

SECTION 4:

U.S. POLICY

THE UNITED STATES AND NORTHEAST ASIA: THE COLD WAR LEGACY

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The engagement of the United States with Northeast Asia was largely shaped during the decade that stretched from the defeat of Japan and the onset of the Cold War, to the Korean conflict and its aftermath. The response of American policymakers to these events resulted in the creation of a network of bilateral security alliances with Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. American national security policy had three primary objectives: to maintain a stable balance of power in the region, to contain the military and ideological challenge of the Soviet Union and Communist China, and to ensure commercial access to Asian markets.

Those Cold War-era alliances, and the realist policy that underlies them, have endured remarkably well. This structure remains intact despite significant geopolitical changes, including the United States' withdrawal from Vietnam, Japan's recovery as the major industrial power in Asia, South Korea's democratization, the Soviet Union's collapse, the normalization of relations with the People's Republic of China, and China's rise as a regional and global power.

From a fairly early point in the Cold War, American policymakers expressed interest in a regional approach to security in East Asia, including economic and even political cooperation and integration. Some initial efforts along these lines took place, most notably in Southeast Asia. But they were largely ineffectual and episodic in nature, particularly when compared with Western Europe. As Cold War tensions eased in the 1980s, and economic rivalry emerged between the United States and Japan, interest in developing regional institutions grew in Northeast Asia.

Despite this renewed interest, the United States continues to rely on a structure of bilateral security alliances in Northeast Asia, in some ways revitalized since the mid-1990s by the ongoing challenge of North Korea's nuclear program and the rise of China. That alliance system, however, effectively inhibits formation of a consistent American policy on intraregional cooperation. Further, the desire to maintain a stable balance of power in Northeast Asia has led the United States to actively discourage and oppose efforts at regional integration that appeared to exclude an American presence.

This chapter examines the Cold War legacy of American policy toward Northeast Asia, its enduring nature, and its impact on the American response to regionalism in Northeast Asia.

The United States and Northeast Asia: Forming the Cold War Paradigm

At the time of Japan's surrender, American policy in Northeast Asia was naturally focused on the need to prevent Japan's reemergence as a direct threat to the United States and to restore stability and a balance of power in the region. Japan's demilitarization, the payment of reparations for wartime aggression, and the promotion of democratization were the main objectives of the American occupation of Japan.

The United States saw itself principally as an offshore power in East Asia. It did not harbor deep commitments to continental Asia. The American occupation of southern Korea at the close of World War II was not deeply thought out. Planning for Korea's postwar status was largely an afterthought of the Japan occupation. The U.S. commitment to involvement in China was shallow, and it visibly waned as Nationalist control over China rapidly deteriorated.

Within a couple of years of the end of the Pacific War, the outlines of a Cold War policy in Northeast Asia—one centered on building a long-term security alliance with Japan as part of a broader offshore system of alliances—had already begun to emerge.

The brilliant American diplomat George Kennan, the first director of Policy Planning at the State Department, saw this geopolitical reality in starkly pragmatic terms. His views, as they were formed by May 1947, could easily be read as a summary of American policy in Northeast Asia over the next two decades.

If, then, the deterioration of the situation in China did not seem to constitute in itself any intolerable threat to our security, what it did do was to heighten greatly the importance of what might now happen in Japan. Japan, as we saw it, was more important than China as a potential factor in world-political developments. It was...the sole great potential military-industrial arsenal of the Far East. Americans, laboring under that strange fascination that China has seemed to exert at all times on American opinion, tended to exaggerate China's real importance and to underrate that of Japan. I considered then, and hold to the opinion today, that if any time in the postwar period the Soviet leaders had been confronted with a choice between control over China and control over Japan, they would unhesitatingly have chosen the latter. We Americans could feel fairly secure in the presence of a truly friendly Japan and a nominally hostile China—nothing very bad could happen to us from this combination; but the dangers to our security of a nominally friendly China and a truly hostile Japan had already been demonstrated in the Pacific war. Worse still would be a hostile China *and* a hostile Japan. Yet the triumph of communism in most of China would be bound to enhance Communist pressures on Japan; and should these pressures triumph, as Moscow obviously hoped they would, then the Japan we would have before us would obviously be a hostile one.¹

In the summer of 1947, the State Department Policy Planning staff, under Kennan's direction, turned its attention to Japan and, at the urging of General Douglas MacArthur, to the conclusion of a peace treaty to terminate the occupation. In two papers on American global policy submitted to Secretary of State Marshall in late 1947, Kennan touched on his view of the future of East Asia.

