

*The Next U.S. Administration and its Policies toward
East Asia and the Korean Peninsula:
A Chinese Perspective**

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Abstract

The U.S. presidential election of 2008 was actually a great debate on the U.S. world view and its strategy. The new thinking which is taking an upper hand over neo-conservatism accepts that globalization is the future of the world and therefore the U.S. has to change its view on major issues and challenges. It seems that the U.S. in the future will take multilateral and cooperative measures to push forward its global and regional agenda. Applying the changes of the U.S. world view to East Asia, the policy priority and strategy of the U.S. in East Asia are likely to be different from the previous approach. There have been many calls for the U.S. to be more actively involved in the regional affairs of East Asia, although, at first, the Iraq and Middle East issues may occupy a lot of time and attention of the U.S. The construction of a regional security institution has been the goal of East Asian states for many years. The new developments in the international environment may provide a new chance to consider fresh options and new practices in this area.

Key Words: 2008 U.S. election, U.S. foreign policy, Obama administration, East Asia, Korean peninsula

* The arguments in the paper only represent the author's individual rather than official or institutional opinions.

Although it became clear after the outbreak of the massive financial crisis in mid-September that Senator Barack Obama would win the election, it still surprised many observers and researchers in China that the Democratic Party swept into power in the election. According to a CNN report up to November 19, 2008, the Democratic Party not only took over the highest administrative positions with an advantage of 192 electoral votes (365 vs. 173) and 7 percent of public votes (53% vs. 46%), but also simultaneously controlled the U.S. Senate with 58 vs. 40 seats (2 seats still undecided) and the House of Representatives with 255 vs. 175 seats (5 seats still undecided). In addition, the Democrats won 7 of the 11 state governorships elected this year. It seems that the Democrats are really getting a chance to push forward their ideas without substantial objections from the opposition party.

The elections certainly made American history because it gave birth to the first African-American President, who, it is believed by the whole world, represents the progress of the U.S. civil rights movement and will further encourage the minorities in the U.S. society to pursue their rights and dreams. On the other hand, whether the overwhelming victory of the Democratic Party means a substantial change of the conservative nature of U.S. society is still an open question. It is true that the unpopularity of the Bush administration tied the Republican candidates down, but it will be an over-simplification to attribute the failure of the Republicans to the tactical issues such as third-term disease or the bad organizational work. The election actually was a great debate on the U.S. strategy for the future. The Americans reflected upon the strategy taken by the Bush administration in the past eight years and became more and more skeptical about it. By giving so many powers to the Democrats, the U.S. is seeking to re-orient its strategy and it may bring about important changes to U.S. foreign policy and its policy to East Asia.

On the base of the above observations, the paper attempts to discuss the possible changes the election brought to U.S. foreign strategy, to U.S. policy to East Asia, and to the Korean peninsula. The paper is composed of three major parts: (1) strategy debates and changes on U.S. foreign strategy; (2) new tendencies in U.S. policy to East Asia; and (3) implications for the Korean peninsula. In general, the paper argues that the U.S. foreign policy makers and their advisors recognize the importance of East Asia, but the U.S. needs more time to re-schedule its agenda and transfer its attention from Iraq and Middle Eastern affairs. There are some new tendencies in the proposals of President-elect Obama, to which East Asian countries shall pay great attention and prepare themselves in advance.

Strategy Debates and Changes in U.S. Foreign Strategy

The authority of the Bush administration was even questioned at the beginning of the administration since President Bush in the 2000 presidential election actually lost in public votes to his Democratic opponent Al Gore and entered the White House through the intervention of the U.S. Supreme Court. During a short period of time after the September 11 terrorist attacks on the U.S., the criticism of the Bush administration decreased to show the determination and unity of the whole country on striking back against the provocation of the terrorists. The concert, however, was soon dissolved with the launching of the Iraq war by the Bush administration. The Bush administration tried to justify the war by the brutality of Saddam Hussein and it did overthrow the Saddam regime and had Saddam executed by hanging, but the war did not proceed and did not end as the Bush administration expected. The situation in Iraq was deteriorating, the casualties of U.S. soldiers and Iraqi innocents were increasing, and all of those caused more and more doubts, criticisms, and even anger over the Iraq war, which finally and inevitably led to challenges

to the very rationale of Neo-conservatism, the doctrine underlying the military action.

Rise and Fall of the Neo-Conservatism

The Neo-conservatism, just as Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski says in his latest book *Second Chance: Three Presidents and the Crisis of American Superpower*, is one of the major American outlooks on global affairs which emerged after the end of the Cold War.¹ It turned from a school of thought into policy practice with President George W. Bush entering the White House, because many neo-conservatism proponents and believers, such as Vice President Richard Cheney, former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, former Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, and former Under Secretary of State John Bolton, took high official positions in the Bush administration and actively pushed forward the strategies based on the ideas of neo-conservatism.

