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# **China and the U.S.-Japan Alliance at a Time of Strategic Change and Shifts in the Balance of Power**

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## **China and the U.S.-Japan Alliance at a Time of Strategic Change and Shifts in the Balance of Power\***

Bonnie Glaser: Before addressing how the Chinese view the U.S.-Japan alliance, I will briefly examine Beijing's perspective on the broader international situation. The Chinese do not look at any bilateral relationship in isolation.

### **The Post-Cold War Global Pattern of Power**

At the end of the Cold War, China expected the global pattern of power to gradually shift from U.S.-Soviet bipolarity to a multipolar world in which China would play a much larger role. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Chinese experts estimated that the global balance of power in which the United States occupied the position of sole superpower was a transitional pattern, to last perhaps five to ten years, which would be replaced by a pattern of many powers or power centers, including China, Japan, Europe, and Russia, rising as independent "poles" to challenge American power and ambition. U.S. power and influence would decline. The Chinese expected U.S. relations with its allies in Western Europe and Asia to be strained by continued tensions in the economic sphere, perhaps spilling over into political and security matters. The more even distribution among several power centers of political authority and economic wealth would bring about a more stable international environment and advance China's objectives of economic development, acceptance as a great power, and reunification with Taiwan.

In the last year or so, however, a growing number of Chinese analysts and officials have concluded that this "transitional" pattern is going to endure for a much longer period—at least one to two decades—with the United States remaining at the apex as the sole, unchallenged superpower. This judgment is based on several factors. First, the Chinese have observed that the political role of the United States in global affairs has not measurably

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declined. Second, they have noted the strength of the U.S. economy and the obvious edge of the United States in the information revolution. Third, U.S. ability to intervene in regional conflicts has not diminished. Finally, U.S. relations with its allies have proven to be remarkably sound as indicated by the expansion of NATO and the strengthening of the U.S.-Japan alliance.

In Beijing's view, the strengthening of U.S. power enables the United States to influence world events in ways that are potentially harmful to China, including an enhanced U.S. ability to (1) intervene in China's internal affairs; (2) prevent Taiwan's reunification with the mainland; and (3) inhibit China's emergence as a great power. Despite assurances from the Clinton administration that the United States pursues a strategy of "engagement" toward Beijing, the Chinese remain convinced that the United States is at best pursuing a "hedging" strategy that could be quickly transformed into a containment strategy should such a response be deemed necessary.

## **Anxieties about the U.S.-Japan Alliance**

The signing of the Joint Declaration on the Alliance for the Twenty-First Century by President Clinton and Prime Minister Hashimoto in April 1996 reinforced Chinese anxiety about U.S. intentions toward China and especially about Washington's alleged efforts to restrain China's role in the Asia Pacific region and beyond.

The Chinese have judged their interests as being best served by a U.S.-Japan relationship that is neither unraveling nor expanding. They prefer to see a degree of tension between Washington and Tokyo, for example friction on trade and other economic issues, but not so much friction that it spills over into the security sphere, threatening the foundation of the alliance. Excessive friction between Washington and Tokyo poses the danger of weakening American influence over Japan, possibly leading to a rupture of the alliance, producing an independent Japanese military power, and eventually even a Japan that is armed with nuclear weapons. In the early 1990s, the Chinese worried that Sino-Japanese frictions and a post-Cold War malaise could lead to the weakening of the U.S.-Japan alliance.

Too close a U.S.-Japanese relationship poses another set of dangers to China. By the mid-1990s, Chinese experts discounted the possibility of a rupture of the Security Treaty and feared instead that the alliance would be strengthened at China's expense. The strengthening of the U.S.-Japan alliance is viewed as putting China in a weak position in the U.S.-China-Japan triangle. From Beijing's perspective, the U.S.-China-Japan triangle is the most critical set of relationships in the Asia Pacific region. If the U.S.-Japan relationship is too close, China's leverage over the United States and Japan is potentially weakened. More specifically, a very close relationship between Washington and Tokyo can result in collaboration to pressure China on issues such as greater military transparency, arms control, human rights, trade, China's military activities in the South China Sea, or even on the Senkaku or Diaoyu islands territorial dispute. The worst case for Beijing would be U.S. and Japanese cooperation to contain China or to intervene in the Taiwan Strait to keep the mainland and Taiwan divided and perhaps even support an independent Taiwan.

Since the 1970s, the Chinese leadership has considered the continuation of the U.S.-Japan alliance as, on balance, serving Chinese interests. They have viewed not only the alliance, but also the presence of American military forces in Japan and the Western Pacific

and the U.S. nuclear umbrella over Japan, as benefiting Chinese interests in at least three ways: (1) checking Japan's ambitions for regional hegemony; (2) restraining the buildup of an independent Japanese military capability and limiting Japan's ability to project power into the region; and (3) reassuring other Asian states concerned about China's growing economic, political, and military power, thus averting an arms race on China's periphery and enabling regional states to focus on economic development—including growing trade with China.

Thus, the decision to strengthen the U.S.-Japan alliance and, in Chinese parlance, to "expand the scope of U.S.-Japanese security cooperation," set off alarm bells in Zhongnanhai and triggered a debate in China about the alliance, its impact on Chinese security interests, and American and Japanese intentions toward China. Chinese concerns about the strengthening of the alliance can be divided into six categories: China's emergence as a great power; Japan; Taiwan; bilateral Sino-Japanese issues; U.S. regional strategy; and theater missile defense (TMD).

As noted above, the Chinese have become increasingly suspicious that a key motivation behind efforts by Tokyo and Washington to reinvigorate the Security Treaty is a desire to counter the rise of Chinese power. The strengthening of the alliance is considered by many Chinese officials and analysts to be a key component of a U.S. anti-China "containment" strategy. With the end of the Cold War and the disappearance of the Soviet threat, the Chinese maintain, the United States is seeking to target China as its new adversary. Americans are charged with stirring up concern in the region and elsewhere about the rise of the "China threat" to justify fortifying its alliance with Japan and solidifying its military presence in the region.

