

**Asian Alliances  
and American Politics**

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## **About the Author**

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## **Asian Alliances and American Politics**

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The domestic politics of our Asian alliances is like the story of the dog that didn't bark. Though our defense ties with Japan and Korea were forged in the Cold War, nearly ten years after the Berlin Wall came down, few voices are being raised to amend, let alone terminate, either the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security with Japan or the U.S.-Korea Mutual Defense Treaty. Although large numbers of U.S. troops remain in both countries, congressional criticisms of allied "free riding" are rarely heard. Our alliances with Japan and Korea provoke little discernible opposition from the Congress, the press, or the general public. Polling data suggests that public support for the alliances and for forward deployments in both countries remains high. And no prominent leaders of the Congress are threatening to link security concerns to outstanding economic issues with the Japanese or South Koreans—a tactic frequently utilized a decade ago.

The tranquillity surrounding our security ties in Northeast Asia is in some respects surprising. Alliances with Japan and South Korea reflected Cold War "trade-offs." In the early 1950s the United States extended to Tokyo—and subsequently to Seoul—unilateral strategic guarantees and wholesale indulgence of mercantilist trade policies in return for Japanese and South Korean political support of our containment strategy and flexible access to military bases on their territory. Many Americans doubted these arrangements would outlive the Cold War.

In fact, in the late 1980s and early 1990s U.S. administrations exhibited less readiness to subordinate commercial interests to larger strategic concerns; and Japanese officials displayed less willingness to take their diplomatic cues from Washington. We adopted tougher trade tactics; Tokyo hinted at "Asianizing" its foreign policy. During the Gulf War frictions over trade issues and burden-sharing disputes even threatened to contaminate our bilateral defense cooperation. Worse yet, in August 1995 widespread Japanese doubts about the future of its alliance with the United States surfaced in response to a brutal rape incident in Okinawa. Yet, by April 1996 Washington and Tokyo had reaffirmed their resolve to preserve the alli-

ance indefinitely. The Clinton administration pledged to retain current force levels well into the next century, the Japanese to sustain high levels of host-nation support and define more robust guidelines for defense cooperation with the United States.

U.S.-Korean defense cooperation has likewise experienced its ups and downs over the years. The greatest difficulties followed in the wake of the Nixon administration's proclamation of the Guam Doctrine, the Carter administration's announcement of its intent to withdraw an Army division from the South, and the Clinton administration's initiation of a bilateral dialogue with Pyongyang. Yet the U.S.-ROK alliance still rests on a firm political foundation. President Kim Dae Jung's June 1998 state visit to Washington evoked effusive expressions of bipartisan support for the U.S.-Korean alliance, as did President Clinton's return visit to Seoul in November. President Kim has even expressed publicly his hope that U.S. troops will remain on the peninsula after Korea is reunified.

This is not what most analysts would have expected of our Asian alliances in the wake of the Soviet Union's disintegration, the atrophy of Russian power, South Korea's decisive victory in its political/economic competition with the North, and substantial Chinese progress in implementing market-oriented economic reforms.

One purpose of this paper is to account for the continuity of domestic American political support for our Asian alliances in a rapidly changing post-Cold War environment. Another is to anticipate domestic and regional developments which could significantly alter or undermine that support in the future.

## **Domestic Opposition to America's Asian Alliances**

U.S. critics of our Asian alliances have not, to be sure, fallen completely silent. The most prominent opponents have been described as "geopolitical minimalists" and "economic nationalists." To date their impact on the foreign-policy debate has been modest at best. They share many convictions, but their motivations for opposing the alliances differ in some respects.

The geopolitical minimalists view our vital security interests in Asia as distinctly limited, and regard regional alliances as an unnecessary and costly burden. They maintain that national defense should be focused on the security, liberty, lives, and property of the American people. They doubt the capacity of any other power credibly to threaten the sovereignty, safety, or territorial integrity of the United States. They believe the weakness of Russia, the timidity of Japan, the domestic preoccupations of China, and the internal divisions within the European Community will assure reasonable stability in the global balance of forces for a long while. And they count on our superior nuclear capabilities, our dominance in the application of technology to defense, the robust strength of our economy, the protection afforded by oceans to our east and west and weak neighbors to our north and south, to guarantee a healthy measure of "strategic immunity" to the United States for the foreseeable future. Hence, they see little reason to "squander" resources on the defense of others.

The economic nationalists' opposition to Asian alliances is directed mainly at the asymmetries in existing patterns of defense cooperation. They believe Japan, and to a lesser extent South Korea, have shortchanged contributions to their own defense to concentrate on building up local manufacturing and high-tech industries that can compete with the United States. They regret—in some cases, resent—Tokyo's and Seoul's resistance to market-opening mea-

tures, the inequities of bilateral defense technology transfers, and the ways in which, they maintain, our stake in security ties with Tokyo and Seoul undercuts our readiness to adopt tougher, more assertive tactics on bilateral trade issues.

