U.S.-China Relations and East Asia Regionalism: What Lies Ahead?

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Acknowledgments

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Executive Summary

U.S. policy in East Asia and especially toward the People's Republic of China is evolving in the Bush administration's second term. Gone are references to "the best ever" in describing Sino-U.S. relations; added are new concerns centered around China's international diplomacy in areas far afield from Asia and a more vigorous emphasis by Washington on the promotion of freedom and democracy. Greater attention is being paid to a not-so-new but increasingly active potential "battlefield": multilateral mechanisms in and around East Asia, especially those that might exclude the United States.

This monograph briefly addresses five major issue areas affecting Sino-U.S. relations: China-Taiwan cross-Strait developments, where growing confidence in Washington's and Beijing's intentions (not to support independence and to seek a peaceful solution, respectively) and a severe limiting of Taiwan independence advocates' options have resulted in at least a temporary defusing of this volatile issue; the North Korea nuclear crisis and broader Korean Peninsula issues, which provide the best current example of Sino-U.S. strategic cooperation but which could easily unravel over a variety of issues; the promotion of freedom, democracy, and human rights, which has taken on new importance, at least rhetorically, during George W. Bush's second term; economic disagreements focused on balance of payments and revaluation issues; and the impact of more pro-active Chinese diplomacy, which has seen China take actions that seemingly challenge U.S. national security interests in, around, and far from Asia. It also addresses growing multilateral cooperation through current and emerging mechanisms, with special focus on the December 2005 East Asia Summit and ongoing attempts at East Asia community building, arguing that this could, but does not currently or necessarily, represent another potential Sino-U.S. "battlefield."

It concludes that the U.S., as we enter the Year of the Dog, will remain committed to remaining a key member of the Asia-Pacific community, as it has been for at least the past half-century, for the simple reason that it is in America's national interest to do so. Its reputation of unilateralism notwithstanding, the Bush administration is likely to remain generally supportive of East Asia multilateralism, including those organizations like ASEAN Plus Three and the East Asia Summit that do not directly involve Washington, provided that they are not seen as vehicles for excluding the U.S. from the region or aimed at diminishing its influence. In this regard, Washington is more likely to watch the behavior and intentions of specific members than the organizations as a whole.

Sino-U.S. relations are likely to experience continued ups and downs but it remains unlikely that Washington would embark on an active policy of containment against the PRC absent drastic action by Beijing, such as an unprovoked military strike against Taiwan. The focus will be on crafting a common definition of what constitutes a

“responsible stakeholder.” Likewise, while the Bush administration will continue its theme of promoting freedom and democracy both globally and regionally, it is unlikely to attempt to actively bring about regime change even in North Korea, much less in China or other less-than fully democratic East Asia countries. On the multilateral front, it is likely to place special emphasis on task-oriented ad hoc coalitions of the willing, such as the Proliferation Security Initiative, aimed at effectively dealing with regional and broader challenges, rather than just talking about them.

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U.S. policy in East Asia and especially toward the People's Republic of China is evolving in the George W. Bush administration's second term. Gone are references to "the best ever" in describing Sino-U.S. relations; added are new concerns centered around Chinese international diplomacy in areas far from Asia (Iran, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Venezuela, to name a few) and a more vigorous emphasis by Washington on the promotion of freedom and democracy. Greater attention is being paid to a not-so-new but increasingly active potential "battlefield": multilateral mechanisms in and around East Asia, especially those that exclude the United States.

This monograph will briefly address five major issue areas affecting Sino-U.S. relations –China-Taiwan cross-Strait developments; the North Korea nuclear crisis and broader Korean Peninsula issues; the promotion of freedom, democracy, and human rights; economic challenges and opportunities; and the impact of more pro-active Chinese diplomacy on U.S. national security interests and Sino-U.S. relations. It will close with a closer look at multilateralism in and around East Asia, with special focus on the December 2005 East Asia Summit (EAS) and ongoing attempts at East Asia community building, arguing that this could, but does not currently or necessarily, represent another potential Sino-U.S. "battlefield." .

The (Rhetorical) Focus on Freedom

As a student of American foreign policy, I would argue that, generally speaking, U.S. policy in East Asia has been remarkably consistent and non-partisan over the years, with far more continuity than change, for the simple reason that U.S. foreign policy continues to be driven by U.S. national interests. The Bush administration, like its Democratic and Republican predecessors over the past half-century, sees the United States as an Asian as well as a European power with vital economic, political, and security interests in the region. As they have in the past, U.S. bilateral alliances remain at the base of Washington's East Asia strategy today. But, bilateral (and unilateral) tendencies notwithstanding, I believe that Washington also remains open to, and largely supportive of, multilateral cooperation in East Asia.