The second Chinese worry is that the strengthening of the alliance will accelerate Japan's development into a "normal" country shouldering greater responsibility for regional security and that it will provide a "cover" for the Japanese to enhance their defense capabilities to be in a position to emerge as an independent military power. The Chinese are especially concerned about the outcome of the revision of the 1978 Japan-U.S. Guidelines for Defense Cooperation, which govern wartime U.S.-Japan cooperation under the Security Treaty. Many Chinese analysts warn that modification of the guidelines will create pressure in Japan to revise the Peace Constitution to include the right of collective self-defense. And a decision by Japan to revise its constitution would be seen by the Chinese as a dangerous watershed in Japanese post-World War II history, signaling to many a movement toward remilitarization.

Many Chinese increasingly doubt the U.S. contention that the alliance plays the role of the cork in the bottle and will prevent Japan from becoming a military power. One Chinese military analyst remarked privately that in his view "the result is just the opposite. Through the review of the Defense Guidelines, the U.S. will drag Japan out of its territory to play a military role." The Chinese also say that assigning broader military functions to the Self-Defense Forces is worrisome not only to China, but also to other Asian states in the region who similarly fear that such a trend could destabilize the region, divert regional states' attention away from economic modernization, engender an arms race, and set back multilateral efforts to address security concerns through confidence-building measures and dialogue.

The third area of Chinese concern about the strengthening of the U.S.-Japan alliance is Taiwan. This is likely Beijing's top priority in the near term; official comments have focused on whether or not the scope of the alliance includes Taiwan. The redefinition of the alliance from military cooperation to defend Japan to jointly responding to deal with "emergencies in areas surrounding Japan," an undefined geographical area, has heightened Chinese concern

that U.S. and Japanese militaries will coordinate and strengthen their ability to respond with force in the event that Beijing seeks to militarily intimidate or take over Taiwan in response to a declaration of Taiwan independence. This is a core issue for PLA General Staff officers, who privately assert that the revised Defense Guidelines increase the likelihood as well as the capability of Japanese active support for U.S. forces in the event the United States decides to intervene in another Taiwan Strait crisis. A senior colonel from the General Staff commented privately that once “something happens” in the Taiwan Strait, the United States will intervene, with Japan providing not only logistical backup but also early warning and even combat support. Noting that the United States had dispatched two aircraft carriers during China’s March 1996 military exercises in the Taiwan Strait, he said he hoped that next time China would not see two Japanese destroyers flanking the U.S. carriers. A subset of this concern about Taiwan is widespread suspicion in China that Tokyo seeks to reestablish its influence over Taiwan, and the strengthening of the alliance will aid Japan in this effort.

The fourth area of Chinese concern encompasses bilateral Sino-Japanese issues. In the view of Chinese experts, the revitalization of the alliance has boosted the influence of right wing “militarists” in Japanese politics. The Japanese right wing is portrayed as favoring a wide range of positions considered negative for China, including a more confrontational stance on territorial issues; denial or minimization of Japan’s aggressive role in World War II; support for forging closer ties with Taipei; curtailing economic aid to China; and criticizing China’s lack of transparency in the military sphere. All of this is viewed as portending a long-term negative trend in Sino-Japanese relations.

Fifth, the Chinese see the United States as using its alliance with Japan as a vehicle to organize and manage security relations in the region. Chinese experts oppose what they say are U.S. plans to have the U.S.-Japan alliance play a role in the Asia Pacific region that is similar to the role that NATO plays in Europe. One Chinese strategist privately questioned whether the United States intends to use its alliance with Japan to respond to a crisis in Asia in a similar manner to the way it relied on NATO in Bosnia. Many Chinese analysts note that when Defense Secretary Perry was in office he highlighted the roles of U.S.-Japan alliance and the U.S.-Australia alliance as the two anchors of American strategy in the region.

Beijing maintains that Asia Pacific stability and prosperity should be guaranteed not by the U.S.-Japan alliance, but instead by the major powers and power groupings, including China and perhaps Russia and ASEAN. Concern about U.S. reliance on its alliances to manage regional security has led to increased support in China for regional multilateral security discussions and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in particular as a means of countering the strengthening of the U.S.-Japan alliance and the perceived effort by the United States to stir up regional worries about Chinese intentions.

Finally, worry in Beijing that the United States and Japan may cooperate to militarily contain China has been exacerbated by the possibility that Japan will deploy a theater missile defense system which would be jointly developed with the United States. Most Chinese officials and analysts judge that the most important factor spurring Tokyo’s interest in the TMD program is not really North Korea’s missile development program but uncertainty about China’s intentions. The Chinese maintain that the Japanese do not expect North Korea to exist five years from now; since TMD development and deployment will take longer than that, who is TMD really aimed at? Obviously, they say, the target is Chinese, not North Korean, missiles.

There is considerable misunderstanding or perhaps lack of informed understanding in China about the various possible options that the United States and Japan are studying in the

area of TMD. Many Chinese also exaggerate the capabilities of any U.S. TMD system, especially advanced TMD for use against ballistic missiles with ranges up to 3,500 km. They are worried that China's deterrent force could be neutralized by some of the options that are under consideration. The two systems that are of greatest concern in China are the Army's ground-based THAAD (Theater High-Altitude Area Defense) system and the Navy's Upper Tier system, which would be based on Aegis destroyers. Chinese scientists privately assert that either of these systems would be capable of defending against nearly 80 percent of China's "strategic" nuclear missiles and could potentially be upgraded to defend against the rest of China's long-range nuclear arsenal, including the small number of Chinese ICBMs that can reach the continental United States.

Thus Chinese nuclear scientists worry that development and deployment of TMD constitutes a major step toward deployment of a ballistic missile defense system to defend the continental United States. They claim that the United States has already moved beyond the limitations on ballistic missile defense contained in the ABM treaty. Once TMD is deployed, they predict that the United States will proceed with deployment of a national missile defense (NMD) system. This has provoked calls by many Chinese nuclear scientists to implement measures to protect China's deterrent. Some of the options they are looking at are increased numbers of ICBMs, possibly with MIRVed warheads; quieter submarines; and depressed trajectory SLBMs. There are other scientists, however, who argue that China need not make any decisions to respond now. Some contend that any TMD or NMD system can be easily overwhelmed by larger numbers of missiles or defeated by penetration aids. In their view, China should wait to see what kind of systems are going to be deployed and assess their capabilities. The extent of the threat posed to China by TMD and how China should respond is clearly an ongoing debate in China that will likely intensify whether or not Japan participates in TMD development.

