

The George W. Bush Administration and East Asia

By John Gershman, Asia Pacific Editor

The Bush administration's foreign policy toward East Asia, and his foreign policy team in general, will look like a rerun of his father's administration. The emphasis will be on a return to a more traditionally "realist" approach to foreign policy in Asia—an emphasis on unilateral and bilateral initiatives over multilateral ones, a greater focus on narrow military security issues over economics, and the marginalization of newer issues like environment and health.

There will be one tension and one twist in the younger Bush's administration, however. The tension will concern the conflict between the free trade wing of the Republican Party, which emphasizes access to markets in promotion of U.S. corporate interests, and the more security-oriented folks, who see military threats (particularly from China) as the overriding concern of U.S. policy in the region. This tension will be more pronounced in Congress than in the executive branch. However, tensions may be also high in the White House, depending on Bush's appointments to key economic posts like Treasury, the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR), and his version of the National Economic Council. The twist will be that unlike traditional realists, some members of Bush's Asia foreign policy team see a role (albeit a circumscribed one) for advancing electoral democracy abroad as a means of enhancing both the security and economic interests of the United States in the region.

The Players

Of Bush's main foreign policy advisers, at least two—Paul Wolfowitz and Richard L. Armitage—have significant Asia experience. They will be important in shaping the Bush administration policy toward Asia, since Bush

himself has signified that he has a greater personal interest in relationships with Europe and Latin America.

Wolfowitz has been dean of the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies since 1994. He entered government service in the 1970s and the State Department in 1981, serving as Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs (1982-86), U.S. ambassador to Indonesia (1986-89), and with Dick Cheney as undersecretary of defense during the Bush Senior administration.

Armitage is president of Armitage Associates, a consulting firm, and also serves on the National Defense Panel, a congressional board that reviews Pentagon strategy. He was Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs in the Reagan administration and the U.S. ambassador to the newly independent Soviet states during the Bush Senior administration. He served as the senior negotiator in the failed negotiations for renewing the leases of U.S. military bases in the Philippines in 1991.

Wolfowitz is the favored candidate of the conservative anti-China crowd to head the Pentagon, but he is also in the running for director of the CIA or UN ambassador. He may conflict with Bush's likely National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice and probable Secretary of State Colin Powell, both of whom are less enthusiastic about deploying U.S. troops abroad and take a softer line toward China than does Wolfowitz. Armitage is a likely second-in-command to Colin Powell at the State Department.

Broad Outlines

Concerning economic issues, there will be little difference between the Bush administration



and the Clinton administration. Bush is more of an unconditional free trader, however, meaning that even the current modest efforts at integrating labor and environmental issues into bilateral trade agreements will be absent from the Bush agenda, a fact that will be greeted with sighs of relief among the region's political and business leaders.

The biggest change under the new Bush administration will be a greater emphasis on strengthening the bilateral alliances with Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand that formed the foundation of the cold war-era security architecture in Asia. As candidate Bush noted: "We must show American power and purpose in strong support for our Asian friends and allies. This means keeping our pledge to deter aggression against the Republic of Korea and strengthening security ties with Japan. This means expanding theater missile defenses among our allies."

Although the Bush administration will strengthen the U.S.-Japan alliance, it will also encourage Japan to play a more visible role concerning security issues in the region. This will include paying more of the tab as well as redefining the mission of Japan's Self Defense Forces. But it's unclear that there is support either in the region as a whole or within Japan itself for Japan to assume a larger security role.

Rarely has an American election produced such a clear-cut division between China and Japan. Typically, both countries favor an incumbent administration, on the theory that it represents stability and continuity.

From China's point of view, the Bush victory raises the prospect of stronger White House support for theatre and national missile defense systems and

for higher levels of U.S. arms supplies to Taiwan—both of which Beijing adamantly opposes. It's true that a Gore administration might have given slightly greater scope to organized labor than would a Bush White House, but the AFL-CIO didn't prevent the Clinton administration from pursuing free trade with China. On the whole then, China would have preferred Gore.

Japan, on the other hand, has been far less happy with the second term of the Clinton administration than has China. Japan resented the downgrading of the U.S.-Japan relationship as the cornerstone in Asia. For example, the U.S., Japan, and South Korea have for years taken great pains to work out a unified, trilateral approach to dealing with North Korea. Japan has footed much more of the bill for stopping North Korea's nuclear weapons program than has the United States. But the Clinton administration routinely gave credit to bilateral U.S.-South Korean initiatives in the recent tentative steps toward ending North Korea's isolation. And President Clinton passed over Japan during his 1998 visit to Beijing. Japanese officials appreciated George W. Bush's comment that "never again should an American president spend nine days in China and not even bother to stop in Tokyo, Seoul, or Manila."

Look to four issues where the Bush administration will differ significantly from Clinton: North Korea, China, democracy, and nontraditional issues such as the environment and health.

North Korea

One of the Clinton administration's few foreign policy success stories was the negotiation of the Agreed

Framework in 1994, under which North Korea agreed to freeze its nuclear program in exchange for the construction of two nuclear reactors and fuel oil shipments. When the U.S. followed the lead of South Korean President Kim Dae Jung's "sunshine policy" with the North, relations eased, and tensions on the peninsula are at their lowest point in memory. A Bush administration threatens to undermine the significant progress made in this area. Congressional Republicans have consistently stalled the implementation of the framework by withholding appropriations, even though Japan and South Korea provide the vast majority of the funds under the agreement.

