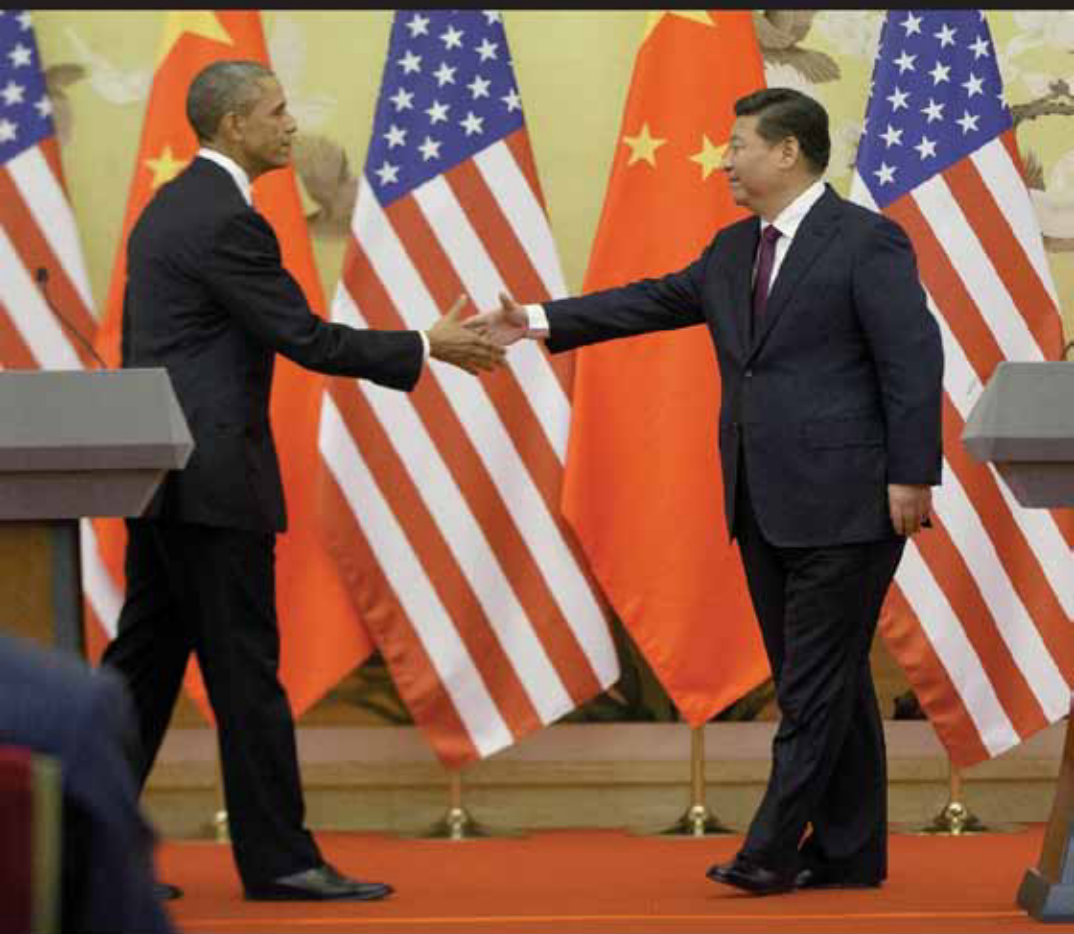


Obama's Challenge to China

The Pivot to Asia



CHI WANG

OBAMA'S CHALLENGE TO CHINA

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The Pivot to Asia

CHI WANG



Routledge

Taylor & Francis Group

LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2015 by Ashgate Publishing

Published 2016 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

The Library of Congress has cataloged the printed edition as follows:

Wang, Chi, 1932–

Obama's challenge to China : the pivot to Asia / by Chi Wang.

pages cm. – (Rethinking Asia and international relations)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4724-4442-4 (hardback : alk. paper)

1. United States—Foreign relations—China. 2. China—

Foreign relations—United States. 3. United States—Foreign relations—2009– 4.

Obama, Barack. I. Title.

E183.8.C5W34135 2015

327.73051—dc23

2014042317

ISBN: 9781472444424 (hbk)

ISBN: 9781315598659 (ebk)

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Acknowledgements

As with any manuscript, many people besides the author put a lot of time and effort into this project, both on and off the record. Thank you to the many colleagues, scholars, and researchers who provided inspiration, comments, or perspective on Obama's approach to US-China relations.

First, I would like to thank my research assistant, Shannon Tiezzi. She worked closely with me on this project for years, from the beginning to the final stages of publication. She played a most important role in this project, from tracking down sources to translating my thoughts into a polished manuscript. Without her participation, this book would not exist.

I'm also grateful to the many top-notch Chinese scholars and researchers who sat for interviews for this project. Without their cooperation and insights, I could not have so thoroughly included the Chinese perspective. This book would have been sorely lacking without their help. My thanks to Ambassador Chen Yonglong; Dr. Yang Jiemian of the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies; Teng Jianqun and the researchers at CIIS's Department for American Studies; Dr. Huang Ping of CASS; Professor Shen Dingli of Fudan University; Professor Jin Canrong of Renmin University; and the staff and researchers of CISS. Special thanks to the staff at the Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs for helping to coordinate interviews.

I benefited greatly from the input and insights of my long-time friends Ambassador Chas Freeman and Ambassador Richard Solomon. Their comments on the manuscript draft greatly improved the final product. I also appreciated the perspective of other friends, including Ambassador James Keith and Dr. David M. Lampton, of Johns Hopkins SAIS, who gladly shared their thoughts on the US-China relationship.

Finally, I would like to thank the editorial staff at Ashgate, especially Kirstin Howgate, Brenda Sharp, and Tricia Craggs, and US-China Policy Foundation staff members Ariane Rosen and Amanda Conklin for their help preparing the final manuscript for publication.

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Introduction

How America deals with China over the next decade will have enormous implications. The US has been the world's sole superpower for over 20 years, ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Now Washington's moment alone in the sun is drawing to an end, and China is the most important of the new group of developing powers seeking more say in global events. Together, the US and China are the world's number one and two economies (with their positions likely to flip-flop sometime this decade) and the two countries with the largest military budgets in the world.¹ If growing distrust between the two nations is not checked, the US and China could fall into a pattern of confrontation, competition, and hostility, starting another Cold War-esque period. Alternatively, if America and China can forge a path of general cooperation, butting heads occasionally but never too seriously, the world will benefit.

Now is the time to determine what path the relationship will take in the future, as US-China relations are at a crossroads. China's rise, more rapid than even Chinese officials had anticipated, has drastically altered the way China and America interact. China has become more assertive of its "core interests" but has been slow to adopt what America views as its international obligations. Meanwhile, America's vulnerability after the financial crisis, coupled with the specter of an ambitious China, has made US policymakers eager to stake out America's position vis-à-vis China. US-China relations are entering a new historical phase, and neither country is quite sure how to handle the changing relationship.

Scholars are also split on how to interpret US-China relations. Some in the realist camp, including international relations theorist John Mearsheimer, believe that confrontation or even conflict between China and the US is inevitable.² According to realist theory, the US as the dominant superpower will seek to maintain its hegemony at all costs. Meanwhile, China, as a rising power, will seek to expand its own influence, particularly control over its immediate neighborhood. Many IR scholars believe that this conflict between rising and established powers, also known as the "Thucydidean trap," will play out yet again as China and the US battle for control of the western Pacific and the world. History is full of similar examples: As Harvard Kennedy School professor Graham Allison notes, "In 11 of

1 "Trends in World Military Expenditure," Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, April 2014, http://books.sipri.org/product_info?c_product_id=476.

