

Regional Overview:

More of the Same . . . and Then Some!

Ralph A. Cossa
Pacific Forum CSIS

More of the same! That appears to be the Asia policy theme for the Bush administration as it begins its second term. During her maiden voyage through Asia, incoming Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice reinforced the central themes of her predecessor: the centrality of the U.S.-Japan alliance relationship and Washington's support for a more "normal" Japan; a commitment both to the defense of South Korea and to a peaceful settlement, via the six-party process, of the nuclear standoff with Pyongyang; and a continuation of Washington's "cooperative, constructive, but candid" relationship with the PRC, including a "one China" policy that objects to unilateral changes in the status quo by either Beijing or Taipei. Underlying all this was Washington's continued commitment to the promotion and expansion of democracy in Asia and around the globe, a central theme in President George W. Bush's second inauguration address.

Unfortunately, it was more of the same from Pyongyang as well, as it continued to boycott the Six-Party Talks, insisting that Washington, among other preconditions, abandon its "hostile attitude" toward the DPRK and apologize for branding North Korea as an "outpost of tyranny" during Secretary Rice's confirmation testimony. China and Taiwan also continued their familiar dance: one step forward (direct flights between Taiwan and the mainland during the Chinese New Year period), two steps back (the PRC's anti-secession law and the massive protests it drew in Taiwan). Further complicating this issue and adding to already rising tensions between Japan and China were reports – largely erroneous – that Japan was now prepared to actively assist the U.S. in maintaining stability in the Taiwan Strait.

Surprisingly, Secretary Rice made no mention of regional multilateral organizations during her Asia policy address. Nor did Assistant Secretary of State-designate Christopher Hill during his March 15 confirmation hearings, although he did express a desire to "thicken up" multilateral diplomacy in East Asia during his end of quarter "listening and learning" trip to Southeast Asia.

Finally, in the "more of the same" category, the quarter ended the way it began, with Indonesia responding to its second devastating massive earthquake in three months, thankfully this time without the tsunami and staggering death tolls experienced in the aftermath of the Dec. 26 event. The U.S. and global response to this earlier crisis raised international cooperation (and generosity) in humanitarian/disaster relief to new levels and helped to improve the Bush administration's battered image in this part of the world.

U.S. Asia Policy: Openness and Choice

Secretary Rice, in what was billed as a major foreign policy address at Sophia University in Tokyo on March 19, stated that “the future of Asia and the Pacific community will be defined around two great themes: openness and choice. She applauded the emergence of democracy in predominantly Buddhist Thailand, in predominantly Muslim Indonesia, in predominantly Catholic Philippines, in constitutional monarchies like Japan, in former communist states like Mongolia, in ethnically homogenous societies like South Korea, and in ethnically diverse countries such as Malaysia. “So,” she pointedly noted, “there is no reason why it cannot continue to spread in this region, particularly to Burma.” This comment seemed to put Rangoon – and its ASEAN colleagues – on notice that Washington expected some progress with its promised but demonstratively ignored “roadmap to democracy.”

Secretary Rice heaped particular praise on “transformational” Japan, which “has set the example for political and economic progress in all of East Asia.” Demonstrating Washington’s trust and confidence in its long-term ally and support for Japan’s higher international profile, she cited Tokyo as a “key partner” in the global war on terror and the search for peace in the Middle East. “Japan has stepped up to wider global responsibilities,” Dr. Rice proclaimed, and “we welcome this.” She proposed a Strategic Development Alliance under which Washington and Tokyo could “systematically” focus on advancing the common strategic objectives laid out during the so-called “2+2” talks in mid-February (more on this later). She also declared that Washington “unambiguously supports” a permanent seat for Japan on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

Dr. Rice also identified the Republic of Korea as “an essential partner for peace and security in the region” and as a “global partner” as well, citing the “significant number” of ROK troops in Iraq – the third largest foreign contingent behind the U.S. and UK – and its command responsibility for a Provincial Reconstruction Team in Afghanistan. She also praised Washington’s alliances with Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand, and its growing cooperation with Singapore, while offering “a vision for a decisively broader strategic relationship [with New Delhi], to help India achieve its goals as one of the world’s great multiethnic democracies.” Of note, Dr. Rice made no mention in her prepared text of regional multilateral initiatives like the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) “gathering of economies,” or the ASEAN Plus Three/East Asia Community (APT/EAC) initiatives – Washington is an active participant in the first two, but has thus far been excluded from the latter.

