

A presentation featured at the

2011 Pacific Symposium:

The New Security Environment – Implications for American Security in the Asia Pacific Region

Hosted by:

The Institute for National Strategic Studies
of
The National Defense University

4-5 April 2011

By

KONGDAN (KATY) OH



Papers presented at NDU Symposia reflect original research by members of NDU as well as other scholars and specialists in national security affairs from this country and abroad. The opinions, conclusions, and recommendations expressed or implied within are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Defense or any other agency of the Federal Government.



THE UNITED STATES IS *IN* ASIA

**Kongdan Oh Hassig
Institute for Defense Analyses**

**5 April 2011
INSS/NDU**



US-Asia Relations: Indispensable to America's Future

- A half century ago, Asia was recovering from a global war, in the middle of a Cold War, uncertain about the future of a world with nuclear weapons, and still suffering from poverty.
- Asia today is growing more prosperous, and living on the cutting edge of the world's innovations and trends.
- Asian culture has influenced world civilization for thousands of years.
- Asia today continues to contribute to global culture, but now it is also a large and rapidly growing part of the global economy.
- Asia is a region of vital importance to the US.
- The US is home to 13 million dynamic and smart Asian American citizens, who comprise one of the most successful segments of American society.



The US Presence in Asia during the Cold War

- The US military presence provided security and a measure of political stability to Asia (e.g., in Japan, Korea, the Philippines, and Taiwan).
- Like any large-scale presence, it was sometimes not appreciated.
- Sometimes it was even trouble-making: The wisdom of the US attempt to stop the spread of communism in Southeast Asia is still debatable.
- But the US had no imperialistic designs on Asia beyond promoting individual freedom in politics and economy.
- The US presence enabled struggling young republics to adopt and adapt Western democracy, market economy, and the values of individualism.
- The US was a huge consumer market for the emerging Asian economies, and an important source of management and technology innovations.
- American colleges and universities trained a new generation of Asian professionals.



The US in the Post-Cold War Era: Reluctant Sheriff

- Americans are active. When they see a problem, they try to fix it.
- The frontier spirit that guided the US still produces patriotic fighters willing to die in foreign lands. American soldiers are volunteers, not draftees.
- Americans have responded to political and economic problems in South and Southeast Asia and the Middle East.
- The US has played the role of the marshal in the movie “High Noon”: I have to do my job, regardless of what others (including my new wife) say I should do.
- Everybody recommends dialogue to solve conflicts (e.g., the Six Party Talks about North Korea), but without the willingness to use power, dialogue goes on forever.



Asian Development and Challenges for the US

- Asia today is enjoying an age of progress, although it is not without its problems: insurgency in South and Southeast Asia, economic and social gaps among the people of most countries, and gross violations of individual human rights in some countries.
- The biggest difference between the last century and this is the confidence that Asians feel today. Asia is the new Europe. The Asia-Pacific Century has finally arrived.
- Meanwhile, people talk about the decline of US power, especially economic power. In relative terms, this is true. From a broader perspective, the gap between rich America and poor rest of the world is closing. This is good.
- But speaking as a naturalized American citizen, I can easily see the continuing political, economic, cultural, and moral power of America.
- Americans live in the kind of society that most prosperous people in other countries admire: free, flexible, and innovative.



Asian Development and Challenges for the US -- Continued

- Despite serious distractions in South Asia and the Middle East, the Obama administration has placed high priority on engagement in the Asia-Pacific:
 - Building a stronger ROK-US relationship
 - Reaffirming the security alliance with Japan
 - Promoting a collective effort to defend free navigation and stability in the East and South China Seas
 - Sustaining a robust strategic partnership with Singapore
 - Assisting the Philippines in defense modernization and economic stability
 - Improving US-Vietnam relations
 - Building a better US-Indonesian partnership and military cooperation
 - Improving US-Indian strategic dialogue
 - Maintaining a strong partnership with Australia and New Zealand



US Is /N Asia: Wrap-up

- US military presence continually adjusting to new requirements.
- US political influence is unchallenged.
- US economic presence is an essential part of the regional economy.
- US educational influence is often overlooked.
- US values are shared by a growing number of Asians.