



Asian Architecture Values Workshop

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This brief summarizes the primary findings of the conference as interpreted by the project organizers. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this brief. Therefore, it should not be assumed that every participant subscribes to all of its recommendations, observations, and conclusions.

Value Cooperation, Not Antagonism: The Case for Functional-Based Cooperation

By Nirav Patel

Executive Summary

Drafting a new regional architecture for the Asia-Pacific is a difficult task and has been the theme of many conferences and seminars around the world. Unfortunately, it is unlikely that US policymakers will be able to devote the necessary focus and energy to this task against the backdrop of two military campaigns in the Middle East, a global struggle against violent jihadists, and domestic struggles ranging from high gas prices to an economic recession.

This should not be a reason to become discouraged and cede US authority and credibility as creators of a new Asian security architecture. Rather, it begs the need for US policymakers to take a more forward-looking and pragmatic approach to the Asia-Pacific. The United States must start to recognize that the international order that it helped build after World War II is no longer capable of dealing with the dynamic changes in the Asia-Pacific. The next US president and his senior advisers should take the following recommendations under serious consideration:

- Pursuing a values-based strategy toward the Asia-Pacific will prove largely unsuccessful in managing transnational challenges, such as pandemics, terrorism, and climate change. Transnational crises require inclusive cooperation among all types of governments.
- Balancing the promotion of US interests without unduly antagonizing China should be a guiding principal for a new regional architecture.
- Functional and interest-based organizations that complement American interests, such as the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), should be pursued.
- Strong participation by US core democratic allies in the region is critical to any new regional architecture.
- US diplomatic engagement must be more robust and sensitive to the rapid pace of change in the Asia-Pacific.

The Arrival of the Asian Century

“The net effect of the Iraq war has been the fast forwarding of the Asian century.”¹

From Japan to India, Asia—more than any other part of the globe—is defined by opportunity. Asia is home to more than half the world’s population. Democracy

continues to spread beyond the traditional outposts in India, Japan, and South Korea. Asia is now an engine of the global economy.

Politically and economically, Asians are shaping a world that is ever more *integrated*. New regional forums are reshaping cooperation and cultivating deeper ties. Some of these forums are governmental, like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) or the East Asia Summit, and some are private, like the Boao Forum for Asia (an Asian Davos that brings together the political and economic elites of the region). Often the politics and commerce in these meetings overlap: Taiwan's new Vice President-elect Vincent Siew and Chinese President Hu Jintao met on the sidelines of this year's Boao Forum and set a dramatically new and positive tone for cross-strait relations.² Free trade agreements and massive flows of people as tourists, business leaders, workers, and migrants are also rapidly integrating Asian economies and mixing cultures. These meetings are slowly redrafting and reconfiguring the architecture of cooperation and interaction in the region.

Amidst this integration, *innovation* defines twenty-first-century Asia. The world's most wired populations are Asian. The latest gadgets and most dynamic Internet communities are in Asia, where customers expect cell phones to stream video and conduct financial transactions. Asian visitors to the United States now often complain of the comparatively poor quality of American wired networks, particularly when compared with the dramatic innovations in online and mobile communication in Asia. Asia's emphasis on higher learning is setting the stage for ongoing innovation, pushing Asia from manufacturing to services and design—the kinds of businesses that can drive longer-term economic growth. Today, Asia accounts for almost 30 percent of global gross domestic product, in large part because of its global leadership in manufacturing and information technology.

Asian *investment* has also reached record levels. Asian countries lead the world with unprecedented infrastructure projects. With over \$3 trillion in foreign currency reserves, Asian nations and businesses are shaping global economic activity. Indian firms are purchasing industrial giants such as Arcelor as well as iconic brands of its former colonial ruler, such as Jaguar and Range Rover. China's Lenovo bought IBM's personal computer business, and the Chinese government, along with other

Asian financial players, injected billions in capital to help steady US investment banks such as Merrill Lynch as the American subprime mortgage collapse unfolded. Chinese investment funds regional industrialization, which in turn creates new markets for global products. Asia now accounts for more than 40 percent of the world's consumption of steel,³ and China is consuming almost half of world's available concrete.⁴ Natural resources from soy to copper to oil are being used by China and India at astonishing rates, driving up commodity prices and setting off alarm bells in Washington and other Western capitals.

