

US Elections in 2012 and the Future of US Asia-Pacific Policy*

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Before getting into the core of this lecture I would like to start with some background factors and changes to the US society which I think are affecting American politics right now. Following that, I will speak analytically about the upcoming election. At the end I will touch on what the implications are for the US Asia-Pacific policy with a few specifics about Korea.

The first thing I want to mention about the background is that Americans are essentially distrustful of power. From the time of their revolution they wanted to reduce the power of government. The Constitution was drafted to ensure that there would not be a concentration of power. That is why the US has the famous separation of powers system of the executive, legislative, and judiciary branches with checks and balances on each other. The congress was divided into the two houses of the Senate and House of Representatives to further decentralize power. They divided the country into a federal system so that states would have significant power. This is a system that was quite effective for the eighteenth and nineteenth century, but in the age of globalization it makes it very difficult for the US to make quick policy changes.

Another background factor is separation of church and state. This is a very important element of the US political system. The US was a haven for people that were persecuted for religious reasons in their own countries. However, this is an area of some tension as the religiosity of the American people is quite high.

There is also a strong tradition of isolationism that lasted throughout the nineteenth century and up to World War II. The US was catapulted into World War II and a position of power ever since. Unlike European countries, the US is not used to international

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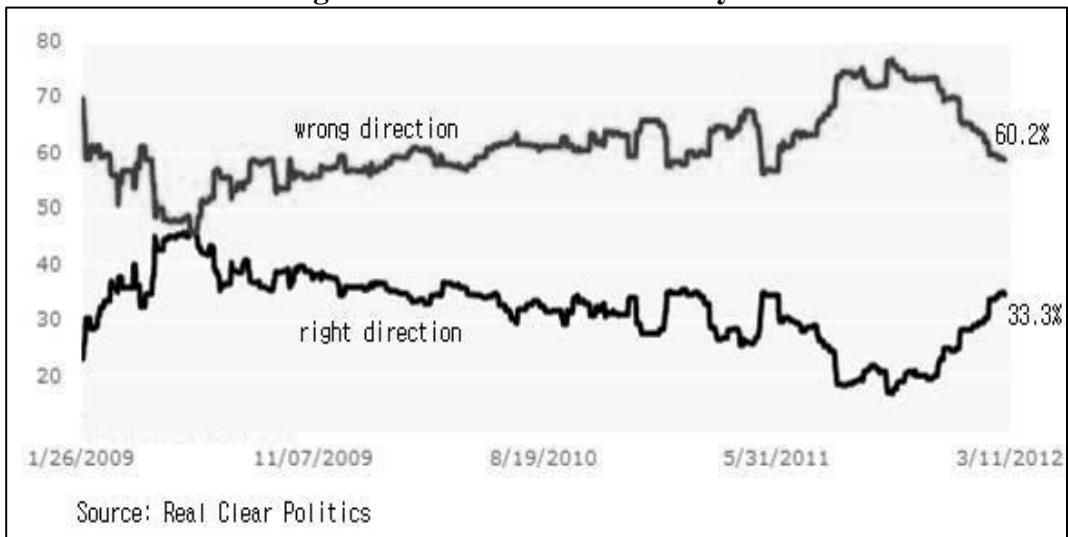
system of several competing equal powers. It was either isolated in its own hemisphere or it was the global leader. Now, in the age of globalization the US is facing a different situation with the rise of China, the coming rise of India, and the integration of Europe. The US now has to act in a way that more compatible with a multi-polar system. The values of the international system will be of increasingly shared values, rather than American values.

Free market orientation and its perception of itself as a middle class, rather than a society with elites and nobles, are also strong features of the American identity. All of these things are characteristics of a belief system that has an impact on the political life of the US.

The American Angst and Sources of Insecurity

Right now there is a pessimistic mood in the US. Figure 1 shows how Americans feel about the direction the country is moving. This is a gauge that is often used to show the degree of political happiness or unhappiness in the society. At the end of President Bush's term (January 2009) the percent of people who thought the country was moving in the wrong direction was very high. After President Obama's election there was a brief period when people felt comfortable about direction of the country. That changed very quickly and there was a significant decline in the number of people who thought the country was going in the right direction.

Figure 1. Direction of Country



The number of people who thought the country was moving in the wrong direction peaked while the US was having a large debate over the debt ceiling from July to September 2011. Since then, certain features of the economy have improved and people are feeling a little better about the situation. There is still a very large gap between the people who are happy and unhappy. This is a reflection of the economic crisis that is continuing in many ways.

