



TALKING POINTS

Asan Plenum 2013: "New World Disorder"
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RELEASE EMBARGO DATE: ARP. 30, 2013 AT 9 AM

Panel: US Pivot to Asia (Regency Room)

Date/Time: Tuesday, April 30, 2013 / 12:30-13:45

Talking Points for: Christopher Nelson, Samuels International Associates, Inc.

LOOKING BACK, WE CAN SEE THAT THE "PIVOT" HAS BEEN IMPLICIT IN OBAMA POLICY FROM THE OUTSET, SINCE HE AND SECRETARY OF STATE CLINTON, ASSISTANT SECRETARY KURT CAMPBELL, AND OTHER SENIOR OFFICIALS MADE A POINT OF VISITING ASIA, ESPECIALLY JAPAN, AS A FIRST ORDER OF BUSINESS...OFTEN MAKING THE RHETORICAL CLAIM THAT "AMERICA IS BACK", AN IMPLIED CRITICISM OF THE 8 YEARS OF THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION.

OBAMA AND HIS TEAM WERE SIGNALLING THEY UNDERSTOOD THE COMPLAINT FROM MANY ASIANS, AND NOT JUST JAPAN, THAT THE BUSH FOLKS ONLY CARED ABOUT COOPERATION IN THE WAR ON INTERNATIONAL TERROR, AND WHAT WERE YOU DOING TO LEAN ON NORTH KOREA? EVERY OTHER "ASIA" OR "JAPAN" ISSUE SEEMED SOMEHOW LESS IMPORTANT, EXCEPT FOR THOSE EXPLICITLY TASKED WITH MANAGING THE RELATIONSHIPS, SUCH AS OUR GOOD FRIEND MIKE GREEN, NOW WAITING AT CSIS FOR THE ROMNEY ADMINISTRATION...AND WHO SENDS ME AN ANGRY EMAIL WHENEVER I WRITE ABOUT OBAMA'S "REFOCUS" ON ASIA!

BUT IN 2008 AS *STILL* NOW, TO BE ACCURATE, THE PRIMARY FOCUS OF AMERICAN STRATEGIC AND DIPLOMATIC FORCE WAS ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA...TWIN AND SOMEWHAT INTERLOCKING CRISES THAT I DON'T NEED TO ELABORATE ON IN MY REMARKS, BUT WHICH YOU MAY WISH TO ASK ABOUT DURING THE Q AND A'S, SINCE ON IRAN, ESPECIALLY, THERE'S WAY TOO MUCH TO WORRY ABOUT.

THE US-ASIA TRADE AND ECONOMIC STORY OF COURSE HAS BEEN COMPLETELY DIFFERENT, AND IF YOU ASK ANY BUSINESS PERSON ABOUT A "PIVOT" TO ASIA THEY SOUND LIKE MIKE GREEN, SAYING "WHAT DO YOU MEAN, WE NEVER LEFT, WE'VE BEEN HERE FOR YEARS AND WE'RE STILL HERE, STILL FOCUSED ON BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE!"

THEY SAY THIS WITH ONE MAJOR EXCEPTION...ALL DURING BUSH AND FOR THE FIRST YEAR OF OBAMA, BOTH BUSINESS AND DIPLOMATIC FRIENDS WOULD ADMIT THAT EVEN CABINET-LEVEL VISITS COULDN'T SUBSTITUTE FOR SEEING THE PRESIDENT HIMSELF AT MAJOR MEETINGS AND EVENTS...AND FURTHER, NOT JUST SEEING THE PRESIDENT IN TOKYO, SEOUL

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OR BEIJING (AS HAPPENED AT THE END OF OBAMA'S FIRST YEAR) BUT HAVING OBAMA'S PERSONAL TOUCH EXTENDED TO SOUTH EAST ASIA, AND ITS REGIONAL ECONOMIC AND STRATEGIC INSTITUTIONS.

AND THAT, FINALLY, IS WHAT HAPPENED IN THE PAST YEAR, WITH OBAMA PERSONALLY HOSTING THE ANNUAL APEC IN HONOLULU, THEN, FINALLY, BEING ABLE TO KEEP HIS PROMISED VISIT TO INDONESIA AND AUSTRALIA...TRIPS WHICH WERE HOPED FOR LONG BEFORE ANYONE WAS TALKING ABOUT A "PIVOT" BUT WHICH HELP FORM THE SOLID BEDROCK OF THE REALITY OF THE "PIVOT"...THAT IT ISN'T JUST A MILITARY OR STRATEGIC "RE-FOCUS", IT'S A COMPREHENSIVE, ONE MIGHT EVEN SUGGEST A "HOLISTIC" INTERGRATED POLICY OF ENGAGEMENT AT ALL LEVELS.

