

foreign policy *in focus*



Interhemispheric Resource Center
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Asia/Pacific Peace and Security Issues

The Asia/Pacific region is the geopolitical center of the struggle for world power. Producing 60 percent of the world's manufactured and agricultural goods, it is the motor force of the global economy. Here U.S., Japanese, Chinese, and Russian ambitions, militaries and insecurities contend. Compounding regional insecurity are 1) the nuclear weapons programs of Japan, North and South Korea, and Indonesia, and 2) the high-tech arms race among the newly industrializing Asian "tigers" and their imitators. Pursuit of economic advantage has largely replaced ideology as the driving force of foreign and military policies. In the Asia/Pacific, this means intensified economic and inter-

state competition is fueling military tensions and insecurity. The regional (dis)order is defined by complex balance of power struggles focusing on the U.S., Japan, and China but also involving Russia and the region's lesser powers.

The Clinton administration's 1995 *United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region* is the most complete statement of U.S. Asian/Pacific policy. Noting that U.S. Asian/Pacific trade totals more than \$374 billion and "account[s] for 2.8 million U.S.

jobs." the strategy reaffirms U.S. "permanent interest in the security of the Asia-Pacific region." The U.S. will, therefore, continue "essential" forward deployments of 100,000 troops in the region, strengthen its alliance with Japan, maintain commitments to South Korea, implement the "Agreed Framework" to dismantle North Korea's nuclear weapons infrastructure, and "engage" China. President Clinton has repeated that multilateral security initiatives will "supplement our alliances and forward military presence, not supplant them."

In 1996 the U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty (AMPO in Japanese) was redefined to revitalize the strategic alliance, which the two countries have considered the keystone of U.S. Asian/Pacific hegemony since 1951. With its not-so-veiled nuclear threats against China and North Korea, the Clinton administration reminded the

region that frontal assaults on the status quo will not be tolerated.

Two potential nuclear flash points remain the focal points of strategic military and diplomatic activities: the armed confrontations on the Korean Peninsula and across the Taiwan Strait. Elsewhere, against the possibility of future U.S. retreats from regional hegemony, Japan and China are competing to develop tacit alliances along the sea lanes linking East Asian economies with Persian Gulf and Indonesian oil. Competition for potentially oil-rich sea beds surrounding the Spratley and Parcel islands in the South China Sea has led to military confrontations and fueled an intense regional arms race involving China and five lesser powers. Adding to regional insecurity is the ever-present risk of nuclear proliferation. As the ratification provisions of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty attest, all major players in the Asian/Pacific strategic struggle are nuclear or potential nuclear powers.

China is seen by Washington and Tokyo as the greatest challenge to their condominium. Whether the new Asian/Pacific (dis)order will be defined by a synthesis of engagement and militarized balance of power struggles, or if the U.S. will seek to contain China through a Manichean confrontation analogous to the cold war, will be determined as the regional powers test one another's ambitions and strengths. For the time being, the Clinton administration has opted for engagement, while continuing military preparations for possible future confrontations.

Although the U.S.-Japanese alliance is expanding, it could be undermined by continued economic rivalry or mounting U.S.-Chinese tensions that threaten Japanese involvement in a war with China. In such circumstances, Tokyo could opt to restructure the balance of power by pursuing an independent path or ally itself with China in pursuit of its economic interests.

Japanese remilitarization under the Mutual Security Treaty (Japan now has the world's third largest military budget) makes these options possible. There are also intimations of an alternative approach based on multilateral security structures and Common Security.

Key Points

- The Asia/Pacific region is the geopolitical center of the struggle for world power.
- Competition for economic advantage and economic security fuel the region's conflicts.
- The U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty remains the keystone of U.S. policy and hegemony in the Asian/Pacific region.

A series of postwar bilateral treaties, which minimize collaboration among U.S. Asian-Pacific allies and clients and maximize their dependence on the U.S., established the structure for long-term U.S. hegemony in the Asian/Pacific. Fundamental was the Mutual Security Treaty, forced on Japan as the price for ending the formal U.S. military occupation.

