

**Two Paths—the Long One and the Short One—to a True Security Community for East Asia: The Importance of Democracy, Shared Values, and Transparency**

Robert D. Eldridge, Ph.D.

*Associate Professor, School of International Public Policy, Osaka University*

*Director, U.S.-Japan Alliance Division, Center for International Security Policy*

*and Studies, Osaka University*

Introduction

The title of this session, The Road to a Security Community, implies that one does not exist in the region. I will suggest that one does in fact exist, although it is clearly a nascent one, an imperfect one. The issue I will argue therefore is not so much about building one, but building an even better one, a true security community where shared values exist to dissuade dangerous behavior, challenge threats, and enhance cooperation for mutual prosperity and safety.

A true security community for this region however won't be possible until all the countries in the region become democratic, exhibit shared values, such as the respect for human rights, the rule of law, civilian control, and make their militaries and military intentions more transparent.

For the politically correct in the audience, talking about democracy has become unfashionable again. It was unfashionable in the early 1990s when certain leaders in the region talked about Asian Values, as a way to avoid transparency, popular will,

direct vote, and other unpleasant aspects of democracy. After 2003, with the problems in Iraq, it has become unfashionable once again, with suggestions that democracy can not be imposed from the outside, etc. I don't believe that because that implies democracy is only for the West and that there are not democratic tendencies among the peoples of the world so they need to be treated paternally.

Asia, in any case, still remains far from democratic—China and North Korea being two of the closer examples, but many more not too far off. Because of this, the trend of the debate over the years has been to not intervene in each other's internal affairs, thus mutually supporting one another's unsustainable regimes.

The lack of democracy also is directly related to the lack of transparency in policy and other governing processes, especially defense budgets. Undemocratic regimes by their very nature do not permit open debate, academic, political, or policy-wise. Because of this, the intentions of countries in the region toward one another remain far from clear. Distrust is prevalent.

Due to this situation, many of the countries in region have become more vulnerable to internal instability, transnational problems, and other threats. The United States has done its best to improve the security situation in the region through its presence and interaction with the countries in the region, but it is clear that that is not enough. A larger functioning security community is necessary.

If time is in our favor, we could take the longer route, waiting for the non-democratic countries and less-than-democratic ones realize the importance of developing mature political systems that would allow them to participate in a more open and confident manner in this growing security community of shared values. But the challenges seem to be increasing at a more rapid pace, and as a result, rather than

treating the symptoms, we should be treating the illness, and thus I am in favor of exploring the shorter path—namely promoting democracy, good governance, transparency—while staying on the longer path. If we think about, this path has been a long one indeed. Sixty years, compared to the experiences and developments in Europe, particularly Western Europe.

Obviously I am basing my views on the democratic peace theory. I am also aware of the debate surrounding it, but think it is more right than methodologically wrong. Look at Western Europe. Young democracies can walk the path of peace and contribute to mutual security.

Incidentally, this may be a good place to note that I believe my paper will be somewhat more policy-related in nature than the other more academic papers on this panel, based on a recent experience I had serving as the political advisor to the commander of U.S. Marine Corps Forces Pacific, an organization that was instrumental in dealing with the military response to the 2004 Tsunami disaster and its aftermath, as well as other issues in the Asia-Pacific Region.

It will be some of these experiences that I will highlight to explain the current state of security communities, from what I think the U.S. military perspective might be as it appears there are no other Americans at the conference.

### Japan's place

Before I begin, however, I should mention that when I first received the invitation to participate in this wonderful conference, I had thought I would focus primarily on Japan and its being an obstacle, one of several, to the development of a true security community in the region.

My reasons for feeling this way were three-fold.

First, Japan's diplomacy, or lack thereof, toward Asia during the Koizumi years (2001-2006) was troublesome, not only toward the countries it directly affected, China and South Korea, but also the United States, which is an alliance partner with South Korea, and an economic partner of China. Koizumi's insistence on going to Yasukuni alienated these countries and led to the creation of a highly unstable situation which could also (and did) get linked with other problems between Japan and China and Japan and South Korea. Japan's perceived nationalism made it an a lonely country, as the title of a Newsweek Japan special suggested.

Traditionally, one view of the U.S.-Japan alliance was that Japan was in danger of being drawn into a U.S. conflict. For the first time in the history of the alliance, the tables were reversed. The U.S. became concerned it would be drawn into a Japan-produced conflict.

Related to the "history problem" and Yasukuni problem, are the other issues Japan is tied to in the region. Namely, Japan has territorial disputes with ALL of its neighbors, Russia, South Korea, China, and Taiwan, and indirectly with North Korea, which supports South Korea's claim to Tok-do/Take-shima. While they do not prevent Japan's ability to have truly cooperative relations with its neighbors, these disputes certainly limit the relations.