Yet Asia is not a theater at peace. On average, between 15 and 50 people die every day from causes tied to conflict,⁵ and suspicions rooted in rivalry and nationalism run deep. The continent harbors every traditional and nontraditional challenge of our age: it is a cauldron of religious and ethnic tension; the venue for the ascendance of new great powers; a source of terror and extremism; a driver of the insatiable global appetite for energy; the place where the most people will suffer the adverse effects of global climate change; the primary source of nuclear proliferation; and the most likely theater on earth for a major conventional confrontation if not a nuclear conflict. Coexisting with the optimism of Asia are the ingredients for internal strife, nontraditional threats like terrorism, and traditional interstate conflict, all of which are intensified by the risk of miscalculation or poor decision-making.

Rebalancing American Engagement

US strategic engagement in the Asia-Pacific must take into account the dynamics of change in the region. Exclusionary policies are inherently antagonistic and will prove counterproductive to the advancement of US interests. For US policymakers, the challenge is no longer convincing Asian nations to cooperate and contribute constructively to peace and stability—for they already are—but balancing Asian strategic interests with US goals and objectives.

The United States has long been a countervailing gravitational force in the region. From the US wartime record on the Pacific front to Richard Nixon's prophetic comments hailing the United States as a Pacific power, the country has benefited from its strategic engagement in the Asia-Pacific.

Unfortunately, contemporary US strategic engagement in the region lacks the sophistication and focus necessary to ensure the protection and

advancement of US interests. It is true that US bilateral alliances remain strong and are vital for the preservation of regional peace, but that has not translated into strategic success. Bilateral partnerships are less useful for managing transnational challenges—particularly nontraditional threats—than multilateral organizations. US strategists have recently been more inclined to eschew regional orders and multilateral institutions in favor of unilateral policies founded in a belief in American primacy. This perspective has attempted to rewrite the international order in favor of democratic governance and free-market liberalism. It has ceased to be either sufficient or beneficial to the preservation of US interests. US policymakers must stop thinking in terms of rewriting the laws of physics in Asia by promoting values-based regional organizations and seek instead to understand and integrate their strategic approaches toward the region in a more fluid and nuanced manner.

China is central to concerns over a values-based regional architecture. Even though China has not exhibited revisionist or revanchist approaches, many of its policies actively challenge US influence and the post-World War II architecture built by the United States. This is manifest from Hanoi to Manila where Chinese-led development projects have driven regional economic development and growth. Contrasted with lackluster US engagement—exemplified by senior officials missing critical high-level meetings, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum, the East Asian Summit, and the 2008 Australia-United States Ministerial Consultations—China’s strategic engagement in the Asia-Pacific heightens perceptions of the United States as a waning Pacific power in the eyes of many Asian policymakers. Perhaps even more telling is how the Sichuan earthquake of May 2008 has helped confer legitimacy on Beijing as a responsible government and regional power. Buttressing this rise is an ambiguous defense posture that foments tremendous anxiety amongst its neighbors. Whether China seeks to balance against Washington and simultaneously enhance Beijing’s power and influence, both in the region and globally, remains an unknown. In the meantime, it is likely that China will remain committed to its “win-win” noninterventionist foreign policy that places greater value on internal growth and stability than on external intervention.

Amidst such change and turmoil it is no longer appropriate for the United States to continue its

“business as usual” strategy toward the region. US bilateral alliances have fared well over the past two decades, but signs of unrest are becoming more evident from Seoul to Canberra to New Delhi. It will no longer be appropriate for US policymakers to engage only allies in the region. Rather, they must seek to enhance US engagement by engaging and shaping a variety of multilateral institutions in the region. US bilateral alliances must remain a baseline for engagement, not an end state. Part of the process of redrafting the Asian regional architecture will be recrafting US engagement in the Asia-Pacific.

Redrafting the Regional Architecture?

Expanding US engagement will require a more robust and comprehensive approach. The form this engagement will take has been the subject of countless discussions and seminars around the world. The long-sought “holy grail” of Asian regional architecture may prove to be a ruse as Asian nations are integrating, investing, and innovating in a manner that enhances stability, prosperity, and security in the region. Capitals throughout Asia are tilting more and more toward the use of a variety of permanent and ad hoc, purpose-driven organizations instead of a single and overarching regional cooperative. This is exhibited by a complex web of regional economic-, political-, and security-based organizations (e.g., ASEAN, six-party talks, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization). The region is quickly becoming too complex and diverse for a “unified command” orchestrated solely by the United States and its like-minded allies. Thinking in terms of redrafting the blueprints of regional engagement is important but should not supplant the function-based cooperation that is proliferating in the region and likely to prove more important in ensuring peace, stability, and prosperity.

