

China's technology stealth

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On Feb. 26, two communist Chinese diplomats were caught speeding past a guard post at the Los Alamos National Laboratory. U.S. officials believe this was part of an intelligence mission. This should not be surprising, as the Chinese have long been interested in our nuclear technology. Had they been successful in extracting information at that time, it is more than possible that technology eventually would wind up in the hands of a volatile country.

Since September 11, 2001, the acronym WMD, Weapons of Mass Destruction, has become a household phrase. The existence of WMD was even used in justification of the Iraq war and President Bush clearly acknowledges the threat posed by their proliferation. In June 2002, the president declared correctly that, "The greatest danger to freedom lies at the crossroads of radicalism and technology." When discussing this problem the same countries are always mentioned. Pakistan, Iran and North Korea are all pursuing WMD capability.

However, to address these countries alone is inadequate. It is akin to fighting a war on drugs by only pursuing the street corner dealer and neglecting Colombia. The aforementioned countries' weapons capabilities all share a similar source. In the last decade, the People's Republic of China (PRC) have contributed to proliferation of weapons and weapons technology to hostile and unstable parts of the world.

In relation to Pakistan, many Chinese companies operate as fronts to propagate China's proliferation agenda. In 1996, the China National Nuclear Corporation sold 5,000 ring magnets to the A.Q. Khan Research Laboratory in Pakistan. These ring magnets are used to enrich uranium.

PRC officials denied knowledge of the sale, and due to lack of proof, no sanctions were issued. In this same year the China National Nuclear Corp. sold special industrial furnaces and diagnostic equipment to nuclear facilities in Pakistan. This equipment could be used to mold uranium or plutonium. Also, in the early 1990s the U.S. issued sanctions against China for the sale of supercomputers, satellites and missile technology to Pakistan. Furthermore, U.S. intelligence has concluded that China has supplied blueprints and provided assistance for a missile-making plant in 2000.

As for Iran, PRC scientists have traveled to Iran to build an electromagnetic isotope separation system at a facility in Karaj. China has provided Iran with blueprints for a plant to convert uranium ore to uranium hexafluoride, and in the mid-'90s sold missile guidance systems and computerized machine tools to Iran. In 1998, the SinoChem Corp sold 500 tons of phosphorus pentasulfide, which can be used to produce a nerve agent. Then, in 2001, NORINCO (a PRC defense firm) sold Iran metal and chemicals for missile use. In early 2002, the Bush administration sanctioned two Chinese companies, for the sale of chemical and biological equipment to Iran.

Lastly, North Korea has also received Chinese assistance. In 1999 accelerometers, gyroscopes and precision grinding machinery were delivered to North Korea from China. Then, in late 2002, Chinese firms sold 20 tons of tributyl phosphate to North Korea.

Despite official statements and adherence to certain treaties and agreements, China has been circumspect about following the letter, rather than the spirit, of the law. China may not be feeding these countries, but they are "teaching them how to fish." This is even more dangerous, as these countries will inevitably become self-proficient in producing weapons of mass destruction. Advanced

ballistic missile capability integrated with chemical, biological or radiological materials could create weapons that rival the destructive effects of a nuclear blast.

The United States, particularly the State Department, must be realistic about China's actions and intentions. The sale of weapons technology through PRC defense firms has helped to equip these unstable nations with advanced missile and nuclear technology. This makes the world a more dangerous place and increases the likelihood that one day terrorist groups will come into possession of these weapons and use them on U.S. soil.

China contributes to an arms race inflames conflicts between Israel and Iran, and between India and Pakistan. There is a clear cause and effect pattern here. If there was no September 11 and no war on terror, China might be the primary national security issue for the United States. By contributing to conflict around the world, China is able simultaneously to distract the U.S. and keep itself off the radar screen.

It is imperative the United States be aware of this and exercise its political, socioeconomic and even military power to thwart proliferation of WMD technology. Now is the time to deal with this problem or free nations will suffer horrendously later.

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