

Contending American Views of the Asian Security Order

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As the new Bush Administration settles into office, there is no single “American view” of the security architecture of the Asia-Pacific region. Rather, the debates surrounding the presidential elections of 2000 suggested that there are several competing visions of the emerging security order in Asia.

These images of Asia’s future draw upon different assessments of the relative capabilities and intentions of the major powers, particularly whether or China is a “partner,” a “competitor,” or an “adversary” of the United States, and on whether Japan will regain its economic vitality and remain a strong ally of the United States in the decades ahead. They also tap different judgments about the feasibility of alternative security mechanisms in the region, particularly the relative weight to be assigned to the American alliance network in the region as compared with cooperative security dialogues such as the ASEAN Regional Forum.

These different assessments produce quite different prescriptions for American security policy toward Asia.¹ Altogether, one can identify at least five different alternatives. Liberals assert the possibility of a formal security community in the region, or at least of an informal concert among the major Asian powers. Realists call for a strengthening of the American alliance structure as the key to stability, or alternatively for maintaining a balance of power favorable to American interests. Alarmists warn of a rising China, and assert the need for a policy of containment directed against Beijing.

Although these different assessments and prescriptions have been evident in America’s security discourse for many years, their relative weight in the debate is shifting. There is far less optimism about creating a “New Pacific Community,” or even a concert of the major powers in the region, than there was at the beginning of the Clinton Administration. Many of the analysts who advised the incoming Bush Administration during the campaign

¹ These positions are similar to those described in Joseph Nye, “The Case for Deep Engagement,” *Foreign Affairs*, 74:4 (July-August 1995), pp. 90-102. However, Nye presents them as theoretical alternatives. Here, they are seen as options advocated by different participants in an ongoing policy debate in the U.S.

are advocating, as an alternative, the strengthening of the network of American alliances in Asia. And some on the periphery of the policy community favor the more extreme options — either a policy of bolstering the American presence to engage in containment against China, or a policy of drawing down the American presence so as to serve as a “distant balancer” in the regional security equation.

However, the real world is never as neat as academic analysts might suggest, nor is dramatic change as feasible as political leaders might prefer. It is unlikely that American security policy toward Asia will shift as sharply as some campaign rhetoric may have implied. In fact, in defining its regional security policy, the new Bush Administration will most likely draw elements from several of the different visions identified here, even though its rhetoric will most likely emphasize the option of strengthening the American alliance structure in the region.

Building a Pacific Community

The first vision is of a network of cooperative relationships in the Asia-Pacific region, embodied in formal regional institutions with universal or near-universal membership. Cooperation would extend to issues of both economics and security. In the security realm, it would involve the creation of what political scientists call a “security community” — that is, a system of nation-states among which war or the threat of force has become unthinkable. In the economic sphere, it would entail a concerted effort to reduce barriers to trade and investment within the region, perhaps not achieving a formal “economic community” in the sense of a common market or a customs union, but still featuring the creation of common institutions to facilitate commercial relations.

The assumption behind this vision is that the barriers to cooperation are falling and the impetus for cooperation is rising. The end of the Cold War has reduced the ideological and political barriers that once divided the nations of the region into contending blocs. At the same time, increasing economic interdependence in the region, part of the broader dynamic known as globalization, is providing greater incentives for each country to maximize its access to markets, capital, and technology, including from economies that it once considered it adversaries. Moreover, the problems associated with economic growth and interdependence — financial crises produced by rapid capital movements, international environmental problems, cross-border crime, the unauthorized international migration — can only be managed by effective international cooperation.

The vision of a Pacific Community is embodied in the regional institutions that were formed in the 1980s. Most noteworthy are the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC), and the ASEAN Regional Forum on security matters (ARF). These institutions were intended to reduce barriers to trade and investment, promote economic and social development, enhance security, and reduce the chances for crisis and war. They were designed to be universal in membership, or nearly so: a way of enabling not only long-standing friends, but also recent adversaries, to find ways of reducing mistrust, building mutual confidence, and promoting cooperation in advancing common interests.