Given the importance of securing Europe and the Middle East from the danger of Soviet expansionism, Kennan argued that the United States was "greatly overextended" in the Far East. For the United States, "Japan and the Philippines would eventually constitute the cornerstones of a Pacific security system adequate for protection of our interests." Kennan further recounted in his memoirs: "If we could retain effective control over these two archipelagos in the sense of assuring that they would remain in friendly hands, there could be no serious threat to our security from the east within our time." Kennan proposed that the United States "liquidate unsound commitments in China and try to recover our detachment and freedom of action." Such actions, he believed, would assure Japan's security from Communist penetration and domination, not to mention Soviet military attack, and assist with Japan's economic rebirth, enabling it again to play an important regional role. He also supported independence for the Philippines, but only so long as it remained "a bulwark of American security in the Pacific region."²

In February 1948, Kennan went to Japan on a delicate mission to examine the future of occupation policy—delicate because MacArthur had effectively barred the State Department from any major role in that area. Kennan was able to establish a rapport with MacArthur, and his recommendations largely reflected the shift in direction already favored by the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP). Kennan's report to Marshall recommended relaxation of SCAP control over the Japanese government, a halt to new reform measures, a move to end the purges, and a shift toward economic recovery. Kennan favored movement toward a peace treaty, though not immediate, and envisioned retaining American armed forces and bases, though he left the door open to removing them later. He advocated preserving Okinawa (and the entire Ryukyu Islands group) as an American-occupied fortress in East Asia for "a long time to come." Kennan also called for reinforcement of the Japanese police and maritime coast guard forces.

Kennan's views reflected a broader consensus within the U.S. government. A Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) report on the "Strategic Importance of Japan," issued on May 24, 1948, clearly outlined the early Cold War policy:

Japan's defeat in World War II has created a vacuum of power in the Far East where the extension of Soviet influence and U.S. strategic interests have been brought into direct conflict. From the point of view of either the U.S. or the USSR, control of Japan is important to the control of the Far Eastern area, both because of the island's geographical location and because Japan,

while militarily defenseless at present, possesses a large reservoir of trained manpower, which, if mobilized and provided logistic support, could become a potent factor in determining the outcome of any future armed conflict embracing the Far East.

Extension of Soviet control or domination over North China, Manchuria and the whole of Korea would result in an incalculable loss of U.S. prestige throughout the Far East. Such a condition might greatly facilitate further Soviet extension into Japan itself, which in turn would expedite Communist expansion in Asia against diminishing resistance.³

A CIA report issued later that summer amplified the particular importance for American security policy in the region of retaining control of the Ryukyu Islands, particularly Okinawa. Control of those islands would give the United States a base for either defensive or offensive operations in Asia, a post from which to guard approaches to China and Korea, and an airbase to conduct surveillance of the entire region.

The CIA report argued that Okinawa would be the base to defend Japan and U.S. bases in the Philippines and other Pacific Islands. And it would “give the U.S. a position from which to discourage any revival of military aggression on the part of the Japanese.”⁴

Later in 1948, the National Security Council, in NSC 13, embraced Kennan’s recommendations, including preparations for the long-term strategic control of the Ryukyus and retention of the main naval base at Yokosuka on Tokyo Bay.⁵

Korea’s Place in American Strategic Thinking

Korea posed a particular challenge for American policymakers. In itself, Korea was not seen as having a great strategic significance, certainly not one worth risking broader conflict with the Soviet Union. But the prospect of Soviet control being extended over the entire Korean peninsula was viewed as a threat to the American position in Japan and throughout East Asia.

American policy options in Korea were laid out in a National Security Council report, NSC 8, issued on April 2, 1948. It presented the realities on the peninsula in sobering terms. U.S. forces and those of South Korean security forces were heavily outnumbered, both by Soviet occupation troops in the North and by troops of the North Korean People’s Army. According to the report, U.S. efforts to set up a democratic and sovereign government in the South were “handicapped by the immaturity of the Korean people,” and by the polarization of Korean political forces in extremes of the right and left. The economy in the South was highly limited, including in comparison to the more industrialized North.⁶

Unless the United States left a Korean security force able to defend itself against overt aggression, the report said, a U.S. withdrawal could be interpreted

as an act of betrayal by the United States of its friends and allies in the Far East. The report advocated extensive training of Korean armed forces and economic aid. But the report also reflected American concern that it might be drawn into a conflict, particularly with the bellicose southern government of Syngman Rhee. "The U.S.," the NSC recommended, "should not become so irrevocably involved in the Korean situation that any action taken by any faction in Korea or by any other power in Korea could be considered a *casus belli* for the U.S."⁷

The debate over Korea policy continued within the U.S. government as it became evident that the Soviet Union was preparing for the long-term division of the peninsula and the establishment of a Soviet-allied satellite state in the North. But the United States was still in the midst of a significant dismantling of its wartime military and was reducing its commitments to areas that were not seen as vital to American interests.