2 John J. Mearsheimer, "Can China Rise Peacefully?" *The National Interest*, April 8, 2014, <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/can-china-rise-peacefully-10204>.

15 cases since 1500 where a rising power emerged to challenge a ruling power, war occurred.”³

Under this theory, the China-US relationship has soured over the past years not because of any policy failings, but because of the inevitable tensions arising between two major powers with very different ideologies and security visions. According to the Thucydidean trap theory, ambition on China's part and fear (or at least insecurity) from America will lead the two countries down a road toward conflict. In more modern terms, distrust between the US and China has caused a security dilemma, wherein each side takes steps to bolster its position (especially its military forces) and thereby sparks increased fear in its rival. Both sides see their strategic moves as defensive, and their rival's as threatening.

There is certainly evidence that the US-China relationship is caught in such a security dilemma. Nearly every American scholar starts with the assumption that the US alliance network in the Asia-Pacific is crucial for regional stability, and therefore that an increased US presence and involvement in the region will result in more stability.⁴ The US believes it must act as a counterweight to perceived Chinese aggression in order to prevent conflict. China, meanwhile, begins from the assumption that the US alliance system is an outdated relic of the Cold War, and inherently harmful to regional stability. Chinese scholars argue that an increased US presence is only encouraging provocations from third parties, and that China's military build-up is a defensive move in response to America's own actions in the region.

However, while the relationship certainly has taken on realist attributes, it's a mistake to read realist theory as creating an inescapable roadmap for the future. Both US and Chinese scholars are well aware of the theories that would argue they are doomed to endure a security dilemma at best and an outright conflict at worse. Leaders on both sides consistently express a desire to avoid the historical patterns of a rising power clashing with an established power, a desire summed up in the call for a “new model of cooperation” or a “new model of major country relationship.”⁵ Yet, despite this acknowledgement of the potential for disaster, the US and China have largely continued down the same path of mutual distrust.

3 Graham Allison, “Thucydides's Trap Has Been Sprung in the Pacific,” *Financial Times*, August 21, 2012, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/5d695b5a-ea33-11e1-984b-00144feab49a.html#axzz35T7TQeal>.

4 See, for example, Christopher Johnson et al., “Decoding China's Emerging Great Power Strategy,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 2014, http://csis.org/files/publication/140603_Johnson_DecodingChinasEmerging_WEB.pdf; Jeffrey A. Bader, *Obama and China's Rise*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2012; Martin S. Indyk, Kenneth G. Lieberthal, and Michael E. O'Hanlon, *Bending History*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2012.

5 “Remarks by President Obama and President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China Before Bilateral Meeting,” White House, Office of the Press Secretary, June 7, 2013, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/06/07/remarks-president-obama-and-president-xi-jinping-peoples-republic-china->

James Steinberg (a key member of the Obama administration from 2009–2011) and Michael O’Hanlon argue that the awareness of IR theory actually contributes to the tensions, as each side believes its counterparts are following the very realist models of thinking they claim to be avoiding.⁶

But there is far more to the US-China relationship than the security dimension, although this aspect receives the most attention from scholars and the media. America and China have intertwined, co-dependent economies, a marked difference from the Cold War relationship between the US and the Soviet Union. By 2013, annual bilateral trade between the two was worth more than \$560 billion. Should conflict disrupt that trade, both countries would be economically devastated. Both Chinese⁷ and American⁸ scholars have argued that, because the two countries depend on each other economically, true conflict between them is unlikely.

Outside of bilateral trade, there are also abundant areas where Washington and Beijing have similar interests, although they often disagree on the best way to achieve shared goals. On vital issues from climate change to nuclear non-proliferation, from stabilizing the global economy to combating terrorism, the US and China must (and do) work together to make progress. Given both countries’ permanent seats on the UN Security Council, proposals on global issues must satisfy Beijing and Washington alike to have a chance of being passed. The need for cooperation on certain issues provides a counterweight for US-China competition. As the saying goes, US-China relations can only be so good, but they can only get so bad.

This is also the attitude publicly embraced by most Chinese and US officials. Obama and other administration officials have repeatedly stated that they “welcome” China’s rise and that they believe there are a number of areas ripe for cooperation between the two powers. For their part, Chinese leaders insist that they have no desire to see the US removed from the Asia-Pacific region. Beijing, like Washington, speaks often about the shared interests between China and the US and ways the countries can cooperate.

However, though China and the US often reference a conciliatory framework for their relationship, their actions prove that each side still tends to interpret the other’s actions according to the logic of the Thucydidean trap. Thus, China looks at the US “rebalance” or “pivot” to Asia as part of a last-ditch effort to contain China’s rise and secure US hegemony. Meanwhile, the US believes that,

6 James B. Steinberg and Michael O’Hanlon, “Keep Hope Alive: How to Prevent U.S.-Chinese Relations from Blowing Up,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2014, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/141476/james-b-steinberg-and-michael-ohanlon/keep-hope-alive>.

7 Pang Zhongying, “A ‘New Type of Great Power Relationship’ Between China and US,” *China-US Focus*, July 2, 2013, <http://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/a-new-type-of-great-power-relationship-between-china-and-us/>.

8 Ali Wyne, “China May Not Be a U.S. Ally, But It’s Also Not an Adversary,” *Forbes*, November 6, 2012, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/realspin/2012/11/06/china-may-not-be-a-u-s-ally-but-its-also-not-an-adversary/>.

despite China's claims to the contrary, Beijing seeks to upend the current status quo and establish its own hegemony over the western Pacific. The diplomatic comments of Washington and Beijing speak of cooperation, while their actions imply each side is expecting conflict.

The tension between these two extremes (the Thucydidean model versus the interdependence model) finds its way into academic analyses of the relationship. Most China experts in the US believe that Washington must practice a policy that mixes deterrence and reassurance in the security realm, and confrontation and cooperation on a broader bilateral level. The idea is that the US must continue to shape China's rise in a way that meshes well with the current international system—and this shaping is done by providing consequences, whether realized or threatened, for behaviors the US believes are provocative. Thus the Obama administration has not approached US-China relations with the goal of avoiding confrontation; at times confrontation is actually seen as necessary to provide a deterrent to China. We can see this dynamic at play in US policies on the South China Sea, for example, or in criticisms of China's economic policies and human rights violations. The Obama administration knows such actions will create a rift between the US and China, but it believes the benefits outweigh the costs.

At the same time, however, the Obama administration must attempt to balance deterrence with reassurance and cooperation. Though Washington believes confrontation can be useful in shaping Chinese behavior, no one wants a full-scale conflict with China, whether a second Cold War or, in a nightmare scenario, the world's first war between nuclear-armed great powers. Thus, the general wisdom goes that the US should balance its deterrence policies with solid reassurance to China, in an attempt to avoid bolstering perceptions that the US will do whatever it can to block China's rise. By doing so, the hope is that China and the US can ultimately avoid falling into the Thucydidean trap.

The current problem for US-China relations is that this strategy has become unbalanced. Deterrence is found in abundance; reassurance is hard to see outside of public speeches that are easily dismissed by Chinese analysts. The "rebalance to Asia," for example, has become lopsided, with an overly heavy emphasis on military deployments and security agreements. This provides strong deterrence for China, but the corresponding reassurance is lacking.⁹ As a result, the rebalance policy has only exacerbated the security dilemma already unfolding in the Asia-Pacific region. Even the economic field, long a bastion of US-China cooperation, has become more confrontational as the Obama administration increasingly seeks to use punitive measures (from tariffs to cases in the World Trade Organization) to force China to alter its policies.