There are a lot of sources of insecurity that are behind this pessimistic feeling in the US, but it is closely linked with the performance of the economy. The US has stagnant income growth, the unemployment rate is still above 8%, there has been a massive loss of wealth compared to five years ago, and the housing market is in significant disarray.

There is a significant threat to the American perception of being a middle class society. All the measures of income inequality basically show the highest degree of inequality in several decades. This is reflected in the Occupy Wall Street Movement.

There is also a large wave of immigration affecting US society. Currently, about 12% of the population in the US is foreign born. This is the highest rate in over a hundred years. It is particularly high in the coastal areas with 24% of the population in California being foreign born. Many of the people are from Mexico, but there are also

quite a few from China and other areas. Nearly half of the growth in population comes from immigration. Immigration and diversity are usually considered strengths of the US, but also with each wave of immigration there has been quite a bit of social tension.

All of these things are a threat to the American identity, traditional values, and the ability for Americans to control their own lives. People often think of globalization as something the US was forcing on the rest of the world. But from an American perspective globalization is something that is happening to them and it is a source of great stress.

Political Divides

In the past, both parties had moderate wings with significant overlap of views. With the exception of foreign policy, this is no longer the case and the political divide has considerably sharpened. Most of the significant differences between the two parties reflect their views about the role of government. Republicans generally favor small government with less regulation and Democrats favor government action to address social needs. Societal problems around the health care system, the education system, and transfer payments in general are sources of great tension.

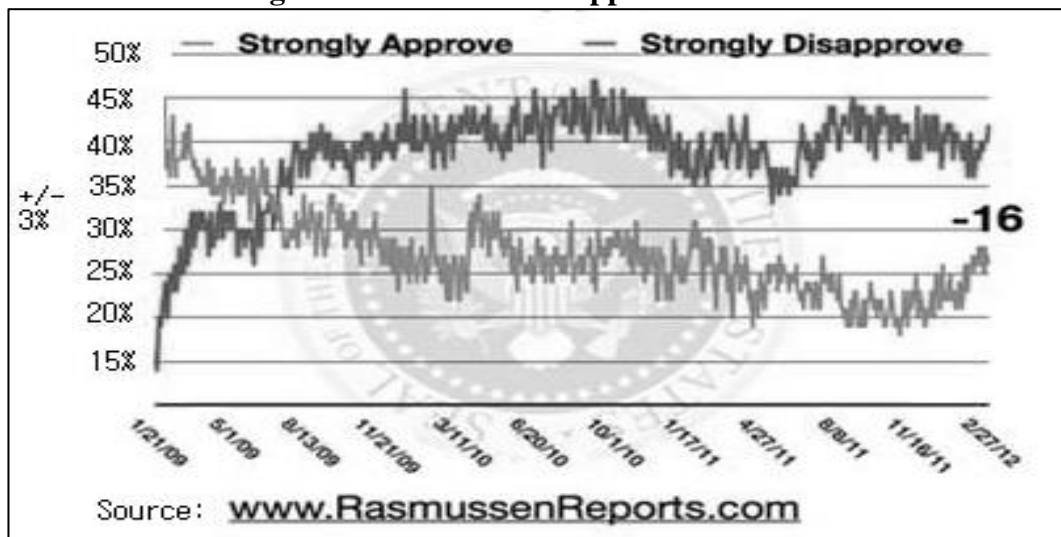
Social values have also been a matter of great political concern. The Republican Party tries to create an identity of being the party of traditional values, religiosity, and constitutional rights, including gun rights. Democrats on the other hand identify with progressive values such as reproduction rights for women and gay rights.

We often hear of the divide between blue and red states. The blue states are states that vote Democratic and the red states vote Republican. However, looking at the political division at the state level is somewhat misleading. It becomes a fuzzier picture when we look at voting patterns at the district level. In many ways it is really an urban rural split. Urban centers generally vote Democratic and rural areas tend to vote Republican.

When we look at the unemployment in the US we see that the higher areas of unemployment such as Michigan, California, and Oregon overlap with the blue states and areas with lower unemployment overlap with the red states. In the red states people are unhappy with their taxes being paid to support unemployed workers in other areas.