Divisions over the strategic value of Korea were expressed in a CIA assessment, issued in late February 1949, of the consequences of U.S. troop withdrawal from Korea. The CIA, with the support of State Department, Navy, and Air Force intelligence, stressed the danger of Soviet control over the entire peninsula. Soviet forces would be able to threaten or neutralize U.S. bases in Japan and the Ryukyus, the CIA report said. With remarkable precision, it outlined the series of events that in fact unfolded the following year:

The present function of U.S. troops in South Korea is purely psychological but no less important for that reason. Aside from the entirely unlikely event that the USSR would be willing to risk war over the issue of Korea, it is most improbable, so long as U.S. forces are present, that Soviet troops would participate in an invasion of South Korea. It is similarly less likely that the North Koreans themselves, with or without other Communist aid, would make war on the South. It is obvious, however, that should an invasion take place despite their presence, U.S. forces would either have to furnish active assistance to the South Korean Republic or be withdrawn, with serious loss of U.S. prestige.

In the absence of U.S. troops, it is highly probable that northern Koreans alone, or northern Koreans assisted by other Communists, would invade southern Korea and subsequently call upon the USSR for assistance. Soviet control or occupation of southern Korea would be the result.⁸

The Army, which was arguing most forcefully in favor of ending the American troop presence, dissented from this view. It did not believe that a U.S. withdrawal would be a major factor in the collapse of the South Korean regime, nor that invasion by the North was a strong possibility. It advocated economic and military aid to the South—and not the continued presence of a small number of U.S. troops—as the key to survival.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff weighed in to support this view in a decision taken in June 1949:

From a strategic viewpoint, the position of the Joint Chiefs of Staff regarding Korea, summarized briefly, is that Korea is of little strategic value to the United States and that any commitment to the United States' use of military force in Korea would be ill-advised and impracticable in view of the potentialities of the overall world situation and of our heavy international obligations as compared with our current military strength.⁹

General MacArthur also embraced this position clearly. In an interview at the time, he laid out an offshore security policy that Secretary of State Dean Acheson later echoed in his famous speech to the National Press Club in January 1950. MacArthur stated that the American defense line in the Pacific "runs through the chain of islands fringing the coast of Asia. It starts from the Philippines and continues through the Ryukyu archipelago, which includes its main bastion, Okinawa. Then it bends back through Japan and the Aleutian Island chain to Alaska."¹⁰

At that same time, the United States had begun to plan for the establishment of limited Japanese armed forces after the conclusion of a peace treaty.

The Response to the "Loss" of China: NSC 48

This constrained realism in the exercise of American power in East Asia continued even in the face of the Communists' defeat of the Nationalists in China. As laid out in the National Security Council (NSC) report 48/2, issued in late December 1949, U.S. security objectives in Asia were to develop the region on a "stable and self-sustaining basis," including militarily, with the aim of reducing and eventually eliminating the preponderant power and influence of the Soviet Union in Asia. The United States sought to maintain a balance of power, and to prevent the formation of power relationships in Asia that "would enable any nation or alliance to threaten the security of the U.S. or the peace, national independence and stability of Asian nations."¹¹

Mirroring the creation of NATO and early steps toward a European common market, the new Asian policy emphasized for the first time the goal of creating regional security and political associations in Asia. Accordingly, the United States should visibly support the formation of "regional associations of non-Communist states of the various Asian areas" and be prepared to assist such associations, "if invited."

"Associations should be formed as the result of genuine desire of nations," the NSC document said, warning that, to avoid the charge of using Asians to further U.S. ambitions, the United States should not take an active role early on. The NSC also called for creating regional security groupings, and for strengthening the bilateral security ties to Japan, the Philippines, and the

Ryukyus. Finally, in the course of promoting economic recovery and the revival of trade and development in Asia, the NSC report recommended early conclusion of a peace treaty with Japan, increased aid to South Korea, and the use of American influence to resolve tensions between European colonial powers and the rising nationalist movements of Southeast Asia, including in Indochina.