Even when the US seeks cooperation, there is a tendency to work actively with China mostly on those issues that are of major concern to Washington. Beijing has

9 Christopher K Johnson et al., *Decoding China's Emerging Great Power Strategy in Asia*, Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies and Rowman & Littlefield, 2014.

little interest in preventing the further development of Iran's nuclear program, for example, yet the Obama administration has repeatedly pushed for more cooperation on this issue. However, areas China has identified as "core interests" (including Tibet, Taiwan, and increasingly the South China Sea) have a long and complex political history in the US, making true cooperation in the areas most important to China all but impossible. With Obama facing a host of domestic criticism in other fields, his administration was especially sensitive to criticisms that they were "soft" on China. In fact, the Obama administration's initial slogan of "strategic reassurance" between China and the US was scrapped, largely because of media outcry that the phrase meant caving to Chinese demands.¹⁰ Thus, China saw a US administration that wanted to push for Chinese cooperation on issues of great value to Washington, but without any corresponding compromises on matters of key concern to Beijing.

The Obama administration, like every presidential administration since Richard Nixon, sought to walk its own version of the tightrope between confrontation and cooperation with China. It is not an easy path: err too far in the direction of deterrence, and the Thucydidean trap may become a reality. Erring on the side of reassurance, however, may seriously jeopardize US interests and credibility, not to mention sparking domestic outrage among US citizens. It is easy to look at the current tensions in the US-China relationship and jump to the conclusion that Obama's administration got it wrong. To really understand how the next president can get this relationship right, however, we must delve deeply into the details to understand the complex factors that helped shape Obama's China policy. In the following chapters, I will do just that.

In Part I, I outline the historical context of US policy in the Asia-Pacific. Though US-China relations are entering a new historical phase, they cannot help but be affected by the previous models these governments have used to work together (or not). After laying out the historical background, I give a brief overview of the key players in Obama's administration, from the president himself to his Cabinet members and the less famous but perhaps more influential advisors in the National Security Council and the State Department. Each of these advisers has a personal background that shaped his or her approach to the US-China relationship. In the aggregate, these personalities and preferences determined the administration's approach to the Asia-Pacific. As we shall see, Obama's China policy changed noticeably as his policymaking team added and lost members.

Part II provides a detailed chronology of US-China relations from the time Obama took office in 2009. In these six chapters, I hope not only to lead readers through the details of US-China relations but also to make clear the general evolution of Obama's China policy, from one heavy on reassurance to one heavy on deterrence. Like all presidents, Obama's foreign policy was not static, but evolved

10 Josh Rogin, "The End of the Concept of 'Strategic Reassurance,'" *Foreign Policy*, November 6, 2009, http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/11/06/the_end_of_the_concept_of_strategic_reassurance.

in reaction to crises or opportunities that unfolded over time. Part II makes clear the chronology of events, explaining not just how but why Obama's China policy in 2014 differed from that of 2009.

Part III takes a different approach, providing in-depth analysis of certain key issues in the relationship. Where Part II provides an overview of the US-China relationship as whole, Part III examines the state of the relationship along different tracks: economic relations, military relations, third party relationships, multilateral partnerships, climate change, and human rights. The Obama administration had different goals and approaches for working with China on each of these issues.

In these chapters, I will also examine the Chinese reaction to the Obama administration's policies. The Chinese perspective as outlined in this book is based on my own personal interviews with Chinese analysts and scholars, as well as media reports and official statements from Chinese politicians. Often, too little emphasis is laid on how US policies will be received in China, yet an understanding of how Beijing reads Washington is absolutely crucial for getting the confrontation-cooperation balance correct. Examining each of these policy areas in detail will help explain more specifically where the administration sought to emphasize deterrence and where reassurance could be more useful.

* * *

Barack Obama, to his credit, came to office in 2009 with the goal of working with China wherever possible—practicing reassurance rather than deterrence. But Obama's relentlessly positive engagements with China during his first year in office gave way to an increasingly confrontational stance on everything from trade disputes to security concerns in the Pacific. Obama ended up erring first on the side of deference and then on the side of confrontation. In the words of one renowned Chinese scholar, Obama's China policy went "from one extreme to the other."¹¹ For the first time since Nixon, America's president has become more, not less, "tough on China" since assuming office.

In the following pages, I take full advantage of the benefits of hindsight to analyze the Obama administration's China policy. By doing so, my goal is not to criticize the past but to provide lessons for the future. The Obama administration faced new challenges in the US-China relationship as China increasingly reached for a larger role on the global stage. Obama and his team had little precedent for their policy decisions; the strategies used by George W. Bush and Bill Clinton were simply inadequate for dealing with a newly confident China. When the next president takes office in 2017, however, he or she will be able to use Obama's eight years of trial and error as a guide for crafting future policy. Knowing where Obama and his team succeeded and where they fell short will illuminate the options for future leaders in US-China relations. I hope this book will provide a useful step in this direction.

11 Interview with Dr. Yang Jiemian, March 1, 2013, 10–11 a.m., Shanghai, China.

PART I

Obama and His China Team

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Chapter 1

US Asia-Pacific Policy in Context

When Barack Obama took the presidential oath of office on January 20, 2009, US-China relations were probably not foremost on his mind. Obama's campaign promise of "hope and change" had largely focused on domestic issues, with promises of bipartisanship and a renewal of the floundering US economy. The election of the first African-American president was an historic event itself, one that seemed to suggest the United States had begun a new era of racial inclusion and harmony.

Yet Obama found himself elected at another historical beginning, one that had even greater implications for global peace and prosperity. If any year can be taken as an historical marker for China's entrance as a major world power, 2008 would be it. The Beijing Olympics provided China with its long-awaited global spectacle, where the nation could prove it belonged in the upper echelons of the international order. Even more importantly, the global financial crisis set in motion in 2008 convinced many Chinese scholars that their time had come.

China recovered relatively quickly from the economic damage, which suggested to many in China that their economic system had at last proven its advantage over Western capitalism. Further, the economic crash drastically slowed Western economic growth, allowing China to close the gap between it and the world's largest economies much more quickly than anyone had expected. China passed Japan as the world's second largest economy in 2010.¹ Most analysts expect that China will surpass the US as the largest economy sometime before 2030, although some have put the date as close as 2016.² To China, it seemed that the financial crisis accelerated the process of US decline, paving the way for Beijing to assume a role as a major world power.

Obama, who had almost no foreign policy experience, could not have been expected to predict the direction China's newly confident leaders would take their country. However, experienced or not, Obama's administration was responsible for setting the course of US-China relations under these new conditions. His leadership would set the tone for the relationship as the two countries grew closer

1 David Barboz, "China Passes Japan as Second-Largest Economy," *New York Times*, August 15, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/16/business/global/16yuan.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

2 Simon Rabinovitch, "China Forecast to Overtake US by 2016," *Financial Times*, March 22, 2013, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/0a3f5794-92b3-11e2-9593-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2pHtJ6yks>.

and closer to being true equals. Absorbing this change will require a massive paradigm shift in both US foreign policy in general and China policy in particular.