It's true that the Bush administration's approach to foreign policy in general has been greatly impacted by the events of Sept. 11, 2001. The global war on terrorism and its "second front" in Southeast Asia have added a new dimension to U.S. foreign policy priorities, just as it has opened up new avenues of cooperation. But it is also true that the major challenges confronting the region prior to 9-11 remain: managing the rise of China (including complex cross-Strait relations between Beijing and Taipei); addressing the challenges posed by a divided Korean Peninsula (exacerbated then, as now, by Pyongyang's nuclear aspirations); defusing conflicting territorial claims (in Northeast Asia as well as in the South China Sea); and dealing with rising nationalism throughout

East Asia; the latter ironically made more challenging by the advent of greater democracy throughout the region.

In his second term, President Bush has added another new dimension to his foreign policy, at least rhetorically: the promotion of freedom and democracy. This, of course, has long been a staple of American foreign policy. But, President Bush has made it more of a centerpiece, especially in the Middle East, where it has helped to justify the U.S.-forced regime change in Iraq and also caused a certain level of consternation among traditional not-so-democratic U.S. friends and allies.

President Bush, during his November 2005 visit to Asia, seized the opportunity to reaffirm his commitment to the promotion of democracy and political and especially religious freedom. He emphasized the close linkage between freedom and democracy on the one hand and economic prosperity on the other. His whirlwind tour, which included stops in Japan, South Korea, China, and Mongolia, began with a major Asia policy address in Kyoto, Japan, where he stressed that "freedom is the bedrock of America's friendship with Japan – and it is the bedrock of our engagement with Asia."

Underscoring the promotion of democracy theme that played so prominently in his second inauguration address, he identified freedom as "the basis of our growing ties to other nations in the region and . . . the destiny of every man, woman, and child from New Zealand to the Korean Peninsula." Citing the examples of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, he noted that "freedom is an outgrowth of economic prosperity," and that the "best opportunity to spread the freedom that comes from economic prosperity is through free and fair trade." He cited Burma and North Korea as two examples of states "whose leaders have refused to take even the first steps to freedom."

Sino-U.S. Relations: the Focus Remains on Cooperation

Some saw in this new focus on freedom the beginning of a more confrontational policy toward the PRC. But, in truth, Beijing got off fairly easy in Bush's speech. President Bush cited China as among those states that "have taken some steps toward freedom – but they have not yet completed the journey." In noting that Taiwan had "moved from repression to democracy as it liberalized its economy," he reinforced the theme that Taipei's transition to democracy could provide a useful model for Beijing: "By embracing freedom at all levels," Bush noted, Taiwan had "created a free and democratic Chinese society."

While Beijing took some offense at Bush's report card and his citing Taiwan as an example, there was much in the speech, and in his subsequent visit to Beijing – where his pro-Taiwan democracy remarks were not publicly repeated – that should have been reassuring to China. In Kyoto, and again in Beijing, Bush praised current and past Chinese leaders for their initial steps down the road toward greater economic and political reform and expressed appreciation for China's "important role" in pursuing the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. He reaffirmed that America's "one-China policy remains unchanged" and that "there should be no unilateral attempts to change the

status quo by either side," a warning that seemed aimed more at Taiwan President Chen Shui-bian (who has had a history of rocking the cross-Strait boat) than at his Chinese hosts (who claim that their policies – including the controversial March 2005 Anti-Secession Law – are specifically aimed at preserving the status quo).

In a pre-trip interview with Phoenix TV, President Bush went even further, stating that "we do not support independence" and that he was "optimistic there will be a peaceful resolution because I have seen cross-Straits discussions starting to take place." Unfortunately, this dialogue has primarily been between Beijing and the leaders of Taiwan's opposition parties; much to Taipei's dismay, President Bush failed to underscore the need for direct dialogue between Beijing and the democratically elected leadership in Taiwan, without whom there can be no peaceful resolution. While noting that relations with China were "complex," President Bush clearly indicated that he remained committed to the "cooperative, constructive, candid relationship" with Beijing outlined in his first term.

Beijing as a "Responsible Stakeholder"

Engaging China does not mean overlooking or papering over differences. But, the U.S., in opening up a senior-level dialogue with Beijing, continues to stress the positive aspects of the relationship and the need for strategic cooperation. This was underscored by Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick, in New York in September 2005, when he presented what was described as the definitive description of the Bush administration's second term approach toward China, calling on Beijing to be "a responsible stakeholder in the international system." The U.S. welcomed China's rise, Zoellick noted, but expected that China would use its increased political and economic clout in ways that contributed to international peace and stability; in other words (and more to the point), in ways that did not threaten U.S. interests or objectives.