NSC 48 reflected the Truman administration's readiness to begin to accommodate the existence of the new Communist state in China. While it advised against early recognition of the People's Republic, it declined to treat it any differently than the Soviet Union. NSC 48 also suggested there might be opportunities to exploit rifts between the Chinese and their Soviet allies. Citing the opinion of the Joint Chiefs, NSC 48 concluded that even though Formosa, then the last bastion of the defeated Kuomintang, was of strategic importance to the United States, it was not sufficient to justify any overt military action to defend it.

The Truman administration was stung by charges that it had "lost" China to the Communists. But the response, which Acheson forcefully presented in his January 1950 speech on Asian policy, was consistent with the constrained vision of America's role in Asia, adopted over the previous few years. The United States, Acheson told the National Press Club, is an ally of Asian freedom and national independence. That freedom was threatened by communism, a spearhead of Russian imperialism that sought to seize control of Northern China and beyond. But, he said, Asians must defend themselves against the Communist threat, without depending on paternalist relations with the West. The United States' vital interests dictated the defense of Japan first of all, Acheson noted, referring to the defense perimeter that ran from the Aleutians to Japan through the Ryukyus to the Philippines.

No one could guarantee the military security of other areas of the Pacific against attack, the Secretary of State said. Resistance to attack would depend initially on Asians themselves, though Acheson also warned that the United Nations would respond to any aggression. Acheson indicated, however, that he saw a greater danger in Communist subversion than in military invasion. He drew a distinction between Southeast Asia—where the United States was already worried about the Communist takeover of Indochina but had little ability to respond—and Northeast Asia, where American interests were more clearly at stake:

In the north we have direct responsibility in Japan and we have direct opportunity to act. The same thing to a lesser degree is true in Korea. There we had direct responsibility, and there we did act, and there we have a greater opportunity to be effective than we have in the more southerly part.

These comments notwithstanding, and as NSC 68—the seminal doctrinal statement of containment strategy toward the Soviet Union that was adopted in April 1950—makes clear, American concerns were still centered in Europe and the Middle East, not in East Asia. It is not difficult to understand how Stalin

might have reached the conclusion, urged on him by North Korean leader Kim Il Sung, that the United States would not respond militarily to a North Korean invasion of the South, following the withdrawal of American troops in 1949. But that miscalculation significantly changed the nature and scope of the American commitment to Northeast Asia, and East Asia more broadly.

The Impact of the Korean War on U.S. Policy in Northeast Asia

The invasion of South Korea moved Northeast Asia to the center of American security concerns. It shifted the boundaries of the U.S. defense perimeter westward, to include South Korea, Taiwan, and continental Southeast Asia. It reinforced the strategic importance of Japan to American national security, accelerating plans to rearm Japan and pushing it to take on a broader regional security role.

The Korean War also hardened a view of China as a major security threat. That fear of China shaped American policy in East Asia for the next two decades, not least in motivating the deeper American military involvement in Vietnam. Finally, it invigorated interest in the creation of regional security and political associations in the region.

The Korean War did not, however, alter the basic goals and approach of American policy in Northeast Asia, as defined during the early days of the Cold War. American strategic aims continued to seek a stable postwar balance of power and to promote the broad economic development of the region as a major market and partner for the United States. Military security remained the central concern and bilateral security alliances the main instrument of American policy.

From the opening hours of the Korean War, American policymakers concluded—correctly, as subsequent archival material has confirmed—that the North Korean government could only have acted with prior instruction from their patrons in Moscow. While they were puzzled by a show of open aggression that was out of step with the caution the Soviets otherwise showed, American government officials concluded that the Kremlin had discounted the risk of general war with the United States. If American analysts went somewhat wrong, it was in seeing the invasion as the opening salvo of a broader and global Soviet assault on the West, one that would be followed soon by probes in other areas, from Berlin and Iran to Vietnam.

In Northeast Asia, American intelligence officials asserted, in estimates made from the first day of the war, that Japan was the real target of Soviet aggression. They urged policymakers to respond quickly and strongly to the attack, or risk losing control of that greater prize:

Soviet military domination of all Korea would give Moscow an important weapon for the intimidation of the Japanese in connection with Japan's future alignment with the U.S. The Kremlin may estimate that with control of Korea, elements in Japan favoring a neutral course would be greatly

strengthened. Moreover, Soviet military leaders may estimate that if the war does actually come, possession of Korea would be of great strategic value in neutralizing the usefulness of Japan as an American base.

The consequences of the invasion will be most important in Japan. The Japanese will unhesitatingly assume that the invasion is Soviet-directed and forms part of an over-all strategy, which, at some point, includes Japan. Japanese reactions to the invasion will depend almost entirely upon the course of action pursued by the United States since they will regard the position taken by the United States as presaging U.S. action should Japan be threatened with invasion.

