

Remaking Policy in Asia?

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Asia is arguably the region that has been most dramatically affected by the shift in U.S. policy since the attacks of September 11. U.S. bases have cropped in Central Asia for the first time in history. Five Japanese vessels participated in the multinational naval contingent that was part of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, marking the first wartime dispatch of naval vessels for operations abroad since the end of World War II.¹ The Bush administration has improved relations with both Pakistan and India at the same time, a feat never accomplished during the cold war. The administration has expanded military cooperation with Taiwan that is unprecedented since the normalization of relations with the People's Republic of China. And the U.S. has improved military relations with the Philippines to the closest they've been since the end of the cold war, and begun to re-engage in a significant fashion with the Indonesian military for the first time since ties were cut in 1999.

The Bush administration came into office committed to change U.S. policy toward Asia. It aimed at reversing the Clinton-era policies of engagement with North Korea and China, and strengthening military alliances perceived as having been slighted under Clinton, particularly with Japan, but also with Australia, South Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand. Military

and security issues were slated to displace economics as the priority concerns of U.S. policy toward the region.

After the September 11 attacks and the launch of the Bush administration's "war on terrorism," Bush policy toward the region followed three uneven phases. The first phase covered the period following the attacks through the State of the Union address in January 2002, and largely involved assembling a coalition that would support (or at least not oppose) the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan. The second phase was marked by two events: the identification of the "axis of evil" in the State of the Union address and the launch of the so-called "second front" in the war on terrorism in Southeast Asia more broadly. In the third and current phase, signs of open dissent are appearing within the administration and between the administration and its hardline supporters concerning the administration's relationship with China. In addition, developments in the region as a whole are complicating U.S. efforts to implement its militarized foreign policies and maintain supremacy in Asia.

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MILITARY PARTNERSHIP WITH JAPAN

Since the end of the cold war, U.S.-Japan relations as a whole have been characterized by the absence of a strategic framework—a gap that the Bush administration has begun to fill. In the first phase of the “war on terrorism,” the United States has put pressure on Japan to change the way it thinks of war and peace.

The closest thing to a blueprint for the Bush administration’s approach to Japan can be found in the so-called *Armitage Report*, the product of a study group led by former Clinton administration official Joseph Nye and current Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage.²

The *Report* places security at the center of the U.S.-Japan relationship and conceives of the U.S.-Japan security alliance as the primary anchor for U.S. force projection in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Despite the 35,000

ground troops in South Korea, no naval forces are based there. Japan hosts the only homeport for a carrier battle group outside the United States, a complete amphibious attack group, and a full marine expeditionary force.

The Bush administration wants a more substantial military partnership that would begin to parallel relations with its European allies, but there is no evidence that most Japanese want such a relationship. Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi has called for the repeal, or at least a reinterpretation of Article 9 of Japan’s Constitution, which forbids Japan to wage war. A reinterpretation would allow Japan to use military force as part of “collective security” operations; that is, to assist allied forces under attack outside of Japanese territory. In a stark contrast to the Bush administration, Japan’s foreign policy

places a greater emphasis on multilateralism. Japan has signed the landmine treaty, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and other multilateral arms control efforts and remains upset by the Bush administration’s rejection of the Kyoto protocol. At a minimum, however, the administration will push Japan further toward collective defense, steps foreshadowed in the late 1990s by Japan’s approval of the revised U.S.-Japan security guidelines and its agreement to cooperate in pursuing theater missile defense (TMD). Anything involving a more formal military role for Japan in the region remains controversial both within Japan and among many of its Asian neighbors, including those friendly to Washington, such as South Korea. Most countries in the region see a more militarily assertive Japan, given its past military adventures, as destabilizing and a danger.



THE “AXIS OF EVIL” AND BEYOND

The second phase of the “war on terrorism” in Asia has centered on confronting North Korea and expanding the conflict to Southeast Asia. With North Korea, the Bush administration has most clearly departed from the policies of its predecessor. One of the Clinton administration’s few

unqualified foreign policy successes was the negotiation of the Agreed Framework in 1994, under which North Korea agreed to freeze its nuclear program in exchange for heavy fuel oil shipments and the construction of two nuclear reactors. When the U.S. followed the lead of South Korean President Kim

Dae Jung’s “sunshine policy” with the North, tensions fell to their lowest levels since the end of the Korean War.