The first Bush Administration was skeptical about many of these institutions. It feared that the creation of a regional cooperative security mechanism would not be effective in enhancing security, but would somehow undermine the network of American alliances on which stability actually depended. It was apprehensive that a stronger regional economic organization would either reduce the chances for global liberalization through the WTO, exclude the U.S. from the Asia-Pacific economy, or both.

In contrast, the Clinton Administration entered office far more enthusiastic about the prospects for community building in the Asia-Pacific. Then-Assistant Secretary of State Winston Lord made the creation of a “New Pacific Community” the cornerstone of his regional policy, as articulated in his confirmation hearings in 1993.² In its first year in office, the Clinton Administration sponsored a significant upgrading of APEC by hosting, in Seattle, the first summit meeting of “economic leaders” from all APEC’s member economies. It also indicated that it would welcome, rather than resist, the establishment of a multilateral security dialogue in the Asia-Pacific region, through organizations such as the ARF.

Over time, however, the momentum toward creating a Pacific Community appears to have slowed, as the process encountered several obstacles. First, the Clinton Administration’s concept of a New Pacific Community became enmeshed with its broader strategy of “enlargement” — of placing the promotion of human rights, democracy, and markets at the cornerstone of its foreign policy. The addition of these objectives to the community-building agenda alienated a number of Asian governments that were not committed to democratic values, or that continued to see a greater role for state leadership in promoting economic development and regulating foreign economic relations.

² Winston Lord, “A New Pacific Community: Ten Goals for American Policy,” *Foreign Policy Bulletin*, 3:6 (May-June 1993), pp. 49-53.

Partly as a result, many Asians began to think of forms of regional organization that would exclude the United States, either as a complement to U.S.-led mechanisms or as a replacement for them. China, once a critic of regional security cooperation, has more recently become an advocate, but has suggested that cooperative security mechanisms such as ARF make the U.S. alliance network obsolete. Malaysia has frequently advanced the idea of an East Asian Economic Group (or Caucus), parallel to APEC, that would not include the United States and whose agenda would not focus so heavily on economic liberalization.

Then, in the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis, Japan proposed the creation of an Asian Monetary Fund, whose terms would presumably be less stringent than those imposed by the IMF. Although no formal Asian Monetary Fund has been created, the meetings of the so-called "ASEAN+3" (ASEAN plus China, Japan, and South Korea) embody the same general concept of a regional mechanism for economic and possibly political dialogue without the United States. Although the Clinton Administration did not express any opposition to the creation of the ASEAN+3, the emergence of this new pan-Asian forum reinforced the reservations of those American analysts who had feared that the U.S. would ultimately lose out from a process of creating regional economic and security institutions.

A second problem for community building in the Asia-Pacific has been the disappointing performance of the two key regional institutions, ARF and APEC, in recent years. To its critics, the ASEAN Regional Forum has proven incapable of dealing effectively with the real security problems in the region: the uncertainties surrounding the rise of Chinese economic and military power, the competing claims to the South China Seas, the tensions in the Taiwan Strait, or North Korea's nuclear program. Many have concluded that, at best, organizations like ARF might institutionalize a security community that had already come into existence, but that they could not in themselves create a security community where it did not already exist.

Similarly, APEC was largely sidelined by several economic developments in the late 1990s. It appeared ineffective in anticipating, preventing, or solving the Asian financial crisis of 1997-98. The financial crisis, in turn, made some member economies less eager to fulfill the commitments to freer trade that they had made earlier in the decade. And as the world focused on the completion of the Uruguay Round of global trade negotiations and the establishment of the World Trade Organization, regional economic organizations such as APEC were given less priority.

Thus, although the institutions of the Pacific Community remain in place, they now attract far less excitement in America than they once did. They may still be seen as good

investments for the future, but fewer analysts regard them as the cornerstones to the present-day security order in the region.

