First, I would like to thank Dr. Tschang Chu Rhee and the Korea Global Foundation for their invitation to participate in this distinguished gathering. We have seen many dramatic new developments on the Korean peninsula in the past decade since the World Korea Forum was established. It is an honor to be invited to participate and to join distinguished participants in considering the major challenges that the United States and South Korea face together on the peninsula, in Northeast Asia, and the world. On the basis of its remarkable accomplishments of the past few decades, South Korea is poised to play an even more important role in global affairs. I believe that there are many ways in which South Korea and the United States are poised to expand their cooperative efforts to jointly promote common interests at a peninsular, regional, and global level. I believe that the title of this session indicates that the organizers have a common view that there is much that the United States and South Korea should be able to do together in order to promote global, regional, and peninsular peace and stability.

My recent report from the Center for Strategic and International Studies entitled “Pursuing a Comprehensive Vision for the U.S.-ROK Alliance” attempts to provide a comprehensive vision for alliance cooperation (extending beyond North Korea and beyond the peninsula) that addresses specific new areas in which the United States and South Korea might expand their global, regional, and functional cooperation. South Korea’s transformation as a leading economy and vibrant democracy has created new potential for expanded alliance cooperation on a wide range of areas including peacekeeping, overseas development assistance, and post-conflict stabilization, themes that have been emphasized in South Korean president Lee Myung Bak’s own positive vision of a “global Korea.” Although the U.S.-ROK alliance has been focused primarily on North Korea for over five decades, there are ways that alliance cooperation can be expanded to fulfill mutual interests, including in East Asia and around the world. The June 16, 2009 Joint Vision Statement shows a commitment by both presidents Obama and Lee Myung Bak to fulfilling the potential of the alliance in these new areas by addressing many new areas through alliance cooperation, including in the areas of non-proliferation, climate change, energy security, counter-terrorism, and space cooperation. The United States should give special consideration to ways in which alliance-based cooperation can serve as a platform for South Korea to more effectively raise its profile and prestige as a leading country that has successfully accomplished the tasks of democratization and economic modernization, which also serve as the foundation for expanded cooperation in the service of our mutual interests.

1 Available at http://www.csis.org/component/option,com_csis_pubs/task,view/id,5412/type,1/
Obama Administration’s Approach to Asia: Continuity and Adjustment

The conventional wisdom among Asia specialists on both sides of the aisle has been that there would be little need for change in policy toward Asia under the Obama administration. At the same time, there is no question that America’s preoccupation with Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Middle East has prioritized the question of how America’s Asian allies might make “out of area” contributions while seemingly neglecting the long-term challenge posed by the rise of China. The virtually exclusive focus of former Assistant Secretary for East Asia Chris Hill on North Korea in recent years appeared on occasion to take the support of America’s Asian allies for granted. These are emerging issues that require adjustments and more intensified U.S. policy coordination with its Asian allies—not necessarily in response to a common threat, but rather as the foundation upon which like-minded countries are able to pursue shared interests.

In a February address to The Asia Society prior to her first foreign visit as secretary of state, Hillary Clinton offered reassurance to allies in Japan and South Korea while signaling the prospect of greater American attention to Southeast Asia and acknowledging China as a critical partner in addressing a wide range of global issues. The trip set the stage for a potentially more focused and reengaged approach on Asia’s intrinsic strategic importance to the United States—not just for the support it can provide to promoting stabilization in other areas or for its importance as a partner in trade and investment and to deal with non-traditional global security issues such as climate change and energy security.

Deputy Secretary of State Jim Steinberg has outlined three elements of an Obama administration strategy to manage a “post-Cold war transition characterized by rising powers and emerging transnational threats” in an April speech to the National Bureau of Asian Research. The strategy emphasizes sustaining bilateral ties with traditional allies, building new, cooperative ties with emerging Asian powers, and to build “new structures of cooperation, both in the region and across the world which link Asia to the global order.”\(^2\)

The strategy prioritizes bilateral alliances but clearly anticipates the necessity of reaching out to rising powers and utilizing regional cooperation structures to buttress the goals of effective alliance management and new forms of engagement. Thus, there is a critical need to establish regional arrangements that would provide assurance to both China and Japan that a unified Korea would not be hostile to their respective security interests. The United States would likely take a special interest in ensuring that regional arrangements are in place and that the Korean peninsula does not become a flashpoint for confrontation among regional powers, as was the case in the 19\(^{th}\) century. This is why Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg’s remarks also pointed to the need for such arrangements as part of the broader U.S. vision for how to assure security and stability in Northeast Asia.

