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Korea: The Achilles’ Heel of the U.S.-Japan Alliance

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Korea: The Achilles' Heel of the U.S.-Japan Alliance*

This discussion focuses on U.S.-Japan and U.S.-Korea relations and how the two interact. The U.S.-Japan review of the 1978 Defense Guidelines also will be considered, in terms of what it does and does not entail and in terms of its application to the security of the Korean peninsula and, more broadly, Asia. I will conclude with remarks about how China fits into the picture. An underlying theme of this presentation is that the U.S.-Japan and U.S.-Korea relationships can survive and prosper only if the United States, Japan, and Korea share some degree of confluence of views on relations with China.

There are common objectives in Northeast Asia shared not only by the United States, Japan, and Korea, but by China, Russia, and perhaps even North Korea. Many of these objectives concern the Korean peninsula, where all of the powers want stability and no one wants to see war. From a theoretical viewpoint, everyone is looking toward a “soft landing” and eventual peaceful reunification. Sometimes the visceral South Korean view seems to differ, and some of the Republic of Korea's policies may be in contradiction with the stated desirable outcome; this may cause tension in the U.S.-Korea alliance in the future.

The desire for a soft landing does not mean that the major powers are pushing to hasten reunification. Ironically, the country least anxious to see it, namely China, is the one least often accused of trying to prolong separation of the two Koreas. South Koreans accuse Japan of trying to keep Korea divided, and whenever the United States talks with North Korea, it is similarly charged. That is not the policy direction of either Japan or the United States; in fact, the Koreans seem not to need help from the outside to be hostile to each other.

All the powers want to see a nuclear weapons-free Korean peninsula. More broadly speaking, they want a benign security environment in the region. This is a rare instance in history where the United States, Japan, China, and Russia are in a state of relative harmony;

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no one or no group is a sworn enemy of another. Each power has a vested interest in maintaining the current environment. Everyone wants continued economic prosperity and understands that this depends on peace and stability.

The goal of this four-part harmony—to keep things in balance among the United States, Japan, China, and Russia—is almost universally shared, with the possible exception of Taiwan. While there is no apparent Taiwanese government policy to disrupt that harmony, certain elements in Taiwan perceive that a bipolar world with the United States and China on opposite poles might serve their interests. This is something to be aware of when looking at Taiwanese initiatives or trying to understand how Taiwan fits into the broader situation.

The U.S. security strategy for Asia is well laid out. The U.S. government might be accused of being unable to pursue its strategy, but it has clearly defined interests in Asia. These are based on maintaining firm alliances with Japan, Korea, and other Asian partners and trying to interact (sometimes called “engagement” or “enlargement”) with countries which were previously less than friendly—namely, Russia, China, and Vietnam. Inroads have been made with all three nations, despite the distance that still lies ahead.

**Multilateralism**

Multilateralism in Asia is also being embraced within the U.S. government. As a proponent, I have worked on the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP), which supports the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum (ARF). However, it is important to understand U.S. policy and to understand what multilateralism is not and probably will not be in Asia.

United States policy is that multilateral dialogue is a useful means of promoting confidence and understanding and avoiding situations of conflict in Asia. It is not a substitute for bilateral alliances. In fact, some have argued that there cannot be a mechanism for multilateral dialogue in Asia if the core bilateral relationships are sacrificed. The U.S.-Japan alliance is part of the foundation required for multilateralism to proceed, as is a modicum of harmony between the United States and China.

Nor is multilateralism to be thought of either as a military alliance or as another means of responding to conflict. When tensions heated up in the Taiwan Strait last year, no one thought to turn to the ARF, and it certainly did not offer any solutions. The big debate within the ARF is whether ten years from now it might have a preventive diplomacy role. Our CSCAP effort tried to hasten that development by putting forward proposals of actions that ARF might envision taking. At the ARF Track II conference in Paris in November 1996, the CSCAP initiative was tabled, but the general view was that they were not quite ready to even discuss it. Thus, it will be some time before a preventive-diplomacy mechanism, much less a conflict-resolution mechanism, is established within the ARF.

Nonetheless, the ARF is vitally important for a variety of reasons. The more dialogue there is, the more understanding there will be, and to a certain extent this will develop confidence. It also provides a useful mechanism to allow Japan to play a greater leadership role in security affairs in Asia in a manner which is non-threatening to its neighbors. It affords a venue for Chinese cooperation and for the Chinese to prove whether they are serious about cooperating in the region. For example, China volunteered to chair the ARF Inter-Sessional Support Group on Confidence-Building Measures; and in March 1997 they
did co-chair it with the Philippines. This afforded China a good opportunity to demonstrate its interest in moving the multilateral process ahead. Results will be reported at the next ARF meeting, but informally I have heard that very little of substance was accomplished.