Another point relevant to the TMD issue is that Beijing views the ability to attack U.S. bases in Japan as a key of part of its strategy to deter U.S. intervention in a conflict with China, although this is rarely acknowledged by Chinese strategists. Chinese analysts therefore worry that deployment of TMD in Japan would weaken deterrence and reduce the risks for the United States of operating out of Japanese bases in a crisis.

There is also concern in China, especially within the PLA General Staff, about the possibility that lower-tier TMD for use against short-range missiles that Japan co-developed with the United States or purchased outright from the United States could be transferred to Taiwan or used on Japanese ships to shield Taiwan from conventionally armed Chinese missiles launched at the island.

## **Conclusion**

Not all Chinese equally share the above concerns about the strengthening of the U.S.-Japan alliance. There is an ongoing debate among strategists in China about how worried China should be and what countermeasures are required to cope with the adjustments in the alliance. In one camp, there is the group of experts that favors adopting a wait-and-see attitude toward the revised Defense Guidelines and their implications. This group would argue that it is not to China's benefit to seek confrontation with the United States and Japan and that a forceful response from China could bring about even closer anti-China coopera-

tion between Washington and Tokyo. There is another group, however, that is already convinced that the Defense Guidelines and the revitalization of the alliance are going to have serious negative consequences for Chinese security. This group advocates taking more proactive, aggressive countermeasures to the strengthening of the alliance. The former group is likely to win out, at least in the short run, because Beijing will be reluctant to assume a confrontational posture toward the United States on the eve of the Clinton-Jiang summit, which takes place shortly after the issuance of the final Defense Guidelines.

Despite growing apprehension that the revision of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty may be damaging to Chinese interests, Beijing is not poised to declare its opposition to the existence of the U.S.-Japan alliance nor to the American force presence in Japan and the Western Pacific. First, Chinese leaders remain optimistic that bilateral ties with the United States can be improved this year. They believe that progress can be achieved at the upcoming Jiang-Clinton summits later this year and early next year and that bilateral ties can be set on a track of reduced volatility and gradual improvement. Second, most Chinese officials and researchers, though deeply suspicious of U.S. intentions, are not yet convinced that the United States and Japan are committed to a containment strategy. They warn that if China reacts too forcefully now to its concerns about the U.S.-Japan alliance, a self-fulfilling prophecy may result. The Chinese will also be reluctant to conclude that the United States and Japan are committed to a joint containment strategy, since reaching such a conclusion that the alliance is unalterably inimical to Chinese interests would require a major shift in China's strategy and strategic priorities. This could include a reordering of China's "four modernizations" that shifts defense modernization from the first to the last position, with obvious negative consequences for China's economic development. A judgment that the United States and Japan are colluding at China's expense would also compel Beijing to unequivocally oppose U.S. forward force presence and alliances in the region, placing in jeopardy China's relations with the United States.

However Beijing chooses to respond to the strengthening of the U.S.-Japan alliance, discussion will continue in China about how to facilitate the creation of new security arrangements in the region that are more favorable to Chinese interests. This debate will focus on (1) the long-term desirability of the presence of U.S. forward-deployed forces; (2) the role of alliances in regional security; and (3) the role of multilateral security cooperation in the Asia Pacific. Chinese judgments on these issues will be influenced by developments in Sino-U.S. relations, Sino-Japanese relations, and cross-Strait relations between Taiwan and the mainland. If there are improvements in these three sets of bilateral ties, then there is a better chance that China's concerns about U.S.-Japanese anti-China collaboration and about major power intervention in the Taiwan issue will be eased. On the other hand, increased tension in the Taiwan Strait or a new crisis in Sino-American relations and Sino-Japanese relations could result in an overt Chinese posture of official opposition to the alliance and even active campaigning with regional states against U.S. alliances and military presence. Such an outcome would signify a grave mismanagement of the issue by Washington as well as by Beijing. It would also pose a serious threat to U.S. regional and global strategic interests.

## Strategic Ferment in China

Banning Garrett: I would like to make a few comments on the strategic debate under way in China and on how the Japanese are perceiving the alliance and China. I would also like to discuss some of the implications for the United States and the balance of power in Asia.

The issues that Bonnie mentioned—the revision of the U.S.-Japan alliance, the United States sending two aircraft carriers to the area of Taiwan during China's March 1996 military exercises, the United States as the sole superpower and global leader, and the eastward expansion of the NATO alliance—have sparked a vigorous debate in China over long-held assumptions. One of the assumptions these “revisionists” are challenging is the notion that the United States and China have common strategic interests that are greater than their differences. Ever since we started annual visits to China in the early 1980s, a theme of nearly every Chinese official and analyst has been that the United States and China have far more interests in common than they have differences, and the two sides should concentrate on common strategic interests and put aside or manage their differences. They would say we have common strategic interests, of course, in peace and stability in the entire region and on the Korean peninsula. We have a common interest in the peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue. We have a common interest in the continuation of the U.S.-Japan alliance to maintain stability and prevent the return of Japanese militarism. We have common interests in a wide range of global issues such as protecting the environment and countering terrorism and drug trafficking. More generally, we have common interests in maintaining regional and global peace, stability, and prosperity.

But the revisionist school is saying, yes, of course we have a common interest in general notions such as peace and stability in the Asia Pacific region. When you get down to practice, however, we have different assessments of what the threats to peace and stability are and how to manage them. For example, regarding Taiwan, the United States points to China as threatening stability with its military exercises, but China sees the United States as posing a threat to its interests by encouraging Taiwan independence. In the future, we could even end up in military conflict over Taiwan. So the question of whether we have common interests in Taiwan is being cast in doubt.

On the U.S.-Japan alliance, the revisionists argue that the alliance could evolve in a direction inimical to Chinese interests—such as the expansion of the alliance to cover the Taiwan Strait—and yet still serve American interests. So do we really have common interests there? Does global leadership by the United States serve China's interests, especially if the United States is in such a strong position that it can exert pressure on China on core national interests like sovereignty and internal stability?

The revisionists are saying that, in practice, Sino-American common interests are not as great as U.S.-Chinese differences, so maybe we have to reconsider this whole assumption. Cooperation with the United States may increase China's dependency while it curtails Beijing's freedom of action without substantially advancing Chinese interests. Therefore, maybe we should find a way to distance ourselves from the United States and put more resources into resisting U.S. pressure on the whole range of issues.