Creating a concert of powers

The second vision evident in American discussions of regional security in Asia is the creation of a concert of the major powers in the region. Like the vision of a Pacific Community, the quest for a concert of powers is rooted in the assumption that the major pattern of international relations in the region is characterized by cooperation, rather than by conflict or even competition. But it is less optimistic that cooperation is a universal phenomenon in the region, or that cooperation can be realized through the creation of effective regional institutions. Rather, it presumes that informal cooperation among the major powers — especially the U.S., China, and Japan — is the key to a stable regional security order.

The concept of a concert of powers was the paradoxical response to a widespread perception in the late 1990s that relations among the three major powers were beginning to spiral downward. The relationship between the United States and China had never fully recovered from the Tiananmen Crisis of 1989, and was further strained by the tensions in the Taiwan Strait in 1995-96, caused by Lee Teng-hui's visit to the U.S., the Chinese missile tests and military exercises just before Taiwan's presidential elections, and the dispatch of two U.S. Navy carrier battle groups off Taiwan in response.

The relationship between China and Japan was also deteriorating. With their own economic and population growth slowing, and with China's economy still advancing at a rapid pace, many Japanese feared a long-term shift in the fundamental balance of power between Japan and China. Perhaps more than any other country in Asia, the Japanese were disturbed by China's use of military pressure against Taiwan during the 1995-96 crisis in the Taiwan Straits. Conversely, the Chinese charged that the Revised Defense Guidelines that Japan and the United States announced in 1996 reflected American encouragement of the remilitarization of Japan, and a Japanese willingness to become implicitly involved in the security of Taiwan. Both Tokyo and Beijing also showed increasing irritation over the unresolved issue of Japan's apology for its actions against China during World War II.

Moreover, while still basically strong, there were also some problems in the U.S.-Japan relationship. With the end of the Cold War, the rationale for the U.S.-Japan alliance, and for American bases in Japan, was no longer so obvious. The social and environmental costs of the bases therefore came under increasing criticism, especially on Okinawa. At the

same, although the protracted Japanese economic recession and the long American economic boom muted the earlier conflict between the two countries over trade, it also made the large payments that Japan made to the United States for host nation support increasingly controversial within the Japanese political establishment.

Although the relations among the three major powers were therefore unraveling, at least to a degree, their leaders appeared determined to preventing a slide toward confrontation. American and Japanese leaders were committed to preserving, and even strengthening, their alliance. At the same time, they did not want to give the impression that their alliance was directed against China; instead, they wanted to reassure their Chinese counterparts that they would welcome a cooperative relationship with Beijing. And, for its part, China clearly wanted to avoid confrontation with the U.S. and Japan. Such a relationship would threaten China's access to the Japanese and American capital, technology, and markets on which its economic modernization drive depended. And that, in turn, would undermine the stability of the Chinese domestic political and social order.

These considerations made it possible to envision the creation of a concert of powers, linking the U.S., Japan, and China. From the American perspective, movement in this direction involved three steps: first, the strengthening of the American alliance with Japan, through the formulation of the Revised Defense Guidelines and the agreement on the relocation and consolidation of American bases on Okinawa; second, the announcement, during Chinese President Jiang Zemin's visit to Washington in 1997, that the United States and China would "build toward a constructive strategic partnership" in the coming century; and third, the initiation of dialogue among the three countries to identify common interests and design coordinated policies for advancing them.

The three countries made some progress toward creating this concert of powers — at least as long as the Clinton Administration was in power in Washington. Their governments were all committed to the view that their common interests, particularly with regard to preserving peace and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region, were more important than their differences on specific issues. They appeared to have identified common ground on the question of North Korea, in that they all were willing to support South Korea's "sunshine policy" and North Korea's steps to improve its relations with Seoul, Washington, and Tokyo. In the Taiwan Strait, the three agreed on the undesirability of a unilateral declaration of independence by Taiwan, and there were signs that China was moving toward a more flexible formula for unification, as recommended by Washington and Tokyo. Institutionally, they conducted a trilateral dialogue only at the unofficial, or Track II level, although there was some movement toward adding officials to the process, attending in their unofficial capacities.

