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# CROUCHING KOREA, HIDDEN CHINA

## *Bush Administration Policy toward Pyongyang and Beijing*

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Andrew Scobell

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This article examines the policy of the George W. Bush administration toward the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the People's Republic of China (PRC). The challenges in both cases involve dealing with communist regimes that are seen as either rivals or adversaries of the U.S. Although combating terrorism has been the Bush administration's consuming focus since September 11, 2001, with the dramatic demise of Al Qaeda and the Taliban by the end of the calendar year the war on terrorism appeared to be entering a new, less urgent phase. This condition is unlikely to change unless the U.S. experiences another large-scale terrorist attack on its soil or Iraq emerges as the primary target of the global anti-terrorism campaign. If the war on terrorism is entering a less critical stage, then North Korea and China are likely to remain two states of great concern to the U.S. Indeed, the Bush administration appears to view Pyongyang as Washington's most dangerous immediate threat and Beijing as the most serious long-term challenge to the U.S.

President Bush had not demonstrated—at least up until September 11—an abiding interest in foreign or defense policy. Moreover, Bush has indicated little interest in the Asia-Pacific and prior to entering the White House visited the region only once—during the mid-1970s when his father was charge

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d'affaires in Beijing. Yet, breaking events forced East Asia foreign policy issues to the top of the agenda early in his administration. First came the U.S.S. *Greenville's* accidental sinking of the Japanese fishing boat *Ehime Maru* off Hawaii on February 9, 2001. Next was the collision of a Chinese fighter with a U.S. Navy EP-3 surveillance aircraft in international airspace near Hainan Island on April 1. Then came the September 11 terrorist attacks on the U.S. The attacks prompted the Bush administration to build a global anti-terrorism coalition and in October launch an air and ground war in Afghanistan against the apparent mastermind of the attacks and his supporters. While President Bush seems to have played central roles in these three crises,<sup>1</sup> he relied heavily on the counsel of Vice-President Richard Cheney and a slate of other experienced high-level foreign policy and defense experts in the administration. These latter individuals include, by the estimation of U.S. House of Representatives Committee on International Relations Chairman Henry Hyde, Secretary of State Colin Powell, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, and Richard Armitage.<sup>2</sup> The views and experiences of these senior officials are likely to continue to shape the administration's policies toward East Asia and the rest of the world.

### The Source of Bush Administration Policy

It is important to underscore the strong ideological foundation of Bush administration policy on China and North Korea. Despite his mild rhetoric, President Bush is a conservative Republican with firmly held beliefs and he has tended to surround himself with like-minded thinkers. Because the Cold War is over and democratic capitalism appears to have triumphed, one might assume that ideology would no longer be a driving force in world politics. Nevertheless, if ideology is defined as "an interrelated set of convictions or assumptions that reduces the complexities of a particular slice of reality to easily comprehensible terms and suggests appropriate ways of dealing with that reality," then it is far from irrelevant.<sup>3</sup>

The impact of ideology on the top policy makers may be so powerful as to impose a type of "ideological straitjacket" approaching the kind that fundamentally influenced the global outlook and policies of the leaders of the for-

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1. On the Hainan Island incident, see, for example, Dana Milbank and Dan Balz, "Behind the Scenes, Bush Played Vigorous Role," *Washington Post*, April 12, 2001.

2. Henry Hyde, "A Congressional Perspective on Asia at the Outset of the Bush Administration" (address to the Asia Society, Washington, D.C., February 2001), <<http://www.asiasociety.org/speeches/hyde.html>>.

3. For the quotation, see Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987), p. xi.

mer Soviet Union, at least prior to Gorbachev.<sup>4</sup> In the case of the Bush administration, its members appear to view North Korea and China as the implacable ideological foes of the U.S. These governments are seen as adversaries whose vital interests are in direct conflict with those of Washington. All the players are locked in a deadly serious game with few if any rules in a larger world where only the strongest and most resourceful will survive. Because of the fundamental nature of the conflict and the huge stakes involved, there is little room for compromise. A country's leaders must be tough, uncompromising, aggressive, and ambitious in protecting and promoting their nation's interest. One's goals should be "push[ed] to the limit."<sup>5</sup> The result of this ideological underpinning is a shift of focus in "U.S. priorities in Asia" from Clinton-era economics to "military issues and security policy"—a transition only likely to be reinforced by the ongoing war on terrorism.<sup>6</sup>

### Priorities and Personalities

Asia is a key area of concentration for President Bush's national security team. According to the *Quadrennial Defense Review* issued in late September by the Pentagon, Asia has replaced Europe as the prime focus of the U.S. defense community. The report states that it is now a critical region that "contains a volatile mix of rising and declining powers."<sup>7</sup> Moreover, China and North Korea figure prominently in a report on ballistic missile threats to the U.S. issued by the Central Intelligence Agency in early January 2002 (five other Asian states—Russia, India, Pakistan, Iraq, and Iran were also surveyed).<sup>8</sup> Bush administration officials as a group tend to advocate strengthening relations with U.S. friends and allies in East Asia, a corre-

4. Indeed, pioneering work on the impact of ideology on policymakers was carried out by Nathan Leites, who conducted studies of the Soviet elite in the 1950s. For more on this approach, see Alexander L. George, "The 'Operational Code': A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision Making," *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 13 (June 1969), p. 191. The approach was also used by scholars to examine American statesmen of the Cold War era.

5. This characteristic was originally attributed to Soviet leaders. See *ibid.*, p. 211. But it seems appropriate to use this phrase to identify the ideological attributes of the Bush administration.

6. Kurt M. Campbell, "Bush's First 100 Days in Asia," *Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER)*, May 10, 2001, p. 32.

7. Donald H. Rumsfeld, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, September 30, 2001 (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 2001). See also Richard Halloran, "Eastern Threat," *ibid.*, October 18, 2001, p. 32.

8. National Intelligence Council, *Foreign Missile Developments and the Ballistic Missile Threat through 2015* (unclassified summary), available on the Central Intelligence Agency home page at <[http://www.cia.gov/nic/pubs/other\\_products/Unclassifiedballisticmissilefinal.htm](http://www.cia.gov/nic/pubs/other_products/Unclassifiedballisticmissilefinal.htm)>.

sponding de-emphasis on cultivating ties with the region's communist states, and deploying missile defenses to defend against so-called "rogue" states.<sup>9</sup>

The administration officials can be divided into two groups depending on the depth of their feelings on these two issues: conservative hawks and conservative pragmatists. A hawk is a hardnosed leader who is a firm believer in a strong defense and stands ready to use the instrument of military power in the practice of coercive diplomacy. The term "hawkish" is not a synonym for "aggressive" or "warlike" and a "hawkish" leader should not be confused with one who is "bellicose" or "belligerent."<sup>10</sup> Hawks believe that building missile defenses is vital to U.S. national security and no compromise is possible. They also believe strongly that the U.S. has neglected its allies in recent years and instead has been pursuing closer ties with communist party-states. Pragmatists in the administration, while they tend to see eye-to-eye with hawks, are less adamant and more flexible on these issues. However, administration officials of both stripes seem to adopt hardline rhetoric with America's rivals or adversaries, appear to approach dialogue with these countries with trepidation, and tend to associate negotiation with appeasement. Indeed, during its first months in office, the Bush administration was criticized by some as being too harsh on a broad foreign policy front with the results being counterproductive and even harmful to U.S. interests.<sup>11</sup>

### *Conservative Hawks*

Probably the most influential hawk in the administration is Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld. Speaking at the Pentagon in late January 2001 Rumsfeld said: "President Bush takes office with three goals in mind: to strengthen the bond of trust with the American military, to protect the American people both from attack and threats of terror, and to build a military that takes advantage of remarkable new technologies to confront the new threats

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9. See, for example, Murray Hiebert, "Flying on Blind Faith," *FEER*, February 22, 2001, pp. 28–29; Condoleezza Rice, "Promoting the National Interest," *Foreign Affairs* 79:1 (January/February 2000), pp. 45–62; and Robert B. Zoellick, "A Republican Foreign Policy," *ibid.*, pp. 63–78. The term "rogue" appears to be back in vogue after the Clinton administration had replaced it with "states of concern." For example, President Bush used the term in his address at the Citadel, a military college in South Carolina, in December 2001. Text of speech available at <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/12/200111211-6.html>>.