In the final analysis, multilateralism versus bilateralism is a false debate: both are necessary. In that context, the U.S.-Japan alliance has been central to peace and stability in East Asia for the last forty years and will continue to be so. However, the alliance has an Achilles' heel, and that is Korea. One reason is that without America's alliance with Japan and the bases and facilities it provides, it would be difficult, if not impossible, for the United States to defend Korea. Second, in the event of a conflict on the Korean peninsula, any Japanese failure to adequately support the U.S. defense effort would probably rupture or destroy the alliance. In addition, the U.S. alliances with Japan and Korea give the two countries a link or an opportunity to have something in common—of which they have little—thereby providing an avenue for greater eventual cooperation between them.

The use of U.S. facilities in Japan is essential for the defense of Korea. But that is essentially assured, despite much incorrect or misinformed debate on the subject. United Nations agreements, dating from the first episode of the Korean War, identify seven bases in Japan that are to be available for use in prosecuting any effort in defense of Korea. That is not what the debate is about in Korea. Nor is Japanese military participation essential, or even desired, in the defense of Korea.

What, then, is all the current discussion about the Joint Declaration and the Defense Guidelines Review? The key point is that while active Japanese participation in combat is not required or sought, there is concern that if Japan did not provide “adequate support” to the United States during hostilities on the Korean peninsula, it would result in a rupture between the United States and Japan. Part of the problem is how to define adequate support. Forty years into the alliance, there is still no definition of what adequate support means—what the United States would want from Japan or what Japan could or would provide in the event of contingencies. This is what the Joint Declaration is all about and what the Defense Guidelines Review will address.

I have argued in Japan and elsewhere that if a situation arises where there are Americans dying on the Korean peninsula, and the U.S. commander calls upon the Japanese to provide ammunition, evacuation support, or AEGIS destroyers—a shield for U.S. bases in Japan, outside the twelve-mile limit—and if this results in a five- or six-day hand-wringing debate in Japan before an answer is provided, it will cause potentially irreparable damage to the alliance. This is what must be decided now.

**Defense Guidelines Review**

There have been many concerns, both in Japan and in the region, about what “revitalization of the U.S.-Japan alliance” means. It is important to note that the word “redefinition” does not appear, at least in the U.S. and Japanese lexicon. It appears in some of the Chinese and Korean writings on the subject, but I believe this is based on misinterpretations. What the United States and Japan are discussing is reaffirmation and revitalization.

It is useful to couch the Defense Guidelines Review and the Joint Declaration in terms of what they will not do. They will neither promote nor require Japanese “remilitarization”—a vague term whose own definition sparks some interesting debates. Japan's Defense
Program Outline, issued at the end of 1995, called for a 25 percent reduction in the size of Japan’s military forces. This was based, in part, on the desire for a “peace dividend.” It was also based in part on reality, because previously there had been an authorized military strength of 280,000, and the self-defense forces were unable to recruit that number. Thus, the number was reduced to about 240,000. The Defense Guidelines Review asks what capabilities these current forces have, what Japan can do, and what it will do. It is not an effort to persuade Japan to develop power projection capabilities, which they do not want and which is not in the interest of anyone.

There have been many press reports recently about the People’s Liberation Army reducing its military force by half a million. After these cuts, the PLA will still have a military ten times larger than Japan’s. Even assuming that Japan wanted to develop a military force capable of threatening China or the Republic of Korea, which has a 600,000-man army, or a combined North and South Korea—which without some type of demilitarization would have the second largest army in the world—what kind of Japanese force would be required? How much money would it cost to develop this kind of capability, and how many years would it take? Chinese and Koreans can take comfort knowing that even if Japan wanted to pose a serious threat, it would take them a long time at great cost to be able to do so. It would also require a complete change in mental attitude on the part of the Japanese, a factor which must be considered.

The Defense Guidelines Review requires no changes in the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty. The treaty has two objectives, to defend Japan and promote regional stability. During the Cold War, the defense of Japan was paramount. It stands to reason that with the reduction of the direct threat to Japan, more attention should be focused on the second objective. This, again, is part of what the Joint Declaration is about and what the alliance needs to be about to make it viable in the future.

No change in the constitution of Japan is required by the current review. In fact, the two-plus-two talks (involving the defense and foreign ministers from both countries) clearly specified the Defense Guidelines Review would adhere to both the current letter and the current interpretation of the constitution. This does not imply that Japan should or should not change its constitution or more broadly define it; rather, it acknowledges that constitutional change is an internal Japanese decision. What is important for the alliance is that the two sides determine what constitutes adequate support and what can be done. Many have argued that there is a considerable gap between what Japan is doing and what it could be doing even today under the current constitution and how it is interpreted.

The review also does not set the stage for a U.S. withdrawal from the region—or, more ominously, a withdrawal after deputizing Japan to take over America’s security role. A few Korean scholars have put forward such an interpretation of the Joint Declaration. The United States is involved in Asia because it is in America’s vital national security interest, and it would certainly not delegate U.S. security to anyone else, least of all Japan. Furthermore, there is no evidence that Japan desires such a role.

