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## **China's Sustainable Development is a Global Priority**

By Juha Uitto, 12/14/2007 11:26:21 AM

China receives more than its share of negative media coverage these days. Some reasons are understandable, given the scandals related to tainted pet food and unsafe toys that have come to light this year. But much of the alarm appears to be based on an irrational fear of China's rise as a world power. This reaction is deeply worrying and may have unfortunate consequences to the United States. Rather than its geopolitics, the more important concern is China's environmental practice.

Since the end of the Cold War, United States has become used to being the sole superpower in the world. Now it appears that any country that is developing rapidly and acting more assertively than before is seen as a threat to the U.S. economy and security. This not only applies to China but to other countries, such as Russia, as well. It harks back to the 1980s when Japan's rise as an economic power was watched with trepidation and anger. Yet, Japan continues to be America's trusted ally and major trade partner.

Since it opened up its markets in the late-1980s, China has experienced unprecedented growth in its economy, much higher than those in America or other developed regions of the world. In October this year China surpassed Germany as the world's third largest economy following the USA and Japan. This tremendous growth has been partly due to the low level from which it started. Largely, however, it is because of the enormous determination and hard work of the Chinese people who rightly aspire to achieve living standards at par with those of the industrialized world.

Similarly, China has attempted to modernize its military to a level appropriate to a major regional power. It still is no match to the American armed forces and will not be for a long while. Furthermore, there is no indication that China would have any desire for a confrontation with the United States.

There are problematic issues with China's rapid development, for sure. These include not only the above mentioned lack of quality control of its products, but also concerns related to labor conditions and political freedoms. It seems, though, that on the whole the Chinese people are happy just to go about their business. Getting wealthy is glorious, in the words of the former leader Deng Xiaoping who opened the country's economy. Politics is secondary. How is that so different from what most Americans feel?

Rather than attempting to isolate China, the United States should embrace it as a partner. The U.S. economic power historically has been based on high levels of management skills, capital and technology. China is still lacking in all of these, but has a huge manufacturing base. Every fifth person in the world is Chinese and as they get richer they will constitute a vast market for goods and services --man opportunity for the U.S., not a threat.

The real problem of China's rise for the world and for China itself is environmental destruction. Industrial growth requires energy and raw materials. Every week, two new polluting coal-fired power plants go online in China. Urbanization takes over natural lands, and the hundreds of millions of consumers demand more and more goods. In Beijing only, more than a thousand new cars are registered every day. Helping China to overcome these challenges is a global prerogative. This is one of the key issues being discussed at the Bali climate conference this month.

It is in America's interest to support China's peaceful and sustainable development. Fear mongering and calls for protectionism will hurt all parties, not least America. There is room for more than one big fellow on the block. China's rise is inevitable. America's welcome will determine how the benefits are shared.

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