



Occasional Analysis:

## U.S. Presidential Candidate Barack Obama's Views on Relations with Asia

### Overall priorities for East Asia

America's future prosperity and security are closely tied to developments in Asia. Our relations with Asia's diverse countries and economies have been stable but stagnant these past few years. Our narrow focus on preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction and prosecuting a war on terrorism have earned us some cooperation, but little admiration. The war in Iraq has lost us good will among both allies and adversaries and has distracted our attention and policy initiatives from Asia's issues. Our preoccupation with Iraq has given a strategic advantage to China in the region, with as yet uncertain consequences. Barack Obama believes that the U.S. needs to strengthen our alliances and partnerships and engage more broadly in the regional trend toward multilateralism in order to build confidence, maintain regional stability and security, restore our international prestige, and promote trade and good governance in this crucial region.

Asia is a complex and evolving region, a mix of economic dynamism and cooperation alongside tensions and deep suspicions that spring from historical, ideological, and cultural discord. The United States has long played a pivotal role in preserving the peace in Asia and undergirding its economic development. That leadership should continue, but must adjust to changes taking place in Asia. Our alliances – friendships that have stood the test of time – remain crucial elements for Asian confidence and security. But new ideas are in play, and the U.S. must be attentive to calls for change. The emergence of an economically vibrant, more diplomatically engaged China and India has energized interest in Asian economic and security arrangements that could augment bilateral alliances and build confidence among adversaries and friends alike. Barack Obama believes we need to demonstrate unequivocally to Asians that our presence in the region is enduring, that our economic, political, and security interests demand it, and that we will reengage with, and listen to, our Asian friends after years of giving the region short shrift. (Barack Obama, "Strengthening U.S. Relations with Asia," August 2008)

### U.S.-Japan alliance

The US Japan alliance has been one of the great successes of the postwar era and Japan's remarkable achievements and constructive role in world affairs over the past 60 years are a great testament to the Japanese people. As the world's two wealthiest democracies, the US and Japan have a shared interest in promoting security and prosperity in Asia and around the world – shared interests that rest on a bedrock of shared values: in democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and free markets. As one of America's closest allies, Japan today plays a vital role in working

with the US in maintaining regional security and stability, promoting prosperity, and meeting the new security challenges of the 21st century.....The US-Japan alliance must remain at the core of efforts to revitalize Japan's role in ensuring stability and security in the region.... Although the US-Japan relationship remains the centerpiece of both US and Japanese policy in the Asia-Pacific region, in recent years the Bush administration has let its attention to this critical relationship drift as it has been distracted by other issues. The alliance demands, and is deserving of, close political cooperation and coordination at every level, reflecting the key role Japan plays as an anchor of US economic and security interests in the region and across the globe. (*Floor Statement, Congressional Record, April 25, 2007, on occasion of visit to US by PM Abe.*)

Japan, as a major consumer and standard center in energy conservation and innovation, is our natural partner in tackling these and other global challenges. In statements in the Senate, Senator Obama has recognized the contributions Japan has made in responding to the December 2004 tsunami in Southeast Asia, fighting avian flu, assisting Africa and its leadership role on environmental issues and climate change. US-Japan cooperation on these global challenges will be a major growth area in our relationship under an Obama administration. (Walter Mondale, Honorary Chair, Japan Advisory Council for Obama Campaign, during an interview with *The Asahi Shimbun*, August 22, 2008)

## **U.S.-China relations**

America and China have developed a mature, wide-ranging relationship over the last 30 plus years. Yet we still have to do serious work if we are to create the level of mutual trust necessary for long-term cooperation in a rapidly changing region. Each country has deep concerns about the long-term intentions of the other and those concerns will not disappear of their own accord....In the coming years, the US and China face challenges that require fresh thinking and a change from the US policy approach of the past eight years. How the US and China meet these challenges and the extent to which we can find common ground will be important both for our own countries and for others in Asia and beyond....US and Chinese cooperation in the 6 Party talks on the NK nuclear issue over the past few years makes clear that we can work together constructively bilaterally and with others to reduce tensions on even extraordinarily sensitive issues.... I know that America and the world can benefit from trade with China but only if China agrees to play by the rules and act as a positive force for balanced world growth. I want China's economy to continue to grow, its domestic demand to expand, and its vitality to contribute to regional and global prosperity. But China's current growth is unbalanced....As President I will take a vigorous pragmatic approach to addressing these issues, utilizing our domestic trade remedy laws as well as the WTO dispute settlement mechanism wherever appropriate....The climate change challenge demands that the US and China develop much higher levels of cooperation without delay. We are currently the world's two largest consumers of oil and two largest emitters of greenhouse gases....Our cooperation to reduce the threat of climate change can produce models, practices, and technologies that will provide impetus to global efforts, including those to reach agreement on a post-Kyoto climate regime....In the modern world, non-traditional security threats are looming increasingly large. These include challenges of terrorism, proliferation, failed states, infectious disease, humanitarian disasters, and piracy on the high seas....I look to China to work with us to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons..... to

halt the genocide in Darfur....Greater progress in protecting the human rights of all its people and moving toward democracy and the rule of law will better enable China to achieve its full potential as a nation, domestically and internationally. China's own people will expect, indeed demand this....China cannot stand indefinitely apart of the global trend toward democratic government, rule of law, and full exercise of human rights. Protection of the unique cultural and religious traditions of the Tibetan people is an integral part of such an agenda. ("U.S.-China Policy Under an Obama Administration," *AmCham-China, China Brief*, October 2008.)

