

Negotiating Global Equilibrium –The Strategic use of Soft Power in an Age of Asymmetric Forces

(A short note written for the Asymmetric Threats Contingency Alliance (ATCA) dated 20 October, 2006)

The mess in Iraq, the less than optimal outcome of the recent war in Lebanon, the festering of the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian issue, and now the threat of unmanageable nuclear proliferation triggered by North Korea, are beginning to see the emergence of a re-think that there may perhaps a more durable alternative to economic or military coercion.

In a prelude dated 4 October to his forthcoming book *'Halting Nuclear Proliferation in the 21st Century'* edited by the Norwegian Institute for International Affairs, Peter Hayes of the Nautilus Institute expounds the need to adopt a more realistic approach to containing nuclear proliferation in an age of asymmetric forces. He sees North Korea's nuclear defiance as a reflection of a deep-seated sense of insecurity and a desire to achieve a breakthrough in its relations with the United States as a balance against the influence of some of its neighbours. The necessity of immediate punishment aside, this argues for direct dialogue rather than continuing stone-wall confrontation.

Ian Bremmer, author of *'The J Curve'*, in News Review in the recent UK Sunday Times explains how a non-military developmental approach to engaging North Korea could lead to its long-term openness and stability. Similarly, Laurence Brahm in the recent South China Morning Post recalls how normalisation of relations and foreign investment helped change the outlook of countries including China, Vietnam and Cambodia.

Indeed, there are speculations that a strategic use of dialogue and more accommodative engagement with countries like Iran and Syria could well be highlighted in the forthcoming James

Baker review on how best to handle the Middle East to be submitted to the White House.

The realisation of the futility of over-reliance on hard-power also underscores China's continuing policy of 'Harmony' and international rapport through the exercise of 'Soft Power', based on cooperative dialogue, mutual benefit, trust, equality, and respect. As I said in my article 'North Korea, the Beijing Consensus, Soft Power and the Art of War' [ATCA, 9th October] this also echoes Sun Tzu's stratagem of 'Winning without War' written in 500 BC. The effectiveness of China's 'Soft Power' explains her expanding influence in such organisations as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation [ATCA, 17th June 2006].

Within China, the Soft Power of 'Harmony' has just been reinforced in the Sixth Plenum of the 16th Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, which upholds a policy of 'Building a Harmonious Society' as China's key goal for the next 15 years. This dramatic shift of priority was last mandated in the latest 11th Five Year Plan (2006 -2010).

The strategy emphasises the importance of addressing such issues as income inequality, balanced development, poverty relief, social provisions, energy conservation, environmental sustainability, people-based and law-based governance, and the development of civil society. In addition to quantifiable energy saving and emission reduction targets in the 11th Five Year Plan, Liu Jian, Director of the State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development, unveiled an ambitious plan on 17th October to bolster non-agricultural economic skills as well as suitable village enterprises amongst 80% of China's poor in some 148,000 targeted villages with a view to lifting them out of poverty over the next five years.

The vision of such a Harmonious Society, if realised, is likely to add to China's image and attraction as a great country, and thus her external Soft Power. Indeed, I have argued that the

improved branding of China as an international player would also help her create more and much-needed proprietary brands for her exports.

China's long-term development rests on her continuing ability to engage the world constructively not only in trade, investment, science, technology, innovation, resource and energy cooperation but also in maintaining peace and harmony between nations. The Central Committee Plenum paves the way for the crucial 17th Party Congress next year, which is expected to herald the grooming of a younger next leadership with even more international savvy to take China forward in the coming decades.

Andrew K P Leung, SBS, FRSA

www.andrewleunginternationalconsultants.com

Personal email: andrewkpleung@hotmail.com

Tel (44) (20) 7821 6177

Mobile (44) 7838 161668

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