

Overview

East Asia in 2002

1. The War on Terrorism and the Iraqi Issue

The September 11 terrorist attacks had—and continue to have—a great impact on international relations. While the new government of President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan, which replaced the Taliban regime, has come to grips with rebuilding the war-torn country, operations to mop up remnants of al-Qaeda fighters continue. To rebuild Afghanistan and prevent it from once again becoming a hotbed of terrorists, the international community must offer continuous assistance. Stability in Afghanistan is essential for the stability of Central Asia, a region where Muslims are dominant and one taking on growing importance in maintaining the power balance on the Eurasian continent. Moreover, the war on terrorism is increasingly being fought in so many fields—information and finance included—that victory hinges on the willingness and ability of the international community to cooperate.

One of the most important tasks for the international community after the Cold War is to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). As a result of the September 11 terrorist attacks, concern about this problem is increasing. In his State of the Union Address in January 2002, President George W. Bush pointed out the real possibility of WMD and ballistic missiles, developed by rogue states, being passed on to terrorists, and declared that Iran, Iraq, and North Korea constituted an “axis of evil” that threatens world peace.

In an address to the General Assembly of the United Nations in September 2002, President Bush pointed out that a number of U.N. Security Council (UNSC) resolutions had been violated by Iraq since the 1991 Gulf War, and stated that Iraq had become a threat to the authority of the United Nations and to world peace. He urged the UNSC to take firm measures against Iraq and not to turn a blind eye. The following month, the United States released a report saying that Iraq had been developing WMD, in violation of UNSC resolutions, and that it possessed biological and chemical weapons and ballistic missiles with ranges exceeding UNSC

Resolution 687 limits. The report also revealed that if Iraq were to obtain a sufficient amount of nuclear material, it could produce nuclear weapons within a year.

In response, on November 8, the UNSC unanimously adopted a resolution urging Iraq to fully disclose its WMD program and to unconditionally comply with unrestricted inspections. Although Iraq submitted a report to the United Nations in accordance with the resolution, the United States was skeptical of it, and 2002 ended with the imminent use of force against Iraq as a possibility.

U.S. Marines conducting exercises in the Philippines (October 23, 2002)
(AP/WWP)

Meanwhile, the United States has become interested once again in Southeast Asia as part of its strategy for combating terrorism. Many Southeast Asian countries feel that the United States did little to alleviate the Asian crisis in 1997, and that it avoided direct involvement in the chaos in East Timor following the Asian crisis. However, since the September 11 terrorist attacks, the United States has come to see Southeast Asia as a key region in the war against terrorism, and is offering various forms of assistance to Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members to prevent terrorism. Typical of this support was a joint exercise conducted by a contingent of U.S. armed forces with Philippine army troops during the first six months of 2002 against an extremist Islamic bandit group known as Abu Sayyaf. Some Southeast Asian countries are undergoing democratization, and lack the ability to maintain public peace and order. This appears to create an environment in which international terrorists find it easier to operate. As a result, the United States seems to be broadening its involve-

ment in antiterrorism activities in the region. The United States is also proposing a bilateral free trade agreement with ASEAN members, giving the impression that such a move is intended to hold in check China, a country that has been strengthening its economic clout in Southeast Asia.

Against this backdrop, a terrorist network connected to al-Qaeda has surfaced in Southeast Asia, suggesting that terrorism is not confined to a single country. Until then Indonesia had not strongly committed to fighting terrorism. In October 2002, a terrorist bombing occurred in Bali, Indonesia, killing more than 180 people. After the September 11 terrorist attacks, in various international forums the United States had advocated regional cooperation to combat terrorism, and it was the bombing in Bali that jolted the countries in the Asia-Pacific region—not just Southeast Asian countries and the United States but also Australia and Japan—into expanding and strengthening regional cooperation.

2. Recurrence of North Korea's Nuclear Development Problem

Although the Bush administration indicated to North Korea that it would leave the door open to the negotiating room, when President Bush labeled North Korea a member of the “axis of evil” in his January 2002 State of the Union Address, he showed, unlike former U.S. president Bill Clinton, the firmness of his stance toward North Korea. Under these circumstances, the problem of North Korea has been rapidly developing since autumn 2002.

Triggering the change was Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's visit to the North Korean capital of Pyongyang on September 17, 2002. During his visit, he met with Chairman Kim Jong Il of the National Defense Commission of North Korea to open the way for normalizing diplomatic relations between the two countries, and the two leaders signed the Japan-DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) Pyongyang Declaration. North Korea seems to have agreed to Prime Minister Koizumi's visit in order to

receive Japanese economic assistance and to avoid pressure from the United States. Although the visit set in motion the process of normalizing diplomatic relations, it hit a snag at the outset—the abduction of Japanese nationals by North Korean agents and the illicit development of nuclear weapons by North Korea.

Until then, there had been strong suspicions that many Japanese had been abducted to North Korea in the 1970s and 1980s, and public opinion calling for an official investigation became increasingly vocal. For its part, the Japanese government had officially acknowledged that 11 Japanese were abducted to North Korea, and repeatedly asked North Korea to investigate their whereabouts. In response, North Korea flatly denied having abducted them. Prime Minister Koizumi made it clear, in meeting Chairman Kim Jong Il, that normalization of relations with North Korea would be impossible until the issue of the abducted Japanese was settled. During their meeting, Chairman Kim Jong Il acknowledged the abduction problem and personally apologized for it. However, North Korea tragically reported that of the 13 abductees, only five were still alive. Furthermore, explanations given by North Korea about the deceased were highly suspect. This has only increased public sentiment that Japan should not normalize relations with North Korea until the abduction issue is clarified and settled.