The Mutual Security Treaty legitimizes the presence of U.S. bases in Japan. These bases serve multiple functions: encirclement of the Soviet Union (and now Russia) and China; training and jumping off points for U.S. foreign military intervention; command and intelligence for U.S. forces; and a lever to influence Japanese politics and contain Japanese military ambitions. Fifty-nine thousand U.S. troops are still based or home-ported at more than one-hundred installations. The U.S.-Japan military partnership has been rife with tensions, most visibly during the 1960 AMPO revolt protesting the treaty's extension, and more recently in Okinawa. Communities, political parties, and popular movements have protested land seizures, GI crime, military exercises, and loss of sovereignty.

Diverging economic interests also undermine the alliance. Americans ask if they should make financial sacrifices for Japanese economic interests. Japanese ask why they must sacrifice for U.S. hegemony and militarism. The Clinton administration is concentrating on the modernization of the alliance and building popular support for it. Its 1995 Nye Initiative envisioned deepening personal relationships between senior U.S. and Japanese leaders and frequent meetings to identify common security interests and to develop new public rationales for the alliance.

The April 1996 summit between Clinton and Prime Minister Hashimoto was used to pacify the Japanese anti-bases revolt, to redefine the AMPO, and to rebuild popular support for the alliance. Eleven bases are to be closed or consolidated over seven years, while respecting the commitment to "fully maintaining the capabilities and readiness of U.S. forces in Japan." No U.S. troops will be withdrawn. No bases will be closed until Japan provides and constructs acceptable alternate sites.

Clinton and Hashimoto also announced the alliance's new public rationales: Korean instability, China's nuclear arsenal, and territorial disputes threatening war with China. Possibly more disturbing was Hashimoto's ostensibly bureaucratic commitment to review the 1978 Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation. This will permit expansion of the Japanese military operations at the expense of the peace constitution. It also provides political cover for the transformation of Japan's Self Defense Forces into a military prepared to fight with the U.S. on the Korean peninsula, along the region's sea lanes, and in the Middle East. The two leaders also agreed to further integrate their militaries through increased Japanese logistical support and continued collaboration in technology and weapons development.

The deepening of the U.S.-Japan alliance reinforces the hierarchy of Asian-Pacific power at the same time that region's economies, technology, and cultures are beginning to integrate along somewhat more equitable and horizontal lines. The military pact is thus seen as an effort to preserve the privileges of the region's two allied and modern imperial powers.

China countered the Clinton-Hashimoto summit by welcoming Boris Yeltsin to Beijing to reconfirm the stability of the Russian-Chinese border. This allows Beijing to concentrate resources on anticipated U.S.-Japanese encroachments.

Korea and Taiwan remain the region's most likely flash points for catastrophic war. It is widely anticipated that North Korea will implode or will be more gradually absorbed by South Korea. The U.S. still deploys 36,000 troops in South Korea, with additional missiles and nuclear warheads at sea. Reunification will not guarantee the GIs' return. The Security Strategy states: "Even after the North Korean threat passes, the U.S. intends to maintain its strong defense alliance with the Republic of Korea."

Regarding China, the debate in Washington and academia has been engagement versus containment. The meeting between Clinton and President Jiang in Manila and the commitment to exchange state visits indicate that engagement is now U.S. policy. However, China's leaders see engagement as an attempt to infuse China with U.S. economic, cultural, and ideological influences. And, the formal identification of China as the Mutual Security Treaty's enemy and loose talk by Pentagon officials about the necessity of containment maintains and legitimizes that prospect.

China's priority is managing its volatile economy and ensuring that economic tensions and disparities do not undermine either Communist rule or China's unity. Beijing's repression of human rights, its military modernization, foreign arms and dual-technology sales, and its militarized diplomacy in the South China Sea do need to be addressed diplomatically. On the historic margins of its empire, Beijing is brutally consolidating its control of Tibet and Xinjiang and has vowed to fight to prevent a formal Taiwanese declaration of independence. It has advanced new claims in the South China Sea and confronted Japan with its reaffirmation of sovereignty over the Daiyou/Senkaku isles.

These problems are compounded by Taiwan's Republican allies in Congress who, along with some human rights advocates, are building political support for a confrontational U.S. policy against China. Meanwhile, Samuel Huntington's well advertised "Clash of Civilizations" dissertations provide the ideological framework for a new cold war.

Key Problems

- The U.S. goal to maintain U.S. Asian/Pacific hegemony is the primary source of regional insecurity.
- The U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty is being redefined in ways that augment Japanese militarism, undermine the Japanese peace constitution, and exacerbate tensions with China.
- China is seen as the primary threat to U.S. Asian/Pacific hegemony.