Discussions in the review process center on accomplishing our missions more effectively. It is somewhat ironic that Koreans seem to be among the loudest detractors of the U.S.-Japan Joint Declaration, since one of its primary motives, from the standpoint of U.S. security planners, has been to increase America’s ability to defend Korea. The United States has done an abysmal job of explaining this to the Korean people, and the Clinton administration is largely at fault for that.

Finally, the reaffirmation of the alliance is not a shift away from defense of Japan in favor of containing China. It is pro-peace and stability, not anti-China. Indeed, the Joint Declaration was devised to get the alliance back on track. There has been a great concern in
recent years in Asia, particularly in Japan, about whether the United States was resolved to remain a viable ally, whether it was interested in reaffirming the treaty. These concerns arose as a result of trade tensions between the two sides, the horrible incident on Okinawa involving the rape of a schoolgirl, and President Clinton's failure to attend the Osaka APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum) Summit. The latter was not because of any shift in U.S. Asia policy, but because of American political inability to get its own house in order.

The Joint Declaration was drafted and would have been part of Clinton's visit to Tokyo after the Osaka Summit of APEC leaders in November 1995. That visit was postponed and rescheduled for April 1996, but in March the crisis in the Taiwan Strait occurred. Thus, Taiwan and China preoccupied everyone, particularly the news media, at the time of the Joint Declaration and the Clinton/Hashimoto summit, despite the fact that it had taken nine months of advance planning to execute this meeting. For that reason, it acquired a more anti-China cast than was intended.

**China and the Alliance**

Sometimes the United States is too defensive when it talks to China about the alliance with Japan. We must make it clear to the Chinese that there are events that could turn the U.S.-Japan alliance into a China containment policy, but these events would be instigated by China. It is not American or Japanese hidden motives or secret intentions that need be of concern, rather Chinese actions. For example, if China were to use military force to enforce its claim to the Senkakus, this would clearly invoke the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty. The United States takes no position over the validity of the claim, which is a source of some confusion; that is a matter for the Chinese and the Japanese to work out. But the U.S.-Japan security alliance calls for the treaty to be invoked if territory administered by Japan comes under attack. To the United States, there is no question that the Senkakus are administered by Japan, because the United States placed the Senkakus in Japan's hands to administer when returning Okinawa to Japanese jurisdiction in 1972. This does not mean that the United States or Japan is looking for a fight, or wants to contain China. However, actions have consequences, and sometimes it behooves us to point that out, instead of being overly defensive.

One defense official told Congress that there was no China containment policy because the United States could not contain China. That is untrue. If China wanted to project its power beyond its borders, it is certainly within America's military capability to contain that. The Chinese know this; therefore, when they hear us say the opposite, they conclude that we are either fools or liars.

It is necessary in the future to proceed with China with a clear understanding. Former Secretary of Defense Bill Perry was held in high regard in China. His stance was always that we want to engage but engagement is a two-way street; that we want to cooperate but it takes two to cooperate. The fact that Perry always had a consistent, direct message was respected by the Chinese.

The objective today is to prevent the day when we have to contain China. This requires a certain amount of sophistication on the part of the United States and Japan with respect to the alliance. They must make it transparent and non-threatening. The goal is not to make
China like the alliance, but that the Chinese understand, accept, and work with it. The approach we should take with the Chinese is that the alliance is not necessarily to their detriment, depending on their goals.

**U.S. Expectations**

The Defense Guidelines Review must identify what appropriate and adequate support means. It should develop a list—say for the sake of simplicity—of one hundred items that the United States desires and expects from Japan in the event of regional contingencies. An enemy need not be named: In the Middle East, the United States developed plans with Saudi Arabia for contingencies because America was concerned about Soviets coming through the Zagros Mountains and the Saudis were worried about the Iranians coming across the Gulf. But the plans developed turned out to be effective in dealing with Saddam Hussein. That possibility would not have been appropriate to plan as a scenario, because Arabs do not attack Arabs. The object is to have contingency planning for loosely defined problems.

Arguably, among the list of one hundred expectations, about eighty will be “green-light” issues that could be done today—for example, Japanese security against protesters at U.S. bases; assurances that logistics flow within Japan; defense of Japanese bases; surveillance of the sea lanes. These tasks are easy to fulfill; and essentially the United States is looking for some assurance they will be done. The problem has been that the Japanese have been so hesitant to even discuss contingencies that many of the easy measures have not been identified.

Another fifteen items will be “yellow-light” matters, about which the Japanese are uneasy. They will require not a change in the constitution, but political courage, and this will depend upon Japan’s leadership at the necessary moment. Nevertheless, these issues must be identified, their importance weighed, and obstacles to achieving them determined so as to avoid a situation where a six-day debate is required to decide whether Japan can provide Americans with ammunition, for example.

