

## ASIAN VIEWS OF AMERICA'S ROLE IN ASIA 2008: AN OVERVIEW

*Han Sung-Joo*

*Tommy Koh*

*C. Raja Mohan*

### Introduction

The election of a new American president is an event of great importance not only to the United States, but to the entire world. Asians from all walks of life have been following the 2008 presidential primaries with great interest and admiration. The world has seen a democratic process where neither wealth nor pedigree — race nor gender — are obstacles to securing America's highest office. Asians are looking at the November 2008 election with great anticipation and are curious about the next American president's foreign policy toward a multi-polar world where countries like China, India, and Russia are increasing their power and influence.

America's 44th president will face many challenges once in office. How to rebuild trust in America after its unpopular invasion of Iraq? How to revive the American economy without resorting to protectionist measures in a global trading system? How to defeat terrorism without creating the impression that Islam is the enemy? How to interface with the international community in utilizing multilateral institutions to uphold international law and foster justice in the world?

How America responds to these and other challenges will determine its future relations with all three sub-regions of the Asia-Pacific: Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, and South Asia.

As the world's preeminent power, the U.S.'s influence is felt throughout the globe. Asia is no exception. From Japan to Afghanistan, the United States plays a crucial role in the security, political, and economic affairs of the region. The United States is either the first or second largest trading partner of almost every Asian nation in all three sub-regions. Although U.S. trade with Asia is expanding — as a percentage of market share, it is declining. Intra-Asian trade now constitutes 55 percent of the region's trade with the world. In this decade, China has replaced the United States as the number one trading partner of Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and a number of Southeast Asian countries. Trends indicate that China will be South Asia's largest trading partner in the near future. But Asians remain concerned that the anti-free trade rhetoric espoused during the American presidential primaries will impede any possibility of successfully completing multilateral trade negotiations under the Doha Development Agenda (DDA) in the World Trade Organization (WTO).

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Although the United States has been “the” regional power in Asia since the end of World War II, there is now some uncertainty about the relevance of U.S. power given current regional dynamics. The United States may still hold the balance of power in Asia, but does this mean that the U.S. necessarily holds the most influence? Gradually emerging is a multilateral Asian architecture based on a series of increasingly shared norms around interstate relations and security. In recent years, Asians have been discussing the idea of “East Asian community building.” Although the growth of such multilateralism had a late start compared with Europe, the past two decades have seen progress with the establishment of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Forum, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN Plus Three (China, Japan, and South Korea) — and now, the East Asia Summit (EAS). The United States is a member of the first two groupings, but not the latter two.

Creating an East Asian Community is a long-term endeavor. A community including China, Japan, India, and Australia — along with the nations of ASEAN, South Korea, and New Zealand — is so vast and heterogeneous that its movement is bound to be slow and incremental. There are two legs to an East Asian Community: economic and political. The economic leg is becoming increasingly stronger with significant trade and investment flows between and among the Asian nations. In contrast, however, the political leg is relatively underdeveloped. The remarkable differences among Asian countries in history, culture, religious traditions, and levels of economic development contribute to American skepticism that creating an East Asian Community is not possible. But the U.S. needs to understand that the growth of an East Asian Community stems from a natural desire in the region to forge ties and create a coherent regional identity. There is a growing sense of Asian regionalism. If the U.S. continues to take a narrow perspective on this issue, it stands to lose influence in the region.

Even if the United States was firmly committed to an East Asian Community and wanted full membership, Asian countries may or may not welcome U.S. participation. Many Asians have been surprised by the U.S.'s passive attitude toward the East Asia Summit (EAS), and suspect it is due to American preoccupation with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and other problems in the Middle East. Nonetheless, even if the United States never joins the EAS, Asian nations must still engage with the U.S. as a dialogue partner. Any discussion on how to solve the global challenges we face — from energy security, environmental degradation, and transnational crime; to the global war on terror; to trade, investment, and finance — must include the United States. Asia wants the U.S. to be an effective, global leader at a time when China, India, and Russia are increasing their own regional and global power and influence.

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For Asians, traditional security and economic issues remain important foundations for U.S. engagement in the region, but energy security, the environment, natural disaster response, and other issues are becoming increasingly salient.

With the price of oil skyrocketing to \$140 per barrel, the Asia-Pacific region needs a cohesive energy security policy. The United States is the world's largest consumer of energy — while China, Japan, India, and South Korea are, respectively, the second, third, sixth, and seventh largest consumers in the world. Eighty percent of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) either passes through – or comes from – Southeast Asia, increasing the region's geo-strategic importance as a conduit, consumer, and supplier of energy. By 2015, 75 percent of all oil from the Persian Gulf will be exported to Asian markets. Any successful energy policy must be a collective effort among Asian countries in all three sub-regions together with the United States.

The United States and Asia also have a critical role to play in the environmental sustainability of our planet. The Asia-Pacific region accounts for 60 percent of the world's population and 50 percent of global economic output. The United States and China are the world's largest emitters of greenhouse gases. Environmental degradation throughout Asia is severe. Global warming and economic expansion have caused significant air and water pollution and scarcity levels from Seoul to Kabul. Tropical rainforests are being depleted and rare species of flora and fauna are becoming extinct. Asian governments are concerned that if they become more ecologically responsible, it will incur a high cost on their states' economic growth. The U.S.'s 2001 refusal to sign the Kyoto Protocol without providing an alternative was a missed opportunity for the United States to provide leadership on how to protect our planet. The U.S. could restore its leadership in environmental policy should it decide to work with multilateral fora (ASEAN, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, APEC, ARF) to develop ways to curb greenhouse gas emissions; and to share technology to promote energy efficiency, clean and renewable energy, carbon capture and sequestration, and other relevant technologies.

