

Presentations

The Role of the United States in a New East Asian Security Order: A Philippine View¹

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Introduction

The coming of the new millennium has occasioned many reflections about domestic, regional, and international issues that are likely to shape our common future. In the field of regional and international security, one key issue is the role of great powers, particularly the United States (U.S.) in the new millennium's security order. This is especially apt with the backdrop of the end of the cold war and the rise of the U.S. as the world's most powerful state, the emerging power of China not only as a regional but also as a global power, the likely rise of Japan as a normal power not only equipped with economic, but also military power, the uncertain future of Russia as a regional and global player, and the evolution of a dialogue process among the ten countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the three countries in Northeast Asia since 1997. The latter development has invited speculation on the prospects for an East Asian security order among the countries of ASEAN and their three Northeast Asian neighbors – China, Japan, and South Korea.

The concept of a new security order in East Asia without the U.S. is a very challenging one. Clearly, the relations among the three Northeast Asian countries remain uncertain, despite increasing economic interdependence and bilateral contacts and cooperation in a number of functional areas. Yet, historical animosities are deep, confidence and trust are thin and tentative, future competition for regional leadership is likely between China and Japan without American military presence in the region, and a united Korea even under a democratic government can pose a challenge to its two larger neighbors. When ASEAN is taken into the equation, this new security order can be extremely complex. The ten member states of ASEAN do not share a common perspective about the features of the present regional security architecture, particularly on the issue of the role of the U.S. Their relations with China and Japan also vary greatly, such being a function of history, geography, economics, formal ideology,

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domestic politics, and other factors. There is no common ASEAN foreign and security policy. The future of the grouping can also be uncertain in the face of domestic challenges facing four of its original members – Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand. This is compounded by the challenges of ASEAN enlargement that compounded the ASEAN divide.

Yet, it is not out of place to look at the role of the U.S. in East Asian security, even as it is detached from the issue of whether a new East Asian security order exists or is possible, and if so, what its features would be. This paper attempts to analyze the role of the U.S. in East Asian security in the first years of the new millennium. It is divided into five parts. Beginning with an analysis of the East Asian security environment at the turn of the third millennium, it then addresses the issue of an emerging new East Asian security order, and the role of the U.S. in it. This role is one that is likely to be shaped by big power relations, internal political, economic, and military developments in key regional actors such as China, Japan, the Koreas, and even Russia.

It argues that at least in the next two decades, although changes are likely to occur in East Asia, the security order that would arise would not be fundamentally new, nor would it be far too different from its main outlines at the turn of the century. U.S. interests in the Asia Pacific in general, and in East Asia in particular are also not likely to change in fundamental ways as to require a drastic change in the security role it is prepared to play. Hence, a critical source of change lies in regional developments in East Asia particularly in the key regional players cited above, and also in ASEAN, in the light of the emerging ASEAN plus three (APT) process that excludes non-East Asian powers, such as the U.S. and Russia.

A realistic Philippine perspective supports a continuing U.S. security role in East Asia, in addition to the potentials of the APT becoming an East Asian Security Forum in the long term. A concluding section deals with the need for the U.S. to remain as a force for regional stability.

The Security Environment in East Asia

As the 20th century drew to a close, East Asia appeared to have achieved a modicum of stability with the relations between the great regional powers becoming less volatile. Despite the end of the cold war and the end of the swing role that China played in the balance of power between the two superpowers, the transition to a post-cold war strategic environment has not led to any serious regional tension that could have been destabilizing. In fact, the loss of the cold war overlay initiated the establishment and growth of a number of regional mechanisms to mitigate the ensuing fluidity and uncertainty in regional and global politics.

As regards the relations of the great powers in the region – the United States, China, Japan, Russia, and India – the end of the cold war facilitated a rapprochement between former hostile states. China and Russia, China and India, Russia and Japan, the U.S. and Russia

entered into a period of more stable relations. For example, China and Russia agreed to a mutual withdrawal of troops from the Sino-Russian border and forged a strategic partnership where China bought excess military hardware from Russia with much-needed hard cash. Soviet-U.S. rivalry came to an end, with the U.S. leading Western countries in an effort to assist the challenging Russian economic transition through trade and investment cooperation, while embarking on a common policy of disarmament. Russia and Japan normalized their relations even without resolving the Northern Islands dispute. China and Japan also embarked on economic cooperation at an unprecedented scale, while Beijing and Taipei found a framework for enhanced economic interaction short of resolving the issue of reunification. In all, the prioritization of economic development and cooperation, a commitment to explore areas of potentially beneficial cooperative relations, while temporarily shelving difficult and sensitive territorial and border issues characterized bilateral relations between them.