Figure 2 shows that President Obama's approval rating has been quite low. It started very high when he first took office, but quickly went down. It went up briefly after the killing of Osama bin Laden, but has been very low ever since. Now, as the economy improves his approval ratings are starting to go up.

Figure 2. Presidential Approval Index

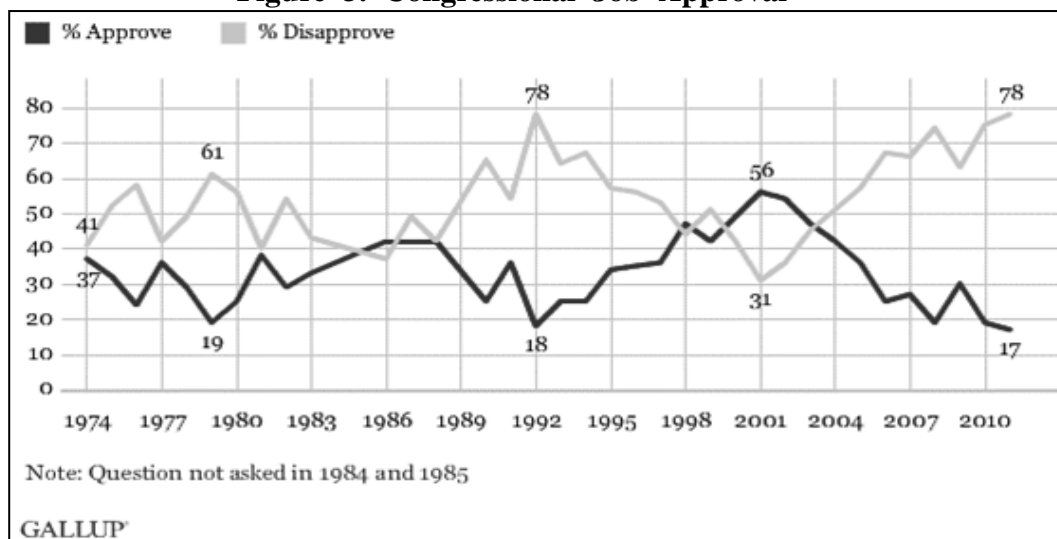


This is not a good picture for the president. A few months ago, any political analyst would have said that a president with an approval rating this low would not have any chance to be reelected. However, he actually has a pretty good chance because the Republicans have not come up with very good opposition.

The president's approval rating is low, but the approval of congress is even lower. Figure 3 shows the approval rating of Congress over a 30 year period. In the early 90's there was extreme disapproval that led to the Republican victory in 1994. Then we saw

a period of greater bipartisanship when the budget deficit was coming down. Ever since the dot-com bust, the disapproval rating of Congress has gone up and the approval rating has gone down. This does not help the Republicans.

Figure 3. Congressional Job Approval



The disapproval is mostly centered on the partisanship in Congress. In many ways the political system rewards partisanship, but it also punishes it. Ever since the budget deficit crisis in August 2011, incumbents in Congress have been worried about their reelection and there is now more of a tendency to try to work together despite the rhetoric that we hear.

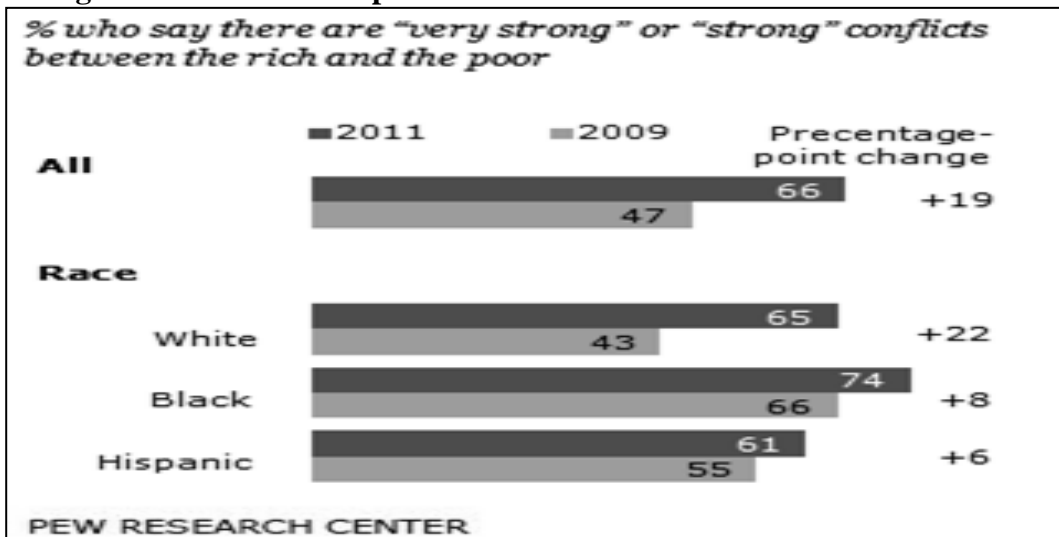
A lot of people are very unhappy and at the beginning of the economic crisis they were very scared. As soon as the situation appeared to be a little more normal all the anger came out. This was reflected very much in the 2010 election, but the level of anger that we saw cannot be maintained for very long. It is, however, still reflected in the disapproval of Congress and the president. It is also reflected with the rise of the Tea Party and the Occupy Wall Street Movement.

