

## **In Search of Harmony -- China appears at last**

*(A short note written for the Asymmetric Threats Contingency Alliance (ATCA) dated 5 August, 2006)*

As bombs and rockets continue to fly, innocent civilians and children are being blown up across Lebanon and Israel, and the pace quickens -- with mounting international pressure -- for an immediate end to this seemingly futile yet escalating bloodshed.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and her Under-Secretary of State are making clear references that diplomatic efforts are intensifying for a United Nation Resolution possibly very early next week. Prime Minister Tony Blair has delayed departure for his summer holiday "as the next few days are crucial."

Meanwhile the world's commentators are probably thinking that China chooses to lie low as she is busy minding the heat in her own economy rather than that in the Middle East. At this critical juncture China has announced the despatch of Sun Bigan, her special Middle East envoy, to visit

Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia  
from Sunday 6th August.

So what is up for China?

1. As a key member of the UN Security Council close to an upcoming Resolution on the Middle East conflict, China's lack of proactive efforts could weaken her authority in the eyes of the world community, especially following the killing of her UN Observer amongst the others.
2. Increasing signs of Middle East instability ranging from Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon do not augur well for China's energy security.
3. China realises only too well that in an interdependent and interconnected world, the Middle East's geopolitical importance far exceeds its geographic 'arc' as any conflagration or instability there is likely to spread to Muslim communities worldwide, with the horrendous fallout all this may imply. This explains the recent expanding reach and scope of the so-called Shanghai Cooperation Organisation under China's initial aegis, now branching out from China's

neighbours in the Near East to encompass such countries as Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey, Pakistan and India. [Ref: ATCA contributions on SCO].

4. The cluster of countries covered by Mr Sun's visit are not only the key players in this conflict but offer interesting potential for economic (and geopolitical) cooperation, whether in energy security or technology.

5. Iran is conspicuous by its absence from Mr Sun's itinerary. Though Iran has denied any instigation of the conflict, it would be inconceivable that she can be left out of the equation. China has been fostering strategic and energy ties with Iran with whom China signed a USD 70 billion deal in November 2004 to develop the Yadavaran, one of the world's largest oil fields. China may find it more convenient to engage Iran behind the scenes of this visit.

6. In typical 'feeling the river pebbles' fashion, China wants to see clearly when and how best she could contribute meaningfully in such a complex and fast moving scenario. With a UN Resolution likely to come up in days, she cannot afford to wait any longer.

7. China's recent avowed national and international policy is centred on 'Harmony'. This is in part a reflection of her Confucian culture: harmony not only in the society but between countries (and indeed between Man and Nature). [Ref Contribution to ATCA on Confucianism]. Now is the time for China to show to what extent mutual concessions, tolerance, acceptance or inclusiveness, rather than sheer military might, could achieve at least a temporarily more harmonious environment.

5 August, 2006

Andrew K.P. Leung, SBS FRSA

[www.andrewleunginternationalconsultants.com](http://www.andrewleunginternationalconsultants.com)

1A Vincent House, Vincent Square,  
London SW1P 2NB  
United Kingdom

Tel (44) (20) 7821 6177  
Mobile (44) 7838 161 668