Globalization and market reform have also served to link regional economies more intimately with one another. Statistics on trade and investment in the region document increases in East Asian internal trade and investments³ such that these economies have become highly integrated, and characterized by remarkable economic growth and prosperity. The regional impact of the devaluation of the Thai baht in July 1997 is a convincing proof of globalization and economic integration in East Asia. An event in one country spread its devastating consequences throughout the region, including in Russia, in varying degrees. Individual countries found themselves vulnerable and they could do very little to stem the negative impact of the devaluation of the baht on their own economies. This has led to the adoption of new modalities of regional cooperation, including the initiation of an ASEAN regional monetary surveillance mechanism and the launching of the ASEAN plus three process at the ASEAN Informal Summit in Kuala Lumpur in November 1997.

The end of the cold war also served to demonstrate the strength of the West's twin ideologies – free trade and markets (capitalism) and open political systems (liberal democracy). This spurred the adoption of human rights, democracy, and market reforms as guidelines in the development policy of advanced industrialized countries, particularly the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD) that included Japan (and subsequently, South Korea). Over the protest of developing countries, the OECD adopted the policy of linking official development assistance (ODA) and “good governance” during its London Summit in July 1991. These principles of “good governance” included the promotion of human rights and democracy, bureaucratic reform for greater transparency and accountability (anti-corruption), market reforms, environmental protection for sustainable development, moderate levels of military spending, and non-production of weapons of mass destruction. As a policy instrument,

³ See various World Bank Report and Asian Development Bank Report over time.

this was aimed at ensuring both the growth of democracy and markets in the “new states” that succeeded the collapse of Stalinist states in Central and Eastern Europe, in the former Soviet Union, and in the rest of the world. Developing countries challenged this definition of good governance, making a distinction between democratic government and good (effective and disciplined) governance, articulated in the notion of “Asian values” in the early to mid-1990s.

This was also the response to Third Wave democratization⁴ that started in the late 1970s and peaked in the immediate post-Cold War period and reached East Asia whose culture and values had been heatedly argued by the advocates of “Asian values” as not compatible with both human rights and democracy⁵. Included in the third wave in East Asia are the democratic transitions in the Philippines, Taiwan, South Korea, Thailand, and Indonesia. This has important regional strategic implications.

Democratization in Taiwan led its government to respond to growing popular sentiments for independence from Beijing that in turn heightened tension across the Taiwan Strait and more assertive demands from Beijing for its diplomatic partners to respect the “One China” policy. Popular demands also influenced Taiwan’s policy to seek a separate seat in the United Nations and other regional bodies that unfortunately hardened Beijing’s determination to exclude it from such bodies. Previously accommodating to agree to Taiwan’s participation in regional bodies, both official and non-official such as the Indonesian-initiated Informal Workshop on the South China Sea, Asian Development Bank (ADB), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC), Beijing has since vehemently blocked Taiwan from participation even in non-official bodies, especially those dealing with political and security issues, such as the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP).

Taiwan’s exclusion has only raised the level of frustration in Taipei, both in and out of government circles. This is a state of affairs that could trigger actions that would only increase tension in cross-strait relations, such as missile testing across the Taiwan Strait in March 1995 prior to the presidential elections in Taiwan. This situation created a crisis that merited the sending of two carrier battle groups by the U.S. in the strait, a warning to Beijing that in accordance with the Taiwan Relations Act, it would likely be involved if armed conflict should break out in the strait. Disruption of contacts between the two sides of the strait has also

⁴ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late 20th Century* (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 1991).

⁵ The “Asian values” debate dominated intellectual and policy discussions about human rights between East Asia and the West during the last decade of the 20th century. Prominent among East Asians that argued in favor of Asian values are Lee Kwan Yu, Tommy Koh, Kishore Mahbubani, Mohamad Mahathir, and Suharto.

raised tension that contributes to regional instability. A new issue in cross-strait relations is the question of the deployment of theater missile defense (TMD) to protect Taiwan from a feared missile attack by China. This is likely to continue into the assumption of George W. Bush to the presidency, as his defense and security officials are perceived to harbor anti-Chinese sentiments. Moreover, the election of Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP) Chen Shui-bian as Lee Teng-hui's successor has increased tension once again due to the DPP's declared policy of independence from the mainland. It does not help that Chen's Vice President is a person well known for her candidness and strong views on the issue of independence.

That democratization can be a very destabilizing process is also seen in the experiences that East Asian democracies are going through. Southeast Asia's democratizing countries are in serious trouble.⁶ Indonesia's political transformation is doubly difficult to a large degree due to the excesses and unsound practices of the authoritarian New Order government of Suharto. Lacking in the social and institutional requisites of democracy, rocked by the deep divisive effects of ethnic strife, battered by the economic and social impacts of the Asian financial crisis, and lacking in effective political leadership, Indonesia faces the 21st century with a set of monumental challenges that it would be extremely difficult to muster. As ASEAN's largest and most politically influential member, internal crisis in Indonesia has impacted on the grouping in a very substantive way. ASEAN has lost its informal leader, its *primus inter pares*, that was responsible, to a large extent, for the forging of ASEAN consensus and cohesion in the past. This is doubly unfortunate, as the enlargement of ASEAN to include the rest of Southeast Asia – Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam (CLMV) that are relatively less developed countries – requires more effort to bring about cohesion. The APEC summit in Kuala Lumpur was a casualty of this loss of informal leadership in ASEAN where lack of progress in APEC tasks resulted. This could have been avoided had Indonesia remained a strong regional force as before the crisis.