There is a growing sense among Chinese youth—backed by a strong sense of nationalism—that China should stand up to the United States. There is a well-known book in China titled *The China That Can Say “No”* modeled on *The Japan That Can Say “No.”* The Chinese book argues that China has become much stronger and no longer has to accept being pushed around by the United States. Chinese analysts and officials taking this popular

side of the debate insist that China has other strategic options and should resist U.S. pressure. They say that China can forge closer ties with other powers to counter the United States.

China's realpolitik analysts, officials, and leaders reject this view, however. For all the bravado surrounding recognition of China's newfound strength, they recognize China's economic and political vulnerabilities and challenges. They see that China has no viable strategic option other than to maintain a good working relationship with the United States. China cannot stand alone in opposition to the only superpower. Nor can it successfully organize a coalition of states seeking to counter U.S. power. The Russians are not only weak and declining but they also need good ties with the West despite their grumbling about NATO expansion and their disappointment in the paltry economic support that has been provided by the West to underpin their democratic experiment. Moreover, the Japanese and the Europeans are not going to unite with China against the United States, these Chinese recognize, while a grouping with the anti-U.S. pariah states like Iran, Iraq, and Libya would be a fruitless dead end. Finally, these realpolitikers maintain that sustaining a good working relationship with the United States is possible and that the United States and China continue to have more common interests than differences despite the Defense Guidelines and the March 1996 confrontation over Taiwan.

In my view, the realpolitikers in China have it right. China's strengths are being overestimated by many Chinese and foreigners alike. It will be a long time before China is truly a great power—much less a superpower—in all the substantive measures of power. Moreover, prospects for China's future will continue to be tied to relations with the United States—not only access to American capital, technology, and markets, but also to U.S. regional and global leadership in the economic and security realms. China needs a growing world economy and a stable international situation in which it can devote itself to economic modernization.

China's participation in multilateral security cooperation has raised another area of strategic ferment in China. The conventional wisdom in China over the years has been to avoid any kind of regional security cooperation. The Chinese look back to Soviet efforts in the 1950s to rope China into an anti-U.S. military alliance that would have put Beijing in a subordinate position to Moscow. Leonid Brezhnev's 1969 proposal for an Asian collective security regime, which was clearly aimed at containing China, is also cited as a historic precedent of the dangers of multilateralism. When Gorbachev made a new Asian security proposal at Vladivostok in 1986, which was no longer targeted at China, the Chinese nevertheless remained wary of Soviet intentions and rejected it out of hand.

The Chinese were suspicious of the ASEAN Regional Forum when it was first proposed, fearing that it would be an anti-China forum that would seek to constrain China. Despite their wariness, the Chinese decided they could protect China's interests better by joining the ARF than by remaining outside. Since then, the Chinese have come to realize that there are benefits and few costs from ARF participation. Participation enables China to ensure that the multilateral security organization does not interfere in China's internal affairs, including on the Taiwan issue, and it has helped defuse some of the "China threat" concerns in the region. But most analysts and officials in China remain wary of any multilateral security organization that goes much beyond a dialogue forum and agreement on voluntary confidence-building measures (CBMs). They oppose creation of an Asian OSCE or NATO that would have any supranational authority and thus would limit China's sovereignty and its room for maneuver.

The revisionist school of thought, which would not necessarily disagree with much of that thinking, saw an opportunity in early 1997 to use the ARF and other multilateral security forums to promote what Chinese officials called their “new security concept.” The new security concept maintains that international security should not be based on bilateral military alliances, which are portrayed as “relics of the Cold War” that should be abandoned. Alliances, it is argued, strengthen the security of those nations in the alliance at the expense of those outside the alliance. Instead, there should be equal security for all states, based on a multilateral security regime and non-allied bilateral relations modeled on the Sino-Russian relationship. As mentioned by Bonnie, this concept was unveiled at the March 1997 ARF intersessional meeting on CBMs.

Interestingly, although the revisionists, especially from the PLA, wanted to use the new security concept to try to rally regional opinion against the U.S.-Japan alliance and U.S. forward military presence, some of those analysts and officials who were behind the formulation of the new security concept say that their intention was quite different than it now appears. They maintain that they could not openly say this, but in their view the United States would not be excluded from playing a major security role in the region. On the contrary, due to regional suspicions of both Japan and China, the United States would have to play the leadership role in the transition from an alliance-based regional security regime to a regional security structure based on multilateral security cooperation and bilateral relations. Moreover, they insist that they do not oppose U.S. alliances or the U.S. military presence in the region but believe that eventually alliances will be voluntarily phased out and a new regional security regime will be established in their place. According to one researcher, the top priority of these analysts and officials was to educate Chinese to the fact that China will have to accept a more interdependent world in the future, including in the realm of security.

The Russian-Chinese relationship, too, is being looked at by some revisionists as a strategic counter to the United States. Most Chinese analysts and officials maintain, however, that while the Sino-Russian strategic partnership is useful tactically, China’s—and Russia’s—real interests lie in strengthening ties with the West. They understand that there is really nothing “strategic” in the partnership other than the long-term strategic need of both countries to maintain peaceful and cooperative relations and to resolve a number of long-standing territorial and security disputes.

Overall, the strategic ferment in China is primarily reactive to developments in the U.S.-China relationship. These developments include the U.S. sanctions imposed after the June 4, 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown and subsequent perceptions that the United States was seeking to subvert the Chinese political system through “peaceful evolution”; more recent suspicion that the United States was seeking to keep China weak and divided to prevent it from emerging as a great power; concerns about U.S. policy toward Taiwan; and the strengthening of the U.S.-Japan alliance, especially the revision of the Defense Guidelines, which the Chinese have interpreted as broadening the scope of the alliance to cover Taiwan and providing the rationale and impetus for Japan to play a larger regional security role.

