The United States and Asia: Challenges of the Twenty-First Century

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With innovation comes challenge. From prehistoric times onward, humans have had to adjust to new developments affecting lifestyle, behavior, and values. We can only imagine the effect of moving from the club and the Stone Age to swords or bows and arrows and, later, guns. With the onset of the industrial revolution, moreover, came massive changes from the economic to the political. The nature of the modern state was shaped during that time.

The Information-Technology Revolution

The twenty-first century promises to be another period of massive technological and scientific changes. Indeed, these are already well underway, affecting individuals in a huge variety of ways—lifestyle, intellectual reach, mobility, and life span. Nations are equally affected. Sovereignty must be reexamined. The time available for leaders to make decisions has been markedly reduced. Transparency has greatly increased, even in authoritarian states. The information-technology (IT) revolution impels knowledge to cross national borders swiftly and easily.

The Asia-Pacific region is in the vortex of the global revolution that is taking place. Its stage of development and proclaimed developmental goals, together with the capacities of its citizenry, make the societies of this region ripe for accelerating change. Among these nations, moreover, the United States is the most revolutionary in terms of the speed and depth of change. It is thus not surprising that Americans are deeply concerned about the domestic issues brought forth by ongoing changes—from those relating to life in the family and community to those involved in living longer with one’s self.

Multilateralism in Asia

It is in this context that I will explore U.S. relations with Asia, both as a region and in terms of individual nations, commencing with several general propositions. At this point, Asia has not reached the degree of integration that now characterizes Europe, where generally similar ideological commitments, culture, and stage of economic development have enabled union to take place. Asia remains diverse in a great variety of ways. Thus the thesis of Asian values versus Western values, although it has some merit, is grossly overstated. There are many Asias. To be sure, multilateralism is making progress. There are a growing number of regional and subregional organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Asian Regional Forum (ARF). Moreover, informal trilateral and quadrilateral groups are in existence, more or less informally. Each of these bodies has merit and has achieved some results, such as bringing together leaders and enhancing understanding. Yet the formal regional bodies remain essentially “talk” associations. They have not yet
evolved to the point of being effective peacemaking or peacekeeping organizations. Even in the economic sphere, in which there are promising prospects for the future, the results thus far have been rather slim. Hence bilateral relations, especially bilateral relations among the major nations, remain the most crucial determinants of the regional order.

**The Decline of Ideology**

A second factor of importance is the decline of ideology as a rigid barrier between states. There remain significant differences in political institutions and principles, but the year 2001 is not the year 1951. In the past 50 years, virtually every Asian-Pacific nation, even the most rigid politically, has had to face the problems of development in an increasingly pragmatic fashion and shape its policies accordingly. Ironically, many Asians accuse the United States of having the most ideological foreign policy at present, based on its effort to promote Western-style democracy. Yet in general, even the United States in its dealings with nations like China is committed to a dialogue encompassing economic and strategic issues, and China has responded similarly.

**Types of Political Systems**

In reality, three types of political systems exist in Asia today: hard authoritarian, authoritarian–pluralist, and democratic. Moreover, in recent times, the movement has been from the first to the second and from the second to the third. China, Vietnam, Laos, and especially North Korea can still be categorized as hard authoritarian states, but in comparison with early times, all except North Korea have had to face the rising pluralism that comes with economic development. And even North Korea is showing signs that its top leadership now recognizes the absolute necessity of economic changes while hoping to keep the political order intact—in the long run, an impossibility. Meanwhile, a number of societies—among them, South Korea, Taiwan, and Indonesia—have evolved from authoritarian–pluralism to democracy.

**The Effects of Globalization on Sovereignty**

There is a third generalization, potentially grave in its implications, that must be advanced at this point. Many Asian democracies are in trouble today through a combination of political and economic factors. As will be noted shortly, this includes Japan and signals an important fact. The greatest challenge to be faced in the security realm during the decades ahead is not likely to be conflict between and among major nations but the regional repercussions of faltering and failing states and terrorism in its various forms. “Humanitarian intervention” will continue to be debated, but there can be no doubt that, in this age of rising globalization, the sovereignty of the nation-state cannot and will not be absolute.

