

The failure of the Baker trip to China

by Michael O. Billington

President Bush canceled his long overdue trip to Asia in the wake of the Thornburgh defeat in the Pennsylvania election and the rapid unravelling of the U.S. economy. Nonetheless, he took the opportunity of a speech to the Asia Society in New York on Nov. 12 to present his Asia policy with all the belligerence of his new world order scheme for a *Pax Americana*, while Secretary of State James Baker III toured Japan, Korea, and China with a list of threats and demands befitting vassal nations.

In his Asia Society speech, Bush was explicit about the intent to use U.S. military strength in the region: "While we must adjust our force structure to reflect post-Cold War realities, we also must protect our interests and allies. In this light, we cannot afford to ignore the important sources of instability in North Korea, in Burma, where socialist despotism holds sway . . . in China and other states that resist the worldwide movement toward political pluralism and that contribute to the proliferation of dangerous weapons."

This was coupled with a barrage of government and press attacks on China, including:

- Leslie Gelb in the New York Times quoted "key Bush administration officials" that the U.S. is considering the "ultimate sanction—a threat to the territorial integrity" of China "if Beijing leaders continue to defy new standards of world behavior on arms sales and human rights." Baker's recent article in *Foreign Affairs* implies that the free trade areas in the south of China could be split off from the economically backward north.

- China was accused by Jack Anderson and others of helping Iran build an "Arab nuclear bomb," a charge which has been raised in regard to Iraq, Algeria, and now Iran. The Chinese support for the nuclear programs in these nations has never been secret.

- David Scheffer of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in a *Washington Post* opinion column called on Baker to "drag China kicking and screaming into the new world order," proposing that the U.S. openly support the Taiwan Independence Movement—a provocation against the mainland and Taiwan's government.

Baker thus went to China in an environment of confrontation. The Bush record on supporting human rights in China is less than credible, since he sent his top envoys to wade through the river of blood after Tiananmen to embrace his

"old friend" Deng Xiaoping. What Bush wanted was rather that the Chinese agree to the "new standards of world behavior" by joining in the denial of technology and arms to Third World nations, especially in the Muslim world, and joining in U.S. operations against other Asian countries. If this were achieved, the human rights issues would be glossed over in deference to the lucrative cheap labor concessions provided by the Chinese dictatorship.

However, the effort to force an immediate confrontation with North Korea over the North's nuclear development program was not successful. As reported in last week's *EIR*, the U.S. administration and press have launched a campaign to paint North Korea with the "Iraq" brush. Baker called North Korea's nuclear program, which may or may not be capable of producing a nuclear weapon, the "greatest threat to regional peace." He called for a superpower alliance to solve the "problem." The intent was for China, Japan, and Russia to be co-enforcers of the U.S. demand that no Third World nation be allowed to develop an independent nuclear capacity. But China refused to go along, telling the Japanese Foreign Minister (before Baker arrived in China!) that such bully tactics against small nations were counterproductive.

China generally sent Baker packing without anything. When the time for his departure arrived with no agreements, Baker postponed his plane and extended the talks for five hours, finally calling a press conference to announce what he himself declared to be a less than dramatic breakthrough. But even this weak agreement was essentially overturned in the official Chinese press interpretation of the talks. While Baker claimed that China agreed to abide by the Missile Technology Control Regime, which would mean an end to the sale of at least several types of missiles to Pakistan, Syria, and other nations, the Chinese press reported that China agreed only to "consider" the guidelines, and only in exchange for the lifting of certain U.S. bans on technology transfer to China.

Minor concessions were made on human rights issues, but then it was learned that two leading dissidents who had been approached by the U.S. Embassy for potential meetings with Baker had been detained by the government for the duration of Baker's visit. Baker is quoted saying that this was regrettable. The London *Guardian* said that the trip "came perilously close to humiliation," while the *Daily Telegraph* compared it to the deployment of Lord Macartney to Beijing by King George III in 1793. The lord was "rebuffed magnificently in the form of an imperial decree which said China did not wish to trade with barbarians." The decree ended: "Tremblingly obey, and show no negligence."

It is possible that the China trip was intended to fail, to justify a change of policy towards Asia with China as the "enemy image" to replace the Soviets, as has been proposed by many in the liberal establishment. Whether intended or not, the failure could mark the end of Bush's cozy relationship with Beijing, and could invite a wild swing in the other direction.