In testimony at his Senate confirmation hearing, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific Kurt Campbell emphasized that the United States needs to “step up its game” in the Asia Pacific region, emphasizing that the United States must show up, consult, innovate, demonstrate leadership, and execute. Campbell underscored that U.S. engagement would

continue to involve extra-regional issues and that the nature of changes in Asia, including the challenges of rising and failing states, proliferation, and violent extremism in Southeast Asia, would continue to engage U.S. interests, and that climate change and energy security would be central issues in U.S. engagement going forward. He also emphasized the necessity of strengthening U.S. alliances as well as its forward military presence in the East Asian region so that the United States might continue to be the “guarantors of peace and stability.”

The Center for New American Security in its new report entitled “The United States and the Asia-Pacific Region: Security Strategy for a New Administration,” offers a major effort to provide a blueprint for anchoring Asia within a strategic vision of U.S. interests in the region. The report argues that the United States should reassert its strategic presence in East Asia, maintain a strong network of bilateral alliances, articulate a realistic and pragmatic China policy and support a stable peace in the Taiwan strait, sustain military engagement and forward presence, engage more actively in regional and multilateral fora, prevent nuclear proliferation and promote nuclear stability and disarmament, among other objectives. Since this report had the benefit of extensive involvement from the Obama administration’s newly-appointed assistant secretary of state for East Asia, Kurt Campbell, it is worth reviewing this report.

From this review of the initial statements by principal players in the Obama administration regarding U.S. policy toward East Asia, several primary themes emerge as central components of U.S. policy in Asia: 1) the importance of alliance reassurance, 2) the desire for cooperative engagement with emerging Asian powers, especially China and India, 3) a pragmatic approach to regional cooperation so as to build the capacity to respond to emerging transnational threats, such as nuclear non-proliferation, energy security and climate change. This framework and thematic focus is likely to shape the Obama administration’s policy approach to East Asia going forward.

Secretary Clinton’s Visit to Asia: Providing Reassurance to Traditional Allies

It is significant that Secretary of State Clinton chose Northeast Asia as the destination for her first trip abroad as Secretary of State. Her initial trip showcased and developed certain themes in the Obama administration’s broader framework, including alliance reassurance, engagement of China, and an emphasis on non-traditional security issues as a concern of the administration.

Secretary Clinton’s visit to Asia also provided the first outlines of the new administration’s thinking on important aspects of the U.S. approach to North Korea, primarily through her ability to reassure partners regarding prospects for continuity in U.S. policy toward North Korea. Her February 13, 2009, remarks to The Asia Society prior to her departure for Asia emphasized the need to work together with partners in the G-20 to stabilize the global economy and stressed the Obama administration’s commitment to continuing the Six Party Talks and the need for North Korea to “completely and verifiably eliminate their nuclear weapons program” in exchange for

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3 Nomination hearing for Kurt Campbell to be Assistant Secretary for East Asia and the Pacific, U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, June 10, 2009.
normalization, establishment of a permanent peace, and provision of energy and economic assistance to North Korea. She underscored “how essential it is that we have a positive, cooperative relationship” with China, and signaled the importance with which the Obama administration regards cooperation on global climate change by bringing with her the administration’s special envoy on climate change, Todd Stern.\(^5\)

During Secretary Clinton’s visit to Tokyo, she reassured Japanese leaders regarding her commitment to the six party talks, affirmed the importance of the U.S.-Japan alliance as a “cornerstone” of peace and stability in Northeast Asia, and met personally with families of abductees, showing her personal concern for their suffering at the hands of North Korea. She provided similar reassurances in South Korea, and did not shy away from acknowledging the possibility of succession in North Korea and indicated that the missile issue should be the subject of negotiations with North Korea.