Security and economic imperatives dictate transformation of U.S. Asian/Pacific policy from militarized hegemony to the realpolitik of multilateral security structures based on Common Security. In the closing decade of the cold war, the Palme Commission brought together U.S., European, Soviet, and Asian political leaders and strategic analysts to build new strategic conceptions based on their collective experience. The commission's most significant contribution was Common Security. The essence of this concept is that no nation can guarantee its security at the expense or detriment of another's. Only by recognizing and addressing mutual security needs can meaningful security be achieved.

As growing numbers of Asian/Pacific policy makers, scholars and security analysts are advocating, the U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty and the related hierarchical structure of bilateral military alliances should be replaced with a multilateral framework, possibly growing out of ASEAN's Regional Forum (ARF).

structures, would be an enormous contribution to Asian/Pacific security. Similarly, a multilateral security structure could facilitate negotiations prohibiting the storage and movement of all weapons of mass destruction and fissionable materials in the region.

The armed and potentially nuclear confrontation in Korea must be addressed immediately. Regional security requires that Washington and its allies fulfill their commitments to Pyongyang under the 1994 agreement and not allow it to be derailed by North and South Korean incidents or diplomatic maneuvers. Ultimately, there will be no peace in Korea or in Northeast Asia until the root cause of the conflict is addressed. The four-party process proposed by the Clinton administration is but one means to this essential goal.

Asian/Pacific security requires understanding much of Beijing's military modernization as a defensive reaction. Confronted by the sophisticated fleets and arsenals of the U.S.-Japan alliance and sobered by the devastating consequences of the U.S. war against Iraq, Chinese military modernization is understandable, but dangerous.

By pursuing a policy of Common Security engagement, not confrontation or containment with China, and by making multilateral security initiatives central, not supplementary, to its Asian/Pacific policies, Washington and other nations in the region can build from ARF and other multilateral initiatives to promote confidence-building initiatives with Beijing and construct an enduring multilateral Asian/Pacific security system. Such a system could mediate tensions across the Taiwan Strait and other focal points of tension, facilitate nuclear disarmament negotiations, and serve as the forum for multilateral disarmament negotiations.

U.S. policy makers should remember that China's military modernization is, for the most part, a compensatory response to the lethal specter of U.S. and Japanese military capabilities. It should also be recalled that even in the electoral succession struggles of the U.S., the mantle of power does not fall to politicians who kowtow to foreign powers.

Security is too important to wait for states to act. With the assistance of international NGO, corporate, and professional networks, citizen diplomacy is already weaving the web of regional ties, identities and visions essential to an Asian/Pacific culture of peace. If people lead, governments will follow.

Written by Dr. Joseph Gerson, the Regional Program Coordinator of the American Friends Service Committee in New England.

Key Recommendations

- The unjust, rigid, and archaic security order, based on the U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty and other bilateral military alliances, should be replaced by a multilateral framework based on Common Security.
- The withdrawal of all foreign military troops and bases, reductions of military forces throughout the region, and strict limits on arms sales and transfers are essential to Asian/Pacific security.
- Nuclear weapons proliferation and nuclear war in the Asia/Pacific region can be prevented by fulfilling the Agreed Framework with North Korea and by the nuclear powers honoring their NPT commitments to complete nuclear disarmament.

Such an alternative security framework, based on the principles of Common Security and respect for national sovereignty and self-determination, could facilitate disarmament negotiations essential to demilitarizing and denuclearizing the region. Within such a framework, reductions of military forces, strict limits on arms sales and transfers, sovereignty over contested islands and sea beds, withdrawal of U.S. and other foreign military bases and forces, and final decolonization of all Pacific island nations could be negotiated without resort to imperial dictate, new imbalances of power, or war.

The continuing dangers of Asian/Pacific nuclear proliferation and war must be addressed. As Joseph Rotblat, Selig Harrison, and others have explained, discriminatory

structures of power do not long endure. The only way to ensure that Asian/Pacific nations honor the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty is for the declared nuclear powers to honor their Article 6 commitments to eliminate nuclear weapons.

The negotiation of a Northeast Asian Nuclear Free Zone, facilitated by regional or multilateral security

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