Colin Powell advocated continuing the Clinton-era policies of engagement, but he was over-ruled by hardliners soon after Bush entered

office and a review of policy toward North Korea was launched.³ Bush embarrassed President Kim by criticizing his sunshine policy when he visited Washington in March 2001. The events of September 11 might have sparked a U.S.-North Korean rapprochement. After condemning the attacks, North Korea promptly announced that it would sign the remaining international antiterrorism conventions that it hadn't already ratified. But the United States kept North Korea on its terrorism list and maintained the accompanying economic sanctions. This more confrontational stance culminated with North Korea's inclusion in the axis of evil in the 2002 State of the Union address, even though the U.S. State Department claims North Korea hasn't engaged in terrorism since the 1980s.

In late August, the two Koreas reached an agreement on three major joint economic projects including reconnecting severed cross-border railways, constructing an industrial complex, and instituting anti-flood measures. Following Koizumi's historic trip in mid-September, Japan and North Korea began negotiations over normalizing relations. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia James Kelley traveled to North Korea in early October and at that meeting confronted North Korean officials with evidence that it has engaged in a secret nuclear weapons program since 1997 in violation of the Agreed Framework, a charge that

North Korean officials acknowledged to be true.

North Korea's acknowledgement of the weapons program, like its acknowledgement that it had abducted Japanese citizens in the 1970s and 1980s, seems aimed at a broader dialogue with the Bush administration. As of mid-October 2002, the Bush administration stance continues to be divided as to how to respond to the recent developments. (The State Department itself is divided, as Undersecretary for Arms Control and International Security John Bolton continues to wave the flag of the "axis of evil" in contrast to the more positive views articulated by Deputy Secretary of State Armitage and Assistant Secretary Kelley).⁴ Hardliners like Bolton are eager to destroy the strategy of engagement represented by the Agreed Framework could provoke a replay of the 1994 nuclear crisis which brought the peninsula to the edge of war. Although the future of the Agreed Framework may be in doubt, the engagement approach remains favored by the key countries in the region. Emerging at the same time that the administration is gearing up support to invade Iraq, the intra-administration debate over how to respond to the North Korean situation may have broader effects on U.S. policy towards weapons of mass destruction.

In Southeast Asia, meanwhile, the U.S. has focused its war on terrorism in the Philippines and

Indonesia. In Indonesia, military cooperation is back on the table despite congressional opposition on the grounds of Indonesian military complicity in massive human rights abuses. Increased military aid to Indonesia is typically justified on the basis that it will promote democracy, but the International Crisis Group (among many others) has argued that bilateral military ties have not succeeded in "producing an Indonesian military that meets the standards of a modern, professional force under civilian control."⁵

In the Philippines, the U.S. deployed over 1,000 troops in a partially successful hostage rescue cum counter-terrorist operation in southern Philippines. Against the backdrop of these counter-terrorism operations, the U.S. has been transforming the Philippines into a staging area for power projection in the region (primarily against China/Taiwan) but also to boost projection into Central Asia and the Middle East. In August the Bush administration added the Communist Party of the Philippines and its armed wing, the New People's Army, to the State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations. The most immediate effect was to get the Dutch government to freeze the assets of the Party leadership, which remains there in self-imposed exile. The longer-term agenda is likely to include an expansion of training and exercises to be directed at countering the nearly 35-year-old

insurgency. Indeed, the military training exercises scheduled to begin in October 2002 are no longer aimed at Abu Sayyaf, the Muslim separatist group linked to al Qaeda, but will take place elsewhere in the archipelago.

The Bush administration foray into Southeast Asia has been troubling for several reasons. First, the terrorist threat was never as large as the rhetoric suggested. While there is a small network of individuals and organizations involved in terrorist activities, they have no mass following. They represent a law

enforcement not a military challenge.⁶ Second, U.S. military aid is strengthening unaccountable and repressive militaries. It also risks undermining fragile democratic institutions and legitimizing broader crackdowns on political dissent by regional leaders.



