

USAPC Washington Report

**Joint Interview with Randall G. Schriver and Michael Schiffer,
Senior Advisors to U.S. Presidential Candidates
Sen. John McCain (R, AZ) and Sen. Barack Obama (D, IL), Respectively**

USAPC: As the region has become more integrated economically, the nations of Asia have been exploring the creation of new regional architectures that would exclude the United States. Is this a concern for your candidate, and how would he keep the United States engaged in the region?

Schriver: The priority in Asia, at the risk of sounding glib, is to make Asia a priority. Senator McCain understands the centrality of Asia to future of the United States and the necessity of being engaged. The first response to new initiatives on regional architecture is to ensure the integrity of the existing architecture – namely, that our military alliances are healthy, that we continue to invest in alliance modernization, and that the regional organizations in which we currently participate are empowered to promote our interests.

Senator McCain has often noted that our policies should be informed first and foremost through our alliances. Exploration of broader regional and subregional cooperation would begin with a strategic dialogue with allies and like-minded states.

Secondly, we won't persuade our friends in the region of our sincerity if our only response to new ideas is to complain that someone else is taking the initiative. Rather, we also should take the initiative to ensure countries in the region see positive alternatives. Senator McCain has raised the possibility of a League of Democracies to explore how like-minded democracies can work together to achieve positive regional and global outcomes.

Schiffer: The United States has long been an Asia-Pacific power, and an important guarantor of peace, stability, and development in Asia through its comprehensive engagement in regional affairs. Given its substantial economic, political, and security interests in the region, this engagement must continue.

Senator Obama believes there remains a deep reservoir of support for U.S. involvement in Asia. He is committed to enhancing and deepening the U.S. presence and U.S. partnerships with allies and friends to strengthen our involvement in this pivotal region.

At the same time, however, Senator Obama also believes that in recent years the United States has been asleep at the switch as Asia has begun to consider new vehicles for dialogue and cooperation and to address the many security challenges facing the region. While he recognizes we need not be a member of every institution that is created, he believes the United States should be actively engaged in both strengthening existing institutions and in the on-going discussion about, and development of, new institutions that supplement and complement already existing U.S.-centered regional security structures.

In order to maintain our viability in a steadily evolving security environment, Senator Obama believes that the U.S. should aim to participate in organizations that meet the functional challenges facing the region and that play the most important role in the region's political, economic, and security affairs.

USAPC: Asia is home to the majority of the world's 1 billion-plus Muslims. What initiatives would your candidate undertake to improve U.S. relations with Asian Muslims?

Schiffer: Senator Obama understands the need to engage more closely and directly with Asia's significant Muslim population. He is personally aware of the central role of Islam and Muslims in Southeast Asian affairs, having spent four of his first 10 years in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim nation.

He also understands that the region has undergone an extraordinary metamorphosis over the past decade, maintaining a religiously tolerant orientation while accommodating increased religiosity in its many diverse societies. While there have been some radical manifestations of Islam, including terrorist groups such as Jemaah Islamiah, the overall nature of Islam in Southeast Asia has been an essential component of the region's on-going political and economic development in recent years.

To improve our relations with Asian Muslims, Senator Obama believes we must first reverse the widespread perception among them that the so-called U.S. "war on terrorism" is a war on Islam. The Bush Administration's misguided war in Iraq, and perversions of justice and the rule of law as symbolized by Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay have contributed substantially to the terrible state of our relations and reputation with Muslims around the world, including in Asia.

While he will apply the full spectrum of U.S. power to the fight against terrorism, including military force when necessary, Senator Obama has made clear that he intends to bring the U.S. occupation of Iraq to an end, close down the detention centers in Guantanamo Bay, and reestablish the rule of law to begin to restore the U.S. reputation around the world, including in Muslim nations.

Senator Obama understands that to the vast majority of Asian Muslims the extremists and terrorists are as big a threat to their well-being as to ours. As a result, he recognizes that we need to listen more to their perspectives on how to address this threat, align ourselves with their developmental interests, and contribute more of the resources they require to attack the extremist challenge from within.

While Asian Muslims may not always agree with U.S. policies, we can do much more to increase understanding and explain our policies to Asia's Muslim communities through increased and more effective public and private diplomacy.

Schrivver: Our relations with the Muslim world present a multi-faceted challenge that will require a multi-faceted response. Senator McCain has stated that our first step to improving our image around the world must be to get our own house in order – and in this regard he's cited the need to close Guantanamo Bay and to end any blurring of lines on torture.

But Senator McCain also understands that America's strengths are the very same attributes that can appeal to the Muslim world if communicated properly. America's strong support for family values, our principled stand in welcoming people of all faiths in our country, and our strong international record in condemning religious persecution can all help form a foundation for improving our communication with Asia's Muslims.

