

# Korea and Japanese Security

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The Korean peninsula is crucial to Japanese security. Currently, the Japan-United States alliance is being reinvigorated to meet the continuing threat posed by North Korea as well as new challenges in the post-cold war era. The recently announced new defense cooperation guidelines outline the support the Japanese will extend to U.S. forces during peacetime, during an armed attack on Japan, and in emergencies "in areas surrounding Japan." In order to avoid unduly alarming China and to win public acceptance of the reformulation of the alliance in the absence of the kind of mortal threat once posed by the Soviet Union, the continuing danger posed by North Korea has been underlined. Yet, should the North Korean threat disappear, justifying the Japan-U.S. alliance will be that much more difficult. To forestall any danger of unraveling of the alliance, Japan must work with South Korea to formulate a new vision of the security relationship between Seoul and Tokyo that more closely integrates their common interests with those of their mutual ally, the United States.

## **The New Defense Guidelines**

To be sure, Japan's relationship with the leading powers of the region is on a positive trajectory, with a burst of summit talks in recent years. Most important, the Japan-U.S. Mutual Security Treaty - the pillar of Japanese security that has stood the test of time - remains in place. The announced revision of the 1978 defense guidelines is

designed to reinvigorate the alliance for the post-cold war era. If the Japanese Diet passes the needed bills into law to implement the new guidelines, the Japan-United States ties, often touted in Tokyo and Washington as the most important bilateral relationship in the world, will be brought to a new level of cooperation.

The new guidelines were jointly announced by Japan and United States on September 23, 1997. This is one of the most important developments in Japan-U.S. security relations since the mutual security treaty was signed during the Korean War, in the early 1950s, because the new guidelines concern crises that do not directly threaten the security of Japan. Whereas article 6 of the mutual security treaty limits Japan's cooperation to little more than allowing U.S. forces to use bases in Japan, the new guidelines allow Japan during these crises to supply U.S. forces with non-lethal material assistance as well as to open civilian ports and airfields to them. They also allow new missions for Japan's Self-Defense Forces (SDFs). For example, the Maritime Self-Defense Forces (MSDFs) could resupply U.S. warships during a crisis, evacuate civilians and U.S. soldiers from dangerous situations, remove mines from the high seas, and enforce United Nations sanctions.<sup>1</sup>

Though some Japanese and Americans doubt the need for increased security cooperation between the two richest countries in the world in the absence of the kind of mortal threat once posed by the Soviet Union, the new guidelines were issued in the hope of reaffirming the Japan-United States alliance. That is, on one level, the new guidelines provide for security contingencies "in areas surrounding Japan," but perhaps more important is the political significance of the new guidelines. Precisely because increasing numbers of Japanese and Americans question the purpose of the Japan-U.S. alliance after the end of the cold war, the relationship had to be redefined in terms of interests the two nations share as they face new uncertainties in the post-cold war period.

Following the 1995 rape of a Japanese schoolgirl by U.S. Marines stationed in Okinawa, the continuing U.S. military presence in Japan came under intense scrutiny by the Japanese people. The outrageous act of a few miscreants threw oil on an anti-mutual security

treaty fire that was already burning in Japan, particularly in Okinawa, which bears a disproportionate share of the cost of hosting U.S. forces on Japanese soil. On the other side of the Pacific, especially in the aftermath of the Persian Gulf war, critics began to voice doubts about Japan's ability and willingness to share the burdens of the alliance in the post-cold war security environment, where Japan is no longer directly threatened by a hostile mutual adversary. Though a major importer of oil from the Gulf region, Japan did not contribute much to the operation of the multinational forces led by the United States in ejecting Iraqi aggressors from Kuwait.<sup>2</sup>

Among other considerations endangering the alliance, these factors forced Japanese and U.S. policymakers to recast the trans-Pacific security relationship from a strategic, long-term perspective. Hence, with the hope of rejuvenating the alliance, the new guidelines were issued emphasizing the alliance's utility in preserving stability and reducing uncertainty in East Asia.

The new guidelines, however, may fall short of their mark for at least two reasons. First, there is ambiguity in how the new guidelines apply or do not apply to the vexing Taiwan question. Whither the alliance if the Chinese attempted to invade Taiwan? While many members of the policy elite in Japan may understand the logic of the Japan-U.S. alliance in balancing the growth of Chinese power, it is difficult to imagine that they - let alone the Japanese public - would support an all-out U.S. attempt to contain China in the event of a severe crisis in the Taiwan Straits.

The second weakness is directly linked to the first. Because of the desire to avoid unduly antagonizing China and the need to win over Japanese public opinion, the new guidelines have been justified as insurance against the security threat posed by North Korea. The public on both sides of the Pacific understands the immediate danger represented by North Korea's defiant militarism and its suspected nuclear weapons program.<sup>3</sup> As a result, the concrete operational language of the new guideline has been explained and justified in terms of dealing with a contingency on the Korean peninsula. However, this may prove to be a problem in the long run.

