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Northeast Asia Security

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Northeast Asia Security*

Major General Pan Zhenqiang (retired)

Geographically, Northeast Asia is an integral part of East Asia. It is generally believed to include China, Mongolia, the Far-Eastern part of Russia, Japan, and the two Koreas. Owing to its extremely important strategic location, Northeast Asia is the center of gravity of East Asia. The security of the region is closely linked up with that of the whole East Asia. However, Northeast Asia is also a geo-political and geo-economic concept in the international relations. The region sees a convergence of vital interests of major powers in and out of the region, particularly the United States. As a result, the intimate interactions among these major players have been playing a unique role in the regional security equation. More importantly, peace and stability of Northeast Asia have far-reaching influence not only on the core interests of these powers, but also on peace, stability and prosperity of East Asia as well as the whole world.

In modern history, Northeast Asia has been affected by almost incessant great turmoil,

conflicts and sufferings. The region has been the major battleground of fierce power struggles and successive military conflicts until the end of the Korean War. Although it ended with an armistice among the warring sides, the Korean Peninsula has been divided along the 38th Parallel Line and the rigid military confrontation between the North and South has been going on ever since.

Favorable security situation in Northeast Asia since the end of the Cold War

The end of the Cold War has, however, brought dramatic changes in the security structure of the world. Northeast Asia has seen no exception. In fact, the region seems at a crossroads in the post Cold War era. The situation looks just like what one old Chinese saying describes: the prospect is bright but the way ahead is bumpy and zigzag.

First of all, the dramatic changes in the world situation have provided unprecedented oppor-

* This paper is the essence of a research study, led by the author and available in Chinese language as monography, published by Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

tunities for Northeast Asia to push for peace, stability and development. The situation has been particularly so since the 9/11 terrorist attack. While many parts of the world have been embroiled in new turbulence and instability, Northeast Asia seems to remain a bright spot, where peace and stability generally prevail and regional cooperation accelerated. "Peace and development have become the mainstream trend in Asia".¹

The favorable security situation in Northeast Asia is in fact a reflection of the general relaxation of the world situation. The end of the Cold War has opened up a new phase for promoting peace and development in the international community. The military competition between the two superpowers has gone; and the possibility of a war on a large scale particularly among major powers becomes increasingly remote. This has provided a new and more conducive international environment for nations to enhance strategic interactions and strengthen political dialogue and cooperation.

This more relaxed world situation has in principle enlarged rather than reduced the space for various nations in Northeast Asia to carry out political cooperation. Major powers have found greater common ground in their strategic interests, leading to a shared request for maintaining and strengthening cooperation. One of the indications to that end is the establishment of various bilateral dialogue

mechanisms among these states. Against the backdrop, Sino-American relations are said to be in the best time since the end of the Cold War. China and Russia have developed into a strategic partnership on a solid basis. Economic interdependence has been growing between China and Japan despite the increasing political frictions in their bilateral relations. In the Korean Peninsula, the North and South have seemed to head towards national reconciliation. In short, there seems a strong trend of mutual interdependence and mutual constraint among these players, in which situation no single power or power group appears to be able to seek hegemony without caring other countries' interests. It is in this sense that it can be argued that Northeast Asia is indeed a region where one perceives the most evident development of a benign trend of multipolarization.

Influenced by increasing dialogues and cooperation among nations, Northeast Asia has also seen the relaxation of the situation in the most glaring hot spot in the region-the Korean Peninsula. The nuclear crisis of the DPRK in the past three years has indeed clouded the Peninsula, threatening peace and stability in Northeast Asia. And the crisis is still pending. On the other hand, this crisis has been under control, defying dark predictions of an inevitable military conflict by many pundits. With the active mediation of China, the major native countries together with the United States have been engaged in the six-party talks aimed

1 Hu Jintao, "The Development of China and Opportunities of Asia", Speech at the opening session of Annual Conference of Boao Forum, April 24, 2004, <http://www.china.com.cn/Chinese/zhuanti/hp/551897.html>.

at peaceful solution of the issue. So far three rounds of plenary meetings and two rounds of working group meetings have been held. Although the fourth round has now been deadlocked owing to the differences on the condition of continuing this exercise, there has been important consensus among all the participants that the six-party talks is perhaps the only valuable venue for a solution acceptable to all these involved parties. All agreed about the value, objectives and guidelines of the talks. Mr. Wang Yi, then Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister and Head of China's Delegation to the Six-Party Talks has made a succinct summary of the consensus reached. They are:

- 1). To resolve the nuclear issue through peaceful means and dialogue. It is stressed the stability and peace should be maintained to achieve lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula;
- 2). While a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula should be realized, the security concerns of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea should also be taken into consideration;
- 3). To explore an overall plan to resolve the nuclear issue in a just and reasonable manner and in a simultaneous and incremental way;
- 4). In the process of negotiations any action or word that may aggravate the situation should be avoided;
- 5). Dialogue should continue to establish trust, reduce differences and broaden common ground;
- 6). The six-party talks should continue and the specific date and venue should be decided

through diplomatic channels as soon as possible.²

No doubt, the nuclear issue of the DPRK can be solved peacefully as long as the above said consensus is maintained. What is especially worth noticing is that for the first time, the Northeast Asian nations are trying to resolve a vital security issue in the region through a peaceful, multilateral and cooperative approach in the form of the six-party talks. To these nations, this is a most significant exploration, the success of which will not only be vastly conducive to the regional security cooperation, but will also be able to offer valuable experience to the other parts of the world for the solution of international disputes.

Politics and economy are always mutually reinforcing. The positive evolution of the strategic and political situation has also paved the way for the region to focus on the economic development, ensuring a sustained high growth rate in most of the Northeast Asian countries in more than the past two decades. In turn, the economic dynamics, which had greatly promoted the interests to enlarge cooperation among states, has become a critical element for the peace and stability in the region.