US Asia Policy during the Early Cold War (1945–1971)

Washington's Asia policy, like most of its foreign policy, was shaped by the Cold War for most of the twentieth century. The dust from World War II had barely settled before the United States had to deal with the Chinese Civil War, which pitted Mao Zedong's Communist Party against Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Party (also known as the Kuomintang or KMT). Despite the US government's officially neutral stance, and its attempts to mediate through General George Marshall, it was clear to both Nationalists and Communists that the United States backed Chiang. As a result, after Mao's forces gained control of the mainland, the US would not recognize the newly-formed People's Republic of China. For over 20 years, the US government considered Chiang's Republic of China (now confined to the island of Taiwan) the legal representative of all of China.³

Right on the heels of the Chinese Civil War came the Korean War, another Cold War-motivated conflict pitting Soviet-backed Communist forces against a US-backed democracy. When Kim Il Sung invaded South Korea in June 1950, the US was able to get a United Nations Security Council resolution authorizing military force to defend South Korea. Though the mission was under the UN banner, the United States provided the vast majority of troops and aid.

On the other side, sources indicate that both Stalin and Mao supported and encouraged Kim Il Sung to invade the south.⁴ Apparently Stalin, Mao, and Kim all believed that the United States was unlikely to become involved in the conflict. When the US did lead troops to the region, the Soviet Union continued to provide Kim's forces with material aid, while China entered the war alongside North Korea.

As an interesting side-effect, the Korean War cemented the policy of US military protection for the island of Taiwan. Before then, President Truman had been unwilling to offer firm US support to Chiang Kai-shek and his remaining forces. But as the United States took a more aggressive anti-Communist stance in 1950, Truman warned that the US would not tolerate any attempt by PRC forces to take Taiwan.⁵ The Cold War battle lines had effectively been drawn.

In the aftermath of the Korean War, the US would continue a policy of containment in the Asia-Pacific, based around maintaining its alliance system to counter any potential Soviet moves.⁶ As early as 1950, the then Secretary of State

3 For more on post World War II US-China relations, see Chi Wang, *The United States and China since World War II*, Armonk, NY: ME Sharpe, 2013, pp. 16–29.

4 Chi Wang, *The United States and China*, pp. 33–4.

5 Ibid., p. 36.

6 Bruce Vaughn, "CRS Report for Congress: U.S. Strategic and Defense Relationship in the Asia-Pacific Region," Congressional Research Service, January 22, 2007, p. 14,

Dean Acheson publicly shared his vision of a “defensive perimeter” stretching “along the Aleutians to Japan and then [going] to Ryukyus ... [and] to the Philippines Islands.”⁷

At the time, US allies in the region included Australia, Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand. Each of these alliance treaties was signed in the early 1950s, as the US was beginning to hedge against Communist expansion. At this point, the US government had little interest in differentiating between Soviet expansion and more-or-less independent national Communist movements—any pro-Communist force was taken as the enemy.⁸ The alliance system would be the US’s primary mechanism for limiting Soviet influence in the Asia-Pacific region. US involvement in Asia during the Cold War was primarily centered on either maintaining alliance relations or directly countering perceived Soviet threats.

In April 1954, less than a year after the end of the Korean War, the US already had its eye on another potential conflict, this time in Vietnam. The success of the Soviet-backed Viet Minh against French forces concerned US policymakers. In this context, US President Dwight Eisenhower introduced what would become known as the “domino theory.” When asked at a press conference about the “strategic importance of Indochina to the free world,” Eisenhower replied, “You have broader considerations that might follow what you would call the ‘falling domino’ principle. You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly.”

Eisenhower painted a picture of Soviet-dominated Communism sweeping across Southeast Asia and beyond:

[W]hen we come to the possible sequence of events, the loss of Indochina, of Burma, of Thailand, of the Peninsula, and Indonesia following, now you begin to talk about areas that not only multiply the disadvantages that you would suffer through loss of materials, sources of materials, but now you are talking really about millions and millions and millions of people [brought under Communist rule].⁹

This perspective—that the countries in East and Southeast Asia were strategically important mostly because the region was a battleground in the Cold War—dominated US policy for over 30 years.

The most clear-cut example of US Asia policy during this period is the decision to become involved in Vietnam, resulting in a conflict that would span over the

<http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33821.pdf>.

7 “United States Policy Towards Formosa” (Acheson press conference), *Department of States Bulletin* 22 (January 16, 1950), p. 79.

8 Chi Wang, *The United States and China*, p. 30.

9 “President Eisenhower’s News Conference,” April 7, 1954, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 1954, p. 382, <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/pentagon/ps11.htm>.

better part of two decades. As Eisenhower explained in 1954, the Vietnam War was an attempt to prevent the “domino effect” that leaders feared would result from the country falling completely under communist influence. This view was also shared by Eisenhower’s successor, John F. Kennedy. Kennedy continued and even expanded the practice of sending economic and military aid to South Vietnam.¹⁰

After Kennedy was assassinated, Lyndon B. Johnson expanded US involvement even further. In 1964, Johnson told Congress of an unprovoked attack by North Vietnamese forces on American destroyers. The resulting Gulf of Tonkin resolution allowed Johnson unprecedented freedom in involving American troops in the conflict without actually declaring war (for which he would have needed congressional approval). To Johnson, as to his predecessors, “The contest in Vietnam [was] part of a wider pattern of aggressive purpose” on the part of global communism.¹¹ Johnson also believed that the United States’ stance on Vietnam was being closely watched by friends and allies across the globe. To abandon South Vietnam was tantamount to destroying US credibility.

However, the war dragged on and on, becoming increasingly unpopular domestically. By the time President Nixon was elected in 1968, he was looking for a way to extricate the US from the situation. Nixon introduced what would become known as the “Nixon Doctrine,” whereby US allies would take on responsibility for their own security, with the US acting mostly as a safeguard against nuclear escalation. Nixon called for the United States to withdraw from Vietnam and to avoid any similar situations. In the future, Nixon believed US involvement in Asia should be limited to economic aid, unless treaty partners were under attack.¹²

Despite his promise to bring US troops home and leave the fighting to South Vietnamese forces, Nixon was reluctant to leave the war in a way that smacked of American defeat. At the same time, Nixon and his advisors had noticed that China, previously one of North Vietnam’s main supporters, was beginning to withdraw from the conflict to focus its energy on the threat posed by China’s increasingly rocky relationship with the Soviet Union. These two trends—a desire to quickly end the Vietnam War and the realization that there was a growing rift between China and the USSR—determined the radical next step in Nixon’s foreign policy: an active outreach to the People’s Republic of China.

US Asia Policy during the Late Cold War (1972–1988)

Nixon’s outreach to Beijing was motivated largely by a desire to counterbalance the Soviet Union. China’s ties with the USSR had become strained in 1956, when new

10 Chi Wang, *The United States and China*, pp. 56–7.

11 President Lyndon B. Johnson’s Address at Johns Hopkins University, “Peace Without Conquest,” April 7, 1965, LBJ Presidential Library, <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/speeches.hom/650407.asp>.

12 Chi Wang, *The United States and China*, pp. 68–9.

Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev denounced Stalin's legacy. By the early 1960s, Soviet interpretations of Communism were officially declared "revisionist" by Chinese Communist Party leaders. As a result, the USSR withdrew its technicians and other experts from China, effectively cutting China off from material aid. The split continued even after Khrushchev was deposed.

As ideological ties deteriorated, tensions grew over the demarcation of the Soviet–Chinese border. The USSR began amassing troops along the border, which eventually led to sporadic fighting in 1969, with the most notable clash occurring at Zhenbao Island on the Ussuri River. To US leaders, the conflict was a clear sign that there was a serious rift in Sino-Soviet relations, one that could be exploited to advance US goals in the region. Further, Nixon was hopeful that he could convince the Chinese to stay out of further hostilities in Vietnam, thus making an American victory more likely.¹³

From the beginning, then, the restoration of Washington-Beijing relations was a calculated geopolitical strategy designed to advance the United States' Cold War interests. In his book *About Face*, James Mann described the relationship as a "strategic marriage of convenience."¹⁴ The US and China were drawn together under the mutual hope that each could use the other to keep the Soviet Union in check. After Nixon's initial overture towards China, each successive US president pushed Sino-US relations forward in his own way without drastically altering the geopolitical calculations at the base of the relationship.