**Japan**

Against this background, the key bilateral relations in which the United States is involved in Asia, starting with Japan, are examined. The Bush administration has begun with the proclamation that more attention will be given to U.S.–Japan relations because they constitute our most important relationship in Asia. Tokyo has high hopes, given its feeling of having frequently been relegated to a secondary position in the recent past. At the same time, there is growing evidence that Japan wants to shift the relationship from that of patron–client to one of partnership, in which greater policy independence will be exercised. This will not necessarily trouble the United States, where there has long been a desire for Japan to do more to promote regional and global order.

The central question today, however, relates
to whether this is possible given Japan’s current state of health. To describe the situation bluntly, Japan is in serious trouble, and there are no indications that the problems will be remedied in the near future. For almost a decade, the economy has been mired in minimal growth or recession. Some Japanese have referred to it as “the lost decade.” Political leadership, moreover, has been both unable and unwilling to undertake serious, in-depth reforms. In recent years Japanese politics have been marked by fragile coalition governments put together by weak leaders who have lacked public support. Efforts to transfer authority from the bureaucracy to the political leadership, therefore, have been largely ineffective. Massive fiscal infusions have greatly raised the national debt without stimulating consumer spending, as was hoped. Moreover, major corruption scandals have tarnished both politicians and civil servants.

Japan is not without its strengths. It remains the world’s second largest economy, next to the United States. Moreover, it has a highly educated population that is quite capable of moving forward rapidly in the IT field. Business leaders have had extensive experience abroad, and a younger generation is now emerging that may well show a capacity to innovate.

Yet in addition to its other problems, Japan faces the prospect of aging more rapidly than any other industrial society in the decades ahead. By 2015, over one-fourth of the Japanese population will be 65 years of age or older. Moreover, if low birth rates continue, the Japanese population will steadily decline from the current 127 million to a projected 105 million in 2050. Some argue that through such changes as removing the compulsory retirement age and bringing more women into the workforce, the problem can be alleviated, especially if greater immigration is allowed to augment the labor force. Yet the latter course is likely to produce political trauma, given the exclusiveness that has characterized Japanese culture.

In sum, Japan stands as testimony to the fact that a given economic strategy, however successful, is not good for all time. Should Japan continue to weaken as China emerges as East Asia’s new power, equilibrium in the region would be profoundly affected. The United States would then have to face the issue of whether it is prepared to assume an ever greater role in maintaining a balance of power.

**The U.S. Approach to Japan**

It seems clear that, without being arrogant or overbearing, the United States should encourage Japan through every possible channel to carry forward essential reforms involving initiatives taken by both private as well as official sources. Meanwhile, the strategic alliance should be maintained, but the United States should make adjustments in the disposition of its forces that are logical in terms of the radical changes in military technology that have occurred and in accordance with the political climate.

The U.S.–Japan relationship, moreover, should be strengthened by greatly increasing the scale and scope of nonofficial dialogue. This alliance, so important to the security of Asia as a whole, has been marked by significant aloofness in terms of human relations between the two peoples, notwithstanding strong support for the strategic ties in both societies. Close interactions, both bilaterally and multilaterally, at official levels should therefore be buttressed by a serious effort to build a genuine understanding at the level of nonofficial opinion makers and the general citizenry. Moreover, Japan should be encouraged to continue its efforts to play a substantial economic and political role in Asia, as was the case in the past despite its domestic problems. This constitutes an additive benefit, not a challenge, to American interests.