Senator McCain also believes we can invest further in our relationships with key Muslim countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia in ways that reflect a genuine interest in their success as multi-ethnic, multi-religious democracies with majority Muslim populations.

USAPC: A variety of free trade agreements (FTA) are being developed between and among Asian countries. How does your candidate feel about the United States being excluded from these deals? What initiatives would he undertake to address this problem?

Schrivver: Senator McCain is a strong proponent of free trade. He believes that we should vigorously pursue free trade through multilateral mechanisms as well as through new bilateral trade agreements involving the United States.

For example, Senator McCain has been a strong supporter of the U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement. As president, he would seek the necessary authorities from Congress to continue trade liberalization, and he would seek to be involved in Asia's progress toward trade liberalization as an active participant driving the agenda.

Schiffer: Senator Obama believes that existing mechanisms, such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, are a useful platform for U.S. economic engagement with the Asian region. Senator Obama believes that any trade agreements we negotiate must have binding labor and environmental standards, provide for effective access to foreign markets for American exports, and be rigorously monitored and enforced.

USAPC: How would your candidate secure denuclearization of North Korea? Would he continue the Six-Party process or something like it?

Schiffer: Senator Obama is committed to pursuing direct diplomacy in close consultation and coordination with our allies South Korea and Japan, and with the cooperation of China and Russia. In exchange for the complete, verifiable elimination of the North's nuclear weapons programs, the Six Party Talks offer North Korea the possibility of a bright future marked by economic assistance, sanctions relief, security assurances, and ultimately normalization of relations with the United States.

But the Six Party Talks by themselves are not enough. They must be accompanied by direct, principled, tough-minded talks with the DPRK [Democratic People's Republic of Korea]. While President Bush scuttled the previous process of diplomatic interaction and refused to engage with North Korea in the first part of his administration, Pyongyang withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), reprocessed its spent fuel, exported nuclear technology to Syria, tested long-range missiles, and ultimately tested a nuclear device.

And the bottom line is that President Bush's approach -- an approach also advocated by Senator McCain in 2000 and 2003, when he spoke and wrote disparagingly of negotiating with North Korea -- made the United States and our friends and allies less safe and less secure. Only after the President changed course and authorized direct dialogue in December 2006 did the North shut down its reactor, accept international monitoring of its key nuclear facilities, and begin to disable them.

Senator Obama believes that we must engage with North Korea not because we trust them, but because we do not. We should proceed on the basis of action for action, fulfilling our commitments *provided* that the North verifiably dismantles all its nuclear weapons facilities, hands over its fissile material, and returns to the NPT. The DPRK's recent stated intention to rebuild its nuclear facilities at Yongbyon would be an unacceptable step backwards. Other issues must also be addressed before relations can be fully normalized, including the question of abductees.

As President Kennedy said, "We must never negotiate out of fear, but we must never fear to negotiate." Patient diplomacy is our best option. But Senator Obama will not allow Pyongyang to dictate or renegotiate the terms of our agreements, and does not believe we should take any option off the table should the North continue to threaten international peace through its pursuit of nuclear weapons.

Schrivver: Senator McCain supports diplomacy to resolve the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula, including multilateral diplomacy. He has expressed concerns, however, about the progress of our negotiations.

As president, Senator McCain would alter our approach in a few ways. First, he would seek a return to the core principles of denuclearization known as CVID, or complete, verifiable, irreversible, dismantlement.

Second, he would work to improve our alliance with South Korea and our communication with Japan on these matters. Our approach to North Korea should be informed first and foremost by the views of our closest allies in northeast Asia.

And, third, he would seek to broaden our policy goals related to North Korea. Currently, we seem to have a de-nuclear policy only. Senator McCain would pursue policies that take into account human rights, illegal and illicit activities, economic and political reform, proliferation, and reduction of the conventional military threat from North Korea.

USAPC: The Bush administration created the U.S.-China Strategic Economic Dialogue (SED) as a way of addressing a variety of bilateral economic issues. Does your candidate feel that the SED remains a useful vehicle for addressing U.S.-China economic issues? Are there alternative vehicles he would prefer using?

Schrivver: The key criteria to judging any particular forum are the results produced. Senator McCain is open to sustaining elements of his predecessor's policies if there is a proven track record of results that further American interests.

While he has not taken a position specifically on whether or not to continue the SED, he does feel that we need the right modalities for addressing challenges and opportunities in our very complex bilateral economic relationship with China. Senator McCain is hopeful that Secretary Paulsen's next round of discussions with China scheduled for after our election will produce good results for our economy.