The Tea Party started as a reaction to the Trouble Asset Relief Program (TARP). At the time there was a decline in personal savings and wealth. Americans saw that the government was spending a lot of money, but they did not know where that money was

going. The effects of the stimulus were not very visible and many of the people that were very angry formed the Tea Party. At the time of the 2010 congressional elections the Tea Party was very popular, but since then public support has declined. Although the influence of Tea Party has waned, the general feelings that prompted its creation remain.

The Tea Party is largely a movement on the right and the Occupy Wall Street is a movement on the left. Occupy Wall Street was a shorter term phenomenon and less politically potent that was driven by the division between the rich and poor. In 2009, about half the people in the US felt there was a conflict between the rich and poor, and now two thirds of people do (Figure 4). The black population has felt this way for quite some time, but there has been a significant increase in the white population that is concerned with this divide. Even though the movement is now declining, the social inequities that gave it life remain and are very important in politics today. We will see efforts by the president and his opponents to try to use this situation in their campaigns.

Figure 4. Public Perception of Conflict between Rich and Poor



2012 Election

On November 6, 2012, there will not only be a presidential election. There will also be congressional and gubernatorial elections as well as many city and municipality

elections. The greatest attention is focused on the presidential election, but the other elections are also very important.

The Senate works on a basis of each senator having six year terms and one-third of Senate seats are up for election every two years. Democrats currently hold 23 of the 33 seats that are up for election this cycle. This makes it statistically more likely for the Democrats to lose more seats than the Republicans. The Democrats currently have a slight majority in the Senate, but there is a high probability that it could change to a Republican controlled Senate after the election.

After the 2010 election the Republicans gained a very strong majority in the House of Representatives, but there is a lot of dissatisfaction. The Democrats are likely to pick up seats in the House, but they would have to pick up a lot of seats to gain a majority. There is a significant chance that the House and the Senate will be Republican controlled following the election. If President Obama is reelected, then this will make his life much more difficult.

In presidential election President Obama has several key strengths. First, as the incumbent he has greater name recognition than any of his opponents. Second, he has the ability to control the media to some extent through his announcements and activities, which are always covered by the media. Unlike in the last election, he now has the value of experience. Obama has a very successful record of fundraising, but in the upcoming election it does not look like he will have the same advantage that he had in 2008.

The president does also have some weaknesses as the incumbent. He now has to run on his record. He was a clean slate in the last election and could talk about overcoming the divisions in the country and bringing change to Washington. Everybody could believe him because he did not have a long record. Now, he has to stand on what he has done in his first term and of course the most important thing will be the economy. The improvement in the economy over the last few months has helped him a great deal, but it probably has come too early. The most important thing is the last three months

leading up to the election. If the economy is moving up in the last three months, then people do not want to change the president. If this recovery does not continue, then he will be in a lot of trouble.

Another key concern for Obama is who will vote. In 2008, Obama motivated a lot of first time voters. Many of those voters believed that change was going to occur and that Obama was a new kind of president. Now, quite a few of those people feel disillusioned and the expectations that a lot of liberals who voted for him have not been met. There are some doubts about whether he can motivate those people to vote for him a second time.

The Republican challenger is being decided through the primary process. The primary system in the US is very confusing. It is not a system that is in our constitution. Rather, it was created in a hodgepodge way. The individual states and parties have their own rules. Some delegates are chosen by state conventions, others are chosen by caucuses, and some are chosen by primary elections. In some states only members of the party can vote and in other states it is open to everybody. It is really a very complicated system.

