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## ASIA IN THE DEBATE ON AMERICAN GRAND STRATEGY

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**T**he United States faces multiple national security challenges, but in the longer sweep of history it is our response to the rise of Chinese power that may have the greatest significance. Over the previous two centuries the Anglo-American-led neoliberal order faced three rising powers. Great Britain managed the rise of American power at the end of the nineteenth century, through a deft strategy of accommodation and co-option. However, the United States and Britain failed to prevent the rise of Japanese and German power from leading to a calamitous global conflict. In those cases both deterrence and accommodation failed. We thus face the prospect of rising Chinese power with a one-for-three record, and the one case of success was one in which the rising power shared the values of the preeminent power.

Americans do not seem disheartened by this prospect, however. The Chicago Council on Global Affairs found in a June 2008 survey that 64 percent of Americans favor a policy of engagement and cooperation with Beijing and that 67 percent oppose U.S. efforts to contain Chinese power.<sup>1</sup> In the 2008 presidential election, Senators John McCain and Barack Obama largely reflected this cautious optimism about the future of U.S.-China relations, despite significant disagreements they had with each other on Iraq and the war on terror. Obama emphasized distrust of China in terms of trade, even while reiterating the need for engagement:

U.S. and Chinese cooperation in the Six-Party Talks on the North Korea nuclear issue makes clear that we can work together constructively bilaterally and with others to reduce tensions on even extraordinarily sensitive issues. . . . America and the world

can benefit from trade with China but only if China agrees to play by the rules and act as a positive force for balanced world growth.

Meanwhile, McCain emphasized distrust of China on the security side, but he too stayed within the overall theme of expanding cooperation with China:

The U.S. shares common interests with China that can form the basis of a strong partnership on issues of global concern, including climate change, trade, and proliferation. But China's rapid military modernization, mercantilist economic practices, lack of political freedom and close relations with regimes like Sudan and Burma undermine the international system on which its rise depends.<sup>2</sup>

This broad consensus on China policy stands in contrast to the "Japan bashing" that characterized the American presidential elections of 1988 and 1992, as Japan was rapidly increasing in power. The differences with Japan are all the more striking when one considers that Japan is an ally and a democracy that poses no military threat to the United States. There are probably several reasons why China is not dominating the American political debate the way Japan did earlier, including the immediacy of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the shared international challenge of the financial crisis, and reassuring examples of U.S.-China cooperation on the North Korean nuclear problem.

Yet the longer-term strategic challenge remains. Goldman Sachs predicts that China's gross domestic product (GDP) will surpass that of the United States by 2027. Even allowing for China's demographic "speed bump" and a slowdown in the global economy, there is no doubt that relative power will continue to shift in China's direction over the coming decades.<sup>3</sup> China's defense increases have surpassed its already impressive GDP growth for a decade, and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) continues to build niche asymmetrical strengths in cyberspace, access denial, and antisatellite capabilities. China has expanded cooperation with the United States on the North Korean nuclear program but continues to undercut U.S. efforts to bring pressure on Iran, Burma, Sudan, Zimbabwe, and other states that undermine international stability because of their proliferation or failure to protect human rights.

The United States and the West as a whole made a bet that integrating China into the world economy would change China for the better before China changed the international system for the worse. The odds for that bet do not look much better or worse today than they did a decade ago, but if the bet fails, the consequences for American interests and the international order will be no less dire. Given those stakes, one would expect America's great strategic thinkers to reflect fully on the future of China and Asia, even though the presidential candidates themselves focused on more immediate foreign-policy challenges in the 2008 election debate.

However, surveying the big “strategic” books on foreign policy that have come out this year to guide President-elect Obama, it is difficult to discern a clear consensus on strategy for managing order in East Asia. In fact, beneath a broad veneer of continuity and consensus on U.S. Asia policy during this election cycle, there are dramatically different assumptions about China’s rise that appear under the surface in major writings on overall American strategy. Some authors argue that the world has moved beyond traditional balance-of-power considerations altogether; others worry that rivalry in Asia means the United States must avoid provocative actions toward China; and yet others see the emergence of a new bipolar competition with China that requires more active balancing.