Although it appears unlikely in the short run, what if - for

whatever reason - the North Korean threat disappears? Clearly, the most obvious justification for the Japan-U.S. alliance disappears as well. At minimum, both the Japanese and American electorates could demand a sharp reduction in U.S. military presence in Japan as a result. More troubling is the possibility that a general unraveling of the U.S. security relationship with Japan as well as that with South Korea would ensue. Since the U.S. presence has done much to dampen East Asia's latent security fears, regional stability could be compromised as a consequence. Should U.S. presence weaken in the region, uncertainties could begin to cloud the security calculations of the regional powers, triggering a dangerous military dynamic that could adversely affect the entire region.

### **Korea's Place in Northeast Asia**

Given the understandable tendency by the Japanese policy elites to avoid open and public discussion of security and strategic issues, many Japanese have an incomplete understanding of the geopolitical significance of the Korean peninsula. The Japanese public is not fully aware that the stability of the entire East Asian region is at stake in Korea. Geography is such that the Korean peninsula is the place where the interests of four of the world's most prominent powers intersect.<sup>4</sup>

Military strategists will point out that Korea has been critical to the geostrategic equation of the region precisely because it has been the weakest power when compared to other regional powers - China, Japan, Russia, and the United States. The often-quoted saying about Korea's geopolitical predicament is that "Korea is a shrimp swimming among the whales." As with other such repeated generalizations, however, this saying obscures as much as it enlightens. Historically, until the arrival in Asia of the Western powers, the Korean peninsula was dominated by only one whale: China, the huge continental empire exerting varying degrees of hegemony over other powers in East Asian "international relations."

Chinese domination had costs, but it had rewards as well. The bilateral relationship was not one of equals, but it was a reciprocal one in which successive Chinese dynasties (including non-Han dynasties) sought to retain Korea as a tributary state while a succession of Korean

courts sought the official recognition, endorsement, and protection of the occupier of the Chinese throne. Compared to the experience of smaller European states in the multipolar Westphalian system, Chinese domination afforded Korea a period of relative tranquillity and peace, if not prosperity and dynamism.

One of the most serious security threats to Korea during this period was the Japanese invasion led by Toyotomi Hideyoshi *en route* to China in the 1590s. The resulting six-year war between Korea and Japan, with China providing assistance to Korea, was highly destructive of Korean life and property. With the death of Hideyoshi, however, Japan's sudden adventurist thrust into Korea gave way to self-imposed isolation, under the Tokugawa leadership. Koreans often talk about the longstanding interstate rivalry between Korean and Japan, but this history is often colored by the troubled bilateral relations of the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. The reality is that the two countries maintained peaceful, if not always friendly, relations for over 250 years after Hideyoshi's ambition was thwarted.

This long-lasting stability was disturbed by the arrival of the Western powers and the superimposition of the Westphalian interstate competition in the region. Western imperialism destabilized China and made Korea a highly contested prize for the Western powers (Russia, in particular) and modernizing Japan, who quickly recognized Korea's geopolitical importance in their quest for security and empire. Only then did Korea become the focal point of great-power rivalry in the region.

As noted earlier, Korea's problem was not the threat it posed to its neighbors, but the danger its neighbors posed to each other *through* Korea. Korea's relatively small size and central location among Northeast Asia's larger powers made it a strategic prize or buffer for these powers.<sup>5</sup> Lacking the state capabilities and resources needed to protect its interests, Korea soon fell prey to the fear and ambition of its more powerful neighbors.

Japan, an insecure rising power forced out of its isolation by the United States, was the most aggressive player in the contest for the control of the Korean peninsula. Recognizing the strategic importance

of the neighboring country to its national security, Japan sought to replace traditional Chinese hegemony in Korea with its own. Decaying China did what it could to maintain its position in Korea, but following its defeat in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, China was forced by Japan to recognize Korea's "independence."

Of course, Japan's goal was temporarily thwarted by Russia's diplomatic machinations. In time, however, the removal of Chinese power in Korea led to a direct and open struggle between Japan and Russia which ultimately resulted in Japanese triumph, in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5. When the Peace of Portsmouth brokered by the United States was signed, Russia was forced to recognize Japan's "paramount political, military and economic interest" in Korea.<sup>6</sup> Soon after Japan's interest in Korea was recognized, Japan brought Korea tightly into its orbit by annexing it formally in 1910. Only the unconditional surrender of Japan to the United States in World War II brought about the recovery of Korean sovereignty.

Unfortunately for the Koreans, the "temporary" division of their country into two occupation zones by Japan's foes - namely, the United States and the Soviet Union, a late entrant to the war in Pacific - produced the development of two rival states hostile to each other. The story of this division is complicated and contested, but the emergence of the bipolar competition between the United States and the Soviet Union intensified and solidified the rivalry of the two states, ultimately producing war.