**China**

In another supremely important relationship—that with the People’s Republic of China—the current scene also is highly complex. Neither
those who concentrate on “the China threat” nor those who focus solely on “China as partner” are presenting a valid picture of a complex situation. China is in transition; hence the future presents various possibilities, and neither the outside observer nor the Chinese can be certain of the dominant conditions that will exist in future decades. The PRC’s economic accomplishments in the past 20 years have been remarkable. Growth has averaged between 8 and 10 percent per annum. Foreign trade and investment have leaped forward and with them a transfer of valuable technology has occurred. With the United States alone, trade came to more than $60 billion in 1999, according to Chinese figures, and it continues to mount. Joining the WTO, moreover, although it is likely to cause China some short-term problems, will benefit both its trade and investment.

In the political realm, as noted earlier, China has been moving into the authoritarian–pluralist category. Successful economic development has promoted the emergence of diverse groups that have shown a growing capacity to be articulate in expressing their interests. Thus the rising concern of leaders is with groups that appear not to be under party or government control. At present the authorities in Beijing are far more concerned about efforts to create independent labor unions and those who would mobilize dissatisfied farmers, as well as groups like Falun Gong, than about university students, who are concentrating on getting ahead with their personal lives and specifically on making money.

In the top political realm for some years, the trend has been from ideological to technocratic leadership. It has led to the emergence of a third generation of leaders trained as engineers, economists, and specialists in other specific fields. The direction is also from single leader to collective leadership. There is no Mao Zedong on the horizon. Moreover, as development has advanced, the issue of central versus regional or local authority has inevitably become more critical. China needs an institutionalized federal system, as many officials are coming to realize.

Thus, despite its economic successes, China will continue to face formidable problems in the years ahead. The fragile financial-banking system weighed down by huge unredeemable loans; massive unemployment that has propelled under- and unemployed rural workers to migrate to the cities, creating both economic and social problems; the East–West gap; and the serious problem of corruption at every level of the political order—these issues, all of them recognized by the authorities—do not submit to any easy or rapid remedies. As the twenty-first century progresses, China is destined to be a major power with major problems.

Finally, as ideology has declined as an effective instrument of mass mobilization and the strengthening of loyalty to the state, nationalism has risen, representing a possible substitute or additive. Indeed, there can be no doubt that nationalism is the strongest political force in China today, including among China’s youth.

Naturally, China’s internal circumstances are vitally important in assessing U.S.–PRC relations. The American exponents of “constructive engagement”—and they have included six administrations—correctly argue that only such a course will encourage positive developments, both political and economic, that will be necessary to underwrite a China that is playing a constructive role on regional and global fronts.

There are various hopeful signs. China has engaged in generally successful intensive efforts to improve relations with all its neighbors. It has promoted increasing economic openness as well as cultural contacts on an expanded scale with the United States and other states. PRC leaders continue to aver that they intend to observe the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, treating all others as equals, seeking harmony, and negotiating differences.

Yet there are complexities. Chinese nationalism has permitted only limited concessions with respect to territorial disputes. Moreover, China clearly intends to be a major power in military as well as other ways. Its military modernization program, although far less threatening to the United States than is sometimes alleged, is al-
most certainly destined to go forward, even if such issues as Taiwan are contained. Consequently, despite China’s success in advancing relations with its neighbors—virtually all small and medium-sized states in Southeast Asia as well as Northeast Asia—U.S. allies want to see the American strategic presence remain in the area. They are concerned in varying degrees about whether Chinese nationalism along with economic and military power will promote a return to the “Middle Kingdom” complex, underwriting the effort to make China the dominant power in the region.

**The U.S. Approach to China**

Almost certainly, the United States will approach China by applying simultaneously the two principles that currently underwrite American foreign policy in general: a concert of powers and a balance of power. Increasingly the United States is likely to seek to build coalitions of states having a common interest in a given issue or problem, and an effort will frequently be made to bring China into such concerts on issues ranging from environmental questions to those involving specific territorial matters. Korea is a current example. Neither China nor the United States wants a collapsed North, a nuclear North, or another conflict on the Korean Peninsula. Hence, despite some differences, we are cooperating both bilaterally and with others in a variety of ways. And this is highly beneficial.