Beijing is likely to step up pressure on both Japan and the United States to provide reassurances about the Defense Guidelines and the overall direction of the U.S.-Japan alliance. The Chinese are also likely to increase their warnings about Japan deploying advanced TMD, hoping that Japan will forego the TMD option or acquire only a very limited capability. But Chinese leaders are likely to be cautious in suggesting that they oppose the existence of the alliance itself for fear of undermining efforts to rebuild Sino-

American relations, especially as the two sides prepare for the Jiang-Clinton summit in October 1997. Moreover, they continue to see the benefits of the alliance—especially “containing” Japan—as outweighing the costs. Given China’s core interests in maintaining peace and stability in the Asia Pacific region to pursue economic modernization, Chinese leaders will not easily decide to take the risks involved in adopting an alternative strategy aimed at countering perceived U.S. “containment” or U.S.-Japan interference on Taiwan.

The state of China’s relations with the United States determines how Beijing judges the U.S.-Japan alliance. If Sino-American relations improve and the Chinese become less suspicious of U.S. intentions toward China, then the Chinese leadership’s concerns about the alliance may be substantially eased. Over time, greater Chinese understanding of the scope and limitations of the revised Defense Guidelines may lead Beijing to the conclusion that little has changed—that the United States and Japan are not seeking to intervene on the Taiwan problem and that Japan will still be highly reluctant to play a significantly expanded regional security role.

## **Japanese Perspectives on China**

Without going into great detail about Japanese use of China and the alliance, it seems that for Japan, China is emerging as *the* security issue of the twenty-first century. The issue for Tokyo is how to manage the rise of China, including integrating China into the region and preventing development of a confrontational Sino-Japanese relationship.

Concerns about China in Japan were clearly exacerbated by Beijing’s March 1996 military exercises. The exercises brought into relief the change in Japan’s perspective on China. Only a few years ago, the Japanese viewed China as a poor, backward country that required Japanese assistance to feed its own people and begin to develop its own economy. A landmark in the transformation of thinking about China in Japan as well as in the United States was the issuing of a World Bank report and International Monetary Fund reports in 1993 that concluded that China was not a \$400–\$500 billion economy as the Chinese claimed, based on traditional exchange-rate-based analyses of comparative GNPs, but rather that after more than a decade of reform China’s economy was beginning to rival Japan’s. Based on purchasing-power-parity assessments, China’s GNP was estimated at between \$1.7 and \$2.7 trillion.

Suddenly, China had emerged as a potential economic giant poised to overtake Japan and eventually the United States early in the twenty-first century. That conclusion, probably more than any other factor, transformed notions about China. China’s linchpin role in the strategic triangle had disappeared after the demise of the Soviet Union and Soviet communism in 1991, relegating China to seeming strategic irrelevance. Now, China was looked upon as a country that could be the dominant power in Asia and a global rival of the United States in the next century. Japanese assessments of China shifted dramatically, as did those of Americans. The perception of China’s rapid emergence as a great power was even more disquieting for Japan than for the United States; China looms as a huge, nuclear-armed continental power vis-à-vis the relatively small and vulnerable non-nuclear island nation of Japan.

Japanese concerns about U.S. management of bilateral relations with China parallel Chinese concerns about the U.S.-Japan alliance. Tokyo fears the United States will either be

too confrontational toward China—heightening tensions in the region and seriously damaging Japan's relations with China or even dragging Japan into a Sino-U.S. conflict—or too accommodating toward Beijing, engaging in cooperation with the Chinese at Japan's expense. In the past few years, the Japanese have worried less that the United States would develop ties with China that were too close than that tensions in U.S.-Chinese ties could damage Sino-Japanese relations and create regional instability. Despite the strengthening of the U.S.-Japan alliance, however, there is still nervousness in Tokyo as Beijing and Washington take steps to improve Sino-American relations. This concern could worsen in the future if Sino-American relations continue to improve, since the U.S.-Chinese relationship is coming to be portrayed as the single most important bilateral relationship in the world—a distinction long held by U.S.-Japan relations. Improvements in Sino-American relations put pressure on Tokyo to improve ties with Beijing as well to not be left out, just as better U.S.-Japan ties compel China to improve ties with the United States and Japan.

For the United States, the dynamics of Sino-Japanese relations, Sino-American relations, and U.S.-Japan relations will require careful management if it is to maintain close allied relations with Japan while building a long-term strategic relationship with China. Finding a workable balance in U.S. relations with Japan and China will be a major challenge for Washington in the next few years and well into the twenty-first century. Should the United States rely primarily on expanding the role of the U.S.-Japan alliance and building a position of strength to contain China? This view is becoming popular in some quarters in Washington, especially on Capitol Hill. Or should the United States seek to address some of China's security concerns regarding Japan and the alliance and to find some long-term *modus vivendi* with Beijing? How do we square the circle in this whole U.S.-Japan-China relationship? The U.S. leadership position in the Asia Pacific region is based primarily on America's ability to manage relations with China and with Japan to achieve not only U.S. bilateral objectives but also to maintain regional stability. If regional states judge the United States to be unable to manage these relationships wisely, the American position in the region could be jeopardized.

I see no reason why the United States cannot do this. I am an optimist about American power and leadership ability. But protecting American interests and enhancing the U.S. role in the region is going to require sensitivity to the concerns of each power about the other and to the other's ties with the United States. Washington needs to mitigate Chinese paranoia about the U.S.-Japan alliance. It is in the interest of the United States that the Chinese continue to acquiesce to—if not support—U.S. alliances and forward military presence in the Asia Pacific region. At the same time, the maintenance of the U.S.-Japan alliance is fundamental to the U.S. regional strategic position. The United States cannot loosen the alliance or distance itself from Japan to ameliorate Chinese concerns. Integrating China into the political, economic, and security communities of the Asia Pacific region will be a joint concern of the United States and Japan and the two sides will undoubtedly discuss issues related to China and try to coordinate their China policies. Beijing has to recognize this strategic reality and understand that Chinese opposition to our alliances and military presence would seriously damage Sino-American relations and could provoke the United States and Japan to pursue the joint containment strategy they fear. But the United States should nevertheless develop Sino-American relations bilaterally and not use the U.S.-Japan alliance as a vehicle for formulating and carrying out China policy. The Chinese expect that China as a great power will be dealt with directly by the United States rather than through the U.S.-Japan alliance.

