

## Obama and China's Rise

Jeffrey A. Bader

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Jeffrey Bader provides a superb account from an insider's perspective of the first two years of Obama's policies toward Asia that will be of interest to foreign policy theorists as well as to students of American foreign policy and of United States–China relations. Bader is an old Washington hand, having served in several administrations in policy-making positions as well as being on the staff of Brookings. He ended his long career in the position of senior director for Asia at the National Security Council as a policy-maker with access to all the relevant key figures in the Obama administration, including the president. Unlike many of the memoirs of major political figures, this is not an exercise in self-glorification or justification. Rather, it is a record of the key developments of America's Asia policy focusing on how and why decisions were made as seen from the perspective of an active participant.

Inevitably, the account reflects the perspectives from Bader's office as well as from his own personal predilections. He does not stray into areas of foreign policy beyond his immediate responsibilities, nor does he expand on the views of the president, the secretary of state, or of that of defense, except as they are directly involved in the issues he addresses. However, he notes that unlike previous administrations, notably that of his predecessor, Obama's was not characterized by deep ideological, personality, or bureaucratic divisions, at least as far as Asia was concerned. Several times in the book Bader describes how he and Kurt Campbell, the head of the State Department's Asian affairs policy, combined to make important interventions in the policy process.

Not surprisingly, problems associated with the rise of China dominate the book. Bader gives a blow-by-blow account of the administration's encounters with China. He presents the principle guideline of the approach of the Obama administration as seeking to influence China's foreign policy in the direction of observing international norms. This is the mainstream Washington view of how to accommodate a rising China.

To take but one example, he presents success in getting China to sign up to UN Security Council resolutions that impose sanctions on North Korea as evidence of its policy-makers having been persuaded by the American counterparts that Pyongyang's errant behavior damages Chinese interests (p. 38). Doubtless, Chinese open diplomatic criticism of North Korea was important, but critics may argue that this overlooks US intelligence reports of Chinese lack of observance of these sanctions. However, Bader's account is about his part in the diplomatic policy-making.

Bader has little time for theories of grand strategy, or for major governmental statements on policy. He sees these as the product of trade-offs between the bureaucracies and personalities involved, which have little effect on actual policy. In other words, he hues to the pragmatic approach, which has been the hallmark of much of the Obama approach to foreign policy. Indeed, one of the points that come across in the book is Bader's deep admiration for Obama the man and for his handling of policy-making and of his meetings with foreign leaders. Obama comes across as highly intelligent, rational, even-tempered, and always in command of the brief to any policy on which a decision has to be made.

Much light is shed on relations with allies and with Asian multilateral institutions. Clearly, Washington found it easier to deal with South Korea than Japan. The former had an effective government under a conservative leader, who not only was secure in office, but who shared much of the American approach to North Korea and to China. Japan, which is arguably the more important geopolitical ally in the Asia-Pacific, seemed to present nothing but trouble because of its problems of domestic governance epitomized by a rapid turnover of prime ministers. In particular, Bader and his colleagues were irritated by the moves of the inexperienced first prime minister of the incoming opposition party. The clear expectation was that allies should adhere to key American interests. Thus the United States did not want conflict between China and Japan, but on the other hand, it was opposed to an attempt by Japan to seek a new balance between its relations and the United States, even if it sought to retain the alliance with the United States. On the more positive side, the book details the moves by the Obama administration to re-engage with the Asian multilateral institutions.

However, most interest in the book centers on relations with China. Contrary to the conventional view, Bader relates that Obama's first visit to China in November 2009 went well and that he also handled the

December Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen well. He blames the failure of the foreign policy team to keep the media closely informed about developments for the contrary impression to have gained ground. Not all will agree with his interpretation of these developments, but all will find of interest his account of the role of the media and of the steps taken to cultivate the press in particular. In any event, Bader's account of dealing with the more assertive China in 2010 is fascinating. The American objective was to impress on China that it should pursue its maritime and associated territorial claims with due regard to international law. He recounts how he and Campbell were the principal authors of Hilary Clinton's intervention in the July 2010 ASEAN meeting, in which she shocked the Chinese not only by insisting on their need to adhere to international law, but also offered to mediate in their dispute with ASEAN members so that the disputes could be handled in a multilateral setting.

In sum, this is very much an insider's account of the first two years of the Obama administration's encounter with China. General readers as well as scholars and students with diverse interests will benefit from a close reading of this book by one of the most experienced and knowledgeable practitioners of Asian diplomacy in Washington.

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