

RELEASE IN PART
B6

From: sbwhoepo [redacted]
Sent: Sunday, January 3, 2010 10:01 AM
To: H
Subject: H: They asked for 250 words and I wrote slightly more, briefly on China. Sid

2010: global cracks, human prospects (part II)

David Hayes, 2 January 2010

Subjects:

- Democracy and government
- International politics

More openDemocracy authors reflect on a volcanic decade in global politics - continued from [part I](#)

openDemocracy deputy editor David Hayes asked openDemocracy writers to reflect on the decade that has passed and the one that lies ahead by considering three questions:

- 1) *What was the most significant trend in the century's first decade?*
- 2) *What do you most hope for, and most fear, about the decade to come?*
- 3) *What idea do you see fading and/or emerging in 2010 and beyond?*

- Sidney Blumenthal

The greatest challenge for the early 21st century is that China's leadership has contempt for much of the international order and many of the international organisations developed since the second world war. In pursuit of its narrow and even crude understanding of its interest, China will constantly abuse and break international rules, protocols and bodies. Its willful destruction of the Copenhagen summit on climate change reveals the pattern. Its mercantile currency policy in a beggar-thy-neighbour approach, environmental degradation, and disdain for human rights and the rule of law generally are the obvious reflections of its despotism. Through its rough and strange neo-imperialism, in Africa especially but also elsewhere, China is able to gain help, partly through economic intimidation, in its international forays to repel or strike down the responsibilities of internationalism.

Internally, China is a prison of nations, an empire similar to imperial Russia and the Soviet Union, and may also be the most unequal industrial country in distribution of income. China's power is increasing, but the authoritarian regime is hardly the wave of the future as some awestruck worshippers of raw power and money (whether investment bankers or ex-Marxists) imagine. The system is inherently unstable, which accounts for its rigid currency policy (at root a fear of operating on other than a virtual slave-labour standard, of turning its poverty-stricken millions into consumers with real choice, and ultimately of letting go even a little bit).

In the long-term the tyranny of the one-party state and its military rule is at odds with the new economic classes of entrepreneurs and professionals it has fostered. China's growing economic power is accompanied by expanding arrogance, demonstrated not least in the incivility and rudeness with which President Obama was treated on his trip there. China's regime lacks an ideal other than a communist gloss on Confucian uniformity, itself based incoherently on reckless economic development, for example in the areas of currency, environment and labour; it has no "soft power", not just because of the coarseness of its supposed diplomacy, but also because its cultural appeal does not travel. China forces its way through coercion of one sort or another.

The next decade will see how flexible or inflexible its rulers are and how secure their system is. The brief effort at a rhetorical gesture by some in the Obama administration who floated the turgid phrase "strategic reassurance" was risible and did not last. For now, the west has no policy to deal with China as it is. The place to begin is on currency.

The most powerful idea for the 21st century is the equality of women. It is the idea most feared by those - from the Vatican to the Taliban - arrayed against modernity, the still vibrant project of the Enlightenment. Someday the United States may even have a woman president. It took fifty years after granting the vote to African-Americans to pass a constitutional amendment giving it to women. Perhaps the distance between electing the first African-American president and the first female one will not be so great.

Sidney Blumenthal is former senior adviser to President Clinton, and an Oscar and Emmy award-winning documentary producer. He is writing a book on Abraham Lincoln

Also by Sidney Blumenthal:

"The choice" (21 November 2007)