

FRANK TALKING

AMERICA'S MODERN ORACLE STILL SEES THE LIGHT ON THE HILL.

INTERVIEW WITH FRANCIS FUKUYAMA

THE DIPLOMAT: You have done considerable work on failed states, some in Australia's immediate neighbourhood. How do you see Melanesia and the South Pacific?

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA: I think that first of all Timor Leste and the Solomons are genuine failed states.

The problem in all those places is that you're dealing with societies that didn't have states prior to European colonialism and they've got a very strong social structure below the state level that really inhibits the formation of things like modern political parties. It's very hard to do economic development because so much of the land is tied up in customary land ownership.

I do think, though, that when the enhanced cooperation program was started back in 2003, it was in the wake of September 11 and the Bali bombings, and the general fear was that failed states could be the platform for terrorism. In retrospect that danger is really not nearly as great as it may have been perceived.

Now we can look at the problem more calmly and say what's really necessary to create governments that can actually deliver services and goods to their people with a minimum amount of stability.

TD: Should Australia be the one who takes leadership in the South Pacific, given that there are a lot of players in that area now – New Zealand, China and Taiwan?

FUKUYAMA: China and Taiwan are not going to be helpful at all. Their rivalry has been this great fount of money for governments in that region that just end up being used for fairly corrupt purposes.

The Chinese can be brought along eventually but in the short run, as in Africa and other parts of the developing world, their primary interests are commercial and they're not on board with regard to environmental or other kinds of standards. And so I think the impact of their involvement is largely negative.

It's quite important that Australia maintains a strong presence there because of all the other international players, with the exception of New Zealand; none has the strength and the combination of the resources and standards for dealing with that region.

TD: Just as there is anti-Americanism around the world, there has been a kind of anti-Australianism in the South Pacific. How can Australia address that?

FUKUYAMA: It's very hard when you have this kind of highly dependant relationship where one country is so much richer or more powerful than another one. So I think that just comes with the territory.

One comment that I've heard from a number of Melanesians is

that they actually preferred dealing with New Zealanders. That probably has to do with the Kiwis' experience in dealing with the Maori populations. I do think that leads to a different kind of perception in the way the two countries handle things. But I don't want to overstate that because it's just inevitable that there's going to be resentment regardless of how Australia behaves.

TD: What about the US' relationship with Japan? Do you think that's in good shape or do you think it's deteriorated slightly over the last few years?

FUKUYAMA: Under the Bush administration it was extremely good. In fact good to the point that it was a little bit troubling because when you have someone like Abe as Prime Minister wanting to revise Article 9 prohibiting Japan from building up its military forces, we probably should have distanced ourselves a little bit from that.

The Japanese are worried right now that if a Democrat is elected there's going to be a shift back to a more China-centric policy but regardless of whether the next US president is a Democrat or Republican the alliance is still going to be a bedrock of American East Asian policy.

TD: What do you think of the debates in the Japanese military about nuclearisation and greater force projection?

FUKUYAMA: The nuclearisation thing never made any sense to me at all because Japan was perfectly happy to live under an American nuclear umbrella during the entire Cold War when the Chinese and the Soviets had thousands of nuclear weapons that were capable of hitting Japan.

And why all of a sudden because of a nuclear threat from Korea they should decide that the American umbrella is not credible any longer and that they need their own, is something that I don't quite get.

TD: Do you think that comes out of a sense of frustration with the US relationship?

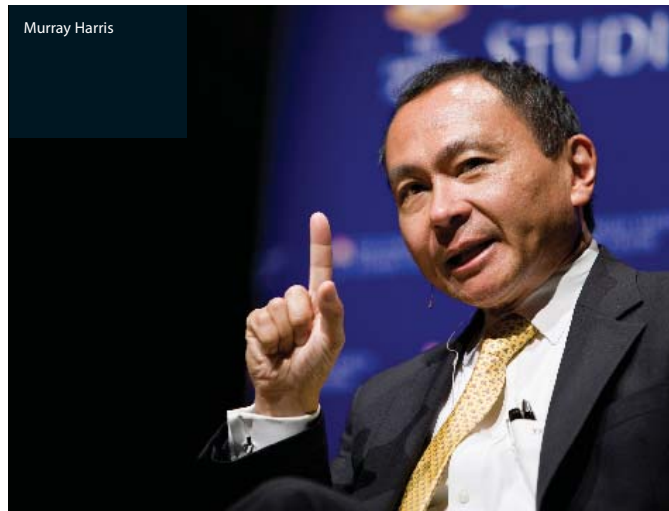
FUKUYAMA: I don't think so. I think that it's a reflection of a certain kind of nationalism.