Failure of the United States to take any action in Korea would strengthen existing widespread desire for neutrality. Defeat of the ROK would greatly intensify Japanese feelings of vulnerability while at the same time the failure of the U.S. to assist the ROK would add force to the argument that alignment of Japan with the United States would, while inviting Soviet aggression, in no way ensure American protection of Japan against such aggression.¹²

American intelligence specialists, interestingly, also saw an undercurrent of Sino-Soviet tensions, or at least potential tensions, in the decision to launch the invasion. Chinese plans to invade Formosa would be jeopardized by a tough American response, they correctly analyzed. And an effective American response would raise doubts in Beijing about the consequences of Soviet blundering.

Truman's unhesitating decision to enter the war, and MacArthur's drive to the Yalu had other unanticipated consequences. By drawing China into the war, the Korean War forestalled for at least a decade the eruption of those Sino-Soviet tensions. And it left the United States unable to exploit those differences fully for another decade beyond that. It is remarkable, however, even in hindsight, how clearly American intelligence analysts understood the political dynamics surrounding the Korean War.

The Korean War prompted a redrafting of the NSC policy toward Asia, now NSC 48/4, in May 1951. It placed East Asia at the center of American security concerns:

In view of the communist resort to armed force in Asia, United States action in that area must be based on the recognition that the most immediate overt threats to United States security are currently presented in that area.

Current Soviet tactics appear to concentrate on bringing the mainland of Eastern Asia and eventually Japan and the other principal off-shore islands in the Western Pacific under Soviet control, primarily through Soviet exploitation of the resources of communist China...Soviet control of the off-shore islands in the Western Pacific, including Japan, would present an unacceptable threat to the security of the United States.¹³

In addition to the previous goals, the NSC now called for denying Formosa to any Chinese regime aligned with or dominated by the USSR, and to strengthen the island's military capabilities. Further, it called for a defense of South and Southeast Asia against communist aggression, the first step toward a fateful military involvement in Vietnam.

A peace settlement and the conclusion of a bilateral security agreement with Japan was now a priority of American policy, along with security pacts with the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, and potentially others. Japanese disarmament was unambiguously abandoned in favor of the establishment of a Japanese military, "consistent with the needs of collective security in the Far East."¹⁴

That alliance system was rapidly realized. The security treaty with Japan, negotiated by John Foster Dulles, was signed in 1951. The Australia–New Zealand–United States (ANZUS) pact was signed in the same year. And the mutual defense agreement with South Korea was signed in fall 1953, following conclusion of the armistice agreement in the Korean War. That basic underpinning of American policy in East Asia continues to the present.

Regionalism and American Policy in East Asia

The turn of events in Korea had another important effect on American policy. It increased interest in trying to create regional security structures in East Asia, organizations that would parallel the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Europe and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) in Southwest Asia. American policymakers also began to think about steps toward forming regional economic associations.

The goal of collective security was even enshrined in the bilateral security deals reached at the time. The treaty with South Korea, for example, called for the two countries to "strengthen their efforts for collective defense for the preservation of peace and security, pending the development of a more comprehensive and effective system of regional security in the Pacific area." However, American policymakers quickly found that there were formidable obstacles to regionalism in East Asia. Asian nationalism, particularly the continuing mistrust of Japan and a reluctance to support any revival of a broader Japanese security role, was a vibrant force. Japanese themselves also resisted the idea of reemerging as a military power. The Japanese people, and their political leaders, including the government of Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru, had embraced the American-imposed antiwar Article 9 of the Japanese constitution. The Japanese government interpreted that provision as a bar to participation in any collective security agreement that went beyond limited self-defense of the Japanese home islands.

American policymakers have never fully resolved the conflict between those two diametrically opposed positions—the earlier promotion of anti-militarism and the decision to encourage a Japanese regional security role. But from 1952,

the United States began to push the latter option more vigorously, including encouraging Japanese conservatives to revise the constitution.

Following conclusion of the Korean armistice in 1953, the NSC called for efforts to explore the creation of collective security arrangements in the Pacific that would include Japan. In what would become a persistent theme of American policy in Northeast Asia, it instructed officials to press both Japan and the ROK governments to negotiate to normalize relations and settle the “outstanding issues” from the war.

