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Peking Duct Tape

By THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN

After a recent U.N. session on the Iraq crisis, I asked a Bush aide how China was behaving. "The Chinese?" the official said. "They don't think they have a dog in this fight."

That certainly is how China is behaving — as if this whole issue were for America to resolve. That is a deeply mistaken view, and it shows how little China (not to mention France and Russia) understands about the new world order. If I were explaining it to China's leaders, here's what I would say:

Friends, with every great world war has come a new security system. World War I gave birth to the League of Nations and an attempt to recreate a balance of power in Europe, which proved unstable. World War II gave birth to the U.N., NATO, the I.M.F. and the bipolar American-Soviet power structure, which proved to be quite stable until the end of the cold war. Now, 9/11 has set off World War III, and it, too, is defining a new international order.

The new world system is also bipolar, but instead of being divided between East and West, it is divided between the World of Order and the World of Disorder. The World of Order is built on four pillars: the U.S., E.U.-Russia, India and China, along with all the smaller powers around them. The World of Disorder comprises failed states (such as Liberia), rogue states (Iraq and North Korea), messy states — states that are too big to fail but too messy to work (Pakistan, Colombia, Indonesia, many Arab and African states) — and finally the terrorist and mafia networks that feed off the World of Disorder.

There has always been a World of Disorder, but what makes it more dangerous today is that in a networked universe, with widely diffused technologies, open borders and a highly integrated global financial and Internet system, very small groups of people can amass huge amounts of power to disrupt the World of Order. Individuals can become super-empowered. In many ways, 9/11 marked the first full-scale battle between a superpower and a small band of super-empowered angry men from the World of Disorder.

The job of the four pillars of the World of Order is to work together to help stabilize and lift up the World of Disorder. Unfortunately, China doesn't seem to realize that. You (like some Bushies) still have a lot of cold war reflexes. Indeed, some Chinese intellectuals, not to mention French and Russian, actually believe you all have more

to fear from American power than from Osama, Kim or Saddam. That's nuts. If America has to manage the World of Disorder alone, the American people will quickly tire. And as Michael Mandelbaum, the Johns Hopkins foreign policy expert, notes, "The real threat to world stability is not too much American power. It is too little American power." Too little American power will only lead to the World of Disorder expanding.

China has to think clearly. If there is just one more 9/11, or if North Korea lobs just one missile our way, it will lead to the end of the open society in America, as we know it, and also constrict globalization. Because we will tighten our borders, triple-check every ship that comes into port and restrict civil liberties as never before, and this will slow the whole global economy.

Now the last time I checked, China had decided to base its growth on manufacturing for the global market and in particular for the U.S. market, where you now send 40 percent of your exports — 40 percent! — and where you just racked up a \$100 billion trade surplus. One more 9/11 and your growth strategy will be in real trouble (unless you plan on only exporting duct tape), which means the Chinese leadership will be in real trouble.

So, you still think you don't have a dog in this fight? You still think you can be free riders on an Iraq war? You still think you can leave us to carry the burden of North Korea? Well, guess again. You need to get serious. It is quite legitimate for China to oppose war in Iraq or North Korea. But why isn't China's foreign minister going to Baghdad and Pyongyang, slamming his fist on tables and demanding that their leaders start complying with the U.N. to avoid war? I understand you don't want us to be impulsive, but why are you so passive?

One more 9/11, one bad Iraq war that ties America down alone in the Middle East and saps its strength, well, that may go over well with the cold warriors in the People's Liberation Army, but in the real world — in the world where your real threat is not American troops crossing your borders but American dollars fleeing from them — you will be out of business.

Now which part of that sentence don't you understand?