As a doctrine combining extreme ideas from both idealism and realism, neo-conservatism characterizes itself with an outstanding preference for the use of military force, the unilateral flexibility of actions, and the enforcement of democracy in other countries and regions. The Bush administration, coming into office with an attitude of taking anything-but-Clinton, exhibited from the beginning an intentional and substantial shift from the foreign policy taken by its predecessors. The world and the proponents of liberal internationalism in the U.S. alertly watched the changes, but it was the Iraq war that finally mobilized a serious debate in the U.S. accounting for the rationality of Neo-conservatism and its application to foreign policy. The Iraq war, as a typical neo-conservative practice in foreign and security affairs, brought about rather negative impacts upon U.S. soft and hard

¹ - Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Second Chance: Three Presidents and the Crisis of American Superpower* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2007).

power. It divided the U.S. from its major allies such as Germany and France, increased U.S. casualties in Iraq, distracted its attention of countering terrorism from Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda, and further destabilized the situation in the Middle East. On the whole, the Iraq war trapped U.S. forces in the Middle East and restrained U.S. strategic options. Therefore, insightful strategists of the U.S. recognized that the U.S. had to go beyond Iraq and in the background a bipartisan commission mandated by the U.S. Congress and co-chaired by James A. Baker III and Lee H. Hamilton put together the Iraq Study Report in December 2006.²

The Bush administration, however, appeared to have difficulties accepting some key points from the 96-page report, for example the suggestion of launching a diplomatic offensive to constructively engage Syria and Iran in the process.³ As a response, the Bush administration announced “a new strategy” in Iraq in January 2007. It might to some degree decrease the pressure on the Iraq issue and balance the influence of the Iraq Study Report, but it exposed further the political division and polarization within the U.S., while the Iraq Study Group actually believes a domestic consensus is critical for the U.S. to escape from this strategic stalemate.⁴

In the second-term President Bush, the administration’s foreign policy was believed to be moving gradually back from the extremes represented by the neo-conservatism to be more realistic, with some neo-conservatism proponents leaving their important positions in the administration and the frustrations the U.S. met in international affairs. The Bush administration’s attitude to the Iraq Study Report, however, shows that it was a far more difficult and complicated issue than expected for the

²- The Report can be found at http://www.usip.org/isg/iraq_study_group_report/report/1206/iraq_study_group_report.pdf on October 20, 2008.

³- Peter Baker and Robin Wright, “Bush Appears Cool to Key Points of Report on Iraq,” *The Washington Post*, December 8, 2006, p. A01.

⁴- About U.S. domestic division and its impacts on foreign policy, please see Charles A. Kupchan and Peter L. Trubowitz, “Dead Center: The Demise of Liberal Internationalism in the United States,” *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Fall 2007).

U.S. to give up its preference to unilateralism and military actions. The behavior mode of the Bush administration reflects a kind of judgment on the U.S. position in the world and can only be changed if the basic assumptions of this world view are proved to be wrong.

New Thinking

In the heated debate on Iraq, a different view on the world, on the U.S. position in the world, and on the big powers' relations gradually makes itself coherent in theory building and policy recommendation. To some degree it goes beyond the traditional category of international relations theory such as realism or even liberalism, which puts their basic focus on states and therefore lets rivalry become the nature of big powers' relations.

This new world view takes seriously the influence of the non-state actors in the international system. Just as Dr. Richard N. Haass says in his paper in *Foreign Affairs*, nation-states are challenged from different sides, for example, from above by regional and global organizations, from below by militias and from the side by a variety of non-governmental organizations and corporations. Since "nation-states have lost their monopoly on power and in some domains their preeminence as well,"⁵ we are entering into an age of non-polarity, which means the increasing distribution of rather than concentration of power. It indicates that leading U.S. scholars may substantially change their views on the nature of the international system.

A logical deduction from the judgment on the nature of the international system is that the U.S. may re-define the most urgent threats it faces in the near future. If the major feature of today's world is globalization, the major challenges then should derive from globalization,⁶ not the

⁵- Richard N. Haass, "The Age of Non-polarity: What Will Follow U.S. Dominance," *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2008.

⁶- Statement of Richard N. Haass, President of Council on Foreign Relations before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, on U.S.-China Relations in the Era of

geopolitical or ideological competitions and conflicts among the big powers. Therefore, in many papers proposing new strategies for the next U.S. President, the issues such as the energy dependency of the U.S., climate change, pathogens, financial vulnerability, anti-terrorism, and prevention of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) from being proliferated to terrorist groups or irresponsible countries are given prior considerations.⁷ Those issues all display obvious features which can be characterized as global public affairs. They cannot be resolved by any country alone even if the country is as powerful as the U.S., or in other words the solution of these problems requires global cooperation.