There are likely to be several “red-light” issues, whose implementation would require significant reinterpretation or amendment of the Japanese constitution. Security planners on both sides would have to weigh the importance of these actions to prosecute a war effort versus their political costs. My view is that there is not likely to be any Japanese action so critical to a military effort as to be worth the political price involved in forcing Japan to change its constitution. But others would disagree. The Defense Guidelines Review is about identifying the spectrum of issues. Failure to do this will render us incapable of having an alliance which survives into the twenty-first century, despite its obvious value.

Let me close with a few words about the future. The United States currently has about 100,000 forces in Asia, which have been justified in the Bottom-up Review and highlighted in the Joint Declaration and in the East Asia Strategy Report. I believe the current Quadrennial Defense Review will not result in a change in that number. As specified in the Joint Declaration, the number of roughly 100,000, including the troops in Japan, is about right, given the current security environment.

What does that mean? If the security environment changes, 100,000 will not be appropriate. For example, should things go poorly with China, we may need more than 100,000. But most importantly, if there were genuine reconciliation between North and South Korea
and peaceful reunification of the peninsula, 100,000 forces could not be justified, and a serious review of our defense requirements would have to take place. I would argue that we need to begin that review now.

During the Cold War, the United States had 150,000 forward deployed troops in Asia; today it has 100,000. This does not reflect a U.S. withdrawal or diminished capabilities. The 100,000 forces, relatively speaking, are far more powerful against any potential threat in Asia than the 150,000 were when contending with the Soviet Pacific Fleet and fleet marine forces. It is a predominant force. With peace on the Korean peninsula, the United States could reduce the number of forward deployed troops and still have a preponderance of military power.

Will there be a postreunification role for U.S. forces on the Korean peninsula? Much will depend on how reunification occurs, but we need to define the strategic rationale now. We need to be asking ourselves: what is the future role of the alliance, the importance of good relations between the United States and Korea and between Korea and Japan after reunification, and the role of the continuing American security commitment in Asia in fitting these elements together?

What vision do the United States, Japan, Korea, and China have for the future, postreunification? I would hope the U.S. vision, looking down the road twenty years, is a peacefully reunified, nuclear-free Korean peninsula that still has a security relationship with the United States, which maintains some type of token military presence to keep stability in the region. I believe the Japanese vision generally is in accord with this, but China's is not. China would like to see a peacefully unified nuclear-free Korean peninsula that looks to China first as the security balancer. This does not mean that China wants Korea to be a vassal state, or that China wants to replace U.S. military bases in Korea with its own. But China certainly would not like to see a U.S. military presence, certainly not north of where it is today, and probably not on the peninsula at all.

It is unclear whether Korea is certain about its long-term vision. Those of us in the United States and Japan who share a vision and believe it should be Korea's vision need to focus our effort on working with the Koreans to bring it about. That is why I believe that examining both the U.S.-Japan alliance and the U.S.-Korea alliance, and their impact on China, is of vital importance to U.S. national security interests in the future.
Questions and Answers

You spoke of red-light issues with respect to the Defense Guidelines Review. What is the status of discussions on these red-light issues in Japan among the Self-Defense Forces and in the government?

Among the uniformed military there is great enthusiasm for being able to do some joint planning and defense contingency planning, because that is what militaries do to prepare themselves. It involves more realistic training, more exercises. Many of them have been to military schools in the United States, and they understand the value of this kind of training and interaction. The bureaucracy within the boeicho, the Japan Defense Agency, is less enthusiastic, and the gaimusho, the Foreign Ministry, is apathetic. If certain elements within the gaimusho get their wish, in September or October when the Defense Guidelines Review report comes out, it will say something like, “We have definitely, positively concluded that this is something we ought to study.” That will not be acceptable, and part of the U.S. message right now is to try to convince the Foreign Ministry that there must be some forward movement. But there is much bureaucratic inertia, and small breakthroughs are more likely to occur than major ones.

During the entire Cold War period, the United States and Japan avoided the issue now being discussed—what constitutes adequate support. Do you not foresee a political fallout or a lack of satisfaction on the part of both governments and both peoples? Why are we suddenly willing to put the alliance in jeopardy, so to speak, after having worked for it for the past forty or fifty years?

There are a number of reasons. First, the Japanese constitution and the Japanese-U.S. Security Treaty clearly say that Japan may cooperate with the United States in the defense of Japan, and our primary emphasis during the Cold War was defending Japan against Russian attack. Thus, there were no constraints. That has changed now. I think we are willing to take a little risk now to avoid a rupture later.