President Jimmy Carter codified Nixon's geopolitical gambit by formally reestablishing diplomatic ties between the United States and the People's Republic of China in 1979. He did this despite serious backlash on Taiwan, which had been a formal American ally. By re-establishing ties with China, Carter's administration had to cut their diplomatic connection to Taiwan. In cutting the deal, the US had to tread a narrow line—presenting a plan for normalization that the Chinese would accept, while not completely abandoning Taiwan. The solution was to continue US arms sales to the island, despite a lack of formal diplomatic ties.

Even then, the opposition was strong, especially among Carter's political opponents. Two future US presidents had especially harsh reactions. Ronald Reagan called the normalization a "betrayal" of Taiwan, while George H.W. Bush wrote in *The Washington Post* that "the United States has put an entire people adrift in a cruel, hostile sea—and for scarcely any purpose."¹⁵ As part of the backlash, in 1979 Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act, which promised to continue the US's security commitment to Taiwan. The formal commitment to Taiwan effectively negated the possibility of a future president severing ties to the island.

13 Chi Wang, *The United States and China*, pp. 76–7.

14 James Mann, *About Face*, New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2000, p. 8.

15 Patrick Tyler, "The (Ab)normalization of U.S.-Chinese Relations," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 1999, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/55407/patrick-tyler/the-abnormalization-of-us-chinese-relations>.

While the normalization of US-China relations was inarguably a historically momentous occasion, it represented a shift in means rather than overall strategy. The most significant change, in terms of grand strategy, was a new willingness to separate the USSR from communism in general. The major goal of US Asia-Pacific policy remained countering Soviet influence; the US government had simply changed its strategy for achieving this goal. As daylight crept between the Chinese and Soviets, it became increasingly apparent that the US could oppose the USSR while cooperating with another communist government in the PRC. The US relationship with Beijing marked a new stage in US Asia policy, but the overall strategy continued to be based upon the US alliance system, with a specific emphasis on containing Soviet influence.

It is especially curious that Carter chose to normalize relations with China without acknowledging human rights concerns, despite his administration's trademark emphasis on this issue. Carter was unwilling to jeopardize the fledgling US-China relations over human rights issues, and so effectively looked the other way as the brief "Democracy Wall" movement in Beijing was crushed by Deng Xiaoping.¹⁶ The distrust engendered by China's economic and (especially) political system remains a serious issue in US-China relations today, in part because it was never fully addressed at the time of normalization. Distaste for China's authoritarian government is especially prevalent in Congress, which has less of a role in making foreign policy and thus more freedom to talk about it.

Though future presidents Reagan and Bush had both expressed dismay at normalization, neither of them chose to reverse this policy. Reagan, with his staunchly anti-communist stance, came closest. He was seen as a strong supporter and friend of Taiwan, even visiting the island during his presidential campaign in 1968. Still, Reagan's advisors, especially James Lilley and Richard Allen, were careful not to let the future president's support for Taiwan damage US-China relations.¹⁷ In fact, though Reagan came to office promising to re-establish official ties with Taiwan, he broke new ground in US-China relations, allowing the United States to sell lethal weapons to Beijing.

Though he saw the value in keeping relations with Beijing humming as a counterweight to Soviet influence, Reagan was still at heart an anti-communist. In other aspects of his Asia policy, he continued the old US commitment to forestalling communist expansion in Asia. Most notably, Reagan offered aid to the Cambodian resistance movement, which was fighting against the communist government installed by the Vietnamese occupation.¹⁸

In US ally states, meanwhile, the Reagan years saw the emergence of true democracies. Reagan, though initially reluctant to do so, eventually persuaded

16 James Mann, *The China Fantasy*, New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2007, pp.74–6.

17 Chi Wang, *The United States and China*, pp. 113–15.

18 "US Will Bolster Cambodia's Noncommunist Resistance Forces," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 11, 1988, <http://www.csmonitor.com/1988/1011/osiha.html/%28page%29/2>.

Ferdinand Marcos to step down from the presidency of the Philippines, paving the way for genuine elections in the country.¹⁹ Meanwhile, similar transitions took place in South Korea and Taiwan. In South Korea, the 1979 assassination of de facto dictator Park Chung-hee saw the beginning of a nascent democracy movement, although a bloody crackdown delayed change. In 1987, the movement came to full force in a mass protest, which pressured the government to accept demands for direct presidential elections and civil liberties. In Taiwan, after Chiang Kai-shek's death in 1975, his son and successor Chiang Ching-kuo began gradually allowing more political freedoms. The process came to a head in the mid-1980s, when Chiang allowed the founding of Taiwan's first opposition party (the Democratic Progressive Party) and then dissolved martial law—nearly 40 years after it had first been declared.

In all of these transitions, the United States was initially reluctant to support change, fearing that instability in these friendly nations would open the door to communist influence. Eventually, though, concerns over human rights violations combined with a sense of inevitability helped persuade Reagan to support the democratic transitions. Just as the Cold War was drawing to a close, the US alliance system finally began to resemble a coalition of genuine democracies. There were even hopes that China could undergo a similar transition—hopes that were quashed along with the pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square in 1989.

Post-Cold War Asia Policy (1989–2001)

When George H.W. Bush came to office in 1989, the Cold War was drawing to a close. With it, the United States' geopolitical rationale for most of its Asia-Pacific policy was vanishing. Since the end of World War II, American presidents had focused on Asia solely as a battleground against the spread of communism and Soviet expansion. When the Soviet Union collapsed, the US would need a comprehensive rethink of its foreign policy in general, including its role in the Asia-Pacific.

Unfortunately, such a rethink simply didn't happen, at least not in the Asia-Pacific. Instead of forming a new strategy for the region as a whole, presidents would deal with incidents on an ad hoc basis, neglecting the region in between minor crises. Other than a vested interest in the region as a growing source of trade, US presidents lacked a vision for what America should be doing in the post-Cold War Asia-Pacific region.

The first missed opportunity for creating a new strategy came under President George H.W. Bush. Bush was a longtime China hand, who had served as the American liaison office chief in Beijing in the mid-1970s. He came to office

19 Stanley Karnow, "Reagan and the Philippines: Setting Marcos Adrift," *The New York Times*, March 19, 1989, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/03/19/magazine/reagan-and-the-philippines-setting-marcos-adrift.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>.

extremely interested in continuing the strides in US-China relations made under Reagan, including not only growing economic ties but a newly robust defense relationship, based on intelligence sharing and US arms sale to Beijing.²⁰

Bush even took a trip to Asia in February 1989, a month after assuming the presidency. The trip, which included stops in Japan (where he attended the funeral of Japanese emperor Hirohito, the stated reason for the trip), China, and South Korea, was designed to highlight Bush's foreign policy experience, as well as his unique interest in and knowledge of Asia. The Northeast Asia tour was his first overseas presidential visit,²¹ making Bush (along with Gerald Ford and Bill Clinton)²² one of the few presidents to highlight Asia in this important way.