Secretary Rice praised China’s “important role” in the Six-Party Talks in pursuit of our “diplomatic common cause” of eliminating nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula. “America has reason to welcome the rise of a confident, peaceful, and prosperous China,” Dr. Rice proclaimed, “We want China as a global partner, able and willing to match its growing capabilities to its international responsibilities.” She reaffirmed Washington’s “one China” policy: “We oppose unilateral changes in the status quo, whether by word or deed, by either party. Both sides must recognize that neither can solve this problem alone.” But she also underscored her “openness is the vanguard of success” theme: “Even

China must eventually embrace some form of open, genuinely representative government if it is to reap the benefits and meet the challenges of a globalizing world.” During her subsequent visit to Beijing she reinforced the Bush administration’s commitment to human rights and religious freedom by attending Palm Sunday religious services at a (government-authorized) Christian Church in the Chinese capital.

North Korea Nuclear Crisis: the Standoff Continues

During her Sophia University speech, Secretary Rice clearly and specifically laid out Washington’s promises and warnings to Pyongyang. Her speech contained several olive branches: “No one denies that North Korea is a sovereign state,” she stated, adding “we have no intention of attacking or invading North Korea.” She reaffirmed that Washington was “prepared to offer multilateral security assurances to North Korea in the context of ending its nuclear program.” But, she also warned that the U.S. would “not be silent about the plight of the North Korean people, about the nature of the North Korean regime, about the regime’s abduction of innocent civilians of peaceful neighboring countries, and about the threat that a nuclear-armed North Korea poses to the entire region.”

In her subsequent visit to Seoul, she reaffirmed the Bush administration’s strong support for the Six-Party Talks and, together with her ROK counterpart, called on Pyongyang to return to the negotiating table without delay and without preconditions. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to “a peaceful and diplomatic resolution.” The Six-Party Talks, Secretary Rice asserted, was “the best way for North Korea to receive the respect that it desires and the assistance that it needs.” The extent of Washington’s willingness to engage North Korea in direct dialogue within the context of the Six-Party Talks remains unclear, however. While both Secretary Rice and her ROK counterpart, Foreign Minister Ban Ki-Moon, claimed a “common understanding” on this issue, Minister Ban seemed more specific when he stated that, “direct dialogue between these two countries within the framework of the Six-Party Talks would be helpful.” The best that Secretary Rice would offer was “when we are at the table, there are sometimes direct dialogues between the United States and North Korea, in the context of the Six-Party Talks.” Then she added, “what we will not do is separate out the United States from the other parties in the Six-Party Talks.”

In his own more upbeat rendition of the U.S. position, Ambassador to South Korea Christopher Hill, senior U.S. representative to the Six-Party Talks and incoming assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs – who has been confirmed in his new position but was not yet sworn in at quarter’s end – is quoted in the Korean press as saying “we have a full intention to meet North Korean representatives separately and discuss, if it is within the framework of the Six-Party Talks.”

Pyongyang remained unimpressed and unmoved. At quarter’s end it was still refusing to return to the negotiating table unless a growing list of preconditions were met, in order to create “mature conditions” for the talks. Washington must end its “extreme hostile policy” and show “trustworthy sincerity” by pledging “coexistence and noninterference”

and agreeing to “directly engage in dialogue” with the self-declared nuclear weapon state “on an equal basis,” various North Korean spokesmen insisted throughout the quarter. Pyongyang at first demanded that Secretary Rice “explain” why North Korea had been listed as an “outpost of tyranny.” Later it insisted on an apology. (In response, Secretary Rice stated, “I don’t know any person who has apologized for speaking the truth.”) Pyongyang also demanded a security guarantee directly from Washington, a statement of “no hostile intent,” and a “sincere attitude that could be trusted.” Adding icing to the cake, it also demanded that Tokyo be ejected from the stalled talks because “its presence does more harm than good.” In response, Washington continues to insist that Pyongyang return to the talks “without preconditions.” The other dialogue partners agree . . . although Seoul and Beijing keep calling for the U.S. to “be more flexible,” a response (in this author’s opinion) that encourages Pyongyang to continue its stonewalling.