10. On this distinction, see Andrew Scobell, "Show of Force: Chinese Soldiers, Statesmen, and the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis," *Political Science Quarterly* 115:2 (Summer 2000), p. 228.

11. See, for example, Robin Wright, "Bush Team's Tough Talk on Foreign Policy Alarms Experts," *Los Angeles Times*, March 27, 2001; Edward N. Luttwak, "Foreign Policy Crew Is Smashing the Crockery," *Los Angeles Times*, March 28, 2001.

of this century.”<sup>12</sup> A week later, addressing a security conference in Munich, Germany, he stressed the dangers facing the U.S. “Today we are safer from the threat of massive nuclear war than at any point since the dawn of the atomic age—but we are more vulnerable now to the suitcase bomb, the cyber-terrorist, the raw and random violence of an outlaw regime or a rogue nation armed with missiles and weapons of mass destruction.”<sup>13</sup>

Rumsfeld is an experienced Washington insider who served in this same capacity during the administration of Gerald Ford in the mid-1970s. Prior to this, he was Ford’s White House chief of staff and also served as ambassador to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) during the last years of the Nixon administration. He is a leading advocate of a strong defense and the most enthusiastic proponent of missile defense, being the head of a panel that in 1998 produced an influential report warning of the dangers of ballistic missiles from “overtly or potentially hostile nations” such as China, North Korea, Iran, and Iraq.<sup>14</sup> Speaking at the Munich conference on European security in early February 2001, Rumsfeld underscored the primacy of missile defense to the administration and sought to reassure Europeans that the U.S. would share this technology with its allies and friends. Washington, he said, would consult closely with European governments. Moreover, Rumsfeld insisted, “[t]hese [missile defense] systems will be a threat to no one. That is a fact. They should be of concern to no one, save those who would threaten others.”<sup>15</sup>

Equally hawkish is Deputy Secretary of State Richard L. Armitage. He is probably the most senior administration official with significant East Asia in-country experience. Speaking in September 2000, as a Bush campaign advisor prior to the election, Armitage stressed Asia as a key area for the national security of the U.S. both in terms of alliances and challenges. He asserted that “Republicans . . . feel that our interests lie in having a very close and congenial relationship with our major democratic partner in Asia, and that is Japan. It is the relationship with Japan, after all, that allows the U.S. to effect

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12. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Hugh Shelton and Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, remarks delivered at official welcoming ceremony to Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, Washington, D.C., Friday, January 26, 2001, at <<http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/2001/s20010126-secdef2.html>>.

13. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, speech to Munich Conference on European Security Policy, February 3, 2001, <<http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/2001/s20010203-secdef.html>>. See also, Ann Scott Tyson, “Rumsfeld’s Worldview: A Ruthless Place,” *Christian Science Monitor* (CSM), May 17, 2001.

14. Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States, *Report of the Commission*, July 15, 1998, 104th Congress, 2nd sess. For an executive summary, see Federation of American Scientists’ home page at <<http://www.fas.org/irp/threat/missile/rumsfeld/execsum.htm>>.

15. Rumsfeld, speech to Munich Conference, February 2001.

all of our security cooperation in Asia.” According to Armitage, the critical challenge is the “management of the rise of two great powers—China and India.”<sup>16</sup> A graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, Armitage served three tours of duty in Vietnam and was working in the U.S. Embassy in Saigon in 1975 when South Vietnam was overrun by North Vietnamese forces. Armitage later held two high-level posts in the Reagan administration: deputy assistant secretary of defense for East Asia and Pacific affairs and then assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs. In these positions, he was a key figure managing U.S. security relations with Japan and China. Later, he served as a special presidential envoy negotiating with the Philippines on the bases issue. Armitage, too, is an advocate of missile defense and has suggested a shift in terminology from “National Missile Defense” to “Allied Missile Defense.”<sup>17</sup>

Another senior policymaker with significant experience in East Asia is Paul D. Wolfowitz, deputy secretary of defense. He served as ambassador to Indonesia in the 1980s and as assistant secretary of state for East Asia and Pacific affairs. Wolfowitz is another strong advocate of improved ties with Japan and cooler ties with China.<sup>18</sup> He is also a strong proponent of missile defense. During testimony on Capitol Hill in July 2001, Wolfowitz stated that the U.S. had embarked “on the long road to developing and deploying effective defenses to protect the American people from limited ballistic missile attacks.” Continued testing, he said, would “eventually encounter the constraints imposed by the [Anti-Ballistic Missile] ABM Treaty.” Therefore Wolfowitz insisted that “we must move beyond the ABM Treaty.”<sup>19</sup>

Vice-President Cheney tends to be viewed as a hawk. He is the most powerful vice-president in memory and likely to be a key mediator on administration foreign policy matters. Cheney is widely perceived as even-handed, non-nonsense, and business-like. Although he could not be considered an Asia expert, Cheney is acquainted with Asian security issues, having served as Gerald Ford’s chief of staff in the mid-1970s and then as secretary of defense from 1989 until 1993.

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16. “A Republican View: Managing Relations with Russia, China, India—an Interview with Ambassador Richard Armitage,” *U.S. Foreign Policy Agenda*, September 2000, <<http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itps/0900/ijpe/pj52armi.htm>>.

17. *Ibid.*

18. Murray Hiebert and Susan V. Lawrence, “Dangerous Brinkmanship,” *FEER*, March 15, 2001, pp. 16–21.

19. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul D. Wolfowitz, Testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee on Ballistic Missile Defense, 107th Congress, 1st sess., July 17, 2001, available at the Department of Defense DefenseLink home page at <<http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/2001/s20010717-depsecdef2.html>>.

*Conservative Pragmatists*

The most influential conservative pragmatist in the Bush administration is Condoleezza Rice, the president's special assistant for national security affairs. She is a trusted member of Bush's inner circle. She believes in a robust national defense and a military that is deployed selectively to serve the American national interest. Rice is also an inside-the-Beltway veteran, having also served on the National Security Council (NSC) in the previous Bush administration. While some view her as a hawk, she is best seen as conservative but with a streak of pragmatism. An expert on Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, she tends to have a realpolitik perspective. From her academic training and policymaking experience, she believes that it is important for the U.S. to deal with communist regimes, but it must be tough and negotiate from a position of strength. Moreover, Rice is strongly pro-missile defense.

Secretary of State Colin Powell has had a long and distinguished military career, which culminated in his rise to chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 1989 until 1993. Powell served two tours in Vietnam in the early and late 1960s, and then one tour in Korea in the early 1970s. He appears to be more pragmatic and less Eurocentric than Rice and Rumsfeld with a strong interest in the Middle East and Africa. Despite his pragmatism, Powell still advocates a hardline policy on Iraq and supports missile defense.

Assistant Secretary of State of East Asian and Pacific Affairs James A. Kelly is another prominent pragmatist with Asian expertise. Prior to joining the Bush administration he was president of the Pacific Forum—the Honolulu branch of a Washington-based think tank, the Center for Strategic and International Studies. A U.S. Naval Academy graduate, Kelly served during the 1980s in the Reagan administration in two capacities: as senior director for Asian affairs on the NSC and prior to this as deputy assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs.

Another pragmatist who serves in an unofficial capacity as a senior foreign policy counselor to President Bush is his father, George H. W. Bush. It is inevitable that the president would consult with his father, particularly on Asia policy, especially on matters concerning China. Indeed the former president weighed in on both China policy and Korea policy during the first year of the new administration (see below).