The continuing political and economic crisis in Indonesia is certain to have negative implications for the region. Indonesia would continue to put priority in putting its own house in order, thereby paying less attention to ASEAN and its many concerns. ASEAN leadership in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) has also been affected. In fact, turning to the APT process can be interpreted as a recognition of this mechanism's inability to address East Asian security concerns – cross-strait relations, the Korean Peninsula, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the region, outstanding territorial and border disputes - among others. It is hoped that the APT can evolve from a forum addressing economic and functional concerns,

⁶ Carolina G. Hernandez, "Political Trends and Socioeconomic Developments in Southeast Asia", a paper presented at the Second Europe-Asia Think Tanks Meeting, The European Parliament, Strasbourg, 24-25 October 2000, to be published in a forthcoming issue of *Perspectives*, a publication of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Manila, Philippines, February 2001.

to one that addresses political and security concerns in East Asia.⁷ The APT is also an admission by East Asians that none of the existing regional and global institutions can effectively address another financial crisis of the nature and magnitude of the Asian financial crisis of 1997.

In the management of regional political issues such as the Cambodian crisis, Thailand and the Philippines have also been important players in ASEAN, together with Indonesia. Since the crisis in Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines have pushed initiatives intended to make ASEAN more effective by being more responsive to transborder sources of tension and instability. In 1997, they argued the need for a relaxation of the “ASEAN way” of decision making, particularly in regard to the principle of non-intervention in another’s domestic affairs. Originally termed “flexible engagement” whereby a neighbor is authorized to express its concern to the source of a transborder problem that affects it, the policy was eventually called “enhanced interaction”. This much-resisted approach is likely to become mainstreamed in the future with the demands of globalization, ASEAN enlargement, and the unleashing of the full impact of the technological revolution in information and telecommunication upon Southeast Asian societies as well as the liberating impacts of economic development among their peoples.

Democratic processes in both Thailand and the Philippines have led to political succession of leaders that may not share the level of competence, clarity of vision, degree of commitment to ASEAN that their former leaders had. The defeat of the Democratic Party in the recent Thai elections means a change in leadership in the Thai foreign office that saw the able stewardship by Surin Pitsuwan and his deputy steer not only Thailand, but also ASEAN in positive directions during the crisis. In the Philippines, uncertainty over its political future under a much-discredited Estrada administration endangered the country’s ability to focus on regional affairs. The successful ouster of Estrada during People Power II on EDSA from 16 to 20 January 2001 and his successor’s commitment to put foreign affairs as a top priority, together with economic recovery, global competitiveness, and poverty alleviation provided the country with a new hope. This could also translate into regional stability in due course. In the meantime, however, these developments would mean that important sources of leadership within ASEAN would not be there for as long as internal political transformation has not run its course successfully and has not enabled competent political leaders to emerge to provide regional leadership. For the time being, Singapore has extended its own share of leadership in a situation of dispersed leadership within ASEAN by pushing a number of initiatives in the area of economic cooperation with other partners, such as Latin America.

Democracy and human rights have also impacted on ASEAN external relations, especially with regard to East Timor and Myanmar. Prior to the referendum that put East

⁷ Lauro C. Baja, Jr., “The East Asia Security Forum”, *CSCAP Philippines Newsletter*, July 1999-June 2000.

Timor on the way to independence, Indonesia had suffered from international criticism over the East Timor issue. The admission of Myanmar into ASEAN has also affected the grouping's relations with the European Union (E.U.) whose members' foreign policy is committed to the promotion of human rights and democracy. Accountable to their civil societies, E.U. members cannot ignore their domestic constituencies that are strong advocates of these principles. Consequently, the political dialogue between ASEAN and the E.U., stalled since the admission of Myanmar into ASEAN only got back on track in December 2000.

On the other hand, the democratization of South Korea and the assumption to power of Kim Dae-jung have had positive effects on regional security. His "sunshine policy" with the North has resulted in the reduction of tension, the historic summit of the two Kims in July 2000, and the visits of separated families across the border. These may not lead to any significant progress in North/South relations, the eventual resolution of the divided peninsula, improvements in the domestic political, economic, and social conditions in the North, or a halt to the missile development and sale of missile technology to other "rogue" states by Pyongyang. These harder issues would obviously take longer to redress, but recent developments on the Korean Peninsula should be seen in a positive light.

There are also signs of economic recovery in the crisis-affected economies of East Asia, except for Indonesia and the Philippines. The question, however, is the sustainability of recovery and the extent to which this could adversely affect the road to further structural reforms, especially of the financial and monetary systems. The intimate connection between domestic political stability and the entry of new foreign direct investments is well recognized. For this reason, domestic political stability in East Asia needs to be assured. Apart from Singapore, this is a problem faced by ASEAN's original member states, as well as by Myanmar and Cambodia.

