

JIAP OBSERVATION

THE ACCIDENTAL TOURIST

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There are few expectations for Bush's trip to Asia both by observers and his policy team. What was once to demonstrate the strengthening US alliances in Asia to mitigate China's growing power, the trip is now an affirmation of US-Chinese understanding. The challenge will be keeping relations with Japan and Korea from deteriorating further. A senior Administration official briefing Washington experts was so sure of trip to China, that he did not even mention the stop in his initial remarks. And in every US magazine cover story from *Time* to *The Economist* the story is Japan.

It seems that the trip was hastily slapped together. Our best guess is that early January briefings from both government and private sector sources on the Japanese economy were so dire that the Administration became actively alarmed. As the US cannot now take over the Japanese economy, the only tool Washington has is to give Tokyo the necessary push or scapegoat to enact sensible albeit painful economic policies. Thus, the quick trip to Tokyo for the President of the United States to lend his support to Koizumi. The Korea and China stops are simple appropriate diplomacy, especially after Bush's Asia policy by hyperbole.

The rub, however, is two-fold. Does Koizumi still have the freedom, i.e., popular political support, to enact drastic, for Japan, economic reform. More important, can Japan act like a capitalist country and absorb the shocks that fixing the economy might entail? Even a partial no to either question bodes poorly for the world economy.

Central to the American thesis that Koizumi can make a difference in the Japanese economy is that the US can influence Tokyo and that Tokyo wants to be influenced. Unfortunately, today, that answer is a likely no. There is suspicion among many Japanese that the West will be the only ones benefiting from any economic restructuring. There is also little acceptance that Japan is as great an economic and political power that the US wants it to be. In light of Koizumi's waning popularity, there is more political capital to be made by the opposition both in and out of the LDP by distancing itself from the US and US-style reform. Koizumi's opponents can condescendingly point to him as a toothless "lion" without either Tanaka or Bush .

None of the experts discussing Bush's trip to Asia touched on the negatives have mentioned above. To be sure, there is a tacit puzzlement as to why Bush was going at all. No "deliverables" are expected, no breakthroughs anticipated, and no "takeaways" to be received. The Administration paints the journey as a "make-up" for Bush's abbreviated fall trip to Asia. This excuse is satisfying to none. Even explanations that the trip is a thank you to our Asian allies and to "deepen and stabilize our new cooperative patterns" falls flat. A gracious analysis notes that the trip allows Bush to get the China trip out of the way before the mid-term elections or that the trip allows the Administration to put Asia policy back on the table. The best, however, that observers can come up with is that Bush will be in China exactly on the 30th anniversary of the Shanghai Communiqué. And a senior Administration official sheepishly admitted that this was purely accidental.

NB: 1972. President Nixon met with Chairman Mao Zedong of the Communist Party of China on February 21. [Bush arrives in Beijing to hold talks with Jiang Zemin on the 21st.] The two leaders had a serious and frank exchange of views on Sino-US relations and world affairs. The Shanghai Communiqué was signed on February 28, 1972. <http://asia.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/episodes/15/documents/us.china/> or <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/china/peoplevents/pande08.html>

NB: 1942. President Bush addresses the Japanese Diet on February 19th, the 60th Anniversary of President Franklin Roosevelt's signing of Executive Order 9066, forcing 110,000 Japanese Americans into interment camps for the

duration of World War II. [Will Bush be apologizing?]

<http://www.uwec.edu/Academic/Geography/Ivogeler/w188/j1.htm>

NB: 1945. On February 19th, Operation Detachment, the U.S. Marines' invasion of Iwo Jima, was launched. The amphibious landings of Marines began the morning of February 19 as Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal, accompanied by journalists, surveyed the scene from a command ship offshore. As the Marines made their way onto the island, seven Japanese battalions opened fire and obliterated them. By evening, more than 550 Marines were dead and more than 1,800 were wounded. The capture of Mount Suribachi, the highest point of the island and bastion of the Japanese defense, took four more days and many more casualties. When the American flag was finally raised on Iwo Jima, the memorable image was captured in a famous photograph that later won the Pulitzer Prize.

<http://www.historychannel.com/tdih/index.html>

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