, used a famous saying, “speak softly and carry a big stick.” It means that during diplomatic negotiations, one can be amicable and polite, but one should simultaneously stick to principle by carrying something of consequence in your hand, i.e., the support of a strong military. When the Kosovo war drew to a close, those so-called “diplomatic talks” and “military negotiations” were mere shams rich only in pretty words. In reality, could there really be “fair talks and negotiations?” Never. The document drafted by the eight-country coalition was thrown in front of Milosevic and the options were clear: if he signed the document, the war could stop; if he refused, the bombing would resume. If he wanted to revise the document, sorry, he did not have the right to do so. So diplomacy must be accompanied by big sticks. Talking tough alone will not do any good. Faced with those bullies of realpolitik, of hegemonism and of gunboat policy, any one who acts overly politely and modestly is

definitely a laughing stock.

The lessons Yugoslavia has provided us are the following: domestic instability, insufficient national cohesiveness, lack of friends and allies in the world. We should learn from all these lessons. First of all, we must pay attention to designing our international image, upholding our dignity and status as a major power, sticking to our principles, keeping our own promises, resolutely safeguarding our own sovereignty and territorial integrity, never giving an inch when it comes to crucial issues that involve principles; secondly, we must vigorously promote democracy and the rule of the law. This means ruling the country by law, the military by law and handling international affairs by international law, by maritime conventions and maritime laws. Only when we behave this way will we not give western powers any pretext of treating us like a “rogue state.” We must go along with global trends and tides, and gradually synchronize with the international community.

Finally, we must carry out a foreign policy of independence and self-determination, avoid using ideologies and religions as criterion to selectively engage diplomatically with foreign countries. We should establish and enhance friendly mutually beneficial relationships with all countries, make the most friends, never form a military alliance with any country or international organization. In our foreign relations, we should pay particular attention to relations with major powers such as the United States, Russia, Japan, France, Germany, European Union and ASEAN. In the meantime, we should improve our relationships with our neighboring countries and take the initiative in solving remaining issues and disagreement. Domestically, we must be especially vigilant against any tendencies of ethnic splitist movements.