CONFRONTING CHINA

In the first draft of the 1992 *Defense Policy Guidance* drafted by Paul Wolfowitz and Lewis Libby, it was unclear where the new rival to U.S. supremacy would most likely emerge. Europe and Japan as well as China were among the candidates. By the time the Bush administration came into office, however, the proponents of this doctrine of supremacy saw only one possible peer competitor emerging in the foreseeable future: China.⁷

But the Bush administration was divided on its approach to China from the moment it took office. Hardline neoconservatives such as Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, his deputy Paul Wolfowitz, and Under Secretary of Defense Dov Zakheim represented a fairly unified Pentagon with John Bolton as a key outpost in the State Department. They have been backed by an even more rabid informal network of China-bashers known as the “Blue Team” who are based in congressional staff, right-

wing think tanks, and media outlets. In the more moderate *realpolitik* camp have been Secretary of State Colin Powell, Director of the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff Richard Haass, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, and Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly. National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, while largely siding with the hawks, has played a balancing role on policy toward China.

Early in the administration, the hawks appeared ascendant, their rhetoric considerably sharper than that of the Clinton administration. Bush denounced Clinton’s efforts to forge a “strategic partnership” with China, referring instead to China as a “strategic competitor.”⁸ The Clintonesque pattern of engagement did prevail at key points, however, such as the resolution of the April 2001 imbroglio involving the PC-3 spy plane collision. And through September 11 that approach appears to have been

maintained. Most notably, President Bush met with Chinese President Jiang Zemin twice in four months (October 2001 and February 2002) and is scheduled to meet him again in October 2002. The number and frequency of these meetings is unprecedented in U.S.-China relations.

The hawks have not given up. In the wake of the spy plane incident, the Pentagon halted military ties and as of September 2002, they have yet to return to pre-April 2001 levels. Rumsfeld remains the only major cabinet member not to have met with his Chinese counterpart. Having apparently lost the intra-administration battle over how to conduct direct relations with China, the Pentagon has focused on upgrading relations with Taiwan and other allies in the region. (While it contains proponents of Taiwan independence, the Bush administration does not formally advocate this position.) In the midst of the spy plane negotia-

tions in April 2001, the Bush administration approved the most generous arms package for Taiwan in a decade, including destroyers, anti-submarine planes, and diesel submarines. While Bush administration rhetoric with respect to Taiwan became less strident after September 11, the Pentagon quietly continued to forge closer links between the U.S. and Taiwanese military establishments, culminating in a meeting between

Wolfowitz and Taiwan's minister of defense.

The Blue Team, relatively quiet since September 11, renewed their salvos in mid-2002.⁹ These China-bashers see an opportunity in the distractions of the Chinese leadership's succession process to strengthen U.S.-Taiwan ties and heighten the anti-China tone of the renewed military ties in the region. They want a more explicit return to the framework of China as a strate-

gic competitor, a view expressed in the first report of the U.S.-China Security Review Commission, which was staffed by a number of Blue Team members.¹⁰ The Blue Team supports pending congressional legislation that demands greater planning and operational integration of the U.S. and Taiwanese militaries that would, if passed, contravene nearly twenty-five years of U.S. policy toward China and ignite a major crisis in U.S.-China relations.



CHALLENGES FROM THE REGION

The aftermath of September 11 enabled the U.S. to expand its military presence throughout the Asia/Pacific region through military operations, exercises, aid, and training programs that have consolidated the U.S. hegemonic military presence and deepened military cooperation in the region. The net effect of these expanded ties has been to expand the capacity for U.S. force projection and has undermine democracy by strengthening unaccountable and repressive militaries in countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines. These developments were not “caused” by September 11—i.e., these were not new policy initiatives—but the way the Bush administration responded to September 11 created a window of opportunity for already existing proposals to succeed.


If the events of September 11 had not happened, it is by no means clear that political support would have existed for expanded ties with the authoritarian regime in Pakistan or the chronically repressive militaries in the Philippines and Indonesia, either in the U.S. or in those countries. Nor would economic resources—military and foreign aid for the Philippines and Indonesia as well as debt relief for Pakistan—have been as forthcoming. These new relationships are driven by the Pentagon. The State Department remains a junior partner and has no significant resources to offer for fighting poverty or strengthening civilian democratic institutions. At the same time, key policies toward Asia have continued regardless of September 11. The September 11 attacks did nothing to weaken the

Bush administration's support for national and theater missile defense systems, or its willingness to sell arms to and develop closer military ties with Taiwan.