One major criticism of East Asia policy during the Bush administration's first term was its "mixed signals" toward Beijing; the accusation that there were two China policies, one pursued by State Department "internationalists" and the other by the Pentagon and administration "neocons." Zoellick's speech was aimed at overcoming this perception. Unfortunately, rather than reinforcing or expanding upon this concept, as many anticipated (or hoped), President Bush never publically repeated the "responsible stakeholder" phrase during his Asia trip, causing many in Asia to again question if Zoellick was merely speaking for the State Department – or perhaps just for himself, since his boss, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, has likewise failed to use this terminology.

In fairness, however, Bush's senior Asia policy advisor on the National Security Council at the time, Dr. Michael Green, did use the term in briefing reporters during the trip and many of the major points made in Zoellick's speech (although not the "responsible stakeholder" phrase) were repeated by Donald Rumsfeld during his long-awaited first trip to China as defense secretary in mid-Oct. The term also reportedly came up in private conversations with Chinese officials. While the press had made much of the

fact that the term "stakeholder" does not easily translate into Chinese, specialists like Bonnie Glaser argue persuasively that Beijing fully understands the concept.

The real point of contention is over conflicting definitions of the word "responsible." In his September speech, Zoellick warned that "China's involvement with troublesome states indicates at best a blindness to consequences and at worst something more ominous." On the other hand, as was made abundantly clear to me during an early January 2006 trip to China, Beijing sees the Bush administration's tendency to interfere in the internal affairs of these so-called troublesome states and its willingness to deal with "splittist troublemakers" like Taiwan President Chen Shui-bian or the Dalai Lama as the greater sin. The definition of "responsible" is in the eye of the beholder. Beijing is clearly not prepared to accept Washington's definition or to have the U.S. alone define global norms or standards of behavior.

It is within this context of growing Chinese confidence and assertiveness that I briefly assess the previously mentioned five issues that largely define the current and future Sino-U.S. relations.

Cross-Strait Relations. Relations between Beijing and Taipei (and between Washington and Taipei) appear relatively stable, following the PRC's March 2005 Anti-Secession Law and the December 2004 and 2005 Taiwan elections, which placed boundaries on President Chen's "independence" proclivities and also allowed Beijing to intensify its "soft hand, hard hand" cross-Strait policy.

In employing a softer "soft hand," Beijing has encouraged (and expertly stage-managed) the visits of opposition leaders to the mainland, opened the doors to Taiwan's tourist and students, offered Pandas as a goodwill gesture, and allowed increased access to the Chinese market for Taiwan's agricultural products. While these measures benefit many on Taiwan, Beijing has sought to implement them in a way that rewards those who cooperate with China and marginalizes those who do not (i.e., the Chen administration). In this manner, the "hard hand" continues its active attempt to suppress Taiwan, denying it international breathing space and keeping pressure on the island through actions like the joint military exercise with Russia this past August. Integral to this strategy is ignoring the elected government in Taipei.

All too often, Taiwan's elected leaders (like Chen and Lee Teng-hui before him) have responded to Beijing's isolation and marginalization attempts through bold gestures that have further complicated cross-Strait relations and, alternatively, Sino-U.S. or U.S.-Taiwan relations, depending on the issue and how each side reacts. As a result, it is foolhardy to become complacent when thinking about cross-Strait relations, especially given Washington's pledge to do "whatever it takes" to help Taiwan defend itself in the event of unprovoked hostile action by Beijing (and the lack of a common definition of what constitutes either "unprovoked" or "hostile action").

In this regard, Chen Shui-bian's pledge, in his 2006 New Year's address, to continue to pursue a new constitution, through referendum if necessary, serves as a

reminder that potential challenges lie ahead, particularly if Beijing continues trying to back the Chen administration into a tighter and tighter corner, rather than provide some of the international breathing space hinted at in the Anti-Secession Law.

The Korean Peninsula. Events on the Korean Peninsula can also impact China-U.S. relations negatively or positively, depending on the outcome of the Six-Party Talks (involving North and South Korea, China, the U.S., Japan, and Russia) and China's willingness, in the final analysis, to put sufficient pressure on Pyongyang to give up its nuclear aspirations. President Bush rightfully praised China for its constructive role in bringing about the Sept. 19, 2005 Six-Party Joint Statement in which North Korea pledged to give up "all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs."