In the last election, the Democrats had a huge fight between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. Clinton continued to contend late into the primary even though it was clear that Obama would be the nominee. Many people thought that that would be bad for the party, but as we know Obama won the election. This time the primary is only on the Republican side.

The problem for the Republicans is that they do not have a candidate that motivates the Republican voters. Mitt Romney has the most delegates and it looks like there is no way that he can lose. He is not, however, winning in a manner that motivates his party. He is organized, has a lot of money, and can deal with all the other contenders, but he has not been able to get more than 40% of the vote.

It is important to remember that the American election is not decided by who

receives the most individual votes. It is decided by which candidate receives the most electoral votes which are allocated at the state level. It can be viewed as 50 different elections and each state has a weight that depends on the number of senators and representatives it has.

On a map the blue states do not look like they represent very much of the country, but they are generally the more heavily populated states and have more electoral votes. The red states look they are a huge part of the country, but aside from Texas they are the least populated states. The focus of the election will be mostly on the ten to eleven battleground states that could go either way. Every state has to be looked at individually to see how the election is likely to turn out. The candidates will look at different electoral maps to formulate strategies on where they should focus their campaigns.

Just as there are several battleground states, there are also battleground demographic groups. Figure 5 shows the 2008 exit poll results and voter preference polls for the upcoming electing broken down by ethnicity. It shows that Obama is weak with white voters and extremely strong among black voters. Democrats have traditionally been strong among Hispanic voters, but their support has decreased slightly.

Figure 5. Vote by Ethnicity

| | <i>2008 voters exit polls</i> | | | <i>Oct 2011 registered voters</i> | | |
|------------|-----------------------------------|---------------|-------------|---------------------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| | Obama | McCain | Diff | Obama | Romney | Diff |
| | % | % | | % | % | |
| All voters | 53 | 46 | D+7 | 48 | 48 | even |
| White | 43 | 55 | R+12 | 38 | 58 | R+20 |
| Black | 95 | 4 | D+91 | 95 | 3 | D+92 |
| Hispanic | 67 | 31 | D+36 | 60 | 37 | D+23 |

Pew Research Center, October 2011

The youth vote is an area where Obama was strong in 2008. At that time two thirds of 18-29 year olds voted for Obama. McCain was the oldest candidate ever and Obama was one of the youngest which may have skewed the youth vote. It will be critical area for the president to continue to try to appeal to.

A majority of voters are women, so they are an important demographic to focus on. They have been a strong element of support for the Democrats. However, the percentage of women voting for Democrats in the 2010 congressional election was lower than in the 2008 election. It will probably go back up in the coming election and there was a recent New York Times article suggesting that Obama is focusing his strategy towards women voters. He is benefiting by taking a stance against some the value issues that the Republican Party has recently been pushing.

The white working class has been an area of weakness for the Democratic Party. In the mid-term elections of 2010 only one-third voted Democratic. The Republicans will continue to try to appeal to this demographic and the Democrats will work to erode the Republican appeal.

At this point I cannot make a prediction on how the election will turn out. In August and September, I thought that Mr. Obama had low prospects of being reelected. Since then, he has had a lot of help from the Republican Party. They have not found a candidate that motivates them and they are going through a very damaging primary process.

It is much too early to say who will prevail and I think it will be a very close election. Of all the Republican candidates, Obama is most afraid of Mitt Romney because he is the least ideological and can attract voters beyond the Republican base. Nevertheless, even among Republicans he is seen as somebody who flip-flops a lot. He has been defined by his opponents in the primary in a way that will hurt him during the general election. The election will basically come down to the economic conditions during the last three months leading up to the election and the ability of each party to motivate their voters.

Implications of the election on the US Asia policy

Foreign policy has generally been an area of consensus. Although this is not true for certain areas, it is certainly true for Asia. As for this region, there was a smooth transition from the Bush administration to the Obama administration. The main issues, including the alliance system and free market, are very strongly supported by both parties. The Obama administration was initially reluctant to get deeply involved in the trade policy, but they did push through the Korea-United States Free Trade Agreement (KORUS FTA). They are also now negotiating very seriously on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Both of those initiatives were started under the Bush administration.