THAT'S REALLY THE CRITICISM, OR THE CONTRAST WITH THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION, AND UNDERLIES THE REAL MEANING OF "PIVOT", WE THINK.

IF THE BUSINESS/ECONOMIC REACTION TO THE "PIVOT" SEEMS OBVIOUS, YOU MAY BE SURPRISED AT HOW PROFESSIONAL DEFENSE AND MILITARY PEOPLE PRIVATELY REACT WHEN READING THE OFTEN HYPER-VENTILATING STATEMENTS OF CHINESE OFFICIALS, ESPECIALLY THE PLA. I THINK THE WAY OBAMA AND OTHER US OFFICIALS HAVE ARTICULATED FUTURE PLANS TO RE-FOCUS MILITARY RESOURCES TO ASIA HAS BEEN MISLEADING BECAUSE IT OMITTS APPRECIATION OF THE ALREADY ROBUST US MILITARY PRESENCE...

THE FACT IS THAT NOTHING HAS CHANGED OR IS LIKELY TO CHANGE FOR TIME BEING THE FACT THAT OF THE ROUGLY 265 SHIPS AND SUBMARINES IN THE US NAVY, 100 ARE FULL-TIME ASSIGNED TO ASIA, WITH 50 ON STATION AT ANY ONE TIME...MOST IN THE JAPAN, S.KOREA AREA AT BASES YOU ALL KNOW WELL.

OF THE 11 US CARRIER TASK FORCES...ANY ONE OF WHICH COULD CARRY OUT A NUCLEAR WAR AGAINST A MAJOR POWER...THERE ARE 5 BASED IN ASIAN WATERS, AND AS THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS, ADM. GREENHART SAID IN A SPEECH LAST WEEK, THERE ARE NO PLANS TO INCREASE ANY OF THESE NUMBERS.

SO THE ANGRY CLAIMS FROM CHINA THAT THE US IS "LAYING OUT FORCES", IMPLICITLY TO "CONTAIN" CHINA, IS FACTUALLY INCORRECT, FOR A START. BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY, IF IT'S THE GENUINE ASSESSMENT OF THE CHINESE LEADERSHIP (AND NOT JUST PROPAGANDA AND PR) THAT TELLS US THAT CHINA FUNDAMENTALLY MISUNDERSTANDS US POLICY TOWARD

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CHINA...AND ASIA.

THE FACT IS THAT US POLICY HAS NOT CHANGED SINCE THE END OF THE VIETNAM WAR, AND TOWARD CHINA, IT HASN'T CHANGED IN ANY NEGATIVE WAY SINCE THE NIXON/KISSINGER DRAMA OF 1972. US POLICY THEN AND TO THIS MINUTE IS TO FIND EVERY POSSIBLE WAY TO HELP CHINA SUCCESSFULLY INTEGRATE INTO THE ASIA AND WORLD ECONOMIC AND STRATEGIC COMMUNITY VIA ENGAGEMENT WITH THE PRC AS A PARTNER, WHEN POSSIBLE, AND OTHERWISE AS A FRIENDLY COMPETITOR WHICH PLAYS BY THE RULES.

THAT IS THE POLICY. BUT CHINA AND MANY COMMENTATORS WHO SHOULD KNOW BETTER CONFUSE POLICY WITH VARIOUS STRATEGIES WHICH MAY HELP COMPOSE A POLICY, MOST CONSPICUOUSLY THE NEED TO "HEDGE" IN CASE THE POSITIVE APPROACHES AND GOALS DON'T WORK.

WHICH BRINGS US TO ANOTHER BIG 'BUZZWORD' THESE DAYS...OF COURSE THERE'S ALWAYS AN ELEMENT OF "CONTAINMENT" IN ANY COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGIC POLICY...YOU MUST "HEDGE" JUST IN CASE "ENGAGEMENT" DOESN'T ALWAYS PRODUCE POSITIVE RESULTS. THE POINT BEING IT'S NOT AN EITHER/OR CHOICE, AND REDUCING A COMPLEX STRATEGIC ISSUE TO A BINARY OVERSIMPLICATION MAKES MISTAKES MORE, NOT LESS LIKELY.

ALSO DIFFICULT FOR CHINA TO ACCEPT IS THAT IT'S OWN BEHAVIOR IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA, AROUND THE SENKAKUS, ET AL, HAS REINFORCED THE "CONTAINMENT" THEME NOT JUST FOR THE US, BUT ITS MANY ALLIES AND TRADING PARTNERS THROUGHOUT ASIA, ESPECIALLY JAPAN. IN FACT, IT WAS THE PATTERN OF AGGRESSIVE CHINESE NAVAL AND PARAMILITARY SHIP ACTIVITIES IN RECENT YEARS WHICH COMPELLED THE US TO FOCUS MORE ON THE POTENTIAL CONTAINMENT SIDE OF THE POLICY EQUATION THAN AT ANY TIME SINCE THE VIETNAM WAR.