The re-definition of the major challenges the U.S. faces will directly influence big powers' relations. On those global public affairs, big powers have more common rather than conflicting interests, because compared with their relations with non-state actors, big powers have more common ground among them, since they all run on the basis of sovereignty. The world view defining the main challenges as those of globalization means that in the common interests dealing with non-state or cross-state problems, big powers can broaden and consolidate the base of their collaboration. One of the presumptions for cooperation, of course, is that the rising or pivotal powers are jockeying for position,⁸ in other words, they do not and will not challenge the existing international system dominated by the U.S.

Despite the victory of the Democrats showing that new thinking has taken the upper hand in U.S. foreign strategy debate, it must be pointed out that it is not that easy for U.S. society to accept the reality of globalization

Globalization, May 15, 2008. See at <http://foreign.senate.gov/testimony/2008/HaassTestimony080515p.pdf>. Accessed on October 20, 2008.

⁷- Richard Holbrooke, "The Next President: Mastering a Daunting Agenda," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2008; Nina Hachigian and Mona Sutphen, "Strategic Collaboration: How the United States Can Thrive as Other Powers Rise," *The Washington Quarterly*, Autumn 2008.

⁸- Nina Hachigian and Mona Sutphen, "Strategic Collaboration: How the United States Can Thrive as Other Powers Rise," *The Washington Quarterly*, Autumn 2008.

and to use it as a foundation to develop its foreign policy. It took about eight years for the U.S. to recognize the flaws and mistakes of neo-conservatism, because the public, especially those who suffered from globalization, do not want to accept the reality that globalization is the inevitable trend of the world development and neo-conservatism creates an illusion that the U.S. can be an exception to history. Even after eight-year complaints on the governance of the Bush administration, globalization does not win decisively in the fight with the neo-conservatism. The Republican presidential candidate, Senator John McCain, did not totally lose his chance to be the next President until the outbreak of the severe financial crisis in September. It is still hard to judge the importance of this issue because of the changes of the world view or just because the poor economic situation encouraged many swinging states and voters to turn to Mr. Obama and the Democratic Party. This kind of observation about the U.S. election should further caution the world. It will be safer to take a more realistic position when it comes to the possible changes on U.S. foreign and security strategy.

Changes in U.S. Foreign Strategy

Based on the new thinking about the world and on the major challenges the U.S. faces, the next U.S. administration shows the following tendencies in its foreign and security strategy.

FREEING ITSELF FROM THE IRAQ WAR No matter what new strategy approach the U.S. tries to take in the next administration, it has to firstly get free from the strategic constraints of the Iraq war, although it is much easier to say this than to do so. The Democratic Party, although it wants to show its toughness on national security issues, does not believe the current administration's arguments that the Iraq war will end in victory and the war on terrorism should be conducted in this way. President-elect Obama opposed the Iraq war from the beginning, which is believed to be one of the

major reasons that he beat Senator Hillary Clinton in the primary, and clearly proposed to withdraw U.S. troops from Iraq. There are doubts on the feasibility of the Obama's withdrawal plan and it is true that to some degree the timetable of the U.S. withdrawal will have to adapt to the security situation in Iraq. But a more important message delivered here is that the next U.S. administration will transfer its focus of countering terrorism from Iraq to Afghanistan and to the area along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. After reducing its involvement in Iraq, will the U.S. invest more resources and energy in other regions such as East Asia? This is really the question that many countries including China want to know.

THE ARC OF CRISIS AND FRAGILE STATES President-elect Obama's proposal to transfer U.S. attention from Iraq to Afghanistan does not mean that countering terrorism has totally lost its priority on the U.S. security agenda, despite the fact that the concept "War on Terrorism" symbolizing the Bush administration's policy in this regard may lose its attractiveness to the new administration. Terrorism probably is the only force in the current world that has the intention and determination to threaten the dominance and even the survival of the United States. U.S. policy makers, advisors, and intellectuals do concern themselves very much over terrorism and especially the combination of terrorism and WMD. Therefore, the responsible withdrawal from Iraq proposed by Senator Obama definitely is not a simple end of U.S. fight against terrorism, but an endeavor to focus U.S. attention more on the real heart of terrorism — the mountainous areas along the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan and the so-called "arc of crisis."⁹ Therefore, it seems that at least in the first few years, the new U.S. administration cannot re-direct its strategic gravity from anti-terrorism and the Middle East to East Asian affairs, let alone say that the U.S. is in addition facing a difficult

⁹ - Richard Holbrooke, "The Next President: Mastering a Daunting Agenda," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2008.

situation because of the economic crisis and related domestic issues.

DIPLOMACY AND MULTILATERALISM Another important criticism stimulated by the Iraq war is the arbitrary style of the Bush administration in dealing with foreign affairs. The Democratic Party, on the contrary, has a good reputation of supporting international institutions and respecting multilateral cooperation. President-elect Obama showed a much more open attitude in the campaign on the issue of direct contacts with Iran and North Korea. In addition, the Democratic administration may make efforts to recover U.S. global leadership damaged by the Bush administration's unilateralism. It can try to fix and re-build existing international institutions and can also initiate some new multilateral proposals in global affairs. In the current environment, at least four areas are calling for urgent global cooperation. They are firstly the global financial market, secondly energy cooperation, thirdly climate change, and fourthly non-proliferation of WMD. All of these items are closely related to world security and prosperity and none of them cannot be achieved by any country alone.