*A Legacy of Appeasement?*

There is a sense among many in the current Bush administration and also among Republicans generally that the previous administration was too conciliatory toward communist countries. This is the case especially on China and North Korea but also on Vietnam with which President Clinton normalized relations in 1995 and then made a state visit to in the final months of his

second administration. Clinton, in the view of many Republicans, appeared too eager to accommodate and endorse positions that undermined U.S. interests.

In the case of North Korea, the Clinton administration is accused of capitulating to a brutal and repressive regime by negotiating the Agreed Framework (AF) that offered to provide Pyongyang with light-water nuclear reactors and regular deliveries of crude oil until one of those reactors came on line. Moreover, Bush advisors argued that this “bribe” did not succeed in halting North Korea’s nuclear program.<sup>20</sup> This eagerness to accommodate a communist party-state was seen as particularly evident in the case of Clinton policy toward China. One prominent Republican has criticized Clinton for his “Sino-centric and highly deferential [Asia] policy . . . [and for his] view that the People’s Republic of China is critical and everything else is irrelevant.”<sup>21</sup> The Clinton administration, for example, was criticized for “tilting toward Beijing” and being too eager to espouse China’s position on Taiwan—Clinton went beyond established U.S. policy in publicly expressing his support for the so-called “Three Nos”—no two Chinas; no one China, one Taiwan; and no Taiwanese membership in international organizations—during a state visit to China in 1998.<sup>22</sup>

Of course, the case could be made that Clinton was actually quite tough with Pyongyang and Beijing when he needed to be. Some believe that the U.S. went to the brink of war with North Korea in 1994 and this enabled Washington to get leverage over Pyongyang and bring its leaders to the negotiating table to sign the AF agreement.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, the dispatch of two aircraft carrier battle groups into the vicinity of the Taiwan Strait in early 1996 sent a strong signal to China that the U.S. would not tolerate Beijing’s saber rattling. Nevertheless, the perception remains among senior Bush administration officials that the legacy of President Clinton in policy toward Asia’s last Leninists is one of appeasement and never to be repeated.

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20. Condoleezza Rice called the Agreed Framework a “bribe.” See Rice, “Promoting the National Interest,” p. 61. See also, for example, James Klurfeld, “Bush’s Korea Misstep Shows He’s Still on the Campaign Trail,” *Long Island News Day*, March 15, 2001. For an incisive analysis of Clinton policy on Korea, see Don Oberdorfer, *Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1997).

21. John R. Bolton, “America and Asia after January 20,” *FEER* January 11, 2001, p. 28.

22. Rice, “Promoting the National Interest,” pp. 56–57. For a close analysis of Clinton China policy, see David M. Lampton, *Same Bed Different Dreams: Managing U.S.-China Relations 1989–2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

23. Oberdorfer, *Two Koreas*, chap. 13.

## Crouching North Korea

The Bush administration views North Korea as an extremely dangerous and well-armed regime bent on the violent unification of the peninsula and capable of lashing out with missiles and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) against the U.S. As such, the DPRK represents the state with the most clear and present military danger for the U.S. in the first decade of the 21st century. Pyongyang is the poster child for “outlaw regimes” or rogue states. North Korea epitomizes the kind of regime possessing ballistic missiles that threaten the U.S. and is regularly cited as prime justification for National Missile Defense (NMD). The missile threat from Pyongyang was underscored by North Korea’s launch of a three-stage rocket that traversed Japanese airspace before plunging into the Pacific Ocean to the east in August 1998.

On the one hand, North Korea’s military power—both conventional and WMD—is the key source of the ongoing tensions on the Korean Peninsula; on the other hand, an attack southward by the Korean People’s Army appears unlikely. Admiral Dennis Blair, commander-in-chief of the U.S. Pacific Command, said as much to South Korean journalists in late March 2001: “I define North Korea as the No. 1 enemy state [in my area of responsibility].” He added: “However, I think that the chances of conflict with North Korea are very low.” He explained the reason for this in his view was that Pyongyang knows the “strength” of the ROK-U.S. alliance and the “military capability” of its forces.<sup>24</sup>

The hallmarks of the Bush policy toward the DPRK are a “go slow” approach on engaging Pyongyang, a broadening of the agenda for negotiation, and an emphasis on verification and reciprocity in any agreement. These three aspects underline a deep fundamental distrust and suspicion of the North Korean regime. The outcome of the Bush administration policy review conducted in early 2001 reflected a compromise between the hawks and pragmatists.

### *Go Slow*

For the first four months of its tenure, the Bush administration put a freeze on the thaw that was underway with Pyongyang under the previous administration while it conducted a policy review. At the outset, the Bush administration appeared open to talks with Pyongyang. In mid-January, president-elect Bush said he was willing to keep negotiating with North Korea to control production and trade in missiles if there were verification mechanisms in

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24. U.S. Commander in Chief Pacific Command Admiral Dennis C. Blair and U.S. Charge D’Affaires Evans J. R. Revere, press briefing, Seoul, Korea, March 20, 2001, <<http://www.pacom.mil/speeches/sst2001/010322Seoul.htm>>.

place.<sup>25</sup> At his confirmation hearings, also in January, secretary of state-designate Powell stated publicly that the U.S. would abide by "commitments made under the Agreed Framework," negotiated by the Clinton administration, "provided that North Korea does the same."<sup>26</sup> Then in March, Powell said: "We do plan to engage with North Korea to pick up where President Clinton and his administration left off." However, the administration seemed to pull back. Within 24 hours, Powell was countermanded by President Bush. A day later, Powell told reporters: "If there was some suggestion that imminent negotiations were about to begin that is not the case."<sup>27</sup> In the first months of his presidency, Bush poured cold water on President Kim Dae Jung's "sunshine policy" toward North Korea while Bush's administration conducted a complete review of U.S. policy toward North Korea. During Kim's visit to Washington in mid-March, Bush was respectful but reserved. Deputy Secretary of State Armitage and Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs James Kelly visited South Korea in May and sought to reassure Seoul that Washington supported President Kim's policy of engagement with Pyongyang. Armitage also reportedly told South Korean officials that he expected the U.S. to resume talks with North Korea "in the near future."<sup>28</sup>

On June 6, President Bush announced the end of the policy review and expressed a willingness to engage with Pyongyang, stating:

I have directed my national security team to undertake serious discussions with North Korea on a broad agenda to include: improved implementation of the Agreed Framework relating to North Korea's nuclear activities; verifiable constraints on North Korea's missile programs and a ban on its missile exports; and a less threatening conventional military posture. . . . Our approach will offer North Korea the opportunity to demonstrate the seriousness of its desire for improved relations. If North Korea responds affirmatively and takes appropriate action, we will expand our efforts to help the North Korean people, ease sanctions, and take other political steps.<sup>29</sup>

25. Murray Hiebert, "A Battle Brews in Washington," *FEER*, January 25, 2001, p. 25.

26. Colin L. Powell, confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 107th Congress, 1st sess., January 17, 2001, <<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2001/index.cfm?docid=443>>.

27. Ben Barber, "Colin Powell Veers Right," *Salon.com*, March 9, 2001, <<http://www.salon.com/politics/feature/2001/03/09/powell>>. See also Jim Mann, "For Bush Team, a Little Turbulence," *Los Angeles Times (LAT)*, March 14, 2001.

28. "U.S., North Korea May Restart Talks Soon, Top Official Says," *Asian Wall Street Journal*, May 10, 2001.

29. President George W. Bush, press statement, Office of the Press Secretary, White House, June 11, 2001, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/06/20010611-4.html>>.