But even though the governments of the three countries tacitly endorsed a concert of powers in the late 1990s, that concept also had its critics:

- In Tokyo, there was widespread concern that Japan might be abandoned by the United States in its search for a “strategic partnership” with China, especially as the balance of power between China and Japan shifted in China’s favor. What began as a trilateral concert of powers, therefore, might end up as a bilateral arrangement from which Japan was effectively excluded. The widespread criticism that President Clinton did not stop in Japan either before or after his visit to China in 1998 was the clearest reflection of this apprehension.
- In Beijing, there was conversely the perception that China was being asked, in effect, to accept a unipolar world centered on the United States. In the eyes of many Chinese, the proposed concert of powers was not to be a concert of equals, but rather a lopsided arrangement in which the United States was to be the leader and Japan the junior partner, with China relegated to a secondary position in which its ties with Tokyo and Washington would always be weaker than the U.S.-Japan alliance. Moreover, many Chinese had grave reservations about recent American actions supported by the Japanese: the Revised Defense Guidelines (as mentioned above), movement toward a national missile defense system for the continental United States and a theater missile defense system for Japan, and the U.S.-led NATO intervention in Serbia. The mistaken American bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999 provided the catalyst for an outpouring of these grievances against American policy.
- In Washington, there was a growing concern that China is not a status quo power, and that it is therefore impossible to conceive that it would be willing to join in a concert with two established powers such as Japan and the United States. The outburst of nationalistic sentiment in China following the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, the subsequent Chinese denunciations of American “hegemony,” and the reports that Beijing was engaged in systematic espionage against the United States, only heightened these suspicions. The resulting skepticism about the feasibility of bringing China into a cooperative relationship with the United States (and, by extension, Japan) was reflected in Governor Bush’s campaign statements that China

should be regarded not as a prospective “strategic partner” of the United States, but rather as its “strategic competitor.”

One might also add that the idea of a concert of power was not universally accepted elsewhere in Asia, either. Smaller countries that would not be members of a trilateral concert feared that major decisions affecting their interests would, under such a concert of powers, be made behind their backs, without their participation.

Building the network of American alliances

To those Americans skeptical of the possibility of building either a Pacific Community or a concert of powers, the most attractive alternative has been to rely more heavily on America's relationships with its closest friends in the region: those with whom it shares common values and similar political and economic institutions.

This approach has its manifestations in discussions of both economic policy and security policy. In the economic realm, there is increasing interest in the creation of free trade agreements linking the U.S. with those Asian trading partners willing to sign them. Thus far, Singapore and even Japan have been mentioned as possible participants in such free trade agreements. The advocates of such an approach believe that it will be far more effective to work with a smaller number of like-minded nations to forge a genuine commitment to free trade, than to try to persuade a larger number of countries, with very different economic institutions and values, to make a similar commitment through region-wide institutions such as APEC.

In the security sphere, this approach would entail less attention to cooperative security organizations with broad membership, such as ARF, and more stress on enhancing the network of American alliances, particularly with Japan, South Korea, and Australia. Most analysts who adopt this perspective call for strengthening these alliances on a bilateral basis, through measures such as the following:

- Bolstering the U.S.-Japan alliance through the promulgation of the Revised Defense Guidelines.
- Strengthening the U.S.-ROK alliance through the conclusion of a revised Status of Forces Agreement.

- Building security ties with Singapore, enabling U.S. naval ships to use bases there for resupply and repair.
- Developing closer security links with Australia, including possibly the deployment of some American forces to Australian bases.

Some analysts have also advocated transforming what is presently a set of bilateral alliances into a multilateral alliance structure that would more closely resemble NATO. This idea traces its origins to late in the Cold War, when U.S. analysts concerned about the rise of Soviet power in Asia proposed the creation of a “NEATO” (Northeast Asia Treaty Organization) or a “JANZUS” (linking Japan to the ANZUS pact) as a way of weaving America’s bilateral alliances into a stronger, multilateral framework. But it has been put forward once again in an essay by Robert Blackwill, an advisor to George W. Bush’s presidential election campaign.³ The proposal draws some impetus from the successful coordination of security policy among Japan, the U.S., and South Korea, creating what some call a “virtual” trilateral alliance out of what was once two separate bilateral alliances centered on the U.S.⁴

This vision does not necessarily presuppose a confrontational, or even competitive, relationship with China, as a policy of containment would. But it does assume that building cooperative relations in Asia can most effectively proceed from the bottom up, rather than from the top down. That is, the United States should not emphasize the construction of region-wide institutions with universal membership, or the construction of a “strategic partnership” with China as part of a broader concert of powers in the region. Rather, it should focus on the strengthening of relationships with the countries with which it has established alliances and with which it shares common values and institutions.