Schiffer: Senator Obama will assess the value of specific policy forums once he is president. In general, he believes that high-level dialogue with China is useful, and it is essential for our economic high-level dialogue to aim to create a more balanced economic relationship and address long-term challenges confronting our two countries.

We have many important issues to discuss, from encouraging China to rely more on domestic demand and less on exports for growth to working together to tackle climate change.

USAPC: U.S.-South Korea relations have been strained by economic disagreements. Relations likely will be tested further by base closures and relocations. How do we repair relations with our longtime ally, but do so in a manner that also addresses the domestic political forces in both countries that have fueled these disagreements?

Schiffer: Senator Obama believes that the first step to strengthening our relationship with South Korea is to recognize the tremendous strides that South Korea has made in recent decades. South Korea is not only a vibrant democracy boasting a world class economy, but also has been a tried and trusted ally of the United States whose contributions in the region and around the globe have not been fully recognized or appreciated in recent years.

As our relationship continues to develop, it is more important than ever for the United States and South Korea to clarify mutual expectations and to craft a shared vision for the alliance

that recognizes South Korea's enhanced capacity and extends beyond the defense of the Korean Peninsula.

In crafting such a vision and in forging closer cooperation in the global arena, Senator Obama believes that the United States should fully take into account the values, norms, and interests it shares with its Korean ally, and at the same time support South Korean-led efforts to promote inter-Korean rapprochement and reunification. It is essential that our two governments strengthen prior policy coordination and deepen their bilateral dialogue on key foreign policy challenges including the North Korean nuclear program.

Finally, the United States needs to reinvigorate its public diplomacy in Korea in order to better explain U.S. policy to the Korean people, better understand their concerns, and better prepare a political foundation for the future of U.S.-Korean relations.

Schrivver: It is unrealistic to suggest we can eliminate domestic forces in either country who criticize the U.S.-South Korea bilateral relationship. But the best bet for garnering greater support for the alliance is to invest in it wholeheartedly and to give it long-term vision and direction so that it may remain relevant to addressing 21st century challenges.

Senator McCain believes our alliance with South Korea can modernize and evolve into a truly global alliance with a global orientation. As a like-minded democracy that largely shares our values, our work together on a global agenda will form the best argument for the importance of the alliance going forward. The basis for this positive future is clear in the numerous polls in South Korea that show the United States remains the most popular country in the world among the Korean people.

USAPC: There continue to be tensions in U.S.-Japan relations arising from the Six-Party Talks. How would your candidate go about reassuring Japan of its importance as an Asian ally and strengthening U.S.-Japan relations going forward?

Schrivver: Japan is our most important relationship in Asia and this should be demonstrated in word and deed. Senator McCain has stated explicitly that our policies in the region should be informed by the views of our allies first. He also has noted our need to have Japan as a strong partner in addressing the various challenges associated with North Korea.

Senator McCain also believes the U.S.-Japan alliance has even greater potential than has been realized in its nearly fifty-year history. Having high aspirations for the alliance and challenging Japan to move toward full partnership not only supports U.S. interests, it also is another way of conveying to friends in Japan our confidence and support.

Schiffer: The U.S. relationship with Japan is the cornerstone alliance of American policy in Asia, and close cooperation between the United States and Japan is the starting place for the maintenance of stability and prosperity in the region. Senator Obama believes that close consultation and cooperation between the United States and Japan is vital if we are to be successful in addressing regional security challenges like North Korea's nuclear weapons programs, where the right mix of pressure and inducements and tough-minded dialogue will be necessary to resolve all issues on the Six Party process agenda, including abductees.

The U.S. and Japan also should consult closely on the short- and long-term impact of China's rise and work to create an environment in which China makes the right decisions to move on a peaceful path.

In the years ahead Senator Obama also believes that Japan and the United States have a significant opportunity to deepen and broaden cooperation, based on shared values and common

interests, to address not just regional issues but shared global challenges as well, including climate change, energy security, and economic development of the world's poorest countries.

Neither the United States nor Japan can afford to take the alliance or our broader relationship for granted. Close and constant attention to furthering a deep, genuine, and enduring collaboration between the United States and Japan will be a vital element in an Obama administration's efforts to build peace and prosperity both in Asia and around the globe.

Randall G. Schriver is a Founding Partner, Armitage International LLC, and President and CEO of the Project 2049 Institute. Immediately prior to his return to the private sector, he served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs.

Michael Schiffer is a Program Officer at the Stanley Foundation. This affiliation is listed for information only. The opinions expressed here are Mr. Schiffer's personal views and do not reflect the views or opinions of the Stanley Foundation.

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