

MEMO TO: EUROPE, RUSSIA, CHINA

By Michael Ventura

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It is no doubt quixotic for a columnist on a weekly paper in Austin, Texas, to address the leaders and peoples of Europe, Russia, and China. The likelihood of their taking notice is, to put it mildly, small. But right now, Europe, Russia, and/or China have more power to influence our future than at any time since the Soviets' fall. Will they appease the United States' rush to empire, or perhaps end it? Will Bush, Cheney, and Rumsfeld wield power irresponsibly through 2008, or will there be a chance to unseat them in November 2004? During these next weeks, Europe, Russia, and China may make choices that decide those questions. So, quixotic or not, here goes. Worse than not being heard is having a voice and failing to speak.

You -- Europe, Russia, and China -- have not been misled by our media's ceaseless cooperation with White House propaganda. You know there are no links between Saddam Hussein and 9/11, and barely any between Hussein and al Qaeda. You know Bush had no evidence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq; if Bush had such information he would have discreetly shown it to your leadership to secure your cooperation and prevent being humiliated by the rejection you handed him at the UN before the Iraq war. You politely use the word "coalition," but you know this is an unprovoked American invasion and occupation, with Britain whoring itself in a desperate bid to retain influence, accompanied by small detachments from small countries that lust for America's favor. You know that if this White House succeeds in Iraq, there will be future invasions, and no one knows who'll be next.

You also know why this White House undertook this misadventure. First, of course, is to dominate Mideast oil. Most American pundits were sleeping, but we can be sure the former oil executives of this White House were not, when *The New York Times* reported on Sept. 9, 2001, that China and Russia began negotiations to construct an oil pipeline from Siberia to northeastern China. With such a pipeline, China will have access to Russia's vast oil reserves and be freed from competition with the U.S. for the Mideast's oil. The Russia-China pipeline will increase the world production of oil, lowering American and OPEC profits; it will give Russia virtually limitless funds with which to rebuild itself into a great country; and it will leave the U.S. energy-dependent on a hostile, unstable Middle East, on which it must continue to expend endless resources. Very quickly, China and Russia could become viable rivals to the United States. This administration intended an Iraq blitzkrieg that would assure its complete dominance of the Middle East quickly, so that it could restructure the area to its advantage fast enough to meet the challenge posed by the Russia-China oil linkage.

The second reason for the war was the blitzkrieg itself. The Bush White House hoped to prove it could attack swiftly and overwhelmingly, anywhere in the world, to enforce its will. Iraq was chosen as much for its (political) isolation and structural weakness as for its oil. Their gamble was that, had Iraq been the success they dreamed of, no country would feel safe enough or strong enough to stand against their will. Their stated conviction, last May, was that by now only 30,000 American troops would be necessary in Iraq and that Iraq's oil would pay for the reconstruction -- i.e., they could then regroup and be ready to threaten elsewhere. Instead, the opposite has occurred:

Roughly 140,000 American troops are indefinitely tied down, and no military analyst believes this White House could mount a (conventional) military response of any significance anywhere else while the Iraq situation continues. With his trademark arrogance, Bush wants you to bail him out of Iraq so that he can threaten you elsewhere -- and with his other trademark, shortsightedness, he believes you'll do this out of fear of increased world chaos if the American behemoth totters. But won't there be at least as much chaos, or more, if it does not?

You've known all along that Bush's proposed "missile shield" is directed not at "rogue states," which do not have the arsenals to rain missiles upon the United States, but at China, France, and Russia, which do. You know such a shield would put the U.S. in position to dictate to you. You've learned this year that the arrogance of Bush/Cheney/Rumsfeld knows no bounds; if they can dictate to you, they will. Which is why, on July 17, 2001, *The New York Times* reported that Russia and China "signed a treaty loosely committing the two nations to coordinate their responses to any American withdrawal from the Antiballistic Missile Treaty and to oppose a global system dominated by a single power -- that is, the U.S." Again commentators barely noticed, but the White House did. September 11 supplied the excuse to act in a far more blatant way than they otherwise could have. Which is why virtually all their efforts since 9/11 have been directed toward foreign dominance, while "homeland security" remains, two years later, drastically underfunded and woefully inadequate. The Bush White House is not afraid of terrorism. Terrorists can frighten all of us and kill a few of us; perhaps even, God forbid, take out a city; but they cannot bring us down. But a Russia-China alliance, cooperating with Europe, would soon mean that the United States must deal with equals - - if, that is, the U.S. can remain their equal.

On Jan. 13, 2003, *The New York Times* reported that "China is using heavy government investment to escape the worldwide economic slowdown and maintain [yearly] growth *above the 7 percent level* [my italics]." (U.S. growth: 2%, minus 50,000 jobs a month.) In 2002, China grew by an astounding 8%, "attributed to surging exports and *a nearly 25 percent increase in direct [government] investment* [my italics]. ... \$200 billion [was spent] in ... 11 months of last year on basic infrastructure projects. ... By 2005, China plans to build 8,500 miles of railroad. ... Shanghai has just opened the world's first magnetic levitation train that zips to its new airport at up to 270 miles an hour." Huang Quifan, executive mayor of Chongqing: "When I say \$200 billion a year, this is not some abstract figure. It's really happening."

China, beset by serious internal problems, may fail. Before this massive surge of investment, I wrote that it wasn't a serious rival. But whom do you think the future will favor? The country that pours its resources into strengthening its basic structural, economic, and cultural elements, while maintaining a substantial military (second only to the U.S.); or the country that pours equally massive resources into futile foreign adventures that waste its military, while allowing its infrastructure, education, and health system to go to the dogs -- not to mention impoverishing its people to enrich its richest and blowing a substantial surplus while running up astronomical deficits? Two years ago the United States had the money and the momentum, and an enormous head start, to do what China is doing and more. Bush wasted that. In everything but our military, we are becoming a second-rate power. Now, with Iraq, even our military is strained.

At this point, to use a Texas phrase, Bush "don't know whether to shit or throw rocks." Last Aug. 14, *The New York Times*: "U.S. Abandons Idea of Bigger UN Role in Iraq Occupation." Two weeks and one day later, after a terrible run of anti-U.S. action in

Iraq and many casualties: "U.S. Weighs UN Role." Now Bush is floating a proposal for you to bail him out -- for, as was also reported last month (but not loudly): *The Pentagon doesn't think it can sustain the present level of involvement in Iraq past next March.* March, of course, is smack in the middle of primary season.

I'm not for you and against my country. I'm for a just, democratic America and against empire. If my country is to return to the promise of its great political documents and take its place as an equal in a truly modern world of economic and cultural mutuality, we must reject empire. If you refuse to help Bush salvage his misadventure in Iraq, that may happen. If you save Bush from humiliation, his reckless drive to empire will endanger not only you, but the freedom and welfare of Americans as well -- especially our people in uniform, whom Bush is sacrificing uselessly. Next year Bush may outspend his political opponents by a factor of 3-to-1. Granted, you can't underestimate how the timidity of our Democratic Party, plus the immaturity of our Greens, might make for a combined political ineptitude capable of blowing the best opportunity. But if you bail out Bush on Iraq, they have scant chance. You must ask yourselves: Do you want to deal with this White House through 2008? History, at this moment, is yours to make.

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