In South Korea, Secretary Clinton underscored cooperation with South Korea in responding to North Korean provocations, stating that North Korea is “not going to get a different relationship with the United States while insulting and refusing dialogue with the Republic of Korea.” Clinton also raised questions about North Korea’s succession question in a public setting, named Stephen Bosworth as the administration’s special representative on North Korea, and warned North Korea against following through with reports of an impending missile test.\(^6\)

\textit{The Obama Administration’s Focus on Partnership With China as an Emerging Asian Power}

During her first visit to Asia, Secretary of State Clinton emphasized the importance of engagement with China as a partner in addressing major global issues, first among them the global financial crisis. By traveling together with the Obama administration’s newly-appointed special envoy Todd Stern, Clinton signaled that the administration has established negotiation of an international understanding climate change as one of its top global priorities. Any progress on climate change would require an understanding between the United States and China, as the two largest emitters of carbon.

In advance of her arrival in Beijing, Clinton indicated that human rights issues “can’t interfere with the global economic crisis, the global climate change crisis, and the security crisis,” suggesting that human rights issues would be handled pragmatically or that they would be dealt with as a lower priority than other issues on the Obama administration’s global agenda. This tone of pragmatism comes into conflict with American ideals in foreign policy; nonetheless, it has become clear in the Obama administration’s dealings both with China and in its focus on diplomatic engagement with states previously treated as pariahs such as Cuba, Syria, and Iran, human rights and democracy promotion would take a back seat to other U.S. interests in the Obama administration.\(^7\)

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\(^{5}\) Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Remarks at The Asia Society, New York, NY, February 13, 2009.


\(^{7}\) “Clinton’s Stumbling Start,” \textit{The Boston Globe}, February 27, 2009.
Secretary Clinton attempted to provide reassurance to China regarding China’s substantial investments in U.S. Treasuries, arguing that the U.S. is a safe investment and thanking China for its continued purchase of U.S. Treasuries. This emphasis was controversial in some quarters, but it is also evidence of the extent to which U.S. and Chinese economic interests are intertwined with each other, and the stakes that both have in working together to ensure a global economic recovery. China’s domestic stimulus plans tracked well with the Obama administration’s early efforts to promote a U.S. stimulus package, but there were other signs of a longer-term Chinese challenge to the primacy of the U.S. dollar as a global reserve currency in the run-up to the April G-20 summit in London. Economic issues are likely to remain at the top of the U.S.-China agenda as an area of the bilateral relationship that has global ramifications.

In this regard, the Obama administration appears to have decided to merge the two top-level bilateral U.S.-China dialogues that had been established by the Bush administration: the Strategic Economic Dialogue and a bilateral dialogue on security issues. The new dialogue will be co-chaired by Clinton and Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner. It remains to be seen how the new combined approach will work, but the merged dialogue certainly shows the rising importance of bilateral Sino-U.S. economic issues in the political relationship and as part of the global economic agenda.

The Obama administration has signaled that it accepts China’s emergence as a global power and that the Obama administration seeks cooperation with China in that role. The Obama administration in its initial approaches to China also appears to have high expectations for China to engage in responsible co-management of global issues such as the financial crisis and climate change for the sake of the broader global good. However, it remains to be seen whether China is up to that challenge, since the basic pattern of China’s diplomacy remains primarily focused on securing its own interests in the context of an expanding sphere of influence, rather than considering a global political leadership role from a broader perspective. This raises the question of whether it will be possible for China to meet the Obama administration’s heightened expectations for China as a global partner and leader, or whether China’s failure to meet the Obama administration’s high expectations might lead to further challenges and disappointment for the Obama administration in its management of the U.S.-China relationship. Much will depend on how the Chinese perform in the context of an approach that provides China with an opportunity to enhance its stature as an essential player on a wide range of global issues.