ALLIANCES AND COALITIONS OF THE WILLING There are two major groups that the U.S. will have to unite if it really wants to change its modus operandi from unilateralism to multilateralism. One is composed of allies of the U.S. and the other is other major powers in international or regional affairs. It is clear that the U.S. trust in its allies, even the "old European"¹⁰ France and Germany, is much higher than that of other powers, and therefore it can be expected that the U.S. would like to depend more on its allies on hard security issues. For other major powers which are

¹⁰ - The term was firstly used by then-U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld on January 22, 2003, when answering a question from Charles Groenhuijsen, a Dutch journalist, about the potential U.S. invasion in Iraq. See the news transcript at <http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=1330>. Accessed on October 20, 2008.

indispensable in dealing with global and regional affairs, their influence may be more emphasized on so-called “soft” issues, such as the financial crisis, climate change, and energy shortages, etc. In addition, the U.S. tends to cooperate with different powers on different problems. For example when it comes to protecting tropical forests and the important issues related to global climate change, it may discuss the issue with Brazil, but it may approach to Russia and China on issues like non-proliferation of WMD. This is to say that the U.S. would like the major powers to play their roles in specific areas, but does not want to provide a chance for the major powers to deepen their cooperation.

New Tendencies in U.S. East Asia Strategy

After having discussed the evolution of U.S. thinking on its foreign and security strategy and the possible adjustment of U.S. priorities and modes of behavior, a direct question we will meet is how the changes will influence the next U.S. administration’s policy in East Asia? East Asia is one of the few places where the Bush administration’s policy received praise.¹¹ It is widely believed that the Bush administration skillfully handled its ties with regional powers in East Asia and successfully pushed forward its relations with China, Japan, and India at the same time, something which was not easy to do from a casual reading of East Asian history. The Bush administration performed well in East Asia, and will the next U.S. administration keep the East Asia policy of the Bush administration? Will something change in Bush’s East Asia policy and if so, what?

¹¹- Fareed Zakaria, “What Bush Got Right,” *Newsweek*, August 18/August 25, 2008.

Leadership in Regional Cooperation

While the Bush administration received a good deal of credit for its bilateral policies, it is criticized for lacking a strategy for the region, in other words, that the Bush administration couldn't match the development of East Asian regionalism.

For many years, the people of East Asia looked for a type of security mechanism in the region. A basic understanding here is that the security mechanism in Europe works for maintaining regional peace and stability, and East Asia with many potential conflicts should learn from Europe and set up a type of multilateral institution to build up a more reliable base for regional security and stability. The process of formulating a structure covering the whole region, however, proved to be very difficult and time consuming, but East Asian countries have never given up on the idea.

After decades' worth of efforts, East Asian regionalism has made some important progress. The first and foremost development of course is the ASEAN+ process. Gradually recovering from the 1997 Financial Crisis, East Asian countries feel it even more necessary and urgent to push forward regional cooperation, and, as a result, started the mechanism of ASEAN+3. The East Asian countries, however, did not stop their regionalization efforts. In 2005, another remarkable mechanism--The East Asia Summit (EAS)--was established and up to now there have been three summits of its 16 member states. In addition to the ASEAN+ process, there has also been important progress on the construction of sub-regional mechanisms in East Asia. For example, in Northeast Asia, the six-party talks, established to deal with the nuclear issue of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), have set up five working groups to discuss economy and energy cooperation, Northeast Asia peace and security mechanism, denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, and the normalization of DPRK-U.S. and DPRK-Japan relations respectively. In Central Asia, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), built up during the resolution of the five

countries' border disputes, is playing a substantial role on anti-terrorism, anti-separatism, and anti-extremism and will expand their cooperation into the economic and energy areas. Therefore, multilateral cooperation and managing regional affairs institutionally are favored by most East Asian countries. Quite different from the attitudes of the local people, the Bush administration seems cool to the development of regionalism in East Asia.

The Bush administration, on one hand, calls for regionalism as a warning to East Asian countries not to exclude the U.S. from the regional integration. But on the other hand, it seems lacking in seriousness when it comes to being prepared to join in the process under the leadership of ASEAN. The U.S. is not a member of the EAS; its Secretary of States missed several meetings of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and its President did not attend the U.S.-ASEAN summit which specially arranged for celebrating the 30th anniversary of U.S.-ASEAN relations. It is widely believed that, in regional affairs, the U.S. favored the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum more than the ASEAN process. But even in terms of APEC, President Bush also cut short his attendance at the 2007 Australian summit.