Proving that “nothing makes things worse than efforts by members of the U.S. Congress to make them better,” two Congressional delegations to Pyongyang left the North Korean leadership with the impression that either President Bush (during his Inauguration or State of the Union speeches) or Secretary Rice (at her confirmation hearing) would publicly wave an olive branch in Pyongyang’s direction. Publicly announcing that Pyongyang expected conciliatory statements helped ensure that this would not happen. Leading Pyongyang to believe that it might create unhelpful illusions and, more importantly, provided a vehicle for subsequently blaming Washington rather than Pyongyang for the continued stalemate.

North Korea’s Feb. 10 Declaration: More of the Same?

If Pyongyang’s stonewalling seemed like more of the same, its Feb. 10 pronouncement that it felt “compelled to suspend our participation in the [six-party] talks” and that it had “manufactured nukes” seemed to break new ground . . . to everyone except the other members of the six-party process, that is. Washington and Seoul in particular argued that the statement was nothing new, mere rhetoric, and/or a bluff. But, while Pyongyang had frequently alluded to its “powerful nuclear deterrent” and reportedly whispered about its arsenal into the ears of various American interlocutors, its Feb. 10 official public pronouncements were the most explicit to date: “We had already taken the resolute action of pulling out of the NPT and have manufactured nukes for self-defense.”

This nuclear “coming out” was followed in early March by an even more explicit, lengthy DPRK Foreign Ministry memorandum on Six-Party Talks which asserted that “it is very natural that we made nuclear weapons and is [sic] making them,” pointing out that it withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 2003 and “legitimately made nuclear weapons outside the scope of the international treaty.” Given Washington’s “hostile policy,” the March 2 Memorandum continued, “to think that we would just give up the nuclear weapons we have manufactured with so much effort is in and of itself a miscalculation.” By the end of the quarter, Pyongyang seemed to be further raising the stakes: “Now that we have become a nuclear power, the Six-Party Talks should be disarmament talks where participants can solve the issue on an equal basis.” Pyongyang now appears to be insisting that Washington’s nuclear arsenal also be put on the table:

“To realize a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula . . . U.S. nuclear threats on the Korean Peninsula and its neighboring region should be removed.” (In reality, this is a non-issue since it has been declared U.S. policy since 1991 not to base nuclear weapons overseas.) It’s anyone’s guess if Pyongyang is telling the truth about its nuclear capabilities. But one thing is clear: North Korea has unambiguously declared to the world that it is a nuclear weapons state and that it henceforth demands to be treated as such.

So, Who’s Bluffing?

As this overview has frequently pointed out, ROK President Roh Moo-hyun has consistently argued, since his inauguration, that the ROK “would not tolerate” nuclear weapons in the North. Pyongyang could either go down the path of political and economic cooperation with the South and reap the considerable rewards inherent in this choice or it could choose to pursue nuclear weapons and face political and economic isolation from Seoul and the rest of the international community; it was supposed to be an “either-or” choice. However else you choose to interpret the North’s nuclear claims, it clearly called Seoul’s hand on this issue. Seoul’s response – that it is still too early to conclude that North Korea has nuclear weapons – tells Pyongyang that it can indeed have it both ways. [For the author’s recommendations on a more appropriate ROK response, see “Pyongyang Raises the Stakes,” *PacNet* No. 6, Feb. 10, 2005.]

At quarter’s end, Washington was sending strong signals that “further measures” might have to be taken if the North continued to boycott the talks. Assistant Secretary-designate Hill, at his March 15 confirmation hearing said, “we need to see some progress here. If we don’t, we need to look at other ways to deal with this.” This was reinforced by Secretary Rice during her visit to China: “It goes without saying that, to the degree that a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula gets more difficult to achieve, if the North does not recognize that it needs to do that, then of course we’ll have to look at other options.” She declined to discuss what those options might be. But Washington has made no secret of its desire to take Pyongyang before the UNSC if the Six-Party Talks prove ineffective, a move China (among others) has resisted.

Of note, Ambassador Hill also told the Congress that North Korea, if it was to enjoy the benefits of enhanced trade and aid, “must dismantle its nuclear programs, plutonium, and uranium, in a manner that is complete, verifiable, and irreversible,” revealing that CVID remains in the Bush administration’s lexicon as it enters its second term. Hill also seemed to be encouraging a further tightening of the economic screws when he told Congress that we needed to “look very carefully at what [countries doing business with North Korea] are doing . . . with a view to determining, are they somehow encouraging bad behavior from the North Koreans or are they encouraging North Korea to come back to the table.” While Washington dismissed rumors that it had set an end of June deadline for the talks to resume, it was clear that its patience was running out and that it expected its dialogue partners to put more pressure on Pyongyang to return to the negotiations sooner rather than later.