Non-traditional Security Issues and New Diplomatic Approaches to East Asia

As mentioned above, the Obama administration clearly intends to address collaboratively global non-traditional security issues such as climate change and energy security as a high priority, in contrast to the Bush administration’s relative disinterest and unilateral approach to these issues. Both the immensity of the challenge of mobilizing collective action to address these new issues on the global agenda and the Obama administration’s determination to address these issues as high priorities should influence the prospects for forging a practical international consensus on how to meet these new challenges.
The existence of a special envoy for climate change in and of itself suggests determination by the Obama administration to forge a new approach. Within Asia, the need to address climate change as a top global issue should be welcomed by Japan and is being approached as an opportunity by the Lee Myung-bak administration, which has also been promoting “low carbon, green growth” approaches to revitalizing the South Korean economy. However, many analysts have suggested that climate change could prove to be a divisive issue between the United States and China, which is the world’s fastest growing emitter of carbon as part of its rapid economic development. Whether or not the two countries can agree on caps for carbon emissions and what sort of bargain can be reached to promote greater energy efficiency within Chinese industry through the adoption of leading environmentally efficient technologies will be a major near-term challenge for both sides, especially in the run-up to the UN conference on climate change to be held in Copenhagen at the end of the year.

Another non-traditional issue that is ripe for discussion between the United States and China is the issue of energy security. This issue has been made more complicated by China’s aggressive foreign investment strategy in the energy sector, which seeks to tie up long-term supply arrangements on an exclusive basis, a practice that can have a distorting influence on market prices for energy supplies. Nonetheless, as fellow consumers, China and the United States, as well as other countries in Northeast Asia such as Korea and Japan, may have an interest in joining together as consumers to negotiate terms with suppliers that are designed to even out price volatility and assure sustainable supplies over the long term in international markets. It remains to be seen precisely how energy security discussions may take shape or influence multilateral security cooperation in East Asia.

Deputy Secretary of State Steinberg’s vague reference to the establishment of “new structures of cooperation, both in the region and across the world which link Asia to the global order” suggests flexibility and a willingness to experiment pragmatically with a wide range of possible mechanisms for multilateral coordination in East Asia. This suggests that there will be more experimentation on a pragmatic basis with new forms of diplomatic engagement in Northeast Asia under the Obama administration.

One form of new cooperation that has received attention is the possibility of a U.S.-Japan-China trilateral dialogue. Such a dialogue was proposed by China in the last year of the Bush administration, but the Bush administration rejected the new dialogue, ostensibly out of concerns about South Korea’s response to such a dialogue. However, a number of individuals who have entered the Obama administration are favorably disposed to a trilateral dialogue to address issues of strategic stability, security, and military transparency among the United States, Japan, and China. Since regional stability hinges on positive relations among these three countries, the idea behind starting such a dialogue is that it would decrease mistrust and promote new forms of cooperation in the service of regional stability. Such a trilateral dialogue might ease Chinese concerns about the U.S.-Japan alliance while ensuring that Japan is engaged fully on critical issues in the U.S.-China relationship and to allay Japanese concerns that a “G-2” involving the United States and China might cut out Japan. Such a dialogue might also be a venue for encouraging greater military transparency among all
parties and for allaying the types of security dilemmas that could potentially lead to an Asian arms race.

The establishment of such a dialogue will pose some interesting diplomatic challenges for South Korea. On the one hand, the Lee Myung-bak administration appears to be more self-confident and less distrustful of U.S. motives in engaging such a dialogue than the Roh Moo-hyun administration. However, the very existence of a U.S.-Japan-China dialogue that leaves South Korea out, despite the existence of a China-Japan-South Korea dialogue that leaves out the United States and a U.S.-Japan-South Korea quasi-alliance interaction that leaves out China, might stimulate South Korea to consider participation in additional “minilateral” or trilateral dialogues. One possibility might be for the Lee Myung-bak administration to join the U.S.-Japan-Australia Trilateral Security Dialogue in order to enhance coordination among U.S. allies. Or the Lee Myung-bak administration might explore a U.S.-China-ROK trilateral dialogue, which might be particularly helpful in addressing strategic anxieties in connection with possible North Korean destabilization or the ongoing challenge of addressing North Korea’s nuclear challenge through diplomatic means. Or the Lee Myung-bak administration might pursue other trilateral options that would tie South Korea more closely to other parts of Asia under Lee Myung-bak’s New Asia Initiative. Possible trilateral configurations might include a U.S.-ROK-India dialogue or a Korea-Australia-Indonesia dialogue.