Revisionist “Japan hands” probably warrant the label “economic nationalists.” Some have urged major adjustments in the alliance, not least to “contain” Japan economically. Chalmers Johnson and E.B. Keane argued in a 1995 *Foreign Affairs* article that the U.S.- Japan alliance was outdated; that our strategic guarantee represented a flawed attempt to buy Tokyo’s cooperation while preserving U.S. strategic hegemony in the Pacific; that perpetuation of the alliance impeded the development of responsible economic conduct by the Japanese, and that our bilateral defense ties enabled Tokyo to delay further serious efforts to come to terms with its past, while robbing us of leverage in bilateral trade negotiations. Only an end to Japan’s “protectorate status,” they concluded, “will create the necessary domestic and political conditions for Japan to assume a balanced security role in regional and global affairs.”

At present these complaints evoke scant resonance within the Executive Branch or with the Congress. The Clinton administration has publicly ruled out any retreat from Asian security responsibilities, and congressional Republican leaders have been among the main defenders of our Asian alliances. Needless to add, the appeal of economic nationalism—and with it the intellectual cachet of “revisionism”—has been checked for the time being by the juxtaposition of American economic vitality with Japan’s prolonged slump and Asia’s financial crisis.

## **Sources of Domestic Support for Our Asian Alliances**

Alliances are likely to enjoy sustainable domestic political support only if they promote clear-cut national interests at acceptable levels of cost and risk. While our alliances with Japan and Korea currently inspire little domestic opposition, the degree of positive political support they inspire is more difficult to gauge. But they serve a variety of national interests, respond to current geopolitical concerns, fit comfortably into the main concepts of U.S. grand strategy, and have been adjusted to reduce asymmetries that formerly provoked domestic criticism.

### **U.S. National Interests**

Flexible access to bases in Japan enables the United States to project power efficiently into the Western Pacific, thereby contributing to a stable balance of forces in the region—a matter of continuing vital interest. The alliance affords Japan a means of achieving security within the framework of its non-nuclear guidelines and its commitment to the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Meanwhile, it provides both nations a valuable form of insurance—i.e., a means of hedging against the major uncertainties marking the Asian security equation—with only modest premiums. Our Northeast Asian alliances help deter renewed conflict in Korea or the Taiwan Strait. The Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security offers both a political framework for a wider diplomatic partnership with Japan, and a source of leverage for achieving more balanced economic ties and an equitable sharing of the costs of defense cooperation with Tokyo. And our defense treaty and forward deployed forces in Korea constitute potential bargaining chips to encourage a substantive North–South dialogue.

By serving a variety of interests, these alliances appeal to disparate domestic constituencies—conservatives and liberals anxious about the future ascent of China and the proliferation of nuclear weapons; nationalists hopeful of sustaining American leadership in Asia, and “budget hawks” eager to induce others to shoulder a larger share of the burdens of collective defense or collective security in the region.

### **Geopolitical Circumstances**

Recent geopolitical developments reinforce domestic support for our Asian alliances. To be sure, the Soviet threat has receded; and the balance of forces among the major powers in Asia appears more benign and less threatening than it has in nearly half a century. At present the prospect of war among the great powers seems remote, and premeditated military conflict in Korea less likely. These developments reduce the risks associated with our regional alliances.

At the same time China is a “rising power,” and no one can be certain how it will use the economic and military strength it is rapidly accumulating. The Russians are currently down on their luck, but their “strategic cooperation” with Beijing includes the sale of weapons and defense technology which will in time limit the operational flexibility of American naval forces in the areas around Taiwan. While the Korean equation has been transformed by North Korea’s prolonged economic stagnation, the situation remains volatile and dangerous. And recent nuclear tests by India and Pakistan remind Americans of the continuing risks of proliferating weapons of mass destruction in Asia. All these developments underline the continuing value of having friends and allies in the area as an “anchor to windward.” While American officials challenge suggestions that our alliances are aimed at “containing” China, they do provide a means of organizing a future regional counterweight against Beijing if that should appear necessary.