Perhaps it is unfair to parse the writings of broad strategic thinkers on the specific question of Asia policy. Certainly, there is a vibrant debate among Asia scholars about the nature of China’s rising power and the proper strategies for securing a stable regional order.<sup>4</sup> But given the enormous pressures the next administration will face, it matters whether the larger strategic context of American foreign policy fits with the realities in Asia. The William Clinton and George W. Bush administrations both wavered in their Asia policies when other international pressures took precedence. For Clinton, economic priorities made Japan an adversary, then an ally to balance China, and then a secondary player in the pursuit of a new “strategic partnership” with Beijing. For Bush, Asia policy centered on Japan, and relations with both Tokyo and Beijing improved. But then the single-minded pursuit of an agreement with North Korea lost the confidence of the Japanese and led to drift in the overall American position in the region. The debate of Asia experts matters, but so does the big picture, and it matters to the U.S. Navy in particular. But before addressing the implications for the Navy, we will review how Asia fits in three broad and contrasting visions of American strategy reflected in Strobe Talbott’s *The Great Experiment*, Madeleine Albright’s *Memo to the President Elect*, and Robert Kagan’s *The Return of History*.<sup>5</sup>

#### THE UTOPIAN VISION

One of the most ambitious foreign-policy visions for the next administration comes in *The Great Experiment*, written by Strobe Talbott, President Clinton’s former deputy secretary of state and current president of the Brookings Institution. Most of *The Great Experiment* is a fascinating and elegantly written history of humankind’s failed efforts to move beyond tribal instincts and state competition toward global governance. It is clear where this dialectical history is going from page 1, and that is an appeal for a new multilateral and United Nations–centered approach to U.S. foreign policy. Talbott argues that the United States may finally be at the point where it has

no choice but to work through global institutions, because the challenges we face today transcend borders:

These mega-threats can be held at bay in the crucial years immediately ahead only through multilateralism on a scale far beyond anything the world has achieved to date. That challenge puts a unique onus on the United States as the most heavily armed nuclear-weapons state and as the leading producer of greenhouse gases. (p. 395)

Ultimately, Talbott sees the megathreats of climate change and proliferation trumping the dangers created by shifting distribution of power in the international system. In fact, he sees these threats as opportunities to build the kind of global governance that might have prevented war in the past as rising and falling powers collided.

The few areas where Talbott touches on Asia strategy reflect his broader Lockean assumptions about the intentions of states within the system and his focus on the United States as implicitly one of the greatest sources of instability in recent history. For example, his vision of a future order assumes that constraining American and allied military capabilities through multilateral treaties, such as a fissile-material cutoff and the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, will reduce the dangers of confrontation with rising powers such as China. Thus, failure to negotiate a new ABM treaty will likely mean that “Russia and China respond by building up their number of offensive missiles and taking a variety of countermeasures, including antisatellite capabilities, in order to overwhelm, penetrate, and blind a U.S. missile defense system” (p. 397). With North Korea, he assumes that a fair deal can be achieved, arguing that “the United States will need to establish diplomatic relations with the governments in Tehran and Pyongyang in exchange for their willingness to get rid of existing weapons in the North Korean case and stop a development program in the Iranian one” (p. 398).

For Talbott, the Hobbesian forces in international relations are fissile materials, greenhouse gases, and other impersonal elements, and the major obstacle to states’ working in concert at this critical moment of history is ideology—and particularly, as he sees it, the Bush administration’s “unilateralism” and pursuit of preeminence. The implicit assumption in that charge is that self-constraint through adherence to multilateral treaties by the United States would lead to a decline in many of the threats we face, including China’s rapidly increasing conventional and nuclear weapons capabilities. However, the evidence is quite strong that China’s military buildup and strategic reach are proceeding apace with the growing resources and ambitions of a rising power that does not fully share the values of the prevailing neoliberal international order. Certainly Beijing’s January 2007 antisatellite test, ten years of double-digit defense

spending increases, and the discovery of a new PLA Navy base on Hainan Island all suggest that Chinese military capabilities are driven by requirements well beyond the Taiwan contingency. Similarly, while there is much evidence to suggest that North Korea seeks normalized relations with the United States, there is very little evidence to support the proposition that Pyongyang would give up nuclear weapons to do so. It does not fit the worldview of *The Great Experiment* that states like North Korea would see it as essential to their survival to exist outside the international system while increasing their leverage on major powers through the possession of nuclear weapons, nor that multilateral agreements like the Non-Proliferation Treaty or institutions like the United Nations are ill equipped to stop proliferation by leaders like Kim Jong Il.