The bloody stalemate of this conflict, the Korean War, then locked South Korea - backed by the United States and, indirectly, Japan (still under American occupation) - and North Korea - supported by the Soviet Union and the newly emerged People's Republic of China - into playing the role of quintessential client state during the cold war. The divided Korea served as the buffer and fulcrum in the balance of power between East and West in the region.

Of course, in Northeast Asia, the confrontation between the East and the West had unique dynamics of its own because of the rivalry that soon developed between the Soviet Union and China. As the division between the two giants of communism unfolded, North Korea was able to gain a degree of foreign policy autonomy not available to

South Korea, which could only depend on the generosity and self-interest of the United States. North Korea was able to play off the mutually hostile communist neighbors against one another, given that both valued the Korean peninsula for its strategic significance.

If South Korea benefited from a security commitment by the United States that was stronger and more certain than the Soviet or Chinese commitment to North Korea, Seoul's foreign policy was clearly limited by the lack of any alternative. Japan continued to have vital interests at stake in the Korean peninsula, but Tokyo lacked Seoul's trust - even after diplomatic relations were established in the mid-1960s - to serve as a counterweight to the United States. The fact that the Japan-U.S. Mutual Security Treaty provided for U.S. military protection of Japan also limited the importance of direct Japanese involvement on the Korean peninsula. Despite the differences between the North and South Korean foreign policy environments, the bottom line is that throughout the 1950s and 1960s both Koreas' foreign policy alternatives were severely limited by the security challenge each presented to the other.

The above account of Korea's place in Northeast Asia greatly simplifies history, but it is difficult to quarrel with the view that Korea has been the vortex of great-power competition since the arrival of the Western powers. While Korea cannot hope to change its geography, its role as a "taker" of the foreign policy of others has started to change in recent decades, beginning subtly in the 1970s, when South Korea began to achieve rapid, if unbalanced, economic growth while North Korea began to experience the various ills of "advanced Stalinism," and the change has accelerated with the end of the cold war and bipolarity in the world system.

With the waning of the cold war, Seoul took the risk of incurring instability on the Korean peninsula by jumping head-first into an all-out drive to improve South Korea's ties with the Soviet Union and China. Its "Nordpolitik" brought about something like a revolution in South Korea's foreign policy vis-à-vis its bigger neighbors. The apparent victor of the North-South bilateral competition, Seoul is actively engaged in multilateralizing its foreign relations as Pyongyang is suffering from isolation.

Washington and Tokyo have generally supported Seoul's diplomatic efforts, but less apparent have been the subtle ways in which these recent developments have reshaped the context of South Korea-United States as well as South Korea-Japan relations. The remnants of client-statism is fast disappearing in Seoul's diplomacy.<sup>7</sup> In fact, although the North Korean military threat remains, some in Seoul no longer see the U.S.-South Korea Mutual Security Treaty and its extensive economic links with Japan as the foundation of South Korean foreign relations. Although the current economic crisis has revealed the depth of its political as well as its economic dependence on Washington and Tokyo, Seoul will continue to build on its expanded ties to other powers of the region, especially China, which Koreans tend to view more favorably than Japan. This could have a major impact on Japan as the regional security structure evolves.

### **Changing Security Dynamics of the Region**

Of course, it is not yet clear what is the dominant force shaping Northeast Asian security in the post-cold war era. The broader East Asian region has benefited tremendously from the integration of the world's markets after World War II, but the current economic turmoil in the region casts a deep shadow over the argument that this region is in turn playing a critical role in the expansion of the global economy and the integration of the Asia-Pacific.

Even before the current crisis, there was no agreement among security analysts that this part of the world would enjoy peace and prosperity in the long run as a "community." Most do not draw fatalistic conclusions, but they are concerned about the implications of the economic and strategic transition taking place in this region today.

Realists worry that contemporary economic and political developments in East Asia are leading to uneven rates of growth among nations, impacting differential growth of power. Even liberals worry that, compared to post-cold war Europe, East Asia suffers from a "thinness" of multilateral organizations as well as democracy, institutions they believe mitigate the instability of multipolarity. Many would agree with Aaron Friedberg's speculation that, while civil wars and ethnic strife will continue to smolder among Europe's peripheries,



in the long run, East Asia may be the cockpit of multipolar conflict.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, there is no conclusive evidence that multipolar systems are necessarily more war-prone or unstable than other configurations of international power. Nonetheless, many security analysts believe that multipolar systems, at the level of structure, do tend toward certain pathologies.<sup>9</sup>

To be sure, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States is today the only great power of the region capable of projecting significant power offshore, but America's "unipolar moment" is unlikely to be sustained indefinitely.<sup>10</sup> Despite its current economic vitality and impressive lead in cutting-edge military technologies, tactics, doctrines, and system of systems (Revolution in Military Affairs), without a competing superpower U.S. power projection capability could erode. Given a possible resurgence of isolationism in U.S. politics that should not be underestimated, the United States — as a maritime power with a secure continental base far away from the region — might even come to adopt a new strategic posture as an off-shore balancing power in the region. Many fear that the resulting power vacuum would increase insecurity in the region.