The Lee Myung-bak administration has already responded pragmatically with a proposal for a new multilateral configuration in Northeast Asia by pursuing Five Party Talks among the members of the Six Party Talks minus North Korea as a means by which to promote further discussion of North Korean provocations and threats to pull out of the six party process. Early responses to such a format appear to be positive, but the Chinese continue to have reservations that the convening of a five party meeting might have negative long-term ramifications for the six party talks or that such a format might provoke North Korea to undertake further crisis escalation measures.

**Key Developments in the Obama Administration’s Policy Toward North Korea**

Given the fact that the administration is still in formation and the relatively low priority of North Korea in relationship to many other issues facing the new administration, the development of practical guideposts on the way to a full-fledged policy has been relatively slow. Beyond the campaign statement that the Obama administration would pursue “direct and tough dialogue,” the Obama transition team issued no statements about North Korea other than in the context of efforts to strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty “so that countries like North Korea and Iran that break the rules will automatically face strong international sanctions.”8 As a result, policy toward North Korea has remained a relatively blank slate even up to President Obama’s inauguration in January of 2009. Despite the lack of a specific policy toward North Korea, L. Gordon Flake has argued that the Obama administration has embraced two fundamental principles related to dealing with North Korea: “1) a firm belief in the efficacy, importance, and necessity of diplomacy; and 2) strong commitment to close coordination, consultation, and cooperation with the United States’ allies and other partners in the region.

8 [http://change.gov/agenda/foreign_policy_agenda/](http://change.gov/agenda/foreign_policy_agenda/)
With these principles in place, the Obama administration’s policies toward North Korea have unfolded gradually and in a piecemeal fashion, mostly in response to North Korean provocations. There has not yet been time for a proper policy review and North Korea has not been high on the Obama administration’s original list of priorities, but the following trends have influenced the shape of the Obama administration’s response to North Korean provocations:

First, the Obama administration has not pursued an ABB (Anything But Bush) policy along the lines of the ABC (Anything But Clinton) approach of the early Bush administration, but several early lessons drawn from observing the Bush administration’s experience have been adopted. For instance, in response to perceived failures by Chris Hill to reassure allies in Tokyo and Seoul, the most important United States is committed to effective coordination. This has been shown both through efforts to enhance the quality of consultations on how to deal with the North Korea issue and most recently through affirmation of the U.S. commitment to extended deterrence in writing as part of the U.S.-ROK Joint Vision Statement issued during the Obama-Lee White House summit in June.

Second, despite North Korean provocations, the Obama administration has an understandable case of attention deficit disorder when it comes to dealing with North Korea. The administration’s priorities remain on issues such as promoting financial sector stability, guiding the American automobile industry through painful adjustments, forging an effective counterterrorism strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan, addressing renewed challenges in the Middle East, and passing American health care reforms, among many other pressing priorities including the task of addressing nuclear development and proliferation risks in Iran and North Korea. North Korea remains the top crisis at the bottom of the American agenda, with little prospect that the level of attention and energy that would be required to effectively resolve the North Korean nuclear issue, especially given the erosion of a political basis for effective cooperation as the cycle of tension escalation continues to rise and the heightened political risk that would accompany any attempts to engage an internally-focused regime that has not yet signaled a willingness to come out of its shell. North Korean provocations have made the American task of coordinating with South Korea, Japan, China, and Russia much easier than it would be if all parties were to return to negotiations.