Nevertheless, *The Great Experiment* does offer at least half of a successful menu for improving stability and American influence in Asia. Asia is a region that struggles to find patterns of multilateral security cooperation in order to tame the forces of rivalry and to reduce uncertainty. Talbott singles out for action precisely the kind of challenges that will help bring greater cohesion to Asia's burgeoning multilateralism. The big transnational challenges Asia faces, from potential pandemics to terrorism and proliferation, require improved international governance and cooperation. In many ways, these issues—particularly climate change—cannot be addressed on a global level without first finding a framework for cooperation with China. Working on these issues productively with Beijing may help to reduce the dangers of rivalry and competition inherent in China's rise.

However, missing almost entirely from the transnational threat focus and appeals for world governance of *The Great Experiment* is the Hobbesian side of Asian international relations today. Despite the twenty-first-century agenda of challenges that Talbott illuminates, Asia retains many characteristics of nineteenth-century great-power rivalry. The United States must attend to balance-of-power considerations in the region, or Asian states will do so themselves—and perhaps to our detriment.

#### DO NO HARM

In *Memo to the President Elect*, former secretary of state Madeleine Albright focuses on more traditional state-to-state relations in addition to the megathreats addressed by Talbott. Her overarching agenda is more modest than Talbott's but in many ways no less daunting. She recommends that the new president give priority to five challenges:

- Developing a more productive working relationship with the Arab and Muslim worlds

- Restoring an international consensus in opposition to the spread of nuclear weapons
- Defending democratic values against a new generation of dictators and demagogues
- Attacking poverty, ignorance, and disease
- Addressing the intertwined global issues of energy supply and environmental health.

Albright also reminds the new president of the fact that he will be simultaneously inheriting three conflicts—Iraq, Afghanistan, and the struggle against al-Qa'ida.

Albright is careful to devote a chapter to Asia, even in the face of this imposing list of pressures on the new president. She implicitly acknowledges the successes of the Bush administration, recommending no major changes other than in North Korea policy (where she advocates a less confrontational approach along the lines latterly pursued by the Bush White House). In fact, she levels an indirect criticism at her own administration's decision in June 1998 to signal that China was more important than Japan, when President Clinton refused to stop in Japan on his way to an eight-day tour around China. As she notes to the new president, "When you first visit East Asia, you are likely to have China uppermost in mind. Your initial destination, however, should be Tokyo. A loyal ally deserves precedence" (p. 178). Albright also acknowledges the centrality of the Taiwan issue in U.S. relations with China and for broader stability in Asia, stressing that the new president must provide assurances to Chinese president Hu Jintao on America's "one China policy" but also recalling that the Chinese backed away from conflict over Taiwan in 1996 "because they didn't think they could prevail in a confrontation with the United States" (p. 195).

For Albright, state-to-state relations still figure prominently in Asia, and U.S. strategy for the region should focus on maintaining the right "balance," in which the "United States acts as a kind of friendly referee" among the many rivals (p. 177). For much of the postwar period this approach was sometimes also called "double containment," meaning that the goal of U.S. policy was to keep Russia, China, *and* Japan from developing significant military capabilities. Albright writes critically of former Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe's security pact with Australia and his symbolic upgrading of Japan's Defense Agency to a ministry, suggesting also that the Bush administration pushed the limits of regional tolerance in cooperating on theater missile defense and encouraging Japan to send "high-tech" destroyers to the Indian Ocean in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (p. 179). Lifting restrictions further on Japan's security

role, she warns, would “likely spur China into an even more rapid buildup of its own, while pushing Korea into a closer relationship with Beijing.”