As often happens, however, history interfered with Bush's foreign policy vision. The 1989 Tiananmen crackdown would overshadow US-China relations not only during Bush's tenure but, in many ways, under every president since. As James Mann wrote in his book *About Face*, "After the Tiananmen Square crackdown, the dynamics changed ... there could be no return to the partnership between America and China that had existed before June 3, 1989."²³

The brutal crackdown on Chinese protestors, many of them college students, forever changed American public opinion about China. During the Cold War, suspicions about China's authoritarian system of government were allayed by two factors. One, China was considered much less of a threat than the USSR, and since the time of Nixon had even been considered a potential ally against the Soviet Union. Two, and more meaningful to the public, in 1978 (in December, the same month that US-China normalization was announced), Deng Xiaoping began his policy of "reform and opening up" in China. The identifiable strains of communism within China's economic system began slowly melting away, as Beijing opened China's economic system under the slogan of "socialism with Chinese characteristics."

To many within the US, it was simply assumed that China would slowly begin reforming its political system as well. James Mann calls this the "Soothing Scenario": the idea that "China's economic development will lead inexorably to an opening of China's political system."²⁴ While Mann is cynical about this possibility, the situation was quite different in the 1980s. As discussed above, the

20 See James Mann, *About Face*, pp. 134–54; and Chi Wang, *The United States and China*, pp. 113–27.

21 "Travels of President George H.W. Bush," US Department of State, Office of the Historian, <http://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/travels/president/bush-george-h-w>.

22 Note that neither Ford nor Clinton included China in their initial Asia visits, but limited their trips to US allies Japan and South Korea. See "Travels of President Gerald R. Ford," US Department of State, Office of the Historian, <http://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/travels/president/ford-gerald-r> and "Travels of President William J. Clinton," US Department of State, Office of the Historian, <http://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/travels/president/clinton-william-j>.

23 James Mann, *About Face*, p. 193.

24 James Mann, *The China Fantasy*, p. 2.

US had watched dictatorships fall (more or less) peacefully in the Philippines, South Korea, and Taiwan, all to be replaced by functioning democracies. To many, China seemed poised to be the next to fall in this US-friendly version of the “domino theory.” US relations with China, then, could be justified even as it became clear that the USSR was no longer a threat needing to be counterbalanced—US engagement with China was assumed to be having a democratizing effect.

The Tiananmen Incident proved this was not the case. China’s leaders, in brutally and efficiently using force to remove the protestors, showed the world that they had no intention of allowing political reform to take hold. The American public had watched the protests unfold on nightly news; now they saw reports on the aftermath. The damage done to China’s image in the US was incalculable and irreversible. And with strong opinions comes strong interest. For the first time since Nixon, US public opinion (and with it, Congress) began to play a major role in US-China relations, which had previously been the realm of the executive branch alone.

Bush, though at heart he wanted to maintain good relations with China, swiftly enacted sanctions against Beijing, in part to forestall separate (and almost certainly harsher) sanctions stemming from Congress. At the same time, however, Bush tried to repair the relationship by sending his national security advisor and deputy secretary of state on a “secret mission” to China.²⁵ Bush’s attempts to keep US-China relations on a somewhat even keel, despite a newfound public disgust with Beijing, would contribute to his defeat in the 1992 election, the last time that Washington’s Asia-Pacific policy would be a major campaign issue.

Before Bill Clinton was elected in 1992, he was outspoken about his disapproval of Bush’s China policy. He accused his opponent of “coddl[ing] China, despite its continuing crackdown on democratic reform”²⁶ and harshly criticized Bush for reapproving China’s Most Favored Nation status (granting China preferential trade treatment) in 1992.²⁷ Still, when Clinton came to office and attempted to follow his own advice, he quickly discovered the new rationale behind US China policy was not human rights at all, but rather economics.

In 1988, when Bush was elected, US-China trade was worth a mere \$13 billion a year. By 1992, despite sanctions in place after the Tiananmen Incident, trade had more than doubled to \$33 billion a year. By 2013, bilateral trade was worth nearly \$512 billion a year.²⁸ While the end of the Cold War lessened the strategic importance of East Asia, China’s reform and opening up was driving an economic boom in the Asia Pacific. For the next 20 years, this economic interest would

25 Chi Wang, *The United States and China*, pp. 134–7.

26 Bill Clinton, “A New Covenant for American Security” (transcript of a speech at Georgetown University), *Federal News Service*, December 12, 1991.

27 Press Release, “Clinton Criticizes Bush Decision to Renew China’s Most Favored Nation Status,” June 3, 1992, <http://www.ibiblio.org/pub/academic/political-science/speeches/clinton.dir/c30.txt>.

28 “Trade in Goods With China,” US Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c5700.html>.

become the new backbone (if there could be said to be one) of US policy towards the Asia Pacific.

In the most notable example of economics leading American policy in Asia, Clinton found himself unable to “get tough” on China the way that he had promised during his campaign. Clinton came to office after berating Bush for cozying up to Beijing, and quickly signed an Executive Order that linked China’s Most Favored Nation status (up for renewal in 1994) to China’s ability to make “overall significant progress” in human rights.²⁹ Unfortunately, Clinton had neglected to check with US business leaders before issuing this order—afterwards, they were vocal in their insistence that revoking China’s MFN status would be disastrous for the US economy. Clinton’s own advising team quickly came to agree, and in a particularly embarrassing moment for US Asia policy, Clinton was forced to rescind his own Executive Order.³⁰ Far from economically penalizing Beijing, Clinton’s administration ended up paving the way for China to enter the World Trade Organization.

While economics was the consistent driving force behind US engagement in Asia in the post-Cold War period, previous commitments and new security concerns kept the US at least intermittently engaged in the region (although without the overarching anti-Soviet strategy that had existed during the Cold War).

One such issue was the defense of Taiwan. While Clinton was in office, Taiwan’s president was Lee Teng-hui, the first native-born Taiwanese to hold the office. Lee placed a large emphasis on Taiwanese identity and culture, which he viewed as distinct from Chinese culture. To Beijing, this smacked of a Taiwanese independence movement. The worsening cross-strait relationship came to a head in 1995, when Lee was granted a visa to visit the US. While there, Lee gave a speech at Cornell University, his alma mater, where he referred to Taiwan as “my country” and the “Republic of China” (both terms that anger the PRC). Lee also emphasized his hope for greater diplomatic recognition of the Taipei government.³¹ Beijing read Lee’s speech as an indication that he was seeking Taiwan independence, and responded accordingly.

After Lee’s speech, Beijing began conducting military exercises and holding missile tests close to Taiwan.³² In response, the US sent an aircraft carrier to the Taiwan Strait. The situation escalated further in early 1996 with more Chinese military exercises close to Taiwan, resulting in two US battle carrier groups being sent to the region. The situation eventually defused, but not before Clinton had proved that, despite the end of the Cold War, the US maintained a strong interest in Taiwan’s defense.

Another issue that brought some US attention back to Asia was the beginning of serious concerns about North Korea’s nuclear weapons program. In 1993, there

29 James Mann, *About Face*, pp. 279–80.

30 *Ibid.*, pp. 294–7, 304–8.

31 Lee Teng-hui, “Always in My Heart: The Spencer T. and Ann W. Olin Lecture Delivered at Cornell University Alumni Reunion,” June 9, 1995, http://csis.org/files/media/csis/programs/taiwan/timeline/sums/timeline_docs/CSI_19950609.htm.

32 Chi Wang, *The United States and China*, pp. 156–7.

began to be rumblings that North Korean leader Kim Il Sung planned to withdraw his country from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty rather than allow inspections of its existing nuclear materials.³³ With this crisis demanding urgent attention, Clinton opted for diplomacy rather than a preventive strike against North Korea's nuclear facilities. In 1994, the US and North Korea signed an agreement wherein Pyongyang agreed to halt its production of plutonium in exchange for promises of aid.