By fall 1954, American policymakers acknowledged that these efforts had run into a set of hardened attitudes that would not bend to American will. Normalization of relations between Japan and Korea had gone nowhere. “Underlying this failure and the chronic tension between the two countries is the deeply ingrained Korean fear and suspicion of Japan, and the equally fundamental Japanese sense of superiority over the Koreans.”¹⁵ Relations between Japan, Australia, and New Zealand were likewise burdened by the past. “They continue to have considerable concern over the possibility of the resurgence of aggressive power in Japan,” the NSC reported.

Creation of a regional collective security structure that would include Japan even faced resistance from the Japanese. Japan was open to a regional organization for economic purposes, the NSC report said, but had little interest in a security pact that would require massive rearmament and lead toward the dispatch of Japanese forces abroad.

Facing that reality, American regionalism turned toward Southeast Asia, where the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was created in 1954. There was also some discussion of initial steps toward economic integration, including establishment of an Asian payments union, a conference to consider trade and payments problems in Asia, and the creation of a new lending institution for development loans (the Asian Development Bank was established in 1966).

American policymakers continued to talk about forming a broader collective security arrangement that would include Japan, the Philippines, Korea, and the Republic of China on Taiwan, linked to SEATO and ANZUS. But that remained a chimerical goal. The revision of the U.S.-Japan security treaty in 1960 did broaden the aim of that pact to include a joint commitment to maintain the security of the Far East. But nearly a half-century later, Japan and the United States are still struggling to stretch the limits of collective security created at the end of the American occupation.

Beyond the Cold War: Revival of Regionalism

The system of bilateral security alliances, centered on Japan and South Korea, was subject to tremendous stresses from the late 1960s. The Vietnam War, culminating in the American retreat in 1975, convinced many in East Asia that the United States was abandoning the region. The declaration of the Guam

Doctrine in 1969, followed by the withdrawal of an American infantry division from South Korea in 1971, deeply disturbed both Seoul and Tokyo. The surprise opening to China and the devaluation of the dollar—the “Nixon Shocks,” as they were known in Japan—only reinforced a sense of panic. In Korea, such panic encouraged the pursuit of a secret nuclear weapons program.

In Tokyo, the government of Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka began to explore the first glimmers of an independent Japanese diplomacy under the rubric of “resource diplomacy,” a response to the first oil crisis. Japanese policymakers began to discuss creation of a “yen zone” in Asia to lessen dependence on the dollar and on the U.S. market. Tensions over trade imbalances began to dominate the U.S.-Japan relationship.

The anti-Japanese riots in Indonesia and Thailand in 1974 were a setback to Japanese plans for a Japan-led regional economy. But Japanese policymakers continued to explore ideas for regional integration through the 1970s. In 1976, the prominent Japanese economist Okita Saburo, in collaboration with Australians, pushed the idea of an Organization for Pacific Trade and Development, a loose free-trade area.

Those developments reflected the emergence of East Asia as the most dynamic growth sector in the global economy and the diminishing sense of security threat, even in Korea. But American policy was still focused on and biased toward a security-based policy in East Asia, and relied on bilateral relationships that were not linked to any broader regional approach.

In the late 1970s, however, some American policymakers began to urge the United States to respond by crafting its own approach to East Asian regionalism. In 1979, Professor Hugh Patrick, in collaboration with Australia’s Peter Drysdale and others, picked up on the Pacific Community Concept, which advocated a trans-Pacific organizational approach. Former U.S. Ambassador to Korea Richard Sneider began organizing an informal network of American experts to support the idea. Some officials in the Carter administration, including Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke, encouraged this move toward regional cooperation.

The result of these activities was the establishment of the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC), a nongovernmental organization with official participation that began meeting in 1980. Eventually, the PECC led to the formation in 1989 of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) conference, the first major institutional expression of a broad regional organization. American policymakers who promoted this idea understood that Pacific regionalism had suffered from the absence of both a clearly shared and urgent mutual security threat—of the kind that motivated the formation of NATO—and a sense of compelling necessity sufficient to overcome the region’s diversity. They also saw Washington’s failure to promote regionalism and its dependence on a web of bilateral ties as factors in the failure to form a regional identity. Sneider summarized the situation as follows:

The U.S. is viewed as overly concerned by security problems and insufficiently concerned by economic problems, active only in support of its own policy initiatives while passive to those of other regional countries. For the United States, particularly, another barrier to a regional institution is its fears that regionalism will somehow impede its global economic policies. There has been concern until recently that any Asian regional trading group, even of the most informal nature, would run counter to American pressures for a global liberal trading environment.¹⁶

However, the argument in favor of American promotion of a regional institution was that such an institution would recognize the region's importance to the United States, and dampen fears of American disengagement. For those policymakers who were fighting the long battle against American neglect of East Asia, a new institution—one that convened regular summits and other meetings—would force the U.S. policy leadership to focus on East Asia outside of periodic crises.

