

United States

The Security Environment

For the United States, 2005 is the fourth year following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the first year of President George W. Bush's second term. Americans enter 2005 in a state of uncertainty, largely connected with the extended conflict in Iraq and the continuing threat of new terrorist attacks on American interests overseas or at home.

Controversy over the invasion of Iraq and its aftermath continues within the United States, reinforced by the continuing drumbeat of casualty reports from the fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. The U.S. government and public are also conscious of international criticism of U.S. policy on Iraq, the war on terrorism generally and, especially among Muslim societies, in the Middle East, which will have unpredictable fallout for the medium-term picture of American security and international relations. Many societies and some governments in the Asia Pacific region are critical or at least ambivalent toward broad American security policy. The Bush administration's announcement of plans to reconfigure the U.S. force presence overseas, including reductions in Asia, has created an additional layer of uncertainty about future American security relations in this region.

External Outlook

The American security outlook on 2005—and future U.S. foreign and security policies—is importantly affected by the solid reelection victory of President Bush on November 2, 2004, over his Democratic Party challenger, Senator John F. Kerry. Bush won both the Electoral College vote, by 286 to 252, and (in contrast with 2000 and therefore more important politically) the popular vote, by 51 percent to 48 percent. The fundamentals of policy probably would not have changed dramatically had Kerry won, but a Kerry administration would have brought an anticipation of change at least in atmospherics and words if not (immediately) in practice. The expectation from the second Bush term is essentially for more of the same, including policies on Iraq, terrorism, the Middle East, and North Korea, which are the highest profile security issues for the American public.

The war in Iraq—which largely subsumes Afghanistan in the mind of the American public—was a major issue in the election campaign, a relatively rare instance in which foreign policy has played such an important electoral role. Less surprisingly, Iraq was also the major focus of international attention. Bush steadfastly maintained—and continues to do so—that he did the right thing by going into Iraq and that he intends to stay the course to achieve the original objectives of leaving a democratic, stable Iraq in the heart of the Middle East. Although Kerry did not enunciate a truly alternative policy (mostly sticking to criticism of the president for getting the United States into the war and for mistakes in the prosecution of the war), Kerry represented the alternative choice and was supported by those Americans (and those abroad) who most strongly disagreed with Bush's decision to invade Iraq. Bush's electoral victory suggests that a majority of the electorate supported the president's view, although some votes may have been more indicative of reluctance to change leaders in wartime (which Kerry's lack of an alternative approach did little to alter). However, a deep split in American domestic opinion on the war remains, and many believe the country is more politically polarized than at any time in recent history.

The retention of Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld in the second term and the departure of relatively dovish Secretary of State Colin Powell reinforce the general expectation of continuity in the administration's approach to Iraq. The immediate focus as 2005 began was the legislative elections in Iraq scheduled (though still not certain) to take place on January 30. American troop strength in Iraq was bolstered to help provide security for the election, but the clear intention is to revert to the former level as soon as possible after the election and the expressed hope is that the numbers will begin a steady if gradual decline after that as the Iraqi security forces take over more of the line responsibilities. The administration has not set a firm target end date for the American presence, but Rumsfeld has projected a possible complete withdrawal by the end of Bush's second term. The public seems as divided on the outlook for Iraq as on the wisdom of the war, essentially between those who hope for the best and those who fear the worst.

More broadly, consciousness of the terrorism threat remains pervasive in the United States. Events in 2004—the Madrid bombings, kidnappings and beheadings in

Iraq, repeated alarms and alerts at home, the Beslan massacre in Russia in September and the September 9 bombing at the Australian Embassy in Jakarta—provided repeated reminders of the danger and near-total unpredictability of terrorism. The report of the U.S. commission investigating the 9/11 attacks, released in July 2004, and subsequent Congressional consideration and then (in December) passage of a major reorganization of the American intelligence agencies further underscored the seriousness of the threat and awareness of American vulnerability. Numerous statements anticipating future terrorist attacks using nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons readily evoke truly nightmarish scenarios. However, there have been no actual terrorist attacks in the United States since 9/11, and the American public has become gradually accustomed to the new security atmosphere including the repeated warnings, with airline travel and tourism rising again and little overt evidence of mass anxiety.