Unfortunately, this would not prove to be a long-term solution, as North Korea abrogated the agreement in 2002 and in 2003 made good on its 10-year-old threat to withdraw from the NPT. The thought of a nuclear-armed North Korea, with its unresolved enmity towards US allies South Korea and Japan, changed US perspectives on Asia. From then on, one of the enduring Asia Pacific questions for American policymakers would remain how to rein in North Korea. The issue was never far from the heart of diplomacy with China, Japan, South Korea, and others in the region.

Other than dealing with these crises and engaging (especially with China) economically, the US did not devote much attention to East Asia in the post-Cold War period. In an essay in *Foreign Affairs* describing Clinton's foreign policy, Stephen M. Walt (a professor of international affairs at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government) wrote, "the Soviet threat gave US leaders a clear set of priorities and imposed discipline on the conduct of foreign policy. But with the Soviet Union gone, US leaders can pursue a wide range of goals."³⁴ The converse is also true: without the "Soviet threat," US officials were free to ignore certain areas of the world—and to all intents and purposes, the US had little interest in the Asia Pacific during this time.

In another essay for *Foreign Affairs*, Richard Haass, a longtime US foreign policy guru both in the government and in think tanks, had harsh words for Clinton's failure to establish a new US philosophy for China and the Asia Pacific in general:

Clinton never decided how much of a priority to make China, going there only once, six years into his presidency. Nor did he decide which issues mattered most to him—wandering among human rights, trade, Taiwan, and Korea—or how to blend carrots and sticks in his attempts at engagement. China thus oscillated from being portrayed as a human-rights outcast to a would-be strategic partner. The entire Asia-Pacific region grew confused about American intentions.³⁵

33 James Mann, *About Face*, p. 288.

34 Stephen M. Walt, "Two Cheers for Clinton's Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2009 Issue, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/55848/stephen-m-walt/two-cheers-for-clintons-foreign-policy>.

35 Richard N. Haass, "The Squandered Presidency: Demanding More from the Commander in Chief," *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2000 Issue, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/56061/richard-n-haass/the-squandered-presidency-demanding-more-from-the-commander-in-c>.

US engagement with Asia had lost its original underpinnings, but neither George H.W. Bush nor Clinton was able to create a new long-term strategy for the region. The next president, George W. Bush, would be no different.

US Asia Policy during The War on Terror (2001–2008)

Like many presidents before him, prior to being elected, George W. Bush made a point of criticizing his predecessor's China policy. In a speech in 1999, roughly one year before he was elected president, Bush rejected Clinton's formulation of China as a "strategic partner," choosing instead to label China a "competitor."³⁶

During this same speech, Bush outlined his vision for America as a democratizing influence, a foreign policy choice that would come to define his administration (though probably not in the way he or anyone else expected). Bush said that America "should work with our strong democratic allies in Europe and Asia to extend the peace." It was an interesting formulation, one that redefined the anti-Soviet alliances of the Cold War as pro-democracy alliances. This new conception of Asia would, obviously, set the US "democratic allies" (Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Australia and Thailand, and perhaps unofficially Taiwan) against other non-democratic nations—notably China, but also North Korea, Vietnam, and Myanmar.

Bush's speech was unusual in the attention he gave to East Asia, a region that had been generally neglected for the past decade. In fact, the largest chunk of the speech, which was seen as Bush's foreign policy manifesto at the time, was devoted to the Asia-Pacific. Bush recommended paying more attention to the US alliances in the region, expressing a hope to forge an alliance structure in the Pacific that "is as strong and united as our Atlantic Partnership." His rationale for this was clearly to hedge against a rising China that might someday threaten the US and its allies. "If I am president," Bush promised, "China will find itself respected as a great power, but in a region of strong democratic alliances. It will be unthreatened, but not unchecked."

This confrontational attitude helped exacerbate the diplomatic crisis caused by the 2001 EP-3 or Hainan Incident. On April 1, 2001, a US Navy EP-3 signals intelligence aircraft and a PLA Navy J-8 fighter jet collided roughly 110 kilometers off the coast of China's Hainan Island. The PLA pilot died in the crash; the US crew survived but had to make an emergency landing on Hainan. There, the crew was effectively held hostage by the Chinese government until the US issued a statement that came close enough to an apology for Beijing to accept.

The US government refused to apologize, with Secretary of State Colin Powell insisting that "we did not do anything wrong, and therefore it was not possible to

36 Governor George W. Bush, "A Distinctly American Internationalism," Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, California, November 19, 1999, <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/bush/wspeech.htm>.

apologize.”³⁷ China, meanwhile, was furious over what it saw as Washington’s stubbornness and disrespect. The incident was eventually resolved (as many US-China snafus have been) through diplomatic ambiguity—the US said it was “very sorry” for the death of the Chinese pilot and for landing on Chinese soil without authorization. Washington interpreted those words as conveying regret, not admitting blame; Beijing took them as a full apology.

The EP-3 Incident, as it came to be known, highlighted an issue that would continue to plague US-China relations, namely, the legality of US military surveillance operations close to the Chinese coast. It also revealed early signs of tensions between the US and China as Beijing began to more firmly seek to enforce its own rules in its backyard. Between the EP-3 Incident and Bush’s clear vision for a community of Asian diplomatic nations that would surround China, the stage was set for a US-China confrontation.

It’s impossible to say whether Bush would have held true to this strategy had events unfolded differently—perhaps the “pivot to Asia” would have unfolded, under a different guise, 10 years earlier. However, the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon completely altered the foreign policy agenda of Bush and his team. Whatever their original plans were for the Asia Pacific region, Bush would wind up devoting the majority of his and America’s attention to the Middle East and the “war on terror.” Bush’s democracy-building agenda would be tested in Afghanistan and Iraq, not East Asia.

As Bush’s administration went to war, first in Afghanistan in 2001, then in Iraq in 2003, the greater Middle East would consume the vast majority of the administration’s diplomatic energies. Bush’s second defense secretary, Robert Gates, made this clear in his memoirs, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*. The administration was naturally focused on the military situation in Iraq and Afghanistan. But even among the other issues that Gates remembers taking up the administration’s priorities, East Asia doesn’t crack the top five. Bush and his team were more concerned with tensions and potential crises in Russia, Eastern Europe, Syria, and Iran.³⁸

Bush did make a point of shoring up relationships with regional allies, perhaps in part because US diplomatic ties to the Middle East and Europe were severely strained in the wake of the Iraq invasion. A 2004 analysis of US-Asia relations sponsored by the DC-based Woodrow Wilson International Center concluded that “America’s ties with most of its long-time friends in Asia, including Japan, Australia, Thailand, Singapore, and the Philippines, are considerably more robust than they were four years ago.”³⁹

37 “U.S. Crew Members to Come Home After Detention,” *CNN*, April 11, 2001, <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0104/11/bn.34.html>.

38 Robert Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, New York, NY: Knopf, 2014, pp. 149–96.

39 Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, “George W. Bush and East Asia: A First Term Assessment,” Robert M. Hathaway and Wilson Lee, eds, 2004, <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/bushasia2rpt.pdf>.

Notably, however, Bush quickly abandoned his rather confrontational stance on China as a “competitor” as well as his emphasis on democracy as the leading requirement for becoming a true US partner. Instead, Bush expanded US-China cooperation in almost every sphere, from economics to military-to-military relations. Bush in essence continued the Clinton-era policy of helping China take a greater role in the family of nations. He also, for the most part, kept economic issues at the forefront of the relationship.