Part of the wake-up call came during the Gulf War, in which I was involved on the joint staff for part of the planning. No one in the U.S. defense establishment was envisioning Japanese combat support. However, what we did want was Japanese roll-on roll-off ships—it could have been useful in handling logistics through them. We were frustrated about the Japanese wringing their hands and, particularly after the war, there was a horrendous debate in Japan on whether or not Japanese mine sweepers, under the UN peacekeeping flag, could go in and do something as passive as sweep for mines.

The decision was finally made and it moved forward. The Japanese were incredibly generous during Desert Shield and Desert Storm—$13 billion is not insignificant. However, that did not buy them goodwill in the United States, partly because it had been preceded by four months of debate and indecision. An immediate “yes” would have at least shown a desire to support [the effort] based on its merits, apart from this debate. The experience clearly told defense planners that this would be a perpetual problem in the future—if we ran into this in the Persian Gulf, ten thousand miles from Japan, what kind of problems would we run into in Korea?

The second wake-up call came, before Jimmy Carter came to our rescue in 1994, as we kept painting ourselves into a corner with North Korea and considering sanctions and how
to enforce them. Once again the debate came up, as did the realization that we cannot sit back in peacetime on the assumption that in wartime, everything will fall into place, which has always been a Japanese argument.

It seems that the political world, as opposed to the world of military planning, is more comfortable waiting until an incident happens. Then, Japan will respond in terms of its national interest. We have a similar situation in this country. People ask why the president and Congress do not get together in peacetime and decide the War Powers Act of 1973, send it to the Supreme Court if required, so that it will not be necessary, as in the Gulf War, to include that argument in Congressional deliberations. But we do not do it because it is not good politics. I think a great deal of what you would like to see in terms of military planning just is not good politics, and that can be seen in the review.

You have clearly defined what we are up against, and you are probably about 80 percent right about the results of the review. In my view, just having this debate is useful. If we identify the green-light issues that are not political, that is also useful. It is also essential to start identifying some of the impediments, because we have discovered that the Japanese will not immediately get on board about anything, unless something explodes on Japanese territory. And in five or six days, lives may be lost, or credibility may be lost, and the political costs could be very serious. We at least need to identify the roadblocks now, and perhaps shorten that six-day process to two days. I am not overly optimistic about how fast we can go, nor do I think we should push too hard.

You spoke about how China might view Korea over a twenty-year period, but how might it view Japan—or Taiwan, where China has fears as well as desires?

I think there has been a change in Chinese thinking—or at least the beginnings of a debate. The conventional wisdom, that China sees the U.S.-Japan alliance as in its interest because it keeps Japan in the box that Japan wants to stay in anyway, is becoming less and less valid. Talking with the Chinese leaves one with the sense they have concluded that if all other things are equal, Japan is no match for China. Historically, it has been when China was weak that Japan and the West have been able to dominate. Today, while China is still weak but ascending, it is important to keep Japan in check.

But twenty years from now, if China is as economically self-sufficient and powerful as Japan, even a rearmed Japan could not seriously threaten China by itself. The United States, without the foothold in Asia that Japan provides, could not do much to counter China’s influence as the power to be reckoned with. But it will take China much longer than twenty years, if ever, to be able to counter Japan and America together. Seen in terms of balance of power, which is what the Chinese are inclined to do, twenty years from now, if the United States and Japan are divided, then China will have the preponderance of power and everyone will have to keep China in the back of their minds. That is why I believe China is trying to sow the seeds today for the eventual rupture of the U.S.-Japan alliance, why we see constant attacks against the alliance, the Theater Missile Defense (TMD) and other things.

Taiwan is a more difficult situation. Probably China would like nothing better than to come up with a one-hundred-year—or longer—solution that puts it back on the shelf. The reason for the crisis is that Taiwan has been pushing the envelope and China feels compelled to do something, even if it cannot militarily conquer Taiwan. The government would not
survive in Beijing if it lost Taiwan today, particularly when it is looking toward the next Party Congress to solidify its role in history. Some level of autonomy, even de facto independence for Taiwan, may be possible, if China and Taiwan come up with some type of fifty-year plan. I can even envision formulas by which Taiwan could play a more active role in the United Nations; but the road to the United Nations for Taiwan goes through Beijing, not through Washington or Tokyo, and Taiwan does not understand or is unwilling to accept that.

Do you believe that the forward American deployment and security involvement in Asia provide an entrée for our economic involvement in the region?

Chalmers Johnson says that we ought to use our presence for leverage—that is because he wants to undermine our presence and figures that this is a good way to do it. Many countries in Asia put up with American arrogance and heavy-handedness, our obnoxious predisposition towards American values being universal values, because they value the American security presence. That is clear, listening to people in Singapore, Malaysia, and elsewhere. The American military presence is in the back of everyone's mind when dealing with American businessmen or politicians, and it provides the United States an unwritten edge. The worst way to undermine that is to try to put it at the front of everyone's mind as a bargaining chip. The United States might lose and people would be forced into making decisions that they might not otherwise want to make. People want American businessmen in their country because they are a de facto security guarantee: Americans protect Americans and the United States would go to the aid of business interests and business people in the event of a crisis. A U.S. military presence has implications not just economically, but also politically and in other areas, because there is an appreciation for the importance of the security that the United States provides.