## **Balance of Power**

Just a decade ago, the Soviet Union, backed by its vast military power, was perceived to be a major power in the Asia Pacific region. Japan was a rapidly rising political power based on its extraordinary economic success. Many Americans even worried that the Japanese economy would overtake that of the United States. China was still viewed as a backward country that was making rapid gains but was not a major power in a league with the Soviet Union and Japan, much less the United States. Finally, although the United States was still the dominant regional power, there were new concerns about the decline of American power globally and regionally.

Today, the Soviet Union no longer exists and the truncated Russian state is trying to reverse a steep economic decline while its Pacific Fleet rusts in Vladivostok harbor. Russia basically counts for little in Asia—its economic presence is minuscule, it has little influence over political affairs, and its waning military capabilities provide it little or no leverage in the region. Moscow's primary impact on the region is through its arms sales, especially to China. A rebounded Russian economy could underwrite resurgent Russian influence in the region, but that seems to be many years if not decades in the future.

The bursting of the Japanese economic bubble in the early 1990s has revealed deep structural weaknesses in the Japanese economic structure and limits to Japan's overall national power. The Japanese economy is not likely to resume its torrid growth of the 1970s and 1980s as it faces an aging problem and declining work force. Moreover, Japan has one-tenth the population and about one-twenty-fifth the territory of China, which is overwhelmingly the largest power in East Asia, dwarfing the advantage of Germany over its European neighbors. In the long run, Japan's strategic position is likely to be more similar to a Britain off the European coast than a Germany in central Europe—with China representing an amalgamation of the largest continental powers.

As noted earlier, China seemed to emerge as a pretender to great power status virtually overnight in geopolitical time. China's role in the world economy has expanded at an extraordinary rate with more than a decade of sustained high growth, rapid expansion of its share of world trade and capital attraction, and the promise of vast markets for foreign business to tap. The rise in China's position in the balance of power has been boosted significantly by the sharp decline in Russia's fortunes and the stalling of the Japanese juggernaut.

The result of these tectonic shifts in national fortunes has been a new configuration of power in the Asia Pacific region. But caution is warranted in projecting the future balance of power. In retrospect, those who in the 1980s forecast Japan's economic dominance were making an unwarranted extrapolation of short-term economic trends and overlooking both the economic Achilles' heels of Japan and the broader measures of comprehensive national power where Japan's structural weaknesses are especially evident. We should be wary of making a similar overestimation of China's future strength based on extrapolation of current trends. China faces immense economic and political challenges that could constrain its economic development and even lead to debilitating political crises. Moreover, China will likely be preoccupied with internal matters and limited in its foreign policy options and military capabilities well into the twenty-first century.

In the relative balance between China and Japan, the balance of power will inevitably shift in China's favor vis-à-vis Japan unless China faces severe crises that stunt economic growth and force retrenchment from China's integration into the regional and global

community. Whatever China's fate, the U.S.-Japan alliance will be an even more important source of security reassurance for Japan in the next century than it is now.

Although it is dangerous to extrapolate trends about the United States just as it is about China and Japan, I think the twenty-first century will still be an American century, that the United States will continue to be the central power in the world. The United States will likely have the greatest overall economic, technological, political, and cultural strength as well as military power. The United States will be unrivaled in its wide range of soft power as well as hard power despite the presence of a number of other large economies on the world stage. There will continue to be constraints on American power, of course, and perhaps those will increase. But in relative terms, it is highly unlikely that the United States will face a global rival with matching power in any category, much less in overall comprehensive national power.

The U.S. role in Asia need not diminish substantially. The United States will continue to have the resources to play a major security, political, and economic role in the Asia Pacific region. In the area of technology leadership, the U.S. position may be enhanced. The latest historic round of global interconnectedness that began with sea routes of communication in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, then was furthered by the telephone and air routes in the twentieth century, is being led by the United States through the Internet and the broader information revolution. The United States is the origin and focal point of much of the research and development as well as product development and marketing effort in hardware and software, including media content. The Internet originated in the United States, of course, and something like 70 percent of Internet Web sites are in the United States. The unmatched creativity and intensity of the U.S. entrepreneurial environment for information technology development (as well as other economic sectors) suggests that the U.S. lead in this critical area of both global power and economic growth may increase in the future. The U.S. share of a hypothetical global "gross information product"—I have no statistics on this, only hunches—might be comparable to America's 50 percent share of world GNP in the first few years after World War II; perhaps in the range of 40–45 percent, one former CEO of a leading software company suggested to me. The U.S. lead in military power may also be increasing. The United States no longer has any global military rival and its pace of technology development in the "revolution in military affairs" is increasing the gap between U.S. military capabilities and those of all other countries, including U.S. allies. U.S. economic, technological, and military strength puts the United States in a strong position to continue to exercise great influence over events in the Asia Pacific region well into the twenty-first century. Asian powers that think U.S. power and influence are waning in the post-Cold War world should reconsider their analysis. The United States is in Asia to stay.

## Questions and Answers

*Is Taiwan a great overriding concern for Chinese policy, with other issues secondary?*

Banning Garrett: Taiwan is a core national security and sovereignty concern for which Chinese leaders are willing to put at risk their other interests, including economic development. In my view, Beijing was trying to get this point across with its military exercises against Taiwan in 1995 and 1996, especially the March 1996 missile firings. I think among other objectives they wanted to dispel the notion promulgated by some people in Taiwan and the

United States that China was so economically interdependent that it would not use force against Taiwan, even if Taipei declared independence, for fear of putting in jeopardy their economic interests. A Chinese leader who stood by when Taiwan declared independence could not remain in power. So regime survival would be threatened in the short run by Taiwan independence even if it would also be threatened in the long run if economic modernization were to fail.

*Does China feel that its freedom of maneuver is more limited than that of the United States and Japan? What are the limits? What can China do? If the Chinese really are concerned about the U.S.-Japan alliance, how are they going to deal with that issue?*

Bonnie Glaser: I think that the Chinese are aware that they could face a strong negative reaction from the United States, Japan, and other regional states if they were to build up a military force that was perceived as threatening by their neighbors or if they were to use military force to seize islands in the South China Sea, for example. On the other hand, they face domestic pressures that strictly limit their freedom to compromise on Taiwan and territorial disputes. Besides the perceived necessity to react strongly to Taiwan independence, the Chinese leadership could feel forced to respond to perceived provocation on maritime territorial disputes even though a military confrontation might be very much against their national interests. I was impressed, however, by the Chinese government's ability to react with restraint regarding the disputed Daiyu/Senkaku islands in the East China Sea in the fall of 1996 despite strong public pressure in China for a tough Chinese reaction to the Japanese right wing erecting a lighthouse on one of the islands.

