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**The Dragon and the Tigers: China and Asian Regionalism**

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Among the many costs of the Bush administration's obsession with the "war on terror" is the diversion of policymaking attention from developments in other parts of the world that may have even greater longterm consequences for American security. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Asia. While administration officials traipse about the globe like itinerant evangelists preaching the gospel of freedom, the People's Republic of China (PRC) is quietly but steadily expanding its influence in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly among the states on its southern border that make up the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The emergence of China promises to alter the strategic landscape of East Asia and the world in the twenty-first century. In barely more than a decade the PRC has become a global manufacturing hub for everything from textiles to computers, a magnet for foreign investment, the fulcrum of international economic growth, and a major buyer of U.S. debt. To speed domestic modernization, China has also actively promoted regional free trade. But regional integration will also make it easier for Beijing to leverage economic power in support of geostrategic ambitions that could seriously threaten U.S. interests in the future. Indeed, China is building a powerful military arsenal. With the help of Russia and Israel, among other suppliers, it has acquired the advanced air and naval platforms that will enable it to project power in the Western Pacific as well as in the South China Sea and across the Taiwan Strait.

The evolution of China's relationship with ASEAN and with its other neighbors in the Asia-Pacific region will depend in the main on the policies of President Hu Jintao and other leaders and on how their policies are perceived in the region. But it will also depend on how the United States

responds to China. In an effort to help refocus policy attention on East Asia and what it may portend for American interests, this article traces the evolution of China's engagement with its periphery, examines the prospects of Asian regional integration, and analyzes the implications for the United States.

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