

Needed: A New Asia-Pacific Strategy Report
by Ralph A. Cossa and Brad Glosserman

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Choosing Asia as Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's first overseas trip has gotten the Obama administration off on the right foot in dealing with this vitally important region. What's needed now is a clearly articulated vision of America's future role in Asia and a well thought out strategy for getting us from here to there.

This was one of the central conclusions of a report on "The United States and the Asia-Pacific Region: Security Strategy for the Obama Administration," produced by the Honolulu-based Pacific Forum CSIS and four Washington-area think tanks (Center for a New American Security, Center for Naval Analyses, Institute for Defense Analyses, and Institute for National Strategic Studies at the National Defense University) and co-chaired by Pacific Forum President Emeritus James Kelly and CNAS CEO Kurt Campbell. The report, which had been offered in draft form to the Obama administration's transition team and incoming Asia specialists, was officially rolled out in Washington DC on March 11 (and is available on the Pacific Forum CSIS web site [www.pacforum.org] as Issues & Insights 09-1). We were among the report's primary authors (along with Michael McDevitt, Nirav Patel, James Przystup, and Brad Roberts).

Secretary Clinton's trip reinforced and started the ball rolling regarding a few of the key recommendations: the need to reemphasize the centrality of Washington's Asian alliance network, a revalidation of a constructive engagement policy toward China, a recognition of ASEAN's and especially Indonesia's growing importance, and serious consideration of signing ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), among others. But the overall vision statement and accompanying Asia-Pacific security strategy remain on the to-do list – similar East Asia strategy reports had been written by the George H W. Bush and Clinton administrations but none has been produced in the past decade despite sweeping changes in the Asian geopolitical environment

Our study contains dozens of specific recommendations, some of the more important of which are summarized as follows:

Reassert Strategic Presence: Asia-Pacific nations need to be reassured of America's continued commitment to the region. This can be done by articulating a clear Asia-Pacific vision and security strategy which explains both to the American people and to our regional friends and allies why it is in our national security interest to sustain a military presence and remain fully engaged in the region even during a

period of dwindling defense resources and competing priorities. Actions must then match the words.

Reaffirm/Reinvigorate Alliances: As North Korea continues its single-minded pursuit of a nuclear weapons capability, our security umbrella and extended deterrence over Asia must be credibly reaffirmed. The Obama administration should also follow through on Bush administration "transformation" commitments and develop/implement joint visions with our allies through genuine consultation.

The U.S.-Japan alliance remains central; the relocation and realignment of U.S. forces from Japan to Guam should be expedited. Washington and Tokyo should broaden and deepen their cooperation, including on nontraditional issues such as climate change and energy security.

American policymakers must also reaffirm the importance of the U.S.-ROK alliance and propose new strategic guidelines to enhance bilateral cooperation both on and off the Korean Peninsula. Washington also needs to be more actively supportive of Canberra's efforts to promote stability and good governance in the South Pacific/Oceania while nurturing our special relationships with allies and partners in Southeast Asia.

Articulate a Clear, Pragmatic China Policy: Secretary Clinton's visit set the right tone. Washington needs to promote cooperative, constructive Sino-U.S. and cross-Strait relations while avoiding "zero-sum" approaches in dealing with China and Taiwan. Our China policy should include: a U.S. commitment to continued prosperity and stability in China and a welcoming of political liberalization; an offer to increase information sharing on military modernization and as regards maritime security issues and concerns; continued engagement in Cabinet-level bilateral dialogue and cooperation on finance and trade-related issues, while still playing hardball when necessary on matters such as product safety, and protection of intellectual property rights; and encouraging bilateral cooperation on climate change, energy security, and other overlapping areas of concern.

Prevent Nuclear Proliferation: Countering proliferation and promoting nuclear disarmament are flip sides of the same coin; both responsibilities should be taken seriously. Serious attention needs to be paid to the 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference and the development of an effective regional export control regime. The continuation of extended deterrence to Japan and South Korea is essential for a stable nuclear order, as is the need to provide assurance to those who depend on external guarantors for their security against nuclear weapons. Direct dialogue with Pyongyang, employing a special envoy, must still be conducted within the context of the Six-Party Talks.

Support Regional Multilateral Efforts: Showing up at regional gatherings is an important first step, as is expanding

the U.S.-ASEAN Enhanced Partnership and efforts to cooperate on nontraditional security challenges. Signing the TAC opens the door for participating in the East Asia Summit to demonstrate support for East Asia community building. Various trilateral dialogues involving the U.S. and Japan (with South Korea, China, Australia, and India respectively) should be considered or enhanced and other formulations, including China-Japan-South Korea, should be supported if they contribute to greater regional interaction.

Promote Open and Free Trade: Free trade and open markets are key pillars of stability and security in the Asia-Pacific, especially as we seek cooperative ways to deal with the ongoing global financial crisis. The Obama administration should encourage free trade agreements and similar frameworks that ensure greater interdependence and economic growth, avoid protectionism, and find a creative way (short of renegotiation) to pass the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement.

Strengthen American Soft Power: The Obama administration should broaden and deepen diplomatic, economic, and cultural engagement, invest in professional competence/capacity building, provide leadership in addressing climate change and energy security, and rebuild America's public diplomacy capabilities. President Obama's election has already helped to restore faith in America among many of our Asian friends and allies but future actions must reinforce this sense of optimism if the U.S. is ever to reclaim its mantle as an "indispensable" nation in Asia.

Counter Radical Islam: This is not just, or even primarily, a military duty; it requires a multi-pronged approach that quietly helps our friends combat violent groups and their enablers by providing intelligence and law enforcement assistance, developing regional information sharing technologies and networks, strengthening legal systems, and training counter-terrorism forces, even while addressing such root causes as poverty and inadequate education. In order to cooperate effectively in this sensitive area, administration officials will need to establish strong personal relationships with Southeast Asian counterparts and take into account the effects of Middle East problems.

The beginning of a new administration brings with it an opportunity to renew policy, to re-frame problems, and to build new political foundations. The above-referenced study identifies a number of specific recommendations aimed at helping the Obama administration seize the moment in the Asia-Pacific. Its cornerstone is the reassertion of a U.S. vision offering clarity about American purposes there and a division of responsibility in advancing shared interests in stability, prosperity, and freedom.

The authors urge the Obama administration to seize upon these recommendations and early on produce its own definitive Asia Pacific Strategy Report to underscore both the U.S. determination to remain engaged and the means by which America and its allies, partners, and friends together can promote and preserve regional peace and stability.