Third, the center of gravity regarding North Korea’s nuclear program is shifting from a focus on a U.S.-centered approach to a viewpoint that insists that North Korea is a regional problem that requires coordination among all of North Korea’s neighbors. The foundations for this shift began with the establishment of Six Party Talks, but even if North Korea boycotts the talks the regional policy coordination framework that has been established will remain invaluable to successful efforts to resolve the deeply challenging problems posed by Pyongyang. The North Korean threat to the United States remains indirect, but the ramifications of either war or collapse in North Korea will have a direct impact on the national security of North Korea’s closest neighbors. Such a shift requires the building of tangible capacities and coordination to collectively meet the challenge of North Korea. UN resolutions can only be effective if they are implemented by states neighboring North Korea.
Fourth, President Obama has made clear in his public statements that the United States will not accept a nuclear North Korea and that he intends to break North Korea’s past pattern of crisis escalation, renewal of diplomacy, and unwillingness to make or implement its own concessions in return for U.S. economic assistance. It may be necessary to break the pattern with North Korea, but such an approach could also lead to the unintended consequence of even higher tensions accompanied by miscalculation. It would be dangerous to assume that North Korea’s capacity to instigate further crisis has been exhausted or to push North Korea too far without a comprehensive plan to counter possible risks of further North Korean escalation.

Fifth, the focal point for Obama administration efforts to address the North Korean nuclear issue is shifting from a direct focus on North Korea to an indirect focus on how to promote cooperation with China on how to solve North Korea. Such a shift in focus may be necessary, but it also faces formidable obstacles, given the existing gaps in perception and priorities between the two countries. China’s own views regarding the danger posed by a nuclear North Korea have brought China closer to the views of the United States and the international community, but it remains to be seen whether the two countries can coordinate policies so as to create a situation in which North Korea’s leaders realize that they have no choice but to pursue denuclearization.

North Korea’s missile and nuclear test have been the primary catalyst that has shaped President Obama’s first direct statements on North Korea. The puzzle of the apparent hardening of the Obama administration’s policies toward North Korea lies in the fact that Obama promised an outstretched hand but did not get an unclenched fist in return. During the campaign, Obama created the expectation that he would meet with Kim Jong Il and promote active engagement with North Korea. For instance, following his appointment as special representative in late February, Ambassador Bosworth made an early visit to Beijing, Seoul, and Tokyo, and reportedly had been open to visiting Pyongyang again as special representative for discussions with North Korean officials. However, the DPRK did not take actions to welcome Ambassador Bosworth and continued to make preparations for a missile test, which became a major subject of discussion among Ambassador Bosworth and his interlocutors during his early March visit.

Despite efforts to promote broad engagement by the Obama administration with the likes of Syria, Cuba, and Iran, North Korean crisis escalation maneuvers, and especially North Korea’s nuclear and missile tests, appear to have short-circuited near-term prospects for engagement as long as North Korea continues down the path of proliferation and provocation. The stark contrast between the Obama administration and the North Korean leadership is even more clear in the context of the Obama administration’s commitment to reducing nuclear weapons both in the U.S. arsenal and globally at the same time that North Korea attempts to consolidate its stance as the world’s ninth nuclear weapons state.

President Obama’s public remarks in Prague on the day of the North Korean launch laid the foundations for a policy that insists on seeing North Korea as a symptom of a global non-proliferation problem rather than seeing North Korea’s nuclear pursuits as a symptom of underlying instability on the Korean peninsula. The White House Statement characterized North Korea’s “development and proliferation of ballistic missile technology pose a threat to the
northeast Asian region and to international peace and security.” In his speech on nuclear disarmament, President Obama declared that “North Korea broke the rules once again by testing a rocket that could be used for long range missiles . . . Rules must be binding. Violations must be punished. Words must mean something.” The administration’s efforts to forge a consensus in favor of a tough UN Security Council Presidential Statement in response to North Korean missile tests bear out this approach, but have only fueled a torrent of North Korean threats and pledges not to continue on the course of diplomacy through the Six Party Talks.

Likewise, the North Korean nuclear test provoked further outrage among Obama administration officials, some of whom interpreted North Korean crisis escalation as part of the same strategy used by the North to tame the Clinton and Bush administrations. The Obama administration has put down a firm line in response, with President Obama asserting at his June 16, 2009, joint press conference with Lee Myung-bak that “there has been a pattern in the past where North Korea behaves in an belligerent fashion and, if it waits long enough, it is rewarded. I think that is the pattern they have come to expect. The message we are sending them is that we are going to break that pattern.” In reference to the North’s apparent pattern, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has said that “I am tired of buying the same horse twice.” The North Korean nuclear test also provoked an unprecedented commitment to provide South Korea with extended deterrence pledges in the event of a nuclear threat to its survival.