In this regard, the rapid development of China is most conspicuous. "China has witnessed an annual 9.4% growth rate in GDP for the past 25 years since it started opening up and

2 Vice Foreign Minister and Head of Chinese delegation to the Six-Party talks, Press Conference, Beijing, August 29, 2003, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/ziliao/wzzt/chwtlft/t2550.htm>.

reform. The whole country has generally realized moderate prosperity. In 2003, despite various natural calamities like SARS and difficulties encountered, China still managed through its hard struggle to insure a 9.1% growth rate in GDP, reaching about 1.4 trillion US dollars in total. The per capita GDP value exceeded US \$1,000. The fact proves that China has embarked on a road of peaceful development".³

Thanks to the strong push by the development of China, the whole East Asia including Northeast Asia has become once again the most dynamic region of the world since the financial crisis in 1997, witnessing the fastest economic growth rate as well as global trade in 2004. The region has now shown stronger capability of resisting risks by shedding the shadow of the financial crisis, overcoming the aftermath of endemics like SARS and birds flu, accelerating economic restructuring and strengthening regional cooperation. According to the Asian Development Bank, the economic growth rate of East Asia (not including Japan) will amount to 6.8% in 2004 compared to 6.2% in 2003. The same pace will be hopefully maintained in 2005.⁴

The economic development in Northeast Asia has also become a driving force for the nations in the region to strengthen regional cooperation so as to be more competitive vis-à-vis the other parts of the world. The option is

a logic result of efforts by these nations to cope with the negative impact of globalization on them too. Starting from 1997, cooperation at various levels has increasingly gained momentum in the region. 10 plus 3 dialogues on an annual basis have been institutionalized, developing into a whole series of these interactions, including one 10 plus 3, three 10 plus one and a trilateral dialogue among China, Japan and South Korea. Northeast Asia is also part of the numerous sub-regional economic cooperations in East Asia which has been now developing with full swing, attracting a lion's share of world investments. All these have not only helped deepen the economic interdependence and political mutual trust, and strengthen the ability of various nations to meet the challenges of globalization, they have also provided new dynamics to the regional development and benign interaction among major powers in the Asia-Pacific. Obviously, nations in Northeast Asia have become the main locomotive for the healthy development in East Asia as well as the greatest beneficiary of it.

One primary challenge in Northeast Asia is the uncertain development of major power's relations.

The inspiring development of the situation in Northeast Asia does not suggest, of course, that this region is free of any security problems. As China sees it, the world is indeed faced with many grim challenges. "The old interna-

3 Zheng Qinghong, Speech at the opening session of the 60th UN Economic and Social Council, April 26, 2004. <http://www.china.com.cn/chinese/zhuanti/hp/552763.htm>.

4 "Locomotive of the Whole Far East", "Echo Journal", France, recited from China's New Reference, Beijing, April 29, 2004, p. 8.

tional political and economic order, which is unfair and irrational, has yet to be changed fundamentally. Uncertainties affecting peace and development are on the rise. The elements of traditional and non-traditional threats to security are intertwined, and the scourge of terrorism is more acutely felt. Hegemonism and power politics have new manifestations. Local conflicts triggered by ethnic or religious contradictions and border or territorial disputes have cropped up from time to time. The North-South gap is widening. The world is far from being tranquil and mankind is faced with many grave challenges⁵. One finds expression of all these negative factors in the security situation in Northeast Asia.

For quite long time to come in the future, three major challenges will especially loom large, and will affect security in Northeast Asia in a fundamental and overall way:

Challenge in the first area is about the future evolution of major power's relations in the region. The fundamental question involved will eventually develop into a sustained cooperative partnerships based on equality, mutual trust and benefit, and mutual respect. The outcome, for better or worse, will have great impact on the regional security structure as well the nature of their bilateral relationships in the future. The answer so far is far from certain. As said above, despite these nations being in a more or less normal and working relations today, cooperation among them seems all to be based on an ad hoc or expe-

diency basis, vulnerable to the changes of time. Deep-rooted suspicion and mistrust still remain almost in each set of the bilateral relationships among these powers, which becomes the major obstacle to the in-depth development of major power's relations. In China's perspective, the situation needs to be improved by first of all requiring all these nations to make common efforts to build a new type of state-to state relations. China hopes that the establishment of a constructive over-all strategic collaborative partnership between China and Russia may provide some inspirations in the exploration of this new type of state-to-state relationship. This relationship is based on common interests and mutual benefit, and strictly not against any third parties.

In this regard, the policy orientation of the United States, the only remaining superpower of the world, becomes the key to the major power relations in the future. But the issue has become precisely the greatest concern of all the other nations. When George W. Bush took power in 2001, the administration's policy, characterized by neo-conservatism and unilateral approach, seems to be clearly inclined to shifting its attention more to the Asia-Pacific, Northeast Asia in particular. The main focus seems to take China as a main target of containment. The Bush administration also planned to strengthen the military deployment in order to consolidate its hegemony in East Asia. The 9/11 event, however, took the administration by surprise and dra-

5 Jiang Zemin, Report at the 16th Party Congress, Beijing, November 17, 2002, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn>.

matically changed its threat perception and seemed to throw havoc to its global strategic deployment. The world seemed subject to another round of drastic changes in the post Cold-War era: the invasion of Iraq has resulted in Washington being bogged down in the Middle East in the foreseeable future with little energy or time to focus on the security issues in Northeast Asia; while the rapid economic development of East Asia has been more intimately involving the US participation. The economic health of East Asia has been closely connected with the economic health of the United States. Implications of all these developments seem to have forced the Bush administration to stabilize East Asia, and seek active cooperation with East Asian countries, including China for the effective combat against the international terrorism, halting the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and increasing economic and trade interactions. It seems that Washington had to exercise restraint in its original strategic objective towards East Asia.