Keeping China on the track where economics leads in both its domestic and foreign policy is a challenge, particularly if its financial and banking institutions were not reformed, its floating population remained adrift, uneven economic development continued, and political succession were uncertain and contentious. Its expected entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) should provide sufficient incentives for China to keep on this salutary track. The question is whether it would be able to manage collateral consequences on its society and political system of the economic goals it seeks and to what extent the achievement of its modernization goals would make it more predictable, more dependable, more tractable, and more responsible as a regional and global actor. It is also a question of whether it would be able to normalize its relations with both Japan and the U.S. to the extent that historical animosities and suspicions would be significantly eroded to ensure predictability and stability in the region.

As East Asia enters the 21st century, therefore, a combination of benign and malign factors defines its strategic environment. They also define the contours of a new East Asian

security order that will also shape American security role in that order.

A New East Asian Security Order and the Role of the United States

The face of East Asia is changing. Some of the features of this change are already noted above – in domestic developments, in economic prosperity, in relations among one another and with external partners, in the rise of new regional mechanisms. These factors define the security order in the region that has actually begun to change since the end of the cold war. The bipolar pattern of global security underpinning superpower relations with impacts on East Asia has come to an end. In its place is an evolving multipolar pattern, where power is no longer largely defined by military capability, and where security is increasingly recognized as multidimensional with growing emphasis on the security of the human being, rather than simply the collectivity in the form of the state. ASEAN and Japan, for different reasons, led in the articulation of the notion of comprehensive security, as early as in the 1970s.⁸ As the Cold War waned and ended, this notion of security and its twin concept of cooperative security became increasingly accepted in the West, with its first obvious expressions in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE/OSCE) and Gorbachev's Vladivostok speech in 1986. Others soon followed.⁹

During the last decade of the 20th century, the concept of human security emerged, increasing the emphasis on human well being and in an effort to avoid the contentiousness of the human rights and democracy debate. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in its 1994 Human Development Report defined human security¹⁰ in terms of its

⁸ Among others, see Yukio Satoh, *The Evolution of Japan's Security Policy*, Adelphi Paper No. 178 (London: IISS, 1982); Umemoto Tetsuya, "Comprehensive Security and the Evolution of the Japanese Security Posture", and Mutiah Alagappa, "Comprehensive Security: Interpretations in ASEAN Countries", in Robert A. Scalapino, et al., eds., *Asian Security Issues: Regional and Global* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1988); Jusuf Wanandi, "Security Issues in the ASEAN Region", in Karl Jackson and M. Hadi Soesastro, eds., *ASEAN Security and Economic Development* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1984); and David Dewitt, "Concepts of Security for the Asia-Pacific Region", Bunn Nagara and KS Balakrishnan, eds., *The Making of a Security Community in the Asia-Pacific* (Kuala Lumpur: Institute of Strategic and International Studies, 1994), pp.9-43.

⁹ Among them are Jessica Tuchman Mathews, "Redefining Security", in William Clinton Olson, ed., *The Theory and Practice of International Relations*, ninth edition (Englwood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1994), pp. 331-336; and Paul B. Stares, ed., *The New Security Agenda: A Global Survey* (Tokyo and New York: Japan Center for International Exchange, 1998).

¹⁰ UNDP, "Redefining Security: The Human Dimension", in *The UN Human Development Report 1994* (New York: United Nations, 1994).

multidimensional content: (1) economic security in terms of income and employment; (2) food security in terms of access to and distribution of food and avoidance of famines; (3) health security in terms of nutrition, medical care, control of diseases, and healthy environment; (4) environmental security in terms of adequate and safe water supply, clean air, safe waste disposal, etc.; (5) personal security in terms of physical safety against various forms of domestic and transnational crimes; (6) community security in terms of the removal of conflicts that come from religious, cultural, ethnic, tribal, ideological differences; and (7) political security in terms of human rights and human equality. Japan and Canada are leading exponents in the promotion of human security in the region. ASEAN civil society and track two actors have also increasingly stressed the framework of human security as a basis for regional and international cooperation,¹¹ especially in the case of actors that have constraints in their external relations such as Taiwan.¹²

There is also a growing recognition of the intimate connection between security and sustainable development. It is argued that both security and development are multidimensional and have to do with the promotion of the well being of the human person, whether as an individual or within collectivities that include the family, the community, the larger society, the nation state, regional groupings, and the international society.¹³ In addition, the rise of transnational crime, including those associated with the revolution in information and communication technologies has also highlighted the comprehensive character of security and the indivisibility of domestic, regional, and global security. All of these are indications of a broadened understanding of security in our time.

¹¹ ASEAN ISIS has been pushing the framework of human security in its various forums, including the ASEAN 2020 Forum that was launched in Singapore in July 1999, the ASEAN ISIS Colloquium on Human Rights that is on its 8th year of implementation, and its various bilateral activities with its counterparts in East Asia, especially Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan.