A third reason was the fact that Japan does not allow itself to participate in collective self defense and other security operations. Due to the peace constitution and domestic opinion it was unable to break away from its one-country pacifism (一國平和主義) for longest time. In recent years, particularly after 9/11 it has been slowly reaching out, but its constitutional interpretation prevents it from being a full player in

the region.

However, there have been encouraging signs that Japan is trying to amend the situation. Japan and its neighbors have experimented with using these disputes to turn them into opportunities to build cooperation, through joint exploration for energy sources, etc. (although in reality the undetermined status of these territories will continue to inhibit these countries). Prime Minister Abe Shinzo's trip, so early on in his administration, to China and South Korea, was a courageous and welcome decision (although personal contacts are not enough to overcome structural problems). Finally, Japan has been debating the relevancy of its self-imposed prohibitions in collective self-defense in recent years suggesting that it is ready to play a more proactive role in international security and that the people endorse it.

One thing related to the constitutional revision process that Japan is vulnerable to criticism on, however, is the fact that Japan has failed over the years to explain that any revision of the constitution would not necessarily mean a return to militarism, as seen in the 1930s. All too often, the debate immediately focuses on Article 9, which becomes like a Dam, and that if article 9 is changed, the dam breaks open and floods Japan and the region with militarism. Thus, attempts to prevent revision of it are like plugging the dam. What Japan has yet to explain abroad, and foreign observers have yet to realize, is that it is not Article 9 that keeps Japan from being a military power, which it generally is, but rather the structural changes in the postwar Japan that makes Japan a democracy with civilian control over its military. Specifically, these are... In other words, the postwar constitution is fundamentally different from the prewar Meiji constitution, and thus I do not believe Japan would or even could return to militarism. Such debate is unproductive. The region and international society should welcome a

more proactive Japan, not fear it. I often wonder if some countries, including China, do not use this argument to prop up their own undemocratic systems, just like the Communist Party of China uses the Japan card to enflame patriotism within its country and generate support for the otherwise bankrupt party.

In thinking about this latter point, the democratic debate in Japan over its future role, and the lack of democratic debate in many countries in the region, the more I realized that Japan is less the obstacle in the region and that the lack of democracy represents the biggest challenge to building a true security community.

As mentioned at the outset, it prevents a free, unimpeded, and open debate domestically about national and foreign policies, without the risk of retribution. Democracy guarantees human rights. It allows for transparency as parliaments are empowered to check the bureaucracy. It allows voters to express their will at the polls if the parliament or the government is not doing their jobs.

Many of the problems in the Asia-Pacific region result from this lack of democracy, namely poor governance, which in turns produces poor health care, education, and social systems, breeding domestic instability that often affects neighboring countries. Addressing these problems and attempting transnational solutions often frightens the governments of these countries, as it would expose their undemocratic and less than democratic regimes to criticism. North Korea is an example, but there are many more. This is the biggest challenge and we do no one any good by ignoring this fact. Promoting democracy, as President Bush did in his speech in Kyoto last year, is the quickest way to a more stable region.

In the meantime, the engagement pursued, for example, by the United States under Theater Security Cooperation, or TSC, is a great example of how militaries can

work together on a whole range of issues, including preventing piracy and terrorism, transnational crime, disaster relief, and other confidence-building measures. It helps to demonstrate the importance of civilian control, transparency in defense budgets and intentions, and builds working relationships of trust. This was seen in the amazingly quick reaction to the Tsunami in December 2004 and the ability to work with the local militaries, whose skills had improved through this sort of mil-to-mil interaction over the years, and mutual training.

As seen in the approach by Dennis C. Blair, then Commander, Pacific Command, known as “From Wheels to Webs,” America desires a security community that is open, not closed, and one that is bottom up, rather than top down. What these two ideas mean is that the U.S. is open to expanding security relations with as many countries in the region as possible. It is not directed at any one country, but at threats to stability. The second meaning, bottom up, is that any and all capabilities are welcome. Countries can contribute whatever they are capable of to the fight against instability. This interaction in turn develops one another’s capabilities, trust, and working relationships that pay off in crises and other calamities, such as the operations after the Tsunami.

The Asia-Pacific region, lacking shared democratic values, unfortunately also lacks a NATO-like security body. PACOM for years has filled that vacuum but it is overworked and overtasked. The Japan-U.S. alliance can serve as the foundation for such a larger security community, as it is one of the most developed alliances and a long history. But expanding it could not be done at the expense of the core values that bind the U.S. and Japan—democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, transparency, etc.

In the meantime, we will probably have to continue along the slower path of incremental cooperation. I know not for sure if this alone will allow us to deal with the emerging challenges if countries do not seriously embrace it.

In the end, we would be better served if instead of addressing the symptoms, we tackled the problems caused by the lack of democracy in the region.