This static view of Japan’s role stands in contrast to Albright’s warning that the United States alone will not be able to continue dissuading and deterring China from military action, as it did in 1996. As she cautions, “Although its military remains far inferior to that of the United States, China is modernizing with a single

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contingency uppermost in its mind, while our armed forces are stretched thin” (p. 196). The reality is that the closer U.S.-Japan alliance relationship begun in the mid-1990s has now virtually guaranteed that China has to consider

not just U.S. but also Japanese forces as obstacles to the use of force against Taiwan. That increases dissuasion, deterrence, and stability. Moreover, Japan’s defense budget remains below 1 percent of GDP, and its defense spending is declining in real terms, in contrast to China’s major defense-spending increases. A dangerous arms race might result from internal balancing (significant unilateral Japanese offensive military capabilities), but as of now, that is not happening. Instead, Japan is pursuing external balancing through closer ties to the United States, as well as with India and Australia. That strategy minimizes the danger of an arms race while complicating Chinese military planning and serving notice to Beijing of the broader strategic implications for Chinese interests of an unchecked PLA military buildup. Also, while Japan continues to have difficult relations with its neighbors over history, the Chicago Council on Global Affairs ranks Japan ahead of China (and behind only the United States) in terms of “soft power” in the region.<sup>6</sup>

Albright’s *Memo to the President Elect* gives good advice to the new president on Asia (including the recommendation that he bring a fork to Japan). It puts allies front and center in U.S. Asia strategy—at least symbolically—and acknowledges the complex and multifaceted strategy needed to manage the rise of Chinese power. It also eschews utopian visions of a new multilateral security framework in Asia, where she urges the president to take a “light hand” (p. 199). But Albright’s strategy for Asia also asks the new president to work with one hand tied behind his back. Shaping China’s strategic choices requires active engagement of Beijing, as well as the development of tighter and increasingly agile alliance relationships in the region, to ensure a balance of power that encourages China’s strategic role to develop in a benign direction.

Albright is not alone in writing a grand strategy that puts the United States in the role of mediator in Asia. In *Statecraft and How to Restore America’s Standing*



*in the World*, veteran Middle East peace negotiator Dennis Ross also recommends that the next president work to prevent a security dilemma with China where hedging becomes a “self-fulfilling prophecy” (p. 322). Ross rightly recognizes that the center of gravity is shifting to the Pacific and stresses that the United States must demonstrate to China that when it plays by the rules, those rules will not be used against Beijing (p. 330). However, the entire thrust of the argument is that China’s rise can be managed through the “elemental statecraft” of embedding an agenda for cooperation in bilateral and multilateral mechanisms that gradually reduces the “perceived need to hedge” (p. 331). Ross is absolutely right about the need to expand win-win cooperation with China in this way, but missing entirely from the strategy is any attention to maintaining the regional balance of power. Indeed, U.S. alliances in Asia are mentioned in *Statecraft* only in terms of reducing the security dilemma with China, since Beijing will see the U.S.-Japan alliance as having benefits for Beijing, “insofar as that presence and those alliances limit the Japanese impulse to remilitarize its posture in Asia” (p. 330).

In *The Post-American World* Fareed Zakaria also recognizes the shift of power to China and Asia, and he notes that this trend should not be viewed as a simple story of American decline and Chinese rise but rather as “the rise of the rest.” Precisely because India and other states in the system are growing in power and ambition at the same time as China, the United States can continue leading in international affairs if it learns to broker and mediate relations among these aspiring powers and to build coalitions around different challenges. Zakaria is exactly right when he argues that the United States must learn to share power, create coalitions, build legitimacy, and define the global agenda. His model for such statecraft is Bismarck. But unlike Bismarck, Zakaria recoils at the notion that part of American strategy must focus on balance of power. He acknowledges that lines must be drawn with China, “but [the United States must] also recognize that it cannot draw lines everywhere.” Ultimately, “*balancing’ against a rising power would be a dangerous, destabilizing, and potentially self-fulfilling policy.* Were Washington to balance against China, before Beijing had shown any serious inclination to disrupt the international order, it would find itself isolated—and would pay heavy costs economically and politically for itself being the disruptive force” (p. 236, emphasis supplied).

It is striking that Zakaria is not talking about “containment” (a strategy that would be both self-defeating and virtually impossible to implement vis-à-vis China) but “balancing”—a strategy that Japan, India, and increasingly South Korea are playing every day toward Beijing, even as their economic interdependence grows with China. It is a strategy that these nations look to the United

States to continue playing even in the complex interwoven international system we live in today.