¹² Carolina G. Hernandez, "Human Security as a Framework for ASEAN-Taiwan Cooperation in the 21st Century", a paper presented at the *Symposium on Taiwan-ASEAN Relations: Promoting a Partnership for Peace and Prosperity*, Taipei, 17-18 November 2000. This concept was apparently adopted by the Foreign Minister of Taiwan, Hung-mao Tien, in his keynote address "Promoting Closer Taiwan-ASEAN Ties: Putting Shared Interests into Practice", at the Fourth ASEAN ISIS-IIR Dialogue, Taipei, 12 January 2001 whose theme was *ASEAN-Taiwan and Human Security Issues: Coping with Globalization*. The Minister said that human security "is a very useful framework to underscore the importance of cooperation on a much wider area than traditional diplomacy and national defense concerns. It is also very probably the future focus of relations between Taiwan and ASEAN...".

¹³ The collaborative project on Development and Security in Southeast Asia (DSSEA) between Canada and Southeast Asia that was funded by the Canadian International Development Assistance (CIDA) whose 3-volume report is forthcoming in 2001 by Ashgate documents and validates the linkages between these two concepts posited in the Project's conceptual framework through empirical research done in Southeast Asia by younger-generation scholars from Canada, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

Thus, in East Asia, a new security order is emerging informed by these developments in the theory and practice of security. The impact of globalization on individual, community, and national life has also contributed to the redefinition of the regional security order. This security order must be more than the military and defense dimensions, although the sustainability of the nation state in its relations with others continues to rely on its military and defense capability. In this regard, the discussion of the role of the U.S. in East Asia's security order in the 21st century will focus on this aspect, although other dimensions of the security order will be touched upon as relevant.

The U.S. role will be defined by a number of factors. The most critical are the U.S. security interests in East Asia and the national interests of East Asian countries, especially the region's major powers, and ASEAN as a grouping. In this regard, it can be argued that the security interests of the U.S. in East Asia are not likely to alter in fundamental ways as to lead to an American military withdrawal from the region in the foreseeable future. Its trade, investment, and business interests in East Asia are substantial and are not likely to change. Its defense umbrella is required to secure these interests by way of providing a stable and peaceful environment in which business could continue and could prosper. Its latest East Asian Strategy Report continues to stress the focus of this strategy, first articulated in 1995, "to reduce areas of uncertainty and to reinforce the region's progress toward economic prosperity and political cooperation".¹⁴

The strategic steps that the U.S. has taken in pursuit of these goals include: (1) confirming U.S. intentions to maintain a robust overseas military presence of approximately 100,000 in the region; (2) strengthening the U.S. alliance with Japan; (3) expanding security cooperation and military access in Southeast Asia; (4) working with South Korea and China to engage North Korea; (5) reaffirming the U.S. security alliance with Australia; (6) building the foundation for a long-term relationship with China based on comprehensive engagement; (7) initiating new mechanisms for transparency and confidence building in the region; and (8) focusing attention on the threat from weapons of mass destruction.

Given the above declaration of strategic intentions on the part of the U.S., there should be little doubt as to the kind of role it seeks to play at present and in the foreseeable future in East Asia's security. The other conditioning factors, however, have to do with the interests of the region's major powers and key actors – China, Japan, South Korea, Russia, and ASEAN. With regard to China, U.S. cooperation is sought in the realm of economics – in trade, investments, business, and support for China's admission into the WTO. Due to the attractiveness of the Chinese market and its demonstrated capacity to grow, the U.S. needs to maintain stable relations with Beijing. Thus, there is a mutuality of interests between Beijing

¹⁴ Department of Defense, *U.S. Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region*, updated 23 November 1998.

and Washington in enhanced economic cooperation that can be assured by stable political relations. Washington has avoided anchoring its economic relations with Beijing on human rights and democracy principles. Yet stable relations are likely to remain elusive for as long as China sees the U.S. as a hegemonic power bent on keeping China a military subordinate (on the issue of nonproliferation, for example) and one that is likely to frustrate Beijing's ambition of reunifying Taiwan with the mainland. China has consistently opposed the San Francisco system of bilateral military alliances between the U.S. and its allies in East Asia and the larger Asia Pacific. It has argued that since the cold war ended, there is no longer a need for these alliances. Beijing also opposes the new guidelines of the U.S.-Japan security alliance, particularly as its former geographic scope has been replaced by a situational criterion that could include the Taiwan Strait. China also opposes the deployment of TMD in East Asia as this is seen as targeting the Chinese mainland.

The only other key player in the region that would somewhat mirror the Chinese position is Russia. Hobbled by its inability to muster the challenges of a dual transition (economic restructuring and political democratization), Moscow has become somewhat sidelined in post-cold war regional security, despite its continuing status as a key nuclear-weapons state. In search for hard cash, it has forged a strategic partnership with China, one that realists cannot brush aside in the long term. China has benefited from this partnership in terms of weapons modernization, a phenomenon that has raised concerns across the Taiwan Strait and elsewhere. The key source of concern is less the acquisition of new weapons, but more the continuing inscrutability of Chinese foreign policy intentions over the long term. Russia, however, does not possess enough leverage over the U.S. security role at present, although it is key to the maintenance of a stable regional order in East Asia due to its military arsenal and as a party to outstanding territorial disputes with Japan. Domestic instability in Russia that could spill over into the region is also part of the East Asian security equation.

