

An Overview of the Obstacles on the Road to an East Asian Security Community, and the Landscape Around it.

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We should start from the premise that the countries in East Asia share fundamental priorities. They want a continuation of peace in the region and the prospect of future stability. We should furthermore assume that these countries are willing to engage in constructive diplomacy toward accomplishing these ends, which implies an amount of mutual trust reflected in assumptions that members of the group have no ulterior designs for gaining political or strategic advantage over one another. But we should also understand that current developments do pose a potential threat to the stability and perhaps even peace in the region, and that therefore any new initiatives to further integration in a system of interdependency should be emphatically welcomed and supported.

The rapid expansion of China as an industrial power has in political centers of The West as well as in Japan since the beginning of this century been characterized as a major challenge that could lead to hostilities. The country where this expectation is most frequently heard, the United States, is widely suspected to be engaged in an attempt to create an alliance of countries - India, Vietnam, Indonesia, The Philippines, and Japan - with which to "contain" China, recreating as it were a Cold War pattern of power blocks. There are no signs of impending success with this venture, but in the light of America's departure from its earlier role as guardian of world order possessing de-facto hegemony (which was until recently accepted by all), and its adoption of preventive war as a tool of international policy, it would be well-advised for all countries in the East Asia region to pay special attention to the vicissitudes of American intentions. In the well-worn "divide and rule" tradition, any political integration of the East Asian region would today not be welcomed in Washington, unless it could be utilized for purposes of whatever incumbent governments consider the national interest of the day. In this respect the radically changed American attitudes toward European integration over the past 15 years form a telling precedent.

The most pronounced initiatives for economic and political integration of the East Asian region, including or implying measures prompted by security concerns, have come from the ASEAN grouping, with China as a relatively enthusiastic supporter, and Japan as a main obstacle.

Japan finds itself in a peculiar situation. Its authorities cling most tenaciously to status-quo preservation policies as ends in themselves. Partly because of this, Japan appears to be at a loss of how to view the expansion of Chinese industrial power, and is most easily seduced by American prognoses of inevitable hostile competition. Under the prime ministership of Junichiro Koizumi Japan's relations with its Asian neighbors have either seriously deteriorated (in the case of China and South Korea) or have stagnated (Russia and the SouthEast Asian countries). This is less a result of well-planned changes in strategic policy than of drifting in the face of an ill-understood transformation of global as well as continental Asian conditions. The Japanese public and political elite are not inclined to welcome greater tension in Japanese relations with neighbors, and Japanese business tends to be critical of lukewarm or suspicious attitudes toward them. But the Japanese case ought to be seen as following from a deeper problem that has as yet not received sufficient attention. In short: Japanese diplomacy and foreign policy thinking is underdeveloped because from 1945 until recently the United States has served more or less as a proxy for Japan, concerning attitudes and acts by which a sovereign state identifies itself internationally in the political, military-strategic and diplomatic sphere. Japan is not so much an ally but rather a vassal of the United States.

While reasons for their desired integration among the members of the European Union may have been

vastly different from those pertaining today in the East Asian region, there are parallels with regard to the emergence of a security community. Efforts to build a European defense organization have been frustrated because of the inability of EU members to properly re-assess their military ties with the United States. NATO has ceased being a credible organization for European security, and is growing into an organization supplying support troops for American purposes. It has been so much a part of post-World-War-II European history, however, and is so much seen as a matter of course, that the Europeans have found it impossible to let go of it. In the case of the East Asian region, SEATO is only a dim memory if a memory at all, but existing regional security arrangements with the United States nevertheless form huge obstacles.

There has been talk that the Six Party Talks, aimed at establishing effective diplomacy with North Korea, might possibly grow into the nucleus of a regional security effort, but aside from the fact that these talks appear to be stagnating at the moment, such an arrangement would include the United States and therefore not be under control of the countries in East Asia. The same is true for the example of the Treaty for Security and Cooperation in Europe. China, Japan, and Korea have at the senior diplomatic level expressed interest in the OSCE system of confidence building and nonconventional security as a model for a regional security system in East Asia, but it would not be regional.

