

**America's Next East Asian Strategy: Listening to Generational Differences** by Arthur Lord, A. Greer Pritchett, Adrian Yi, and Stephanie Young

*The authors are members of the Pacific Forum CSIS Young Leaders program. (Additional biographical details are available in the report, available at [http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/issuesinsights\\_v09n02.pdf](http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/issuesinsights_v09n02.pdf)). The Pacific Forum CSIS will host a panel discussion on this subject with two of the authors and other young analysts on the afternoon of April 15 in Washington. Additional information is provided at the end of this PacNet.*

The beginning of every new U.S. administration produces a flurry of reports and recommendations for the new president. Today is no exception. One constituency often sidelined in these discussions is the next generation. This prompted the Pacific Forum CSIS to ask a group of its Young Leaders (YLS) to offer impressions to supplement "The United States and the Asia-Pacific Region: Security Strategy for the Obama Administration," [[http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/issuesinsights\\_v09n01.pdf](http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/issuesinsights_v09n01.pdf)], a report produced by the Pacific Forum CSIS in conjunction with the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA), the Center for a New American Security (CNAS), the Institute for Defense Analysis (IDA), and the Institute for National Security Studies at the National Defense University (NDU).

Our Young Leaders assessment [[http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/issuesinsights\\_v09n02.pdf](http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/issuesinsights_v09n02.pdf).] concludes that Young and Senior Leaders view many of the challenges and opportunities for the U.S. in Asia through similar lenses. We agree on the need to recognize the vital importance of the Asia-Pacific region, calibrate engagement with Asia, actively continue to develop bilateral and multilateral ties, advance the U.S. relationship with China, partner on trade, revisit democracy promotion, collaborate on climate change and environmental degradation, coordinate on energy security, and continue to build military-to-military relationships.

Nonetheless Young and Senior Leaders view diverge on the centrality of preventing and responding to nontraditional security threats as a focus of U.S. foreign policy. Many younger analysts believe that nontraditional security threats such as resource scarcity, responding to natural disasters, terrorism, climate change and energy security are of equal concern to more traditional security threats such as WMD proliferation, great power competition, and armed conflict. Although many senior specialists recognize these emerging contours of the new security environment, they tend to see them as secondary, not primary, threats. This may be a difference of tone more than substance, but the implications of this divergence are significant, particularly when setting foreign policy priorities.

**Why generational differences matter**

A generational shift is occurring, both here and abroad, and with it may come a re-framing and re-thinking of beliefs about power, interdependence, and cooperation. Understanding what this means for U.S. foreign policy is essential for long-term success.

Younger generations see the world differently from their predecessors. Today's Young Leaders have come to political consciousness in a post-Cold War world, with different possibilities, and potential pitfalls, than did our parents. This matters because many complex issues that seem to defy resolution today, may be soluble by future leaders. This is not because we are smarter, or more able, but because we simply see the world differently.

Younger leaders see a connected, flattening world, where access to information is instantaneous and international travel isn't a big deal. The main source of our contact with others hasn't been based on conflict but rather through cultural, educational, or economic exchanges. This matters because deepening senses of interdependence through shared experiences are starting to strengthen transnational identities and interests. For today's Young Leaders, pragmatic, international cosmopolitanism is on the rise. Largely identifying themselves as global citizens, American Young Leaders are connected with their foreign counterparts at unprecedented levels.

With this different world view, Young Leaders generally feel that there is a need for a broader understanding of *human security* in the 21st century. Although instability and limited conflict have become more prevalent since the end of the Cold War, Young Leaders have not grown up with the same sense of an existential threat faced by many Cold Warriors. Although nuclear proliferation, great power competition, and resource wars occupy a rightful place in security dialogues, many Young Leaders have shifted their focus to nontraditional security threats. This is surely influenced by the largely peaceful world in which we have come of age.

Some consider this shifting focus a lack of appreciation for realist concerns. We disagree. Ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, largely fought by our generation, remind us that wars remain a reality and stability operations can only start once stability is achieved. But this does not prevent us from wanting to further an international order of multilateral institutions based on rule of law, good governance, and human rights, reinforced through economic interdependence. Nor does this prevent us from wanting to move away from "us vs. them" thinking.

## Looking ahead

Differences in generational perspectives matter because a coherent strategy in the Asia-Pacific region with a consistent, clear message requires a broad base of support. Integrating diverging viewpoints into a long-term vision will support a higher degree of continuity in U.S. foreign policy and will increase the possibility of long-lasting U.S. leadership in the Asia-Pacific region. As such, U.S. leadership can be significantly enriched if Senior Leaders effectively incorporate the views of the next generation (both U.S. and foreign) when considering trends that will prevail in the decades ahead.

Furthermore, many American and foreign Young Leaders are willing and able to have open and honest discussions on a myriad of complex issues for which our predecessors may be obligated to exercise certain levels of discretion due to their prominence and/or position. At such an early juncture in our careers, Young Leaders tend to find room in our relative anonymity to freely discuss sensitive issues regardless of the nationality of their counterpart. Through these truly open dialogues, answers to fundamental questions such as what legitimizes U.S. leadership in the eyes of emerging Young Leaders from across the globe can be realized. Such insights need to be applied toward shaping a lasting U.S. foreign policy in order to empower American leadership throughout the region, in the Obama administration, and beyond.

*We invite you to join us for a panel on the next generation's perspective on U.S. policy toward East Asia. Details of that meeting are provided below.*

### Agenda

**Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)  
1800 K Street, NW, Floor B-1  
Washington, DC  
April 15, 2009**

#### **Young Leaders panel: "Next Generation Thinking about America's East Asia Strategy"**

3:00PM      Presentation of Young Leaders Report  
3:30PM      Open Discussion  
5:00PM      Meeting Adjourns