In Asia, beyond the threat of terrorism, the greatest specific security concerns for Americans focus on Northeast Asia. The extended crisis over North Korea's nuclear weapons programs and capability is the most immediate danger, but U.S. relations with China have also taken a turn toward more tension after China ratcheted up rhetorical pressure over Taiwan following the reelection of independence-minded Taiwan president Chen Shui-bian in March 2004. China's more critical posture toward the United States has extended to the negotiations with North Korea (which China hosts) as well as Iraq (where China has taken a more actively critical stance in the United Nations) and even to the geographically distant issue of genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan (on which China publicly opposed an initial U.S. proposal for a UN resolution in September). These developments created renewed uncertainty in a key relationship that since 9/11 had shown a general spirit of cooperation and even partnership. Trips to China by then National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice (who has since been appointed secretary of state) in July and Vice President Dick Cheney in April demonstrated the seriousness that the Bush administration attaches to the relationship with China, but did not lead to tangible progress on any of the differences.

Southeast Asia generally occupies a lower profile in American perceptions and policy, with a few exceptions in 2004. The reelection of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo in the Philippines was followed by Arroyo's premature withdrawal of the

Philippine contingent in Iraq in response to a kidnapping and death threat, which in the Bush administration's view would only encourage opponents of the coalition effort to stabilize Iraq. (Arroyo's subsequent initiatives to develop a security relationship with China reinforced American concerns about the longer-term evolution of the Philippines' orientation.) Parliamentary and then presidential elections in Indonesia replaced the relatively unassertive incumbent Megawati Sukarnoputri with General (Ret.) Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, bringing promise both of more energetic pursuit of reforms in Indonesia and movement toward a closer military relationship with the United States. Lingering or resurgent secessionist movements and Islamist terrorism in both these countries as well as southern Thailand remain subjects of U.S. concern.

In South Asia, the major U.S. priority of prosecuting al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan shared the stage in 2004 with Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf's decision not to surrender the military leadership (as called for by earlier constitutional changes) and the surprise change of government in India, which raised questions about the future of negotiations with Pakistan initiated by the previous government. At the start of 2005, Musharraf seemed to have consolidated his power position at least for the moment, and the new Indian government was pursuing the negotiations with Pakistan, somewhat relieving concerns although not ensuring positive outcomes.

Political Economics

The other major issue in the 2004 U.S. election campaign, though somewhat less visible internationally, was the state of the U.S. economy. Steady growth at around 4 percent, higher than in most recent decades, and significant job growth over 2004 did not allay widespread concerns of Americans over job security. This in turn reflected the progressive loss of high-paying jobs especially in the manufacturing sector but also—more recently—in such relatively “high-tech” sectors as information technology (e.g., software programming). Job losses have been linked in the popular imagination with “outsourcing” of jobs to foreign countries by American firms.

Debate over the loss of jobs, and especially the argument that American jobs are being “exported,” was the economic issue that attracted most attention internationally. On this subject Bush came across as more internationalist than Kerry, who made job losses one of his major themes and played to the Democrats' union base and others

fearing for their jobs by promising to withdraw benefits from “Benedict Arnold” firms that outsource jobs overseas. Bush by contrast stressed adjustment assistance (retraining) and for the long term improved education for American workers. Asian governments were probably somewhat worried over Kerry’s position, but it was not a major scare even in key investment-receiving states such as China and India. It is not clear how the economy-jobs issue ultimately broke in the election, but at least in the key “battleground” industrial state of Ohio Kerry’s argument failed to capture the majority.

Looking forward, the most serious U.S. economic policy issue for 2005 and the Bush second term is the huge budget deficit and, linked to that, the growing international weakness of the dollar. Both Bush and Kerry promised to cut the deficit over the next four years; Bush now has the responsibility of making good on the promise. It is widely recognized at least in economic and political circles that a dramatic fall of the dollar would seriously undermine both the U.S. and international economies and therefore one of the foundations of international security. However, the American public does not (yet) perceive this as a genuine crisis.

Defense Policies And Issues

The Bush Doctrine, Iraq, and the Middle East

Although the Iraq intervention is still contentious within the United States, the 2004 election campaign demonstrated the lack of a real policy choice. The practical choice is between staying the present course versus a greatly accelerated return of security responsibilities to Iraqi control and reduction of the American troop presence. Few Americans (and virtually no political leaders, including Kerry) are ready to endorse a Vietnam-style walking away. The question remains whether the United States can pull it off, and few beyond administration spokespersons are prepared to express unqualified confidence on this score.

Overall, the Bush Doctrine is not playing well in Asia. Many governments criticize the policy, including Indonesia and Malaysia as well as China and Vietnam. There is broad public opposition in Japan, South Korea, and Thailand to government troop contributions to the U.S.-led coalition, and negative public sentiment triggered the early withdrawal of the Philippine contingent in July 2004. Indicative of the broader

critical atmosphere was a high-profile regional conference in June 2004. Rumsfeld attended and delivered an uncompromising defense of American policy, stressing firm U.S. determination to act pre-emptively against terrorism when necessary in the future. The host, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong of staunch U.S. supporter Singapore, defended U.S. anti-terrorism leadership but went on to bluntly criticize Washington's position on Israel, calling the United States "essential to the solution, but . . . part of the problem" in the Middle East.