At the same time, as a deterrent to those within China who might argue for a militant approach to certain problems, the United States will maintain a strategic presence in the Asian region in various forms, including its existing alliances. Meanwhile, two immediate issues trouble the U.S.–PRC relationship: namely, Taiwan and the projected missile defense programs (TMD and NMD).

**Taiwan**

The issue of Taiwan probably does not represent a major threat in the short term. Despite the fact that the leader of the proindependence party (the Democratic Progressive party), Chen Shui-bian, occupies the presidency, Chen—whose response to U.S. urging has been an important factor in his stance—has taken a moderate position, at least publicly, urging the resumption of the Cross-Strait dialogue. Yet, despite major increases in economic and cultural interactions between the mainland and Taiwan in recent times, the political impasse continues. A complete lack of trust characterizes the relationship between the PRC and the current Taiwan leadership. Beijing is pursuing a united-front policy, seeking to cultivate the opposition parties while keeping the DPP at arm’s length. Although the risk of conflict in the near term is not high—given the PRC’s domestic priorities, its desire for good relations with its neighbors, and its incomplete military preparedness—uncertainties clearly exist concerning the longer term.

In facing this issue, the United States has constructed what might be described as a balanced policy that contains elements of conscious ambiguity. On the one hand, at the presidential level it has expounded the Three No’s: no two Chinas or one China/one Taiwan; no Taiwan independence; and no admission of Taiwan into international organizations for which statehood is required. A fourth No, however, has sometimes been expressed: no resolution of the Taiwan issue that does not have the support of the Taiwanese people.

In addition, the United States has established certain “perimeters,” namely, voicing a strong stance against any PRC use of force at one end and opposition to any Taiwan declaration of independence at the other end. Within those perimeters, it urges negotiations. At the same time, however, in accordance with the Taiwan Relations Act, it furnishes “defensive military equipment” to Taiwan. Moreover, it refuses to state what it might do if the PRC were toelect to use force against Taiwan.

There is strong reason to believe that this policy will not be greatly altered in the foreseeable future, despite the arguments of some Ameri-
can critics who support giving more explicit guarantees to Taiwan as well as providing enhanced arms sales. To make firm guarantees to Taiwan would not only encourage the independence movement on the island and seriously exacerbate relations with Beijing, it would also divide the American people. The issue of arms sales, however, is more difficult, and it looms immediately ahead. In its opening months, the Bush administration will have to make a decision about selling more advanced equipment (such as Aegis-equipped ships) to Taiwan, which has been requested by its officials. One can assume that the United States will seriously consider both compromise and postponement in dealing with this issue and that leverage will be maintained in an effort to influence the PRC’s placement of missiles on its coast opposite Taiwan. Yet there is no easy route the United States can take on these issues.

**Theater Missile and National Missile Defense**

Coupled with the issue of Taiwan is the question of theater missile defense and national missile defense programs to which the Bush administration is committed. China will unquestionably continue to oppose these programs vigorously and will seek to bring maximum pressure to bear on the United States via Russia and certain European states that have grave doubts about such developments. A supreme challenge for the Bush administration will be whether it can persuade others to work with it on some type of cooperative program relating to missile defense and control.

**Assessing the Relationship**

It is clear that U.S.–China relations will continue to be delicate in the years ahead and that the potential for periodic crises will exist. Cautious optimism, however, is warranted. Both countries are steadily increasing their economic interactions to the mutual advantage of both. Both sides, moreover, are being pressed by their citizenry to give priority to domestic issues, and nobody questions the conclusion that a war between major nations in this age is unwinnable—that the “victor” as well as the “defeated” would suffer greatly. Thus, although it is likely that each side will continue to criticize the other on issues ranging from human rights to superpower dominance, and that both sides will continue their military modernization programs, the willingness to negotiate and live with differences is likely to prevail. It is imperative, however, that both official and unofficial dialogues be expanded to include agendas ranging from the strategic to the environmental and that all routes to cooperation be explored.