China

The Bush administration will continue Clinton's policy of supporting China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO). The Bush administration will acknowledge the "one China" principle (without defining it) and will continue to oppose a unilateral declaration of independence by Taiwan. But the similarities will end there. Bush will take a more confrontational approach regarding security issues, and there will be no discussion, as there was under Clinton, of the formation of a U.S.-China strategic partnership. Bush has already described China as "a competitor, not a partner." China will also come under attack regarding nuclear nonproliferation as well, a favorite issue for Senate Republicans who almost derailed passage of Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) this summer. The new president supports not only the Republican-backed Taiwan Security Enhancement Act, which would expand America's military relation-

ship with Taiwan, but also the deployment of national and theatre missile defense systems, both of which are opposed by China.

An early division within the new administration is likely to occur over the questions of providing an explicit statement on U.S. defense of Taiwan and increasing arms sales. Rice and Powell are more interested in maintaining the strategic ambiguity of U.S. policy regarding a response to an invasion by China. Wolfowitz, Armitage, and many congressional Republicans would prefer an explicit statement of support for Taiwan. The Clinton administration denied Taiwan's requests for naval destroyers outfitted with the top-of-the-line AEGIS radar and for High-Speed Anti-Radiation Missiles (HARM) for its air force in order to avoid rupturing relations with Beijing or reigniting a crisis in the Taiwan Straits. Acquisition of these weapons would give Taiwan the capability to project and coordinate its air power against targets in mainland China and to dramatically increase its ability to fend off China's missile edge. Bush's father approved the sale of F-16 fighter jets to Taipei in the early 1990s. With some of the same foreign and defense policy advisers lining up for key positions in the new administration, Taiwan sees an opening on the arms sale front.

Politics will play a major part in whether such a deal is approved. Most of the AEGIS destroyers are built at Ingalls Shipbuilding in Mississippi, the home state of U.S. Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott. Moreover, this year Raytheon moved the primary guidance production for the HARM missile from Tennessee to Arizona, the home state of John McCain, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Democracy

Bush's core foreign policy advisers include some people who see championing electoral democracy as a key component of enhancing the U.S. national interest. Wolfowitz, for example, was a key player in shifting U.S. policy toward the Philippines in the mid-1980s away from Marcos and supporting instead an elite-led transition to electoral democratic rule. This vision of democracy, however, is a narrow one and does not incorporate a broad vision of human rights. Furthermore, the tools of choice for democracy promotion will only rarely (if ever) include sanctions. Rather, democracy is to be advanced by "constructive engagement." There will be less support under a Bush administration for sanctions (as in Burma) or for suspending bilateral military ties (as with Indonesia).

Burma will pose an immediate challenge to the conflict between commercial interests and democratic ideals. How might the new Bush-Cheney administration, with close ties to the U.S. oil industry, reconcile that conflict in a place like Burma? The Clinton administration's unusually firm stand against Burma has been unpopular with the business community. The anti-boycott organization USA*Engage, created and funded by U.S. corporations, has urged Congress to lift the sanctions against Burma. Oil companies like UNOCAL, the leading American investor in Myanmar, have been eager to expand their operations there. The incoming Bush foreign policy team has some ties with UNOCAL-funded front groups. In 1997 Richard Armitage went to Burma on a trip sponsored by the Burma/Myanmar Forum, a Washington group with major funding from UNOCAL. Look to the Bush administration to

resist strengthening sanctions and to roll back some existing ones on the grounds that they undermine the role that U.S. businesses could play in promoting democracy.

Nontraditional Issues

The Bush administration's more traditional "realist" approach will mean that it is unlikely to effectively engage Asia on two broad areas of growing concern: global environmental issues such as ozone, climate change, biodiversity, and invasive species and global health issues like infectious diseases. Bush opposes ratification of the Kyoto Protocol and is unlikely to engage China's proposal that greenhouse gas emissions be limited on a per capita basis rather than a per country basis. Bush's poor record on the environment in Texas does not bode well for engaging Asia on important environmental issues. Regarding health, Asia is poised to become the next flash point in the global HIV/AIDS pandemic. UNAIDS estimates that only 5% of HIV cases are currently reported in China.

The Vision Thing Redux

Policy formulation toward Asia in the Bush administration is likely to be incoherent, fragmented, and even contradictory. It will, in short, suffer from "the vision thing" for several reasons. First, the Bush administration will lack a clear mandate, and during the campaign, the new president offered no coherent foreign policy agenda as a whole, let alone for Asia. Second, Bush and his main advisers are not primarily interested in Asia. Third, the Republican Party in Congress is itself divided on key foreign policy issues in Asia, both between the free traders and the

security people (China, North Korea) and between the prodemocracy types and the free traders (Burma, Indonesia). It is entirely conceivable that right-wing “blue team” Republican initiatives, such as boosting arms sales to Taiwan, may pass the House at the same time that a

new initiative promoting closer ties with China is taking shape.

In short, a George W. Bush administration risks confirming the prophetic views of Karl Marx in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*. “Hegel remarks somewhere

that all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.”

John Gershman may be contacted at <jgershman@igc.org>.

The Republican Rule

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