Whether the changed security environment leads to a fundamental change in its Northeast Asia policy of the Bush administration or was just no more than an act out of expediency is still anybody's guess. Nobody is sure if the restraint of the policy will persist in Bush's second term so far. What is more assured though, is that the US basic goal towards Northeast Asia will continue to be reflected in its grand strategic calculation, namely, the control of the Euro-Asian land and prevention of the emergence of any adversary which can challenge its supremacy over the region. To that end, the US will focus on two inherently

self-conflicting major tasks in Northeast Asia. One is to effectively manage to contain all these major powers like China, Japan, and Russia which could possibly pose such a challenge. Equally important is the second task of maintaining peace, stability and prosperity in the region by seeking greater political and economic cooperation with other major powers so as to insure and expand the US economic interests in the process.

In the American point of view, one of the toughest question for the Bush administration in its dealing with all these major powers is perhaps the one as how to deal with a rising China. To a certain extent, it can even be argued that the centerpiece of the US strategy in Northeast Asia is perhaps no more than the formulation of a consistent and effective China policy, which Washington seems never having achieved. For ever since Nixon's visit to China in 1972, starting the thaw of China-US relations, the US China policy has always been characterized by a great measure of ambiguity.

In the first place, the US China policy has certainly always demonstrated some continuity. All the US administrations since Nixon have paid great importance to this bilateral relationship, stressed that Washington has both common strategic interests and fundamental differences with China. Against the background, none of the US policy makers have concealed the fact that the US China policy has always carried two conflicting aspects: while it wishes to see an independent, stable, and cooperative China, it has also cherished great fear that an independent and strong China will eventually undermine the US

security interests. Thus all the US administrations have also made great efforts to create obstacles in China's progress, change China's course of development, and contain its expanding influence abroad. This dual nature of the US China policy of engagement plus containment has continued till today and seems even to have formed a certain pattern of behavior since the end of the Cold War. Each administration, for example, would be strongly ideological against China and vowed to pursue a more containment-oriented China policy at its initial period of the presidency. With the time passing, necessity becomes the mother of change. Facilitated by the evolution of situation, each of these administrations would invariably readjust its policy, seeking cooperation with China at all levels. The senior George Bush, Bill Clinton and the young George Bush have all demonstrated such a pattern of behavior.

But then, even on this dual-fold nature of the US China policy, there has never be a consensus in the circle of the policy-makers in Washington. One can always hear different voices over China policy in innumerable debates in Washington. Moreover, the partisan power struggle and mutual constraints among different established interest groups have always victimized the US China policy. Often, one powerful group attacked the administration's China policy not so much aiming at hurting China as hurting its domestic opponents. On many occasions, some specific US moves in dealing with China-US relations are worked out not really even in its own interests, thus pushing the China-US relations to an even more strange and difficult situation.

In the circumstance, one has good reasons to believe that the China policy in Bush's second term can continue to be mixed. It will hopefully continue to head towards greater cooperation and collaboration between the two countries. On the other hand, the Bush administration will not give up its efforts to contain and guard against China. The latter efforts will be further strengthened with China's continued development and rising influence in the Asia-Pacific. Predictable US moves will include a more beefed up military deployment in the Asia-Pacific, specifically aimed at China in the name of the accelerated military transformation and readjustment of its military presence abroad; a more consolidated military alliances with Japan and South Korea, which will be used to focus more on the so-called China's threat; and an expanded arms dumping to Taiwan, that will surely give rise to the indignant reactions from Beijing. The Taiwan issue will continue to be a time bomb in the China-US relations. The latter issue will be detailed later. In short China-US relations will not be a smooth sailing.

In addition to US China policy, the US non-proliferation policy could also have far-reaching impact on the security in Northeast Asia. The current most thorny problem is the nuclear issue in the DPRK. Despite the stalemate between the US and the DPRK, Pyongyang's attitude seems more pronounced. It has made it explicit that as long as Washington provides security assurance, realizes normalization with the DPRK, and gives economic assistance and compensation for Pyongyang's scrapping its nuclear programs, Pyongyang would immediately return to the negotiation table, and ac-

cept a deal of its denuclearization under adequate and effective verification. To be fair to the DPRK, this attitude is quite reasonable. One can argue of course that there are many details to be clarified like questions if the DPRK has really a highly enriched Uranium (HEU) program, if the eventual agreement will allow Pyongyang to maintain its nuclear program for peaceful purpose, and how to specifically carry out the verification, etc. But it will be unfortunate to let these technical problems become obstacles to an eventual agreement. Further, only in the framework of denuclearization on the basis of mutual compromise can these detailed issues be effectively addressed.

The ball seems now in Washington. As the second term of the Bush administration is to start in January 2005 with inevitable reshuffling of its cabinet, it is reasonable to expect that the new administration needs perhaps a little more time for a review and readjustment of its policy towards the DPRK including six-party talks. One only hopes that the administration may demonstrate adequate flexibility in striving for a peaceful resolution of the nuclear issue based on respect of the security interests of all the parties involved. It needs the administration enough political wisdom and courage to make the right decision.

Japan is another important element, whose policy will bear on the future of the security in Northeast Asia. As said above, the fate of Northeast Asia had been closely connected with Japan's rise and its policy of expansions and aggressions in modern history. With the end of the Second World War, Japan as a de-

feated country, was under great constraints under its peace constitution for its security policy. The only option it had then was to be solely associated with the US policy while keeping itself in an extremely low profile. This policy turned out to be a free ride for Japan's development, as under the US umbrella, Tokyo has succeeded in insuring its security, and achieving remarkable economic miracle. Now the Japanese economy has become the second largest one in the world. With this powerful economic might, Japan's political self-assurance has also been strengthened. The end of the Cold War seems to offer Japan a mixed situation. Faced with a both dramatically changing domestic and international environment, Japan seems now also to be prepared to make readjustment of its policy, and define a new role in the security equation in Northeast Asia. But this task is by no means an easy one.