Anti-Secession Law: Closing (or Opening) the Door?

In Taiwan, the anticipated defeat of the ruling “pan-green” coalition during the December 2004 Legislative Yuan (LY) elections seemed to open the door for at least some measured cross-Strait interaction now that President Chen Shui-bian’s “splittist” tendencies had seemingly been contained. The first sign of a possible spring thaw was the agreement to allow unprecedented direct flights between Taiwan and the mainland, by both Taiwan and PRC carriers, over the Chinese New Year period. As a further goodwill gesture, Beijing sent two senior representatives from its Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS) to attend funeral services honoring Koo Chen-fu, who previously headed the counterpart Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) responsible for conducting cross-Strait dialogue with ARATS during the early 1990s. This was accompanied by a lowering of voices on both sides of the Strait, amid discussions on how to build upon the direct flight initiative.

This one step forward was quickly neutralized by a giant step back in early March when the National People’s Congress passed (by a vote of 2,896 to 0) an anti-secession law (ASL) authorizing the use of “non-peaceful means and other necessary measures” in the event “that possibilities for a peaceful reunification [with Taiwan] should be completely exhausted.” During a visit to Beijing in late January, I asked senior Chinese officials why Beijing felt compelled to proceed with the ASL, given the recent positive upturn in cross-Strait relations. Sorting through a variety of reasons and excuses, it appears that the real answer is that the law was originally aimed at stopping the “creeping independence” that seemed to be speeding up in Taiwan as a result of Chen’s narrow reelection as president in March 2004 and his anticipated LY victory. By December, the political momentum in Beijing (read: high-level leadership support) for the ASL was too great to turn it off. In short, not unlike last year’s decision by President Chen to pursue his “defensive referendum” despite strong objections from Beijing (and Washington), domestic political imperatives, this time in Beijing, seemed to be driving leadership actions, despite their geopolitical drawbacks. As many had warned, Beijing’s heavy-handed action revitalized Chen’s coalition and put the opposition once again on the defensive.

The big question is, “what happens next?” Does the ASL make further progress in cross-Strait relations unlikely (if not impossible), as its critics argue, or does it, as Beijing contends, open the door for further progress as long as Taiwan does not take irreversible steps toward independence? To answer this question, one needs to read beyond Article Eight (the “non-peaceful means” clause). On a more constructive note, Article Six lays out a series of “measures to maintain peace and stability in the Taiwan Straits and promote cross-Strait relations.” More significantly, Article Seven affirms that, “the state stands for the achievement of peaceful reunification through consultations and negotiations **on an equal footing** between the two sides of the Taiwan Straits.” [Emphasis added.]

More intriguing is the acknowledgment, also in Article Seven, that “these consultations and negotiations may be conducted in steps and phases and with flexible and varied modalities.” It remains unclear what “flexible and varied modalities” are acceptable to

Beijing. In my January discussions, Chinese officials implied that an acknowledgment by Taipei that “an agreement to agree to disagree” over the interpretation of “one China” had previously existed – the so-called “1992 consensus” that allowed earlier direct cross-Strait dialogue to occur – might suffice. President Chen himself hinted that such an agreement might be possible when, in his National Day speech last October, he proposed that “both sides use the basis of the 1992 meeting in Hong Kong, to seek possible schemes that are ‘not necessarily perfect but acceptable,’ as preparation of a step forward in the resumption of dialogue and consultation.”

If the leadership in Taiwan is prepared to move beyond the emotion of the new law and creatively test its possibilities, and the leadership in Beijing is serious when it asserts that the ASL opens rather than closes the door for meaningful dialogue, then the anti-secession law might yet prove helpful to both Taipei and Beijing.

Japan Steps Forward on Taiwan . . . or Does It?

Japan found itself in the middle of the cross-Strait issue in early February when *The Washington Post* reported, in advance of the annual Security Consultative Committee meeting’s final communiqué, that the joint statement “could help lay the groundwork for the Japanese to extend as much cooperation as they legally can, including logistic support such as transportation and medical rescue operations behind the lines of combat” in the event of a U.S. confrontation with China over Taiwan. *The New York Times*, citing the *Post* story, noted that “common strategic objectives” contained in the communiqué “will include ensuring security in Taiwan as well as on the Korean Peninsula.” A subsequent *Times* story, which (accurately) described a steady deterioration of China-Japan relations, noted that this was caused in part by “Japan’s pledge to aid the United States in defending Taiwan.” The Chinese were predictably outraged while Taiwan, equally predictably, applauded the “fact” that “Japan has become more assertive.”

