

Overview

East Asia in 2003

1. Terrorism and Weapons of Mass Destruction, and the Response of East Asia

The disarray among major countries engendered by the use of force against Iraq has thrown into sharp relief various problems centering on the war on terrorism and weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The regime of Saddam Hussein had never wholly complied with the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) demanding that it dismantle its WMD. The UNSC remained divided on the question of what to do about Hussein's intransigence. The United States, the United Kingdom, and Spain broke off diplomatic negotiations at the UNSC over the opposition of France, Germany, and Russia to the use of force against Iraq, and coalition forces of the United States and the United Kingdom went ahead and launched military operations in the early morning of March 20, 2003 (local time).

Reaction to the use of force against Iraq varied from one country to another. Russia was bitterly critical, saying that it was a serious political mistake that ran counter to world opinion and the Charter of the United Nations. However, it soon toned down its criticism in the interest of maintaining cooperative relations with the United States, to which it attached importance. At a U.S.-Russia bilateral summit held in June the same year, the leaders of the two countries affirmed that the strategic partnership between them remained unchanged. As Russia did before it, China called for a political solution to the Iraqi question within the framework of the United Nations and opposed the use of force. On the question of Iraq's reconstruction, it took the position that it should be carried out under the leadership of the United Nations, and has not lent any specific cooperation.

South Korea has deployed a contingent of about 470 military personnel to Iraq as of December 2003. They are assisting in infrastructure-building and providing medical services. Subsequently, South Korea decided to send an additional 3,000 troops, despite strong public opposition. Some in South Korea pointed out that this would be the largest overseas deployment of South Korean troops since the Vietnam War. It is believed that a factor prodding South Korea to take such an active posture is its concern over Washington's plans for U.S. Forces Korea.

Among Southeast Asian countries, Indonesia and Malaysia, where Muslims account for the great majority of the population, advocated a UN-led solution to the Iraq issue and criticized the use of force by the United States and the United

Kingdom. However, Singapore, which enjoys a close relationship with the United States, expressed support for the U.S. position and decided to dispatch transport aircraft and navy vessels for the purpose of aiding reconstruction efforts. Thailand did not officially express support for the use of force against Iraq. After major combat was over, however, it sent some 450 troops to Iraq to provide medical services and to rebuild war-damaged public buildings.

Japan's Minister of State for Defense Shigeru Ishiba and U.S. Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld at a press interview held in Tokyo on Nov. 15, 2003

As a responsible member of the international community, and as an ally of the United States, Japan supported the use of force against Iraq. Pursuant to the Law Concerning Special Measures on Humanitarian and Reconstruction Assistance in Iraq that passed the Diet in July 2003, the Japanese government in December the same year adopted a basic plan regarding response measures and an implementation plan based on the law. These measures provided a legal basis for dispatching contingents of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to Iraq. The main activities envisaged for the SDF contingent are: medical services, water supply, and the rehabilitation and maintenance of public facilities such as schools by a Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) contingent of a maximum of 600 men in southeastern Iraq; and transportation of materials related to humanitarian and reconstruction assistance by a maximum of eight aircraft of the Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) to destinations in Iraq. The Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) is to transport and supply materials, primarily to the GSDF contingent, using a maximum of four vessels.

There was no uniformity in response among different countries to the use of force against Iraq. This may be explained by the fact that some of them characterize the way the United States implemented its security policy as "unilateralist." Therefore, for all its efforts to win international backing, including the adoption of a UNSC resolution, the support for U.S. use of force against Iraq by the international community was relatively weaker than it had been for the U.S. attack on the Taliban in Afghanistan.

However, cooperation among the countries over the war on terrorism has

progressed. Southeast Asian countries were among those that stepped up their cooperation with the United States in this war. The United States extended “major non-NATO ally” status to the Philippines and Thailand, and aims to work out a framework agreement for promotion of strategic cooperation partnership with Singapore. The United States has also characterized Southeast Asia as “the second front” in the war on terrorism, and has been extending various types of counterterrorism assistance. It plans to conduct Balikatan 2004, a combined exercise with the Armed Forces of the Philippines, early in 2004 on Palawan Island in the southern Philippines. This is reportedly aimed at mopping up the Abu Sayyaf, a terrorist organization. In August 2003, the man thought to be in charge of operations of the terrorist group *Jemaah Islamiah*, which is suspected of having ties with al Qaeda, was arrested in Thailand. Hambali’s arrest demonstrated that intelligence cooperation between investigation agencies of the United States and their Southeast Asian counterparts was paying off. Malaysia, which had consistently opposed the use of force by the United States, including its actions against the Taliban in Afghanistan, decided to cooperate with the United States by agreeing to establish a Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-terrorism based on a proposal made by the United States at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) conference held in October 2002.