At home, Japan seems to be facing a paradoxical situation. Despite its economic strength, Japan has been experiencing most severe economic depression over the past decade since the end of the Second World War. The unique dynamic economic development has been replaced by a ten year long slow and even zero growth rate. The government has tried every way to add new momentum to its economic performance like expanding domestic consumption and expedite economic restructuring, etc. But so far the effect is disappointing. In the political field, the end of the Cold War has destroyed a power balance between the left force, which used to be a mainstream element standing for peaceful development in Japan on the one hand, and

the rightist wing force which has never been reconciled with the defeat of Japan in the Second World War and has dreamed of restoring Japan's glorious past on the other. In Japan today, the former has been greatly weakened while the latter has been dramatically strengthened. The new imbalance emerged not the least because of the longstanding economic illness of the country, which drove many Japanese people desperate and despair. They turn to the rightist wing force for consolation, and wish to see the old days coming back by reviving the rightist political ambition. What is called "the island mentality" is being turned into a more narrowly defined nationalistic sentiment. The whole nation seems on the way of turning rightist.

This development of strong nationalistic feelings in Japan has led to a very strange paradox: on the one hand, many Japanese seem to have a dark view of the world and its periphery, pessimistic about Japan's future with a deep sense of crisis. On the other hand, however, there seems an increasing desire on the part of average Japanese people to see their country respected and regain a world power status, matching with its economic strength. To do justice to Japan, this desire is indeed legitimate as Japan does deserve a world power status, and it is in the interest of the world to see Japan play an expanded role in the international affairs. The big inherent risk though, is that against the current domestic background of Japan, this legitimate desire to be a "normal country" could easily play into the hands of the rightist wing force for its ulterior motives. In the view of these rightist elements, being a "normal country", Japan

should be virtually free of any constraints by the peace constitution, play a leading role in the international affairs, and use military force to protect its core interests. Linking up this ambition with the efforts of these people to whitewash the atrocities perpetrated to the Asian people during the Second World War, many Asian nations question their true motivation.

Internationally, the emergence of the new situation seems to offer Japan both opportunity and challenge. The disappearance of the Soviet Union has reduced much of the military pressure on Japan, wetting Tokyo's appetite for a new influential position in the restructuring of power balance in Northeast Asia. On the other hand, the rise of China seems to be a growing threat to its much coveted leading position in the world in general and the Asia-Pacific in particular. Japan's ambivalence serves to be a new primary inspiration for the strengthening of security collaboration between Washington and Tokyo.

Against the backdrop of the fast changing of both domestic and international environment, two trends seem to be particularly worth paying attention to in Japan's security strategy in Northeast Asia in the future. First, Tokyo's emphasis on the increasing role of its military force in helping achieving the goal of security strategy and as a means in solving international disputes. Strengthening military power seems also to be viewed as one of the essential moves for Japan to change its past image of "economic giant but political midget" and to be a world power in its true sense. Secondly, Tokyo's explicit inclination to be closer to the

United States, hoping to achieve its security objectives by chiefly taking advantage of the US influence and power in the region. This decision of Tokyo's seems closely related to its changed vision of the future world configuration. No longer is there the mood of optimism of "surpassing the US" which was prevailing in Japan in 1980's. The current prevailing view among the specialists and pundits in Japan is that the United States is going to maintain its only superpower's status for quite a long time to come; and therefore, the future security structure in the world as well as in Northeast Asia is a unipolar configuration. Further, according to this view, a unipolar world should be much more stable and more conducive to Japan's security than a multipolar one.

On December 9, 2004, Japan announced that it would adopt a new National Defense Program Outline, which maps out its defense policies for the next 10 years. Along with the new outline, Japan also issued the midterm defense buildup program, detailing the SDF equipment and personnel formation plans in the five years to come. These two documents are a physical reflection of Japan's security and military policy trend as discussed above. The new outline for the first time named DPRK and China as its major concern. It pictured DPRK's military moves as "a significantly unstable factor in regional security and a serious problem for global nonproliferation efforts." As with regard to China, the document stressed that "China, which has significant influence on the region's security, is pushing forward its nuclear and missile capabilities and modernization of its navy and

air force", and that "it is also trying to expand its scope of naval activities and attention must be paid to these developments." As the outline called for measures to respond to these challenges, Tokyo has in fact taken DPRK and China as explicit threats in the future. Japan's voice strikes a particularly inharmonious cord in Northeast Asia when the region seems now to head towards general relaxation and greater regional cooperation.

Based on its threat perception, the new outline set out Japan's two major missions: to defend the homeland and to carry cooperative activities for international peace. The wording of the latter task was rather ambiguous as these activities were allegedly to include "improving the international security environment so as to prevent threats from involving Japan". The message virtually means that the focus of Japan's defense policy has expanded from the defense of its homeland to the one of maintaining international security. Thus, Japan's military force is prepared to go to the world. Reflecting this longstanding ambition to have the SDF play a role in a more far-flung scope, the outline stressed Japan would actively take part in international peacekeeping activities.

The outline has made known Japan's own version of military transformation. The number of the SDF would be further downsized. Emphasis is therefore placed on the quality buildup. In this regard, the SDF would be streamlined and transformed into "a multifunctional, flexible and effective force". Efforts would particularly be made to enable the SDF to have sustained capability of fighting against nuclear,

chemical and biological threats, and of maritime operations overseas over long distance. The SDF was also going to be equipped with the most advanced interceptors against ballistic missile attacks and the highly efficient intelligence and monitoring systems based on its science and high-technology so as to be able to deal with various contingencies. In short, the SDF would become the most efficient and advanced armed forces in the world.

The new outline, as expected, also stressed Japan's determination of further strengthening its alliance with the United States as the most important pillar in its defense efforts. It indicated a go-ahead decision with the missile defense cooperation with the US. To that end, with the Cabinet's approval of the new outline, Chief Cabinet Secretary Hiroyuki Hosoda issued a statement announcing Japan would exempt arms parts related to missile defense when the ongoing Japan-U.S. joint research moves to the development and production stages. In the case of arms exports related to other joint projects with the United States and contributions for international antiterrorism operations, the government would decide on a case-to-case basis, the statement says. One should not take it at its face value. Since 1976, Japan has maintained a blanket ban on arms exports regardless of the destinations. But the transfer of military technology to the United States has already been an exception since 1983. The

current relaxation of the arms sales ban would in fact be a breakthrough in Japan's overall arms export policy. In future, behind the camouflage of the so-called case-to-case studies, Tokyo would find no major obstacle to selling anything to any country in legal terms if it so wishes.