The now-infamous quadrilateral dialogues, born out of the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami that devastated Southeast Asia, and former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s *Towards a Beautiful Country: My Vision for Japan* were precisely meant to ensure that the United States would be able to manage the region and redraft blueprints for regional security-based architecture. The quadrilateral dialogues represented four major democracies—Australia, India, Japan, and the United States—that had formed a loose coalition to discuss issues affecting like-minded democracies and allies.

For a number of reasons the four nations were unable to agree on the true purpose and goal of the

coalition, and it eventually withered away as Australia's less-than-enthusiastic supporter of the quadrilateral discussions, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, was compelled to heed Beijing's demarches and concerns. Beijing quickly found tremendous fault with the organization and viewed it as "ideological and political subversion" on the part of Western democracies that were intent on containing China's rise.⁶ Regardless of whether or not Prime Minister Rudd should have submitted to Beijing's objections, his response was pragmatic. Why antagonize Asia's largest nation and a critical contributor to global economic growth? Excluding China from regional groupings is like prohibiting the United States from participating in the North American Free Trade Agreement. The US alliance with Australia still remains on solid footing; however, Rudd's divergence indicates that a US-led effort to promote a "democracy agenda" in the Asia-Pacific not only alienates China but also induces resistance from the United States' most steadfast ally.

Some proponents of the values-based approach argued during the conference that the United States should enhance its formal cooperation with bilateral allies by promoting values-based cooperation and policies. Values in this context were defined as democratic norms, such as elections, free speech, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. Advocates of this approach are aware of China's reluctance to accede to such groupings but found value—perhaps heuristic—in promoting values-based policies in hopes of preserving US primacy in the region. Proponents of the quadrilateral dialogue contend that a values-based regional architecture is critical for regional peace because it ensures that the supposed dividends of the democratic peace theory are appropriately distributed in the Asia-Pacific. Many believe that this would be best represented by an Asian "league of democracies" that would coalesce and (though an ambitious goal) effectively compel China to convert to both a free-market economy and a democratic government. At minimum, a "league of democracies" would counterbalance a potentially assertive China.

Ironically, liberal democratic theorists and neo-conservatives both hold values-based regional architecture in high regard. They have an almost religious devotion to democratic governance and free markets. However, values-based propositions will prove increasingly difficult to implement since the United States' international credibility and reputation have been wounded by its perceived

pendant for unilateral military operations as exemplified in Iraq and the global war on terrorism. Eschewing international law and multilateral consensus has alienated US allies and precariously positioned America to deal with the aftereffects of two major military campaigns. "Democracy" has become a tainted word, defined—however inappropriately—by the Bush administration's policies. The specter of one hundred thousand US soldiers preemptively invading nations to enforce democratic governance has not been lost on allies and other watchful observers of the United States. Cries of hypocrisy are not only found amongst the liberal intelligentsia in European and Arab capitals but also in China, where questions about the US commitment to autocratic governments in the Middle East are gaining more ground. This feeling is even more acute in Beijing, where a belief in the primacy of sovereign integrity has long guided its interaction with the international community and remains a foundation for the legitimacy of the People's Republic against self-determination claims from Tibet to Taiwan.

In particular, policies that attempt to overtly exclude and antagonize China will fail and generate uncertainty that is not beneficial to US interests in the region. The United States has a "10 year window to cement 100 years of opportunity in Asia,"⁷ and that will prove impossible without a responsible and pragmatic foreign policy orientation that recognizes that cooperation on mutual interests—from pandemic cooperation to controlling the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD)—is more important than cooperating with like-minded democratic states. Responding to transnational security challenges will require bridging divides created by divergent systems of governance.

Function-Based and Inclusive Regional Security Architecture

Drafting a new regional architecture for the Asia-Pacific is a difficult task. Balancing the promotion of US interests without unduly antagonizing China should be a guiding principal for such a new regional architecture. Unfortunately, US policymakers will probably not be able to devote the necessary focus and energy to this task against the backdrop of two military campaigns in the Middle East, a global struggle against violent jihadists, and domestic struggles ranging from high gas prices to an economic recession. However, this should not be a reason to become discouraged and cede American authority and credibility as creators of a new Asian

security architecture. Rather, it begs the need for US policymakers to realize that Asian friends and allies are already drafting a more flexible, dynamic, and less formal regional architecture. It is time for US strategists to start acknowledging that Asian nations are writing their own destiny, and with or without America's blessings they will achieve a regional order that best suits their needs. The question for the United States is simple: What steps should (and should not) be taken to shape the regional order in order to preserve and increase US influence?