**The China–Russian Relationship**

China and Russia have joined in a “strategic partnership.” That tie is based on their common opposition to American hegemonism and interference in the internal affairs of other nations as well as their common concern about Islamic separatism in Central Asia. This relationship, however, is well short of an alliance, and there is little likelihood under present circumstances that this will change. Ideological glue is missing; economic relations, given Russia’s current condition, are sparse; and China’s huge population just to the south worries many Russians, especially those in the Russian Far East.

**The U.S.–Russian Relationship**

Like others, Russia faces enormously complex problems, some of which will continue to affect its relations with the United States. The collapse of the Soviet Union was followed by a rapid economic descent that has only recently been slowed, perhaps halted. Early strategies for reform failed either because they were flawed or because enforcement was lacking. The center lost authority, and unplanned decentralization followed.
Yeltsin progressively lost the confidence of the Russian people, and deep pessimism concerning the future prevailed. Russia had become a failing state.

In this setting Vladimir Putin won election shortly after his appointment by Yeltsin, primarily because he conveyed the image of being a strong man. Leadership, not institutions, was the critical issue for a great majority of Russians. To date Putin seems to have played that role effectively. Although reform has generated some progress, the economic situation remains cloudy. Putin, however, has taken a tough line on Chechnya and has sought to streamline Russian politics by eliminating some minor parties as well as by moving toward some degree of centralization. His actions have worried some observers, who see the shadow of the old KGB and the Communist party, but Putin insists that he favors a market economy and political openness—short of subversion or chaos.

In foreign policy, Putin has forcefully reasserted Russia’s claim to major power status. To that end he has pursued a policy of greater involvement in both Asia and Europe. While cultivating good relations with China and improved relations with the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), he has sought to reestablish a close relationship with India, a country long associated with the Soviet Union, to offset earlier Pakistan–China–U.S. ties. Only with Japan has progress thus far been largely thwarted because of the issue of the Northern Territory (South Kurils).

Further, while making clear his differences with the United States on such issues as the enlargement of NATO and the missile defense program, Putin has sought to engage Washington in a far-reaching dialogue, including an early approach to the Bush administration. The future of the Russian–American relationship will hinge partly on whether progress can be resumed on nuclear reduction, the Senate’s ratification of START II, and the commencement of negotiations over START III. The missile defense issue will also require intensive negotiations.

### Assessing the Relationship

At some point, Russia will reemerge as a major power. It has the educated population, the resources, and the geopolitical position to enable it to restore its regional and global power. No doubt for the foreseeable future its first priority will be cementing relations with former parts of the Soviet Union as well as with neighbors in the Middle East. Yet it will also be eager to reach meaningful agreements with the United States that will match those with China. As noted, its relations with Beijing are currently good as a result of common apprehensions relating to the United States. In the long run, however, a comprehensive relationship with the United States involving greater economic interactions and strategic accommodation may be the most meaningful for Russia’s stability and advancement. The United States and Russia remain the two major nuclear powers, and their efforts to harmonize their strategic policies are likely to have a beneficial impact on the world at large.

Thus, in addition to negotiating intensively on such matters, the United States should take seriously the desire of Moscow to play a larger role in Asia. It should demonstrate a willingness to bring Russia into various concerts—official and unofficial—that pertain to ongoing issues. The time to encourage a responsible Russian foreign policy is now, prior to its ascendancy. No one can predict with assurance either the political or the economic system under which a revitalized Russia will operate, but current American policies are likely to have some influence on those matters.