Japan's new policy orientation is immediately welcomed by Washington as the US is in desperate need of greater allies' support to address various security challenges in the world in general, and in the Asia-Pacific in particular. In these circumstances, the two countries are in fact prepared to discuss the new definition of the bilateral alliance, and design a new framework of the security cooperation in the future.⁶ A new "Joint Declaration of the Security Cooperation between Japan and United States" is reportedly to be reached in February 2005. The agreement is said to openly point to China and the DPRK as "major destabilizing factors", and that the two states decide to join efforts to cope with all these threats in Asia. To that end, the two sides seem to have further division of labor; the US force based in Japan will be restructured, and redesigned new missions outside East Asia; and the US encourages Japan to take up greater defense burdens in the region.⁷ This updating of the Japan-US military collaboration will no doubt have serious impact on the strategic situation in the Asia-Pacific in the future. The development of the US-Japan alliance is going to be a major ob-

6 See news release of gts, Tokyo, December 22, 2004, re-quoted from China's News for Reference, Beijing, December 24, 2004.

7 See news release, of Japan Economic News, Tokyo, December 22, 2004, re-quoted from China's News for Reference, Beijing, December 23, 2004.

stacle to the development of more benign major power's relations in Northeast Asia. It will also bring negative impact on the security in the whole region.

The outline has also triggered great concerns and criticism from Japan's close neighbors. Views are expressed, for example, that the new outline "may reduce sense of security in the Asian region," and that "it will not be helpful for Japan to seek a peaceful solution of the Korean nuclear issue while taking on openly the DPRK as a potential threat".⁸ Other analysts believe that the new guideline will cause further problems for Japan with its neighbors, particularly with China and the DPRK. A comment by German newspaper *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* pointed out that "Japan's constitutional pacifism came to an end ever since Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi tied the country's defense policy closer with America's Pacific policy. Unlike Germany, the comment said, Japan has never come clean about its history of militarism. The White House probably has forgotten Japan's past, since through sending troops to Iraq, Koizumi provided political covering for Bush. But in Asia, Japan's past will never be forgotten. Before becoming a normal country it wishes, Japan has to win trust from its former war-field rivalries, while by setting up imaginary enemies it can only get the opposite result."⁹

In the meantime, how far Japan's turning mili-

taristic could go is still uncertain. Tokyo's ambition will face many constraints. The country has caused untold pain and suffering of people in the region in history. The Japanese brutality is still fresh in the memory of many Asian peoples. Japan's reluctance to honestly accept historical responsibility for its war against the Asian people is, therefore, its Achilles' heel in its relations with the close neighbors and erode trust and confidence in whether Japan is a responsible country by the international community. On the other hand, Japan is also aware that the growing cooperation among Northeast Asian countries including China especially in the economic and trade field is not only in its own vital interests. It may be even indispensable in order to help Tokyo get out of economic depression in the future. Thus a confrontational approach is unlikely to solve Japan's security problems. Domestically, despite the rampant activities of the rightist wing force, the influence of the force wishing to insisting on peaceful development is far from negligent particularly among the grass roots of the Japanese people. In short, Japan's security policy seems at the crossroads, too. There are still many uncertainties.

China has now been playing a growing important role in the security restructuring in Northeast Asia. This is mainly the result of China's unprecedented great effort to embark on a road of peaceful development characterized by focusing on economic construction and carry-

8 See news release of China News, Beijing, December 16, 2004. <http://www.chinanews.com.cn/news/2004/2004-12-16/26517714.shtml>.

9 "Japan's New Defense Outline bares Military Teeth", News Comments, December 13, 2004. http://english.people.com.cn/200412/13/eng20041213_167164.html.

ing reform and opening towards outside. To achieve that purpose, China needs a long-term peaceful, stable and friendly international environment. The strategy out of this overarching consideration is not based on expediency but on longstanding national policy that Beijing will pursue for generations to come. Thanks to the persistency in this policy over the past two decades, China has succeeded in achieving remarkable economic progress with a sustained rapid economic growth rate all along. Its total economic volume and size of foreign trade have been both among the front ranks of the world. Functioning as a new engineer in the Asia-Pacific, China's dynamic development has also added momentum to the development of other Asia-Pacific countries. At the same time, the peaceful development of China has helped the rise of its political influence in the world and the Asia-Pacific in particular. Perhaps only except for Japan, other Asian countries seem increasingly to take China's development more as an opportunity rather than a threat. Most of them now are pursuing a policy aimed at strengthening cooperation and collaboration with China. It is no exaggeration to say that China's development has become one of the main causes for the bright prospect of the Asia-Pacific.

In China's strategic calculation, Northeast Asia occupies an extremely important place. From both a geo-political and geo-economic point of view, China's security has largely hinges on peace, stability and prosperity in Northeast Asia. The goals of China in Northeast Asia are basically two-fold. One is the maintenance of regional peace and stability, in particular the

peace and stability in the Korean Peninsula. This objective has become a component part of China's comprehensive efforts to build a peaceful and stable periphery. To that end, the current China's focus is on the peaceful resolution of the nuclear issue of the DPRK. China will continue to be not only an honest mediator, but also an active participant. In collaboration with all the other parties, Beijing is expected to expand its efforts to bridge the differences among the various parties for an agreement at the six-party talks that is acceptable to all the nations involved. China's second goal in Northeast Asia is striving for peaceful unification. When conditions for unification are immature, China will be content to wait but will adopt resolute measures possible to hold back the attempt of any forces to split the nation...

The above two strategic goals of China are both obviously linked up with China's efforts to develop a constructive cooperative relation with all the other major powers in the region. In this regard, China and Russia have made fruitful efforts and laid a good foundation for a new state-to-state relationship.