Following up on September 18, Secretary of State Powell stated that the U.S. was "prepared to engage with the North Koreans again at any time and place . . . without any preconditions."<sup>30</sup>

### *Broadening the Agenda*

The Bush administration has expressed a desire to broaden the scope of the dialogue with North Korea with a more comprehensive agenda. Not surprisingly, the administration seems to be taking the advice proffered by a 1999 study group that included Armitage and Wolfowitz. The group, headquartered at the National Defense University in Washington, recommended the U.S. to undertake a proactive "comprehensive approach to North Korea" on issues including nuclear, missile, and conventional forces.<sup>31</sup> The group had also found that while the Clinton administration's approach was to focus on Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programs, the real and immediate threat to U.S. and ROK forces on the Korean Peninsula comes from the DPRK's sizeable conventional forces, including its long-range artillery arrayed north of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ).

On June 7, 2001, Secretary of State Powell told reporters that Washington would also like to include a whole range of items, including "conventional force posture" and "the humanitarian problem." After talks with South Korean Foreign Minister Han Seung Soo, Powell stated that for the present the Bush administration would move forward on the basis of the AF, although Powell held out the possibility of revisiting the AF at a later date.<sup>32</sup> Indeed there had been considerable speculation that Washington would seek to renegotiate the AF and try to replace the light-water reactors promised by the Clinton administration with conventional power plants. In fact, as Congressional Research Service analyst Larry Niksch has observed, such thinking is not the drastic break with Clinton administration policy many assume. In the final months of Clinton's second-term administration, there was a serious re-assessment of the North Korea policy.<sup>33</sup>

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30. Secretary of State Powell, remarks delivered in joint press conference with Foreign Minister Han Seung-soo of South Korea, Seoul, September 18, 2001, <[http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2001/\[4937.htm\]](http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2001/[4937.htm])>.

31. Richard L. Armitage, "A Comprehensive Approach to North Korea," *Strategic Forum*, no. 159 (March 1999), at <<http://www.ndu.edu/inss/strforum/forum159.html>>.

32. For the text of the press conference, see <<http://usinfo.state.gov/secretary/rm/2001/3374.htm>>.

33. Larry A. Niksch, "What Can the Two Koreas Expect from the Bush Administration?" *Monthly Choson* (Seoul), March 2001. English translation provided to author by Dr. Niksch.

*Verification and Reciprocity*

The Bush administration is adamant that there be unambiguous verification of any reduction or freeze in North Korea's nuclear or missile programs and that all agreements be reciprocal. According to NSC Advisor Rice, the "U.S. must approach . . . North Korea resolutely and decisively."<sup>34</sup> For the administration, this appeared to mean no negotiations without prior unilateral concessions on the part of Pyongyang (e.g., a pull back from the DMZ or a reduction in size of the Korean People's Army).<sup>35</sup> And "[w]ith its military deterrent virtually the only remaining card North Korea has to play, it will be hard pressed to make concessions on the conventional military standoff without a reciprocal gesture from the U.S."<sup>36</sup>

However there seemed to be an unwillingness on the part of many in Washington to link reductions in North Korean conventional capabilities or force size to corresponding reductions in U.S. forces on the peninsula.

*A Window of Opportunity?*

Despite the completion of the policy review in early June and the indication of a desire to resume talks with Pyongyang, some experts have voiced concern that the Bush administration may be missing a golden opportunity to seize the initiative.<sup>37</sup> The current top leaders in Seoul and Pyongyang, who both seem to be disposed toward making progress on decreasing the tensions on the peninsula, will not be around forever. Indeed, President Kim of South Korea will step down in early 2003. Although likely to remain in power for some years to come, Chairman Kim of North Korea is in his early 60s and will not always be vigorous and healthy. There is certainly the potential for a breakthrough on the peninsula. This was the March 2001 message of a bipartisan task force composed of 30 prominent foreign policy analysts established by the Council on Foreign Relations.<sup>38</sup> If Pyongyang is serious about moderating its foreign and defense policies and reforming economically, then there exists real potential for substantial progress in decreasing tensions in North-east Asia.

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34. Rice, "Promoting the National Interest," p. 61.

35. This was the view expressed by several Korea experts at the "North Korea Today: Confrontation or Engagement?" Conference held at the Bush School of Government and Public Service, Texas A & M University, College Station Texas, April 2001.

36. "North Korea: Not Likely to Budge on Military Threat to South," <*Stratfor.com*>, June 19, 2001, <[http://www.stratfor.com/standard/analysis\\_view.php?ID=200111](http://www.stratfor.com/standard/analysis_view.php?ID=200111)>.

37. Views expressed by Korea experts at the "North Korea Today" Conference, April 2001.

38. The group included Ambassadors Robert L. Gallucci, Donald Gregg, and James R. Lilley. See Robin Wright, "Bush Team's Tough Talk on Foreign Policy Alarms Experts," *LAT*, March 27, 2001; and Christopher Marequis, "Experts Urge Bush to Resume North Korea Talks," *New York Times (NYT)*, March 27, 2001.

There were signs in early 2002 that the Bush administration had formulated a comprehensive policy initiative toward North Korea and was prepared to proceed in coordination with South Korea and Japan. Efforts to start a dialogue with Pyongyang in January built up to President Bush repeatedly expressing a readiness to talk to North Korea during visits to Seoul and Beijing in February. As of the time of writing, North Korea had failed to respond positively to the offer. If this indeed continues to be the case, at the very least Washington will have called Pyongyang's bluff. If the Bush administration goes further and makes specific comprehensive, verifiable arms reduction proposals to the North Korean regime and is again rebuffed or ignored, then the U.S. can claim the moral high ground and achieve a significant victory in the court of South Korean and international public opinion. Either way, it would be hard for the U.S. to lose. If, however, the Bush administration remains outwardly very hardline toward Pyongyang, this "feeds ROK suspicions that the U.S. just wants to keep the North Korean threat alive in order to justify both its military presence in Asia and its [NMD] program."<sup>39</sup>

Certainly, North Korea is a distasteful and repressive regime, but it is still the one that confronts the U.S. today and likely to continue to confront Washington for the foreseeable future. As the Perry Report concluded, Washington "must, therefore, deal with the North Korean government as it is, not as we might wish it to be."<sup>40</sup> It is important to recall that the U.S. has dealt with unpleasant and repressive regimes in the past when it was deemed important. As NSC Advisor Rice had noted, President Reagan visited China and "engaged" with the Soviet Union in the 1980s.<sup>41</sup> The fact remains that the status quo on the peninsula is inherently unsustainable and dangerous. Rather than adopt a reactive or passive posture, it may be more prudent (in conjunction with U.S. allies) to take a more active and comprehensive carrot-and-stick approach.<sup>42</sup>

Irrespective of the Bush administration's actions or changes of policy, momentum for the North-South rapprochement gained in 2000 may be lost. Enthusiasm in South Korea for warming with North Korea seems to be rapidly

39. Ralph A. Cossa, "Bush's First 100 Days: Northeast Asia Policy Off to a Rocky Start," *PacNet Newsletter* (Honolulu), no. 18A, May 4, 2001, <<http://www.csis.org/pacfor/pac0118A.htm/>>.

40. William J. Perry, U.S. North Korea policy coordinator and special advisor to the president and secretary of state, *Review of United States Policy Toward North Korea: Findings and Recommendations* (unclassified report), Washington, D.C., October 12, 1999, <[http://www.fas.org/news/dprk/1999/991012\\_northkorea\\_rpt.htm](http://www.fas.org/news/dprk/1999/991012_northkorea_rpt.htm)>.

41. Rice, "Promoting the National Interest," p. 50.

42. Andrew Scobell, "Making Headway on the Korean Peninsula," in *U.S. Strategies for Regional Security: Report of the 42nd Strategy for Peace Conference* (Muscatine, Iowa: The Stanley Foundation, forthcoming, 2002).

dissipating as economic issues and domestic political differences absorb more attention. Moreover, Kim Jong Il's failure to reciprocate Kim Dae Jung's June 2000 journey to Pyongyang in 2001 has stalled the Korean reconciliation train. And if North Korea resumes its antagonistic attitude and acts of belligerence, the train may be completely derailed. Kim Jong Il reportedly told a high level European Union delegation visiting Pyongyang in May that he wants to visit Seoul and that North Korea is willing to keep the moratorium on missile testing until 2003.<sup>43</sup> Washington should press Pyongyang to follow up its words with deeds.