The long-term good news in the context of our subject has been the relative success of the ASEAN group. As someone present in the region since 1962 and as having witnessed earlier attempts at political cooperation that all ended in failure, I believe that the ASEAN that finally emerged in the wake of the Vietnam debacle and the politicians that made it work deserve applause and congratulations. The ASEAN initiative for an Asian Regional Forum also deserves our support, and it should be kept in mind that the East Asia summit held in Kuala Lumpur in December of 2005 fell short of delivering what had been hoped because of serious disagreement between Japan and China.

Among the more remotely possible developments that could bring instability to the East Asian region we must include a not likely internal Chinese upheaval, caused by major economic setbacks, a banking crisis or environmental factors. The implosion of Northkorea would have far-reaching and unpredictable regional consequences, but is also not very likely. Perhaps least likely would be a crisis over Taiwan, which is often mentioned as a possible fuse for belligerency. The United States, for all its criticism directed at China does not want to risk a crisis over Taiwan, and the majority of the Taiwanese population appears to be committed to the preservation of the status quo. Economic integration between the mainland and Taiwan has been steadily proceeding, and if the Kuomintang returns to power it is, in the long run, likely to seek accommodation with Beijing.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which includes China, Russia and the countries of Central Asia, has become more important to Beijing because of frustrated Chinese efforts to arrive at one of what it calls "strategic partnerships" with the Europeans and because of understandable concern about the expansion of the American military presence in oil-rich Central Asia. Enlarging this grouping with other countries in the East Asian region would unquestionably be regarded in Washington as an anti-American move.

On the whole China has until now exerted itself to be a stabilizing factor in the region. Noteworthy has been its cooperative stance on matters of economic development. While a large amount of foreign investment moved to China to the disadvantage of countries in South East Asia, China has as it were compensated these countries with massive purchases. Indeed, China is more and more viewed as a creator of co-prosperity in the region.

Thailand has moved farthest into the Chinese orbit. Malaysia is also pro-China oriented, Singapore attempts to play a more global diplomatic role, and maintains security ties with the United States. Indonesia and Vietnam lean more toward Washington and may perhaps accommodate new bases for the American fleet, while the Philippines has become a kind of strategic orphan.

It would seem clear that the road to a security community for the East Asian region is blocked by American boulders. These need not be permanent, and a regional security community need not in actual fact be a liability to the United States. But the changes that have come over the American posture toward global

security after the collapse of the Soviet Union, changes that rapidly accelerated with the actions of the current administration, appear to have created a situation that precludes Washington's happy acceptance of integration elsewhere that it cannot control.

Among the most important lessons that can be learned from the European experience is that the Transatlantic Alliance, which had existed on the basis of shared goals and a consensus on how to accomplish those, has been unilaterally abrogated by the United States, and replaced by a de-facto system of vassalage. This should be familiar to Tokyo, but probably not at all acceptable to a majority of the members of a more integrated East Asian region.

An Asian Security system with good prospects for its health would require first of all Japanese diplomatic initiatives and imagination. The potential for imagination is certainly widely available in Japan, but the initiatives would require re-instatement of respect for talent in the *gaimusho*, and close cooperation between its officials and enlightened politicians. These initiatives would furthermore require an assertion of genuine independence in Japan's international dealings, and a purging of the notion that its future safety lies solely in an alliance with, or rather with subservience to, the strongest naval power in the Pacific.

Japanese political assertion may encounter suspicion in the region, and here we must hope for the final removal of historical burdens. Asian fears for a resurgent Japanese nationalism that could turn into Japanese aggression are, I believe, entirely unwarranted. Ritualized protests against a supposed Japanese flirtation with its own militarist past have become a bad habit. Still, there remains much room and good reason for Japanese reassurances that it too cannot conceive of another desirable future but one in which vastly increased cooperation and mutual trust have become a reality.