The continuing division of Korea has extended the life of the bipolar security structure in Northeast Asia, maintaining U.S. engagement in the region. However, the end of U.S.-Soviet competition has removed the mask of the capitalist-communist logic of the power alignment across the Korean DMZ, laying bare the buffer role served by the two rival Korean states in separating China and Japan. So long as Korea remains divided, Koreans are quick to note, a degree of stability in the region is assured. There is nothing more predictable than a status quo. While the North Korean threat remains potent and the mutual security treaty between the United States and South Korea remains in place, the Japan-U.S. alliance makes sense and is readily justifiable. Further, this crucial trans-Pacific link, ensuring limited Japanese armament, will continue to provide comfort to Japan's neighbors, especially China.

The problem is that North Korea's economy is in dire trouble. A country that has advanced the principle of national self-sufficiency to the level of religious doctrine (*Juche*) is now reduced to accepting

international famine relief. Of course, there is no sign of significant political unrest afflicting the North Korean government, and some argue that North Korea will muddle through.<sup>11</sup> However, consistent information from various sources paints the picture of a country without much future. If the North Koreans continue to do nothing meaningful to help themselves, the probability for implosion or explosion will surely increase.

Indeed, what happens if North Korea collapses? Once the North Korean threat disappears, what rationale remains for U.S. troop presence in Korea? While security analysts and military strategists can offer sound reasons for the continuation of the South Korea-U.S. alliance after Korean reunification, a compelling reason may be lacking in the minds of ordinary Americans and Koreans. At the same time, the last overt justification for Japan-U.S. security relations would disappear as well. Once the North Korean threat disappears, however, the same kind of question can be asked about the Japan-U.S. alliance as about the South Korea-U.S. alliance.

As mentioned, to win public support, the Japan-U.S. alliance is now being reinvigorated with Korean contingencies in mind. However, should the North Korean threat disappear, justifying the alliance to voters in Japan and the United States will be more difficult.

What impact will the disappearance of the North Korean threat have on Japan's security environment? As any security analyst would recognize, the answer depends on the way the threat disappears. However, no matter how this transformation is handled, the probability is not low that it could prove disruptive to peace and security in the region and force a fundamental realignment of power.<sup>12</sup>

### **What Is to Be Done?**

What can be done to ensure peace and stability in Northeast Asia? While it is impossible to foresee and prepare for all future possibilities, there are some prudent measures that can be taken in the way of "insurance," to reduce uncertainty about the future.

#### *The Short Term*

This much is clear about the present: the region lacks meaningful

confidence- and security-building institutions. A number of confidence-building measures are being carried out, and institutions have been proposed for the region, but the talk of "multilateral dialogue" and "transparency" has yet to take any meaningful form. Furthermore, at the political level, Northeast Asia lacks anything like Southeast Asia's ASEAN that can act as a powerful driving force advancing a regional security agenda. The danger is that events may overtake these nascent efforts: At the present pace, constructing a viable security structure is decades away.

This does not mean the attempt to build some kind of multilateral security institution in Northeast Asia is futile. The effort should continue and the pace of progress accelerate. Japan has taken a keen interest in fostering security dialogues and institution-building efforts.<sup>13</sup> However, as many participants and observers of this institution-building process would acknowledge, it would be foolhardy to stake the security of the region on what is now only a promise.

Even the Chinese, who claim to oppose "hegemony, alliances, and coalitions," recognize that one factor that is critical to security throughout the region is the continuing U.S. military presence via the Japan-U.S. and the South Korea-U.S. alliances.<sup>14</sup> Everyone acknowledges that the region has had problems achieving a stable balance of power in the past, with grave consequences. Certainly, it is this destabilizing competitive dynamic that has condemned the Korean peninsula to play the part of a strategic prize or buffer for the larger regional powers, as outlined earlier. It would be difficult to dispute that the United States-centered alliances in Northeast Asia have been critical to a stable balance of power since the end of the Korean War.

Unfortunately, as cold war institutions, these alliances have become vulnerable to the uncertainties of the new era. The reality in the larger East Asian region is that the network of security structures created by the two contending superpowers during the cold war has become greatly weakened. The security arrangements created by the former Soviet Union have disintegrated altogether, leaving its erstwhile allies throughout the region to find other ways of ensuring their security.