APEC's early success and the end of the Cold War seemed to lend credence to this argument in American policy circles. Secretary of State James Baker III embraced the creation of an architecture for a Pacific Community, driven first of all by the need to have a framework for economic integration that would avoid a breakdown into regional trade blocs.¹⁷ Baker argued that in the post-Cold War period, the system of bilateral security alliances—the so-called “hub and spoke” structure—was still effective. But rather than countering the Soviet Union, the primary rationale for the American military presence should be “to provide geopolitical balance, to be an honest broker, to reassure against uncertainty.” Baker advocated being open to multilateral approaches to security, such as on the Korean peninsula, but noted that such approaches should flow from actual needs. More crucially, Baker supported the idea that economics, and not military security, offered the better route to fostering regional integration. “APEC is as much the hallmark of American engagement in the region as are U.S. security ties,” he wrote.

The Clinton administration, which hosted the first APEC heads-of-state summit in Seattle in 1993, picked up this relative optimism about Pacific community-building. But it also retained, as did the Bush administration that preceded it, a clear commitment to maintaining the Cold War-era system of alliances. President Clinton presented the new administration's views in a speech delivered at Waseda University in Tokyo in July 1993, ahead of the summit:

The time has come for America to join with Japan and others in this region to create a new Pacific community. And this, to be sure, will require both of our nations to lead, and both of our nations to change. The new Pacific community will rest on revived partnership between the U.S. and Japan, on progress toward more open economies and greater trade, and on support for democracy. Our community must also rest on the firm and continuing

commitment of the United States to maintain its treaty alliances and its forward military presence in Japan and Korea and through this region.

The rhetoric surrounding the first summit drew even more heady parallels. A senior administration official briefing reporters on the summit characterized APEC as a key part of the architecture in the post-Cold War period, stating that "One may think of this as a bit like being at perhaps a NATO meeting in 1950 with a key difference, and that is [that] NATO is organized around a common enemy, organized around a common security threat, whereas APEC is organized around common economic interests."

The momentum in this direction continued through the 1994 summit in Bogor, Indonesia, where an agreement was reached on a series of steps to create a free-trade area in the region by 2020, with the industrialized nations achieving that goal by 2010. The Osaka summit in 1995 adopted an action plan toward that end.

But from an American policymaking point of view, the interest in promoting this path rapidly began to fade. The Clinton administration's interests were diverted elsewhere, both domestically and globally. When the Asian financial crisis hit in 1997-98, the administration was slow to respond and resisted any effort to address the crisis through regional institutions. On the grounds that such a form of regionalism threatened global multilateral institutions, American policymakers strongly opposed Japanese proposals to create an Asian monetary fund to cope with the payments crisis.

The Clinton administration also faced renewed security challenges in Northeast Asia, which tended to reinforce the utility of the Cold War structure. The North Korean nuclear crisis in 1994, followed by tensions in the Taiwan Strait in 1996, led to an effort to reinvigorate the security alliances with South Korea and Japan. The U.S.-Japan joint declaration on security, issued in April 1996 during Clinton's visit to Japan, stressed that despite the end of the Cold War, "instability and uncertainty persist in the region." The declaration reinforced the importance of the security pact for the Far East and the need to maintain the U.S. military presence in Japan for regional goals. The North Korean test of a long-range ballistic missile in 1998 added to the sense that security concerns were once again paramount.

American policymakers' diminished interest in regionalism only deepened following the election of George W. Bush in 2000. The Bush administration came into office expressing concern about the rise of China as regional power with global aspirations. The events of 9/11 shifted focus toward responding to the challenge of radical Islamists. But as is evident from its approach to the annual APEC summit meetings, the Bush administration has tended to see the organization as a forum for promoting its security agenda first and global economic policies second. Regional institution-building rates barely a mention in any policy statement by senior officials, except, most recently, in response

to China's efforts to promote the formation of an East Asian Community that would pointedly not include the United States.

Instead, the administration has focused on pushing the U.S.-Japan security alliance, with the aid of 9/11, much further down the road walked in 1952—of Japan playing a broader security role in East Asia, and beyond. Perhaps ironically, there is a tendency for China to play once again the role it did a half-century ago, as a principal focus of security concerns in Northeast Asia. While China is not necessarily seen as a foe, as in the early Cold War period, American policymakers are again talking about countering a Chinese military buildup and the spread of Chinese influence in Southeast and East Asia. Even in Korea, where the fabric of the Cold War system is most tattered, the alliance survives. There is even an effort to reinvent it as a regional security pact, more along Japanese lines. Even if this fails, the Cold War system could revert to the offshore structure of the late 1940s, with a far more limited involvement in the Korean peninsula.