A popular explanation of the Bush administration's neglect over East Asia is that the administration's attention and time were totally occupied by the war on terror and the Iraq situation.¹² It is true that the U.S. President and his Secretary of State changed their East Asia visits to deal with Middle Eastern Affairs, but it should be pointed out that the U.S. showed its inaction to East Asia even in 1997. Thus, the Iraq war may not be a sufficient reason to explain the U.S. attitude to multilateral cooperation in East Asia.

Differing with the ASEAN's plan to build up a regional architecture

¹²- Yoichi Funabashi, "Keeping Up With Asia: America and the New Balance of Power," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 5.

under the leadership of the organization, the U.S. thinks that its alliance system should be the foundation of any future regional institution in East Asia. It argues that only the alliance can deter or defend against hard security threats, while multilateral cooperation is more suitable in dealing with soft problems. Therefore, the U.S. is constrained by the thinking that bilateral alliances and multilateral cooperation cannot share a common form of leadership with each other. It seems difficult for the U.S. to change its attitude to regionalization in East Asia.

The next U.S. administration, however, will have to engage more with East Asia for muting the repeated complaints from its allies and friends in the region and to deal with domestic criticism.¹³ President-elect Obama does say, "We need an inclusive infrastructure with the countries in East Asia that can promote stability and prosperity and help confront transnational threats from terrorist cells in the Philippines to avian flu in Indonesia."¹⁴ Though the situation in Iraq and Middle East still will occupy most American energy, it actually is not that difficult for the U.S. to be involved in multilateral cooperation in East Asia. For example, for the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in Southeast Asia, the pre-condition of joining in the EAS, the U.S. in fact does not have substantial obstacles to signing up to it, because three major allies of the U.S.--Australia, Japan, and South Korea--signed the Treaty and the U.S., as a member of the ARF, has accepted the principles of the Treaty. Therefore, the U.S. hesitation to participate in the EAS is more due to psychological reasons or the lack of political will. If the next U.S. administration makes a decision to change its attitude to the TAC and EAS, it can do so quickly.

¹³- "U.S. Asia Pacific Council Warns of Danger of Ignoring East Asia Regionalization," The East-West Center, *Observer*, Fall 2005.

¹⁴- Barack Obama, "Reviewing American Leadership," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2007.

Strengthening Alliances

There is a widely accepted argument in East Asia saying that a Republican President of the U.S. attaches more importance to its allies than his Democratic counterpart does, because the Republicans in general care more about strategic and security issues.¹⁵ However, if we look back to the history after the Cold War, we may find that this impression is not totally correct.

With the end of the Cold War, the United States became the only superpower in the world, and at the same time, the U.S. almost habitually began to reduce its overseas military presence. For at least a short period of time, the U.S. military troops and bases in East Asia were reduced, attributed to the U.S. tradition of isolationism, the decline of the U.S. economy, and the requirements of U.S. allies in East Asia. In addition, U.S.-Japan relations were in tension in the early 1990s. The two allies quarreled with each other on trade and Okinawa military base issues. The U.S. alliance system in East Asia was facing many problems in the mid-1990s, but it gradually changed in the Clinton administration. It was former President Clinton that re-affirmed the strategic importance of Asia Pacific, and began to re-adjust and strengthen U.S. military alliances in East Asia.

On April 17, 1996, U.S. President William Clinton and his Japanese counterpart Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto said in the Joint Declaration on Security that “they reaffirmed that the Japan-U.S. security relationship, based on the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security..., remains the cornerstone for achieving common security objectives, and for maintaining a stable and prosperous environment for the Asia-Pacific region as we enter the 21st century.”¹⁶ Since then, the U.S. and Japan have not only stabilized

¹⁵- Yoichi Funabashi, “Keeping Up With Asia: America and the New Balance of Power,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 5.

¹⁶- “Text: U.S.-Japan Joint Declaration on Security,” see at <http://www.fas.org/news/japan/11318448-11333165.htm>. Accessed on October 20, 2008.

their policy coordination, but also begun to expand the role of the alliance from the narrow security of Japan to “the situations that may emerge in the areas surrounding Japan and which will have an important influence on the peace and security of Japan.” Therefore, some U.S. scholars called the summit “historic.”¹⁷

The George W. Bush administration, with a pre-occupied perception that China is the “strategic competitor” of the U.S., highly emphasized the core position of the U.S.-Japan alliance in its East Asia policy, just as was suggested by the first Armitage Report.¹⁸ The U.S. National Strategy released in September 2002 reiterated that the U.S. “looks to Japan to continue forging a leading role in regional and global affairs.”¹⁹ Under the encouragement from the U.S., Japan joined the U.S. in deploying theater missile defenses in East Asia, which will integrate Japan command and control systems with the U.S., and began to assist the U.S. in its military actions in Afghanistan and Iraq after the September 11 attacks. It is obvious that the U.S. regards Japan as the key stronghold in Asia Pacific. But on the other hand, a key position or a leading role in practice means more responsibilities, or in other words, sharing more burdens in the alliance system. Burden sharing is the same reason behind the Bush and the Clinton administrations’ intentions on expanding the roles of U.S. allies in military cooperation.