The Obama administration has been largely domestically oriented. Aside from Hillary Clinton, the foreign policy advisors have had a less significant role than in the previous administration. Raul Emanuel, the former chief of staff, had virtually no interest in foreign policy. My personal feeling is that the president is more comfortable working on domestic social issues which he worked on long before becoming president.

When Obama first took office, the administration had a plan on how they were going to move in Asia. Part of that plan was to paint Mr. Obama as the first Pacific president. He was born in Hawaii and lived in Indonesia when he was young. That gave him some credentials that no other president has had.

The administration had a strong focus on China and felt that they had common interests that were underestimated and underappreciated by the Bush administration. They felt that they could appeal to the Chinese and form a partnership on things such as climate change and had an idea of forming a kind of G2. When Obama arrived in China the first time, he found that it was a different environment than he thought and that there were a lot of differences between the US and China making cooperation more difficult than expected.

Japan also turned out to be more difficult than expected. Japanese politics have been very unstable and the Democratic Party of Japan gained power. The Democratic Party of Japan undid an agreement on Okinawa that Obama had hoped to continue.

While China and Japan were disappointing, South Korea looked like a very bright spot in Asia. President Obama formed a good relationship with President Lee Myung-Bak. The Obama administration was very happy to pursue a close relationship with President Lee. Having similar policies with South Korea over North Korean issues allowed them to put off any significant discussions with the North. In fact, the US is always hesitant to negotiate with North Korea because they are so difficult to negotiate with and there can be no positive political outcome.

In the case of Korea, the desire of the Obama administration was to continue to have a close relationship with Korean government. It was very interesting to see the center-left government of the US work so closely with the center-right government of Korea. I do not think there will be much difference even if the political situation in South Korea changes and there is a United Democratic Party government. That being said, the US will be less interested in engagement with the North than a liberal South Korean party will be. However, if Obama wins a second term and both countries have a center-left government, then perhaps we will see something new in terms of engagement with the North.

There has been a lot of emphasis on South East Asia. Most of the emphasis has been picking up initiatives that were started by the Bush administration. This included having an ambassador to ASEAN and more emphasis on ASEAN and regional cooperation. South East Asia looked like a very positive area for the US.

For the first year the Obama administration ignored trade. Then, they discovered that the US could not have an Asia policy without a trade policy. They picked up the TPP from the Bush administration at the Singapore APEC meeting and now it is one of their favorite initiatives.

Regional cooperation has been an area of considerable interest for the Obama administration. This will continue to be the case for any US administration, regardless of who wins the election. This is because the traditional “hub and spoke” system in a multi-polar world is becoming less and less effective. The US has to work through regional organizations. They can be an arena for competition with the Chinese, but they are also an arena where the US can take its own initiative.

There are some very important issues for US foreign policy in general. One of the important issues is that the resources going into both foreign policy and defense are declining. This causes a problem of having to do as much or more than before with fewer resources. The result of this has been that the US is still proposing many initiatives but they are asking other people to resource them.

There is always an issue of managing presidential time and that will come up during the East Asia Summit and APEC meeting. The Democratic National Convention is just before the Vladivostok APEC Summit and President Obama has not made a decision to go the summit. It has been many years since a US president has missed the summit, but his attendance is questionable this year. It is also possible that he will not attend the East Asia Summit.

There is considerable partisanship on Middle East issues. We have seen this over issues involving Iran and Israel. As mentioned earlier, the US is in the midst of changing its foreign policy style. Both the transformational policy of Condoleezza Rice and the Smart Power policy of Hillary Clinton have emphasized partnership and greater cooperation with other countries.

The biggest issue in US foreign policy and in global governance as a whole is how to deal with China. As China’s rise continues there are concerns about how the two great powers will get along. Actually, there are not that many differences, but there is significant mutual distrust. China fears that the US actually opposes its rise and wants to contain it. The US fears that China wants to undercut the system that they created with Europe.

Questions & Answers

Q: How do you and Americans in general react to the Korean opposition party's pledge to repeal or renegotiate the KORUS FTA?

A: First of all not that many Americans know about the KORUS FTA. Among those that do know about it, about half feel that it should be renegotiated or eliminated. There is a strong protectionist element among US policy makers that think the KORUS FTA provided more benefits for Korea than for the United States. However, in general the people in the government and others who are following this agreement are not very worried about the opposition party repealing the agreement.