### Hidden China

The Bush administration views China as the primary long-term strategic challenge to the U.S. While some observers hype Beijing's current capabilities, the key concern of most hawks and pragmatists in the administration and many U.S. analysts is more medium and long term. It is the enduring fundamental ideological differences they see between Washington and Beijing and growing capabilities of the Chinese military that raise daunting questions in their minds about the future. However, the case that China is the primary emerging threat for the foreseeable future is rarely explicitly made.<sup>44</sup> Some U.S. observers and many Chinese insist that the real justification for missile defense efforts, both NMD and Theater Missile Defense (TMD), is not Pyongyang but Beijing.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless when key strategic thinkers such as Andrew Marshall of the Pentagon's Office of Net Assessment look into the future they see a rising China looming on the horizon.<sup>46</sup> China is perceived by some to represent a new Soviet Union. Indeed, in late 2000, then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Henry H. Shelton remarked that the U.S. must do all it could to ensure that China did not become "the 21st century version of the Soviet bear."<sup>47</sup>

Coming in, the assembled national security team individually held reputations for tough lines on China; collectively, they were expected to take a "harder line toward China than either the Clinton or first Bush administration

43. Kim Ji-ho, "North Korea Will Not Test Missiles until 2003," *Korea Herald*, May 4, 2001.

44. The case for a China threat appears to be made primarily behind closed doors. Top administration officials reportedly made this pitch to Japanese officials. See "U.S. Calls China Biggest Security Concern in Asia," Kyodo New Service (Tokyo) (in English), June 2, 2001, in Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Daily Report/China*, June 2, 2001.

45. Richard J. Newman, "Another Push for a Shield of Dreams," *U.S. News and World Report*, May 14, 2001, p. 20; and Paul H. B. Godwin and Evan S. Medeiros, "China, America, and Missile Defense: Conflicting National Interests," *Current History* (September 2000), p. 287.

46. See, for example, John Barry and Evan Thomas, "The Pentagon's Guru," *Newsweek*, May 21, 2001.

47. Cited in Steven Lee Myers, "Military Chief Seeks Money, Saying Forces Are Strapped," *NYT*, December 15, 2001.

did." Wolfowitz, for example, was on record as supporting a change in Washington's so-called "strategic ambiguity" policy toward Taiwan with having the U.S. government explicitly "declare unambiguously that it will come to Taiwan's defense in the event of an attack or blockade."<sup>48</sup> Moreover, the polarized debate in Washington, the so-called "Red team-Blue team" confrontation, makes it extraordinarily difficult for a sober and reasoned dialogue or debate on China policy to take place.<sup>49</sup> Unlike the past two decades of the Cold War, China policy is now very much in the maelstrom of Washington partisan politics. Moreover, the growing networks of ties—economic, educational, and cultural—mean that now there are far more contentious issues in the relationship. These include a substantial bilateral trade deficit in China's favor, intellectual property rights violations, and human rights abuses. Arguably, Beijing's formal entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in December 2001 may actually turn out to have exacerbated rather than ameliorated these economic issues, although they will now tend to be played out in multilateral fora instead of in bilateral settings. Then there are national security issues such as allegations of Chinese espionage of nuclear and other classified information, as well as conventional and nuclear proliferation.

While China presents the Bush administration with a wide variety of thorny issues, two major topics meriting attention in the security realm are the Chinese reaction to U.S. missile defense initiatives and the threat China poses to Taiwan. The hallmarks of Bush national security policy toward China are a cautious continuation of dialogue, a balanced approach, a stubborn myopia on missile defense, and a more vigorous support for Taiwan.

#### *Cautious Continuation of Dialogue*

President Bush has expressed a willingness to continue a dialogue with China. He received Vice-Premier Qian Qichen in March 2001. That meeting along with others that Qian had with senior U.S. officials were reportedly "cordial and respectful."<sup>50</sup> Still, what is puzzling was Bush's clear reluctance to communicate directly with his Chinese counterpart during the EP-3 crisis the following month. The Hainan Island incident would appear to be precisely the kind of situation to merit use of the hotline that now links the White House and the Chinese leadership compound of Zhongnanhai. The ostensive reason for President Bush not contacting PRC President Jiang

48. Steven Mufson, "U.S.-China Ties in the Balance," *Washington Post*, February 17, 2001.

49. Murray Hiebert, "Red Scare," *FEER*, October 12, 2001, pp. 28-31.

50. Susan V. Lawrence and David Murphy, "China-U.S. Ties: War by Other Means," *ibid.*, April 5, 2001, p. 16.

Zemin was "to avoid blowing the incident out of proportion."<sup>51</sup> But for a time it seemed that the incident was escalating precisely because of the lack of contact at the highest level. Senior U.S. officials did try to contact high-level Chinese leaders early in the crisis but to no avail.<sup>52</sup> Chinese leaders reportedly would have preferred to handle the incident quietly out of the media glare, but short of the prompt release of the aircraft and crew it is difficult to see how the matter could have been resolved without publicity.<sup>53</sup>

Moreover, it is hard to conceive of the U.S. crew and aircraft being released swiftly in any event. Beijing leaders are particularly sensitive to public criticism within China toward any action that might be perceived as a demonstration of Chinese weakness or capitulation to U.S. demands. For example, the EP-3 was only returned to the U.S. in early July—three months after the aircraft made its emergency landing on Hainan Island. Because of Chinese sensitivities, even after Beijing had agreed in principle to return the aircraft there was a delay owing to Chinese leaders' refusal to permit the airplane to fly out under its own power. Eventually, the EP-3 was disassembled and flown out in a Russian cargo aircraft.

During Vice-Premier Qian's March visit, President Bush also expressed a willingness to visit Shanghai in the autumn to attend the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit and possibly continue onto Beijing, although in the immediate aftermath of the Hainan Island incident this visit was in doubt. The president's moderate and measured approach to the situation indicated a desire not to see U.S.-China relations sour if at all possible. Reportedly, President Bush made great efforts to restrain the hawks who were eager to take a hardline approach and his moderation was also strongly encouraged by his father.<sup>54</sup> This is also evident from the tone and turns of phrase used throughout the crisis. Take, for example, President Bush's statement on the morning of April 11 announcing the U.S. servicemen and women being detained on Hainan Island were about to be released in which he said: "This has been a difficult situation for both countries. I know the American people join me in expressing sorrow for the loss of a Chinese pilot. Our prayers are with his wife and his child."<sup>55</sup>

51. Steven Mufson and Philip P. Pan, "Spy Plane Delays Irk President," *Washington Post*, April 3, 2001; and David E. Sanger and Steven Lee Myers, "How Bush Had to Calm Hawks on Devising a Response to China," *NYT*, April 13, 2001.

52. Milbank and Balz, "Behind the Scenes"; Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, interview by Jim Lehrer, *News Hour with Jim Lehrer*, Public Broadcasting System, April 13, 2001.

53. John Pomfret, "A Buildup of Irritations in Relations," *Washington Post*, April 3, 2001.

54. Sanger and Myers, "How Bush Had to Calm Hawks"; Jane Perlez, "Fatherly Advice to the President on N.K.," *NYT*, June 10, 2001.