There is some thought that the budget projections for the next four years will place great pressure on U.S. troop levels around the world, including the 100,000-troop commitment to East Asia, because of the need for increased expenditures on R & D and on acquisitions—particularly if the prospects in Korea begin to improve. Coupled with that is the question of the political viability of sustaining the U.S. Marines in Okinawa. Does the Nye formula, making the number 100,000 the real indicator of America's credibility, leave us in a slightly overexposed position? Should we instead refer to a credible forward deployment, or a robust deployment, but not be so tied to a specific number?

In retrospect, the decision to stress the number 100,000 was solving an old problem. The Nye Report was concerned with the reduction of U.S. forces from 150,000 to 100,000 and the uncertainty of how much further it would go; thus it emphasized 100,000 as a demonstration of commitment. It equals the number in Europe—where there were formerly 450,000—and shows the parity between the two. Unfortunately, we put too much emphasis on that number and have been trying to back away from it slightly. However, with the lack of certainty on the Korean peninsula, we are not in a position to send the signal of lessened resolve and the figure of about 100,000 has been linked in people's minds to U.S. resolve. There would have to be a seminal event—some solution on Korea—to break that link, and that is why I do not think that the Quadrennial Defense Review will change it.
We conducted a survey of retired American military people about a year ago, asking about the U.S. military role in Korea, under several scenarios: the situation today; a successful Agreed Framework; a confederation between North and South; and genuine peaceful reunification. Given that the respondents were retired military officers, it was no surprise that they strongly favored staying there under current conditions. Even successful implementation of the Agreed Framework would solve only one small aspect of the problem, and there was no question for the respondents that the U.S. military still ought to be there. About 70 percent said that even with a confederation, there would have to be a presence to enforce the articles of confederation. But it was essentially a fifty-fifty split on a U.S. postreunification role. Those arguing in favor of a continued presence said it was essential for stability; those against it, in some cases using a more realistic argument, said they could not imagine how it could be politically justified.

We have grown accustomed to host-nation support. The Japanese are generous because it is in their national interest to keep us there. The Koreans, given the size of their economy and ability, are relatively generous in host-nation support. But if the Korean government is saddled with absorbing the North, there will not be much left to pay for the U.S. presence. Will our Congress be willing to remain for the psychological benefits that are accrued? The solution might be for the Japanese to pay us to stay in Korea or to move the marines from Okinawa to Korea to keep them in the neighborhood.

Okinawa is a perplexing case. There is an antibase feeling there that does not manifest itself in an anti-American feeling. Believe it or not, relations between the Americans in Okinawa and the local community are extremely good. They do many things together; they have joint festivals; people are invited to their homes all the time. When the Japanese go out and protest about the bases or about noise, they normally send a note of apology. The real battle, in many respects, is between the Okinawan prefecture and the central government, and we are somewhat caught in the middle.

The rape of a twelve-year-old schoolgirl in September 1995 inflamed emotions, and anyone who took a public opinion poll two days or even a month after that incident got some skewed results. But never more than 20 percent on any poll, even after that incident, wanted a complete withdrawal of all American bases; rather, a referendum showed that the majority wants a reduction in the number of bases and facilities. This is because of an essential understanding of two things in Okinawa. First, the U.S.-Japan alliance and the U.S. presence are important to the security of Japan, including Okinawa. Second, there are many economic benefits to be gained—not just in direct benefits, arguably $3–4 billion a year, but also in indirect benefits such as central government funds for rent and economic development because of the burden of having the American forces there.

There is a third reason, which the Japanese government does not like to acknowledge but which Okinawans are more direct about. That is, if Okinawa and Japan need to be defended, and if Okinawa is a strategic location given the Senkaku Islands situation, then if the U.S. military were not there, the Japanese defense forces would have to occupy some or perhaps most of those bases. And there are justifiably intense feelings against the Japanese military in Okinawa, given the fact that during World War II, Okinawa was the only site of a major battle on Japanese soil, and some 120,000 Okinawans died because of the Japanese army's policy of no surrender. The Japanese army's view was that they were willing to die to the last Okinawan to delay the American attack on the mainland. That feeling is immortalized everywhere in Okinawa.

That is a serious question we need to start addressing. I think there will be a lot of pressure from the Japanese and in the United States if Japan is the only place in Asia where American forces are based, pressure to “remove the last vestige of the Cold War.” It is instructive to look at the debate over the bases in the Philippines. [Singapore Senior Minister] Lee Kuan Yew recognized the situation in the Philippines and offered the United States some modest facilities in Singapore. Then the Philippines decided against U.S. bases, and there are now several hundred Americans based in Singapore. They are Singapore bases, but Singapore pays for them and lavishly houses the Americans to keep that presence.