The debate between the community-builders and the alliance-strengtheners in Asia mirrors the debate in Europe over the relative emphasis to be placed on strengthening the OSCE and enlarging NATO. Those who have faith in the potential of cooperative security arrangements focus on strengthening region-wide institutions like the OSCE and ARF, drawing former adversaries like Russia and China into such organizations as full partners. In contrast,

³ Robert D. Blackwill, “An Action Agenda to Strengthen America’s Alliances in the Asia-Pacific Region,” in Robert D. Blackwill and Paul Dibb (eds.), *America’s Asian Alliances* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), pp. 111-34. See also the rejoinder by Blackwill’s co-editor, Paul Dibb, dissenting from the proposal to multilateralize America’s bilateral alliances. “Paul Dibb Comments,” in *Ibid.*, pp. 135-36.

⁴ On the “virtual alliance,” see Ralph A. Cossa (ed.), *U.S.-Korea-Japan Relations: Building Toward a “Virtual Alliance”* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1999).

those who are skeptical about the effectiveness of institutions with universal membership advocate building on the American-led alliance systems in NATO and Asia. Other nations, such as China and Russia, would be welcome to cooperate with the U.S. and its allies, but would not be regarded as full partners in the alliance system. And, if they chose not to cooperate, then those same alliances would form a powerful counterweight against their ambitions.

Critics of this strategy have attacked it from two quite different perspectives. Some warn that, no matter how carefully it is presented, Beijing will perceive a reinforcement of the U.S. alliance system as a containment policy directed against China. Rather than encouraging Chinese cooperation with the U.S. and its allies, as the proponents of this option says is their intention, this strategy will only drive U.S-China and Sino-Japanese relations in the direction of competition, or even confrontation. Indeed, few American allies seem eager to join in this strategy, particularly if it entails the multilateralization of the American alliance structure, or an adversarial posture toward China.⁵

Additionally, many Asians would prefer a more pluralistic security order in Asia, in which the United States, while still actively engaged, plays a somewhat reduced role. They worry that calls to “strengthen the U.S. alliance system” represent an American attempt to create a regional security order that is even more unipolar than it is today. They are also apprehensive that Washington will try to impose unpopular policies (such as national missile defense) on its allies, or will attempt to persuade its allies to accept a greater share of the military and economic burden. Thus, while many Asians still see the need to maintain the U.S. alliance structure, they do not necessarily agree on the desirability of strengthening it or enlarging it.

Other critics take a different perspective. They argue that the end of the Cold War has fundamentally eliminated the rationale for the American alliance system, and that continuing to see it as the foundation for American security policy in the Asia-Pacific, or as the cornerstone for stability in the region, is profoundly anachronistic. Moreover, they believe that continuing to deploy large numbers of American forces in Asia carries significant costs. It is a burden on the American economy; it makes it difficult for the U.S. to address trade and investment problems with its allies in a forthright manner; it obviates the need for America's partners to assume responsibility for their own security; and it threatens to involve the United

⁵ See, for example, Michael Richardson, “Asia-Pacific Fears Arms Race from Bush Policies Toward China,” *International Herald Tribune*, January 25, 2001. This is also implicit in Tadashi Yamamoto, Pranee Thiparat, and Abul Ahsan, *America's Role in Asia: Asian Views* (San Francisco: The Asia Foundation, 2001).

States in conflicts in which it has few direct interests at stake. These critics conclude, in short, that the U.S. should be planning for the significant modification of its alliance system in Asia — not for its strengthening or enlargement.