Over the past four years, the Asia-Pacific region has endured natural disasters that have brought death and destruction on significant scales. These include the 2004 tsunami in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and India; the 2008 Nargis cyclone in Myanmar (formerly known as Burma); and devastating earthquakes in Pakistan and China in 2006 and 2008, respectively. The United States recently proposed the idea of developing a standing coordinated mechanism to respond to these types of catastrophes. With U.S. leadership, it would be timely for the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) to embrace this proposal and we hope the next U.S. president will act on this initiative.

Promoting democracy and the protection of human rights has been a major thrust in U.S. policy. But while conducting the war on terrorism, the United States has been inconsistent with its own principles in dealing with terrorist suspects and political prisoners in Guantanamo and abroad. The U.S. has demanded international isolation of Myanmar for its harsh military rule while seeking engagement and dialogue with the dictatorial regime in North Korea. The United States would be well advised to set a good example of upholding the very values it espouses. U.S. allies in the region are acutely aware of America's poor image among their own public and want the next administration's foreign policy to pay special attention to public diplomacy. How the U.S. engages not just Asian governments, but the Asian people through education and cultural opportunities should be of equal consideration to the above issues when strategizing and implementing foreign policy. Both Americans and Asians will benefit if the political, intellectual, and cultural bridges between our peoples are strengthened.

This overview captures only a handful of issues that resonated in all three Asian sub-regional meetings held in Seoul, Singapore, and New Delhi. Below are a set of recommendations that we, the pro-

ject's three Asian Chairs, felt were the most important. But in addition to these issues and recommendations, the ensuing chapters of this report delve into greater detail about the U.S. foreign policy concerns most important to all three sub-regions — from security on the Korean peninsula and the Afghanistan-Pakistan border to U.S. relations with China, India, and ASEAN. We believe if the 44th president of the United States and the next Congress that assumes office in January 2009 adopts these recommendations, U.S. relations with our region as a whole will greatly improve.

Specifically, these recommendations include:

1. The U.S. should actively support a regional architecture in Asia. Bilateral relations are important, but greater emphasis should be placed on multinational diplomacy around political, economic, and security issues. This includes signing the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), which, at a minimum, would allow the United States to be an effective dialogue partner with members of the East Asia Summit. The U.S. signature would also illustrate its confidence in regional organizations such as ASEAN, ARF, and APEC.
2. The new U.S. administration should take two critical steps toward improving trade with the region. First, seek an early and successful conclusion of the Doha Development Round (DDA) under the auspices of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Second, Congress should give the 44th president fast-track trade negotiating authority, through which it could ratify the U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement.
3. The next administration should work with Asian regional institutions to begin a dialogue on energy security and climate change — especially in the area of curbing greenhouse gas emis-

sions – and to bring the post-Kyoto negotiations to a successful conclusion. The United States must share with its Asian partners its expertise in energy efficiency, clean and renewable energy, carbon capture and sequestration, and other technologies.

4. Over the past several years, the United States, despite irritants, has been able to maintain sound and sensible relations with China. The 44th president should not be tempted to score domestic political points by using contentious rhetoric toward China. The new administration should take advantage of China's declared intention not to upset the status-quo and its willingness to maintain good relations with the United States.
5. A long-term military and development commitment to Afghanistan must be clearly and repeatedly articulated. There is a widespread assumption in Asia (particularly South Asia) that U.S. attention to Afghanistan is, at best, short-term. If the United States prepares to draw down its forces in Iraq in the coming years, it should be in a position to enhance U.S. troop presence in Afghanistan. Such a commitment must be supplemented by a range of economic and development measures that increase Afghanistan's national capacity to effectively govern and provide for its own security in all 34 provinces.
6. The United States should also help Pakistan and Afghanistan resolve their long-standing border issues in a diplomatic and nuanced way. The United States must undertake a significant effort to win political support among the Pashtun tribes, separate them from al-Qaeda and the Taliban, and make them stakeholders in the war against terror. The United States must help the Pakistani and Afghan governments strengthen the traditional Pashtun tribal structures.

7. The transformation of the relationship with India has been a major contribution of the Bush administration to the evolution of U.S. policy in Asia and has had strong support from the Democratic Party. Building on this bipartisan consensus, the next administration must complete the implementation of the historic civil nuclear initiative between the two countries and consolidate the strategic partnership with New Delhi.
8. As the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) emerges at the top of the new administration's agenda, Washington will need a comprehensive strategy. In East Asia, the new U.S. president would be well advised to continue with the North Korea policy adopted by the Bush administration in spring 2007. More broadly, the United States can help reinvigorate the global nuclear order by agreeing to significant reductions in the American and Russian nuclear arsenals; encouraging China and India to contribute more to the maintenance of the non-proliferation regime; boosting the institutional capacity of the International Atomic Energy Agency (the principal watchdog working to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons); and balancing the competing imperatives of increased use of nuclear energy for electric power generation around the world.
9. Finally, the United States must devote more attention to its public diplomacy efforts with the Asian people. This includes strengthening educational, intellectual, and cultural ties to civil society organizations and Asian opinion leaders.