China evidently wishes to build the same cooperative relations with both the US and Japan in all its good faith. The progress of China's efforts is mixed as said above. Good news is that both the two bilateral relationships are generally stable and mutually beneficial especially in the economic and trading field. The three countries are increasingly interdependent and virtually inseparable. In the case of China-US relations, despite numerous zigzags and setbacks, this relationship seems to have

become more mature, rational and comprehensive in nature. Both countries are keenly aware that their common interests are now enlarged to include economic, political and security fields, which provide a more solid basis for the healthy and stable development of their relations. So, as far as China's US policy concerned in the future, Beijing will continue to make efforts to stabilize this most important bilateral relationship to push for greater cooperation wherever there is convergence of interests, and manage the differences where there is conflict in interests. The major test ground is again the Taiwan question.

With regard to the China-Japan relations, the situation seems more complicated. It is no secret that the two countries have encountered a series of setbacks in their political relations mainly because the attitudes of the Japanese policy-makers towards the historical issues have gravely offended the feelings of the Chinese people. Taiwan could also be a major issue. There are already signs that the Japanese government has provided support to the Taiwan "independence" elements in both open and covert manners, which have further added to the mistrust on the part of the average Chinese people. On the Japanese side, many Japanese people feel perplexed and dissatisfied by the rise of the indignation and protests from their neighbors. These feelings are being turned into a "disliking the Chinese" sentiments particularly fueled by the demagogic and distorted propaganda by the anti-Japanese rightist wing force. It is most unfortunate to observe that when people of the world tend to be more in contact and cooperation, the average Chinese and Japanese people seem

to increasingly tend to dislike and keep distance from each other. This sorry situation has in turn restricted the freedom of action of policy-makers in both capitals. There is also good news though. Despite the political frictions, the two countries continue to see greater interactions in economy and trade. This paradox situation is hopefully a powerful inhibiting factor to prevent the bilateral relations from further being deteriorating.

Now what is the future prospect of both the China-US and China-Japan relations? As China is the weak side in this trilateral relationship, the policy of Beijing is mainly defensive in nature, responsive to whatever actions by the other side while the US and Japan seem to hold the key to the future evolution of the sets of bilateral relationships at least for the short term. In this respect, two opposite trends seem both to develop. But one needs not to be too pessimistic nor too optimistic. On the positive side, given the general development of the world and regional situation, one has the reason to believe that policy makers in both capitals will eventually realize that to cooperate with China is far more in their own core interests than to confront each other. But that will take time. Meanwhile, it will be a mistake to underestimate the energy and influence of the anti-China sentiments of the neocons and rightist wing force in both the US and Japan respectively. Manipulated by these forces, policies of these two countries are now strengthening their collaboration in an attempt to reduce and contain a rising China. Their provocative joint measures are particularly dangerous in possibly giving rise to an unexpected contingency around the Taiwan Straits

that will even reverse the course of China's relations with both these two countries.

Stabilization of China-US and China-Japan relations, in the final analysis, hinges on the balance of force among these related countries. In the current situation, as said above, despite China's development, Beijing is no match to either Washington and Tokyo in terms of strength. To say it another way, the fundamental reason that the two countries dare to pursue a hegemonic policy towards China is that China is still too weak, and neither of the countries seems ready to accept China as an equal partner and carry out cooperation on the basis of equality and mutual respect, nor want to stabilize its relations with China, willing to take into consideration China's core interests. Thus it is the author's belief that these two bilateral relationships are able to be stable only when China really develops and becomes strong on the basis of its sustained economic development, and further enhancing its comprehensive national strength. This does not suggest of course that when China becomes developed and strong, Beijing should take revenge and proceed to compete with the US for the dominance of world, or to push Japan into a corner of North-east Asia as a second rate nation. On the contrary, all is hoped to express here is that only when China becomes stronger and developed, there will be a material foundation for China to strive for a constructive cooperative relationships with both the United States and Japan.

Russia is also a major player which has great impact on the strategic situation in Northeast

Asia. Compared with the former Soviet Union, Russia has been dramatically reduced in strength. However, Moscow still retains huge potential influence on the security of North-east Asia. First of all, Russia's inherited military power and advanced military technologies are factors that cannot be lightly dismissed in the security structure in the region. Secondly, heavily squeezed by Western powers in Europe, Russia has now increasingly shifted its attention to East Asia, expressing extraordinary interests in participating in security cooperation in Northeast Asia. But Russia is also constrained in many ways. The inefficient economic strength often makes Russia fall short of its wishes. In addition, the United States and Japan both have high vigilance against Moscow's reemergence in the region at the expense of their interests. Japan has even territorial disputes with Russia, and does not seem to welcome Russia's expanding role unless the territorial disputes are solved and its relations with Moscow normalized. Finally, Russia on its part occasionally demonstrates a pragmatic aspect in its policy in Northeast Asia, and seems to be vacillating on vital issues for its short-term selfish interests, thus eroding trust and confidence in Moscow by other countries. These negative factors will affect Russia's ability to contribute to the security in the region. These negative factors are however secondary compared to its potential positive influence in the future. On the whole, Russia will increasingly be an active participant in solving security issues in the region, playing a positive and promoting role in strengthening peace and stability in Northeast Asia.

The second major challenge in Northeast Asia is the difficult process of peaceful unification of two divided nations.

Challenges in the second area that Northeast Asia is facing is about the realization of unification of two divided nations without jeopardizing peace and stability in the region.

Causes and ways of the division of the two nations, namely, Korea and China are entirely different from each other. One thus envisages different approaches to the eventual unification of the two nations respectively. However, the divisions do bear one importance resemblance, that is, they are both caused and perpetuated by the interference from outside. It is in this sense, the key to the solution of unification in both nations is creation of an environment in which the divided parties come together to negotiate peacefully on a solution without the interference from outside. Such an propitious environment becomes an essential condition for the unification in both cases. And only when unification is achieved can one expect to see sustained peace and stability in Northeast Asia. Otherwise, if the divisions are let drift, both the Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan Straits will be no less than two time bombs, which, once ignited, will be bound to bring huge devastating consequence to the whole world, the Northeast Asia in particular.

