



## **Pax Asia Pacifica?** by Ralph A. Cossa

“Are the United States and East Asia ready for the creation of a ‘Pax Asia Pacifica’ as a logical successor to the ‘Pax Americana’ that has provided peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region for decades?” This question was foremost on former Philippine President Fidel Ramos’ mind when he lectured on U.S.-China and East Asia relations recently in Washington, DC.

Ramos was giving the inaugural “Ambassador L.W. ‘Bill’ and Jean Lane Lecture in Diplomacy” at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, hosted by the Pacific Forum CSIS. His remarks focused on the geopolitical realities of a rising China, a more self-confident and involved Japan, an emerging India, and a “preoccupied” United States. The time has come, he argued, not to replace or discount the U.S. role in East Asia but to share the burden, in the hope of creating a more cohesive Asia-Pacific community.

While some in the U.S. have cautioned about a “Pan Asianism” vs. “Pan Pacificism” debate, Ramos believed that building a greater sense of East Asian identity would help and not hinder the broader Asia-Pacific grouping that included the United States. He argued that the emerging East Asia community should not only be based upon “one vision, one identity, one community,” as called for by the ASEAN Experts and Eminent Persons Group – he serves as the Philippine representative to this informal advisory body – but also upon “one union,” to be defined over time. He argued that it was the ASEAN Plus Three network (involving China, Japan, and South Korea) that is the “basic mechanism” upon which this sense of community will be built. Ramos also supported deeper U.S. involvement in the East Asia Summit (EAS), which will hold its second meeting this coming December in the Philippines, applauding the grouping’s inclusivity, involving the ASEAN Plus Three nations plus Australia, New Zealand, India, and even Russia.

In his formal remarks, President Ramos focused on China’s “peaceful rise,” noting that the “rise” seems inevitable, but the “peaceful” part depends first and foremost on the leadership in Beijing, and then on the ability of the United States and China’s neighbors to effectively manage and adjust to China’s re-emergence on the global leadership scene. He argued that the most important strategic decision Washington will make in the next decade is neither about Iraq nor Iran nor North Korea, but about China . . . and similarly, the most important strategic decision that Beijing will make in the next decade is how to relate to the U.S. Cooperation, not confrontation, is the preferred route. But this will require skilled diplomacy, especially in the management of the race for energy resources. A constructive Chinese role in creating a “Pax Asia Pacifica” would demonstrate its commitment to

being the “responsible stakeholder” that Washington has challenged Beijing to become.

While President Ramos focused on China and the need for closer China-U.S. cooperation, he addressed a wide range of issues during a free-wheeling question-and-answer session, highlighted by his direct, candid answers to even the most sensitive of questions, something rarely seen inside the Washington beltway.

He encouraged Japan to play a more responsible role in the region as part of his “Pax Asia Pacifica” vision. Ramos expressed concern over growing tensions between Beijing and Tokyo, calling on both to focus on the future, not the past. It is time to “put World War II in the background,” he asserted. While the interests of the so-called “comfort women” who suffered at the hands of the Japanese during World War II should not be neglected, the countries of East Asia should remember that Japan has been “our best ally” in terms of official development assistance consistently over the years.

Turning to Philippine domestic developments, President Ramos reminded the audience of his long-time support for a parliamentary system that would be more responsive and readily accountable to the needs of the people and would also help to better train and prepare the next generation of leaders. “Why should we risk another People Power Revolution?” he asked, asserting “as an old soldier, I am the first one that would say never again.” He also recounted, in very personal terms, how he dealt with the insurgency problem in the southern Philippines during his tenure as president. Today’s leaders in Manila would be well-served by carefully reading these insights, focused on addressing the basic needs of the people. (A copy of Ramos’ speech, including the Q&A session, is available at [www.pacforum.org](http://www.pacforum.org), as *Issues & Insights* No. 9-06 [[http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/issues/insights\\_v06n09.pdf](http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/issues/insights_v06n09.pdf)]).

In watching President Ramos relate to his audience – he stayed on after the speech was over, to shake hands and pose for pictures with every single Filipino and Philippine-American in the audience (and there were many) – it is easy to understand why many today wish he would run again for president. Absent that, today’s leadership, in Manila, in Washington and Beijing, and in other East Asia capitals, would benefit greatly by listening to his wise counsel: a closer, more cooperative East Asia union, bound together with the United States, can help bring about a Pax Asia Pacifica in which China, Japan, India, and the United States all act as responsible stakeholders.

*Ralph A. Cossa ([pacforum@hawaii.rr.com](mailto:pacforum@hawaii.rr.com)) is president of the Pacific Forum CSIS.*