Moreover, these critics also warn that, even if the United States remains committed to its alliances, its partners may become less so. They predict that progress toward reducing tensions on the Korean peninsula, especially if it actually leads to the reunification of Korea, will significantly undermine public support for American bases in Korea, whatever the views of the Korean government. And if once American deployments in Korea are eliminated or significantly reduced, then it will be increasingly difficult to maintain similar deployments in Japan, given the environmental, economic, and social costs of the American bases there.

Although they share a common conclusion, the difference between these two lines of argument is profound. The first group believes in continued American engagement in the Asian security order, but warns that an attempt to strengthen American alliances will prove counterproductive. The second group believes that it is time for American disengagement from Asia, and believes that trying to bolster the American alliance system is unwarranted. At present, the voice of the first group is far louder than that of the second, but the second group can always appeal to the isolationist impulses that are an ongoing feature of American discourse over foreign affairs.

Acting as the distant balancer

This leads us to the fourth vision for the regional security order in the Asia-Pacific. Those who believe that a Pacific Community is too visionary, a concert of powers too impractical, and a U.S.-led alliance system too anachronistic, sometimes favor a return to a more traditional balance of power system in the Asia-Pacific region, in which the U.S. could play a more detached role than it does today.

According to this strategy, the U.S. would maintain or expand its strategic dialogue with a wide range of nations across the region. Its aim would be to maintain good relations with most, to build coalitions to deal with particular problems, to counterbalance those that seek to expand their power and influence in the region, and to prevent the emergence of coalitions antithetical to American interests. But the United States would expect Asians to manage most regional issues, especially in the security realm. U.S. would be able to serve as a distant balancer, aloof from most security problems in the region, and intervening only on matters of the utmost importance.

At present, this vision in its pure form is held only by a relatively small group of policy analysts outside of the American government, particularly in research organizations that take a libertarian bent toward domestic policy.⁶ Still, one of its principal implications — that Washington should be expanding its strategic dialogue with non-allies to seek common ground on issues of mutual concern — is evident in some recent American actions. President Clinton's visits to Vietnam and India toward the end of his term in office are widely interpreted as efforts to increase American strategic leverage in the Asia-Pacific region by building security dialogue with countries that are important powers but are presently neither allies nor adversaries of the U.S. And the American reluctance to participate in peace-keeping operations in East Timor, leaving the leadership of that exercise to the Australians, is also an example of a U.S. to limit its involvement in at least some kinds of security problems.

Ironically, although they may complain that the development of American strategic dialogue with Hanoi and New Delhi is intended to contain China, this is very much the option that the Chinese would like the United States to adopt. Of the five visions under discussion here, it is the only one that is truly multipolar and yet non-confrontational. Conceiving the Asia-Pacific region as a balance of power system would give China the greatest room for maneuver — at times to counterbalance the United States, but at other times to cooperate with Washington on relatively equal terms.

But, as already noted, this vision is the least popular inside the U.S. A true balance of power system is not familiar to Americans, who like to think of more enduring alliances and institutions based on common values, rather than the constant maneuver in pursuit of national interest that a truly multipolar system would entail. Moreover, the transition from the present security structure in the region to a balance of power system is not widely regarded as beneficial to the United States, since it would imply a transition from a largely unipolar system centered on Washington to a multipolar order in which the U.S. would be simply one player among many. Additionally, it is not clear that the regional security order in Asia is sufficiently firm that the United States could disengage strategically without a significant risk of instability.

It is for this last reason that most of America's allies would also oppose any decisive U.S. movement in this direction. Although they fear that the third vision — a strengthening

⁶ The most notable of these advocates is Ted Galen Carpenter of the Cato Institute, who has called on the U.S. to "avoid an overt strategic partnership with any Asian state and encourage the emergence of multiple power centers" [emphasis added]. Ted Galen Carpenter, "Roiling Asia," *Foreign Affairs*, 77:6 (November-December 1998), pp. 2-6.

of America's alliances — might mean entrapping them in an American confrontation with China, they also fear that this fourth vision would mean American abandonment of its allies in the name of a fluid balance of power. While they might gain greater room for maneuver in such a security structure, this would come at the cost of considerable uncertainty, not only about their own place in the balance of power, but about the stability of the regional order as well.

