

## **American Foreign Policy in East Asia: Prospects for Shared Leadership?**

**Panel:** Session 3 (Grand Ballroom)

**Date/Time:** April 26, 2012 / 8:45-10:00

**Organizing Institution:** Maxwell School of Syracuse University

**Speakers:** James Steinberg, Syracuse University (Moderator)  
Richard Falkenrath, Chertoff Group  
Jonathan Pollack, Brookings Institution  
Choi Kang, Korea National Diplomatic University

### *Panel Short Summary*

Robert Warshaw, The Heritage Foundation  
Suh Jihye, Korea University

James Steinberg framed shared leadership in the Asia-Pacific by first deeming the U.S. an “indispensable nation,” echoing President Obama’s remarks, and noted that the Obama Administration is credibly committed to U.S. leadership in the Asia-Pacific, fully cognizant that new challenges require shared leadership. The Administration’s tripartite engagement strategy—by sustaining existing alliances, building new partnerships, and expanding multilateral engagement—demonstrates America’s strategy of leadership by partnership. Yet questions perennially remain over the sustainability of that commitment. To Steinberg, the Obama Administration appreciates that sustainability is more than the sum of issue-driven engagement, and the Administration’s actions, like high-level visits and the invigoration of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)—America’s answer to a bifurcated region currently hedging between U.S. security guarantees and Chinese-led economic growth—match the “pivot” rhetoric. Long-term, the U.S. must enhance cooperation with Europe on improving relations with China.

Richard Falkenrath described U.S.-Asia policy contextually vis-à-vis the 2012 presidential election. While a Mitt Romney victory would elicit some change, Asia policy is fairly bipartisan, with minor quarrels emerging over minutia rather than grand vision; therefore, observers should not expect drastic changes. Furthermore, Falkenrath insinuated that U.S.-Asia policy needs vision, rather than remaining the sum of issue-driven engagement

across numerous agencies. To that end, military issues increasingly pale in significance to fiscal problems—for instance, America’s reliance on Chinese debt purchasing outweighs Okinawa basing agreements. Finally, cybersecurity vis-à-vis China demands strong American leadership and sustained attention.

Jonathan Pollack acknowledged the geographic and economic significance of the Asia-Pacific region, emphasizing the systematic and functional approach of U.S. policy towards East Asia. As the U.S. strives to articulate its centrality, it needs to carefully examine its goals and expectations, while inheriting traditional relationships with its allies. In that sense, the U.S. naval redeployment in Australia is an effort toward increasing distributive capability and flexibility, and reflects devotion to Southeast Asia rather than threatening China. Facing the increased capabilities of its allies in the region, the U.S. should find ways to reconcile the elevated powers in a flexible way while maintaining its presence. The subtext is China, as it attempts to grasp its regional implication and its role. The U.S. can reinforce its credibility among regional partners through better fiscal policy domestically, regardless of who the next president is.

Choi Kang observes diminishing U.S. visibility in the Asia-Pacific, amidst increasing Japanese and Chinese regional influence. America’s emphasis on alliances and traditional security concerns do not address new challenges, such as economic integration and human migration, and America should take a more proactive, rather than reactive, approach. Kang emphasized the importance of continuity and sustainability for U.S. policy towards East Asia and encouraged more cooperative relations between U.S. and China. Concurrently, security, while the weakest part of U.S. regional policy, can be enhanced with better understanding and clarification of U.S. and allied roles facing budget shortcomings. Finally, he suggested that the Obama Administration try to build confidence and trust through enhanced communication with its counterparts, with “mini-lateral” dialogues a means for better cooperation.

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