

Present and Future Directions for US Foreign and Security Policies: The Impact on Global and Regional Security

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General Background:

1. The first time the world heard of United States foreign policy was probably in 1823 when President James Monroe announced to US Congress the policy named after him: that the US will not tolerate interference in the American continent by any European power. The Monroe Doctrine became the basis for US relations with Latin American countries from then until today. It also became the basis for American isolationism because it was attended by a pledge not to intervene in European affairs. Two world wars lured the United States out of its isolationism, and the isolationist aspect of the Monroe Doctrine evaporated when the United States joined NATO at the onset of the Cold War. American isolationism was not operative in Asia where it colonized the Philippines at the very beginning of the 20th century.
2. In the 1960s, a period of unprecedented prosperity in the United States, two powerful social forces emerged: (a) a leftist counter-culture that stressed individual freedom and espoused such causes as civil rights, feminism and the right to abortion, and environmentalism; and, in reaction, (b) a religious social conservatism that espoused traditional values, including thrift, hard work and the capitalist drive to create wealth. Both sides had their shining positive aspects and their dark sides.
3. The two social forces respectively gravitated to two alternating trends in American politics. The liberal counter-culture was drawn towards an idealism in foreign relations, as exemplified by the Kennedy, Carter and Clinton administrations. The conservative reaction inclined to realpolitik in foreign affairs, which strongly promotes national self-interest. This was exemplified by the conservative politics of the Reagan and the two Bush administrations. To make a convenient generalization, one was Democrat, the other Republican. The fact is that each party has its own left-to-right spectrum. And there are

outstanding exceptions: Giuliani, the front running Republic presidential hopeful is pro-gay and pro-life and therefore looks more like a product of the counter-culture rather than a conservative.

4. The bottom line is that in the eyes of the rest of the world, in general a Democrat administration is more likely to be multilateral in its foreign policy orientation than a Republican one. And a Republican administration is more likely to take unilateral military action and to use hard power than an administration under the Democrats. This could all be wrong in particular cases but this is the way conventional wisdom goes.

The Post-Cold War Era

5. During the Post-Cold War era, several lines of thinking could be observed in American politics. These are:

- a) Neo-isolationism. Proponents of this policy argue that the national interest of the United States should be the main consideration of foreign policy. Since the United States has become the sole superpower and there is no threat from any other power, it is not necessary to make any interventions abroad. This view did not anticipate the attack of 9/11 in the American heartland, and has since that debacle virtually lost all support.
- b) Selective engagement. This line of policy thinking seeks to strike a balance between doing too much and doing too little. This view holds that any dispute or conflict with another major power could pose a grave security threat to the United States, but it can and should be selectively engaged neither in an overly restricted nor an overly expansive way. With the all-out war against terrorism, this view seems to have a lot of ground, but the fact is that the United States is still doing some kind of selective targeting. For example, not too long ago, the US was putting a great deal of pressure on Iran but not on North Korea. The idea seems to be that if something cannot be done everywhere, at least it should be tried where it is most likely to succeed.
- c) Cooperative security. In the United States and all over the world, there are thoughtful circles who believe that the

United States, in its unchallenged position as the single superpower, has the responsibility to provide leadership and resources in collective action against any danger to any significant part of humankind. Many governments, including those of Indonesia and most of the ASEAN countries share this view, as they have always regarded any US disengagement from the Asia-Pacific region as a potential debacle. Those who hold this view also hope that the United States would work more closely with the United Nations, which is the world's vehicle for multilateralism, and that it would consistently seek UN legitimation for any of its hard power initiatives.

- d) The Grand Strategy of Dominance. This is a policy view that has been attributed to the neoconservatives of the Bush administration, including President George W. Bush himself. It is also the policy view that impelled the United States and its small "coalition of the willing" to march into Iraq without legitimation by the UN Security Council and without a post-conflict strategy. The view holds that the preponderance of US military and economic power (plus cultural influence) can and should ensure global peace and spread American democratic values where these values are lacking. As a policy of the current Bush administration, this has not worked and has only multiplied the problems of the United States, including the problem of terrorism. Apparently the Bush administration has begun to realize that this policy is not working and is today making some adjustments that may or may not be too late to refurbish the American image in the eyes of the rest of the world.

The War on Terror

6. This is a war in which the United States has many allies, including Indonesia, but it is nevertheless a difficult war. What makes the war against terrorism so difficult is the nature of the enemy: he represents no government, he wears no uniform, has no fixed address. He has no face and even no name—*Al Qaeda* being no longer accurately descriptive. He makes full use of all the known strategies and tactics of the weak against the strong, which may be summed up as a violent sociopolitical operation.

7. Hence, terrorism cannot be defeated through the use of conventional military tactics and police methods. Apart from the use of the state security apparatus, the terrorist threat must also be met with a sociopolitical operation in a battle for the hearts and minds of the population involved, which is usually the mass base of the terrorist.
8. Unfortunately for the US and its allies in the war against terrorism, it has not been very effective in a waging for the hearts and minds of populations. There have been several well known bungled operations in this regard, including a television broadcast operation, which is supposed to be the American answer to Al Jazeera, that has not attracted a significant-size audience and has not earned much credibility.
9. If the United States learned the hard lessons that can be derived from its current failures in the war against terrorism, it may still be able to wage a more effective fight against this enemy and to be of greater help to its allies. For example, it should realize that its allies are not as obsessive as the United States itself in confronting terrorism. They have other problems that they must also address, including the problems of poverty and global warming. In fact, the Oxford Research Group has cited the following as the top four security threats of our time:
 - a) Climate change
 - b) Competition over limited resources
 - c) Marginalization of the majority of the world
 - d) Global militarization
10. Nowhere is international terrorism in that list, and many thoughtful circles and governments all over the world would agree with that list. Yet, they are not altogether unrelated to the threat of terrorism: for example, the marginalization of Palestine is a source of grievance that fuels the anger driving many terrorists. The United States can therefore wage a more effective fight against terrorism if it is also seen worldwide as also addressing these other threats to the security of humankind.