An interesting phenomenon in the readjustment of the U.S. alliance in East Asia is that the U.S. seems to have difficulties in simultaneously strengthening the U.S.-Japan and the U.S.-ROK alliance. While the

¹⁷ - Patrick M. Cronin, “U.S.-Japan Alliance Redefined,” *Strategic Forum*, No. 75, May 1996. See at http://www.ndu.edu/inss/Strforum/SF_75/forum75.html. Accessed on October 20, 2008.

¹⁸ - Richard L. Armitage and Joseph S. Nye, *The United States and Japan: Advancing Toward a Mature Partnership*, *INSS Special Report*, October 11, 2004, www.ndu.edu/inss/strforum/SR_01/SFJAPAN.pdf. Accessed on October 20, 2008.

¹⁹ - The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, September 2002, p. 26, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf>.

U.S.-Japan alliance developed quickly in the Bush administration, the U.S. met big problems in its ties with the Republic of Korea (ROK), another important ally of the U.S. in East Asia, for the highest-level leadership of the two countries lacked mutual trust. Now, with Mr. Lee Myung-bak entering into the Blue House (Cheong Wa Dae), the expectations for the improvement of the U.S.-ROK relationship are rising. But on the other hand, the U.S. finds that Japan goes back to its domestic political division, which may complicate the prospects of expanding Japan's roles in U.S. overseas military actions. Furthermore, a financial crisis, which is exerting its negative influence globally, must be considered here too. Burden sharing is not a slogan if it is to be implemented. With the uncertain prospects of the financial crisis, it is a real question whether the Japanese and the ROK governments will be willing to spend more on the alliance.

Therefore, the strengthening and readjustment of the U.S. alliance in East Asia is an issue more complicating than appears at first glance. There is some continuity in the U.S. policy, for example, keeping the alliance as a useful and effective tool for pursuing U.S. interests. But on the other hand, the evolution of the U.S. alliance system will also be influenced by the surroundings and the political willingness of U.S. allies, etc. The second Armitage Report, published last year, showed obvious differences from the first one.²⁰ The second Report seems to pay more attention to a more balanced regional order, in which the U.S.-Japan alliance of course is important but its nature of non-exclusiveness is emphasized. The second Armitage Report continues the stress the common values between the U.S. and its allies, which reminds the world of the need to keep their attention on the influence of the ideological element to U.S. foreign policy, although leading U.S. scholars do not believe that concepts such as a "league of

²⁰- Richard L. Armitage and Joseph S. Nye, "The U.S.-Japan Alliance: Getting Asia Right through 2020," http://www.csis.org/media/isis/pubs/070216_asia2020.pdf. Accessed on October 20, 2008.

democracies” can be really implemented in practice.²¹

Cooperation with Major Powers

In addition to more actively involving itself in constructing regional architecture and further adjusting and strengthening its alliance system in East Asia, the next U.S. administration seems to take a positive attitude to cooperation with other major powers in the region. The tendency of U.S. East Asia policy is directly related to the assessment of the major challenges that the U.S. is facing. Since most concerns of the U.S. at present are the problems derived from globalization and so-called non-traditional threats, such as anti-terrorism, climate change, natural disasters, human rights, and drug trafficking, etc., the U.S. sees many common interests in cooperating with regional powers, especially in terms of China in East China.

China-U.S. relations have remained good on the whole in the past seven years, and in the election, China again avoided being a major topic. The U.S. “neglect” is regarded by most of Chinese researchers as good for China-U.S. relations, and they believe that the outstandingly stable development of China-U.S. relations in past years cannot be simply explained by “fortune.” There are at least three aspects critical to support the stable development of these bilateral relations.

The first is that China and the U.S., after a period of conflict in the early period of the George W. Bush administration, reached important agreement on their common interests. The common interests not only refer to economic interdependence between the two, or the cooperation between the two on regional and global issues such as on the nuclear issue of the DPRK and on anti-terrorism, but also mean that the two

²¹- Statement of Richard N. Haass, President of Council on Foreign Relations before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, on U.S.-China Relations in the Era of Globalization, May 15, 2008. See at <http://foreign.senate.gov/testimony/2008/HaassTestimony080515p.pdf>. Accessed on October 20, 2008.

countries recognize that they both basically support the existing system. The concept of “responsible stakeholder” raised by former U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick is a sign showing the U.S. was changing its definition of China’s role in the system.²² And this is the important basis for China and the U.S. to keep their relations in good shape.

