

Introduction

East Asia in 1999

1. East Asia 10 Years after the End of the Cold War

The year 1999 marked the 10th year from the end of the Cold War. Those who witnessed on television in November 1989 the scenes of people tearing down the Berlin Wall had a premonition that a new era peaceful and free from the balance of terror was just around the corner. In reality, however, a rash of ethnic conflicts, such as the ones that erupted in the former Yugoslavia, have occurred in many parts of the world, and the international community is still adrift groping for a new order for peace and stability.

In East Asia, an issue of East Timor surfaced suddenly in 1999 amid political turmoil touched off in Indonesia by the currency crisis. While Indonesia annexed East Timor in 1976, the international community virtually acquiesced in it in a Cold War power game. Nevertheless, movement for the independence of East Timor had continued to simmer. The popular consultation in August 1999 confirmed the wish of inhabitants of East Timor to become independent from Indonesia, but chaos developed on the heels of the vote. Meanwhile, tensions on the Korean Peninsula, a legacy of the Cold War, have been posing a threat to peace and stability of the region. The tensions continued through 1999 as North Korea was poised for another missile launch that follows one in August 1998.

Since the fall of 1999, however, the situation in East Timor stabilized with the deployment of the International Force for East Timor. On the Korean Peninsula, also, signs favoring dialogue emerged in North Korea as Japan, the United States and South Korea closed their ranks.

Although confusion arose in, and tensions continued between, certain countries of the region, 1999 was a year in which concerted efforts achieved certain positive results toward solving these problems. Whether these efforts will create and sustain a problem-solving mechanism is a challenge confronting East Asia in the early years of the 21st century.

Worrisome at this juncture was the fact that cooperative rela-

tions among the major powers, a pivotal factor for the stability of the post-Cold War international order, worsened, and signs of discord began between the United States and China, and between the United States and Russia. China and Russia took umbrage at the bombing of Yugoslavia by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and found shared interests in acting in concert with each other in opposing the United States. This is not to say that the major powers have already bogged down in an irreversible zero-sum game. These three countries need one another's cooperation for security and economic reasons. Cooperation among the three major powers is essential for the stability of the world and East Asia.

2. Discord among the Major Powers

The year 1999 saw discord to develop in the relations among the major powers that hold profound influence on the stability of East Asia. Differences between the United States and China came to the fore when NATO initiated military intervention in Yugoslavia.

The NATO's air campaign against the Yugoslavia in March through June 1999 on humanitarian grounds aroused the strong opposition of China. China had long opposed the use of force without endorsement by the United Nations against, or any interference in the internal affairs of, other countries, and defiance of its position by NATO aroused its resentment. For a China that had to deal with separatist movements of ethnic minorities within its borders and the question of Taiwan, NATO's bombing against Yugoslavia was not something it could look on with indifference.

The overwhelming military might of the United States demonstrated in Yugoslavia fanned the embers of resentment of China, a self-styled major power aspiring to create a multipolar world order. Its resentment was inflamed all the more intensely by the accidental bombing of its embassy in Belgrade by a U.S. aircraft. And the chain of these events jolted China into realizing the urgency of its

need to strengthen its military power with science and technology.

China's fear was shared by Russia, which views NATO's eastward expansion as a serious challenge to its security, as was the case with China, has to deal with separatist movements of ethnic minorities in its back yard. Russia had become increasingly aware of the danger of foreign intervention in its domestic disputes. What Serbia experienced during the Kosovo conflict made Russia painfully aware of the necessity for overhauling its conventional forces. Besides, Russia was inclined to rely on tactical nuclear weapons to make up for the inferiority of its conventional forces.

In such circumstances, cooperation between China and Russia with an eye on the United States increasingly became a reality. One piece of the diplomatic fallout of such cooperation was opposition to the development of ballistic missile defense proposed by the United States. China and Russia joined forces in the effort, with success, to pass through the U.N. General Assembly a resolution urging parties of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty to observe their treaty obligations. With the aim of opposing the hegemony of the United States, China bent its efforts to create a framework of bilateral cooperation with Southeast Asian countries and sought to form a partnership with France.

Needless to say, confrontation between the United States and China, and between the United States and Russia, or between the United States, on the one hand, and China and Russia, on the other is anything but a foregone conclusion. China and Russia realize that militarily, they are no match for the United States. In the area of economy, also, their development could suffer seriously unless they maintain good relations with the United States. Therefore, the effectiveness of an allied rivalry of China and Russia against the United States has its limits.