Containing China

Finally, the fifth vision calls for organizing America's security policy around the containment of China. It is based on the assumption that conflict is inevitable between a rising power like China and a status quo power like the United States, especially when the two countries have such great cultural and ideological differences, and when the status quo power believes it has a natural right to leadership and the rising power is trying to overcome what it regards as national humiliation.

These assumptions are reflected, of course, in a growing body of literature being published in the United States, under such titles as *The Coming Conflict with China*.⁷ They are also being articulated, within the policy community, by a group of analysts who style themselves as the "Blue Team," who believe that mainstream analysis is far too sanguine about the Chinese ambitions and about the threat posed to the United States by the rise of Chinese power.⁸ Charges that China is engaged in espionage against the U.S., and is developing nuclear weapons and strategic missile systems based on information acquired through espionage, give greater weight to this perception of China as a rising threat. So too do publications by Chinese analysts warning of a coming conflict with the U.S., although a careful reading of that Chinese literature suggests that they are predicting a conflict that is begun by an American attempt to stop the rise of China rather than by a Chinese attempt to challenge

⁷ Richard Bernstein and Ross Munro, *The Coming Conflict with China* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1997).

⁸ On the "blue team," see Murray Hiebert, "Red Scare," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 12, 2000. For representative works by leading advocates of that point of view, see Bill Gertz, *Betrayal: How the Clinton Administration Undermined American Security* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 1999); and Edward Timperlake and William C. Triplett II, *Red Dragon Rising: Communist China's Military Threat to America* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 1999).

the United States.⁹

Thus far, however, the option of containing China has not been fully or effectively articulated, even by those who warn of the threat of a rising China. For one thing, as noted above, America's allies are warning the U.S. against adopting a containment policy, describing it as both unnecessary and counterproductive. And even those who warn of the "China threat" must take into account the economic costs (both absolute and relative) of engaging in a confrontational policy toward one of its major trading and investment partners, and the potential strategic costs (both financial and potentially human) of engaging in a confrontational policy toward another nuclear power.

Moreover, the lukewarm enthusiasm for a containment policy reflects the fact that, whatever China's discontents, it does not yet appear to be posing the typical threats that rising powers have presented in the past: it does not have territorial ambitions other than Taiwan and the South China Seas, it is no longer interested in extending its ideology beyond its borders, and it is willing to work within most existing international regimes and institutions. The Chinese government seems committed to trying to discourage Washington from returning to a policy of containment, not only by warning of its consequences, but also of reassuring the United States that it vastly prefers a cooperative relationship. Until those orientations undergo fundamental change, the U.S. is unlikely to adopt a full-blown policy of containing Beijing.

More common than a full-fledged containment policy, therefore, are proposals to selectively counter Chinese ambitions in areas of immediate concern to the United States:

- To counter China's growing strategic capability by explicitly acknowledging that any national missile defense system will be directed, at least in part, against China.¹⁰
- To adopt a less equivocal, statement of American opposition to any Chinese use of force against Taiwan.¹¹

⁹ For a summary and analysis of that Chinese literature, see Michael Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1999).

¹⁰ See, for example, Robert Kagan, "The Good Fight," *The Weekly Standard*, January 22, 2001. On the debate over whether an American national missile defense system should be directed against China, see "Moving Target: Among the Unknowns About Missile Defense Is Who the Enemy Is," *Wall Street Journal*, February 9, 2001.

¹¹ See, for example, Jesse Helms, "Defending Taiwan," *Washington Times*, January 9, 2001.

- To strengthen Taiwan's ability to defend itself by increasing American arms sales to Taiwan, including some form of theater missile defense.¹²
- To reduce military-to-military exchanges with China, on the grounds that they give Beijing opportunities to engage in intelligence-gathering against the U.S. armed forces.¹³

At present, the first of these proposals has attracted relatively less support than the others, which have been endorsed by some of those who served as advisers to the Bush campaign during the 2000 presidential election. Whether or not they will be translated into policy by the new administration, however, remains to be seen.