### The Korean Peninsula

There is reason for hope that a new course has been launched, however uncertain the ultimate outcome. ROK President Kim Dae-jung deserves great credit for opening the door to the North via his Sunshine Policy. Given the progressive decisions of Kim Jong-il and his
top officials that economic change was essential if the North were to survive, that policy proved to be well timed. At this point the issue is not whether change will take place, but the extent and timing of that change. Naturally, the DPRK elite, having observed developments in Russia and China, want maximum political continuity.

Kim Jong-il’s trips to China, his interest in ROK investments, the expansion of programs designed to train young North Koreans in a variety of fields abroad, and a host of other developments—including the establishment of diplomatic relations with a number of European and Asian nations—all testify to the fact that changes are under way. Naturally, one should be cautious. There were times in the past when promising signs emerged only to be abandoned later.

Moreover, South Korea is experiencing the onset of problems ranging from deepening economic troubles to corruption scandals. Kim Dae-jung is facing charges that he has neglected domestic policies for foreign policy and that, in dealing with the North, he has not insisted on reciprocity or pursued advances on the strategic front. North Korea still represents a military threat, it is asserted, a fact adduced from its military budget and the disposition of its armed forces.

Assessing the Relationship

In this setting, U.S. policies have been and will continue to be of critical importance. On balance, recent trends have been promising. U.S.–Republic of Korea relations under the Clinton and Kim Dae-jung administrations were stronger at the official level than at any other time since World War II. Issues such as the revision of the Status of Forces Agreement and continuing economic protectionism existed, to be sure, but on the broad policy front, a consensus was fashioned, and Kim’s policies toward the North and U.S. negotiations with the North were interwoven. Indeed, for a time at the end of the Clinton administration, it appeared that a concrete agreement on missile development and sales might be reached with the DPRK, enabling Clinton to visit Pyongyang in preparation to taking steps toward diplomatic relations. Final agreements, however, were not reached, and the issues have been bequeathed to the Bush administration.

Bush officials have intimated that a tougher policy toward the North will be pursued, demanding reciprocity and accountability. It can be presumed, however, that negotiations will be continued. Given uncertainties about the capability of the North’s facilities to make the use of nuclear power a viable option, the KEDO program may be reconsidered or it may go forward. This is one of the first issues that will confront the Bush administration. In any case, efforts will be made to maintain rapport with the ROK on various fronts. Indeed, President Kim’s recent visit to Washington can be taken as an expression of the joint desire to underline the U.S.–ROK alliance. Anti-Americanism has grown in South Korea, the product of rising nationalism and the airing of such events as the Nogun-ri incident. Yet an overwhelming number of South Koreans support the continuance of the strategic alliance.

If and when unification occurs—and it seems unlikely in the foreseeable future, barring a collapse of the North—a wide range of issues will be opened. Thus it is essential to discuss future as well as present military options with the South Koreans. Moreover, the Korean issue has been subject to in-depth discussions in various trilateral and quadrilateral contexts (U.S.–Japan–ROK and the Four-Party Talks), which should be continued and expanded. At the same time, unofficial as well as official dialogue should be promoted at the bilateral level between the United States and the DPRK. In a period when the North is considering its options and appears receptive to certain new approaches, the United States should not refrain from entering into contacts at many levels.
Southeast Asia

Although Northeast Asia represents the sub-region of greatest significance to the United States from economic, political, and strategic points of view, Southeast and South Asia cannot be neglected. Southeast Asia presents a worrisome picture. In this region, there are a number of faltering and failing states whose problems threaten to spill over and affect the region as a whole.

Indonesia

It is clear that the most serious problem relates to Indonesia, the largest and potentially most influential country in the region. Indonesia is adrift. A legacy of corruption and institutional weakness, reinforced by economic problems and inept leadership, continues to cast its shadow over the present. The future is unpredictable. Will the military return to power? Will separatism be constrained, or will it continue to exhibit potency, threatening the existence of the state? Can adequate leaders be found and then be sustained by public support? Optimists believe that, despite its travails, Indonesia is moving from an authoritarian–centralized system to a more open, decentralized order that will serve the interests of its citizens.

