

London floats plan for splitting China

by Mary Burdman

Britain's two premier strategic institutions, the Royal Institute of International Affairs and the International Institute of Strategic Studies, are launching a "trial balloon" on how to deal with China. A commentary published April 16 by Gerald Segal, a senior fellow of the IISS, in the *International Herald Tribune*, calls for "regional China cards, to play warily." Segal's views will soon be published in the RIIA journal *The World Today*, in an article on "dividing China."

As usual with the highest levels of British policymaking, there is nothing new here. Segal's articles reflect one important trend in British policy toward China, similar to that at the turn of the century, when British geopoliticians, then far more blunt about their aims, explicitly called for the partition of China to counter the policies of Russian Finance Minister Count Sergei Witte for a Eurasian region of cooperation. It also recalls the British-American-backed policy of "Open Door" concessions to facilitate looting China at that time. It was this British policy which helped unleash World War I.

Segal's piece is intended to break what he calls a "conspiracy of silence" among western China specialists who have been refusing to discuss the implications of growing regionalism in China. Their mistake is, he asserted in the *Tribune*, a tendency to "blind optimism" about the "apparent victory" of Deng Xiaoping's campaign for economic reforms. Although he does not foresee the breakup of China along the lines of the collapse of the Soviet Union last year, to deal with China "only through Beijing" would be a strategic mistake, Mr. Segal's arguments imply, because it would mean missing a historic opportunity for doing what the British most want to do: preventing the development of a powerful Eurasian region.

For all its compliance with the West, China remains an "incalculable" factor in the world situation, leading British strategic thinkers acknowledge. Since the demise of the Soviet Union, China's leaders have emphasized that they will not accept the "unipolar world" of George Bush's "new world order" in which China has no important strategic role. A document circulated among China's hierarchy earlier this year said: "It is necessary to exploit the contradictions, especially those which exist among the western nations, in order to reinforce China." China must act "calmly and intelligently to maintain its position, to conceal our capacities, to win

time, and to avoid conflicts."

The RIIA-IISS move will force the issue of China's own agenda out into the open. One well-informed source told *EIR* that this policy is credible and on the agenda.

China itself is, of course, not the only question here. British analysts comment that Eurasia will see many more Afghanistan-type civil wars in the future, and that "fragmentation," not cohesion, is the future of Eurasia. Even a revived "Great Game," contested among Britain, Russia, and China in the last century for control of Central Asia, will have multiple players this time, including Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, and Israel.

But Eurasian integration is a possibility, which could render the "Atlantic powers," such as Britain, relatively insignificant. For example, during the conference of the U.N. Economic and Social Commission for Asia held in Beijing starting April 14, China announced that it will participate in the trans-Asian railway project, originally projected in the 1960s to link Europe and Asia, from Istanbul to Singapore, by rail. Already, the completion of the last kilometers of railway between Xinjiang in China and Alma Ata in Kazakhstan, means that Rotterdam in the Netherlands is linked with Lianyungang in China by rail. A "northern route" will integrate Russian, Mongolian, and Chinese railways.

Pressure on Beijing

While some may see Deng's factional tactics, including his trip to southern China in January, to enlist support against his enemies in Beijing, as an assurance of a "rosy future" for Hong Kong, Segal's article takes no such simplistic view. Chinese investment in Hong Kong is now larger than Hong Kong investment in China, he wrote. The growing power of China's regions poses real questions for East Asia policy.

One cannot help noticing that the problems Segal warns of, are just what London would want to foster. For example, southern Chinese leaders more interested in strong local trade ties than ideology, might well oppose Beijing if it wanted to take a hard line with Hong Kong or Taiwan, or attempt to block Beijing's effort to take control of the oil-rich Spratley islands, disputed among the nations of the region.

The West would do well to prepare for this rapidly evolving situation, his article indicates: "At a minimum, it would be sensible to begin dealing with parts of China in a more regionally differentiated way," focusing on local economies and cultures. This way, the West will be able to manipulate China. "Trying to deal with Beijing while opening contacts with the outer provinces is a delicate game," Segal concluded. "However, if it is skillfully played, it may be a way of adding pressure on Beijing to be more cooperative on important global security issues, such as arms transfers and the proliferation of nuclear weapons." Pressure has been, and is being, applied to get the Chinese to go along with certain policies, such as the Gulf war against Iraq, which they have been reluctant to support.