

Comment

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1. Overall Evaluation of Paper

This paper analyzes in depth the facts and clarifies extremely accurately in a balanced fashion U.S. policy toward Southeast Asia. In particular, the following points were considered important. The commentator agrees with and has learned much from these:

- (a) Clinton's foreign policy has been characterized by a linkage between the issue of revitalization of the domestic U.S. economy and Asian policy.
- (b) The new American policy has prompted Southeast Asia to move toward liberalization of trade and investment and toward regional security forums.
- (c) Future American engagement in Asia will probably continue to be based on the U.S.-Japan security cooperation.
- (d) It is necessary to understand the features of American society and America's political system which form the backdrop to the formation of America's foreign policy.

2. Basic Problems

If any problem still remains, it is still the question of how to gauge Clinton's foreign policy. This problem, as the author himself recognizes, relates to the questions of why the initial directions taken by the Clinton administration in its high profile Asian policy have been lost or have failed to be pursued in 1994. The "self-indictment" in the famous memo by Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Winston Lord, the overhaul of U.S. policy toward China, including everything from retraction of the conditions on extension of China's most favored nation status to resumption of military exchanges, the resumption of the dialogue with the Myanmar military regime, etc. all represent fundamental turnabouts in policy directions. The meaning of Clinton's foreign policy itself is once again being called into question.

The author suggests that this is due to the excessive pressure exercised by the U.S. in Asia in pursuit of its own agenda, problems in the policy-coordination process inside the American government, and the lack of understanding of Asia about the features of American society and the U.S. political system. This might explain part of the problem, but the commentator does not completely agree where the problem ultimately derives from.

3. Crux of Problem

The commentator goes further and questions, rather, how "unique" the "new"

Clinton foreign policy strategy of seeking to solve the problem of the domestic economic revitalization of the U.S. by tapping into the dynamism of the Asia Pacific region is. Wasn't this issue raised, though in a different form, during the preceding Bush administration? That is, giving my conclusion first, isn't the strategy a common approach to the "objective conditions" which the U.S. faces after the end of the Cold War?

The commentator points out that at the inception of the Bush administration in 1989, then Secretary of State James Baker spoke of the need for a new mechanism for multilateral cooperation among the nations of the Pacific Rim using the name of a "Pacific Community." This was at a speech given at the Asia Society on June 27. Baker had also already stated to the effect that "we are going to see in Asia the necessity for closer coordination with ASEAN and other regional groups—and perhaps even new institutional arrangements" in his testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on January 17 of that same year.

The first APEC conference was held in Canberra just four months after the speech at the Asia Society. APEC is considered to have been first proposed by Prime Minister Hawke of Australia in January 1989. The relation to the Baker testimony of the same month and the events leading to the same are still not clear, but whatever the case the Bush administration had since its inception viewed a "new institutional arrangements with ASEAN and other regional groups" as essential to the Post-Cold War order in Asia. It affirmed the participation and commitment of the U.S. in regional cooperation in the area as a "Pacific nation."

One more thing which should be noted here is that a stance toward expanding the just established U.S.-Canada Free Trade Agreement to Mexico and to the western hemisphere as a whole was suggested as early as the Baker testimony, though in a vague form. The later appearance of NAFTA became the biggest factor prompting the formalization of APEC and the establishment of the AFTA by ASEAN, but it may be said that the fact that both the NAFTA and APEC were first conceived at the start of the Bush administration (the former was signed in December 1992) shows the common nature of the problems and common strategic objectives of the Bush and Clinton administrations.

The "common nature of the problems" refers to the relative decline in the global position of the American economy, which had been fostered during the long Cold War, with the end of the Cold War. Western Europe and Japan have boosted their own positions in the global economy. The former has been consolidating the common market and is moving to expand this to Europe as a whole. Asia, which had been considered a hinterland of Japan, has been establishing an independent position for itself through dynamic economic growth.

The strategy for dealing with this problem has been to keep competitive, high tech industries and the service and intellectual property sectors in the country, move production in other less competitive industrial sectors overseas, and increase trade opportunities in overseas markets. The biggest target overseas is Asia with its remarkably high rate of growth. The strategy is now being pursued to open up the markets in Asia using as a foothold the newly opened trade and investment markets gained by NAFTA.