### **Competing Strategic Grand Designs**

Since the end of the Cold War the United States has been struggling to find a new set of foreign-policy guidelines to replace the containment strategy. Several grand strategic concepts have vied for official approval. With one exception, all assign an important continuing role to America’s Asian alliances. Joseph Joffe, the German journalist, has described that exception as “anti-hegemonism without entanglements.” Its proponents urge that America forswear alignments with other powers unless the balance of forces in the Pacific is itself in jeopardy. At present, since no nation or potentially hostile coalition of nations is in a position to establish its dominance in Eurasia, they urge that we phase out our Asian alliances, limiting our responsibility to act only as the offshore “balancer of last resort.” In practice this implies a readiness to employ a diplomacy of maneuver; and to accept the possibility that our aloofness from the day-to-day management of the balance of power could result in others’ miscalculations—indeed even the risk that this might impel Tokyo and/or Seoul across the nuclear threshold. At present this option is largely academic; it has been rejected by the Clinton administration, and has few proponents on the Hill. For the moment American leaders accept the role of balancer and broker in Asia, and believe it is easier to carry out these responsibilities with the help of Japan and Korea than without it.

Other competing grand designs generally require, or at a minimum support, the preservation of U.S. alliances with Japan and South Korea.



- Some advocate preserving America's predominance, or "perpetuating the unipolar moment." Defense planning guidance leaked to the press in 1992 implied that an effort to "lock in" American primacy by dissuading any other big countries—i.e., Japan, Germany, China, Russia—from becoming a major rival was the Bush administration's grand strategy of choice. According to this guidance, "in the post-cold war era, America should refocus its strategy to preclude the emergence of future global competitors by persuading them that they need not aspire to a greater role." This implied our retention of preeminent responsibility "for addressing those wrongs which threaten not only our interests, but those of our allies . . . ."
- Others—for example, Joseph Nye—propose to concentrate American Asian strategy on integrating potential future "disturbers" into the management of international regimes for regulating security and trade and multilateral arrangements for handling other transnational problems from a position of strength. Its advocates urge the consolidation—even expansion—of our alliances in Europe and Asia, while simultaneously mounting an effort at "deep engagement" with possible future rivals in Beijing and Moscow. The counterpart in Asia to NATO expansion was the so-called "Nye Initiative" aimed at firming up security cooperation with Japan (and Korea) as a prelude to rebuilding more constructive ties with China and Russia.
- A variation on this strategy is what Joffe has described as a "Bismarckian" policy of active engagement with all the major powers. Since we are now the preeminent military and economic power, the principal danger we face is that other major powers may attempt to "gang up against us." The logical strategic response is therefore aimed at cultivating closer ties with each of the other major powers than they maintain with one another. Rather than serving as balancer or broker, the United States, in this view, should attempt to "bandwagon" with others to consolidate a generally favorable political and territorial status quo. With Asia plagued by historic rivalries, the United States occupies a pivotal position as the key power with which all others seek close links as a hedge against their neighbors. Our capacity to nurture such relationships is enhanced by our disproportionate contribution to the "common goods" of the region—e.g. security, liberal trade, and open regionalism. Thus, maintenance of our Asian alliances facilitates our continuing engagement in the region while helping to assure that our friends continue to derive obvious benefits from their close ties with the United States.
- Still others encourage a strategy of "cooperative security." Conceptually derived from Wilsonian ideas, in practice a "cooperative security" strategy presumes U.S. readiness actively to intervene, in concert with others, to rectify a wide variety of regional ills. In Asia, the Clinton administration expressed its hopes for "assertive multilateralism" in the security sphere through its active participation in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Yet even the most enthusiastic proponents of "cooperative security" acknowledge that institutions like the ARF can only complement, rather than supplant, Asian alliances for the foreseeable future.
- Finally, Tony Lake, President Clinton's first national security adviser, described the administration's over-arching foreign policy aim as "democratic enlargement." Presuming that democracies don't fight one another, its ambitious objective was to nurture democratic transitions in key countries as a means of discouraging future wars.

All of these competing grand strategies, with the exception of “anti-hegemonism without entanglements,” emphasize the continuing value of our alliances with Japan and Korea—either as a counterweight to potential rivals, a building block to larger associations of democratic nations, a means of discouraging Japan and Korea from pursuing nuclear ambitions, or an opportunity for expressing American leadership. By serving a variety of regional aims, our Asian alliances appeal to a wide range of constituencies on both sides of the political aisle at home.

### **Modifying Asymmetries in the Asian Alliances**

Historically, domestic criticism of our Asian alliances focused less on general principles than on specific asymmetries. And there were many. We are obligated to come to Japan’s defense; Tokyo made no corresponding commitment to come to ours. We generously shared defense technology with Japan and Korea; they only rarely reciprocated. We extended to our allies wide access to our market; securing comparable entrée to theirs was generally a more elusive aim. When regional security problems emerged, we regularly took the lead in orchestrating a response. Japan, because of prohibitions on overseas military responsibilities, and Korea, because of its abiding preoccupation with the North Korean threat, generally confined their response to adjustments in levels of financial assistance to locally deployed U.S. troops. These asymmetries have gradually been tempered, mollifying American critics by reducing targets for their complaints.