Banning Garrett: I think many people in China who would like to find other strategic options—as I suggested there is a strategic debate under way in China—recognize that a strategic alignment with Russia against the United States would offer China very little beyond access to advanced weapons systems and military technology. Russia is not in a position to challenge the United States and to help China counter U.S. pressure. Beijing and Moscow could perhaps coordinate on some issues facing the UN Security Council to the detriment of U.S. interests and perhaps could cooperate in other international forums in ways harmful to the United States. But both countries would have to carefully consider the implications of any such actions for their bilateral ties with the United States. As for the geopolitical weight of the Sino-Russian “strategic partnership,” such triangular leverage only works if the third party notices and cares about the other two seeming to “collude.” It is my impression that U.S. officials hardly notice such events as exchange of high-level visits and communiqués calling for a more multipolar world without one country—that is, the United States—seeking to set the rules for the rest of the world.

Chinese leaders also recognize that they have very limited room to maneuver on the alliance issue. They are aware that a shift in Chinese strategy toward the United States would be very costly indeed. So they are reluctant to publicly oppose U.S. alliances and the American military presence in the region.

There are some in China who think that China's growing economic strength gives Beijing more strategic options. For example, they argue that the United States is increasingly dependent on the Chinese market and can be manipulated, in the same way Beijing manipulates the Europeans to get political compliance on issues like human rights in exchange for major economic deals such as occurred with China's purchase of Airbus aircraft. But I think the more sober minds in Beijing recognize China's weaknesses and

vulnerabilities as well as U.S. strengths. Chinese leaders probably are more aware of China's vulnerabilities and dependencies than some policy advisers or hardliners from the PLA. Those people who have to implement and live with the implications of a new strategy may have a very different cost-benefit assessment than the strategists who advocate radical change. Similarly, I would say there are advocates in the United States of containing China who may not have calculated the economic, military, and political costs. What would be the political cost to the United States' position in Asia? Would Asian states rally behind the United States? How great a U.S. military buildup would be required in Asia? At what cost? How would a hostile relationship with China affect U.S. economic interests and the global as well as regional economy? Would U.S. political leaders be willing to pay a high price for containment unless they perceived virtually no other viable alternative? Political and military leaders in the United States are likely to be very cautious in considering a change in strategy toward China. So the United States faces constraints on its freedom of maneuver as well.

*With the economic changes that are taking place, will this interdependent strand of liberal thought manifest itself in China's strategic thinking?*

Bonnie Glaser: I continue to see far more evidence of "interdependence" in Chinese thinking in the economic sphere than I do on security issues. There are some notable examples of China agreeing to security interdependence measures such as the NPT and the CTBT—although other factors such as fear of isolation were also at work in these examples—and, in private discussions, Chinese experts express an understanding that China is part of a larger international community and that its security is interdependent with that of other states. But there continues to be a great deal of tension between that approach and the more realist, balance of power, security self-help approach. The Chinese traditionally are practitioners of hard-nosed, realpolitik strategies in international politics. Interdependence is a new trend of thinking in China that is only beginning to gain a foothold. I think that tension will continue to exist for a long time. I don't see any time soon when the Chinese will opt for significant reliance on security interdependence measures and arrangements, particularly measures that constrain Chinese behavior.

*What sort of a multilateral security arrangement do the Chinese foresee for Northeast Asia or the Asia Pacific region as a whole?*

Banning Garrett: Chinese policy advisers involved in the effort to develop the "new security concept" maintain that any new security regime has to be agreed upon and organized primarily by China, Japan, and the United States—the three major powers of the region. This would have to be done primarily behind the scenes since none of the three powers would want to be accused of trying to set up a condominium to dominate the region. But in the Chinese view, any effort to create a regional security structure would fail if it did not involve the agreement and cooperation of all three powers. There is a minority view that the region needs to eventually establish some sort of supranational security structure like NATO or the OSCE to help guarantee peace and security in the Asia Pacific, although these analysts and officials recognize broad opposition to such a multilateral security structure within China. Some Chinese analysts suggest that a multilateral effort to manage the Korean peninsula in a unification process could form the basis for a permanent multilateral security arrangement in Northeast Asia.

*Do you think that China is seeking to replace the United States as the dominant external power on the Korean peninsula?*

Bonnie Glaser: I think you have to begin with Chinese estimates of how the situation on the peninsula is evolving. The Chinese continue to estimate that the North Korean regime will survive for at least three to five years. And while they are concerned about the deteriorating economic situation—and recent defections have probably increased their worries about the potential for political instability in the North Korean leadership—they have not altered their assessment that North Korea does not face imminent collapse. That gives China time before it decides to begin serious preparations for a collapse. Having said that, I think that the Chinese want to strengthen their position for whatever outcome there is on the Korean peninsula.

So what does that mean about their attitude toward U.S. influence on the Korean peninsula? I do not believe that Beijing has a strategic objective of replacing the United States as the dominant external power on the peninsula. First of all, the Chinese do not view themselves as in a strong enough position to play that role. They do not think that the South Koreans are going to push the United States out and let China replace the United States as the primary power. The Chinese are seeking to strengthen their relationship with the South and position themselves to have greater influence with the eventual government of a united Korea. I noted earlier that the Chinese view the United States as pursuing a hedging strategy toward them and I would contend that Beijing is in turn pursuing a hedging strategy toward us. If the United States is preparing to contain China if necessary, then China is preparing to counter a possible containment strategy. If Sino-American relations improve and Chinese suspicions about U.S. intentions are eased, however, Beijing would rather see the United States as the dominant outside power on the peninsula than Japan or Russia.

Banning Garrett: There are undoubtedly people in China who would like to push the United States out of Korea and Japan and pursue a goal of establishing China as the regional hegemon some time in the middle of the next century. But these are not China's strategic objectives as far as we can determine and they have no connection with Chinese strategy or policy. Our interlocutors in China dismiss the notion that China has a long-term strategy and set of policies aimed at pushing the United States out of the region. They insist that Chinese leaders and government officials are concerned with near-term, concrete issues such as how to respond to revision of the Defense Guidelines, the four-party talks, etc. They note—and lament—that Chinese policy is reactive and focused on near-term issues and considerations. China's main concern, they say, has to be maintaining peace and stability in the Asia Pacific region, and adoption and implementation of a strategy aimed at forcing the United States out of the region would be destabilizing, counterproductive, and unsuccessful. They realize that China does not have the power and influence to accomplish such a goal and that regional states could turn against perceived Chinese "hegemonism" if they tried.