South Korea continues to value its alliance relationship with the U.S., despite opposition from the radical segments of its population. However, without U.S. presence that provides an assurance against North Korea, South Korea's physical and military vulnerability would only deepen. Moreover, being in a region that is faced with nuclear arms proliferation, one in which the remnants of the cold war remain a reality, and one where neighbors continue to be suspicious, if not hostile with one another, South Korea will continue to need a stabilizing force that the U.S. is able to provide. Regional reconciliation in Northeast Asia is still a work-in-progress that requires the support of both the U.S. and ASEAN. For these reasons, and for South Korea's diplomatic and economic strength, it is likely to continue supporting the U.S. military presence in the region, including on its soil.¹⁵

The U.S.-Japan security pact has underpinned regional security since the rise of

¹⁵ See Sung-joo Han, "The Korea's New Century", *Survival*, vol. 42, no. 4, Winter 2000-01, pp. 89-91.

communism in China. Without it, the U.S. security role would not be as effective as it has been, particularly with the closure of American bases in Thailand and in the Philippines. Thus, together with South Korea, Japan remains host to these bases. Like in South Korea, its military presence in Japan has not been without problems. And despite trade and investment problems that require “a third opening” of Japan, both continue to value their military alliance. Japan’s constitutional constraints and psychological inhibitions from becoming a “normal state” are not likely to quickly disappear, in spite of increasing willingness within and outside Japan for an increased political and security role for Japan. Yet, there have been strains in the alliance over time, including its asymmetry, those arising from specific security problems such as cross-strait relations, territorial disputes, and economic issues.¹⁶ To the extent that these strains do not outweigh the importance of their alliance, Japan can be expected to continue supporting the U.S.’s key role in regional security in the immediate future and playing the role of the U.S.’s junior partner.

Finally, ASEAN views about the security role of the U.S. are also important, bearing in mind the fact that ASEAN member states do not have sufficient military and defense capability to secure their interests in the event of actual threats to their physical security. ASEAN is also not a military alliance and although their armed forces have been conducting joint border and naval patrols and joint military exercises, these have been limited and exclusive to two or three parties, rather than inclusive. While ASEAN believes in the comprehensive and cooperative character of security, its member states have sought to upgrade their military capabilities, particularly before the Asian financial crisis. Military modernization has been stalled in all of the affected countries so far, although some have sought access to new weapons systems through improvements in their military relations with the U.S. The Philippines, for example, entered into a Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) with the U.S. in 1999, over public protests by anti-U.S. groups due to the pressing need to normalize military relations with Washington after the closure of the military bases in the Philippines in 1992. Chinese occupation of Mischief Reef in the disputed South China Sea territories also contributed to the conclusion of the VFA.

Lacking in a common foreign and security policy, one cannot argue that ASEAN as a group, supports continuing U.S. military presence in the region at present. Moreover, their diverse historical ties with key strategic actors in the region preclude the adoption of a common position on this issue. Certain to support U.S. military presence are the older members of

¹⁶ For insightful analyses of this relationship, see Masashi Nishihara, ed., *The Japan-U.S. Alliance: New Challenges for the 21st Century* (Tokyo and New York: Japan Center for International Exchange, 2000); Gerald L. Curtis, ed., *New Perspectives on U.S.-Japan Relations* (Tokyo and New York: Japan Center for International Exchange, 2000); and Yoichi Funabashi, “Japan’s Moment of Truth”, *Survival*, vol. 42, no. 1, Winter 2000-01, pp. 73-84.

ASEAN, despite public rhetoric to the contrary from some of them. They have forged various kinds of arrangements, whether on a commercial basis or as a consequence of their military alliance with the U.S., to enable U.S. air and naval vessels to refuel or be repaired and its troops to land for joint exercises or rest and recreation on their soil. The new members of ASEAN tend to resist the U.S. security role in the region for different reasons. The states of the former Indochina have been U.S. foes in the past. Burma/Myanmar has very strong links with China, links that Western sanctions and the Asian financial crisis that affected older ASEAN member states only strengthened. The U.S. human rights and democracy policy vis-à-vis the military junta in Yangon is another stumbling block towards improving bilateral relations.

Having stated these, it must also be noted that some progress in U.S.-Vietnam relations has occurred in recent years with the normalization of political relations, increased economic and functional cooperation, and cooperation with respect to the MIA (U.S. personnel missing in action in Vietnam) issue. Interaction within multilateral mechanisms, such as the ARF has also helped in this process of normalization. ASEAN support for the eventual inclusion of its new members into APEC, beginning with their membership in the APEC Working Groups can also help move this process forward. However, unless ASEAN is able to forge a common foreign and security policy, and this will not be easy or soon, a common ASEAN position on the U.S. security role will not be forthcoming. At best, ASEAN is able to provide a vehicle for further interaction and cooperation between its member states and the dialogue partners that include the U.S. At best, they are able to benefit from the stabilizing impact of continuing U.S. military presence in East Asia.