Goh's reference to U.S. Middle East policies illustrated another major issue in U.S. relations with Asia, especially those states with substantial Muslim populations. Over recent decades, and particularly after the U.S. interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Israel-Palestine conflict and perceived one-sided American support for Israel have moved from being a relatively minor item on the agenda in Asia to a central reference point in Asian Islamic attitudes—and to a certain extent broader attitudes as well -- toward the United States. The Bush Doctrine of assertive intervention for peace and stability is seen as applying everywhere except to Israel. Goh's statement underscored the reality that the United States must find a way to deal with this issue if it wishes to recover its credibility in much of the Asia Pacific as well as the Middle East.

Regional Security Initiatives

The United States is energetically pursuing its Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) to control seaborne traffic in weapons of mass destruction and related technology. This initiative particularly applies in the maritime Asia Pacific region. Other cooperative programs include the Container Security Initiative, which began placing American customs agents in foreign ports to assist in predeparture screening of cargoes bound for the United States. A setback occurred when Admiral Thomas B. Fargo, commander for the U.S. Pacific Command, announced in Congressional testimony at the end of March 2004 a Regional Maritime Security Initiative (RMSI), and in the same testimony referred to the possible use of U.S. forces in security operations in places such as the pirate-plagued Strait of Malacca. This evoked an immediate negative response from the Indonesian and Malaysian governments, whose territory borders the Strait but with whom the initiative apparently had not been formally discussed. U.S. officials subsequently

stressed that the envisioned U.S. role was primarily information sharing in support of operations by regional countries rather than the active provision of forces.

Overseas Troop Reconfiguration

In August, Bush announced a global restructuring of U.S. overseas forces. This had been under consideration virtually since the start of the administration but had gained topicality in the context of troop requirements for Iraq. The initiative would remove 70,000 troops from bases in Europe and Asia (primarily Germany and South Korea), and increase the mobility and flexibility of the remaining forces. The announcement brought a mixed reaction in South Korea, with both society and government torn between concern over the possible undermining of deterrence against North Korea and interest in reducing controversies created by the U.S. presence. In Japan the response was more consistently favorable: To Okinawans it offered the prospect of reducing the disproportionate share of American troops stationed in their prefecture, while for the national government it promised lessened pressure to find other locations in Japan to accept units transferred from Okinawa. Although the plan will take years to implement, intense attention to the announcement in the main host countries demonstrated the continuing complexities and sensitivities of basing issues.

In the Asia Pacific region, strong U.S. supporters Australia and Singapore seem most likely to see an increase in U.S. military activity, if not full-time presence, as a consequence of the reconfiguration program. Both governments warmly welcomed the prospect, although in Australia the Labor Party opponent to Prime Minister John Howard in the October 2004 election was more critical. (However, like Bush, Howard won reelection, reducing the immediate salience of Labor's opposition).

Defense Spending

U.S. defense spending continues to rise, with US\$447 billion having been appropriated by the Congress for the 2005 fiscal year (up from US\$375.3 billion for fiscal 2004 plus US\$65 billion for defense out of the US\$87 billion supplemental for Iraq and Afghanistan). A further supplemental for the Iraq conflict of \$80 billion or more was considered certain to be submitted early in 2005. Regular U.S. defense spending

(excluding supplemental funding for the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq) has risen by more than 10 percent per year in nominal terms since 9/11. Funding for fiscal year 2005 includes support for continued work on missile defense and research on new nuclear weapons, both of which have been controversial programs in the United States and the region.

The level of spending on Iraq was an issue in the presidential election campaign, primarily because Kerry had voted against the US\$87 billion 2004 supplemental appropriation. With Bush's reelection and with Republican control of both houses of Congress confirmed (indeed increased), it is unlikely that spending on the Iraq operation will be a budgetary issue in 2005. At the same time, the administration's emphasis on maintaining U.S. military predominance and on the transformation of the U.S. military into more mobile and more lethal forces seems set to continue. This means that the base level of defense spending is almost certain to continue at a very high rate relative to other countries. However, because defense accounts for more than 18 percent of the total U.S. budget, the administration faces difficult decisions on future defense budgets as it tries to redeem the president's promise to reduce the deficit.