Even if values-oriented engagement is desired, it should manifest itself as a functional, not as an ideological, issue. China has little to offer in terms of contributing to democratic election monitoring in Mongolia and should become more comfortable with the fact that the promotion of democracy does not pose an inherent threat to its national integrity. China is not a democracy and should not be expected to understand, much less promote, a democratic foreign policy. As resistant as China remains to US-led democratic engagement, US policymakers can and should persuade China to understand that assisting fledgling democracies is not meant to contain China but is critical to US strategic objectives both inside and outside of Asia. An ideologically neutral regional architecture may lack the glitter of US statesmanship and creativity, but it is pragmatic and likely to be an effective approach for managing regional challenges.

US policymakers must find solace in the fact that China has yet to pursue a revisionist or revanchist foreign policy. Beijing remains committed to the current regional order. It serves both Chinese economic and geopolitical interests to remain on a non-confrontational trajectory. Quieter and more subtle notes are beginning to emerge from China, indicating a greater degree of comfort with the prospect of "sharing Asia" with the United States—just as long as US policies do not needlessly antagonize China and undermine its development and stability. Undoubtedly, if the United States pursues a values-based regional architecture—similar to the quadrilateral dialogue—China will perceive it as part of a process of containment and perhaps react in a manner that is not conducive to regional peace. This underscores the need for a more robust but nuanced strategic engagement with Beijing. It is no longer sufficient for the United States to engage China and the Asia-Pacific by acting as the "beacon on the hill." The truth of the matter is that there are numerous alternatives—both for governance and

prosperity—that are competing with US engagement in the region. It will be increasingly important for the United States to recognize that in order to succeed and advance its interest in the Asia-Pacific it will have to intensify its engagement in purpose-driven and functional groupings.

The answer is not in forming a "league of democracies" in the Asia-Pacific but rather in establishing interest-based organizations that complement American interests. For example, the PSI and groupings to manage avian influenza outbreaks have been important in ensuring the peace and stability of many nations. Functional or interest-driven groupings have gained more traction in Asia as the preferred foundation for cooperation and interaction. This is most evident in the proliferation of free trade agreements throughout Asia that are integrating and binding nations as diverse as China, India, Japan, and South Korea.

Cooperation within these organizations can manifest as antiterror, antipoverty or pro-regional integration and trade-based agendas. Creating a solid foundation for engagement requires a more fluid and balanced approach. Recognizing that the United States' Asian friends place greater value on economic growth and stability than on ideological goals—such as democracy and free speech—is critical. Reconciling US constitutional culture with emerging post-industrial Asian identities will prove difficult, but, if managed properly, it can enhance US standing both in Asia and in the international community.

Where Do America's Democratic Allies Fit In?

Strong participation by US core democratic allies in the region—Australia, Japan, South Korea, and India—is critical to any new regional architecture. However, all of these nations have exhibited at least some disenchantment with the prospect of a values-based strategy to engage China. Discussions throughout Asian capitals, particularly allied ones, are now revealing a stronger desire to engage in multilateral organizations that are inclusive and purpose-driven.

Australia's position in the region has been greatly enhanced over the past few years. Kevin Rudd, a China hand by trade, is likely to continue a conciliatory and cooperative relationship with Beijing. Rudd's recent pronouncement of an Asia-Pacific Community (APC) may prove to be an enduring Australian contribution to the regional order of the Asia-Pacific. The idea remains in its early conceptual

phase but with the assistance of the United States and other Asian nations, it could play an important unifying role. Australia is a respected regional power and its stable relations with Beijing could be decisive in convincing China to participate constructively in the APC. As a strong ally of the United States, Australia remains a key supporter of US military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, it is unlikely that its commitment would continue if the United States took an antagonistic turn in its engagement in the Asia-Pacific. Australian leadership in this effort could further ensure that America's strategic presence is cemented for another 100 years by convincing Washington to work positively in shaping a new regional institution.

Japan and South Korea have a history of tension with China. Even though both nations are economically integrated with China, traditional distrust and nationalism continue to complicate open engagement with Beijing. Both of these nations have strong democratic cultures that dictate the tempo of engagement with China. However, both Prime Minister Fukuda and President Lee Myung-bak have shed their predecessors' ideological baggage for a more pragmatic policy toward China. Both Japan and South Korea are core US allies but will seek to distance themselves more from US policies that seek to exclude and antagonize China. This prognosis underscores the need for the next American president and his foreign policy advisers to pursue a more constructive and pragmatic regional order.

