

East Asia and U.S. Security Policy during the Second Bush Administration

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An important development in judging whether the world is more secure today than during the Cold War era is the change in the nature of threat to security from a single major threat posed by the former Soviet Union to one of multiple minor threats. One may ask, however, whether we have developed a new strategy to replace the one formerly used against the Soviet Union. Current strategic efforts can be considered a fight against international terrorism, but at the end of the day it is doubtful if the words “war on terror” represent the reality of the situation. It is a misnomer to call a preemptive strike against stateless terrorists a “war” in the conventional sense. Although the United States wields a historically unprecedented degree of power, it is inadequate as a global power, since it alone cannot address issues of global governance. It also has not been very serious about building a “coalition of the willing and able.” The war on terror, therefore, is not exclusively a U.S. war, and certainly not Bush’s war. Indeed, it is a misnomer to even call it a “war.”

What are the chief characteristics of the Bush administration? Replacing Colin Powell as Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice emphasized the word “diplomacy” upon taking the official oath of office during her swearing-in ceremony. If the U.S. is different in any way with the advent of the second Bush administration, the difference has more to do with the change in circumstances rather than in leadership. One change in circumstances is that, as in the case with Afghanistan and Iraq, the U.S., despite its overwhelming power in prosecuting war, will not necessarily succeed in peace-building, which requires perseverance and, accordingly, soft power. In addition, the newly emerging circumstances make diplomacy more important than war. These changes have increased the need for multilateral cooperation between the U.S. and its allies, implying that greater priority should be given to Japan-U.S. relations during the second Bush administration.

Shifting our focus to Asia and the instability in the region, we observe a variety of “Arcs of Instability,” which can be defined in various ways. Due to the ambiguity inherent in the term, it is important to identify the focal point of our security policy. In addition, the degree of consistency between the U.S. and Japanese concepts of “Arc of Instability” must be examined. The “Arc of Instability” as conceived by both the U.S. and Japan stretches from the Middle East and Southwest Asia to the Korean Peninsula and to the Western Pacific via the Indian Ocean, the Straits of Malacca, the South China Sea, and Southeast Asia, with Iraq and Iran to the far west and North Korea to the far east. Within this Arc lie the “seam states”

(in Thomas Barnett's words) of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Indonesia, which will have a critical impact in the fight against terrorism.

How can we evaluate the nature of instability? The question of whether the common causes of instability should be attributed to Islamic extremism is crucial. Excessive emphasis on Islamic factors is counter-effective; rather, it is necessary to consider the background of the rise of Islamic extremism. The causes of the current instability do not lie in inter-state competition and conflicts such as arms races, but rather in domestic security. Therefore, the solution to the current instability is international cooperation in nation-building. Although neo-conservatives tend to undermine the problem of nation-building, it must be placed at the forefront of security objectives. Encouraging signs have emerged in this regard, as in the case of spontaneous transnational rescue activities for the tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean. Although the Six-Party Talks concerning North Korea are important, institutionalization of international cooperation, like in the case of the tsunami relief aid, is vital. Japan should focus more of its attention on southern countries.

The question now becomes whether Japan itself is stable. Although Japan may be stable, East Asia, of which Japan is a part, is unstable. Important factors relating to security exist in East Asia; China's "peaceful" rise and its impact, the possibility of a collapse of North Korea's anachronistic regime and its aftermath. The "state," which constitutes a framework that defines international relations, continues to function in East Asia, although the framework will certainly undergo a major change in the near future. As Secretary Rice has stated, China and the U.S. have common national interests despite their differing values. Even though China may not be a threat, its influence cannot be ignored. In other words, the eastern end of the "Arc of Instability" is associated with issues apart from the fight against terror or the fight against poverty. Asia is not dangerous in the short-term; it will not return to a 19th century-type balance of power. Important changes, however, are certainly underway and a long-term strategy which takes these changes into account is necessary.

Japan will be an essential participant in establishing a "community of democracies," in Secretary Rice's words. In the past, a division of labor existed between the U.S. and Japan, the former exercising "hard power" and the latter "soft power." Whether this division of roles will continue or not remains to be seen. Japan is under pressure to reassess its philosophy on military power and must accept the fact that there will be situations where military action may become necessary, and the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) may have to play a role. While there will be moves to revise the Constitution, one cannot deny the importance to be placed on areas in which Japan excels, and any revision of the role of the SDF must be considered within this context. For its part, the U.S. should appreciate more squarely the merits of non-military solutions in which Japan excels. There will still be differences between the U.S. and

Japan in terms of their capabilities and policy priorities, which are not likely to be eliminated. What needs to be kept in mind is that support for nation-building is a prerequisite for a peaceful world order. Sustained and strenuous effort based on this awareness is the sole solution to achieve a stable international order.

(These notes were prepared by the editorial staff from the minutes of the day's special speech.)