- In the 1980s, the demand for greater “burden sharing” was the rallying cry of critics in the Congress. And successive administrations pushed Japan and Korea to do more. Japan put itself at the head of the class among our allies by assuming virtually all the yen-based costs of our forward-deployed military presence. By shouldering nearly \$5 billion worth of annual expenses—roughly 70 percent of the non-personnel costs associated with our presence in Japan—the Japanese government helped alleviate the impact of U.S. domestic budget cuts on our power-projection capabilities in the Far East, while dispelling the image of a “free rider.” In response to the Reagan administration’s strong reaffirmation of the U.S.-South Korean alliance, Seoul also began to shoulder more of the burden of maintaining U.S. forces. In 1987, it paid roughly \$1.6 billion in indirect contributions in addition to a \$200 million cash payment as part of a new burden-sharing arrangement.
- During the Gulf War, Japan’s reluctance or inability to tackle humanitarian and rear-area logistic-support missions generated intense irritation among some American officials, congressional representatives, and members of the media. The Japanese Diet passed a Peace Keeping Operations bill in 1991 permitting it to participate within carefully prescribed legal strictures in UN-sponsored peacekeeping activities. And the recent redefinition of the Guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation should help fill a lacuna in Japanese policy and law, permitting Tokyo to assume a more ambitious role in the event of future military contingencies in areas adjacent to Japan.
- Persistent asymmetries in defense technology exchanges were modified in the 1980s through adjustments in Japanese law and through hard bargaining over the details of development and production contracts regarding specific defense systems such as the FSX fighter aircraft.
- Japan and South Korea have pursued parallel approaches with the United States to a variety of regional security issues—for example, their provision of financial support for North

Korea's future energy needs under the terms of the U.S.-North Korean Nuclear Framework Accord, and the extension of economic assistance to Cambodia following the UN-brokered settlement and internationally supervised elections in 1991.

- Over the past decade the negotiation of a number of bilateral market-opening agreements has created a more level playing field in our economic competition with Japan and South Korea. As a result, despite sizable and persistent trade deficits—over \$50 billion in 1998 with Japan alone—U.S. firms now enjoy considerably wider commercial and investment opportunities in both Japan and South Korea.

These changes have reduced both the financial and political costs of our alliances in Asia, especially in Japan. With respect to Korea, to be sure, U.S. political support for the alliance was perhaps even more decisively affected by the ROK's transition from autocratic to democratic rule. As South Korea's relative strength vis-à-vis North Korea increased, moreover, the risks associated with the deployment of U.S. troops near the DMZ declined. Seoul's readiness to provide more substantial host-nation support certainly helped. And Kim Dae Jung's embrace of market-oriented economics promises to reduce or eliminate many of the residual economic asymmetries marking our relations with South Korea.

Meanwhile, a substantial coalition persists within the U.S. bureaucracy—particularly the Pentagon, State, and the NSC staff—to resist a linkage of economic concerns to security issues in order to preserve Tokyo's assistance in controlling pressures for major reductions of our forces in Okinawa, completing legislative action on defense cooperation guidelines, and sustaining robust levels of cost sharing in the face of stringent pressures on Japan's own defense budget; and to assure Korea's help in coordinating our respective approaches to Pyongyang while keeping the Nuclear Framework Accord on track.

The so-called revolution in military affairs (RMA)—i.e., the transformation of military operations and relative military capabilities driven by the application of information technology to military strategy and tactics—inevitably creates new asymmetries between the United States and its Asian allies. But it seems more likely to solidify than to attenuate our Asian alliances. The “knowledge power” that is augmenting America's military capabilities should increase the attraction of alignment with us. As Joseph Nye and William Owens have observed, “Coalition leadership for the foreseeable future will proceed less from the military capacity to crush any opponent and more from the ability quickly to reduce the ambiguity of violent situations, to respond flexibly, and to use force, where necessary, with precision and accuracy.” The core of these capabilities, as they note, is “fungible and divisible.” In the future we can share with allies an “information umbrella”—which is perhaps a functional cyber-age analogue to the nuclear umbrella. Selective sharing of such an “information umbrella” with technologically sophisticated allies like Japan and South Korea may bolster our role as coalition leader; failure to do so may increase allied incentives unilaterally to match—to the extent they can—our own capabilities.

### **Developments in American Politics**

A robust economy and a more peaceful world are reshaping American politics. The Clinton administration and the Congress are heavily preoccupied with domestic concerns. The responsibility for managing many of these problems, moreover, is devolving back from the federal government to states and municipalities, thereby reinforcing the “localism” in Ameri-

can politics. This was the setting in which a potentially controversial expansion of NATO was accomplished with little congressional opposition and scant national debate.

