

# Gulf madness gives China an opportunity

by Mary M. Burdman

Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen, in a strategic review of the world situation at the end of 1990, asserted that "some unexpected things may take place" in the current "unpredictable" period. One thing he certainly had in mind, is that the Beijing government is taking the opportunity presented by the Gulf crisis to put itself forward in a number of diplomatic moves aimed at overcoming the relative isolation in which it has found itself in the 18 months since the Tiananmen Square massacre. These moves include "carrot and stick" initiatives toward the Third World, and new steps toward rapprochement with the Soviet Union.

"Détente, or even compromise and cooperation, between the United States and the Soviet Union has not brought world peace and tranquility that some people predicted," Qian Qichen wrote in his year-end strategic assessment, published in the Beijing magazine *Qiushi* on Dec. 16, 1990. He reviewed the economic collapse in the developing sector, the Gulf crisis, which has been exacerbated by the "change in global structure," the industrialized nations' pressure on the Third World, the economic and political turmoil in the Soviet Union, and the profound problems facing Eastern Europe.

## Whose 'New World Order'?

The horrors of George Bush's New World Order are forcing the nations of the developing sector to deal with Beijing, which is dusting off the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence," dating back to the mid-1950s Bandung Conference, for a political offensive at this moment. China, Qian stated in his analysis, is proposing its own "new international political and economic order."

"As we see it, the pattern characterized by the domination of the world by the superpowers, or by several powers of the 'richest nations' club' cannot be accepted as a new order," Qian wrote. "The new international order should be established on the basis of equality of all independent states, large or small, rich or poor, strong or weak; and it should contain the kind of political and economic relations which truly conform with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. . . . [This is] totally different from the old international economic order which is economically unfavorable to developing countries."

Over the past 18 months, while waiting for the West to forget the Tiananmen Square massacre, as Deng Xiaoping predicted it would, Beijing has not been idle. It has sent big-

diplomatic missions to Africa, Ibero-America, and especially Southeast Asia, which Prime Minister Li Peng visited in August and December.

In the weeks leading up to the war against Iraq, as Qian Qichen emphasized, he was the only foreign minister of one of the U.N. Security Council "Permanent Five" to visit Baghdad in an effort to avert the war. Of course, China ultimately washed its hands of Iraq by abstaining from voting either for or against U.N. Resolution 678, but there is no question that there is genuine alarm behind the Chinese warnings against the war. A regime that has brutally ruled for the past 18 months by making "stability" its priority, has reason to fear the world upheaval that must follow the carnage in the Gulf.

Li Peng called for "unremitting efforts to achieve peace" on Jan. 15, the day before war began. "Reason must prevail in the Gulf crisis," the official Beijing *People's Daily* wrote Jan. 11. "Once war breaks out, it could cause heavy casualties and material devastation and touch off worldwide political and economic turbulence. Some people believe that the war may be brought to a quick end, but actually, if war really breaks out, it will be independent of man's will and the consequences will be unimaginable." The critical question, Chinese media have emphasized, is that the war will spread.

On Jan. 17, hours after the bombing began, the Chinese Foreign Ministry released a statement that "the war that the international community had striven to prevent and the world's people had not wanted" had broken out, and "the Chinese government expresses its deep anxiety and concern over this."

## Asian rapprochement

In the past month, the Gulf crisis has fueled increasing rapprochement between China and the Soviet Union. One Asian analyst asked, "Does the U.S. know what it is doing, what it is setting off, by this war?" George Bush has little idea of what he is really setting off, especially among the world's 1 billion Muslims. But, there is no doubt, both the Soviets and the Chinese do know.

On Jan. 19, the Chinese ambassador to Moscow met Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Rogachov to deliver a message on the Gulf crisis from Li Peng. Rogachov had just been in Beijing, where he met with Deputy Foreign Minister Tian Zengpei on Jan. 11. The news agency Xinhua reported that they "exchanged opinions on the Persian Gulf, Cambodia, the Korean peninsula, and "further development and deepening of Soviet-Chinese relations." Xinhua noted that Rogachov said "the Soviet Union firmly opposes war in the Gulf and believes not all diplomatic means have been exhausted." Rogachov told Soviet television, "We have had political consultations with the leaders of the Chinese Foreign Ministry. Problems had built up that needed to be discussed and we had to coordinate our joint and parallel actions. First and foremost, we discussed the problem of the crisis in the Persian Gulf. I should say that, on the whole, generally the

approaches of the Soviet Union and the P.R.C. to this crisis situation coincide.”

