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BOOK REVIEW: How we manage the heavyweights

SHIFTING SUPERPOWERS: THE NEW AND EMERGING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES, CHINA AND INDIA

By **Martin Sieff** Cato Institute, \$26, 240 pages

Reviewed by Sol Schindler

As Herodotus told us a couple millennia ago, everything changes. In the 20th century, the great powers, as they liked to be called, joined a suicide club and virtually extinguished themselves. They are finally being replaced, as Martin Sieff tells us in his new book, "Shifting Superpowers," by two relative newcomers, both gigantic in land area and population and energetic in economic expansion. China and India are the two new heavyweights, and Mr. Sieff attempts to lay out a program about how to get along with each.

China's first modern experience with the West was through war, brought on in good part by its own arrogance. The emperor's palace in Peking was considered the physical center of the universe, trade was a despised vocation, merchants a despised class and ocean-going ships a blot on civilization. War with visiting traders in the mid-19th century became inevitable as was Chinese defeat.

The insurrection of a wildly heretical Christian movement, the Taiping, then followed. It was rabid in its destruction of the Imperial structure, and suffered an equally rabid reaction. Total fatalities may have reached 30 million, according to the author. But the demise of the Taiping did not bring peace. Their revolt was followed by the Boxer Rebellion, the fall of the

empire, a series of war lords and invasion by the Japanese.

A central government in Nanking was established by one general, Chiang Kai-shek, who because of his repetition of anti-communist slogans and the appeal of his glamorous wife, managed to garner considerable American sympathy. The author feels that because the media romanticized these two figures, despite the general ineptitude and corruption of their regime, American diplomatic maneuverability became severely limited. The Chinese nationalists were easily routed by the communists and, once again, China had a central despotic government ruling the entire war-ravaged country.

The path to Indian statehood was somewhat different. President Franklin D. Roosevelt had always championed Indian independence and it was virtually a given that American financial aid would be forthcoming. The large Muslim population within the country, however, made the form of independence difficult to devise. Partition was the final British solution, and the Muslim state of Pakistan emerged. The remainder of the subcontinent kept the name of India, but still had a substantial Muslim minority. In the process of transferring elements of the population to their new homes, what amounted to ethnic warfare broke out with fatalities possibly exceeding 1 million, a nerve-shattering experience.

American policy towards India during its early years was generous and accommodating. We first lent, then gave, hundreds of millions of dollars of farm surplus to feed the ever-hungry and growing Indian masses. We also helped them devise a "green revolution" that made them self-sufficient in food and freed them from the periodic famines that had afflicted the country.

When the Chinese army attacked and virtually obliterated Indian frontier troops on their mountain borders, we provided almost without question replacement armament. When Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru became one of the founding fathers of the Third World movement, a group of penniless states that were afraid of being too close to the Soviet Union for fear of being swallowed, and too close to the United States for fear of being called capitalist, but wanted a public platform to express their noble emotions, we simply shrugged and said they will grow up.

When India obsessively clung to its ties with the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and elsewhere, we kept our patience and felt that both truth and democracy would eventually prevail. And now that pragmatists have shed the superstitions and inherent anti-Americanism of the London School of Economics and the country is enjoying an economic blossoming in electronics in partnership with the United States, we can expect even more

fruitful relationships.

The author feels that we should be careful not to infringe upon the dignity or aspirations of the country; but this is true of all our diplomatic endeavors. In any case, the growing commonality of our popular culture and the steady movement of Indian immigrants into the United States indicates continued future alignment.

Relations with the Chinese followed a clearly different pattern. We did not recognize the Chinese communist government from its very beginning, and a few years later waged a deadly war against it in Korea. Their heavy losses there made them less eager to use force as a final weapon, but it was not until both countries recognized the dangers of a desperate Soviet Union that diplomatic relations were established.

When economic pragmatists (men who wanted to see a prosperous economy, rather than simply a politically correct one) gained control of the Chinese economy, trade burgeoned but, unfortunately, mostly to China's advantage. Because of a huge trade imbalance, according to the U.S. Treasury, China had accumulated by September 2008 U.S. Treasury securities totaling \$585 billion.

Such heavy Chinese investments give the dollar much-needed strength, but it also makes this country's foreign policy exceedingly vulnerable to economic pressure. If China finally decides to go ahead and do what it has been threatening to do for the past 60 years - invade Taiwan, and tell us not to intervene or otherwise they will sell every dollar-denominated security they have, thereby destroying the dollar and plunging the United States into a ruinous depression - what would the American response be?

Our relations with the two new superpowers should be as it is to all countries: We maintain our vital interests and do so in an ethical, honest and peace-loving fashion. We do not stand by casually or indifferently while another country painstakingly formulates a trade policy that reduces us to impotence. Machiavelli said, know thy adversary; Socrates said, know thyself. We should do both.

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