Coming from Washington D.C., I will try to give the Washington perspective—which is not necessarily the U.S. perspective—on a few issues of key security importance for the Asia Pacific region.

The first issue I would like to mention is alliance management. The main Pacific Asian allies of the United States—Australia, Japan and South Korea—have adjusted rather well to shifts in U.S. policy in the past few years, especially since 9/11, and certainly better than America’s European allies. Australia and Japan not only have maintained close relations, but have also succeeded in forging even stronger ties in the course of dealing with key issues, including terrorism, Iraq and proliferation security. South Korea in the meantime has witnessed the rise of anti-Americanism, though I think this has as much to do with Korea’s internal dynamics, such as generational change, improvement in inter-Korea relations and the electoral successes of progressive parties, than with U.S. policies. On a government level, ties have remained fairly consistent and strong.

As for the rise of anti-Americanism in Asia generally, one might ask how it differs from that in the Middle East or in Europe, to the extent that such a sentiment exists. We talk about anti-Americanism as an expression of anti-Western sentiment, anti-Bush sentiment or bona fide anti-Americanism as such. In the case of Asia, even though it is very difficult to generalize, I think it is a combination of all three. The difference from other continents may be, whereas in the Middle East it is more anti-Westernism, and in Europe more issue or personality specific, in the case of Asia it is a combination of both, with the caveat that anti-Americanism is not as deeply rooted as in the Middle East and not as issue-specific as in Europe. In addition, I think there is what I would call the familiarity factor. Parts of Asia have been too familiar, too dependent on and too close to the United States for too long, requiring the assertion of psychological independence from the USA.

North Korea is another issue that is important to the region. I think it is reasonable to say that a Democratic administration would not be any less firm than the Republicans about opposing North Korea becoming a state with nuclear weapons. But if past experience and present rhetoric are any indication, a Democratic president might be more receptive to the idea of U.S.-North Korean bilateral negotiations than a Republican one. It is true that North Korea used to, and still does, prefer to talk with the United States on a one-on-one basis versus in a multilateral context. That is one aspect of the issue that could change with a change of the administration, and North Korea is more than likely considering this. However, Pyongyang seems to have learned to handle multilateral negotiation, and even to enjoy doing it. In fact, North Korea may believe that in this forum it is winning the propaganda and persuasion game. It is trying very hard, and with some success, to demonstrate that it wants to be reasonable and cooperative and that it is the United States that is the obstacle to the amicable resolution of the issue. Critics of the Bush administration say that because it has been neither willing to use the carrot nor the stick effectively, despite its firm stance, North Korea’s nuclear capability has grown on its watch. If that is the case, the next administration, whichever it is, will have a much more difficult task dealing with the issue.

Turning to China, in the past presidential election, that is, in 2000, candidate Bush and the Republican Party had a rather negative attitude toward China, advocating a tougher and more stringent policy approach. Although the Bush administration had a rather rocky start in its relations with China, especially with the case of the EP-3 aircraft incident, President Bush quickly mended fences with China, and now China and the United States have a very cordial and cooperative relationship. China,
for its part, was nervous about the prospect of a Bush presidency before the election. Today, China
seems more reassured that its relations with the United States will continue to be good, regardless of
who is elected in the next election. China needs U.S. cooperation in dealing with the Taiwan issue.
The United States needs Chinese cooperation in dealing with the North Korean nuclear issue.
However, there is no indication that either Washington or Beijing is directly linking the issues.
Whatever linkage exists is kept only implicit. Nonetheless, because of these two important issues on
which China and the U.S. need mutual back-scratching, they cannot afford to have an estranged, much
less hostile, relationship.

A related subject is China-Japan relations. Traditionally, Japan and China have regarded each other as
rivals. In recent years, the sense of rivalry escalated with the rapid growth of the Chinese economy and
the decade-long stagnation of the Japanese economy, although we’re hearing now that recovery is at
hand. China is a nuclear power and a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council and is heading
toward becoming a regional superpower. Japan, with its advanced technology, still formidable
economic power and considerable nuclear capabilities, albeit for peaceful purposes, could become a
nuclear power at a moment’s notice. China strongly objects to the appearance of Japan’s homage to its
past, as shown by the frequent visits of Prime Minister Koizumi to the Yasukuni Shrine. Japan is
forging an even stronger alliance with the United States and has joined it to embark in earnest on its
missile-defense program. China, for its part, is moving fast and actively to bring the rest of East Asia
as well as Southeast Asia into its fold. All the while, economic interdependence has been growing
between the two countries to the extent that one depends on the other for their continued prosperity.
Nonetheless, increasingly Asian countries will be subjected to the crosscurrents between the United
States and Japan on the one hand, and China on the other, certainly presenting a dilemma that is much
greater than that faced by countries such as Poland and Spain, stuck between a Franco-German Europe
on one side and America on the other.

During the campaign of 2000, the Republican party of then-candidate Bush clearly sided with Japan
vis-à-vis China in this rivalry, criticizing the Clinton administration for being too friendly toward
China at the expense of Japan. Today, even though Japan is one of the closest allies of the United
States, the administration is carefully cultivating its relationship with China. Again, China has no
reason to fear that things will be different after the coming election, regardless of the outcome.

Finally, let me make a few comments on the war on terror, the Middle East and Iraq, issues in which
Asia has so much at stake. Many countries in Asia are concerned about how the Iraqi situation is
evolving and how the war on terror is going. They also have a keen interest in past, present and future
U.S. policy toward the Middle East, especially regarding Israel-Palestinian relations. What happens in
Iraq is of interest and concern to Pacific Asian countries for several reasons. A number of them have
sent or are sending coalition troops to Iraq. The United States is preoccupied with Iraq to the extent
that its attention to and presence in Asia are being affected. American troops in East Asia are being
diverted to the Iraq effort, as are those in Europe. The war in Iraq also has a decisive impact on the war
on terrorism, and many Asian countries are directly affected by terrorism in their respective societies.

Let me say this in the United States’ favor. Despite the stream of unfavorable publicity about the
behaviour of U.S. personnel toward prisoners in Iraq, we should note that it is the U.S. media itself
that has been at the forefront of exposing the abuses. More importantly, I haven’t seen any criticism in
the United States that these reports, which clearly seem to have hurt the interest of the United States
for the moment, have been made. This is what distinguishes the United States from most other
countries and which I think will save it from infamy and disgrace. In fact, I think this reflects the
strength of the United States and which, if handled right, can enable it to reclaim its moral and
ideological leadership in international relations, which is essential for success in the current effort.

As for the U.S. presidential election, Pacific Asian countries recognize that they are passengers
together with people in other countries on a ship that will determine their fate, and that the American
voters are selecting the captain who will steer that ship. They can only watch and see if the American
voters are wise enough to elect the best person.
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