In addition, the U.S. support for and commitment to the strengthening of multilateral mechanisms to promote security in East Asia is critical, until a new regional order finally emerges. These mechanisms include ASEAN, the ARF, APEC, and the emerging ASEAN plus three (APT) process. In the end, these mechanisms are about the building of a peaceful and prosperous Asia Pacific region because they are its component building blocks. Not being included in the initial phases of the APT, the fact that the process is not likely to make East Asia into a bloc due to the majority's commitment to "open regionalism" should reassure the U.S. that APT is not against U.S. interests. By the principle of subsidiarity, ASEAN and its three partners in the APT are trying to address problems that existing institutions and mechanisms are not able to deal with effectively. One example is responding to a regional financial crisis like the 1997 crisis that East Asians feel they can better address in the APT rather than through the IMF/WB or even APEC. A more stable East Asia can only benefit the larger region. It can also reduce the challenges that key actors, such as the U.S. would have to face. It can be an example of burden sharing in the field of monetary and financial management. If successful and if East Asian cooperation should spill over into political and security cooperation, the defense burden on all states in the region could be eased.

Challenges to the U.S. Security Role

Apart from the lack of consensus among key regional actors on the U.S. security role in East Asia, there are challenges specific to U.S. relations with each of them that spill over into that role. A major challenge lies on whether U.S. interests and commitment to East Asia's security would continue into the future, as well as whether the strategic environment in East Asia would not alter in fundamental ways as to make a U.S. security role irrelevant. This would include the emergence of a security community (in the Deutschian sense) in East Asia, where each state feels assured that others would not use violence in the settlement of disagreements or disputes between and among them. Mutual reassurance and confidence building are key to this process. But given the present state of affairs in East Asia, particularly among China, Japan, and the two Koreas, such a goal is likely to take a very long time indeed.

In the meantime, China's continuing objection to U.S. hegemony, to the American security guarantee to Taipei under the Taiwan Relations Act, the U.S. military presence in the region as a hindrance to Chinese territorial goals in the South China Sea, and U.S. opposition to nuclear arms development by China are among the challenges towards this U.S. role from the side of Beijing. However, China's military modernization seeking to obtain military parity with, if not superiority over the U.S., will likely support a continuing American military role from the point of view of neighbors that consider such a scenario inimical to their security interests.

Another set of challenges comes from U.S. relations with Japan, as already noted. Managing the alliance is a great challenge in itself.¹⁷ The asymmetrical relationship will not go away together with the issue of whether a threat to Japan would be automatically interpreted by the U.S. as a threat to itself in the absence of U.S. military presence on Japanese soil. Yet, because both sides value the alliance, it is likely that they would continue to live within these parameters into the foreseeable future, unless the regional strategic environment drastically changes making the alliance no longer relevant. As noted above, this scenario is not probable in the short to the medium term.

The same may be said of South Korea and the older members of ASEAN. Their security concerns are likely to support the U.S. security role in a largely unaltered strategic environment. The judgment by a group of security analysts on the continuing value of military ties with the U.S. after the Cold War¹⁸ remains valid in the beginning of the new millennium

¹⁷ On the problems confronting the Japan-U.S. security alliance, see Yoichi Funabashi, *Alliance Adrift* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1999).

due to the persistence of uncertainty and flexibility in regional politics and the lack of a credible replacement security mechanism. The U.S. security role in an East Asian security order would then depend on the character of that order. Right now that security order takes much of the elements that would warrant a continuing U.S. military presence and the U.S. bilateral military alliances that underpinned the cold war and immediate post-cold war era.

A Realist Philippine Perspective

Being a small state, hobbled by the Asian financial crisis, and the devastating consequences of lack of good governance especially in the last 30 months under the Estrada Administration, the Philippines is in no position to become an independent actor in regional and global affairs. Hence, its bilateral and multilateral relations are of crucial importance to its viability. Its most important military security threat lies in Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea. Chinese occupation of Mischief Reef, within the Philippine claim, is seen as a dagger pointing to its strategic heart. Lacking in military capability to defend its claimed areas, it has relied on dialogue and the use of multilateral institutions, particularly ASEAN and the ARF to bring its concerns to the attention of the international community. It has also led to the conclusion of the VFA with the U.S. to resume its joint exercises with U.S. military forces and to avail of U.S. military assistance. It also led the Philippines to actively pursue the “stewardship principle” in the development of the resources in the South China Sea, seeking to have the closest claimant to a territory in the South China Sea oversee its development, the fruits of which will be shared by other claimants.¹⁹

Thus, the Philippines has seen fit to retain its military alliance with the U.S. under the Mutual Defense Agreement even as the basing relationship ended in 1992. Although there are doubts as to the reliability of the U.S. commitment to defend Philippine territory under attack by a foreign power, Manila believes that U.S. security interests in the region are broad enough to ensure the peace and stability of the critical sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) that include the South China Sea. Thus, U.S. military presence serves as deterrence to hostile acts leading to an impairment of the freedom of navigation in the SLOCs. Access to Philippine territory by U.S. vessels and troops is a critical component of effective protection of the SLOCs. Thus, the VFA can serve this purpose as it upgrades interoperability between

¹⁸ William Tow, Russell Trood, and Toshiya Hoshino, eds., *Bilateralism in a Multilateral Era: The Future of the San Francisco Alliance System in the Asia-Pacific* (Tokyo and Brisbane: Japan Institute of International Relations and Centre for the Study of Australia-Asia Relations, Griffith University, 1997).

