

JIAP OBSERVATION

THINKING DEEP INSIDE THE BOX: THE ARMITAGE REPORT TWO YEARS LATER

*This was first published in the 10/6-12/02 edition of the **Asia Policy Weekly (APW)**, a weekly review of important news, reports, opinion, and primary source documents for Japan analysts produced for members of the **Japan Information Access Project** [<http://www.jiaponline.org>]*

October 11 marked the second anniversary of the Armitage Report*. The poorly attended press briefing on Capitol Hill that presented the team report to the public 24 months ago featured a panel discussion that included many of the men who now hold important positions in the Bush Administration: Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Armitage, James Kelly, Michael Green, Robert Manning, and Torkel Patterson. These Asia policy experts all came to office with a vision of how Asians should behave. They were misinformed.

The Armitage Report imagined that nothing would change in Asia, at least not without US influence. The Report took several features are given: Japan will remain a non-nuclear ally; North Korea will remain isolated and belligerent; China will remain an unfriendly trade partner and uncooperative military threat; Taiwan will continue to behave and keep its distance from China; South Korea will continue humbly to host US troops; and South and Southeast Asia were a morass of inconsequential entanglements, best avoided. Asia was a manageable stasis the last front of the cold war against communism. Japan was the Great Britain of Asia for the US.

In reality: Japan only considers itself as having a relationship (*kankei*) not alliance (*domei*) with the US and is using all means to exert its independence. The South Koreans are not keen about their American allies and their engagement policy with the North is bearing fruit. China can be a reliable ally and will overtake Japan economically. North Korea is into no-nonsense regime maintenance and knows how to call the American's bluff as a peacemaker; and Taiwan is practicing democracy as it builds closer ties with the Mainland. Among Asians there are few that want North Korea to merge into the South and there are many that desire the US out of Asia.

The region now is moving well outside the box that the Armitage Report sought to create for it. Japan with its long-standing ties to North Korea may create a near-alliance with Pyongyang. Japan and South Korea may replace the US nuclear umbrella for one maintained by proxy by North Korea or both may simply intensify their own nuclear programs. Taiwan, with many of its citizens trading with, living in, or defecting to the PRC may tacitly rejoin the Mainland. The growing interest in regional security cooperation is as a bulwark against *both* China and the US.

The Armitage Report anticipated none of this. The men involved were too sure of the power of America to compel Asians to behave. Some of the blame for this shortsightedness can be placed on the Asians themselves. The careful cultivation of these Americans by Asia's foreign policy establishments isolated these men from the great economic, social and political changes of the region. Sometimes the Asian opinion leaders, designated colleagues, unofficial interlocutors, and Track Two team members were as isolated intellectually as their American peers. Thus, the lasting contribution of the Armitage Report may be its description of what America can no longer do in Asia.

Mindy L. Kotler

Director

Japan Information Access Project

(202) 822-6040, mkotler@jiaponline.org, <http://www.jiaponline.org>

Ms. Kotler holds a MA in International Relations from Yale University and received her BA with high honors in Chinese History and Government from Smith College. She is also among the first classes of girls to attend The Phillips Exeter Academy.

*Actual name: *The United States and Japan: Advancing Toward a Mature Partnership*, INSS Special Report, 10/11/02. http://www.ndu.edu/inss/press/Spelrepts/SR_JAPAN.HTM