55. President Bush, press statement, Washington, D.C., April 11, 2001, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/04/20010411-3.html>>. See also the carefully worded letter sent

President Bush did travel to Shanghai in October for the APEC forum, although plans to also visit Tokyo and Seoul as well as continue on to Beijing were shelved because of the war on terrorism. In Shanghai Bush had his first face-to-face meeting with Chinese President Jiang Zemin. Although both sides sought to portray the session in positive terms it was actually a disappointing meeting. There seemed little in the way of substantive results beyond vague and qualified Chinese expressions of support for U.S.-led anti-terrorism efforts. Moreover, the two leaders failed to establish any kind of rapport in stark contrast to the personal bond that appeared to have been created between Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin during their first meeting earlier that year.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, Washington has recognized the value of having a strategic dialogue with China particularly in light of the war on terrorism. While China was limited and unenthusiastic in its support for the global struggle against terrorism, what is significant is that Beijing did not seek actively to oppose the U.S.-led effort. Beijing did share some intelligence with Washington and also provided Islamabad with limited economic aid and reassurances that Pakistan was doing the right thing by supporting the U.S. following September 11.

#### *A Balanced Approach to China*

The Bush administration has tried to take a more balanced approach toward China than its predecessor. President Bush was willing to take steps that were certain to raise the ire of Chinese leaders. In May he met in the White House with the exiled Tibetan leader the Dalai Lama and allowed Taiwan's president Chen Shui-bian to make stopovers in the U.S. on the outgoing and return legs of Chen's extended trip to Latin American countries. Both men are reviled by Beijing as splitists who plot to separate Tibet and Taiwan, respectively, from the Chinese motherland. The Clinton administration was far more willing to accommodate Chinese sensitivities regarding U.S. contacts with these two leaders. Clinton, for example, would not formally invite the Dalai Lama to meet him in the Oval Office but rather arranged to "drop by" while the Tibetan was in the office of a lesser White House official. And the Clinton administration tried as best it could to prevent the president of Taiwan from stepping foot on U.S. soil. It granted Chen's predecessor a visa in 1995 only in the face of overwhelming Congressional pressure.

At the same time, Bush has been more conciliatory on other issues. The Bush administration decided not to oppose Beijing's bid to host the 2008

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by U.S. Ambassador to China John W. Prueher to Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan, April 11, 2001, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/04/20010411-1.html>>.

56. See, for example, Philip P. Pan and Mike Allen, "U.S., China Agree on Little Beyond Fighting Terrorism," *Washington Post*, October 20, 2001.

Olympics and supported the renewal of Normal Trading Relations (NTR) for China and China's accession to the WTO. Moreover, Washington did not make the release of U.S.-based scholars detained in China a precondition for improving relations with Beijing. Nevertheless President Bush expressed his concern over the detainees directly to President Jiang Zemin during a 20-minute telephone call on July 5, 2001.<sup>57</sup>

Furthermore, the White House has blunted the effort of conservative hawks in the administration intent on taking a harder line with China. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld appears to be a driving force behind the get-tough policy.<sup>58</sup> Rumsfeld reportedly sought to sever military-to-military contacts with China but the president countermanded the effort. A May Pentagon memorandum from a key Rumsfeld aide to this effect was swiftly retracted, purportedly at the direction of the White House. It is widely assumed that this policy reversal was at the instigation of NSC Advisor Rice.<sup>59</sup> The White House sought to maintain at least a minimal level of military-to-military contacts initially on a case-by-case basis and by the end of the year they appeared to be on their way to returning to some kind of normalcy.<sup>60</sup>

#### *Missile Defense Myopia*

There is enormous potential for missile defense—a topic that is clearly high on the Bush administration's agenda—to undermine the broader U.S.-China relationship even though it is not in the interests of either side for this to happen. The argument generally made for NMD is that it is necessary to protect the U.S. against intentional attack from a handful of missiles from rogue states or accidental launches. While President Bush and top administration officials regularly and publicly acknowledge that Moscow has concerns about U.S. missile defense plans—notably the scrapping of the ABM Treaty—and express a willingness to engage Russians in a dialogue on the subject, they have until quite recently seemed strangely oblivious that a similar dynamic might be at work with China and that similar approaches might be merited toward Beijing. Secretary Rumsfeld told reporters in July that he

57. On the administration and the Olympics bid, see Joseph Curl, "Bush to Bolster Relations with Russia, China Says Aide," *Washington Times*, May 23, 2001; on administration support for NTR, see Colin L. Powell, "The Promise of China Trade," *Washington Post*, June 1, 2001; on the administration and scholars detained by China, see David E. Sanger, "Bush Calls Jiang, Voices Concerns Over Detentions," *NYT*, July 6, 2001.

58. See, for example, Tom Plate, "Hawks Clamp on to the China Portfolio," *Honolulu Advertiser*, June 10, 2001.

59. See for example, Robert Kagan and William Kristol, "The 'Adults' Make a Mess," *Weekly Standard*, May 14, 2001.

60. Michael R. Gordon, "Rumsfeld Limiting Military Contacts with the Chinese," *NYT*, June 4, 2001; Mike Allen, "U.S. Widens Look at China Contacts," *Washington Post*, May 5, 2001; Ann Scott Tyson, "U.S., China Cautiously Rekindle Military Ties," *CSM*, February 20, 2002.

believed that Washington could “fashion an understanding” with Moscow on the ABM Treaty “that [would] make sense for both of us.” Finally, on December 13, President Bush formally declared Washington’s intent to withdraw from the ABM Treaty shortly after calling President Jiang and offering to initiate “high-level strategic talks” with China.<sup>61</sup>

But regarding China and U.S. plans for missile defense, Rumsfeld has seemed dismissive. While China is in “a different circumstance” than Russia, he remarked in July that China was going to build “a whole host of ballistic missiles” no matter what the U.S. did or did not do. He then added:

I don’t think, frankly, that missile defense is going to make one bit of difference to China. They’re going to be doing what they’re going to be doing anyway. And the only state or entity that could contend that missile defense was threatening to them is a country that has decided that they [sic] want to try to intimidate the U.S. or their neighbors with ballistic missiles.<sup>62</sup>

Other administration officials, including NSC Advisor Rice and Deputy Secretary of State Armitage, insist that China is not the threat being countered and China should not feel threatened by American efforts to develop NMD.<sup>63</sup>

However, the fact of the matter is that China *does* feel threatened and it will be difficult to persuade Beijing otherwise. China possesses an estimated two dozen intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of reaching the U.S. NMD would negate China’s strategic deterrence capability. In the absence of discussion with Beijing and some effort to address China’s concerns about missile defense, considerable damage may be done to U.S.-China relations. Indeed, as some conservative Republican commentators recognize, “[i]f NMD goes forward, Bush may precipitate a breakdown in U.S.-China relations.” A breakdown may be “healthy” in the view of these analysts.<sup>64</sup> And a breakdown could very possibly spiral into a 21st century version of the 20th century Cold War between the Soviet Union and the U.S. Thus, the costs and policy implications of single-minded pursuit of NMD are significant and serious.

Moreover, respected Asia watcher Harry Harding noted: “Our allies are all saying ‘we like the idea that the U.S. will pay more attention to us, but we worry about the policy toward China that we are being asked to support.’

61. David E. Sanger, “Bush Offers China Talks on Arms as U.S. Pulls Out of ABM Treaty,” *NYT*, December 14, 2001.

62. Secretary Rumsfeld, Pentagon press briefing, July 11, 2001, <[http://defenselink.mil/news/Jul2001/t07132001\\_-t0711sd.html](http://defenselink.mil/news/Jul2001/t07132001_-t0711sd.html)>.

63. “George W.’s World View,” *New Perspectives Quarterly* 18:1 (Winter 2001), pp. 35–37; and Howard W. French, “Top Bush Aide Urges Japan to Form In-Depth Ties with U.S.,” *NYT*, May 9, 2001.

64. Robert Kagan and William Kristol, “The Good Fight,” *Weekly Standard*, January 22, 2001.

Many of our allies are concerned that they'll be caught in a U.S.-China conflict."<sup>65</sup> Indeed, Bush administration officials have sought to reassure key allies, notably Japan, that the U.S. will do all it can not to place them in an impossible position.