### ***Cross-strait Relations***

I sincerely hope that the PRC will respond to the beginning of your Presidency in a constructive and forward-leaning way. It is important for Beijing to demonstrate to the people of Taiwan that the practical and non-confrontational approach that you have taken toward the mainland can achieve positive results. I hope there will be progress including development of economic ties, expanding Taiwan's international space and cross-Strait security on which you have made proposals that deserve a good faith response. I support the "one China" policy of the US, adherence to the three US-PRC joint communiqués concerning Taiwan, and observance of the Taiwan Relations Act. On that foundation, I believe the US should strengthen channels of communication with officials of your government. We should continue to provide the arms necessary for Taiwan to deter possible aggression. (May 20, 2008 letter from Obama to Taiwan's President Ma Ying-jeou)

Senator Obama welcomes the Bush Administration's decision to notify Congress concerning the package of weapons systems for Taiwan. This package represents an important response to Taiwan's defense needs. This action is fully consistent with US obligations under the Taiwan Relations Act. The sale helps to contribute to Taiwan's defense and the maintenance of a healthy balance in the Taiwan Strait....Senator Obama strongly supports the reduction of tensions between China and Taiwan and commends China's President Hu Jintao and Taiwan's President Ma Ying-jeou for their efforts in that regard. A strengthening of Taiwan's defenses will not undermine the process of reduction of tensions and can actually promote it. (Statement by Obama campaign spokesperson Wendy Morigi, October 6, 2008)

### **Korean Peninsula, denuclearization, and the Six-Party Talks**

North Korea's agreement to these verification measures is a modest step forward in dismantling its nuclear weapons program. President Bush's decision to remove North Korea from the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism is an appropriate response as long as there is clear understanding that if North Korea fails to follow through there will be immediate consequences. It is now essential that North Korea halt all efforts to reassemble its nuclear facilities, place them back under IAEA supervision, and cooperate fully with the international community to complete the disablement of the Yongbyon facilities and to implement a robust verification mechanism to confirm the accuracy of its nuclear declaration. The last eight years have demonstrated the necessity of confronting the threat from North Korea through aggressive, sustained and direct bilateral and multilateral diplomacy. Too often, there has been a failure to effectively engage our partners throughout this effort....If North Korea refuses to permit robust verification, we should lead all members of the 6 Party talks in suspending energy assistance, re-imposing sanctions that

have recently been waived, and considering new restrictions. Our objective remains the complete and verifiable elimination of North Korea's nuclear weapons program. This must include getting clarity on North Korea's efforts to enrich uranium and its proliferation of nuclear technology abroad. (Obama Statement on US-North Korea nuclear agreement, October 11, 2008)

The U.S.-ROK alliance has been a remarkably strong and successful one. Forged in blood during the Korean war more than a half-century ago, the alliance has sustained itself through the crucible of the cold war and remains central to U.S. security policy in East Asia. Our bonds have only deepened through the extensive social and cultural ties that have formed between our two countries, including 100,000 Americans who live in Korea, and the 2 million Korean-Americans who enrich our society through their classic American ethic of hard work, strong families, and tight-knit church communities.

Nonetheless, I do not think it is an overstatement to say that the U.S.-Korea relationship has been adrift in recent years. At the heart of it have been our respective approaches to North Korea. The Bush administration has been divided within itself on how to deal with Pyongyang, branding it a member of the "Axis of Evil" and refusing bilateral discussions with it before subsequently reversing course. This unsteady approach not only has allowed North Korea to expand its nuclear arsenal as it has resumed reprocessing of plutonium and tested a nuclear device. It also has understandably caused anxiety in South Korea, as its leaders and people have tried to figure out what the Bush administration policy is.

The U.S.-Korea economic relationship has also benefited both nations and deepened our ties. I look forward as well to supporting ways to increase our bilateral trade and investment ties through agreements paying proper attention to our key industries and agricultural sectors, such as autos, rice, and beef, and to protection of labor and environmental standards. Regrettably, the U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement does not meet this standard.

We need to work with South Korea on a common vision for the alliance to meet the challenges of the 21st century, not only those on the Korean Peninsula but in the region and beyond.