#### A NEW CLASH OF IDEOLOGIES?

Robert Kagan's *The Return of History and the End of Dreams* goes in an entirely different direction from Talbott, Albright, Ross, and Zakaria. It offers a strategic worldview that is as sweeping as Talbott's but focuses on the Hobbesian and not the Lockean world before us. Kagan's whipping boy is Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* and the subsequent post-Cold War writings that anticipated a new peaceful international order, in which governments were expected increasingly to embrace liberal democracy after the collapse of communism. For Kagan, the world has again returned to normalcy and nation-states remain as strong as ever, fueled by ambitious nationalism. Now there is a new collision of ideologies: between the democratic West and an authoritarian bloc centering on China and Russia.

Kagan's dissecting of the new ideational contest between East and West has far more nuance than his critics usually attribute to it. He acknowledges that the ideological contest between Western liberalism and Eastern autocracy has none of the neatness of the divisions of the Cold War. He points out that the huge economic interdependence of the West on China for commercial relations and on Russia for oil has blurred the lines between friends and adversaries. He also highlights the weaknesses within China's own political system and its unattractiveness to most major powers in the world.

At the same time, Kagan also hits on some central truths about the dynamics of East Asian security that are missing from most of the other books on American grand strategy. It is hard to refute his assertion, for example, that "today the Chinese believe that their nation's ancient centrality, appropriately adjusted for the times and circumstances, can, should and will be restored" or that they "consider the trend toward Chinese regional hegemony unstoppable" (p. 27). He is also right when he warns that concerted action on nuclear nonproliferation of the kind advocated by Talbott is being undermined by the clash of great powers with competing forms of government, as China and Russia run interference for Iran while the United States and Europe support India's nuclear ambitions (p. 77). This ideological divide also hampers international action on such humanitarian crises as Darfur, Burma, and Zimbabwe.

Kagan sees the authoritarian camp taking shape in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which the Russians celebrate as an anti-NATO alliance and the Chinese as another vehicle to expand their influence in Asia. In contrast, he sees democratic nations increasingly working together "beneath the radar" to counter the authoritarian principle of "noninterference in internal affairs" and

encourage the embrace of universal values. Kagan may at this point be overstating the solidarity of the SCO, particularly in the wake of China's refusal at the August 2008 SCO meeting to endorse Russia's justification for the attack on Georgia. On the other hand, there may be more movement among like-minded democracies than he suggests. In addition to Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh's declaration in 2005 that the "idea of India" is one of a democracy and that "all countries of the world will evolve in this direction as we move forward into the 21st Century," and Japanese prime minister Taro Aso's concept of building an "arc of freedom and prosperity" in Asia, other nations in the region have begun branding their national identities in terms of universal values.<sup>7</sup> Indonesia championed the inclusion of democratic norms in the new charter for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and held up its ratification because of weak

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enforcement mechanisms for the charter's proposed human rights commission. The new conservative government of South Korea has hosted the first senior officials' meeting of the Asia-Pacific Democracy Forum, echoing similar

sentiments to Japan's and India's about the idea of Korea being a model of democratic development.

The difficulty in applying Kagan's insights to policy lies in the question he himself asks: Are the democracies ready to step up and take the lead in shaping the emerging international order? His proposal for a global concert or league of democracies became a political hot potato in this election year, but in the book it is a fairly modest proposition—convening "perhaps informally at first, but with the aim of holding regular meetings and consultations among democratic nations on the issues of the day . . . to signal a commitment to the democratic idea." That much is already happening with the Asia-Pacific Democracy Forum, the U.S.-Japan-Australia Trilateral Strategic Dialogue, and quiet meetings before meetings of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, among the "APEC Friendlies." Building on those examples makes perfect sense.

The higher bar to cross is Kagan's proposal that the concert, or league, of democracies might pool resources to address issues that cannot be addressed at the United Nations (pp. 97–98). The fact is that this is also happening, in the form of U.S.-Japan–Republic of Korea trilateral strategy meetings on North Korea and in the G-7 agreements on financial sanctions toward Iran, for example. But an overt attempt to supplant the United Nations will be a difficult sell even among nations (like Indonesia, India, Korea, and Japan) that are already highlighting their unique roles in demonstrating the importance of democratic values to the

region. The sell will be even more difficult if it is posed as a counterbloc to the SCO, since none of China's neighbors are eager to risk trade or political relations with Beijing by appearing to align with either of two adversarial camps. Kagan is right that the United States must strengthen coordination among democracies, but in Asia that strategy will be more successful if it is regionally focused (i.e., not a "global concert") and if the lead is taken by Asian democracies wherever possible. The danger in pushing too hard for an American-led bloc is that the United States may end up being the only member.