Beneath diplomatic friction between the United States and Russia, they cooperated in the area of security. It was demonstrated by the joint efforts the two countries had made to avert accidental launching of ballistic missiles that might otherwise have hap-

pened on account of the year 2000 problem. Despite fundamental differences that existed between the United States and China on the Taiwan question and human rights, relations between the two countries improved since November 1999: They came to terms on the question of admitting China into the World Trade Organization and agreed to resume military exchanges, which had been suspended since the accidental bombing of the Chinese Embassy. Although the U.S. Senate refused in October to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, a bedrock essential to building a post-Cold War nuclear order, and neither China nor Russia ratified it as of the end of 1999, the three nuclear weapon states continued to abide by the treaty.

In 2000, presidential elections will be held in the United States, Russia and Taiwan, and this raises the possibility of respective domestic politics of the United States, Russia and China restraining cooperation in matters relating to foreign policy and national security. However, it is imperative for the stability of the world and East Asia that they transcend these constraints and sustain the momentum of cooperation.

3. The Necessity for Regional Cooperation

In 1999, despite the turmoil in East Timor and the continuing tension on the Korean Peninsula, countries inside and outside the region made joint efforts to solve these problems. It was also a year in which the indispensability of the U.S. military presence in East Asia to these efforts was reconfirmed.

The turmoil in Indonesia triggered by the currency crisis of 1997 had degenerated into civil disorder in East Timor over its independence that resulted in the random killing of inhabitants, arson and looting. In response, countries in and outside the region formed an International Force for East Timor (INTERFET), which succeeded in restoring order and security, and paving the way for establishing an independent state in East Timor.

INTERFET was brought into existence at the initiative of Australia, a non-member state of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), pursuant to a resolution of the U.N. Security Council. However, principal ASEAN member states — Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore — played an important role in that endeavor. This served to suggest the possibility of changing ASEAN's principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other member states that had prevented it from discussing concrete issues relating to the security of the region. A great deal rides on the dialogue between ASEAN and major non-ASEAN countries or on that taking place in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) for solving territorial disputes over the islands in the South China Sea and for eradicating piracy that threatens the safety of maritime traffic in Asia. It is to be hoped that the experience the international community had in East Timor will help translate the idea of "preventive diplomacy" floated in the ARF into reality.

Meanwhile, the situation surrounding North Korea remained tense owing to a number of factors: the lingering possibility of another missile launch by North Korea, rekindled suspicions over nuclear weapons development in the country and exchange of gun fire in June 1999 between naval vessels of North and South Korea. In March, two suspicious vessels believed to be those of North Korea infiltrated the territorial waters of Japan. Meanwhile, in May, North Korea allowed experts of the U.S. government to visit suspected underground facilities and in September it announced that it would not launch a missile while talks with the United States were in progress. Helped by such developments, Japan and North Korea agreed in December to work for an early resumption of normalization talks. And the situation surrounding North Korea thus began to improve.

Nudging North Korea into changing its attitude was closer cooperation and policy coordination among the United States, South Korea and Japan. The three countries made untiring efforts to dissuade North Korea from developing nuclear weapons through the

medium of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO). In parallel with a review of the U.S. policy toward North Korea by former Defense Secretary William Perry, representatives of the three countries met regularly in 1999 to coordinate their respective policies. The firm stand the three countries took against the development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles by North Korea, and their concerted efforts to solve various problems — and improve relations — with North Korea narrowed the chink in the policy armor of the three countries, which North Korea could strategically take advantage of.

Moreover, the policy of the three countries toward North Korea was basically supported by ASEAN countries, China and Russia. For instance, the sixth ARF of July 1999, in which these countries had participated, expressed in its Chairman's Statement concern about "the August 1998 payload launch" and, in effect, appealed to North Korea the importance of having dialogue with the United States and South Korea. These developments, which led to the temporary suspension of the missile launch by North Korea, testified to the vital importance of such multilateral cooperation for the stability of East Asia.

The developments in 1999 served to reaffirm the importance of the U.S. military presence in the region. In East Timor, the U.S. armed forces did not directly involve themselves in the operation of INTERFET and only played a logistical role — transportation of personnel and supplies, and provision of the communication service. These activities of the U.S. forces, coupled with their forward deployment in East Asia, alliance or cooperation with Australia and Singapore, and bilateral or multilateral military training exercises with the countries of the region, contributed greatly to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of INTERFET. In dealing with North Korea jointly with Japan and South Korea, the deterrence supported by Japan-U.S. and U.S.-South Korea alliances, and by the U.S. military presence in the region was essential. In

this sense, profoundly significant was the passage of a legislative package to ensure the effectiveness of the Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation.

Indeed, the bilateral alliance or cooperative relationships between Japan and the United States, between the United States and South Korea, and between the United States and Australia are essential to maintaining the stability of East Asia, and the region needs to create a multilateral cooperative mechanism. The peace and stability of this region in coming years depends on whether these countries will share the recognition of such necessity.