The New York Times, in its initial reporting, did note that Secretary Rice “declined today to directly confirm reports that Japan will align itself with the United States’s policy of protecting Taiwan.” It then joined *The Washington Post* and others in assuming this was the case. Those who took the time to wait for, *and then actually read*, the so-called “2+2” declaration – signed by the U.S. secretaries of State and Defense plus the Japanese minister of foreign affairs and the Japan Defense Agency director general – would have had difficulty reaching the conclusion that Japan was now prepared to assert itself in the Taiwan Strait or anywhere else. It noted that one common strategic objective shared by Tokyo and Washington was to “encourage the peaceful resolution of issues concerning the Taiwan Strait through dialogue.” Another was to “encourage China to improve transparency of its military affairs.” Both were preceded by the objective to “develop a cooperative relationship with China.” This hardly constitutes “a demonstration of Japan’s willingness to confront the rapidly growing might of China,” as the pre-release *Washington Post* analysis breathlessly proclaimed.

What’s significant is that Japan, for the first time, was willing publicly to define the “common strategic objectives” that would help define and explain the rationale for the

alliance in the 21st century. The identification of global as well as regional common objectives underscored the changing nature of the alliance that Secretary Rice cheered in her Sophia University speech.

Whither Multilateralism?

As noted in the opening summary, Secretary Rice made no mention of regional multilateral organizations during her major Asia policy address and made only passing reference to multilateralism in general in her Jan. 19 confirmation testimony. Neither did Assistant Secretary of State-designate Christopher Hill during his March 15 confirmation hearings, although he did applaud “expanding regional cooperation that is addressing transnational issues, such as human trafficking, international crime, environmental degradation, and the spread of infectious diseases, including HIV/AIDS.” While he did not mention it, much of this regional cooperation has occurred through the ARF and APEC and through cooperation, both collectively and individually, with the 10 ASEAN states. Hill also made reference to the many East Asian democracy “success stories,” highlighting in particular “the example that Indonesia, the world’s most populous Muslim majority nation, sends to other countries in terms of its vibrant new democracy, free press, and religious diversity.”

Ambassador Hill also spoke of bolstering relations with long standing treaty allies and pointed out that America’s solid military-to-military relationships in the region contributed to the speedy, effective response to the Dec. 26 earthquake and tsunami. Among the challenges to be faced, he said, were areas of disagreement with China (which he intended to confront “forthrightly and creatively”), terrorist threats (especially in the Philippines and Indonesia), the need for greater political freedom in Laos and Cambodia, and the “destructive policies” of the Burmese junta, whose continued detention of Aung San Suu Kyi and “sham” National Convention “portend a pessimistic future.”

While he is not expected to be sworn in as assistant secretary until mid-April, Ambassador Hill has already conducted a low-key visit to Manila, Bangkok, and Hong Kong. During a press conference in Hong Kong March 31, he skillfully avoided being drawn into a debate on the controversy surrounding the leadership change in Hong Kong following the resignation of Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa, stating that he was on a “listening and learning” trip. In his opening remarks, he did however say that he would “be interested in seeing what we can do to thicken up the multilateral diplomacy in the region,” making specific reference to this year’s APEC meeting in Korea and “a number of ASEAN events coming up in the next month or two.” When questioned about his “thickening up” comment, he noted that “as a general proposition, we’d like to see APEC be all it can be, to make sure it’s really doing well in terms of its agenda,” further opining that he thought “working through multilateral institutions as well as working bilaterally is very important.”

There is a growing concern among many U.S. allies and friends in Southeast Asia that the new Bush Asia team will be even less interested in the region and its multilateral institutions than its predecessor, given their lack of familiarity with Asia and

Washington's traditional (and growing) preoccupation with Northeast Asia in general and the Korean Peninsula in particular. ASEAN members will be closely watching Assistant Secretary Hill when he participates in the upcoming ARF Senior Officials Meeting in Vientiane, Laos May 18-20, in hopes of hearing more definitive statements about Washington's views regarding multilateralism in general and the ARF and APEC in particular. Should he fail to go or, worse yet, should Secretary Rice be unable to attend her first ASEAN Regional Forum ministerial meeting in Vientiane in late July, this would send the wrong signals and potentially negate some of the confidence and good will gained by the Bush administration during its greatly appreciated tsunami relief operations.

