

“US Foreign Policy toward East Asia”

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I have no formal ties to the Bush Administration, so this will be my personal view on what is happening inside the Beltway with regard to East Asia policy. It is much too early to say where the Bush Administration is going with its policy and I will not attempt to make any predictions; policy evolves through facing challenges. But I would like to introduce some of the key players, and the thinking that is informing them.

Examining campaign rhetoric is not an accurate way to predict what actual policy will be. Generally one candidate will “caricature” the other’s policy and claim to support a position that is 180 degrees opposite. The Bush campaign claimed that, if elected, Bush would restore Japan to its place as a “strategic partner” (as opposed to the “Japan passing” Clinton was accused of) and that China would be a “strategic competitor.” But let’s not forget that Clinton first sought to tie trade with China to human rights, and did an about-face on that policy in his second term. He also had to back down when Japan refused numerical targets in trade. Will Bush do something similar?

This is the general outline of Bush’s apparent stance on East Asia:

1. Japan is the US’s most important strategic partner in Asia.
2. China is a strategic competitor.
3. The US should be clearer in its support of Taiwan.
4. The US should have a tougher policy toward North Korea.
5. There is uncertainty in north and south East Asia that requires attention, especially Indonesia.

What action will be taken on these tenets is unclear.

The Bush Administration has the most seasoned foreign policy team to be assembled in a very long time. Top people have experience in East Asia, demonstrating attention shifting from Europe to East Asia. Richard Armitage and James Kelley are two of the Reagan “Gang of Three” that recalibrated US policy toward Japan (especially with regard to security) under Reagan (the third was Gaston Sigur, now deceased). In

addition, Paul Wolfowitz, Torkel Patterson, and Michael Green can all be considered “Japan hands,” or “chunichika,” in stark contrast to the Clinton Administration. Some have even worried slightly that there is a lack of China expertise on the foreign policy team.

A critique, then, of the Bush team: the lack of China expertise seems to reflect the current sour climate toward China in Washington. There has been the shift to “strategic competitor,” but still, the team should reflect more China knowhow. There is a sense that those who are too close to China, who have studied there, are “panda-huggers,” and cannot be trusted.

There are currently four schools of thought in Washington with regard to China policy:

1. Among Democrats- “Aggressive liberalism”: tie trade to human rights, strict on trade liberalization with China.
2. Among Democrats- “Comprehensive engagement”: a policy which dominated the 2nd Clinton term. The US should embrace China totally and a new, “democratic” China will emerge from the development that will ensue from this interaction.
3. Among Republicans- “Limited, or conditional, engagement”: don’t isolate, but support with economic measures, such as WTO entry. There is also fear here that China’s development will expose social/economic contradictions which could lead to instability, which the regime will brutally suppress, which will have external as well as internal consequences. This is a view supported by moderate Republicans, and is sometimes referred to as “con-gagement” (containment [see below] and engagement). Secretary of State Colin Powell and National Security Adviser Condoleeza Rice are proponents of this view, which dictates “hedging” against possible Chinese aggression: expanding arms sales to Taiwan, comprehensive US missile defense, and a strengthening of alliances with Japan and South Korea. There has been some debate about this policy in China: the Chinese assumed this would be the Bush Administration’s chosen policy, and see no difference between it and outright containment, or perhaps as “polite containment.” The US currently sees this as a way to avoid a potential break or military confrontation with China, because the US respects several “red lines” set out by the Chinese. One is, no Aegis systems to Taiwan. The second is continued support of the “one China” policy. A third is that the US accepts as a given that Chinese leaders understand the importance of US-China relations for China’s economic development.
4. Among the Republican right wing- “Containment”: The Republican right does not

believe in engagement with China. They believe that China's economic development will translate directly into more military power and therefore repression at home. They do not believe there is potential for democracy in China. The paranoia of the current Chinese regime and its increased military spending do bear out this theory. Containment advocates would cross the "red lines" mentioned above; they would sell the Aegis system to Taiwan, they are skeptical of China's WTO entry making management of China easier, and feel that the US is too lax on technology transfer at present. They will press harder on trade restrictions, even if it means China doesn't enter the WTO. They would like Japan, South Korea and other China neighbors to join in a coalition to "balance" China.

No one in the Bush Administration openly supports containment. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld called it "unrealistic" (as opposed to "undesirable"), apparently in a belief that other nations would not support the policy. But if given the option, both Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz would support containment. Containment-like leanings are already affecting China policy as seen in the response to the ongoing surveillance-plane issue.

The administration was first conciliatory, expressing sorrow at the loss of the Chinese pilot. The Republican right saw this as weak. Arms sales to Taiwan included not Aegis but submarines, which China sees as tools of offensive capability but did not expressly indicate as a "red line" item. The package to Taiwan, then, was seen by China not as moderate but as an increase, going against the letter and the spirit of the 1982 accord to reduce arms to Taiwan. As a result, they feel the new administration can't be trusted. Shortly after, President Bush publicly stated that the US would do "everything possible" to defend Taiwan. Then, there was the Pentagon memo on breaking off military cooperation with China and the resumption of surveillance flights.

There is no debate at the moment of engagement versus containment policy. But the US seems to "inadvertently" do things to anger China, which could lead to a downward spiral in relations. Because of domestic politics in the respective countries, the US seems to be "drifting toward containment."