Conclusion: The Cold War Legacy

America's Cold War legacy continues to define its policy in Northeast Asia. In describing our current posture in the region, American policymakers' strategic logic in the late 1940s and early 1950s has surprising relevance today. And the structure of the Cold War bilateral security alliances still serves to address many of the crucial issues facing the United States.

In part, this situation reflects the fact that the underlying realities of post-World War II Northeast Asia have not changed. Korea remains divided. Japan is still locked in a relationship of security dependency on the United States, constrained by its own ambivalence about a larger role and by its neighbors' fears of its resurgence. China is a power on the rise, whose future relationship to the United States is highly uncertain and potentially hostile.

It is also the case, however, that American policymakers have consistently failed to formulate an approach to regional integration and to pursue that goal with any continuity of purpose. The United States has moved in this direction only when confronted by efforts from within Asia—from Japan in the 1970s and 1980s and more recently, from China—to create regional institutions that threaten to exclude an American role. Crafting an American vision of East Asian regionalism ought to be on the policy agenda. But the Cold War legacy suggests this will not—and should not—easily supplant an alliance system that has served American interests fairly well.

Notes

1. George Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925–1950* (Boston, MA: Atlantic Monthly Press/Little Brown, 1967), 374–75.

2. Kennan recounts the content of these papers in his *Memoirs, 1925–1950*,” 377–81.

3. Central Intelligence Agency, “Strategic Importance of Japan,” May 24, 1948, reproduced from National Archives in *Declassified Documents Reference System*, Doc #: CK3100420615 (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale Group), 1.

4. Central Intelligence Agency, “The Ryukyu Islands and Their Significance,” August 6, 1948, declassified January 1, 1976, National Archives.

5. “A Report to the President by the National Security Council on Recommendations with Respect to U.S. Policy Toward Japan,” NSC 13/2, October 7, 1948, reproduced from National Archives in *Declassified Documents Reference System*, Doc #: CK3100347865 (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale Group).

6. National Security Council 8, “A Report to the President by the National Security Council on the Position of the United States with Respect to Korea.” April 2, 1948, reproduced from National Archives in *Declassified Documents Reference System*, Doc #: CK3100347874 (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale Group), 5–6. Hereafter NSC 8.

7. NSC 8, 12–13.

8. Central Intelligence Agency, “Consequences of U.S. Troop Withdrawal from Korea in Spring, 1949,” February 28, 1949 (National Archives), 5.

9. “Decision on J.C.S. 1776/4, A Memorandum by the Chief of Staff, U.S. Army on Implications of a Possible Full-Scale Invasion from North Korea Subsequent to Withdrawal of U.S. Troops from Korea,” June 23, 1949 (National Archives).

10. Cited in Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years at the State Department* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1969), 357.

11. NSC 48/2, “A Report to the President by the National Security Council on the Position of the United States with Respect to Asia,” December 30, 1949, reproduced from National Archives in *Declassified Documents Reference System*, Document #CK3100353717, (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale Group), 1.

12. Intelligence Estimate prepared by the Estimates Group, Office of Intelligence Research, Department of State, June 25, 1950, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, Volume VII, Korea* (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1976), 148–54.

13. NSC 48/4, “A Report to the National Security Council on United States Objectives, Policies and Courses of Action on Asia,” May 4, 1951, reproduced from National Archives in *Declassified Documents Reference System*, Doc #: CK3100365872 (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale Group), 1.

14. NSC 125, “A Report to the National Security Council on Interim Policy with Respect to Japan,” February 21, 1952, reproduced from National Archives in *Declassified Documents Reference System*, Doc #: CK3100391068 (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale Group), 5.

15. Operations Coordinating Board, Washington DC, "Progress Report on NSC 125/2 and 125/6 (Japan)," October 27, 1954, reproduced from National Archives, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, in *Declassified Documents Reference System*, Doc #: CK3100003782 (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale Group), 10.

16. Richard Sneider, "Regionalism in East Asia," paper prepared for SeCAP (Social and Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific) workshop on Asian Regional Cooperation, Tokyo, August 19–21, 1985. Held in author's personal archives.

17. James A. Baker III, "America in Asia: Emerging Architecture for a Pacific Community," *Foreign Affairs* 70, no. 5 (Winter 1991/92), 1.