U.S. Military Humanitarian Relief Operations: Making a Difference

"The military role is to provide its unique capabilities and significant capacity to provide immediate relief and save lives." This simple sentence, by Adm. Thomas Fargo, then-commander of the U.S. Pacific Command, sums up the very complicated mission undertaken by forces under his command in response to the horrific Dec. 26, 2004 earthquake and tsunami that left some 200,000 or more people dead or missing, with upward of a million more displaced, in 11 South and Southeast Asian nations. As devastating as the damage was, it could have been much worse, if it had not been for the rapid response by the international community. While many countries participated and the U.S. Defense Department deliberately played down its central role in the humanitarian relief efforts, pointing first and foremost to the various host nations and their military and civilian relief efforts, the U.S. military's "unique capabilities and significant capacity" provided lifesaving relief, and hope, to countless tens of thousands.

At the height of the relief effort, some 16,000 U.S. military personnel were deployed throughout the areas most affected by the tragedy; more than two dozen U.S. ships (including an aircraft carrier battle group, a Marine amphibious group, and the hospital ship *USS Mercy*) and over 100 aircraft were dedicated to the disaster relief effort, at an estimated cost of over \$5 million/day (above and beyond the pledged U.S. government aid – recently increased to \$950 million – and the substantial – roughly \$700 million and still growing – corporate, institutional, and personal American contributions spearheaded by former Presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton). By the time the major relief effort ended, U.S. military aircraft had flown over 3,500 sorties; over 24 million pounds of relief supplies and equipment were delivered. Six Maritime Preposition Ships from Guam and Diego Garcia also were dispatched to provide critical drinking water, helping to prevent widely predicted but largely avoided outbreaks of malaria and other diseases.

The U.S. response was fast, effective, and well-coordinated. U.S. ambassadors in the stricken countries immediately offered financial and technical assistance and called upon U.S. military and Agency for International Development (USAID) experts to begin assessing the damage. U.S. ships were given orders to begin deploying to the region within hours of the tragedy – well before the extent of devastation was clear or any government had officially requested their assistance – in order to be there if and when called upon. Within 24 hours, U.S. Navy *P-3 Orion* aircraft began flying missions over

the affected areas to help assist in the search and rescue effort and to assess the extent of the damage. This, despite the fact that U.S. military forces continue to be severely over extended and many had seen recent duty in Iraq.

Within 48 hours of the tragedy, with news reports still estimating that “20,000 people are feared dead,” the U.S. Pacific Command was already establishing a joint task force to coordinate and conduct humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations. Access approval was requested and quickly obtained from the Thai government to allow its massive Utapao Air Base to serve as the regional hub for the relief effort. Meanwhile, U.S. defense attaches were arranging overflight and landing rights and making initial contacts to allow U.S. forces, if and when authorized to assist, to more effectively interact with their regional counterparts.

Three days after the tsunami struck, Combined Support Force 536, under the command of USMC Lt. Gen. Robert Blackman (who also commands the Third Marine Expeditionary Force in Okinawa), was already playing a key role in coordinating the U.S. and initial international effort. Most notably, CSF 536 worked closely with U.S. embassies and with USAID field elements, including deployed USAID Disaster Assistance Response Teams (DARTs) to ensure a seamless U.S. response. While Washington bureaucracies are not famous for their ability to work effectively with one another, USAID Administrator Andrew Natsios praised the “effective coordination mechanisms, from the tactical field level all the way up to the strategic headquarters level.”

The CSF 536’s Combined Coordination Center (CCC) at Utapao quickly became the heart of the coordinated international relief effort, with liaison officers from Australia, the UK, Japan, Thailand, and Singapore, along with a Civil-Military Coordination Cell, USAID DART representatives, and a local official from the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). They met several times a day to coordinate their respective national and institutional efforts. This provided an essential element of on-scene coordination that helped to avoid duplication of effort and facilitated accurate assessments of the extent of the damage and identification of the areas most in need of assistance. The CSF’s CCC also helped facilitate the efforts of the international “Core Group” (involving the U.S., Australia, Japan, India, Canada, and others) that was established to coordinate the first stages of the international relief effort, identify and fill gaps, and avoid or break logistical bottlenecks, until the United Nations was able to mobilize and play a more central role in the relief response.