In this third phase of the “war on terrorism,” the internal conflict between the hardliners and the advocates of engagement, unsustainable in the long term, will continue until one side or the other is defeated (with most of the betting on Colin Powell to resign first).¹¹ The Pentagon has the edge, since the recent boost in military spending gives it resources that other agencies lack. The most likely pressure for change in the foreseeable future will come not from within the Bush administration but from the region. A number of key events will take place in late 2002 and 2003—China's leadership succes-

sion, presidential elections in South Korea, and the decision to continue or abrogate the Agreed Framework. If Japan and South Korea respond positively to the new North Korean initiatives, and continuing economic crisis makes a major expansion of Japan's military role more

difficult, U.S. hardliners will find it more difficult to promote confrontation with North Korea. The missing element is popular mobilization at home to seize the opportunity presented by the divide within the administration. Popular mobilization forced Congress to

cut ties with the Indonesian military in 1999, and popular mobilization can challenge, transform, or at the very least mitigate the worst elements of Bush administration policy in the region. 

ENDNOTES

- ¹ During the Gulf War Japan contributed about \$10.8 billion out of the estimated \$60 billion it cost to fight the war and minesweepers, but those only after the hostilities had ended. See Yukio Okamoto, "Japan and the United States: The Essential Alliance," *Washington Quarterly* 25(20) (Spring 2002), pp. 59-72.
- ² The report was published in late 2000 by the Institute for National Strategic Studies under the title "The United States and Japan: Advancing Toward a Mature Partnership," and is available online at http://www.ndu.edu/ndu/sr_japan.html. In addition to Armitage, key Bush administration officials who participated in drafting the report include: Paul Wolfowitz, (Deputy Undersecretary of Defense), James Kelley, (Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific), and Torkel Patterson (former Senior Director for Asian Affairs, National Security Council).
- ³ For the June 2001 policy review, see "Statement by the President," June 13, 2001, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/06/20010611-4.html>. For Bush's March 2001 comments, see "Remarks by President Bush and President Kim Dae-Jung of South Korea," March 7, 2001, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/03/20010307-6.html>. For Powell's remarks, see "Press Availability with Her Excellency Anna Lindh, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sweden," March 6, 2001, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2001/1116.htm>.
- ⁴ See their comments at *Agence France-Presse* ("US Slams 'Evil' North Korea's Weapons Proliferation," August 29, 2002) where Bolton denounced the DPRK as "an evil regime that is armed to the teeth including with weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles."
- ⁵ International Crisis Group, *Indonesian-U.S. Military Ties*, July 17, 2001, p. 7, available online at http://www.crisisweb.org/projects/asia/indonesia/reports/A400360_18072001.pdf
- ⁶ See John Gershman, "Is Southeast Asia the Second Front?" *Foreign Affairs* July/August 2002, pp. 60-74 and International Crisis Group, "Al-Qaeda in Southeast Asia: The case of the 'Ngruki Network' in Indonesia," (August 8, 200) available online at http://www.crisisweb.org/projects/asia/indonesia/reports/A400733_08082002.pdf
- ⁷ See the *Washington Post* newspaper article "Keeping the U.S. First; Pentagon Would Preclude a Rival Superpower," by Barton Gellman on the guidance at <http://www.yale.edu/strattech/92dpg.html>. For a discussion of the debate with respect to China see Thomas J. Christensen, "Posing Problems without Catching Up: China's Rise and Challenges for U.S. Security Policy," *International Security* 25:4 (Spring 2001): 5-40.
- ⁸ For a useful discussion see David Shambaugh, "Sino-American Strategic Relations: From Partners to Competitors," *Survival* 42:1 (Spring 2000), pp. 97-115.
- ⁹ See Jim Lobe and Tom Barry, "Yellow Peril revisited," July 12, 2002 available online at <http://www.fpiif.org/commentary/2002/0207china.html> and Lawrence F. Kaplan, "United Nations: China's war on terrorism and ours," *New Republic* July 22, 2002 pp. 20-24.
- ¹⁰ See <http://www.uscc.gov/> and <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jul2002/d20020712china.pdf> and respectively.
- ¹¹ For an article that makes a similar argument see David Shambaugh, "Sino-American Relations since September 11: Can the New Stability Last?" *Current History*, September 2002.

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