If this strategy has been pushed much more clearly in the Clinton administration,

this was because the Bush administration had been shouldered with the task of bringing the final curtain down on the Cold War with the then Soviet Union, while the Clinton administration was able to take the stance of giving clear priority to the economy as the first president elected after the end of the Cold War.

The range of choices available to any administration taking office after the end of the Cold War is very narrow. There will probably be no basic change in the strategic emphasis on the economic priorities and the strategic objective of seeking an end to America's relative economic decline through opening up of markets in Asia.

4. Factors Behind Collapse of Clinton Foreign Policy

What then were the factors behind the collapse of Clinton's foreign policy?

The foreign policy of the Clinton administration is based on three policy objectives: the afore-mentioned domestic economic revitalization, the reorganization of the military for Post-Cold War realities, and the global spread of democracy and market economies (these were formulated during the election campaign and have been frequently reaffirmed after the start of the administration). These represent the economic, military, and political stances taken by the world's last remaining superpower, the U.S., in its foreign policy as it strives to maintain its leadership in the world. All other administrations have probably also had these as policy objectives. The weight accorded to each, however, naturally differs. As everyone is aware, the Clinton administration, the first Democratic administration in the executive office in a long while, has pushed "democracy and human rights" to the forefront.

If we assume that there has been no great change in foreign policy objectives, in particular, priorities, among the different administrations in the Post-Cold War period, then the problem lies less in the way policies have been formulated and more in how they have been implemented.

Have the problems in implementation arisen from the personal style of President Clinton and the lack of experience of the Democrats arising from their long absence from the White House? These factors undeniably come into play, but the commentator believes rather that the problem lies in the administration's ignoring restrictive conditions in its rush to pursue its three policy objectives. In other words, there is the paradox of the U.S. forgetting about its dwindling power as it tries to stop the relative decline of the American economy.

The specific restrictive conditions which should be considered are, first, the limit of available resources and, second, the changes in international relations.

With the current account and fiscal deficits piling up, defense budgets and foreign aid budgets, which may be said to be prime tools of foreign policy, have been slashed, thereby inevitably weakening American say in world matters. For example, even if the U.S. repeats its pledges over a continued American military presence, Southeast Asia, which has witnessed the pull-out from the Philippine bases, cannot afford to place complete credence in those commitments.

On the other hand, there have been changes in the international relations of the U.S. not only with Europe and Japan, but also with Southeast Asia and the rest of the Asian countries. The flood of Japanese investment in Southeast Asia which followed the appreciation of the yen in the late 1980s brought about rapid growth, both quantitatively and qualitatively, in the economies of the ASEAN countries and fostered

a sense of confidence among them. The start of moves toward AFTA, wherein ASEAN is trying to set up its own free trade zone in advance of APEC, and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), wherein countries are trying to build a new framework of security involving leading countries outside the region, are reflections of this.

The Clinton administration tried to quickly recover lost ground by demanding an even playing field, that is, equal treatment, even with respect to developing countries, and achievement of numerical targets in opening up of markets with the aim of domestic economic revitalization. It mixed issues of "human rights" and "democracy" with issues of trade and threatened the use of sanctions. When considering the restrictive conditions which the U.S. faces, such a strategy clearly was to be ineffective not only with respect to giant markets such as China, but even with respect to the countries of Southeast Asia.

The excessive stress on "democracy" among the three objectives of Clinton's foreign policy no doubt reflects the diversity of American society, but when contradictions and conflicts occur among the three objectives, pragmatically speaking, it is only natural that emphasis be given to "domestic economic revitalization" as it is of the utmost priority and that the other objectives be placed on the back burner. American businesses focusing on entry into the markets of China, Vietnam, and Myanmar have become increasingly vocal in their opposition and as a result the U.S. has been forced to tone down its demands for improvement of human rights.

The commentator, however, will not deny that American demands for opening up markets have had a positive effect in pushing the Southeast Asian countries, which have already past their infancy, to discard protectionism (however, the pressure for a uniform pace of market-opening steps is unproductive). Further, when considering U.S. policy toward Southeast Asia, the commentator has no intention of justifying the reactive, opaque method of making policy in Japan.