Kagan's *The Return of History* stands out among the big strategic books that have come out this presidential election cycle because it focuses on state-to-state relations, balance of power, and ideologies. Kagan also stands out in one other respect—unlike Albright, Ross, and Talbott, he was on the losing side of this presidential election.

#### THE NEED FOR A COMPREHENSIVE ASIA STRATEGY

There is one thing that every author preparing a grand strategy for the new administration does agree on, and that is the indispensable role that the United States plays in Asia. Yet few seem to come to terms with the fundamental sources of American leadership in the region. Certainly, the United States has standing as an "honest broker" in a region burdened with historical mistrust and nationalism, as Albright argues. But the United States is not really neutral when it comes to the rise of Chinese power. If it were, it would seek to accommodate China by allowing Beijing to shift the terms of the neoliberal order to benefit a more mercantilist view of the world and a more Sino-centric view of Asia. Instead, we have sought to shape Chinese behavior over the past ten years to encourage Beijing to become what former deputy secretary of state Bob Zoellick calls a "responsible stakeholder." We have done this by building a positive agenda for cooperation with China where we can—for example, on North Korea—but also by demonstrating the benefits to China of playing by the rules of the neoliberal order, as well as the downside risk for China of moving in a less responsible direction.

Shaping Chinese behavior requires us to demonstrate not only that we are prepared to defend American interests (hedging) but also that other major powers in the region share our determination to avoid a more mercantilist international order or Sino-centric Asian order (shaping). Placing our hopes in the United Nations system as Talbott suggests will not sustain that proposition, though it may reinforce patterns of cooperation with China and help to bring China into international frameworks on challenges like climate change.

The reality is that we will need a strategy that builds regional cooperation based on twenty-first-century concepts of globalization and that strengthens international governance while we attend at the same time to the fundamental nineteenth-century balance-of-power issues that Asia's great powers watch with

such intensity. The latter part of the strategy requires a disciplined focus on our allies and their interests so that we collectively reinforce a regional order that benefits China as Beijing reassures its neighbors that it is playing by the right rules. As one bipartisan group of Asia experts (including this author) wrote in March 2007, “To get China right, we need to get Asia right.”<sup>8</sup> We need to both engage and balance.

The steady erosion of balance-of-power logic in the big books on international strategy in recent years is an unmistakable trend. Richard Haass’s “The Age of Nonpolarity,” in *Foreign Affairs*, and the “Phoenix Initiative” on the American role in the world, led by prominent advisers to Barack Obama during his campaign, both pick up on the theme that the international order is increasingly defined by transnational forces beyond the control of single states and that American exceptionalism is somehow outdated.<sup>9</sup> These themes probably reflect the foreign policy elite’s rejection of some of the logic that led to the Iraq war. Taken from an Asian perspective, however, they do not create a compelling vision of America’s role in the world for friends and allies who are forced to live with the reality of balance-of-power politics every day and who look to the United States to provide reassurance and leadership.

Asia is a maritime theater, and the U.S. Navy is poised at the cutting edge of each of most of that region’s challenges and opportunities. In the 2004–2005 tsunami relief operations the Navy demonstrated that American preeminence rests in part on our ability to provide “public goods” but also that rising powers like Japan, India, and Australia could win influence and respect for doing the same in times of crisis. The 2007 MALABAR exercise series in the Bay of Bengal (involving naval forces from India, the United States, Japan, Australia, and Singapore) sent a signal that the major maritime democracies had the capacity to work together to maintain open sea-lanes of communication and welcomed others willing and able to do the same. Through the Proliferation Security Initiative, the U.S. Navy helped to create a new regional and international norm with respect to interdiction of transfers by dangerous states of materials related to weapons of mass destruction. The successful missile defense tests off of Hawaii in December 2007 demonstrated that the United States and Japan are working toward increasing interoperability and virtual jointness in the face of new threats. The list could go on for pages, but in each instance the Navy has reinforced the American national objectives of reassurance, dissuasion, and deterrence in the region.

The Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard October 2007 strategy document *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* captures all of these dimensions of Asian security, from managing the global commons to deterring the use of force by potential adversaries.<sup>10</sup> Importantly, the document highlights Asia as

one of two key theaters for U.S. maritime power. That should have been a highly reassuring signal to our Asian allies. Yet I found surprising anxiety expressed in private about the new maritime strategy among strategic thinkers in Japan, Australia, and India. Where I shared other American experts' views that the new strategy offered a healthy mix of cooperation on transnational challenges together with attention to traditional balance-of-power concerns, many of my interlocutors in maritime Asia thought they saw too much of a focus on cooperative engagement and not enough on defending their respective nations and maintaining a favorable balance of power. I suspect that this says less about the maritime strategy itself than about the larger context of American strategic discourse on Asia that some of our friends think they hear. We need to be certain that the search for new strategic "vision" does not blur the national security realities right before our eyes.

American strategic thinking has flirted with new security paradigms before. After the First World War, the prevailing strategic view was that alliances and balance-of-power logic were fundamentally dangerous and that new multilateral

agreements, such as the Washington and London naval treaties, would better help to preserve the peace in Asia. That proved to be a fallacy, as Japan re-armed and drifted unchecked toward

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aggressive expansion. Postwar American strategy in Asia focused solidly on alliance relations and balance of power, while reinforcing the peace through open markets and economic development. After the Cold War the Clinton administration came into office with a new paradigm that emphasized national economic security and devalued alliances and traditional balance-of-power logic. But by 1995 the region was questioning the staying power of American strategic leadership in Asia, as Chinese power grew and the Pentagon led a course correction with the "Nye Initiative" and the April 1996 joint security declaration between President Clinton and Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto that expanded defense cooperation with Japan.

New administrations tend to import big strategic ideas that collide with reality before very long. It is not clear how much influence the focus on megathreats and the growing resistance to balance-of-power logic will have on a president-elect who has already demonstrated a hardheaded pragmatism and will inherit two wars and a major financial crisis. Whatever the evolution in strategic thinking about Asia, the broader implications of this debate for the Navy are significant. There is plenty to commend the new maritime strategy to senior officials focused on megathreats, coalition building, and global governance. But do those missions

require a surface combatant fleet as large as we now have in the Pacific? Also, if the danger of a security dilemma with China is deemed equal to or greater than the threat posed by the PLA's growing anticarrier capabilities, how far should the U.S. Navy go in terms of deploying new assets, strengthening interoperability with Japan, or updating planning for Taiwan contingencies in ways that might cause a reaction in Beijing? Similarly, if remaining questions about arms sales to Taiwan and Japan (for example, Taiwan's request for F-16s or Japan's interest in F-22s) are viewed as too provocative, how else will we redress the growing delta between our allies and the PLA capabilities? Set against these strategic questions is the obvious backdrop of the financial crisis and growing budgetary requirements for the Army in the Central Command theater.

The Navy may face a difficult "branding" issue in the years ahead. The new maritime strategy encompasses all of the tools a new president would want to have in order to face the complex array of challenges in Asia, from the megathreats to traditional power competition. But depending on where the larger strategic debate goes, and given coming resource constraints, the Navy may be forced into the position of having to trumpet the "dissuade, deter, defeat" part of its mission in the Pacific in order to ensure that those capabilities are not devalued. That may be uncomfortable for a service that also sees itself, rightly, as the leading edge of military diplomacy in the region. But as an Asia strategist taking the long view of U.S. interests in the region, I for one hope that the Navy does not shy away from an effort to keep policy makers focused on the underlying strategic dynamics in this vital region.

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#### NOTES

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8. Richard L. Armitage and Joseph S. Nye, *The U.S.-Japan Alliance: Getting Asia Right through 2020* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 16 February 2007), available at [www.csis.org/media/isis/](http://www.csis.org/media/isis/).
9. Richard Haass, "The Age of Nonpolarity," *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 3 (May/June 2008), available at [www.foreignaffairs.org](http://www.foreignaffairs.org). One notable exception is the Center for New American Security's report on Asia; see Campbell, Patel, and Singh, *The Power of Balance*.
10. Reprinted in *Naval War College Review* 61, no. 1 (Winter 2008), pp. 7–19, and available at [www.navy.mil/maritime/MaritimeStrategy.pdf](http://www.navy.mil/maritime/MaritimeStrategy.pdf).