Contributions to Regional and Global Security

Unilateralism vs. Multilateralism

Persistent criticism of the Bush administration as unilateralist contrasts with the reality of increasing administration cultivation of international coalitions and support. The adoption of a more multilateral approach to Iraq was reflected in its successful sponsorship of a UN Security Council resolution authorizing the coalition force presence until 2006 and its successful promotion of an active UN role in preparing for the upcoming Iraqi elections. The most conspicuous example of a multilateral approach in the Asia Pacific region is the Six-Party Talks on North Korea, where somewhat ironically the pressure from U.S. partners (clearly including China) has been for the United States to negotiate more unilaterally—which is to say bilaterally—with the North.

The real issue in the Bush administration's international approach is not unilateralism versus multilateralism so much as ad hoc versus institutionalized multilateralism. The administration's clear preference is for the former, operating with

“coalitions of the willing” within which it can exercise dominant influence. By comparison, UN- or even NATO-based multilateral efforts are both more difficult to initiate and frequently less effective in actual combat. The model here is the first Gulf War, in which an American-led coalition operated with the endorsement of the United Nations. It was not formally a UN force. (In fact, the practice of the Clinton administration in this regard, e.g., in Bosnia, was not significantly different from that of either former President George Bush or the current president, his son.) It seems unlikely that Bush’s second term will see any change in the preference for ad hoc arrangements in situations of direct security interest for the United States. (The inverse example here is Darfur in Sudan, where the United States has less direct interest and while playing an advocacy role has left decision-making and action completely in the hands of the United Nations and the African Union.)

Regional Security

The Bush administration sees initiatives such as the PSI and even the more controversial RMSI as contributing to—and indeed depending on—a higher level of cooperation on security by and among Asia Pacific governments. Critics can argue that these initiatives primarily reflect U.S. assessment of the country’s security interests, and that resistance to them by some regional governments indicates that the U.S. approach may be inhibiting practical regional cooperation. A more paradoxical possibility, however, is that U.S. assertiveness is actually stimulating regional governments to increase cooperation among themselves (as, for example, on piracy in the Strait of Malacca) if only to counter the appearance of U.S. domination.

The December 26, 2004, tsunami off Sumatra brought out a different and more unqualifiedly positive dimension of the U.S. role in regional security in the broadest sense. Helicopters from a diverted U.S. carrier task force carried the first relief supplies to, and injured victims from, the long stretches of Aceh’s Indian Ocean coast rendered inaccessible by the disaster. After a modest start, official pledges of relief and reconstruction assistance quickly rose to US\$350 million and later US\$950 million, while private-sector contributions grew to more than US\$700 million. This response demonstrated both the unique ability of the United States to respond physically to human

disasters in the region and the concern within American society over the fate of even distant communities representing different cultures and religions. At a time of much suspicion of American motives particularly in the Muslim world, the response to December 26 provided a strong counterstatement.

Global Security

The Bush administration perceives its intervention in Iraq, and indeed the whole war on terrorism, as being a significant contribution to international security. The intervention removed a dangerous and tyrannical regime, ended Iraq's flouting of UN Security Council resolutions and inspections, and, in the eyes of the administration, may have a transforming effect on the entire Middle East. Critics argue otherwise: that the Iraq action may actually have increased rather than decreased the impetus toward terrorism. It is too soon to know which of these views will prove out, but the action in Iraq at a minimum has committed the United States to a major and long-term new involvement in the Middle East.

Much of American elite and media opinion does not share the administration view of its action on Iraq. But polls indicate that the action still resonates with at least half of the American public. The problem for America's international role is that the policy is also widely criticized internationally by elites, publics (in a less informed way), and many governments. Indeed, much of international opinion has come to accept simplistic formulations that U.S. international policy is controlled by large corporations and Israel, that U.S. policy in the Persian Gulf region and Central Asia is driven purely by a desire to dominate the oil resources of that region, that the war against terrorism is a war on Islam, and that the United States fully intends to invade other countries of its own choosing if it can succeed in subduing Iraq.

It is worth noting that most informed Americans (even fervent critics of Bush and the Iraq adventure) reject these more stark characterizations of U.S. policy. This was also the message of the Kerry candidacy, which would have continued all the major elements of U.S. foreign policy of the Bush administration—including the Iraq campaign—albeit with differences in packaging and tactics.

However, viewed from the perspective of the overall contribution of the United States to international security, the rhetorical split in itself has negative consequences. At

its best, the U.S. role in international security ever since World War II has represented a stabilizing, reassuring influence. With that identity now under more serious question than at any time since the height of the Vietnam War (or possibly the anti-nuclear movement of the mid-1980s), both the effectiveness and the net impact of U.S. policy are far more problematic.