In Northeast Asia, Moscow's abandonment of North Korea

forced Pyongyang to seek the "security" of nuclear weapons, introducing a highly dangerous factor into the region. The U.S. alliance system with Japan and South Korea has fared much better and remains intact (unlike other U.S.-centered arrangements, in Southeast Asia), but as indicated earlier, the alliances are entangled in increasing disputes over burden-sharing and differences over the foreign policy goals of alliance members. As many Japanese realize, in order to safeguard the continuation of U.S. forward deployment of forces in the region, Japan must not allow its alliance with the United States to become weakened or be shadowed by doubts. The importance of this is obvious to almost all responsible Japanese opinion-makers.<sup>15</sup>

### *The Long Term*

More important in the long run, Tokyo needs to improve its security relations with Seoul. If the Japan-U.S. and South Korea-U.S. alliances remain solid and are further strengthened by improved relations between Tokyo and Seoul, then a more ambitious cooperative security project becomes possible in the region. Just as NATO is sustaining itself as a powerful security institution and has become the basis of a cooperative security structure including its former adversaries (some soon to be alliance members), the United States' alliances in the Pacific can become the basis of a security community held together by common values that in turn may become the vehicle to bring non-alliance members into a cooperative security framework.<sup>16</sup>

In fact, beyond the geopolitical logic, the most important reason for Japan to support Seoul and the continuation of the South Korea-U.S. alliance may be a political one: South Korea, like Japan and the United States, is a liberal democracy. While many security analysts in Japan understand the geopolitical logic of the alliance, this fundamental point is often missed. However, this political dimension will be the key to maintaining the Japan-U.S. and South Korea-U.S. alliances so crucial to a stable post-reunification Northeast Asia.

The simple reality is that, in the post-cold war era, the geopolitical foundation of the Japan-U.S. Mutual Security Treaty as well as the South Korea-U.S. Mutual Security Treaty is assailable. To keep the United States engaged in Northeast Asia, a solid political foundation

has to found for the Japan-U.S. alliance and for the South Korea-U.S. alliance. That is, these security relationships have to be redefined in terms of political values and institutions the three countries share, not just their common strategic interests.

The problem of basing alliances on interests is that interests change over time and circumstance. In the United States, as the memory of the Soviet threat fades and economic tensions grow, increasingly more people view critically Washington's security commitment to Tokyo and Seoul. For example, the critics of Japan's trade policy have been arguing for some time that the United States should end its security relationship with Japan because of its economic misbehavior, or should use the threat of termination of the alliance to obtain a better trade deal.<sup>17</sup> One observer asks, "Why should U.S. troops serve indefinitely as the security guards of a latter-day Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere from which many American products are effectively excluded?"<sup>18</sup>

The impact of economic conflict on security matters will surely continue to grow. The current economic crisis in East Asia is having a worrisome and negative impact on America's balance of trade with the region. Increasing trade problems strike at the U.S.-centered alliances by eroding the incentives for the United States to remain militarily committed in Asia. American ambivalence will become even more acute if Japan is seen as having abrogated its economic responsibilities to the region and as trying to competitively export its way out of its own economic dilemma at the expense of its Asian neighbors and the United States. There is a danger even in a scenario where the crisis ultimately has little effect on the aggregate growth rate of the U.S. economy: There will be questions about how important East Asia really is in terms of the cost and risk of U.S. deployment in this part of the world. After all, policymakers in Washington have stressed for years the economic centrality of the region to U.S. prosperity in order to "sell" the deployment to the American public.

Many in the United States have been also ambivalent about the open-ended U.S. commitment to the security of South Korea. As with the Japan-U.S. alliance, a few are arguing for the termination of the South Korea-U.S. alliance.<sup>19</sup> Certainly, ordinary Americans do not fully

understand what is at stake for the United States in that part of the world. For example, in a recent survey of American public opinion regarding U.S. foreign policy conducted by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations (CCFR), there was a gap of some 41 percent between the opinions of "leaders" and those of "the public" with regard to the use of U.S. forces to stop North Korean aggression against South Korea.<sup>20</sup>

To be sure, these feelings about the Asian alliances in the United States are linked to greater skepticism about alliances in general in the aftermath of the cold war. There are many signs of declining willingness of Americans to support all types of international commitments of money and lives. In the 1999 CCFR poll, for example, defending the security of American allies was ranked "very important" by only 44 percent of the public, as opposed to 61 percent in 1990.<sup>21</sup> In the same period, the support among the American public for the protection of weaker nations against foreign aggression fell from 57 to 24 percent.

Nonetheless, it is critical for Japan (and South Korea) to understand how popular sentiment in the United States can drive American foreign policy. While the political leadership may still sound the old reassuring themes in U.S.-Japan bilateral relations, there is much skepticism among the general public. Many people have a difficult time accepting the argument that the United States has to play a mediating, stabilizing role in Northeast Asia for as long as it takes the countries in the region to learn to get along with each other in trustful manner. For many policy elites, the geopolitical interest in preventing the rise of a hostile regional hegemon might be sufficient to justify the security engagement in East Asia; however, for ordinary Americans, economic interests and moral/value issues matter as much, if not more, in the post-cold war era. Worried about jobs and domestic economic growth, and about safeguarding human rights and promoting democracy, the U.S. public is interested in more than security.

