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## The Obama Administration and US Policy in Asia

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Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs

ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute

Volume 31, Number 2, August 2009

pp. 189-216

ARTICLE

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### Abstract

American preoccupation with the global economic recession and conflicts in Southwest Asia and the Middle East indicated that US relations with the rest of the Asia-Pacific region were likely to be of generally secondary importance at the start of the Obama administration. In Asia, the economic crisis put a premium on close US collaboration with the major economies, China and Japan, and on avoiding egregiously self-serving economic practices that could prompt protectionism and curb world growth. Apart from the Middle East-Southwest Asian region, the other major area of US security concern in Asia was North Korea. North Korea's escalating provocations created a major international crisis in 2009 that forced the Obama government to change priorities and give top-level attention to dealing with Pyongyang. The provocations included a long range ballistic missile test, a nuclear weapons test (North Korea's second), withdrawal from the Six-Party Talks and resumption of nuclear weapons development. Longstanding US concern with the security situation in the Taiwan Straits declined as President Ma Yingjeou reversed the pro-independence agenda of his predecessor and reassured China. The Obama government seemed poised to build on and

make a few needed adjustments to Bush administration policies towards regional allies and emerging powers, China and India. Early indicators suggest that enhanced US activism and flexibility in Southeast Asia may represent a significant change in US policy in Asia under an Obama administration that otherwise seems generally inclined to adhere fairly closely to pragmatic and constructive US approaches to key Asia issues in recent years.

*Contemporary Southeast Asia* Vol. 31, No. 2 (2009), pp. 189-216  
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DOI: 10.1215/0013-2545-216  
ISSN 0219-747X print / ISSN 1793-204X electronic

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**Key words:** US leadership, US-Asian relations, economic crisis, security concerns, Obama administration.

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