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Is China really profiting from American overreach?

Posted By [Daniel W. Drezner](#) ■ Wednesday, April 6, 2011 - 1:21 PM ■ [+](#) [Share](#)

Over at *The National Interest*, [Ted Galen Carpenter](#) blogs that America's militarized focus on the Middle East is providing a huge strategic opening for China:

Members of China's political elite who are eager for the Middle Kingdom to displace the United States as the world's leading power probably can't believe their good fortune. America has so many natural advantages that such a displacement would normally take several generations, if it occurred at all. Yet clumsy, counterproductive U.S. policies may be shortening that time frame dramatically....

Global meddling is also damaging the American brand with respect to political values and even popular culture. That is especially apparent in the Muslim world, where public opinion surveys reveal that positive views of the United States now sometimes languish in the single digits. But America's popularity has waned even in Europe and other formerly very friendly regions. Even as Washington's aggressive behavior alienates populations, especially in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, [China is cultivating countries in those regions](#), portraying itself as a less intrusive, more cooperative political and economic partner.

Um, Ted? 2006 called, and it wants the hackneyed geopolitical analysis back.... and sent via MySpace.

Seriously, this blog post reads like it's five years old. It either ignores or elides the following facts:

- 1) America's popularity in the rest of the world has **rebounded quite nicely** since 2006
- 2) Contrary to Carpenter's claims, **the Libya intervention has gone down rather well** on the Arab street.
- 3) China committed a series of **foreign policy blunders** in 2009 and **2010** that increased regional and global wariness about the Middle Kingdom and (according to China experts who talk to me) forced Beijing to rethink its grand strategy.
- 4) Chinese authorities are currently occupied with trying to **cancel news about the Arab revolutions**, play **hide and seek with its dissidents**, **get a grip on its real estate bubble**, and **avoid populist backlash** for its Africa investments. I'm not seeing a lot of successful efforts by Beijing to push the "less intrusive" line elsewhere in the globe.

These are pretty important facts that get in the way of Carpenter's analysis. Now, there is a glimmer of truth to this kind of *realpolitik* argument. Saudi Arabia, for example, is **less than thrilled** with how the Obama administration is handling the Arab revolutions, and it might cozy up more to Beijing as a result. That said, if we're really witnessing a fourth wave of democratization in ...foreignpolicy.com/.../is_china_really_...

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the Middle East, does Carpenter seriously think that these regimes will automatically be more sympathetic to China than the United States? That would be the realist argument, but I think this is one of those situations when realists don't sound terribly grounded in reality.

There are a lot of good critiques that can be levied against American grand strategy and the Obama administration's foreign policy in the Middle East. The notion that China has gained a strategic advantage in recent months ain't one of them.

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DON BACON 2:10 AM ET April 7, 2011

Is China really profiting? You betcha.

1)Obama, June 4, 2009: "I've come here to Cairo to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world, one based on mutual interest and mutual respect, and one based upon the truth that America and Islam are not exclusive and need not be in competition."

Nope. Pew Attitudes Report, June 17, 2010 -- U.S. favorability ratings remain high in Western Europe and have increased markedly in China and Russia. But opinions remain negative in many Muslim nations.

2) Libya -- It's too early for anyone to come to any conclusions on this war which has no conclusion in sight.

3) How has China's grand strategy changed? Actually it hasn't. China is developing new friends and economic ties in Asia, Europe and Africa. In the U.S. back yard, China has surpassed the United States as Brazil's top trading partner.

4) Regarding China's internal problems, they don't compare with those in the U.S., with a government shut-down and massive budget cuts pending, along with persistently high unemployment and housing problems.

The US is in the economic dumps, and this weakens the country. As Obama's National Security Strategy states: "Our national security begins at home. What takes place within our borders has always been the source of our strength. . . In the long run, the welfare of the American people will determine America's strength in the world, particularly at a time when our own economy is

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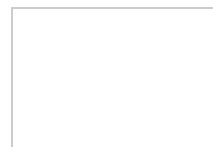
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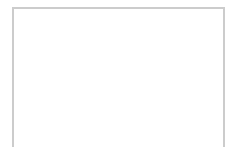
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inextricably linked to the global economy. Our prosperity serves as a wellspring for our power. It pays for our military, underwrites our diplomacy and development efforts, and serves as a leading source of our influence in the world."

Finally, the U.S. is in deep national debt while China has a high positive national account balance. But you knew that.

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NICOLAS19
10:55 AM ET
April 7, 2011

I agree with all your points

Adding to No. 2. It is ridiculous to quote a National Interest article to substantiate Drezner's argument, especially an article wrote by the same guy, who argued in February that American support prolongs the lives of regimes like Tunisia, Egypt... well, look at them now
(<http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/egypt-tunisia-iran-4868>)

Drezner's train of thought is typical wishful thinking, the same that floats around the US media: "we might do badly, but they are doing much worse than us!". Which is nothing to be surprised of, considering that China-bashing has become the norm.

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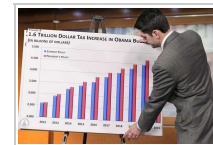
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