There are many reasons why it is useful, perhaps essential, and certainly in our security interest, to maintain a presence in Asia. The easiest to justify politically during the Cold War was the Soviet threat. The easiest to justify today is the Korean threat. Since we have a tendency for bumper-sticker diplomacy and taking the easy solution, we have tied so much of the rationale to the Korean peninsula that we are setting ourselves up for the same kind of post-Cold War experience. We need to be looking today at post-Korean peninsula requirements for U.S. presence or nonpresence in Asia, so that we begin the debate before it becomes a huge emotional tidal wave.

Maybe a slower process of unification, rather than a sudden hard-landing contingency, would be in everyone’s interest, if we utilized that time to do some of the things you mention.

Three years ago the United States and South Korea were in agreement that it would be in no one’s interest to have a rapid reunification. The South Koreans did cost studies, looking at German parallels, and there was no comparison. West Germans had been in East Germany for twenty years developing the infrastructure, and when the Wall came down, all the mechanisms were in place for reunification. They only needed a way to prevent a mass exodus from East to West, so they hastened the process slightly. None of those conditions exists in North Korea today. There is no infrastructure, no interaction, no basic awareness of essential principles.

The logical strategic approach in Korea, then, is to view reunification [as a gradual process]. Part of this process was to bring North and South Korea into the United Nations together, and to agree on cross-recognition, whereby Moscow and Beijing would recognize South Korea and Tokyo and Washington would recognize North Korea. However, the second half of this cross-recognition has not occurred. Part of the reason the North Koreans are so adamant about not participating in many different things today is that they feel the playing field is not level. That must change. However, South Korean leadership is weak. If the current government has a strategic vision, it has not defined it well, allowing itself to be driven by emotions and public opinion rather than trying to shape and educate public opinion. In many respects this is true of the U.S. government, but not as seriously as in the case of South Korea. My concern is not what the United States is doing with North Korea, but about U.S.-South Korea relations and emotions.

The problem is that the U.S. presence in Korea no longer gains us anything—it is taken for granted. When a couple of soldiers get into an argument with some Koreans on a subway, it becomes blown out of proportion, and the fact that 37,000 people are willing to
risk their lives to defend Korea is forgotten in this equation. The fact that South Korea is a strategic ally, and North Korea a nuisance that we are trying to make less so, is somehow lost to people in Korea.

My view is that the South Korean government, rather than playing on people’s suspicions and concerns, ought to take a more active role in educating its people on how important the alliance is to their welfare. That requires more political courage than President Kim has shown and more insight and finesse than our ambassador has shown or than the United States has shown in its dealings with Korea. There is much blame to go around. I think South Korea wants to see a soft landing, but first they want [North] Koreans to come crawling. That strategy is somewhat inconsistent internally and potentially self-defeating.

To what extent are Japan and Korea discussing these issues?

At the official level, and at the NGO [non-governmental organization] level, there is very good dialogue between South Korea and Japan. However, politicians in Japan have yet to realize that anything they say on Korea will be wrong, and that they should stop talking about it. They still try to find a way to put a positive spin on forty years of occupation. Even when they say something that might theoretically, academically, or historically be accurate, it does not matter. To have one of those comments made hours before President Kim Yung Sam and Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro were to meet, guaranteed that Kim had to respond and Hashimoto apologize and that there would be a great deal of distracting nonsense. Cooperation on the World Cup will be pivotal. There are good defense cooperation discussions going on, but the basic emotions and the basic public attitudes, particularly in Korea, have not changed.

President Clinton met with President Kim in April, the day before his Joint Declaration meeting with Prime Minister Hashimoto. They talked about the four-party proposal, and getting China involved, and North Korea, but did not say a word about the U.S.-Japan alliance or the following day’s events in Japan. Every day in the Korean newspapers there is something about Japanese remilitarization. To me, it was inexcusable that President Clinton did not take this wonderful opportunity to anticipate and deal with an emotional and visceral response. My theory is that he has smart advisors on Japan and smart advisors on Korea and neither thought about the other country. There are specialists in the State Department and elsewhere, worrying about their own piece of the puzzle, but a dearth of generalists who can put it all together.

Concerning whether or not the U.S.-Japan alliance or Joint Declaration are containment of China, you say [the United States and Japan] have adopted an attitude of waiting to see what the Chinese will do. When you say that if China behaves one way, there will be no problem but if it behaves another way, you will fight— that in itself is containment. Why shouldn’t the United States and Japan take a positive attitude and find opportunities for cooperation with China? The United States and Japan may become too strong, while China is economically and militarily weak, and positive steps from the United States would be helpful. China is worried about two hundred years of foreign invasion and occupation, but the United States does not have this burden.