The Aftermath of the Mid-term US Elections

11. The results of the mid-term US elections on 7 November 2006 have shown that there is widespread dissatisfaction among the American electorate with the policies of the current Bush administration, including its policy on the war in Iraq. This has resulted in the dismissal of Donald Rumsfeld as Defence Secretary and the transfer of control of US Congress from the Republicans to the Democrats.
12. But congressional control by the Democrats is too narrow to warrant any substantial change: they were not able, for instance, to tie up the passage of a law on military spending in Iraq to a schedule of troop withdrawal. So there is less talk these days of a fresh perspective on Iraq and more on bipartisanship. The Republicans cannot afford to look like they are surrendering in Iraq and the Democrats cannot afford to look like they are soft on Iraq.
13. Therefore they have a middle ground to meet on, especially now that President Bush has a new defence chief who is more conciliatory and whose ideas are more acceptable to democrats and anti-war Republicans. Bipartisanship looks more and more promising as events unfold: President Bush has opened himself to greater congressional scrutiny in the conduct of the war in Iraq, he has allowed his Secretary of State to engage Iran in dialogue, and has even very recently adopted, at least rhetorically, a more mainstream position on climate change, where before he had completely repudiated the Kyoto Protocol. Hence, at least for the moment, there seems to be no urgent need for a third political force that will occupy the centre. Both parties are moving towards it and the frontrunners among the presidential aspirants of both political parties, Clinton of the Democrats and Giuliani of the Republicans, are seen as centrists.

Implications for East Asia

14. A US administration that is less exclusively focused on Iraq would be more judicious in spreading its attention to other global areas that it also needs to engage with. One of them is East Asia, where there is a real risk of nuclear proliferation, a scattering of potential flashpoints in the South China Sea, as real danger of a breakout of a pandemic, aside from the threat of international terrorism.

15. Fortunately, there is in the US Department of State today an advocate of deeper American engagement with the region. State Undersecretary Christopher Hill recently disclosed in Jakarta that the United States wants to be more involved in the community building process of ASEAN. This is very much welcome to Indonesia and other ASEAN countries that have noted in the recent past a waning of American interest in the ASEAN dialogue process.
16. One major contribution that the United States can make is to give a new sense of direction to the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the APEC forum, and the East Asia Summit (EAS). In the ARF, the United States can, if it wishes, launch an initiative to dialogue on security matters with China and North Korea. And since the United States is largely responsible for the insertion of the issue of counter terrorism into the APEC agenda, it can see to it that activities addressing this issue are more substantive.
17. The worrisome thing about the East Asia Summit (EAS) is that it has already met twice and it still does not have a real agenda. It may be too soon for the United States to seek formal participation in this summit, but if its dialogue partnership with ASEAN is intensified and expanded, it may be able to find ways of influencing the direction of the summit without actually being a member.
18. As to Northeast Asia, the resumption of the Six-party Talks and its recent positive results points to the possibility of a spin off into a Northeast Asian grouping that can also take up concerns other than the nuclear issue on the Korean peninsula. The United States can always give an encouraging push to any effort to institutionalize a Northeast Asian forum. However, so long as the ASEAN+3 process maintains its current momentum, there is probably no urgent need to launch a purely Northeast Asian process, and the United States would do well to present itself as supportive of the ASEAN+3 process.
19. A beneficiary of a deeper engagement of the United States in East Asia would be Indonesia, which is also one country that can greatly help the cause of American security in this part of the world. In any global or regional picture, Indonesia is too big to be ignored: it is the world's fourth most populous nation and the world's third largest democracy after India and the United

States. It also has the world's largest Muslim population: there are more Muslims in Indonesia than in the entire Middle East, and of the moderate kind too. Being overwhelmingly Muslim has not prevented Indonesia from being a frontline country in the global fight against terrorism.

20. But Indonesia has problems. It has not been able to translate its macroeconomic stability into job opportunities as the performance of the real sector remains sluggish. It has excess liquidity that for some reason is not being put to work to create jobs. The national process of decentralization, which began suddenly in 2001, has not led to any major turbulence, but budget execution has become painstakingly slow, to the detriment of people in the rural areas in great need of social and economic infrastructures. Indonesia remains the third most corrupt country in Asia, after the Philippines and Thailand, and has not gained the confidence of foreign direct investors. Much of that corruption, as a result of decentralization, has shifted from the national government to the local governments. There are several more millions of poor people today in Indonesia than before the present administration assumed office, not for any fault of the administration, but due to the mini-crisis brought about by the spiral of world oil prices in 2005.
21. In a very real sense, democracy is on trial today in Indonesia. If the democratic system that is newly put in place does not deliver economic growth, social progress and a better life for the people, dismay could lead to desperation and widespread disorder, including a possible resurgence of terrorism. At best, it would be a major setback to the country's ongoing democratization. The worst scenario is a return of the military to political power—although that is unlikely. At any rate, it will send the wrong signal to a world that is keeping an interested eye on whether democracy will deliver its promise in Indonesia.
22. It is therefore to the interest of the United States to help Indonesia build and sustain a democracy that is fully committed to good governance and also to a market economy. The American business community would be serving the interest of the United States and the cause of global peace by bringing in more foreign direct investments to Indonesia, and thereby giving a chance for Indonesia's newly passed investment law to do its work. As the President of Indonesia today loves to say, "*An*

*investment in the Indonesian economy is an investment in
democracy.”*