The KORUS has gone through two changes in the American political system and one change in the Korean political system. It was started by what is now the opposition group in Korea. It is now supported by President Lee, so it is interesting to see that the group that first started it is calling for it to be repealed.

In the United States it started with the Bush administration. The Obama administration was initially not positive about any of the free trade agreements, but now they are supporting them.

Trade is important for America, but the agreement is even more related to America's feeling about its relationship with Korea. It is important to have strategic elements of that relationship that are not based simply on the traditional alliance, but also on the economic area. That is why the FTA received overwhelming support in Congress.

It is very hard for me to imagine that a Korean government would repeal the agreement after it comes into force. The cost of repeal would be so damaging to US-Korean relations, that it would be politically quite costly. I see it as something that people will talk about in an election to appeal to a particular constituency. However, if

they are in the government, then it becomes much harder to do those kinds of things. It should not be a major concern for us.

Q: There are some signs that America is “Coming back to Asia.” If that is the case, then how will the US deal with China?

A: The Obama administration has really emphasized that they are making a “Pivot to Asia,” but in my view the United States never left Asia. The Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Kurt Campbell, is trying to have a broader approach to the region than his predecessor. Part of that has been a greater emphasis on the East Asia Summit and other initiatives throughout the region. Many of these initiatives, however, were started by the Bush administration. There is actually a great deal of continuity.

Overall, systemically there is no other part of the world that is more important to the United States than East Asia. East Asia and South Asia have always had a majority of the world’s population. China, the other great power, is in the region. Asia is the fastest growing area of the world. It has the largest amount of international currency reserves in the world. Excluding Canada and Mexico, America’s largest trading partners are in the Asia-Pacific region and it is a major growth area for American exports.

There is no other area that is as important to the US, but it has suffered in terms of visibility because of the very significant problems in the Middle East. We do have to pay attention to the Middle East, but as the US reduces its military power in the region there is the potential for rebalancing in the Asia-Pacific.

It should not only be a military strategy. It needs to be a broad strategy that includes public diplomacy. Institutions, like the East-West Center, that play a role in promoting US-Asia relations are also a very important part of the rebalancing effort. I very much welcome what the Obama administration is doing and I hope it will continue.

The US-China relationship is very significant for the US. There is a minority of

Americans that think that China needs to be contained. That has not, however, been the policy of any administration in the US. The policy has always been to try to engage China to develop a relationship so that China works with the United States to provide global goods. China is certainly focused on its own economic development right now, but as it continues to develop and have more global interests it will have to support the global institutions. There will be differences between the US and China, but the important thing is that the two countries work together. Korea, Japan, Europe, and the rest of the G20 are also needed to socialize the Chinese. Going forward, it is important that we all work together to maintain the global system.

Q: Do the American people oppose maintaining the naval base in Pearl Harbor? How would America defend itself if an attack were attempted by an Asian superpower?

A: I do not see any threat to continuing to have a base at Pearl Harbor. It is a facility that is etched in the minds of the American people as an essential bastion of our security. There are no anticipated attacks that we see. The Japanese were foolish to attack it 70 years ago and I cannot see anybody who has the capability to do it today.

Q: Considering the slow economic recovery in the US and the reduction of military forces, there could be a power vacuum in the Asia-Pacific region. What tools can the next president use to fill the vacuum?

A: I think there is a potential for the perception of a power vacuum, but I do not see one actually developing. The US is still overwhelmingly the world's largest military power. It is the only power that can project power on a global scale. The defense spending in the US is equal to the next 15 countries combined. That being said, the United States is not in a position where it wants to expand. The US is readjusting and reducing its overseas presence. The Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) allows us to project power offshore in ways that we could not do before without foreign bases.

It is more important to focus on the economic, cultural, and education dimensions of US power. They involve more of the society as a whole, but they need more

conscious support. The US has tremendous educational institutions, but we have not given the export of educational services the attention that other countries do. I feel that is an area that is quite important to our society.

For many decades to come the US will remain a society that is very dynamic and vigorous by nature of its political and economic system. It will be a hub of world activity, but it will not be the only hub. Americans increasingly need to learn about and be aware of the other hubs.

Q: How does the United States perceive North Korea's new leadership? Will the US continue to maintain the policy that dismantlement of nuclear facilities as a prerequisite to diplomatic normalization?

A: When the leadership change took place, the analyses that we saw in the press tended to be superficial. They emphasized the bad things that happened under Kim Jong-II and the lack of experience of Kim Jong-Un. There were questions about whether there would be any instability with the new leadership.