U.S. military personnel, in every instance, worked closely with their local military counterparts, in some cases overcoming years of suspicion, and once again demonstrating the value of routinizing military-to-military contacts to allow for more effective cooperation during periods of crisis. As Adm. Fargo noted, “one of the reasons [we] have been able to respond effectively is because we have established these habits of cooperation together over many years. . . . we have built strong partnerships and standard operating procedures and when this disaster occurred we were able to reach back and put those into effect.”

Some of the lessons learned during the first tragedy came into play when the region was struck by a new series of massive quakes March 28 (one of 8.7 magnitude, followed by a 6.7 magnitude quake two hours later). Thankfully, no significant tsunami was generated but had there been, people living in the previously affected coastal regions were at least warned to be prepared. Unlike the December tragedy, the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center this time had a long list of people to call and those on the other end knew with to do with the information once they received it. Aid was also able to flow into the newly stricken areas much more quickly and effectively.

Changing Muslim Views of U.S. and Bin Laden

The massive U.S. humanitarian relief effort, and the generosity demonstrated by the U.S. government and the American people alike, seems to have helped Washington's image in the Muslim world. A nationwide poll in Indonesia conducted Feb. 1-6, 2005 revealed that more people in the world's largest Muslim country now favor U.S. efforts against terrorism than oppose them. In a stunning turnaround of public opinion, support for Osama bin Laden and terrorism in the world's most populous Muslim nation dropped significantly, while favorable views of the U.S. increased. The poll demonstrated that the reason for this positive change was the American response to the tsunami. The poll was conducted for Terror Free Tomorrow poll by the leading Indonesian pollster, Lembaga Survei Indonesia, and surveyed 1,200 adults nationwide with a margin of error of ± 2.9 percentage points.

Key findings included:

- For the first time ever in a major Muslim nation, more people favor U.S.-led efforts to fight terrorism than oppose them (40 to 36 percent). Importantly, those who oppose U.S. efforts against terrorism have declined by half, from 72 percent in 2003 to just 36 percent today.
- For the first time ever in a Muslim nation since Sept. 11, support for Osama bin Laden has dropped significantly (58 percent favorable to just 23 percent).
- 65 percent of Indonesians now are more favorable to the U.S. because of the U.S. response to the tsunami, with the highest percentage among people under 30.
- 71 percent of the people who express confidence in bin Laden are now more favorable to the U.S. because of U.S. aid to tsunami victims.

Among the "critical findings" cited by Terror Free Tomorrow are the following:

- The support base that empowers global terrorists has significantly declined in the world's largest Muslim country. This is a major blow to al-Qaeda and other global terrorists.

- U.S. actions can make a significant and immediate difference in eroding the support base for global terrorists.
- The U.S. must sustain its relief and reconstruction efforts in Indonesia in order to prevent the support base from rebounding.
- The size and strength of the support base can dramatically change in a short period of time. This is a front in the war on terrorism where the U.S. can continue to achieve additional success.

As noted last quarter, the outpouring of U.S. assistance was not motivated by a desire to win friends and influence people but was a natural, time-honored, consistent American response to tragedies, whether at home or abroad, regardless of the race, religion, or nationality of those most affected. Nonetheless, it was gratifying to see that some goodwill was (at least temporarily) generated. Whether it will be sustained will depend, in large part, on the new Asia team's ability to convince Southeast Asians that Washington believes the region to be important in its own right and not just as a "second front" in the war on terrorism.

Regional Chronology January-March 2005

Jan. 1, 2005: 6.5 magnitude aftershock strikes Sumatra, Indonesia.

Jan. 4, 2005: South Korea increases its tsunami relief contribution to \$50 million.

Jan. 6, 2005: Special ASEAN Leaders' Meeting on Aftermath of Earthquake and Tsunami in Jakarta.

Jan. 8, 2005: DPRK says it will not return to Six-Party Talks until U.S. drops its "hostile policy."

Jan. 8, 2005: Congressman Lantos visits DPRK.

Jan. 11, 2005: Assistant FM Shen highlights China's aid of \$133 million to tsunami-stricken countries.

Jan. 12, 2005: Chinese security agents abruptly end news conference by four ROK legislators, forcibly removing journalists; ROK demands an explanation. (Beijing says domestic law bans news conferences not approved in advance.)

Jan. 13, 2005: Indonesia asks all foreign troops to complete humanitarian missions by March 31.

Jan. 13, 2005: Congressman Weldon visits the DPRK.