Asian alliance issues also have been on the back burner. The value of these alliances is rarely contested or celebrated in our national politics. The occasional crises that have emerged in recent years—e.g., North Korea's bid for nuclear weapons in 1994, the Taiwan Strait incident in 1996, the detection in mid-1998 of Pyongyang's suspicious excavations near the Yongbyon nuclear facility—have tended to underline the residual benefits of our Asian alliances rather than their costs or risks. Since things are going well, there seems little reason to alter the status quo. So long as peace persists and host-nation support remains robust, the burdens of these alliances seem relatively light. Yet therein lies the rub. U.S. public support for alliances with Japan and Korea may be deceptive—"a mile wide and an inch deep." But we will be able to confirm that only if a major crisis raises the level of costs and risks required to sustain them.

The influence of special interests in foreign policy is no longer disciplined by broad and agreed strategic guidelines like "containment," but the economic and commercial lobbies that formerly attacked both Japan and South Korea for mercantilist trade policies and "free riding" in defense have "gone to ground." The health of our economy juxtaposed against recession-plagued Japan and South Korea diverts attention from traditional complaints about market access or impediments to free investment flows. The Asian financial crisis has evoked general sympathy for the plight of the South Korean government as it seeks to implement market-oriented reforms. By the same token, it has reduced fears of Japan as a competitor while generating frustrations with Japan for its failure to take swift, bold actions to reverse a prolonged economic slump. Our trade deficits with both Japan and Korea are large and U.S. anti-dumping suits against Japanese and Korean steel producers are proliferating. Whether these are harbingers of intensified trade conflict is more problematic so long as U.S. economic growth remains robust and unemployment low. If our economy stalls, however, the fallout could erode our security cooperation with both Japan and Korea. But that result is far from foreordained.

The anxiety Beijing provokes on both the left and right ends of our political spectrum serves to muffle criticism of Japanese and Korean allies, whose help may be necessary to cope with a rising China. To be sure, the tendency of some Americans to see China as a timely replacement for the Soviet threat can complicate political and security ties with Japan and South Korea—with Japan because many of its leaders do not wish publicly to acknowledge possible rear-area support for the United States in a Taiwan contingency; with South Korea because it does not want to aggravate its relatively cordial links with China at a time when Beijing has extended its aid to Pyongyang.

Ethnic politics asserts a growing influence over many facets of U.S. foreign policy. Some policies have been virtually "subleased" to various groups of hyphenated Americans—e.g. Greeks, Armenians, Jews, Hispanics, Afro-Americans, and others. But neither Japanese-Americans nor Korean-Americans have exerted much discernible influence on the contours of our Asian alliances. Perhaps this reflects the fact that immigrants from both countries have concentrated more on improving their economic status than building political clout.

Differences between the major parties with respect to support for Asian alliances also appear slight. On balance, the Republicans have been somewhat more preoccupied with strategic concerns, more supportive of a robust defense budget, and more solicitous politically of our Asian allies. But the internationalist wing of the Democratic Party—which includes the President—has largely shared those views.

The contours of budgetary politics in America also underline the continuing value of Asian alliances. Tight defense budgets, even in an era of incipient federal surpluses, make the host-nation support provided by Japan and Korea highly valuable to the Pentagon. It allows the U.S. military establishment to maintain units in Japan—particularly Marine contingents stationed in Okinawa—that might be dropped from the force structure if we had to do without allied financial support.

## **Developments That Could Undermine Domestic Support for Asian Alliances**

What developments might alter this relatively sanguine picture? Four possibilities warrant special attention: (1) an erosion of support for the alliance and our bases among the Japanese political class; (2) regional contingencies that might expose sharply divergent policies by Japan and the United States; (3) a reunification of Korea; and (4) a prolonged period of détente among the Asian great powers. I have not addressed the possibility of a steady buildup of Chinese military power accompanied by an assertive posture by Beijing on territorial claims and regional issues. Such a development would most likely mobilize support in Washington and among our regional allies to sustain and indeed bolster mutual defense cooperation.

### **Developments in Japan That Could Erode Support for the Alliance in the United States**

None of Japan's political parties, with the exception of the communists, favors a termination of the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security. Attitudes toward the presence of our bases, and the level of U.S. forces assigned to them, however, are in flux. It is scarcely surprising that Japanese tolerance for a large-scale foreign military presence would slip as the Cold War becomes a distant memory. Japan is, after all, a homogenous society with a history of self-reliance. It accepted foreign bases as the price for regaining its sovereignty and securing a U.S. strategic guarantee. Its leaders have consistently urged a reduction in the size of the U.S. military presence whenever security concerns eased. And they have regularly responded to criticisms from constituents about noise, environmental hazards, safety concerns, and social problems associated with the bases by calling on the United States to exercise tighter discipline over military units in Japan and to return to Japan bases no longer considered essential to the U.S. mission. In a period of relaxed tensions, such pressures inevitably increase.