Besides, based purely on security considerations alone, even those who value the alliances question the current status quo. Many believe that the lopsided nature of the alliances hardly warrants the notion that the United States, Japan, and South Korea are truly allies. After all, the reality is perverse. The alliances are justified as useful in

preserving Northeast Asian regional stability by keeping Japan on a U.S. strategic leash (thereby reassuring Koreans) and keeping Korea's problems, and perhaps in the future a reunited Korea as well, on another U.S. strategic leash. This Machiavellian logic should be even less convincing to ordinary Americans.

There is a real danger that the United States might withdraw from or fundamentally rethink its security commitments in Northeast Asia. It must be kept in mind that not only "isolationists" but also prominent establishment figures such as Henry Kissinger think that the United States can, if necessary, play a "mediating" role between Japan and China. According to Kissinger, what the United States must do is to "help Japan and China coexist despite their suspicions of each other."<sup>22</sup> Although he does not argue for an off-shore balancing strategy or disengagement for the United States in Northeast Asia, the logical implications of this view should be troubling to America's Asian allies and argues for a "community building" strategy that keeps democratic America actively engaged in a security community of Asian democracies.

This democratic community strategy is accepted by many in the United States with regard to Europe. Even realists will accept that the existence of a democratic and capitalist Atlantic community affects how the United States approaches the balance of power on the western side of the Eurasian landmass. Interestingly, they generally do not see its applicability to East Asia. Kissinger writes, "Wilsonianism has few disciples in Asia. There is no pretense of collective security or that cooperation should be based on shared domestic values, even on the part of the few existing democracies. The emphasis is all on equilibrium and national interest."<sup>23</sup>

If Japan and South Korea are to have alliances with the United States on a par with those of America's European allies, they need to begin pursuing a security strategy that is coincident with the strain of U.S. diplomacy that believes in a close relationship among the democratic capitalist nations of the world. In American domestic politics, this kind of value-based diplomacy is easier to defend in all-important electoral politics. The American people are not as prone to think in terms of geopolitics as people in some other nations.

In Northeast Asia, this kind of community-building process would require closer cooperation between Japan and South Korea. It logically implies turning the two U.S.-centered alliances from bilateral relationships to a more trilateral one over time. Although some may fear that strengthening the security relationship will provoke other powers of the region, particularly China, it may be defended as the first step toward a more comprehensive confidence-building process in Northeast Asia. Strengthening of tripartite security relations gives Japan the option to pursue a meaningful cooperative security regime, as discussed earlier.

Obviously, this kind of strategy requires more work than Japan's periodically making adjustments to the alliance, under U.S. pressure, to keep Washington happy. Japan needs to work with South Korea to formulate a new vision of the security relationship between Seoul and Tokyo that more closely integrates their common interests.

In the United States, many recognize the fact that the destinies of the two alliances are connected. Zbigniew Brzezinski, for example, argues that "a true Japanese-Korean reconciliation would contribute significantly to a stable setting for Korea's eventual reunification, mitigating the international complications that could ensue from the end of the country's division." He goes on to say, "A comprehensive and regionally stabilizing Japanese-Korean partnership might in turn facilitate a continuing American presence in the Far East after Korea's unification."<sup>24</sup> However, it is entirely up to America's two allies to forge a workable security relationship.

The immediate goal should not be the formation of a United States-Japan-South Korea tripartite alliance. In order for such an alliance to be contemplated, there has to be a fundamental change in perception by the Japanese and Korean people and/or some extraordinary political leadership. At the moment, this kind of reconciliation is difficult to imagine.

### **A Window of Opportunity**

While a dramatic change in Japan-South Korea relations may not be possible, there are encouraging signs that some hurdles have been lowered in the path toward Japanese-South Korean reconciliation. The



current climate of improved relations between the two countries presents a window of opportunity in which prudent bilateral security cooperation measures may be initiated.

First, in September 1998, Tokyo and Seoul reached a basic understanding on the long-standing disputed fishery problem between Japan and South Korea. This dispute arose when, in 1996, Japan decided to ratify the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea, establishing a two-hundred nautical-mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ). The driving force behind this was Japan's desire to protect the interests of its fishermen as well as prevent overfishing by the more aggressive South Korean fishermen in the Sea of Japan, a body of water called the Eastern Sea by the Koreans. However, the ire of the vast majority of South Koreans, not only fishermen, was provoked when Japan used a disputed group of islets (Takeshima/Tokdo) in the middle of this body of water claimed by Japan as well as South Korea for the purpose of demarcating the EEZ. The situation deteriorated to the point that the president of South Korea, Kim Young Sam, felt it necessary to send the South Korean armed forces to conduct exercises near the islets.<sup>25</sup>

To be sure, both sides are having difficulty in dealing with the domestic political fallout from the agreement. Fishermen in both Japan and South Korea have put political pressure on their respective governments. Both governments have responded by offering various forms of compensating subsidies to ease the burden of economic dislocation resulting from the agreement. The pressure on the South Korean government has been particularly severe, given that the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries made technical mistakes in its negotiations with the Japanese.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, the accomplishment of achieving a basic understanding on the fishery issue should, over time, diminish the importance of the conflicting economic interests and, more importantly, ease the tension caused by conflicting territorial claims regarding Takeshima/Tokdo islets.