Because the nationalist right in Japan is not particularly pro-American they want Japan to strike out on its own and that's exactly what we don't want to happen.

The whole reason you've had peace in Asia since 1945 is that the United States has taken certain aspects of sovereignty from Japan and kept them in a way that's reassured the rest of East Asia.

Japan could move to that kind of posture – and ultimately ought to – but it has to be based on a much more open confrontation

Murray Harris





about all the historical issues and domestic Japanese politics in a way that more deeply reassures China and Korea.

TD: Robert Kagan contends that the conflict between autocracy and democracy has re-emerged as the driver of history. Would you agree with that?

FUKUYAMA: I think he's a little bit too nostalgic for the Cold War. He wants to see the current world in these bipolar terms as if there's these two ideological poles of democracy and autocracy.

I think that you're in a much more multi-polar world, where some regimes are more democratic and more autocratic, but the democratic ones don't cohere necessarily and the autocratic ones don't cohere, they do it because they've got common interests. I think it's not ultimately that helpful a way of seeing the world, but it is true that there are these two big authoritarian modernisation projects going on and we'll just have to see how stable and successful they are.

TD: We spoke with a former senior Bush administration official last year who said that the last thing America needs now is "big" ideals in foreign policy. Do you agree with that?

FUKUYAMA: No. I think that democracy promotion has always been an important component of American foreign policy. It's just we've given it an exaggerated role as a strategic instrument and that link needs to be broken. But this idea that we're not going to care about human rights abuses, or the way other humans treat their citizens, that's not in line with American values.

It's not good for the world as whole if the US simply went back to a Kissingerian realism. We just need a better balance where this is not projected on the world as the US trying to make everybody.

TD: Do you think one of the first tasks of the next US president is to revitalise America's presence in big multilateral institutions?

FUKUYAMA: It probably would send a good signal. Beyond that I think there's a more fundamental structural question about whether the existing institutions we have are the right ones. The Bretton-Woods institutions largely don't have a role anymore.

I think that in East Asia the more kinds of multilateral institutions you can incorporate China into in the long run the better. I don't mean more like the East Asian summit but things that could deal with real security and economic issues that potentially might be more productive.

It's conceivable that if you had a region wide agreement like a free trade area in the Americas or the EU and if it had more teeth with regard to corporate governance, that might be considered more useful.

At the moment it would be up to the United States to push

something like that. We've just been out of this multilateral game for a while.

TD: What about the economic mood between Beijing and Washington?

FUKUYAMA: The economic relationship is so strong, we're in a mutual suicide pact with the Chinese with them holding American dollar reserves and the US being China's largest export market.

The one issue that overlays this is the protectionist one. On the trade front there's a lot of anti-Chinese sentiment and it's much stronger in the Democratic party than among the Republicans. For some reason they take it out on small countries like Columbia and Korea rather than China itself. But I do think that that's something to watch and worry about.

TD: Can any new US president really make a fresh start given the foreign policy albatrosses they'll be inheriting?

FUKUYAMA: I think people are probably overly optimistic about how big a break we can make. In the Middle East and a lot of areas, it's not just albatrosses, we have commitments. It's not clear that you want to break out of a lot of those existing arrangements.

TD: What is Barack Obama's relationship with the military establishment in Washington?

FUKUYAMA: It's non-existent right now.

TD: Would this be a problem for his presidency if he was elected?

FUKUYAMA: I think that it's a problem for any Democrat; Bill

» IT'S NOT GOOD FOR THE WORLD IF THE US SIMPLY WENT BACK TO KISSINGERIAN REALISM

Clinton didn't handle it all that well. There's a longer term problem in US civil military relations in that once you have a professional military it becomes kind of a class unto itself. There's a gap between them and the rest of the surrounding society and the Democrats are more on the outside than Republicans are.

TD: Will this weaken Obama's ability to change the direction of American foreign policy?

FUKUYAMA: It all depends on the way he goes about doing that. For all the close ties between the Republicans and the military, the military is really exhausted and there's a lot of unhappiness about a lot of the things they've been asked to do in the last seven years of the Bush presidency. So I think potentially handled the right way Obama could make it work. ☒

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA VISITED AUSTRALIA AS A GUEST OF THE U.S STUDIES CENTRE. AN EXTENDED VERSION OF THIS INTERVIEW IS AVAILABLE AT WWW.THE-DIPLOMAT.COM.