At present, the Korean Peninsula continues to be in rigid military confrontation between the North and South. There seems no possibility of unification for the foreseeable future. On the other hand, the fact that both sides insist on the national unification by peaceful means

as their ultimate goal respectively seems to exclude an immediate risk of erupting a large scale war at least for a short term. This attitude of either side has been warmly embraced and supported by all their neighbors. There seems a measure of stability in the overall instability in the peninsula despite a long way to go before unification is achieved. The current priority is the resolution of the nuclear issue in the DPRK, so as to insure a sustained denuclearization in the peninsula. Once a solution is achieved, it could be high time that all the parties involved in the Korean War sign a peace agreement to replace the armistice which has existed over half a century. The peace agreement will surely reduce dramatically the deep-rooted hostility, and pave the way for the eventual unification that, in turn, contributes to the further peace and stability in Northeast Asia. One important issue accompanying the unification in the peninsula is the future policy orientation of a unified Korea and the nature of its strategic relations with neighboring major powers. In China's perspective, a unified, peaceful and neutral Korea, aimed at maintaining friendly and cooperative relations with all these powers will be in the maximum interests of the country as well as in the interests of peace and stability in the region.

The prospect of China's unification looks more complicated. Different from the division in the Korean Peninsula, the division of China is purely a continuation of the civil war starting in mid-1940s. The defeated government dominated by the corrupted ruling party-KMD fled to Taiwan-its final power base, but was so fragile and weak that the island would have been

soon liberated and the KMD government totally perished if it were not for the United States prevention by sending its Seventh fleet to the Taiwan Straits to block the PLA military action. The US move was a sheer violation of the fundamental principle of the international law and the product of a Cold War mentality. It is in this sense, the Taiwan issue, which has been able to drag on till today, is in essence the consequence of the US interference in China's internal affairs. Now over a decade has passed and much has changed in the world situation since the end of the Cold War. In the hope of maintaining the maximum national interests and the overall peaceful regional peace and stability, Beijing has been making the greatest efforts for the peaceful unification based on the formula of one country two systems. However, instigated by the outside force, particularly from Washington, the "independent" force on the island has been going increasingly far to split the country, which has not only threatened the prospect of China's peaceful unification, but also jeopardized peace and stability in Northeast Asia. The intention of Washington's acquiescence in the separatist activities on the Island seems to use it to reduce and contain China rather than to see a really independent Taiwan as it is fully aware that independence only means war. It thus fully understands the danger of the inevitable and forced military action by Beijing if that situation arises. And then Washington would be in an intractable dilemma as neither involvement or non-involvement in the military conflict is in its best interests. In the circumstances, it seems that Washington's best strategy is to perpetuate the status quo and keep the situation at the Taiwan Straits nei-

ther unified nor openly and legally split; neither at peace nor at war. For that purpose, the challenge for the Bush administration seems to support Taiwan's contention with the mainland but have to have some control over Shen Shuibian's regime so as not to let the situation explode. This challenge looks now increasingly difficult if not possible to meet, as the US conflicting intent is playing into the hands of Shen's separatist designing. With an illusion that the Bush administration would come to help for whatever they do, the "independence" elements have become more and more rampant in their activities, especially in recent years. The reelection of Shen Shuibian in 2004 has made the situation on the island even more volatile. Shen has made it very clear that he would create an "independent" Taiwan no later than 2008.

In the face of the grim situation, the mainland has virtually not much room for any flexibility. On the eve of Chen Shuibian's inaugural ceremony for his second term of "presidency", Beijing issued an official statement on May 17, 2004, reaffirming its resolve of making maximum efforts for the peaceful unification; and that pending the realization of it, expressing willingness to go along with the other side of the strait in the creation of a sustained framework for peace and stable development as long as Chen accepts the one China principle, namely, accept that there is only one China, and that both the mainland and Taiwan belong to the one and same China, and renounce any separatist activities in the future. On the other hand, Beijing will never allow Chen to cross the red line of going "independent". Thus, for Chen Shuibian, there

are only two options. Which way he will go, the mainland will wait and see.¹⁰

Looking at the issue from another angle, the solution of the Taiwan question is also dependent on the role of Washington to a large extent. Because if Chen Shuibian is really determined to press forward on his "independent" road, he must have bet on one illusion that the US would come anyway to his help eventually whatever troubles he makes, and that as a result, Beijing would be intimidated and would not be able to take any actions. Chen's future actions therefore will hinge very much on the attitude of Washington. Beijing seems to fully appreciate the situation. It has evidently striven for the best, that is, to cooperate with Washington in seeking ways to jointly stabilize the situation by heading off any provocative moves by Chen Shuibian's regime. However, Beijing seems also not to cherish any unrealistic dream that Washington will be fully on its side, giving the US ambiguous and often conflicting policy as discussed above. Beijing is also prepared for the worst. The May 17th statement stressed that China will never waver in its resolve to stop the "independence" of Taiwan and to strive for the unification. "The Chinese people are not afraid of ghosts, nor will they be intimidated by brutal force. To the Chinese people, nothing is more important and more sacred than safeguarding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of their country. We will do our utmost with the maximum sincerity to strive for the

prospect of peaceful reunification of the motherland. However, if Taiwan leaders should move recklessly to provoke major incidents of "Taiwan independence", the Chinese people will crush their schemes firmly and thoroughly at any cost", the statement warned¹¹. Thus, in China's perspective, to stop the perpetual division of the nation and realize unification is an issue in China's internal affairs as well as a central issue in the China-US relations. Only on the condition of an established agreement between Washington and Beijing, will there be a possibility of the resolution of the issue. In the current situation, however, there seems still a number of uncertainties chiefly for reasons from the US side.

The third major challenge in Northeast Asia is the problem of developing a sustained multilateral security regime that will take care of the core interests of all nations involved.