### *Vigorous Support for Taiwan*

Taiwan, of course, is the other central security issue with China that the Bush administration faces. There is strong pro-Taiwan sentiment within the administration and anti-communist feeling as noted earlier. This was reflected in the April decision to sell Taiwan a package of arms—including four Kidd-class destroyers and a dozen P-3 Orion anti-submarine surveillance aircraft—and help the island acquire diesel-powered submarines. Yet, because this sale was anticipated and the weapons included were not the most sophisticated available, China's response was quite muted. Of course, China's desire to receive NTR status from the U.S., keep Beijing in the running to host the 2008 Olympics, and get admitted to the WTO also were important reasons to remain mild-mannered.

But what really got the attention of journalists and scholars were remarks made by President Bush during a television appearance on April 24, 2001. The president's answer to a question about the U.S. commitment to Taiwan ignited a storm of controversy. Bush stated that the U.S. would do "whatever it took to help Taiwan defend herself."<sup>66</sup> Many journalists and analysts in both China and the U.S. drew the conclusion that this meant an end to the so-called policy of "strategic ambiguity."<sup>67</sup> Certainly, as noted above, individual members of the Bush administration were on public record prior to becoming government officials as favoring a change in policy. Nevertheless, administration spokesmen and officials, notably Vice-President Cheney, have stressed in the aftermath of the president's interview that the policy remains unchanged.<sup>68</sup> This does not of course preclude a policy change at a later date. In any event, while there may be ambiguity in China regarding the

65. Harry Harding is quoted in Hiebert and Lawrence, "Dangerous Brinkmanship," pp. 20–21.

66. David E. Sanger, "Bush Tells Beijing the U.S. Is Ready to Defend Taiwan," *NYT*, April 26, 2001.

67. See, for example, Philip P. Pan, "China 'Concerned' by Bush Remark: Beijing Says U.S. Drifting Down a Dangerous Road," *Washington Post*, April 27, 2001; and Sanger, "Bush Tells Beijing." The majority of Chinese participants at the workshop on "The Bush Administration's Security Policy and Northeast Asia" held in Hong Kong in early May 2001 were of the view that President Bush's remarks marked the end of the U.S. policy of strategic ambiguity on Taiwan. On reactions in the U.S., see "The End of Strategic Ambiguity," *Washington Times*, April 27, 2001; and Michael O'Hanlon, "A Need for Ambiguity," *NYT*, April 27, 2001.

68. "Vice President Cheney Marks First Hundred Days," Fox News Sunday, April 29, 2001, on <<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,18518,00.html>>. See also Charles Babington and

precise nature of the U.S. response to an unprovoked Chinese attack on Taiwan, there is little mistaking the widely held belief among Chinese analysts that the U.S. would come to Taiwan's defense in a conflict.

On the Taiwan issue, the administration appears to want to have its cake and eat it, too, that is, to maintain a cordial relationship with China while at the same time continuing to retain strong ties with Taiwan and keep the Taiwan lobby in Congress content. This was evident when Secretary of State Powell, during budget hearings in early March, repeatedly referred to Taiwan as the "Republic of China."<sup>69</sup> This is the preferred name for the Taipei government among conservatives on Capitol Hill but was guaranteed to anger Beijing.

### *Strategic Ambivalence?*

According to conservative commentator Robert Kagan, speaking in March 2000 about then-candidate George W. Bush: "There is a faction among Bush's advisors who have a hawkish view of China and a stronger view of Taiwan. But in his gut, Bush is his father's son on China."<sup>70</sup> In other words, President Bush is likely to be somewhat more conciliatory toward China than some of his advisors would prefer. Indeed, Bush's telephone call to his Chinese counterpart in July 2001 was a clear signal to Beijing that the president desires an improved relationship with China. This first direct communication between the two leaders reflected a mutual interest in opening a dialogue at the highest levels and restoring regular contacts following the resolution of the Hainan Island incident. Jiang Zemin had signaled this by sending a congratulatory message for July 4 to Bush along with an invitation for the U.S. leader to make a state visit to China later in the year. NSC Advisor Rice was reportedly behind the initiative, reasoning that the timing was auspicious given that the EP-3 was on its way home and the Chinese leader's apparent interest in getting relations back on track.<sup>71</sup>

Moreover, the fact that the president's father is a firm believer in the power of personal relationships in diplomacy is likely to influence his son. Significantly, Yang Jiechi, the current China's ambassador in Washington, is an old friend of the senior Bush. Nevertheless, George W. Bush does appear to be

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Dana Milbank, "Bush Advisors Try to Limit Damage: No Change in Policy Toward Taiwan," *Washington Post*, April 27, 2001.

69. Some see Powell's choice of words as a "gaffe" but more likely these words were intentional, calculated to appeal to the pro-Taiwan lobby. See, for example, Barbara Slavin, "Powell's Positions Split at Times from Bush's," *USA Today*, March 26, 2001.

70. Quoted in Murray Hiebert, "Presidential Shift," *FEER*, March 9, 2000, p. 22.

71. Sanger, "Bush Calls Jiang."

willing to risk antagonizing China particularly on the hot button issue of Taiwan.<sup>72</sup>

In the final analysis, there is a hint of what one might call “strategic ambivalence” in the president’s thinking about China. In an April 5 speech, he first labeled China as a “strategic partner” before quickly correcting himself and using the term “strategic rival.”<sup>73</sup> As Secretary of State Powell said in testimony before Congress on January 17:

A strategic partner China is not, but neither is China our inevitable and implacable foe. China is a competitor, a potential regional rival, but it is also a trading partner willing to cooperate in areas where our strategic interests overlap. China is all of these things, but China is not an enemy, and our challenge is to keep it that way.<sup>74</sup>

### Too Soon To Tell: Some Preliminary Observations

At the time of writing, just one year into the new administration, it is still too soon to judge Bush administration policy toward Northeast Asia. Because of the protracted election debacle in the fall of 2000, the administration-in-waiting was on hold as far as making appointments and conducting policy reviews. In this context, continuity is probably better than change. In the view of many Asian leaders, the U.S. is a mighty and unpredictable power. A strong dose of predictability would help ease the jitters for most Asian states. The Bush administration might be well advised to steer a course on Korea a little closer to that of the Clinton administration albeit more proactive and sterner. Certainly, U.S. forces and their Republic of Korea allies must remain vigilant and combat ready. On China, the Bush administration might do well to be more patient and less eager to “do something” on Taiwan. Given the larger global war on terrorism and the many domestic challenges that confront President Bush, his Asia policy may yet by default exhibit “more continuity than differences” with the Clinton Asia policy.<sup>75</sup>

It is the administration’s core security issue of missile defense that may likely prove the greatest test for President Bush—perhaps even more than the global fight against terrorism. As two conservative commentators observed:

72. On Yang, see Jim Mann, “Chinese Tiger Is a Pussy Cat to Bushes,” *LAT*, December 20, 2001. On Taiwan, see Robin Wright and Tyler Marshall, “U.S. Tilt to Taipei Is Seen as Risky,” *LAT*, May 21, 2001.

73. President Bush, remarks delivered to the American Society of News Editors Annual Convention, Washington, D.C., April 5, 2001, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/04/20010405-5.html>>; and E. J. Dionne, Jr., “China Policy Full of Contradictions,” *Denver Post*, April 10, 2001.

74. Powell confirmation hearing, January 2001.

75. James Lindsay quoted in Hiebert, “A Battle Brewing in Washington,” p. 25.

"It is a big, controversial issue." Moreover, "[I]f he [Bush] doesn't put himself on the line, and right away, it [missile defense] will not happen."<sup>76</sup> The effort will require considerable persistence at home to get it adequately funded. The tax cut engineered by the administration along with the shift of power in the Senate from Republican to Democratic control in June 2001 has made this all the more of a challenge. The effort will also require intensive and extensive lobbying of friends and allies of the U.S. around the world. Given the opposition to or lukewarm support for the concept, it may require a vast amount of administration time and energy to convince other countries of the value of missile defense and that it does not threaten their security. The effort may put considerable strain on U.S. alliances and even sour or worsen relations with other states, China being perhaps the most significant example.