Secondly, there are some important institutions established between the two countries, which are very helpful in stabilizing the bilateral relations. Those institutions include the highest-level summits, the working-level exchanges and negotiations between the governmental officials, and more importantly, the two strategic dialogues on foreign and security issues as well as on economic issues. These frequent and timely contacts with each other are useful to reduce misperceptions and to prevent disputes and conflicts from escalating.

Thirdly, there are a huge amount of daily person-to-person exchanges between China and the U.S. for education, business, travel, and other purposes. Those people are not policy makers of the two governments, but they do have their interests in requiring their governments to keep relations good and stable. Therefore these common people have become a stabilizing force when the bilateral relations meet problems. In summary, there are many reasons to expect that China-U.S. relations will keep its currently good momentum in the future. President-elect Obama does say that he “will also encourage China to play a responsible role as a growing power--to help lead in addressing the common problems of the 21st century. We will compete with China in some areas and cooperate in others. Our essential challenge is to build a relationship that broadens cooperation while strengthening our ability to compete.”²³

China-U.S. relations, however, face some uncertainties too. For

²²- “Deputy Secretary Zoellick Statement on Conclusion of the Second U.S.-China Senior Dialogue,” Office of Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/t/pa/prs/ps/2005/57822.htm>. Accessed on October 20, 2008.

²³- Barack Obama, “Reviewing American Leadership,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2007.

example, in the economic and trade area, China concerns itself over “protectionism” in the U.S., because Senator Obama talked a lot in the campaign about the unfairness of the Chinese market and the currency practices of China.²⁴ Secondly, there is a concern from the Chinese side that a Democratic administration and a strong Democratic Congress will over-emphasize human rights differences between the two countries. China does not want to see the whole relationship and the strategic cooperation between the two becomes a hostage of the disputes in this regard. Thirdly, the U.S. side is very suspicious of the military modernization of China, although China has on many occasions assured everyone that its strategy is of peaceful development. The last but not least are the important Taiwan and Tibet issues, which directly relate to China’s sovereignty. Therefore, there are problems between China and the U.S., but the mainstream of the bilateral relations is good and most Chinese researchers do not believe the differences in the near future will overthrow the current framework of China-U.S. relations, which is also consistently accepted by both the political parties of the U.S.

Thus, in the new administration of the U.S., East Asia may maintain its peace and progress on the whole, and it is expected that countries in the region will carry out more cooperation in the economic area and on non-traditional issues.

Implications for the Korean Peninsula

Against the background that the new U.S. administration may pay more attention to economic problems and non-traditional threats, some questions may also be asked of Korean peninsula issues.

²⁴ - Barack Obama, “U.S.-China Policy under an Obama Administration,” AMCHAN-China’s *China Brief*, October 2008.

Will the DPRK Nuclear Issue Still be at the Top of the U.S. East Asia Agenda?

Usually, it is taken for granted that Northeast Asia is a source of concern for the world, because the region hosts almost all the major powers in East Asia and there are hot spots in the region and potential conflicts amongst the big powers. However, this kind of routine perception of East Asia may be challenged in the future, because the major powers' relations are improving, the urgent concerns of the U.S. are different, and more importantly, the DPRK nuclear issues have shown some degree of stability in the past few years.

It has been more than six years since the current round of DPRK nuclear-related problems broke out in October 2002. Although the DPRK nuclear issue is full of ups and downs, generally, the issue is becoming more manageable and controllable. There have been six rounds of the six-party talks and some progress was achieved during the process especially the reaching of the September 19 Joint Statement in the Fourth Round of the Six-Party Talks in 2005, the February 13 document of Initial Actions for the Implementation of the Joint Statement, and the October 3 Agreement on North Korean Nuclear Program in 2007. If the agreements can be respected and implemented in the future, the nature of the DPRK nuclear issue may change from reacting to a crisis to more detail work on verification. There still will be back and forth movement on the DPRK nuclear issue, but at least we have the six-party talks, a mechanism including all of major powers in the region, to deal with the problems,²⁵ and the six-party talks can also play a very important role in monitoring and safeguarding the implementation of the agreements and the verification of the DPRK nuclear program. In addition, Mr. Obama showed in the campaign that he takes a more

²⁵ - The advantages of the six-party talks are summarized in Wu Chunsi, "The Six-Party Talks: A Good Platform for Broader Security Cooperation in Northeast Asia," *Korean Journal of Security Affairs*, Vol. 12, No. 2, December 2007.

moderate attitude to the DPRK nuclear issue. Therefore, it is not impossible that the DPRK issue will remain stable to some degree in near future.

If there really is a period of stability on the DPRK nuclear issue, then the new U.S. administration's attention may be drawn to other issues in East Asia. Considering the U.S. concerns over the current financial and economic crisis, the preference of the Democratic Party on human rights and non-traditional security, and the urgent need of the new government to recover U.S. leadership in the region, it seems possible that the U.S. will greatly refocus its attention on Southeast Asia, the sub-region which is more closely connected with anti-terrorism, holds an important sea line of oil delivery, and contains some countries of concern such as Myanmar. Therefore, whether Northeast Asia or the DPRK nuclear issue is still on the top of the agenda is an open question which can be asked.