The major challenge in the third area that Northeast Asia is facing is about a sustained security mechanism that is both matching the regional characteristics and acceptable to all the nations concerned. Perhaps except for Japan, East Asia encompasses mostly developing countries. They have the same historical experiences, share the strategic objective of development, and face similar security environment. Meanwhile, as a consequence of globalization and rapid development of science and high technology, the security situation has

10 See Statement of the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, PRC, *Lainhe Zaobao* internet, May 18, 2004. <http://www.zaobao.com/special/china/taiwan/pages6/taiwan170504h.html>.

11 *ibid.*

become more complicated and pluralistic, in which no nation is able to cope single-handedly with the impact of non-traditional security threats like international terrorism, proliferation of WMD, financial crisis, environmental pollution, drug smuggling, human trafficking, and aids, etc. Against this backdrop, to close ranks and strengthen cooperation among themselves become the common aspiration of Northeast Asian countries. But Northeast Asia is characterized by its diversity. The region has seen vast differences among nations in their political and economic systems, historical backgrounds, values, religious beliefs and development levels. All these have made Northeast Asia rich in historical grudges and bilateral disputes but lack in mutual trust and confidence among various nations. Against the backdrop, although efforts to build a multilateral security mechanism are on the agenda of the Northeast Asian countries, it is imperative to bear in mind that establishing such a mechanism would have to take into consideration the region's diversity. It would be a long-term process of accumulating strategic trust among these countries. The region can certainly learn from the experience of regional cooperation and integration from other parts of the world. But the experience from outside can only be learned as inspirations rather than being copied or transplanted.

What seems to be a positive development in East Asia, including Northeast Asia, is the growing interest in the combined efforts to seek institutionalized regional cooperation. More importantly, agreed guidelines to regulate these activities seem also to be reached. It is agreed, for example, that all nations

should participate on an equal basis, make decisions through consultation and consensus so that all the parties involved feel comfortable in the interaction. Secondly, it is encouraged to start by addressing the easiest issues and then progress forward in a step by step way. In this regard, to start from the regional economic cooperation is widely accepted as a most effective starter. The progress in economic cooperation will go a long way towards developing political dialogues and collaboration. Thirdly, in the case of Northeast Asia, it is important to bring into full play specific advantage and role of each of the three major players: China, Japan and South Korea. Finally, security cooperative mechanisms at different levels should be inclusive, taking care of vital interests of all the participants. This is going to be a prerequisite for the concerted efforts of all the major players, which is so essential for the success of the exercise. There is a suggestion in the Western media that the greatest obstacle to the security cooperation in the region is the so-called competition for the dominating role between China and Japan. The allegation is ill-founded. From China's security perspective, it is impossible for Beijing to have such an interest. On the contrary, China welcomes Japan, as a member of the region, not only to attach greater importance to the regional cooperation, but also to make greater contribution to its progress by bringing into play Japan's own advantages. China evidently wishes to promote regional security cooperation by strengthening China-Japan collaboration. In the meantime, the regional cooperation will also in turn enhance the friendly ties between the countries.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, in order for the nations in Northeast Asia to achieve economic prosperity and social progress, and to promote regional peace and stability, one essential condition is continuing to maintain the dynamics of the regional economic development. Since the end of the Cold War, nations in the region, China and South Korea in particular, have all benefited from the development of globalization, thus achieving a sustained rapid economic growth. But globalization is a double-edged sword. It has brought the Northeast Asian countries both unprecedented opportunities for development and gigantic challenges in security. The financial crisis in 1997, however, demonstrated in a most vivid way that all these countries were in fact very vulnerable to the impact of the fast progress of globalization. It showed particularly that economic structure as well as ways of economic performance were in great need of profound reform. This is going to be a long and painful process as it is also accompanied by the restructuring of the various societies and changes of concepts of average people. In short, these revolutionary political, economic and social transformations which will be inevitable to follow in the process of globalization will be a daunting challenge to all the nations in the region. But, on the other hand, countries cannot afford to lose the battle. For failure to cope with the challenge will result in unpredictable consequences, including continuing economic depression, social turmoil, and eroding credibility of the national governments. Opportunities offered by globalization will be lost, let alone maintenance of regional peace and stability.

No country alone is able to meet the challenges involved, which has become almost a common understanding in the region. This common understanding has also become a powerful driving force for the various nations to strengthen cooperation and even push for regional integration. Although the exercise in Northeast Asia takes place rather late compared to other parts of the world, it has nevertheless demonstrated impressive vitality as it conforms with the trend of historical development and the aspiration of the Northeast Asian peoples. It is expected that the process of promoting the regional cooperation will provide a propitious context in which nations in the region are able to adequately address the above said three security challenges.

Discrepancy and diversity will continue to be constraints for the regional cooperation. Fortunately, however, discrepancy and diversity have also forced various nations to learn to live peacefully with each other, to learn to be more inclusive in their policies so as to give rise to a situation in which different civilizations learn from and complement each other to achieve co-prosperity. Thus, despite so many uncertainties in the regional security as enumerated above, the mainstream trend in Northeast Asia remains encouraging.

Mr. Qian Qichen, former vice premier of China once offered his own dream for the future development of the Asia-Pacific. In his view, the Asia-Pacific countries should strive to reach three goals: "nations should maintain peace and stability, respect and trust each other, and keep away from military conflict and war; all the people realize full development, enjoy

human rights, have dignity, and eliminate poverty and unfairness; various civilizations live in harmony, be tolerant and inclusive, promote each other, and give up discrimination and prejudice".¹² It goes without saying that Qian's view also applies to the regional cooperation in Northeast Asia. For his dream is worth common efforts by the Northeast Asian countries and people.

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12 Qian Qichen, "Strengthening Cooperation, Meeting Challenges Jointly, and Creating a Fine and Bright Future", Speech at the seminar hosted by the high-level panel for the planning of the prospect in the Asia-Pacific. Shanghai, April 26, 2004. <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/chn/wjdt/zyjh/t92252.html>. The quotation is translated into English by the author.