I do not think that responding to Chinese aggression is containment; rather, it is realistically stating that actions have consequences. If the United States were to try to stop the reversion
of Hong Kong to China and China reacted militarily, would it be trying to contain the United States? No, it would be defending its own national interests. Clearly, you do not give up the right to defend your own national interest. If China is insisting that China makes all the rules and everyone else must follow them, if that is their definition of engagement, then that is not a good or reasonable definition. Chinese behavior matters, and American behavior matters. The Chinese constantly say that it is actions that count, and I think we need to say the same thing back to the Chinese.

We are willing to cooperate; on a day-to-day basis we are cooperating. Considerable direct foreign investment from Japan and the United States has been committed in helping China to modernize—I think U.S. direct foreign investment is $25 billion. That is not sitting back or containing, but helping China grow to become a self-sufficient, economically strong country. Many of the joint ventures in China are with American companies trying to help China. They are also trying to make money, but they are helping China.

If the Japanese were to do something that threatened our interest, we would have to respond. But we have a good dialogue, and it is doubtful that would occur. China and America need to have similar dialogue. America needs to understand what actions China would see as threatening, and China needs to understand what actions America sees as threatening. That is not trying to contain one another; it is an attempt to have a realistic relationship based on an understanding of one another’s strategic interests.

For example, if the United States supports Taiwanese independence, it is an act of aggression against China. The United States understands that and has made it clear that it does. If China uses military force to take islands in the Spratlys that are occupied by the Philippines, China must understand that is an act of aggression against U.S. interests. That warning is not containing China any more than China’s warnings about Taiwan are containing the United States. If every time the United States tries to have a frank dialogue with China, it is accused of trying to threaten or contain it, we will not have a frank dialogue and it is more likely that someone will cross the wrong line somewhere.

We need to be a little less sensitive. China is an emerging major power, there is no question of that. The United States will not try to prevent that, nor can it. It would like to see a cooperative China, and it is taking the required steps. China is in ARF and in the APEC forum, and we are working toward China’s membership in the World Trade Organization and in other avenues. Every effort has been made to integrate China, contrary to the argument that the United States is sitting back or trying to hold China back.

You gave a few examples to support your argument that Asian people should not worry about Japanese remilitarization; yet you say Japanese armed forces are greater than China’s. Another important factor is people’s feelings about things done by the Japanese in the Second World War. You have said that the Japanese apologized, but they just say they are sorry about things that happened. There is a strong difference, and people in China, South Korea, and other East Asian countries are not satisfied. They say the Japanese should admit they committed crimes, and say they are sorry, and then there can be cooperation.

I understand the emotions concerning Japan. That is why I favor no change in the Japanese constitution and no direct combat role for Japan. There is a tendency to overlook some sincere apologies on the part of Japan in the last several years, including those made by the emperor in China and by the last three Japanese prime ministers. I would argue that Japanese textbooks today have a much more accurate reflection of how World War II started than
Chinese textbooks have on how the Korean War started. But if we were to dictate to China that they must change their textbooks, we would be accused of interfering in China’s internal affairs, and I have no intention of doing that. Every country has problems with its textbooks and trying to put itself in the best light. Japan is also a democracy, and one of the problems of democracies is that one must put up with stupid things being said, even by people in government. But one must be able to distinguish between someone’s personal opinion and the government position. I think that the government has made it clear that Japan was at fault and committed atrocities, and that it has apologized.

People are rather concerned because Japan has the second largest defense budget in the world. That number by itself can be disconcerting until put in the context of maintaining a force of 240,000 people. Consider what it would cost to maintain a force four times that size, given Japanese standards of living.

Japan has a highly capable military force; a Chinese navy ship should not want to engage in a sea battle with the Japanese. But Japan does not have power projection capability—it does not have long-range bombers, missiles, a naval infantry, and the other important elements of long-range power projection.

What about its nuclear potential?

If Japan made the decision to develop nuclear weapons, it could probably do it in six months. Korea could, too. And China did it twenty years ago. However Japan, more than any nation in the world, lives by non-nuclear principles. There is a nuclear “allergy” in Japan that is genuine, and it was learned the hard way. My own view is that it would take an earth-shattering event to get Japan to change its mind about nuclear weapons; it would have to be convinced that it was the only alternative for its security.

That is another reason for the importance of the U.S.-Japan alliance. Japan is a rich country in a neighborhood of big countries, many of whom have nuclear weapons. If Japan could not rely on the United States for its security, its only realistic option would be to develop that capability itself. Japan will certainly not look to China or Russia, its historic enemies, to defend it in the future. The nuclear potential is there, but the motivation and mindset are not, and it would take a major traumatic event in Japan to break that cycle. It ought to be in the interest of everyone that such an event does not occur.
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