

AMERICA'S CONTINUING SEARCH FOR ALLIES

by

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Clemson, South Carolina**

2005

**THE
STROM THURMOND
INSTITUTE**



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While the United States in 2005 is the world's only economic and military superpower, it cannot be said with certainty that this dominance will last forever.

Being challenged with respect to world economic clout is, however, something the United States can live with. Our historic position has been that with free and fair trade America will prosper and that being the first, second, or third largest world economy is of little consequence. Maintaining military superpower status is another matter. Our national interests and commitments are global in nature and there is general agreement that the nation must have the capability to protect those interests. In plain terms it means that no nation or combination of nations can be allowed to militarily threaten the United States. This does not mean, however, that the United States alone must be equal to various threats to its security and interest. An acceptable outcome would be one where America, along with allies, can balance, and hopefully exceed, the military capability of any potential adversary. Should, however, such adversary or adversaries become dominant in one or more regions of the world then, as history shows, conflict is the more likely result.

From the end of World War II into the 1990s, a third world conflict was avoided by a balance of power as between the U.S. led NATO and the Soviet Union led Warsaw Pact. Maintaining such a balance today is absolutely essential to America's security. But that is easier said than done. In many cases our perceived national interests will not coincide with those of long time allies. Afghanistan and Iraq are cases in point. NATO by and large supported the U.S. led invasion of Afghanistan but split with respect to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. And in another part of the world, would NATO militarily support the United States should it become necessary to defend Taiwan against an invasion by the

People's Republic of China? Not likely. And should the UN act its likely contribution would be words and little else. Japan, Australia, Singapore, the Philippines and possibly South Korea might stand with the United States but be able to contribute little with respect to military assistance. Continuing the scenario, assume Russia, China and North Korea support a PRC attack on Taiwan. With NATO neutral, the balance of power in the Pacific has shifted against the United States.

The problem for America is that in different conflict scenarios our traditional allies may not see it our way and simply opt out. This presents both a diplomatic and military dilemma. How to forge and maintain alliances that can militarily equal or exceed those of a potential enemy when the threat itself is unknown.

In August of 2005, Russia and China for the first time in history conducted joint military exercises. Should this be considered a threat to Taiwan? China's Ministry of Defense cited the exercise as a means of improving each nation's ability to fight terrorism and "separatism." And how should the United States respond to the recent declaration by the six nation Shanghai Cooperation Organization, led by Russia and China, that the U.S. set a timetable for closing its bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, bases set up to support the war in Afghanistan. Should the United States encourage Japan to again become a major military power? Should we buy our way back to bases in the Philippines? How should the U.S. view China's recent overtures to India? In response, should we court India as a potential ally?

As difficult and frustrating as it may be, the United States must continue to seek allies that share our basic values while, at the same time, accepting that alliances will change with time and governments. In the uncertain political environment of the 21st century we have no choice but to remain a military superpower but a military superpower always willing to seek allies to insure that no nation, or combination of nations, as was the case in World War II, threaten the existence of democracy in the world.

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