



**Testimony before the
House Permanent Select
Committee on Intelligence**

**“NEW STRATEGIC CHALLENGES:
THE AGE OF ASIAN ANXIETY”**

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A Statement by

**Kurt M. Campbell
Senior Vice President & Director,
CSIS International Security Program**

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Kurt M. Campbell
Senior Vice President, Director of International Security
And Henry A. Kissinger Chair in National Security
Center for Strategic and International Studies,
Washington, D.C.

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“New Strategic Challenges in Asia”

Chairman Hoekstra, Ranking Member Harman, distinguished members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you today to discuss the strategic challenges confronting the United States over the course of the next decade and beyond. While my colleagues have focused much of their attention on the manifest issues of concern associated with the global war on terror and the continuing struggles in Iraq, I intend to focus my remarks on a set of developments in Asia that, if left unattended, could pose significant risks to larger American pursuits and priorities in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

U.S. Preoccupation Away from Asia

The United States is involved and fully invested in a desperate counter-insurgency in Iraq, a conflict that is now inextricably woven into the larger struggle against Islamic fundamentalism. For understandable reasons, the lion’s share of American strategic interests and focus lies squarely on the Middle East, where it undeniably belongs. However, as important as the larger war on terror is for long term American security interests, there are equally important challenges on the horizon that will confront American interests, perhaps sooner rather than later. The most obvious arena for this playing out of new strategic realities is in Asia, where the United States currently is a surprisingly peripheral player on several key issues. While the challenge posed by Al Qaeda and the Islamic fundamentalist network represents the most important non-state challenge to U.S. security interests, the most pressing traditional challenges to peace and stability are currently found in Asia. And the most multifaceted challenge in Asia today for the United States is the remarkably rapid rise of Chinese power and influence.

For the first time in living memory Europe is largely free from the prospect of major power skirmishes that could thrust the global community into conflict. Asia, however, is different. Indeed, every major traditional challenge to peace and stability is currently be found in Asia, from the continuing dangerous stalemate on the Korean Peninsula, the increasingly dangerous undertones in the China-Taiwan relationship, and the tinderbox

quality of the nuclear competition between India and Pakistan. Furthermore, while the current focus of U.S. actions in the war on terror is in the Middle East, it is arguable that the long term “hearts and mind” challenge associated with Islamic politics will be found in Southeast Asia, where the largest population of Islamic followers on the planet reside.

China’s Rise and the New Asia

Furthermore, this already challenging set of regional dynamics is complicated by a near epochal development in big power politics: China’s rise. In the very recent past, it was proper to talk about China as a rising power in the future tense. However, the PRC’s dramatic entry into global politics, commerce, and strategy means that China is a big power player in the here and now, comparable in many respects to the U.S. (and even surpassing the U.S. in some spheres). And, China’s preeminence has enormous implications for long-term American interests in the region. This is not to suggest that the United States will inevitably be confronting China or even that the U.S. and China will be working at crossed purposes in the international arena. Rather, it is merely to suggest that with a great power like China with significant domestic liabilities and persistent anxieties about the U.S., it is perhaps inevitable that a degree of distrust and competition will animate our interactions for the foreseeable future.

Of late, there have been numerous efforts designed to investigate the dynamics of an emerging China in the new global environment. Indeed, current developments strongly signal China gaining strategic traction and consolidating great power prominence both in the Asia-Pacific region and globally. Recent indicators of Chinese operational effectiveness are widespread: the dramatic opening gambit to the Philippines after their sudden departure from Iraq, various strategically inspired free trade agreements in Southeast Asia, major inroads in Europe including efforts to lift the arms embargo, a much more robust and confident engagement in multilateral settings to include the launch of a major “Asia only” meeting next year, and important macroeconomic diplomacy around the dollar that underlines the essential weakness of the U.S. fiscal position. Too many of these projects, though, are content to simply catalogue the ascending prominence of Chinese actions, both subtle and unsubtle.

However, merely diagnosing the problem is insufficient at this juncture given that many policy forecasters predict China’s ascent will be the most pressing issue for American foreign policy over the long term. In this vein, there are several emerging realities, notably: 1) a high degree of U.S. preoccupation is probably inevitable for the foreseeable future so a successful strategy to counter or at least recognize China’s muscle flexing must take this into account; 2) China’s diplomacy in many arenas seems to suggest a certain zero sum quality, even while in other areas they are supporting larger U.S. initiatives; 3) the U.S. still has trouble recognizing indicators of great power prominence when they do not match up to our Soviet-era contaminated expectations (nuclear weapons, military parades, closed societies, etc.). There is a powerful and urgent need to think creatively and operationally about how to construct a strategy, at least for the short term, which takes into account that essentially the U.S. is operating with one hand tied behind its back.

What Is to Be Done?

The United States, in cooperation with other countries, will need to develop a comprehensive strategy to deal with the growing strength and increasing sophistication of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Rather than seeking to weaken or confront the United States directly, Chinese leaders are pursuing a subtle, multifaceted, long-term grand strategy that aims to derive as many benefits as possible within the existing international system while accumulating the economic wherewithal, military strength, and other resources to reinforce China's continuing emergence as at least a regional great power. Due largely to preoccupation with the war in Iraq, official Washington has devoted insufficient attention to developing an effective response to this challenge. Analysts of U.S.-Chinese relations too often focus on mechanics, such as the number of high-level Chinese-American exchanges, rather than substance, such as the content of these meetings. Managing the China challenge requires both a comprehensive understanding of China's economic, political, and military assets and policies, and an evaluation of how other countries are responding to them.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, China's rise to a sustained great power status in the global arena is not preordained, nor is it necessary that the United States and China will find themselves at logger heads over Taiwan, increasing trade frictions, regional rivalry in Asia, or human rights matters. The United States and China are currently working together on a wide array of issues surprisingly well. But there are underlying signs of China practicing a diplomacy that has elements of competition and even a zero sum quality. There are enormous problems in Asia ahead – resolving the North Korea nuclear dilemma, preserving peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, helping to deter a major nuclear armed crisis on the sub-continent, and coping with the changing nature of Islamic politics in Southeast Asia – and many of these require the active cooperation of China. Yet American preoccupation away from Asia, at a time of enormous uncertainty, raises questions throughout Asia about the ultimate reliability of the United States. While it is logical that the United States continue to devote significant attention to the challenges of Islamic fundamentalism and the ongoing conflict in Iraq, there is also a powerful argument that the United States shortchanges Asia at its peril. The United States, in the years ahead, must have the wit and wisdom to develop and orchestrate a sophisticated strategy to deal with the myriad challenges of the most dynamic of region on Earth: Asia and within it, a rising China.

Thank you for the privilege of testifying before you today.