With American attention on the war on terror, China's potential to become a military competitor sometime in the future seemed less concerning. China was also eager to portray itself as a potential ally in the war on terror, and began to classify Uyghur separatists operating in and around Xinjiang province as terrorist networks.⁴⁰ Such groups, notably the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement, are presumed to be connected to al-Qaeda and train in the mountainous regions of Pakistan, along with terrorists targeting US citizens and troops.⁴¹ The war on terror, in essence, gave the US and China a common enemy again for the first time since the USSR collapsed.

By the end of his term, the president who had trumpeted the importance of human rights and questioned China's intentions had formed a fairly warm relationship with Chinese leaders. As a case in point, he chose to personally attend the Beijing Olympics in 2008, despite calls for him to boycott the games in response to China's crackdown in Tibet. This was a final, clear signal that in East Asia human rights was a secondary concern for Bush.⁴²

Like the Clinton administration, then, the George W. Bush administration would only truly focus on East Asia when a crisis emerged. The major source of angst in the region during the early twenty-first century was undoubtedly North Korea. During Bush's term, North Korea's nuclear ambitions grew more and more apparent. This problem, at least, demanded serious attention from Bush. Bush demonstrated his concern by including North Korea in the so-called “axis of evil” along with Iraq and Iran.⁴³

In keeping with this confrontational language, Bush rejected the Clinton-era policy of engagement with North Korea, which some analysts have suggested provoked Pyongyang's decision to restart its nuclear program.⁴⁴ Whatever the reason, in 2002 North Korea announced that it was secretly enriching uranium

40 Chien-peng Chung, “September 11 and Uighur Separatism,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2002 Issue, <http://www.cfr.org/china/chinas-war-terror-september-11-uighur-separatism/p4765>.

41 Shannon Tiezzi, “Who Is Fighting China's War on Terror?” *The Diplomat*, November 26, 2013, <http://thediplomat.com/2013/11/who-is-fighting-chinas-war-on-terror/>.

42 Chi Wang, *George W. Bush and China*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009, p. 124.

43 George W. Bush, “State of the Union Address,” January 29, 2002, The Miller Center, <http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/4540>.

44 Henry C.K. Liu, “Bush's Bellicose Policy on N. Korea,” *Asia Times*, January 4, 2007, <http://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/153/26492.html>.

and shortly thereafter expelled International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors. Throughout Bush's administration, the US would attempt to rein in North Korea's nuclear ambitions. In 2003, the Six-Party Talks, a dialogue format suggested by the Chinese, became the primary mechanism for handling the crisis.⁴⁵ The talks continued on and off, with little lasting progress, until they were finally suspended in 2008.

Other than the Korean nuclear crisis, the largest factor driving engagement with Asia under Bush was anti-terrorism. Two of the most notable sites for such cooperation were the Philippines and Indonesia.

After the September 11 attacks, the US worked with the Philippines to establish the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines, which includes about 600 US troops.⁴⁶ According to a Council on Foreign Relations backgrounder, the southern Philippines was "a breeding ground for terrorist activity" including the Abu Sayyaf Group, which is suspected of having ties to al-Qaeda.⁴⁷ The same report noted a huge increase in US-Philippine military cooperation in the wake of September 11, with 37 joint exercises in 2006 alone.

Indonesia was also considered a potential hotbed for terrorist activity, especially after a deadly attack in Bali killed more than 200 people in 2002. Since then, the US and Indonesia have greatly increased their cooperation on counterterrorism.⁴⁸ To facilitate cooperation, the US restored full military-to-military ties with Indonesia in 2005, after having suspending military assistance programs due to the violence surrounding East Timor's independence referendum in 1999. Part of subsequent US assistance included the training and equipping of a special Indonesian counterterrorism police unit, Special Detachment 88.⁴⁹ This unit, which *Reuters* called the "elite of Indonesia security," would win much credit for successes in Jakarta's anti-terrorism fight.⁵⁰

Still, as the country with the world's largest Muslim population, some in Indonesia resented the seeming conflation of terrorism and Islam under the Bush administration. There was also resentment that the US seemed to have little interest in regional issues, but instead saw the Asia-Pacific simply as another battleground

45 Chi Wang, *George W. Bush and China*, pp. 70–74.

46 "US Maintains Quiet Counterterrorism Effort in Philippines," *Voice of America*, July 27, 2011, <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-maintains-quiet-counterterrorism-effort-in-philippines-126348218/167810.html>.

47 Preeti Bhattacharji, "Terrorism Havens: Philippines," Council on Foreign Relations, June 1, 2009, <http://www.cfr.org/philippines/terrorism-havens-philippines/p9365>.

48 "Terrorism Havens: Indonesia," Council on Foreign Relations, December 2005, <http://www.cfr.org/indonesia/terrorism-havens-indonesia/p9361>.

49 Adam O'Brien, "The U.S.-Indonesia Military Relationship," Council on Foreign Relations, October 3, 2005, <http://www.cfr.org/indonesia/us-indonesian-military-relationship/p8964#p1>.

50 Ed Davies and Olivia Rondonuwu, "U.S.-funded Detachment 88, elite of Indonesia security," *Reuters*, March 18, 2010, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/03/18/us-indonesia-usa-security-idUSTRE62H13F20100318>.

in the global war on terror. The success of counterterrorism activities showed what the US could achieve when it engaged in the region, yet the Bush administration rarely invested its energies in region-specific relationship building efforts.

By the end of Bush's term, the general consensus among Asia watchers, particularly those based in the influential DC-area think tanks, was that the US needed to reestablish its presence in the Asia-Pacific region. According to the conventional wisdom, eight years of focus on anti-terrorism, especially in the Middle East, had caused many nations in East and Southeast Asia to doubt US commitment to their region. In the meantime, China's rapidly growing economic and political clout was edging out US influence as well. A 2007 Congressional Research Service report noted these trends, and cautioned that a rising China plus perceived "American inattention" was "shifting regional states' perceptions of the long term role of the United States in the region."⁵¹ A study by the East-West Center came to a similar conclusion, and recommended that "Washington must actively re-engage [in the Asia-Pacific] if it is to maintain its influence."⁵² Under Obama, this line of thinking would result in the US "pivot" (later dubbed the "rebalance") to Asia.

Obama's Foreign Policy Vision

When President Obama came to office, he envisioned himself as righting the wrong turns he believed Bush's foreign policy had taken. In a general sense, this meant a new commitment to multilateral and international processes, outreach to Muslim communities, and less emphasis on the goal of democracy-building. With regards to the Asia-Pacific, specifically, Obama was determined to renew the US presence in the region. This was the course recommended by Asia experts in DC, as noted above, but Obama's interest in the region was also more personal.

Barack Obama was born in Honolulu, making him the first US president to be born in Hawaii; he and Richard Nixon (from California) are the only two American presidents to have been born west of the Rocky Mountains.⁵³ Obama moved to Jakarta, Indonesia in 1967 along with his mother and stepfather. Obama would live in Indonesia from the age of 6 to 10. In 1971, he moved back to Hawaii to live with his maternal grandparents. From a young age, then, Obama was exposed to life in the Asia-Pacific, giving him a more solid connection to this region than any of his predecessors. Professor Jin Canrong, associate dean at Renmin University's

51 Bruce Vaughn, "CRS Report for Congress: U.S. Strategic and Defense Relationship in the Asia-Pacific Region," Congressional Research Service, 2007, p. 14., <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33821.pdf>.

52 Brad Glosserman, "The United States and Asia: Assessing Problems and Prospects," Honolulu: East-West Center, 2006, <http://www.eastwestcenter.org/publications/united-states-and-asia-assessing-problems-and-prospects>.

53 CB Presidential Research Services, <http://www.presidentsusa.net/birth.html>.