OFFICIALLY, THE PRC REMAINS IN DENIAL ABOUT CAUSE AND EFFECT, AND TO THIS DAY YOU HEAR THAT BEIJING HAD NO PROBLEMS WITH ANYONE IN S.E. ASIA UNTIL SEC. STATE HILLARY CLINTON'S REMARKABLE CONFRONTATION WITH CHINA'S FOREIGN MINISTER AT THE ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM IN HANOI, IN 2010.

IN FACT, WE'D ARGUE THAT CLINTON'S SPEECH...WHICH CAME IN RESPONSE TO A UNIVERSAL BUILD-UP OF REQUESTS FROM REGIONAL ALLIES AND TRADING PARTNERS...HILLARY'S WAS THE REAL START OF OBAMA'S "ASIA PIVOT"...TWO YEARS AGO!

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A RELATED EXAMPLE OF ENGAGEMENT/CONTAINMENT AS PART OF A LARGER POLICY IS NORTH KOREA. FOR NEARLY 20 YEARS, THE US, JAPAN, CHINA AND S. KOREA HAVE AGREED THAT WE ALL WANT PEACE AND STABILITY ON THE PENINSULA, AS CENTRAL TO CONTINUING THE REMARKABLE ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION OF NORTH EAST ASIA. AND WE ALL AGREE THAT MEANS NO WAR, NO "PROVOCATIONS", OR THINGS LIKELY TO LEAD TO ACCIDENTAL ESCALATIONS AND CONFLICT.

SO NO PROBLEM, RIGHT? WE ALL AGREE!

WRONG, AS YOU ALL KNOW! IT TURNS OUT THAT CHINA DEFINES "STABILITY" IN TERMS OF PRESERVING THE NORTH KOREAN STATE, SINCE IT FEARS THE ONLY LIKELY ALTERNATIVES ARE DESTABILIZING COLLAPSE AND CHAOS, OR SOMETHING WHICH MAY EVEN LOOK WORSE IN BEIJING...A UNIFIED, DEMOCRATIC, CAPITALISTIC, AND POSSIBLY NUCLEAR ARMED "KOREA", A POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS NEW POWER WITH A MILITARY ALLIANCE WITH THE UNITED STATES.

HOW ANY JAPANESE GOVERNMENT WOULD REACT TO THAT IS A GOOD QUESTION! AND THE IDEA THAT THE US, ROK AND JAPAN APPARENTLY CAN'T NEGOTIATE IN ADVANCE WITH CHINA HOW TO PLACATE IT'S DARKEST FEARS IS BUT ONE OF MANY INSTANCES OF WHY "ENGAGEMENT" WITH THE PRC REMAINS A DIFFICULT PROCESS.

FOR NOW, YOU CAN MORE EASILY UNDERSTAND WHY, TO CHINA, EITHER COLLAPSE OR UNIFICATION MEANS PRESERVING THE KIM FAMILY REGIME, WHICH MEANS ONLY GOING SO FAR IN ALLOWING UNITED NATIONS SANCTIONS ON THE DPRK NUCLEAR AND MISSILE PROGRAMS TO BE IMPLEMENTED.

SOUTH KOREA WOULD NOT LIKE TO SEE AN UNCONTROLLED COLLAPSE IN N. KOREA, FOR OBVIOUS REASONS, BUT ALSO THE NOT-SO-OBVIOUS ANXIETY OVER THE FINANCIAL COST OF TRYING TO CLEAN-UP THE MESS. A "SOFT LANDING" COLLAPSE LIKE THE SOVIET UNION OR EAST GERMANY? PROBABLY TOO MUCH TO HOPE FOR!

I NOTED CHINA'S DEFINITION OF "STABILITY". THE US, JAPAN (AND TO SOME EXTENT THE ROK) DEFINE "STABILITY" AS NORTH KOREA NOT CARRYING OUT NUCLEAR BOMB AND MISSILE TESTS TO THE POINT WHERE THEY ACTUALLY WORK, SINCE THOSE WEAPONS INCREASINGLY CONSTITUTE A PRACTICAL AND AN EXISTENTIAL STRATEGIC THREAT TO ALL THREE ALLIES.