Central to advancement in bilateral relations was the election of Kim Dae Jung as the president of South Korea, in 1997. Kim, who took refuge in Japan during some of his wilderness years as a persecuted opposition leader, understands the importance of a healthy Japan-South Korea relationship, perhaps more than any other national leader since

Park Chung Hee, a military strongman who, despite popular opposition, established normal relations with Japan in 1965. When Kim came to power, he put priority on improving bilateral relations, and a workable fishery agreement was worked out through intensive negotiations. This led to a highly successful summit meeting in Tokyo between President Kim Dae Jung and Prime Minister Obuchi Keizo in early October 1998. The summit, in turn, produced an unprecedented written apology and an expression of regret by the Japanese government for the suffering Japan had inflicted on Korea during its colonial occupation. Both sides demonstrated remarkable flexibility and understanding in this diplomacy.

Of course, Japan and South Korea had some "help." First, the economic crisis that engulfed the region in 1997 raised the incentive, particularly for South Korea, for better bilateral relations. Second, on August 31, 1998, North Korea fired a ballistic missile that streaked across Japan, shocking the Japanese government and people. This sobering demonstration of the danger posed by Pyongyang has worked wonders in allowing both the South Koreans and the Japanese to openly talk about closer security ties. When Prime Minister Obuchi visited Seoul in March 1999, he discussed with President Kim, besides the current regional economic crisis, issues affecting the security interests of both nations.<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, it appears quite possible now that Japan and South Korea can carry out a low-key but concerted effort to foster meaningful defense cooperation. Of course, caution must be exercised to avoid any attempt to reinterpret the Japanese Peace Constitution. Although views are changing, Japanese public opinion still holds that collective defense is not permitted under the constitution. A major controversy in the Diet would be counterproductive. There is also the South Korean public opinion to consider. Despite the distinct warming of relations between Japan and South Korea since the Tokyo summit, Prime Minister Obuchi's recent reciprocating visit to Seoul was met with the usual protest by South Korean nationalists demanding a more complete Japanese apology and compensation for Japanese wrongdoing during the Japanese imperium.

What is needed, then, is the kind of quiet dialogue between

Japanese and South Korean security establishments that allowed the new Japan-U.S. defense guidelines to be hammered out. This should in time lead to the acceleration and intensification of confidence-building measures between the two militaries; and this in turn could lead to more ambitious security cooperation, such as joint patrolling of sea lanes of communication (SLOC).<sup>28</sup> The hope is that these instances of cooperation will lead to a massive change in attitude about and perception of the ways in which the Japanese and South Koreans see the security relations between their countries.<sup>29</sup>

## Conclusion

Stability on the Korean peninsula is vital to Japan's security. If the Japanese Diet passes the legislation required to make the new defense guidelines between Japan and the United States a reality, Japan will be in a much better position to deal with the unpredictability of North Korean behavior. However, without a broader strategic and political vision, the expediency of justifying the increased bilateral security cooperation on the continuing North Korean threat may prove short-sighted and potentially dangerous. If that threat were to disappear, fundamental questions about the need for U.S. forces in both Japan and South Korea could be raised, and with them the relevance of both alliances. It may be difficult to imagine today, but it is not inconceivable that the United States-centered alliances will unravel. The risk is enormous that this would have dangerous consequences for Northeast Asian stability, not least the complicated Japanese-Korean relationship.

To forestall any possibility of unraveling of the United States-centered network of alliances in the first place, Japan must work with the United States and its democratic neighbor, South Korea, to build a security community based on common political values. As a mutual ally of both Japan and South Korea, the United States can play an important mediating role in the creation of such a community. However, as a first step, Japan must take the lead in reaching out to South Korea to build a climate of mutual trust and respect. This may appear to be an impossible task to some, but more amazing things have occurred in history. During the late 1930s, who could have imagined

Franco-German reconciliation, leading to the creation of the European Union? Who could have foreseen the success of the Japan-United States alliance?

If the prospect of increased cooperation between Seoul and Tokyo in security matters seems problematic to the skeptical, the risk and trouble involved in strengthening the bilateral Japan-South Korea security ties should be weighed against the very dangerous prospect of a future reunited Korea, "freed" from the mooring of the South Korean-U.S. mutual security treaty, trying somehow to play China off against Japan. Japan needs to forestall such a possibility by actively engaging South Korea on security matters now.