Among some Japanese politicians the concept of a “burdenless alliance”—i.e., a U.S. strategic guarantee but no bases—exerts an undeniable appeal. This idea is not new. The now defunct Democratic Socialist Party embraced that view for many years. Several contemporary opposition leaders are flirting with the concept. Former prime minister Morihiro Hosokawa is one. His 1998 article in *Foreign Affairs* answered the question “Are U.S. Troops in Japan Needed?” with an apparent no. He urged Japan to cling to the alliance, but suggested the U.S. “military presence in Japan should fade with this century's end” on grounds that the troops are costly for Japan and unnecessary for America. He presumed that with or without bases, the United States would continue to provide Japan with a nuclear umbrella out of its own self-interest. Hosokawa's language, while refreshingly blunt, is not likely to endear him either to the U.S. administration or to the Congress. “It is egotistical,” he wrote,

“for Americans to believe that the United States has done Japan a favor by defending it all these years by stationing forces in the country . . . . Whenever more American soldiers leave, the Japanese see it as more good news.”

Hosokawa is no longer a major national political leader; indeed his former seat in the Diet was recently reclaimed by the LDP. But other opposition politicians are proposing variations on Hosokawa's theme. Yukio Hatoyama and Naoto Kan, prominent leaders of the largest opposition party in the Lower House, surfaced a similar proposal, though with a more relaxed timetable. Hatoyama, for example, urged the gradual phaseout of U.S. forces from Japan by 2015. He would preserve the Treaty and allow for emergency reentry of American troops in a crisis—i.e., gradually get rid of the “guard dog,” while maintaining the kennel. Other key opposition figures—e.g., former prime minister Tsutomu Hata—express greater sympathy for preserving existing bilateral defense arrangements. To date, the Democratic Party has issued no formal White Paper embracing a new stance. But clearly some members of Japan's political class are repositioning themselves on this issue.

For the United States accommodating the concept of a “burdenless alliance” seems a non-starter. Removing U.S. forces from Japan without modifying our strategic guarantee would raise our costs for projecting military power into Asia, possibly diminish the credibility of our nuclear umbrella, forfeit Japanese host-nation support, and rekindle the “free rider” debate on the Hill. In short, it would not reduce the “burdens” of alignment for us. Fortunately, several recent political developments in Japan suggest that the winds of change are not blowing too strongly in this direction.

- The LDP's loss of seats in the July 1998 Upper House elections forced it to search for new political allies to offset its minority status in the House of Councillors. Its new coalition partner, Ichiro Ozawa's Liberal Party, favors an assertion of Japan's right to collective self-defense, more robust Japanese participation in UN peacekeeping, early passage of enabling legislation for the revised Defense Cooperation Guidelines, and a tougher stance toward North Korea—positions the United States finds congenial and timely.
- In Okinawa, where local sentiment on base issues has been traditionally more critical than in the main islands, Governor Ota, a long-time opponent of our military presence, was defeated in the November 1998 elections.
- Public indignation in Japan in response to North Korea's August 31, 1998 missile test has contributed to a more positive attitude toward collaboration with the United States on theater ballistic missile defense, and contributes a greater sense of urgency to Diet debates about Defense Cooperation Guidelines legislation.

To be sure, there are other currents in Japanese political life. Irritants have accumulated in our bilateral relationship, and their importance should not be discounted. Many Japanese resent the frequency, specificity, and public character of our admonitions on economic policy. They fear that “Japan passing” reflects a downgrading by Washington of the priority we accord the alliance. They wondered why President Clinton, while visiting China, openly criticized Japanese policies in joint appearances with President Jiang, and failed to defend our bilateral alliance with Japan to the Chinese people. In addition, many Japanese are critical of the quality of our intelligence about North Korea's missile satellite program, and our diplomatic response to it.

These matters provide ample reason to work harder on the substance and atmospherics of the relationship. But three broad developments should help keep that relationship on track:

- For nearly a century Japan has aligned itself with the world's strongest nation. The considerable renaissance of American power over the past decade should reinforce the durability of our alliance by dispelling doubts about America's future strength.
- The rise of China and the possibility that its conduct will revive the strategic rivalry that frequently has marked Sino-Japanese relations in the past gives Tokyo a strong motivation for preserving the "anchor to windward" that the U.S.-Japan alliance provides.
- And while Japan may belatedly have begun to adjust the balance between the power of government and the power of markets in its approach to economic policy making, the changes now under way will gradually reduce a prime source of discord over trade and investment issues that periodically has threatened to disrupt bilateral defense cooperation.