These comments have invited continued harsh rhetoric from North Korea, and there are few signs as of the beginning of July that the potential for crisis escalation or miscalculation by either North Korea or the United States has been contained. One clear countermeasure to an apparent disinterest on the part of North Korea in negotiations is defensive coordination among the other five parties; however, it must be noted that from a North Korean perspective, they do not yet see the outstretched hand, and there is no evidence that North Korea is willing to unclench its fist. Rather, there is a possibility that each of the five parties may hold a finger in a collective attempt to unclench North Korea’s fist. Whether or not North Korea’s weapons explode when dropped from the unclench fist, or whether North Korea feels compelled to take drastic action in response to the perception that there is no way out, are different matters.

We are in the midst of an escalatory cycle of tensions that may potentially up-end the framework that the Obama administration has laid for pursuing its own diplomatic strategy in Asia by introducing unanticipated consequences. Nonetheless, if the principles that the Obama administration is putting into place can be used to forge a common defensive strategy that transcends engagement with any particular North Korean regime and makes clear the long-term direction that North Korea must pursue in order to attain its survival either under Kim Jong or under a future leader, then such a result would not only further the prospects for peace in

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Northeast Asia but may also lay the foundation for continued cooperation in the service of peace and prosperity on the peninsula and in the region.

**Conclusion: The Obama Administration’s Evolutionary, Not Visionary, East Asian Policy**

This paper has attempted to analyze early developments shaping the Obama administration’s developing policy toward Asia, with the caveat that frameworks and principles are always tested and/or proven only in response to actual developments. The Obama administration has thus far hewed to the principles of alliance reassurance and engagement with emerging powers in Asia, and has taken a pragmatic approach in dealing with the likely emergence of new non-traditional security issues that will require the development of new forms of cooperation and capacity building of Asian nations are to cope effectively with these emerging challenges. With regard to North Korea, the approach has turned out to be defensive rather than engagement-oriented, in contrast to the Obama administration’s approach to other pariah states that the Bush administration preferred to isolate rather than engage.

There is one ingredient that is thus far missing from the Obama administration’s approach to Northeast Asia that will ultimately be a critical prerequisite for developing an effective regional strategy toward Northeast Asia: the Obama administration must present a positive vision for how it sees the future development of Northeast Asia. The presentation of this vision will be a critical factor in addressing Chinese concerns about U.S. strategy in the region and in laying the foundations for a shared vision for how to manage North Korea’s transition from isolation to regional integration. Without this ingredient, there is a higher possibility that conflict will continue to divide the region.

A second observation is that the North Korean regime, as it has turned inward, has not received positive signals from the Obama administration and therefore does not perceive the basis for renewed negotiations. It may well be that given North Korea’s internal preoccupations, there is little prospect for positive external engagement at this stage. However, it would be a tragedy if both sides thought they had sent positive signals in favor of diplomatic engagement that have been misinterpreted by the other side. The risks of miscalculation might create bigger problems before an effective regional coordination mechanism has been put into place to manage the consequences of those problems. This is the main risk and danger that all parties face at the current stage, and it is one that requires careful management by the Obama administration going forward in order to assure that the foundations for its strategy effectively remain in place.

As indicated at the outset, the Obama administration’s emerging policies toward East Asia in essence build on the accomplishments of the Bush administration, while attempting to make minor course corrections. Instead of “change we can believe in,” the slogan that fits the Obama administration’s early approach to Northeast Asia appears to be “continuity we can build upon.” The bumper sticker is not catchy—and clearly the major challenger to this premise remains North Korea—but one hopes that the Obama administration’s approach will be effective as a means by which to secure U.S. interests while continuing to promote peace and stability on the Korean peninsula and in Northeast Asia.