On October 16, subsequent to Prime Minister Koizumi's visit to North Korea, the U.S. State Department announced that North Korea, during a visit by James Kelly, U.S. assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, admitted to carrying out a uranium enrichment program for nuclear weapons. In retaliation, the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) suspended oil shipments to North Korea, previously made in exchange for a freeze on North Korea's nuclear weapons program. Reacting to this suspension, North Korea declared the end of the freeze on its nuclear facilities, and started to operate them under the pretext of generating electric power for its energy needs.

Once again North Korea has adopted its "diplomatic brinkman-

ship” policy, which is reminiscent of the crisis in 1993 and 1994. In response, Japan, the United States, and South Korea are trying hard, through peaceful means, to dissuade North Korea from re-suming its nuclear weapons program. If, as is likely, China and Russia actively join forces with these three countries, they could bring strong pressure to bear on North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons program.

However, recently there have been reasons for concern about South Korea. It is feared that the reactivation of North Korea’s nuclear weapons program could strike a fatal blow to the Sunshine Policy, which President Kim Dae Jung had pursued until the end of his term and had wanted to pass on to his successor. While the North-South summit in June 2000 helped allay South Korea’s fear of North Korea and Chairman Kim Jong Il, antipathy toward the United States and its troops in South Korea, intended to deter North Korean aggression, has been mounting. There is concern that the recurrence of the problem of North Korea’s nuclear weapons program, coupled with mounting nationalistic anti-American sentiment in South Korea, could further destabilize the Korean Peninsula.

3. The Rise of China and Its Change of Leadership

As the stature of China has markedly risen in recent years, debates have begun over the impact China may have on the regional order of East Asia. It is clear that U.S.-China relations are the most important factor for the stability of the region.

The Bush administration hopes that China will further prosper by the policies of reform and opening-up, and that if China is further integrated into the world economy, it will become a democracy and transform itself into a responsible member of the international community. Yet the Bush administration does not rule out the possibility that while China may become more powerful, its process of democratization may not progress as smoothly as hoped, creating a confrontational stance toward the United States.

When viewed from a Chinese perspective, given the priority it places on domestic stability, the deterioration in relations with the United States was unfortunate at a time when it was preparing for entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) toward the end of 2001 and when the nation was about to undergo a leadership change. On the economic front also, China had to contend with a number of serious problems—reform of state-owned enterprises and the growing pressure to remedy the widening disparity in wealth. China's participation in international markets, bound by

Outgoing President Jiang Zemin and incoming President Hu Jintao
(Kyodo Photo)

rules, is essential for it to develop its economy further. President Jiang Zemin's choice of the United States as his final country to visit prior to stepping down seems to indicate the importance he attached to relations with the United States, economically as well as politically, for China in a period of transition.

However, there were a number of problems—such as Taiwan and human rights—over which the two countries had conflicting interests. Of course, China still remains cautious toward the United States. China has been increasing its defense spending by a high double-digit rate for each of the past 14 years. All indications are that the modernization of its military has focused on strengthening nuclear deterrence toward the United States and on increasing its naval and air power to thwart Taiwan's ambition for independence. However, China's drive for a modern military is shrouded in a lack of transparency. A report released by the U.S. Defense Department in July 2002 estimates China's annual defense spending at more

than three times the amount announced by the Chinese government. It is only natural that the rapid increase of China's power stirs up the anxiety of its neighbors. Therefore, China should make its defense policy more transparent.

At the 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), November 8-14, 2002, the "third-generation" leaders (including Jiang Zemin) resigned. Jiang Zemin stepped down as general secretary of the CPC Central Committee and transferred the government to the "fourth-generation" leadership of Hu Jintao. Yet Jiang Zemin remained chairman of the CPC Central Military Commission in an attempt to retain political clout. This is clear from the fact that although members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau (except Hu Jintao) had resigned, six of the

Commentary

The Outlook for Multilateral Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region

Japanese Minister of State for Defense Gen Nakatani delivered a speech entitled The Outlook for Multilateral Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region at a conference on Asian security organized by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in Singapore in June 2002. In his speech, he proposed that countries in the region cooperate in two ways to ensure their mutual security.

First, the defense ministers of the Asia-Pacific countries should hold regular meetings aimed at creating a framework of dialogue for peace and security in the region by discussing various problems, including the region's changing situation, defense policies, arms control and disarmament. Second, the defense authorities of the relevant countries should come to an arrangement concerning peacekeeping activities, maritime rescue, large-scale disaster relief, measures against pirates, drug trafficking, and terrorism. As a preliminary step, he proposed the creation of a cooperative system for the exchange of information concerning these problems.

In this speech, he also stressed the importance of bilateral alliances between the United States and the countries of the region, as well as the presence of the U.S. armed forces in enhancing peace and stability throughout the region.

eight newly appointed members had been aides to outgoing President Jiang Zemin

While it is true that the 16th CPC National Congress confirmed the status quo, its greatest significance lies in the fact that it permitted the admission of private “capitalist” entrepreneurs into the Communist Party. This signals that the Communist Party, a revolutionary party that represents workers and peasants as the proletariat, has transformed itself, into a party tolerant of profit making, and one that places the highest priority on economic growth. It is unclear how much power Jiang Zemin will retain over the new leadership, but it is worth watching how China will develop under its new leadership in the coming years.