Bonnie Glaser: They're as ad hoc and focused on short-term considerations in policy making as we are.

Banning Garrett: I agree that they are very ad hoc and short-term in their foreign policy making process. And oddly enough, they tend to leave out consideration of the U.S. alliance with South Korea when they complain about the U.S.-Japan alliance. That in large part is a function of China's general view that the United States is handling the Korean peninsula situation well and that U.S. forces stationed in South Korea currently are a stabilizing factor. They also say if the Korean people want to maintain the alliance with the United States and

the presence of U.S. forces, 'that's okay with us because we don't want Japan in there. We want stability. We don't want Korea to become a focal point of confrontation in the region, that's not in our interest—it would be destabilizing.' So I think that, as Bonnie said, the key issue is the status of Sino-American relations at the time when this issue is raised. I do not think Chinese policy will be guided by some grand strategy between now and then. In addition, some people in China will say that in the long run, Korea is not very important—that the big concern for China is managing relations with Japan and the United States.

*How does Chinese policy toward South Asia relate to the larger picture of Chinese foreign policy? Do you see the possibility that China will use Tibet as a kind of bargaining chip, perhaps offering greater autonomy for Tibet if the United States behaves in a certain way?*

Bonnie Glaser: I have never seen even a hint of the possibility that Beijing would offer to increase Tibetan autonomy as a bargaining chip. I can't imagine any such scenario. In addition, Tibetan autonomy would be a nightmare for Beijing. It would raise the specter of autonomy for other parts of China.

Banning Garrett: I do not have the impression that the Chinese see India as posing a threat on Tibet any more—certainly not to the extent they did in the fifties and sixties. I think they feel that they now have their relationship with India on a pretty sound footing with tacit border agreements and CBMs as well as a warmer political relationship.

Bonnie Glaser: Particularly with the collapse of the Soviet Union, China has been able to pull India a little bit more into its orbit. At the same time, China is maintaining a good relationship with Pakistan. Jiang Zemin visited both countries at the end of last year. In going to India first, I think Jiang was signaling that India is an important power to be reckoned with and that Beijing wants more balanced relations with India and Pakistan.

*What about the role of Indonesia in Chinese policy?*

Banning Garrett: Indonesia and Southeast Asia are of greater immediate concern to China, I think, in both commercial and strategic/political terms. But the real ball game for the Chinese is the United States and then Japan and Western Europe. Other powers like India can be a nuisance, but they are not a major concern. The Chinese want to balance—or rebalance—their relations with India and Pakistan, as Bonnie said, and the Chinese government does not want to see the Kashmir conflict erupt into an India-Pakistan conflict. But the attention of Chinese leaders is elsewhere. Oddly enough, the Chinese attitude toward the significance of South Asia is similar to the American attitude even though India and Pakistan are their neighbors and not ours.

*Why is China's attitude toward Tibet so inflexible?*

Bonnie Glaser: This is part of the larger issue of Chinese attitudes toward sovereignty. There are many scholars who have developed possible solutions for the South China Sea territorial dispute that seem eminently reasonable and involve compromises by all sides. But it is difficult for Chinese to look at any issue that involves territory and sovereignty in an isolated, compromising way. Their concern, particularly on Tibet, is that if you give up one piece of territory or grant independence, then you are setting a precedent for resolution for other territorial/sovereignty issues which could lead to China's unity unraveling. Particularly worrisome to Chinese leaders are areas of China that border Central Asia, such as Xinjiang, which have ties to Islamic groups across the border.

Banning Garrett: In the long run, the Chinese might change their position on how to maintain territorial integrity and sovereignty and at the same time allow significant autonomy. I would just say they would not do it in the context of bargaining with an outside power. But as an internal question they might change if they felt more confident that new arrangements would work.

*How do the Chinese view the development of military-to-military ties with the United States?*

Bonnie Glaser: In developing the military relationship with the United States, there is a deep suspicion on the Chinese side that we want to uncover their weaknesses. To some extent, it is true that we want to promote transparency and reciprocity so we can learn more about the PLA. It is also true that we want to show them U.S. strength to enhance deterrence. China wants to understand what makes us tick, and we want to understand what makes them tick. The Chinese also want to identify where the differences are that could create real problems and even inadvertent military conflict between the two countries as well as commonalities and potential areas for cooperation. The resumption of the strategic dialogue between top leaders since March 1996 has been instrumental in helping leaders on both sides understand each other's thinking on core issues like Taiwan and U.S. alliances as well as Korea, proliferation, and bilateral issues such as human rights and trade. So while there is a cynical component to the motivations for developing military-to-military ties on both sides—that we need to know the potential enemy, its strengths and weaknesses—there is also a sense that there is something to be gained for both sides in understanding each other better as well as in engaging in cooperation in a number of specific areas. Finally, there are many in the PLA who hope that the development of the military relationship with the United States will eventually lead to the resumption of the transfer of military technology and equipment to China.

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**Banning Garrett** has been a consultant to the U.S. government on Asian affairs since 1980. He currently is a consultant to the Office of the Secretary of Defense and Sandia National Laboratories as well as other agencies of the U.S. government. Garrett is also a senior associate with the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C. He has written extensively for the Defense Department and other branches of the U.S. government on a wide range of issues, including Chinese views of the strategic environment, regional security in Northeast Asia, U.S. Asia strategy, U.S.-Soviet-Chinese triangular relations, Sino-American relations, multilateral security cooperation and arms control in Asia, and Russian strategy toward Asia. Garrett is co-author of *War and Peace: The Views from Moscow and Beijing* and has written for *Asian Survey*, *International Security*, *The Washington Quarterly*, the *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, and many other publications as well as for numerous edited volumes on Asian security and on the history of U.S. policy toward China and the strategic triangle. Banning Garrett is a member of the board of directors of the U.S. Committee of the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP).

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