A good time to take stock will be at the APEC summit in October, but a lot could happen in the meantime. Administration officials were critical of Gallucci's efforts in North Korea. The administration has said it will not abandon the 1994 Geneva Accords, but while Powell said we would continue to negotiate with North Korea on missiles, Bush

did not concur in his meeting with South Korean President Kim.

Why is Bush cool to Kim's Sunshine Policy?

1. The US should not give in to North Korean blackmail.
2. If the North Koreans are responsive to peace overtures, it would reduce the need for US missile defense.
3. Further development of North-South relations may lead to a "peace declaration," which would surely mean the reduction or withdrawal of US troops from South Korea.

Implications for Japan:

The direction of US policy is generally good for Japan. Japan is happy with the Bush re-evaluation of North Korea policy. Expectations of Japan as an ally, as laid out in the Armitage report, are too high, but it is being treated as something to aspire to. The Bush Administration will not use a "Mickey Kantor approach," but will try and develop a common agenda.

Impact on Japan of events on Korean peninsula: President Kim should take advantage and push for engagement with North Korea. He doesn't have a lot of time left. Unfortunately, due to domestic politics, neither Japan nor the US really support his efforts. There could be a new crisis on the Korean peninsula in the future. Kim Jong Il promised no missiles until 2003, which was not an arbitrary date; it is when KEDO (Korean Economic Development Organization) is supposed to manifest. North Korea could return to brinkmanship then, if things don't go as Kim Jong Il wishes.

Japan-China relations: They have worsened, but are not adversarial. Japan wants a normal relationship, even as the US drifts toward containment. It is the worst choice possible for Japan, one that should be avoided if possible. Good US-China relations and improving China-Japan relations is a much better situation to strive for, but avoiding the worst-case choice could be difficult. Japan and the US should have a dialogue to discuss this and other pressing issues in the region, such as unrest in Indonesia. Hopefully Koizumi will be able to engage in such discussions soon.

Question and Answer Session

Q: China is a major recipient of loan aid from the Japanese government. What should

be done about political and economic links? What is the Bush Administration's stance on business with China?

Mochizuki:

The new administration has a tougher job. They have a two-track policy going in different directions. The memo regarding a break in military cooperation was effectively quashed, but the administration would like good economic relations. The business community is, of course, in favor of China as a market, but domestic politics could present obstacles. Clinton claimed that China's WTO entry would promote democracy in China, but it may not, and China may be generally uncooperative in this regard, which could leave US business in a vulnerable position. Also, there are a variety of views within the business community on various issues. The Kyoto Protocol issue shows how strong energy interests are under this administration. It could have been handled better. What kind of business support is key to the administration's actions.

Q: There seems to be an alliance between the extreme left and extreme right with regard to China, as seen in the attempts to keep PetroChina's IPO off of the New York Stock Exchange.

Mochizuki:

This will increase if China becomes more repressive.

Q: There is a fear in China of the Bush Administration's China policy. What impact will US India policy have, on China and overall foreign policy?

Mochizuki:

India policy is being thought through at present. It may not be explicit policy, but India is being treated as a geopolitical actor. China will see encirclement. Using the US-Japan Alliance for containment is no good- it should be used for engagement. China's military capability is meager compared to the US-Japan Alliance, especially when you include South Korea and other allies. Japan should be less nervous.

Q: What will Congress do this summer on PNTR with China? Should Japan weigh in on this as a part of engagement?

Mochizuki:

It is by no means decided, and congressional members have a negative tone toward China. Rather than be critical, Japan could use a light touch. Japan has an interest in stable US-China relations. In the US, citizens worry about the “rise of China”; in China, they worry about “Sino-US relations.” I wish that Foreign Minister Tanaka could have delivered a message like that to Armitage.

Q: What is the US stance on greater Asian regional cooperation, such as ASEAN + 3?

Mochizuki:

The last Bush Administration was too harsh on EAEC, and wound up making it seem even more attractive. The US is more cautious now, recognizing the achievements of ASEAN + 3, especially on currency swaps. Also, the US sees it as not that important, so if Japan wants to take part, that's ok. The worry is that ASEAN + 3 is not just economic, that China may use it to talk politics and security. It could become alarming. The US wants to play a bigger role, but only its way: the US will always want things its own way. The best thing to do with ASEAN + 3 is to keep the US informed and reassured that it is not being used by China. The Bush Administration has not thought all of this through yet. The team is not in place. Green is the newest member.

Q: (about moving forces off of Okinawa)

Mochizuki:

“Moving” forces does not indicate a weakening of the security commitment. New technology allows forces to be dispersed in new ways. Hawaii is certainly part of the Pacific, as is Guam, as is Alaska. This (deploying forces in those places) is not “pulling back,” but forward deployment. Perhaps redistribution will include forces in Southeast Asia, too. I hope that the Bush Administration will put this old-fashioned method of measuring commitment to rest.

Q: On Burma- is it safe to assume that if the US doesn't revise its policy it will lean toward China?

Mochizuki:

It was impossible to revise US policy on Burma under Albright's values-oriented foreign policy. Powell is different, but it could still be difficult. Anything seen to be undermining Aung San Suu Kyi will be difficult.

-The RIETI editorial department is responsible for this article.