### **Divergent Reactions to a Regional Contingency**

Once enabling legislation is passed in the Diet, it will be possible for Japan legally to extend logistic and rear-area support to U.S. forces in the event of military contingencies in "areas adjacent to Japan." Two questions arise: (1) Would Japan act, even if it were legally permissible, in contingencies in Korea or the Taiwan Strait? (2) Would Americans be satisfied with "rear area support" in situations in which U.S. forces were engaged in combat in Japan's own neighborhood? Although it is impossible to answer such hypothetical questions, it is worth recalling that tensions in U.S.-Japan relations became quite acute over similar issues during the Gulf War—a conflict halfway around the world from Japan. I suspect most Americans would be even more reluctant to shoulder the lion's share of the risks and costs of a conflict in Japan's backyard where Tokyo's security stakes were arguably as great or greater than our own. A fundamental divergence between Washington and Tokyo over whether and how to respond to a serious military contingency in Northeast Asia could certainly fracture the alliance. The question is, how likely might such a major divergence be?

The possibility seems greater in relationship to Taiwan than Korea. Prolonged economic decay in North Korea has weakened it militarily. None of its neighbors—Russia, China, or Japan—would encourage or countenance a premeditated assault on South Korea. Given its own economic difficulties, moreover, Seoul has scant interest in encouraging Pyongyang's collapse. The Chinese seem increasingly willing to prop up the North Koreans with food aid to reduce the likelihood of major instability. And improved policy planning between the United States and South Korea now offers each greater confidence that contingencies short of war can be managed.

Still one cannot rule out civil discord in the North, which could provoke in turn widespread political confusion, perhaps massive immigration, additional high-level defections, and perhaps a military coup. In these circumstances, neither the Koreans nor the Japanese would wish to contemplate Tokyo's performance of direct combat missions on or near Korean territory. But rear-area support from Japan would be helpful in coping with a humanitarian or military crisis. Providing such help would not be easy for any Japanese government—particularly the kinds of fragile coalitions that have formed in recent years. But the consequences of inaction for Japan could be even greater.

We may face a more imminent possibility; namely, North Korea's refusal to allow intrusive and random inspections to clarify its tunneling activities near the Yongbyon nuclear facility, combined with further missile or satellite launches. Such actions would highlight shared U.S. and Japanese concern about nuclear proliferation in North Korea, and Pyongyang's development of more advanced means for their delivery. The Japanese reacted more sharply to North Korea's August 31, 1998 satellite launch than Washington. Indeed, Japanese officials subsequently intimated that they would find it difficult to sustain support for the Korean Energy Development Organization in the event further Taepodong missile tests occurred. Needless to add, it would probably be easier to secure Japanese support for a strategy of isolation and containment of North Korea, possibly including new sanctions, than one which required Japanese rear-area support for either passive military actions (e.g., a naval embargo of North Korean missile exports) or preemptive U.S. air strikes against the North. Under current political conditions, Japan's reluctance to embark on a preemptive strategy of coercion would presumably be reinforced by South Korean and Chinese reservations about its prudence.

With respect to Taiwan contingencies, the future efficacy of close U.S.-Japan or U.S.-Korean policy coordination is more problematic. Major figures within the Japanese governing party have publicly expressed their view that the new defense guidelines should not apply to Taiwan-related contingencies. A director general in the Foreign Ministry was fired in 1998 for publicly arguing that they should and would. Yet future PRC-Taiwan confrontations in the Strait cannot be excluded. Since anxieties about China are a core reason for continued congressional support for the U.S.-Japan alliance, clear evidence of Japan's unwillingness to assume the risks associated with rear-area support in the face of an overt and unprovoked Chinese military challenge to Taiwan's autonomy could deal a severe—perhaps fatal—blow to the U.S.-Japan alliance. At the same time, it is precisely the fear of being abandoned by the United States in the face of a more powerful and potentially assertive China that could drive Japan toward greater strategic cooperation with the United States.

### **Korean Unification**

Over the longer haul a reunified Korean peninsula seems likely—even if short-term, or even medium-term, prospects have been attenuated by South Korea's economic crisis and China's aid to Pyongyang. A reunification of Korea would require a basic rethinking of the logic of our alliance and of our military presence on the peninsula. Both have served mainly as a deterrent against North Korean aggression. If the peninsula were reunited, why, many will ask, would there be any further need for the alliance? The question itself is not dispositive, for the same issue arose in connection with Germany—yet there it sits within an expanded NATO even though the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact are history!