In debates over the use of force against Iraq, many pointed to potential threats posed by WMD being transferred to terrorists. In East Asia as well, tasks to be tackled to prevent WMD proliferation were also discussed. In particular, to prevent the proliferation of WMD and WMD-related materials, it has become necessary for the international community to take concerted measures to restrict their export. To help Asian countries tighten their export controls in this area, Japan has been sponsoring the Asian Export Control Seminar, and held the first Asian Export Control Policy Dialogue in October 2003, followed in November by Asian Senior-level Talks on Non-Proliferation (ASTOP) that focused attention on the nonproliferation of WMD.

Meanwhile, among measures recently launched was the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). It was proposed by the United States and drew much attention. This is a scheme designed to “search planes and ships carrying suspect cargo and to seize illegal weapons or missile technologies” in cooperation with participating countries. Since June 2003, PSI participants had held four meetings by the end of December. At the third meeting held in Paris

in September, eleven participants agreed to a Statement of Interdiction Principles. In addition, maritime interdiction training exercises were held off Australia and in the Mediterranean.

PSI-participating countries have begun to take concrete steps to implement the PSI, which calls on them to extend cooperation within the framework of international law, and to the extent that their domestic laws allow. Cooperation called for under the Statement of Interdiction Principles includes boarding and searching vessels suspected of carrying WMD-related cargoes, and seizure of such cargoes on the high seas, although some argue that the grounds for such action under international law should be clarified.

On the question of security cooperation on the ocean, there is a concept called “ocean-peace keeping” (OPK). At a conference held under the auspices of the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS), Minister of State for Defense Shigeru Ishiba of Japan in his private capacity touched on OPK as a possible area of international cooperation.

2. The Nuclear Issue of North Korea

North Korea’s declaration of withdrawal from the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in January 2003 reignited the nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula, posing a WMD threat to Japan.

A solution is being sought through multilateral, six-party talks, which is different from what happened during the crisis of 1993–94, when a solution was sought through bilateral talks between the United States and North Korea. Following three-party talks between the United States, North Korea, and China held in Beijing in April 2003, Japan, the United States, China, South Korea, North Korea, and Russia held the first round of six-party talks in Beijing in August the same year.

Acting as intermediary, China arranged the talks and served as chairman. At the time of the 1993–94 crisis, China did not cooperate with the United States in its North Korea policy and opposed a UNSC resolution to impose economic sanctions on North Korea. This time around, however, China lost no time in announcing its support for a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula when North Korea’s nuclear development program came to light, took a tough line toward North Korea, and has reportedly put pressure on North Korea to attend the three-party talks.

The United States declared that it had no intention to invade or attack North

Korea, and that the nuclear issue should be solved peacefully through diplomatic means. It announced that it merely called on North Korea to change its nuclear policy, and was not seeking a regime change. It is believed that the United States hopes to solve Iran's nuclear issue through the initiative of Europe and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and North Korea's nuclear issue through multilateral talks involving North Korea's four neighbors North Korea. However, at the negotiating table, the United States consistently pursued dismantlement of North Korea's nuclear capability and showed no sign of willingness to compromise.

The government of President Roh Moo-hyun of South Korea set forth a "policy for peace and prosperity" toward North Korea. Having pressed ahead with projects for inter-Korean cooperation, South Korea is not necessarily insisting on playing a leading role and is seeking to solve the issue through multilateral talks. And in the framework of the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG), consisting of Japan, the United States, and South Korea, it has actively contributed to economic cooperation and people-to-people exchanges. In this way, South Korea is sharing roles with the United States.

What makes North Korea's WMD development an outright threat to Japan is the existence in its inventory of ballistic missiles as a means of delivery. This has made it necessary for Japan to equip itself with an appropriate defense capability, to make further efforts to stabilize the strategic environment surrounding Japan, and to maintain and strengthen Japan-U.S. security arrangements.

With this in mind, Japan is planning to develop missile defense. The Japanese government included in its budget proposal for fiscal 2004 appropriations for remodeling an Aegis destroyer, for acquiring Standard Missile 3 (SM-3), for remodeling Patriot missile systems now in deployment, for procuring surface-to-air guided missile Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3) missiles, and for retrofitting antiballistic missile capability to the BADGE (Base Air Defense Ground Environment) system. The joint Japan-U.S. technological research project now being carried out will be pushed further to develop still higher capabilities.

With threats of WMD and terrorism growing, the international community has been searching for various solutions, and Japan is expected to contribute actively to the efforts of the international community.