## Notes

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1. *Japan Times*, September 23, 1997.
2. Although it contributed financially to the operation in a significant way, Japan could only manage to send token minesweepers to the Gulf after the hostilities ceased in 1991. The Japanese were clearly constrained by the constitutional ban on participating in such an operation, but there were many criticisms from the United States that Japan was content to write a check while other countries were risking the lives of their sons and daughters.
3. See the *Yomiuri Shimbun*/Gallup opinion survey published in the *Daily Yomiuri*, November 30, 1997.
4. Kenneth Waltz considers the United States, Japan, China, Germany (or a West European state), and Russia the five great powers of the future. Hence, Northeast Asia contains four out of five potential great powers. See Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics," *International Security* 18, 2 (Fall 1993), pp. 44-79.
5. Thomas L. McNaugher, "Reforging Northeast Asia's Dagger? U.S. Strategy and Korean Unification," *Brookings Review*, Summer 1993, p. 13.
6. Paul H. Clyde, *The Far East* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1971), p. 382.

7. Edward A. Olsen, "The Diplomatic Dimensions of the Korean Confrontation," in Sheldon W. Simon, ed., *East Asian Security in the Post-Cold War Era* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1993), pp. 110-12.
8. Aaron L. Friedberg, "Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia," *International Security* 18, 3 (Winter 1993/94), pp. 5-33.
9. Ibid.
10. See Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise," *International Security* 17, 4 (Spring 1993), pp. 130-76.
11. See the analysis of Marcus Noland in "Why North Korea Will Muddle Through," *Foreign Affairs* 76, 4, pp. 105-18.
12. For a comprehensive treatment of this issue, see C. S. Eliot Kang, "Korean Unification: A Pandora's Box of Northeast Asia?" *Asian Perspective* 20, 2 (Fall-Winter 1996), pp. 9-43.
13. See Tsuyoshi Kawasaki, "Between Realism and Idealism in Japanese Security Policy: The Case of the ASEAN Regional Forum," *Pacific Review* 10, 4 (1997), pp. 480-503.
14. This view was expressed to the author by senior Chinese diplomats in Tokyo, December 1997. The author would like to note that in his ongoing informal survey of Chinese officials and scholars, he has observed that there appears to be a generational divide regarding the Chinese view of the Japan-United States and South Korea-United States alliances. The older Chinese appear more comfortable with the alliances, to the extent that they ensure limited Japanese armament, but the younger ones are prone to see them as tools for containing rising Chinese power.
15. For a particularly forceful Japanese view, see Hisahiko Okazaki, "Decisiveness Needed for Strong Alliance," *Daily Yomiuri*, March 15, 1998, p. 6.
16. For a similar view, see Mike Mochizuki and Michael O'Hanlon, "A Liberal Vision for the US-Japanese Alliance," *Survival* 40, 2 (Summer 1998), pp. 127-34.
17. An argument for using the security relationship as a tool for trade policy is found in Chalmers Johnson and E. B. Keehn, "The Pentagon's Ossified Strategy," *Foreign Affairs* 74, 4 (July/August 1995), pp. 103-14.
18. Michael Lind, "Asia First: A Foreign Policy," *New York Times*, April 18, 1995.
19. Most notable is Doug Bandow, *Tripwire* (Washington: Cato Institute, 1996).
20. John E. Rielly, ed., *American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy 1999* (Chicago: Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 1999), p. 38.
21. Ibid., p. 16, and John A. Rielly, ed., *American Public Opinion and U. S. Foreign Policy 1995* (Chicago: Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 1995), p. 21.
22. Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), p. 828.
23. Ibid., p. 826.
24. Zbigniew Brzezinski, "A Geostrategy for Eurasia," *Foreign Affairs* 76, 5 (September/October 1997), pp. 62-63.
25. Kim Young Sam may have intentionally fanned the flames of anti-Japanese sentiment for domestic political reasons, given his plummeting popularity by 1996.
26. Many in South Korea were outraged that the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries was misinformed about various methods of fishing, especially *ssangkuri*, a

method involving double-boat dragnets. The immediate political fallout of this was the resignation of Kim Sun-kil, the head of the ministry.

27. The day after Obuchi's visit, March 23, an incident occurred in Japanese territorial waters which involved units of Japan's Maritime Safety Agency. The Maritime Self-Defense Forces fired warning shots at two unidentified vessels suspected of being North Korean spy ships. This is also affecting the current climate of change in Japan's security posture.

28. See Paul Bracken, "Naval Cooperation in Northeast Asia," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 9, 1 (Summer 1997), pp. 203-14.

29. The lesson of some of the greatest changes in recent times is that small changes feed on themselves, causing people and institutions to behave differently and precipitating huge, unforeseen shifts. See Robert J. Samuelson, "Small Changes, Then Unexpected Upheaval," *International Herald Tribune*, January 8, 1997, p. 8.