What is the Main Topic of Relevance to the Korean Peninsula?

The question above begs the further question as to whether the Korean peninsula will have no position on the U.S. foreign and security agenda? The answer, of course, is that it will be on the agenda. The basic reason here is that there are still some uncertainties on the Korean peninsula.

Recently, there were many reports and stories in western media about the health of DPRK's supreme leader Kim Jong-il. No matter that the reports were based on solid facts or were totally groundless as suggested by the DPRK, the phenomenon itself indicates that the U.S. and many other countries still attach attention to the Korean peninsula, but in a more general context of security and stability. It means that even if the DPRK nuclear issue looks not that urgent in the future, the Korean peninsula is still an important topic to the U.S.

The more general issue related to the Korean peninsula in terms of security and stability may be addressed on two levels. The first is within the Korean peninsula. That is, the issue is one of constructing a peace

mechanism on the Korean peninsula. Since the DPRK has many reasons to pursue its nuclear weapons program, the international community should consider some institutional arrangement to totally eliminate the motivation behind the DPRK nuclear weapon program. Constructing a peace mechanism on the Korean peninsula, which includes a peace treaty to replace the more than five-decades-old Armistice Agreement, the normalization of the relations between related states and the arrangements guaranteeing long-time peace in the Peninsula may be helpful for this purpose.

Secondly, Northeast Asian countries should consider some institutional arrangements in the sub-region too. Currently, there is some institutional cooperation among Northeast Asian countries under the framework of the six-party talks, but that kind of cooperation and communication are far from sufficient. Major powers in the region have many disputes between them. They need more opportunities and institutions to exchange their views and to reduce mutual suspicion and increase mutual trust. For example, the ROK, Japan, and China, the three important states located in the region, have historical and territory disputes with each other and they may form some kind of trilateral dialogues to seek more common understandings on regional security cooperation. In addition, how to accommodate both the U.S. alliance system and other powers into one security mechanism is another important subject related to regional security. The U.S., its allies, and China may one day have to sit together to discuss it.

All of these indicate that the main topic on the Korean peninsula may be a little different from those of the past seven years. Institution construction should be given a higher priority.

What are the U.S. Goals on the Korean Peninsula?

With possible changes in U.S. policy priorities in terms of the Korean peninsula, the goal of the U.S. in the region becomes a question worthy of being asked.

Firstly, it has been for many years that the international community has cast doubts on the real bottom line of the U.S. policy on the DPRK nuclear issue. Will it be a complete denuclearization of the DPRK nuclear program or just non-proliferating nuclear weapons, materials, and technologies to other countries or non-state actors? With the change of the U.S. government and the more flexible attitude the next U.S. administration will possibly take on the issue, the question is being floated again. As U.S. allies in Northeast Asia--The ROK and Japan-- take a relatively firm attitude to the denuclearization of the DPRK, how the U.S. will coordinate its position with its allies is worth considering.

Secondly, the U.S. supports President Lee Myung-bak in his rejection of the "Sunshine" policy proposed by former ROK President Kim Dae-jung and takes a more hard-line approach in its relations with the DPRK. On the other side, the U.S. is gradually withdrawing from its hard position on the DPRK. President-elect Obama says he will enhance coordination with allies, but the question here is: Will the kind of cooperation pattern between the ROK and the U.S. on the DPRK issue be beneficial to the ROK? The recent developments on ROK-DPRK relations do not seem good for the ROK.

Thirdly, partly because of the rare mention of East Asian affairs in the election, the Obama administration's views on the architectures of the Korean peninsula and Northeast Asia are not very clear. It seems that the U.S. has interest in discussing with interested countries the situation within the DPRK and the general issue of stability on the Korean peninsula. But these discussions will be difficult if the U.S. cannot give interested countries a clearer picture of its policy and goals.

In conclusion, there are many uncertainties on the Korean peninsula.

We shall not take for granted the assumption that the DPRK nuclear issue will always be the number one topic on the East Asian security and foreign agenda. We must realize that the world is changing and the newly-elected President of the U.S. promises to bring changes to the U.S.

Conclusion

This year's U.S. general election shows a great change in U.S. mainstream world view. The new thinking differs with previous neo-conservatism in that it re-defines major challenges and threats the U.S. facing and this may provide more opportunities for big power cooperation. In East Asia, the new U.S. administration probably will carry forward the merits of the Bush administration, for example, the relatively balanced relations with all regional major powers, and further correct what the Bush administration did not do very well, for example, neglecting the development of regionalism in East Asia. Of course, it will be much easier to speak on these matters than to put them into practice. However, since these changes will have an important impact on East Asian and Korean peninsula security, East Asian countries including the ROK and China shall watch them closely and prepare themselves in advance.

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