Unfortunately, the statement defers or leaves many critical questions unanswered. One of the most critical is the fate of Washington's earlier promise (under the now defunct Agreed Framework) to provide Pyongyang with light water reactors (LWRs). This problem was not solved; it was merely deferred, with the parties agreeing "to discuss at an appropriate time the subject of the provision of light-water reactors to the DPRK." Washington (and reportedly the other four, including Beijing) apparently agreed that the "appropriate" time was after Pyongyang had returned to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and came into full compliance with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards and immediately made this clear. North Korea obviously disagrees, wanting – as it always has – its rewards up front, clearly inappropriate timing from Washington's perspective.

As in the past, the LWR issue distracts attention from the real issue, which is Pyongyang's plutonium- and uranium-based nuclear weapons programs and how to both account for and then verifiably dismantle them. One detail that remains critical to the ultimate success of the agreement is the definition of "all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs." The Sept. 19 Joint Statement successfully finessed the disagreement over whether a uranium enrichment program exists in the North. Washington says it does; Pyongyang still denies it; Beijing seems to disbelieve both. Agreeing that "all" programs will be included is only significant if there is agreement on what constitutes "all." The other parties cannot allow the LWR smokescreen to overshadow this yet to be resolved issue.

Also unresolved is the broader issue of energy assistance to Pyongyang. The Joint Statement "reaffirmed" the ROK offer to provide 2 million kilowatts of electric power to the DPRK. It did not indicate if the North was prepared to settle for this offer, much less accept it as a substitute for the LWRs (which, by no mere coincidence, were to have provided the same amount of power). Seoul, which trumpeted this "breakthrough" when it was first announced, has now been strangely quiet on the connection between its energy offer and the need for Pyongyang to drop the LWR demand. Washington has argued that there is no such thing as a "peaceful nuclear energy program" when it comes to North Korea; Beijing and Seoul disagree.

Another major unresolved issue is sequencing. While all concurred that the denuclearization agreement will be accomplished in "a phased manner in line with the principle of 'commitment for commitment, action for action,'" the "commitments" and "actions" have yet to be defined, much less put in an agreed-upon order – Washington apparently wanted some sequencing outlined in the statement but Beijing saw this as too hard.

Another important missing element is discussion of security assurances or guarantees. The Joint Statement includes a promise by Washington not to attack or invade the North, but does not address the behavior of the other parties. If North Korea employs military force against South Korea or Japan – two U.S. treaty allies – is Washington prohibited from responding? Is stopping a North Korea ship suspected of smuggling nuclear weapons (or drugs or counterfeit currency) an "attack"? Is Pyongyang prepared to refrain from hostile acts of this nature? These questions will also have to be sorted out during subsequent rounds of dialogue. This opens the possibility of still more arguments between Washington and Beijing.

All of this is not to demean the Chinese-brokered Joint Statement; it represents a vital first step and makes a real breakthrough possible, if the other five parties can avoid being distracted by the LWR issue and can, instead, speak with one voice with Pyongyang and insist that it start charting a clear path toward the accomplishment of agreed upon objectives when/if the talks reconvene in Beijing. Unfortunately, Pyongyang has been better at playing Washington and Beijing against one another than they have been in jointly pressuring Pyongyang to cooperate. Expectations remain high in Washington for China to "clear up this mess"! It remains to be seen if Beijing can (or even wants to) deliver.

Pyongyang's refusal (as of this writing) to return to the negotiating table until Washington changes its "hostile policies" toward the DPRK puts added pressure on Beijing to put added pressure on North Korean leader Kim Jong-il to come back to the negotiating table, something the Chinese leadership has been hesitant to do. The situation is further complicated by the belief, prevalent during my recent discussions with Chinese officials and scholars, that the current manifestation of Washington's hostility – its sanctions against eight North Korean companies for proliferation-related offenses and against a Macao bank for assisting DPRK money-laundering – was specifically generated at this time to undermine the talks. Washington has yet to provide a convincing explanation of how, in the words of Undersecretary of State for Arms Control Bob Joseph, the sanctions "reinforce the prospect for the success of those talks," a statement many in Asia (and in the U.S.) find disingenuous, if not insulting.

Human Rights and Democracy. As noted previously, the promotion of freedom has increasingly become a central feature of the Bush administration's regional and global foreign policy, including greater emphasis on religious freedom. President Bush called his decision to attend church services in Beijing an "affirmation of my strong belief that people should be able to worship freely." This was not unprecedented, of course. His two most recent predecessors, and his secretary of state, had done the same. But it reinforced

the president's view that freedom of religious expression was a fundamental human right, a point further underscored by Bush's public meeting with the Dalai Lama in Washington 10 days before his China visit.