¹⁹ The Ramos administration has effectively called attention to Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea during its watch, a stance that was not sustained under the short-lived Estrada administration. Ramos is the author of the “stewardship principle”.

Philippine and U.S. forces in the event of armed conflict involving both of them. The VFA also enables an upgrading of Philippine military readiness.

On the other hand, the Philippines also believes that dialogue and multilateralism are important vehicles for the promotion of regional security. Thus, its support for and commitment to regional dialogue mechanisms such as ASEAN and the ARF are strong. It recognizes the fact that only in solidarity with other small and medium-sized states can a country such as the Philippines acquire some influence and play a significant role in regional affairs. In the face of the loss of the informal leader of ASEAN when Indonesia buckled under the heavy burdens of the financial crisis and its aftermath, the Philippines with Thailand undertook some of the tasks of leadership as seen in the initiative for “flexible engagement”. This initiative recognizes that under present circumstances where the ICT revolution and globalization have rendered national borders almost meaningless, ASEAN must relax its understanding and practice of non-intervention in the domestic affairs of other countries, in certain clearly defined areas. These areas are transborder in nature, such as the spill over of refugees across borders, illegal migration, and some forms of transnational crimes. These activities can no longer be treated as domestic concerns because their effects are harmful to neighboring states.

Even as the initiative failed to reach a consensus, ASEAN later recognized the need to discuss domestic problems that cross borders. Hence, in the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting of July 2000, the grouping agreed to formally adopt the idea of an ASEAN troika, consisting initially of the past, present, and future chairs of the ASEAN Standing Committee. The troika is authorized to call the attention of the member state whose domestic problem has crossed its borders so that effective management of the problem can be achieved and its negative impact on the neighbors and the region redressed.

The Philippines has also actively supported the APT process. In fact, it has gone beyond the concept of the APT as a vehicle for monetary, financial, and economic cooperation and has espoused the concept of an East Asian Security Forum.²⁰ This forum is seen as taking on political and security issues that cannot be tackled by the ARF. In particular, it is seen as a vehicle for filling the gap in the ARF that is regarded as unable to deal with the security concerns of Northeast Asia such as cross-strait relations, the Korean problem, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Thus, the Philippine approach to regional security is a combination of military and non-military instruments. For this reason, military ties with the U.S. and the San Francisco system of alliances in East Asia and the broader Asia Pacific constitute an important foundation for Philippine security, as Manila seeks to promote peace and security through regional dialogue mechanisms where the U.S. may or may not be a participant. Belief in building blocks for

²⁰ Baja, Jr., “The East Asian Security Forum”.

peace and security and the principle of subsidiarity leads it to establish and participate in various forms of regional security mechanisms. This is the most realistic approach and sound basis of security policy for a country such as the Philippines, unless a security community emerges in East Asia in the long run.

The U.S. as a Continuing Force for Regional Stability

The above discussion shows that for most countries in the region, the U.S. is seen as a force for regional stability, in spite of strains in their relations with the only hegemonic power in the world. The U.S. is also seen as a known quantity, a “devil that we know” and on the whole we can handle in a more or less satisfactory fashion. No other actor in East Asia enjoys the power, influence, and track record of the U.S. as a force for regional stability. China is handicapped by an imperial past that threatens and promises to be its future, given the continuing uncertainty and inscrutability of long term Chinese foreign policy intentions. Japan is similarly tainted by its history of colonialism and repression that came to an end only in 1945. While it has a remarkable postwar track record of good regional and global citizenship, its foreign and security policy continues to be circumscribed both by constitutional constraints and psychological incapacity.

On the other hand, Russia’s predecessor state did not enjoy regional confidence and support during the cold war when it was a superpower. What makes it a credible contender for providing regional security at present or in the foreseeable future, given its present state of economic and political uncertainty? And the Koreas still need to successfully address their problems, reunification being only one of them. ASEAN, though a credible regional actor in the past, will take a while to sort out its adjustment problems that stem from dual enlargement and the domestic political evolution of its key member states. It also needs to adjust its “ASEAN way” of decision making that is no longer in tune with the challenges of the 21st century.

For the above reasons, the role of the U.S. in the emerging East Asian security order, still defined by uncertainty and fluidity and lack of mutual confidence and trust among the key players, is likely to remain as it has been in the past 50 years – as a force for regional stability – but whose relations with each of the key players in East Asia need to be managed more effectively as we enter the 21st century.