An alliance that once was built solely on defense against common threats must today be built also on our shared values and strong mutual interests. (Floor Statement, *Congressional Record*, February 11, 2008)

### **Regional economic cooperation and free trade agreements**

In terms of our shared prosperity, nowhere is America's sustained leadership more important in ensuring that the global economy remains vibrant. Together the economies of the APEC region account for over half the world's output and trade. It is essential that Asian countries work with us to ensure balanced growth and openness of the global trading system. This means shifting away from their traditional dependence on export-led growth and weak currencies toward stronger consumption at home and greater absorption of imports. The United States should negotiate only "gold standard" agreements with our Asian trading partners that stimulate growth and jobs and contain binding labor and environmental standards and intellectual property protections. (Asia Issues Fact Sheet)

Sen. Obama believes that existing mechanisms, such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, are a useful platform for U.S. economic engagement with the Asian region, and that any new trade agreements negotiated with the U.S. must have binding labor and environmental standards, provide effective access for American exports, and be rigorously monitored and enforced. (Michael Schiffer, Asia Advisor to Obama campaign, September 2008)

### **Norms, Values, Promotion of democracy and human rights, and U.S. Foreign Policy in Asia**

Barack Obama understands that the political and economic development of Asia means a more peaceful and stable Asia: Obama will make support for the aspirations of the people of Asia for human rights, democracy, and good governance a tenet of his regional foreign policy. The people of Asia, like people all over the world, cherish the ability to raise their children free from fear and want and to have a say in their own futures.

The continuing dire situation in Burma requires particular attention in this regard. Burma's military junta is one of the most repressive regimes in the world, threatening the stability of neighboring states, among others. Barack Obama continues to support U.S. trade and investment sanctions against Burma to demonstrate our strong, principled condemnation of the regime's oppressive rule, and our solidarity with the Burmese people. He joins the international community, including Burma's ASEAN neighbors, in calling for the unconditional release of the nation's political prisoners, including the symbol and leader of Burma's democracy movement Aung San Suu Kyi. At the same time, he favors humanitarian assistance that will reach the suffering people of Burma and that does not empower the military junta. Efforts to influence the regime have seen only limited results – in part because the international community has been unable to coordinate its efforts. While the dynamics of change ultimately must come from within the country, Obama will work toward achieving a coordinated international approach that includes the nations of ASEAN, China, India, Japan, and Europe to help contribute to the process of reform and reconciliation in Burma. (Asia Issues Fact Sheet)

### **East Asia community building efforts and regional multilateral security cooperation**

With the nations of East Asia working together through ASEAN, the ASEAN Regional Forum, APEC, the East Asia Summit and other regional arrangements, Asia is moving ahead--with or without us--to create a new regional architecture. Our interests demand that we re-engage to ensure trans-Pacific linkages are relevant and strong. That means developing new arrangements to meet new and rising challenges and transnational threats that stem from globalization--especially in the areas of pandemic disease, climate change, and energy security. The latest pandemic, an unidentified, highly contagious virus affecting pigs, is sweeping Asia. We must ensure that China and other affected countries cooperate in research and containing this and future outbreaks of disease. We should use the opportunity of APEC to further the dialogue about the growing problem of pandemics. (Obama Speech to Senate on Sustained Leadership in the Asia-Pacific Region, September 4, 2007)

### *Islam in Asia:*

Senator Obama ... is personally aware of the central role of Islam and Muslims in Southeast Asian affairs, having spent four of his first 10 years in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim nation. He also understands that the region has undergone an extraordinary metamorphosis over the past decade, maintaining a religiously tolerant orientation while accommodating increased religiosity in its many diverse societies. While there have been some radical manifestations of Islam, including terrorist groups such as Jemaah Islamiah, the overall nature of Islam in Southeast Asia has been an essential component of the region's on-going political and economic development in recent years.

The Bush Administration's misguided war in Iraq and perversions of justice and the rule of law as symbolized by Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay have contributed substantially to the terrible state of our relations and reputation with Muslims around the world, including in Asia.

To improve our relations with Asian Muslims, Senator Obama believes we must close down the detention centers in Guantanamo Bay, and reestablish the rule of law to begin to restore the U.S. reputation around the world, including in Muslim nations. Senator Obama understands that to the vast majority of Asian Muslims the extremists and terrorists are as big a threat to their well-being as to ours. As a result, he recognizes that we need to listen more to their perspectives on how to address this threat, align ourselves with their developmental interests, and contribute more of the resources they require to attack the extremist challenge from within.

While he will apply the full spectrum of U.S. power to the fight against terrorism, including military force when necessary, Senator Obama has made clear that he intends to bring the U.S. occupation of Iraq to an end." (Interview with Obama campaign outside foreign policy adviser Michael Schiffer, *Washington Report*, September, 2008)