The fundamental question that should be posed regarding missile defense is: do the benefits outweigh the costs? According to experts and senior officials, including NSC Advisor Rice, NMD is not a cure-all and it is certainly not foolproof. This being the case, is it worth the administration sapping its energy and depleting goodwill on the domestic and international fronts in pursuit of what continues to be expensive and unproven technology?

Whatever the Bush administration thinking is on missile defense, the most pragmatic approach might be to move forward gradually on missile defense with a focus on research and development instead of deployment, while at the same time conducting a dialogue with countries such as North Korea and China.<sup>77</sup> If discussions are fruitful and Washington can achieve concrete and verifiable agreements with these governments, then perhaps development of NMD and TMD can be curtailed or modified. (There are of course other rogue states, such as Iran and Iraq, armed with ballistic missiles that are also cited as threats to the U.S.) If the dialogue goes nowhere, then missile defense can continue and even be accelerated if necessary.

Moreover, in making these efforts at dialogue, the U.S. can, on the one hand, assuage the concerns of American allies and friends if the talks succeed and, on the other hand if the talks fail, significantly increase the likelihood that U.S. allies and friends will be more receptive to cooperating with Washington on missile defense development and deployment. Both South Korea and Taiwan, while appreciative of strong U.S. support, remain concerned that well-intentioned U.S. actions may prove counterproductive and detrimental to their security. Both prefer a more nuanced and balanced approach by Washington toward their respective communist neighbors. One Seoul-based scholar remarked that he recognized that the Bush administration found it

76. Kagan and Kristol, "The Good Fight."

77. Avery Goldstein makes this general point. See his "U.S. Policy Toward China: Try for the Best, Prepare for the Worst," *Foreign Policy Research Institute E-Note*, March 30, 2001, <<http://www.fpri.org/enotes/asia.20010330.Goldstein.chinapolicy.html>>.

necessary to use a combination of caution and severity toward North Korea. However, he also stressed that a downward spiral in Washington-Pyongyang relations would serve to sabotage any hope of a Seoul-Pyongyang rapprochement. “[I]f US relations with North Korea deteriorate, inter-Korean relations will deteriorate even more, by two- or three-fold.”<sup>78</sup> Many Taiwanese see the tough U.S. stance toward China as a “mixed blessing.” One Taipei-based scholar noted that “[w]e want to encourage [closer] ties with the U.S., but our own survival is dependent on good relations with mainland China.”<sup>79</sup>

Because of the ideological basis of policy on North Korea and China, it will be difficult—barring any significant concessions from the other side—to make substantive progress. Washington will be very reluctant to make compromises or concessions. Pyongyang on the one hand appears interested in improving ties with Washington and putting dialogue with Seoul on hold pending the conclusion of the Bush administration policy review on Korea. On the other hand, North Korea appears reluctant or unwilling to engage the Bush administration in substantive negotiations.<sup>80</sup> It is unclear as to how the ongoing war on terrorism has affected Pyongyang: the stunning battlefield successes in Afghanistan and ominous rhetoric of some administration officials could have made North Korea more fearful—if not paranoid—of U.S. military power and intentions, or provided another convenient excuse not to engage Washington.

Most noticeably, President Bush, in a November 26 press conference at the White House, warned: “Afghanistan is just the beginning. . . . [States that] develop [WMD] . . . to terrorize nations . . . will be held accountable.” Then, in response to a follow-up question about whether he had expanded his definition of targets in the war on terrorism to include countries like North Korea, President Bush seemed to answer yes, although he insisted his definition of terrorism had not changed.<sup>81</sup> While in Seoul in February 2002, the president, on the one hand, made plain his distaste for the North Korean regime but, on the other, indicated a clear readiness to open talks with Pyongyang. Whether U.S. actions and rhetoric will make North Korea more or less interested in talking to the U.S. remains to be seen.

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78. Ilene R. Prusher, “South Koreans Wait for North to Return the Favor,” *CSM*, June 20, 2001. See also Doug Struck, “Asia Allies Wary of U.S. Shield Plan: While Tokyo Debates Its Role, Seoul Fears for Reunification Process,” *International Herald Tribune*, May 3, 2001.

79. Cited in “Asia: The New U.S. Strategy,” *Business Week* (Asia edition), May 28, 2001.

80. See, for example, Prusher, “South Koreans Wait.”

81. President Bush, press statement, November 26, 2001, available at <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/11/20011126-1.html>>. These remarks were followed in early December by the already-mentioned major foreign policy address delivered at the Citadel with a similar message about “rogue states” although North Korea was never explicitly named.

Beijing's muted response to Bush administration actions since the return of the EP-3 crew is unlikely to continue indefinitely. This is especially so on the issue of Taiwan, where Beijing clearly feels that the U.S. has moved much closer to Taipei. And certain groups in China are likely to be particularly hardline, especially the military. In the aftermath of the U.S. arms deal announced in April 2001, the People's Liberation Army's newspaper declared that Taiwan had established a "de facto military alliance with the U.S" (*fazhan MeiTai shizhixing juntongmeng*).<sup>82</sup>

China's leaders remain greatly concerned about U.S. hegemony. In the wake of the remarkable U.S. successes in Afghanistan late last year, the continuing American military presence in Central Asia, and the warming of ties between Washington and Moscow, not to mention the recent discussion of Russia possibly joining NATO, Beijing cannot but be perturbed. Those developments cast considerable doubt on the value of the mid-2001 agreements signed with the Russian Federation and the Central Asian states. In June, China further formalized and expanded the membership of the so-called "Shanghai Five." It became the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and Uzbekistan joined the existing membership of Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Then on July 16, President Jiang and Russian President Putin signed a bilateral Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. While China and its co-signatories insisted these arrangements were not directed against any third country and were not military alliances, both the multilateral and bilateral treaties contained military components. And China's intent in signing the treaty with Russia was clearly aimed in part at countering the power and influence of the U.S.

Nevertheless, the decision to award Beijing the 2008 Olympic Games, announced in mid-July 2001, and China's entry into the WTO will tend to engender moderation at least in the short to medium term. Moreover, China has a massive economic stake in continued stable relations with the U.S. The positive spin that Washington and Beijing put on the February 2002 Bush-Jiang summit despite their inability to reach any agreement of great substance suggests that both leaders recognize the value of at least maintaining a cordial bilateral relationship.

Either by design or accident, the initial hardline taken by the Bush administration toward China and North Korea, and the uncompromising stance on missile defense may turn out to have been "an opening gambit designed to

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82. See, for example, Charles Hutzler, "Bush Administration's China Policy Confounds Foreign Policy Experts," *Wall Street Journal*, May 24, 2001; and Wright and Marshall, "U.S. Tilt to Taipei Is Seen as Risky." The quote is from the May 30, 2001, issue of the *Jiefangjun Bao* (Liberation Army Daily).

establish the Bush administration as a tough negotiator.”<sup>83</sup> President Bush’s visits to Tokyo, Seoul, and Beijing early this year seem to indicate a willingness by Washington to have a forthright and ongoing dialogue with its allies as well as attempt frank and wide-ranging discussions with states it views as strategic rivals.

Nevertheless, the hardline approach is not merely a tactical ploy; it also reflects the firmly held conservative beliefs of President Bush and his key advisors as well as the interplay between the hawks and pragmatists in the administration. It is these factors that will continue to form the parameters of U.S. policy toward Northeast Asia.

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83. Editorial, *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, March 19, 2001. The quote and editorial specifically refer to U.S. policy toward North Korea. The same point is made by the *Economist* regarding Bush policy toward China. See “Working Out the World,” *Economist*, March 31, 2001, pp. 23–24.