New Delhi remains an outlier in discussions of regional architecture as it attempts to balance its post-Nehruvian worldview with an emerging and more sophisticated international role. As India transitions from an idealistic to a realistic strategic culture, it will be forced to decide how to engage the region. India's growing trade portfolio with China is just one of many signs of an Indian nation that is attempting to improve its engagement in the region. Moreover, Indian Prime Minister Singh and former Japanese Prime Minister Abe's historic summit in the summer of 2007 not only enhanced Indo-Japanese relations but gave greater legitimacy to India's "Look Eastward" policy that is slowly pushing India into becoming a more engaged regional power. India's participation in a regional grouping will be indispensable. Not only is India the world's most populous democracy, but its economic potential and stabilizing influence will help ensure the management of crises in the Asia-Pacific.

It will not be an easy task to convince India to "step up" its engagement in regional organizations—particularly as the Congress Party's coalition attempts to recover from multiple body-blows incurred over the course of the past two years.

Each of these nations has much to offer in terms of shaping a new regional order. It is perhaps more important in the coming years to think in terms of networks and connectivity when redrafting Asia security architecture. Strong bilateral alliances will serve as the basis for this integration. Redrafting the regional architecture must not occur in isolation from other existing institutions or without prior consultation with US friends and allies in the region. It will not be an easy task but for the foreseeable future the United States will have to commit sufficient resources and diplomatic focus to solidify its position in the Asia-Pacific.

Conclusion

The next president, whether Democratic or Republican, will not have the international diplomatic capital to antagonize allies while attempting to rebalance the US global reputation and influence in the Asia-Pacific. Reestablishing American influence and standing in the world should be the top priority for the new president. Absent a fundamental rearticulation of the US global purpose in the world, efforts to create a new Asian regional architecture will be difficult and relatively ineffective. Drafting an inclusive regional architecture that is driven by functional purpose and US leadership will make a stabilizing contribution to the future of the region.

Pursuing a values-based strategy toward the Asia-Pacific will prove largely unsuccessful in managing the type of challenges likely to emerge in the region in the years ahead. Transnational crises require cooperation between all types of governments. The next president of the United States will be forced to balance US commitments in the Middle East against a plethora of challenges elsewhere in the world. Asia will require a fresh strategic assessment from US policymakers. This assessment cannot succeed without an appreciation of the diversity in Asia and the geopolitical physics of the region—physics that are increasingly centered on China.

What is becoming more certain is that offending China will be disadvantageous both to the future of the region and to resolving myriad challenges from energy security to proliferation of WMD to climate

change. A regional order founded upon antagonism will not serve US interests and will most assuredly put US strategic equities at risk. Key to the success of a new regional architecture is a forum capable of mediating tensions and strengthening bonds between Beijing and Washington.

The task is to envision a forward-looking strategy to engage the region but not to supplant effective purpose-driven regional orders that are already in place. The US role will be comparable to that of a network administrator. Instead of running the day-to-day operations of a complex multitiered computer network, the United States will help integrate many of Asia's existing nodes of order into a more efficient and effective network. Without a more forward-looking approach to the region, the US influence will be most jeopardized. No matter what nomenclature a new grouping takes, US values will remain instrumental to its success. However, promulgating values at the expense of regional security and stability is a lose-lose formula. US friends and allies in the region will play an important role in trouble-shooting problems and offering guidance when faced with significant challenges.

The next commander-in-chief should seek to enhance US engagement on both bilateral and multilateral planes in the Asia-Pacific. Actively reestablishing the true US democratic spirit will prove decisive in the US ability to ensure the stability and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific and its role as a foundational component of the international order. Above all, the next president's Asia-Pacific policy must be pragmatic, realistic, and strategic.

Endnotes

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- ² Caroline Gluck, "China-Taiwan Meeting Bridges Gulf," BBC News, April 13, 2008.
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- ⁵ Briefing Pacific Command, Honolulu, Hawaii, April 15, 2008.
- ⁶ Bahukutumbi Raman, "Quadrilateral Talks," The Stanley Foundation and Center for a New American Security, Honolulu, Hawaii, April 2008.
- ⁷ Briefing Pacific Command, Honolulu, Hawaii, April 15, 2008.

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