The Chinese will presumably be wary of any American military presence in a unified Korea, but might be persuaded to accept such a modified presence in Korea if it were substantially slimmed down and confined to areas below the 38th parallel. Much would, of course, depend on the state of Sino-U.S. relations at the time.

It will be particularly challenging to persuade Americans of the need for a sustained security relationship with a united Korea. If such security ties are intended to check Chinese ambitions in Korea, this could put us on a collision course with Beijing. If they are to serve as a counterweight to Japanese influence on the peninsula, it will invite resistance from our friends in Tokyo. If generally friendly relations between the Asian great powers and Korea



prompted greater tolerance for a continued American presence there, what, our people might ask, is the essential mission?

The American people are most likely to support a post-unification U.S. arrangement on the peninsula if strongly requested to do so by a democratic Korean regime, if the other major powers—particularly Japan and China—acquiesce in such an arrangement, and if it is perceived as a means of helping to forestall a further Korean bid for nuclear weapons, and of facilitating sustained support in Japan for our forward-based military units there.

### **A Great-Power Concert in Northeast Asia**

In recent years a pattern of “competitive bilateralism” has emerged in the relationships among the Asian great powers. Since each of the powers fears isolation within the Asian quadrilateral, improvements in one set of relations begets improvements in others. To date this has produced a virtuous cycle of improving ties among Washington, Tokyo, Beijing, and Moscow—a development that is welcome so long as it lasts.

A successful reunification of Korea will presumably require collaboration among all the major powers—or at worst their acquiescence. Such cooperation among the powers may also enhance the possibilities for establishing subregional institutions in Northeast Asia to cushion potential future shocks among them—as ASEAN has done in Southeast Asia. But whether an extended period of peace, marked by positive cooperation among the great powers, would prompt our alliances and military presence in the region to wither is less clear. On the one hand, it would make these alliances less necessary; on the other hand, their preservation would entail fewer political risks and financial costs.

A peaceful Asia would generate further pressures for remodeling our security role in the region and reducing the forces we deploy there. Asian peoples would be less inclined to tolerate the inconveniences associated with the presence of foreign troops. Asian governments would doubtless exhibit less generosity in the provision of host-nation support, thus adding incentives to reduce the size of our forward presence. Yet they might very well wish to keep a modest U.S. presence as a makeweight in the balance of forces and as a source of reassurance to our non-nuclear allies. For our part, the desire to preserve a stabilizing role in the balance of power and to maintain American equities in the region could, in these circumstances, provide a basis for retaining some naval and air units in Japan and Korea, particularly if the other powers found it, at worst, unobjectionable, and, at best, welcome. Under these circumstances the U.S. presence in Okinawa could be reconfigured to scale down or eliminate large Marine deployments. Residual forces would be largely designed to provide reassurance of our continued involvement to our non-nuclear allies. And future allied command arrangements could be relatively loose in Korea, as in Japan.

## **Conclusions**

What conclusions can one draw from this? The variety of future geopolitical possibilities in Northeast Asia makes it wise to proceed slowly and with caution in reshaping our security posture in the region. Our Asian alliances remain valuable principally for deterrence. Military contingencies in areas adjacent to Japan would present Tokyo with the most agonizing choices, but those contingencies are less likely to materialize if our security ties with Japan

and Korea remain robust while conditions ripen for Korean unification and for whatever eventual accommodation may take shape between Taiwan and the People's Republic of China. We should structure our diplomatic approach vis-à-vis Korea's eventual unification in a way which emphasizes consultation and cooperation with Seoul, Tokyo, Beijing, and Moscow. This will maximize the possibilities of great-power acquiescence in Korea's unification and, perhaps, a durable security connection between a unified Korea and the United States.

It is important to remember that our ultimate objective in Asia is the perpetuation of a stable equilibrium, not the maintenance of existing alignments or current U.S. force levels for their own sake. But no stable equilibrium is likely without our active participation. And as in the case of NATO, our alliances in Asia help keep Americans engaged, while averting nuclear proliferation and preventing others from establishing their dominance.

Because deep rivalries and mutual suspicions persist in Northeast Asia—and without the multilateral institutions that cushion shocks among the great powers in Europe and other areas—America's role will remain vital. We remain a critical provider of security; we offer the largest market; our companies transfer investment flows and technology. Most countries in the area fear their neighbors more than they do us. We have ample resources with which to preserve constructive ties with all Northeast Asian countries, including alliances with Japan and Korea. But we will need to devote more attention than we have in recent years to building an active and informed constituency in America to assure their continued support.



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