Before Kim Jong-II's death the US had already engaged in a negotiation with North Korea. They were looking toward an agreement that would cover humanitarian aid that was separate from an agreement on what the North would do with its nuclear activities. They were worried that those negotiations would be disrupted or delayed by the change in leadership. This has not happened and that is an encouraging sign that discussion can continue to go forward.

Denuclearization is definitely the formal objective of American policy, but there is a lot of skepticism that North Korea will want to completely give up its nuclear capabilities after using it effectively for bargaining. However, the US objective remains the same and it is difficult to see true normalization without that objective being achieved. There can still be a process where steps in the right direction are taken.

I want to point out that food aid is not part of a quid pro quo relationship that

requires North Korea to take steps to bring back inspectors or halting uranium enrichment. Humanitarian aid is dependent on the ability of the international community to monitor where the food aid goes. Since 1995, the US has been one of the most generous countries in providing food aid to the North. That is because of a genuine humanitarian interest in the situation of the people there.

Q: Professor Jagdish Bhagwati at Columbia University believes that the TPP is an attempt by the US to contain China. He has come to this conclusion because the TPP contains a lot of non-trade related issues that China could not accept. Do you agree with this assessment or do you see other factors for the Obama administration's support of the TPP?

A: The force behind the TPP is not so much to contain China, but rather to catch up. The US was absent in the free trade effort while China and Korea were hubs of free trade agreements. If the US is to be an economic leader in the region, then it needs to be much more proactive in forming multilateral free trade agreements rather than bilateral agreements.

The idea behind the TPP was to get a small group of like minded countries together. The actual trade value would not be affected very much because most of these countries already have free trade agreements with each other. Before Japan expressed interest, the biggest partner that the US did not already have an agreement with was Vietnam. Vietnam was included more for balance. We told Canada that they could not join because that would make too many countries from the Americas and more Asian countries were needed. The addition of Vietnam creates big negotiating problems for America, because Vietnam has state owned enterprises, a large low-income workforce, and there are concerns about worker's rights. This will all become very complicated during the ratification process of the TPP.

When the Japanese said they wanted to join it was welcomed to some extent. It looks like the process is expanding. On the other hand, Japan will introduce a whole

other group of questions to what will already be a very difficult negotiation.

The real intellectual force behind the TPP is to set up a model for 21st century free trade agreements. The TPP may never be fully negotiated or ratified, but it is still worth the effort. It is educational and gives us something to work for. In the end, it is not to oppose countries like China, but to bring them in and provide a benchmark.

Q: It seems that the agenda of the six party talks is very narrow and the progress has been in fits and starts. Is there a possibility to broaden the agenda to include other issues and new participants?

A: To address the specific problem of North Korea's nuclear weapons capability, then it is essential to have a process that deals specifically with that problem. If that is broadened to include too many things, then it will lose its edge to deal with the core problem.

Other issues involving North Korea are also important in their own right. Issues such as the human rights problems, humanitarian aid, environmental problems, and reducing military clashes do not need to be swept up into one negotiating process. The EU, UN, or other powers will have relevance to some of those issues, but there are other issues that are really much more limited to North-South relations. There do need to be multiple forums for dealing with North Korea.

I do think there should be a North-Pacific entity, because the core of the power in the region lies in North East Asia. Japan, China, and the US are the three largest national economies in the world. Additionally, Korea is one of the most energetic economies. This is the core region for the global economy right now, so we need some process to solve global and regional issues and provide global leadership.

Korea showed its leadership ability very well with the G20 meeting last year. Of course, the G20 goes beyond the Asia-Pacific region and that is why it was so refreshing to see the leadership provided by Korea during the meetings here in 2010.

Q: What do you think the likely outcome of the 2012 elections will be and how will it affect the gridlock that we see in Washington?

A: The presidential election is very hard to predict, but I think there is a slightly greater chance that President Obama will win reelection. Congress is a different matter and there is a strong possibility that we could see a Republican House and Senate with a Democratic President. This is not a very good formula for moving past the stagnation and partisanship that we see now. There has, however, been a dampening down of the partisan rhetoric over the last several months.

There needs to be some kind of initiative from the Whitehouse for a national dialog and effort to build some kind of consensus. Getting over the partisanship and gridlock is a very important issue for the American people and I do not know what the solution is.