Conclusion

The Clinton Administration came into office in 1993 committed, at least in principle, to the concept of a New Pacific Community. It left office in 2001 more sober about the prospects to this kind of formal regional organization, but still seeking a loose concert of powers among the U.S., China, and Japan. In contrast, the Bush Administration has entered office committed, again in theory, to a greater focus on America's allies in the region, and critical of what it regards as a naive belief in the possibility of either building a security community in the region or of creating a "strategic partnership" with China. Although few members of the Bush team have advocated the overall containment of China, some have favored a more robust opposition to possible Chinese use of force in the Taiwan Strait, through a program of expanded arms sales, a less equivocal commitment to Taiwan's security, or both.

Although there has therefore been a shift in the balance among the five visions outlined above, the differences between the preferences of the two Administrations are unlikely to be that great. After all, the Clinton Administration was not opposed to strengthening relations with traditional American allies, especially Japan and South Korea, even as it attempted to build more cooperative ties with former adversaries, such as North Korea and China. Conversely, the Bush Administration will find it difficult, if not impossible, to abandon at least a nominal commitment to organizations such as APEC and ARF, even as it emphasizes the need to reinvigorate American alliances. The realities of the region will require a

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Edward Timperlake and William Triplett II, "Revealing Report on Our Damaged Security," *Washington Times*, February 16, 2001.

multifaceted policy, and one that retains significant continuities with the past.

Thus, the new administration is most likely to adopt a policy toward Asia that draws on elements of several of these visions:

- The Bush Administration's main emphasis, at least in its first months in office, will be to strengthen its alliances in Asia.¹⁴ Given the uncertainties surrounding the balance of power in the region, most American allies will welcome a closer security relationship with the United States. However, for this policy to be successful, the U.S. will also have to consult with its allies in determining policy on regional and global issues, avoid adopting positions of which its partners disapprove, and assure its allies that it is not trying to disengage from the region.
- The Bush Administration will probably continue to participate in Asian regional institutions such as APEC and ARF.¹⁵ But its degree of enthusiasm, and the level of its participation, will be dependent on their demonstrated ability to work effectively. There will also be concern about any attempt to form new regional institutions that exclude the United States, especially in the economic realm.
- Although the Bush Administration will abandon the Clinton Administration's rhetoric about building toward a "constructive strategic partnership" with China, it will also eschew the stark alternative of containing Beijing, and in particular will try to avoid an adversarial relationship with China. Indeed, in part at the behest of its allies, the U.S. will continue to welcome China, and possibly Russia as well, to join Washington and Tokyo in working cooperatively to address economic and security issues in the Asia-Pacific region, beginning with the Korean peninsula.

But although these will probably be the broad contours of America's regional security policy in the new administration, there remain important uncertainties about the fate of two

¹⁴ This was the thrust of Secretary of State Colin Powell's testimony at his confirmation hearings. See "Confirmation Hearing by Colin L. Powell," January 17, 2001.

¹⁵ But as Ralph Cossa, President of the Pacific Forum CSIS has noted, the one element "conspicuously absent" from Secretary of State Colin Powell's testimony during his Senate confirmation hearings was a reassertion of the American interest in regional organizations like APEC and ARF. See Ralph A. Cossa, "Bush's Emerging Asia Policy: What's Still Missing," *PacNet*, no. 6, February 9, 2001.

more specific campaign commitments: first, whether to significantly upgrade the American commitment to Taiwan, perhaps by selling more advanced arms; and second, whether to provide theater missile defense to its allies in the region and to deploy a national missile defense system to protect the U.S. itself.

Unless handled with great care, fulfilling these campaign pledges runs the risk of seriously alienating Beijing, pushing U.S.-China relations toward confrontation, undermining the effectiveness of regional institutions, and alarming America's allies. Thus, these decisions will prove extraordinarily difficult. The choices that are ultimately made, and the ways in which they are publicly justified, will be important indicators of the approach that the new administration is taking toward the security order in the Asia-Pacific.