The Muslims of Asia are a key reason why the Soviet and Chinese approaches coincide. The massive unrest in the Soviet Central Asian republics in 1989-90 was followed by an armed rebellion by Turkic-speaking Uighurs in China's Xinjiang province in April 1990. The revolt, in which hundreds must have been killed, considering the extent of the Chinese crackdown since, was a key item on the agenda when Li Peng was in Moscow in April 1990.

Xinjiang is one of the most strategically sensitive regions of China. Besides being one of the world's richest regions in mineral resources—including unexplored oil reserves—Xinjiang borders the Soviet Union, India, Mongolia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. It is also the center of the Lanzhou military region, China's strongest in both non-conventional and nuclear strategic terms. Lanzhou is the site of China's major defense industries, including aircraft, national defense research, and the base of China's main force of the strategic guided missile troops.

Disturbances in this region—which was only finally occupied by Beijing in 1949—is not something China would take lightly.

### **Empire building**

For all the rhetoric about peace and rapprochement, there is no change of heart in Beijing. Since the Gulf crisis came to a head, the P.R.C. has made one move after another to assert its own imperial power, unhindered by any Western objections.

On Jan. 10, Foreign Ministry spokesman Li Zhaoxing unilaterally announced that China is taking control of the city of Hong Kong—six years before it is officially ceded to Beijing by the British. “China is handling Hong Kong's status within international organizations,” Li said. Five days later, the head of the Chinese delegation to talks with the British colonial authorities in Hong Kong on a project to build a new airport and other infrastructure, asserted that China would veto the project if all its conditions were not met. “Only the central People's government can speak for the people of Hong Kong,” Luo Jiahuan said. “If the Chinese side does not speak, who will? If the Chinese government doesn't get involved, who will? Surely not the government of the United Kingdom.” However, Her Majesty's Forces, now enmeshed in the Gulf, are not being deployed to bomb Beijing.

China is also making a show of force against Taiwan, including staging airborne maneuvers right across from the Taiwan-held island of Quemoy over the Jan. 19-20 weekend. Leave was canceled for Taiwan soldiers, and the Army is on alert. In addition, Beijing's naval command announced Jan. 10 that China's first aircraft carrier fleet is now operating. This will enable the P.R.C. to step up its military threat in the oil-rich Spratley Islands in the South China Sea, where Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia, and the Philippines also have claims.

## **Taiwan leaders fear invasion by P.R.C.**

by Lydia Cherry

Will the People's Republic of China take advantage of George Bush's Persian Gulf war to militarily impose its regime on Taiwan? This is the question raised by Beijing's menacing tone toward Taiwan since the Gulf crisis began. Some leaders in Taiwan think that Communist China may have been given a green light to do this, in reward for the P.R.C. not voting against the U.N. Security Council resolution supporting a U.S.-led war, sources report.

The Taiwan government is expecting the worst. Before Bush's genocidal bombing began, on Jan. 14, the government of the Republic of China readied itself by putting its Armed Forces on full alert “in order to safeguard the security of the Taiwan Strait,” Taipei Domestic Service reported.

Beijing had given indications it might use the crisis to go after Taiwan a month earlier, when Chinese Communist Party (CPC) Central Committee President Chien Wei Chang announced that if Taiwan would not open negotiations regarding the unification of the two Chinas, then Beijing would consider “accelerating” the unification process by military action.

The pro-Beijing Hong Kong newspaper *Wen Wei Po* also indicated that the Central Committee had taken a resolution to resolve the Taiwan question, asserting that the mainland's “stable situation” and “thorough development of reform” were conducive to resolving the problem of two Chinas. Taiwan alone bears responsibility for the division of China, the Central Committee stated, because it insists upon its demands that the Communist Party practice democracy and adopt a free economic system, that it give up force as an option for resolving the conflict, and that it restrain from obstructing Taiwan's foreign policy. The Hong Kong daily *Ming Bao* pointed out that the Persian Gulf war has “enlightened” the P.R.C. regime that a military solution may be the best way to “force” the opposing side into negotiations. As if to corroborate that report, in late December, the P.R.C. Air Force held a military maneuver in the Canton district, at the southern tip of the Formosa Straits.

The P.R.C. press is making an effort to show that Taiwan is seeking to overthrow the Beijing government. For example, on Dec. 29, the P.R.C. announced the arrests of several members of a group allegedly plotting to “overthrow the leadership of the CPC and subvert the socialist system.” The Kunming, Yunnan Provincial News Service reported that the group had “crossed over to Burma illegally to throw in their lot with the KMT [Taiwan's Kuomintang] secret service.” The press claimed that Taiwan had organized the group and appointed its leaders in Shanghai and Yunnan Province.