In any case, outside governments, especially those that are not neighbors, can probably do little to help Indonesia in making the critical decisions—political and economic—that it must make. Yet carefully constructed programs of economic assistance, combined with the provision of support for the training of young Indonesians in such fields as law, legislative performance, and advanced technology, may be useful. In this respect, the United States should work with others rather than seek to play a strongly visible solo role. Assuming a very low posture in the East Timor events was unquestionably a wise approach on the part of the United States. In any case, Indonesia is only the most prominent illustration of the current fragility of Asia’s open societies.

The Philippines, Cambodia, and Singapore

The Philippines has just been through a political earthquake that forced its president to resign after being confronted by “people power.” Cambodia’s future remains uncertain despite the survival of the fragile Hun Sen-Ranariddh coalition and some advances made on both the economic and political fronts. Only Singapore among the region’s more open societies appears to be stable. Many would argue, however, that this city-state is not completely democratic.

Assessing the Relationships

Should the United States or possibly Americans at nonofficial levels undertake to explore with their Asian counterparts contemporary problems of democratic societies (not excluding the United States) and possible approaches that might bring some positive gains? Should the United States be involved in in-depth discussions of “humanitarian intervention,” including a discussion of the rules that could govern such actions and an estimate of both the benefits and costs? In the new age of interdependence and at a time when no final answers are available about how to live with globalization, it is not possible to live solely with the conventions of the past.

India as the Focus of South Asia

India is undergoing changes of potentially great significance. It is experiencing rapid economic development and at the same time is seeking to achieve recognition beyond the subcontinent, especially in East Asia.
For many reasons the United States should abandon its relative neglect of India and seek closer relations, politically as well as economically. The United States shares key political values with the Indian government. As events in Silicon Valley demonstrate, moreover, we can move forward together with respect to the IT Revolution. India is destined to be a country of increasing power and regional significance, and that can be beneficial in bringing about a broader balance of power throughout Asia.

Conclusions

The period ahead offers great opportunities for as well as significant challenges to American interactions with Asia. First, the battle on behalf of internationalism must be fought and won at home. Although they are a minority, a certain number of Americans, including some individuals of influence, are championing a form of neo-isolationism, urging that the United States withdraw from extensive involvement except when U.S. interests are involved; and in those situations, they often favor unilateral action. Certainly it is appropriate to avoid indiscriminate involvement in crisis situations abroad. Our interests as well as those of our allies should be carefully considered. Further, there are many forms and degrees of involvement, military and nonmilitary, unilateral and multilateral. Always prior to involvement, moreover, we should calculate both the costs and the chances of success. In addition, American arrogance and insistence that every nation follow the American way must be modulated and controlled. In the final analysis, the United States cannot have a flourishing economy and a stable polity in the midst of a chaotic world. Our domestic well-being is inextricably connected with the broad course of international events.

It is incumbent on the United States to pursue two broad courses of action: create coalitions of power and assist in maintaining a balance of power. We should actively support multilateralism in its varied forms while continuing to improve our bilateral ties. One important form of multilateralism is the creation of ad hoc coalitions dedicated to resolving or containing specific problems. In supporting a balance of power, the United States must be prepared to accept, indeed encourage, greater commitments by its allies to increase their participation in decision making and to present independent initiatives.

Moreover, the precise nature of the U.S. military program should be subject to reexamination as events—both technological and political—dictate. The United States should be careful not to send the wrong signals by taking premature action that might mislead both our allies and others.

The course of American foreign policy in Asia will never be simple or free of controversy. Complex issues require continual reexamination and a willingness to change when new circumstances warrant change. On balance, however, the United States, by virtue of its interests and power, will remain the most prominent actor on the Pacific-Asian stage in the decades immediately ahead. Working closely with others, it can help to build a future that holds promise for the cause of peace and development.

About the Author

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