THE US, JAPAN AND THE ROK HAVE TRIED AND SO FAR FAILED TO CONVINC

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CHINA THAT CURRENT DPRK BEHAVIOR IS ITSELF AN "UNSTABLE" SITUATION AND THEREFORE INHERENTLY A THREAT TO THE MAIN CHINESE STRATEGIC CONCERN...AND THAT GENUINELY ENFORCED INTERNATIONAL SANCTIONS WILL COMBINE WITH KIM FAMILY MISMANAGEMENT TO HASTEN THE COLLAPSE OF THE DPRK, THE VERY THING CHINA HOPES TO AVOID.

THE OBVIOUS "SOLUTION"...THE US, CHINA, JAPAN AND S. KOREA OFFER THE KIM FAMILY REGIME SUFFICIENT INDUCEMENTS THAT IT AGREES TO GIVE UP ITS NUCLEAR WEAPONS, ITS NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROGRAMS, AND ITS LONG-RANGE NUCLEAR MISSILE PROGRAM, IN RETURN FOR AN END TO SANCTIONS AND COOPERATION TO INTEGRATE THE DPRK INTO THE REGIONAL ECONOMY.

(JAPAN CAN PRESUMABLY JOIN IN SUCH A MASSIVE AID OFFER NOW THAT IT HAS STOPPED SELF-MARGINALIZING VIA ITS PRE-CONDITION THAT THERE CAN BE NO STRATEGIC TALKS WITH THE DPRK UNTIL THE HUMANITARIAN TRAGEDY OF THE ABDUCTEES IS RESOLVED. EMOTIONALLY AND POLITICALLY UNDERSTANDABLE, OF COURSE...SEE HOW THE DOMESTIC POLITICS OF POW/MIA'S PARALYZED US POLICY TO VIETNAM FOR A GENERATION...BUT STRATEGICALLY, TO BE REALISTIC, ABDUCTEES WAS A POLICY WHICH KEPT JAPAN OUT OF THE GAME.)

ANYHOW...THE AID AND ENGAGEMENT "SOLUTION" SEEMS OBVIOUS AND LOGICAL TO EVERYONE...EXCEPT THE KIM FAMILY REGIME. AS JONATHAN POLLACK OF BROOKINGS HAS DEMONSTRATED IN HIS RECENT BOOK, "NO EXIT", FORMER SOVIET AND CURRENT CHINESE ARCHIVES PROVE WITHOUT A SHADOW OF DOUBT THAT FROM ITS VERY OUTSET, MORE THAN 40 YEARS AGO, N. KOREA'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM WAS DESIGNED AS A WEAPONS PROGRAM.

FURTHER, POLLAK SHOWS HOW THE NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROGRAM HAS BECOME AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE N. KOREA STATE, AND SO THE VERY SURVIVAL OF THE KIM FAMILY REGIME. CUTTING THIS GORDIAN KNOT IS THE REAL-LIFE CONUNDRUM FACING THE US-JAPAN AND US-ROK STRATEGIC ALLIANCES, AND THEIR COMBINED EFFORT TO FIND A WAY TO CONSTRUCTIVELY ENGAGE CHINA IN A PEACEFUL RESOLUTION OF THE PROBLEMS POSED BY THE DPRK.

FINALLY, NEARLY EVERY EXPERT ON THE DPRK WILL CONCEDE THAT FOR THE KIM FAMILY REGIME, THE "MODEL" FOR WHAT WOULD HAPPEN TO THEM IF THEY EVER REALLY ALLOWED THE START OF CHINESE, OR VIETNAMESE-STYLE ECONOMIC REFORM WOULD BE "CHAUCESCU" IN ROMANIA. UP AGAINST THE WALL, BROTHERS. WILL THIS NEW LEADER, THIS YOUNG MAN, HAVE THE VISION AND/OR THE CAPABILITY OF CHANGING

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DIRECTION? OR WILL MUST HE RISK FURTHER “PROVOCATIONS”...EVEN MORE OF A RISK, NOW THAT THE US AND THE ROK HAVE HINTED THAT JOINT MILITARY RETALIATION MAY BE AT STAKE?

(THAT THREAT CERTAINLY GOT CHINA’S ATTENTION...WHETHER PYONGYANG TAKES IT SERIOUSLY REMAINS TO BE SEEN...HOPEFULLY WE WON’T FIND OUT.)

SO FOR NOW IT LOOKS LIKE THE BEST ANYONE CAN HOPE FOR IS TO CONTAIN THE RISK, WHICH IN ITSELF IS A RISK, SINCE THE HISTORIC PATTERN IS THAT SOONER, OR LATER, THE DPRK ENGAGES IN A “PROVOCATION” TO TRY AND COMPEL AID AND INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE IT CANNOT OTHERWISE SECURE.

(end of Nelson speech selection from 1/23/12)

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