In this author's opinion, a more pointed gesture would have been for President Bush to worship privately in his room during his Beijing visit, rather than at a state-sponsored church, in silent tribute to the millions of Chinese who risk persecution by worshiping at underground churches rather than attended services that are closely controlled and monitored by government authorities. In fact, during my recent visit to Beijing, Chinese interlocutors were pointing to Bush's attendance at religious services in Beijing as "proof" that religious freedom exists in China; this is clearly not the point the president was trying to make.

During Bush's November visit to Beijing, his Chinese hosts demonstrated that they no longer felt it necessary to seize the opportunity of such visits to make grand gestures or provide significant "deliverables" on human rights issues. Usually, in advance of a presidential visit, Beijing will release a few political prisoners from a U.S.-provided "wish list" as a goodwill gesture; this time Beijing unceremoniously added to the list instead. Also of note, during his last visit, in Feb 2002, the Chinese government allowed live press coverage of Bush's speech to university students; this time his primary Chinese photo op was a mountain bike ride with Chinese Olympic hopefuls. This reflects a new found, and growing, confidence in Beijing when it comes to handling Sino-U.S. relations, which could lead to less flexibility or mutual accommodation in the future.

Trade and Economic Issues. Another perennial source of tension in Sino-U.S. relations revolves around trade and broader economic issues, which take on a political as well as an economic dimension, especially during U.S. election years (which 2006 is, although gratefully not at the presidential level). Calls have been growing for greater exchange rate flexibility, with the yuan taking center stage, at least in the halls of the U.S. Congress. China resurfaces again and again as the focus of the debate, with Bush administration economic officials achieving only limited success in their attempts to assuage congressional concerns that the administration isn't pressing China hard enough on a range of issues: compliance with WTO commitments, freeing the yuan's peg to the dollar, enforcing intellectual property rights, addressing the burgeoning trade deficit, textile quotas, and the list goes on.

Such concerns are certain to add political challenges to the relationship in the coming and future years. A failure by China to press on with financial reforms that allow it to broaden the trading band of the yuan beyond the minor adjustment to the exchange rate made in July 2005, will cast a negative shawdow on the upcoming summit between President Bush and Chinese President Hu Jintao planned for early 2006 in the U.S.

China's International Diplomacy. They say you can judge people by the company they keep. The same can be said about countries. So what does it say about China when Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing skipped the annual ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) ministerial meeting this past summer to go visit Myanmar, at the same time that Chinese

President Hu Jintao was welcoming Zimbabwe dictator Robert Mugabe to Beijing with full honors – the same Hu who responded to the carnage in Uzbekistan by inviting its president, Islam Karimov, to Beijing for a 21-gun salute in May, within two weeks of the Andijan massacre? The same China, one might add, that has systematically blocked stronger United Nations Security Council (UNSC) action against the genocidal government in Sudan and potential nuclear proliferator Iran, and prevented the UNSC from discussing North Korea's flagrant violation of international nuclear and human rights norms. In fact, as one surveys the globe's pariah regimes, it seems the one thing they all have in common is the same best friend: China!

This phenomenon no doubt contributed to Deputy Secretary Zoellick's admonition (during his afore-mentioned Sept. 21 speech, "Whither China: from Membership to Responsibility?") that Beijing recognize how its actions are perceived by others. Zoellick warned Beijing that Washington had noticed the increasingly active Chinese diplomatic campaign aimed at protecting, if not emboldening, some of the world's most repressive regimes. Such efforts frequently run contrary to U.S. interests and the preservation and promotion of global norms and are hardly the actions of a "responsible stakeholder." (As a current and vital case in point, a failure to reach a common position on how best to deal with the ongoing Iranian nuclear standoff could be a moment of truth for the bilateral relationship.) The perception that Beijing is working at cross-purposes with Washington on key international issues also causes Washington to take a closer look at China's involvement in various multilateral organizations, especially ones that do not include the United States.

Multilateral Pros and Cons

In particular, Washington has begun to cast a wary eye on the Beijing and Moscow-dominated Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) which also involves four Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan). In early July 2005, the SCO, during a summit meeting in the Kazakhstan capital of Astana, called on the U.S. and its coalition partners to "decide on the deadline for the use of the temporary infrastructure and for their military contingents' presence" in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan – the U.S. keeps roughly 1,000 troops each at airfields in Karshi-Khanabad in Uzbekistan and Manas in Kyrgyzstan – "as the active military phase in the anti-terror operation in Afghanistan is nearing completion."

By the end of the month, it became obvious that one of the hosts – Uzbekistan, which had come under increasing criticism from the U.S. and the international community in general for its harsh repression of protestors in Andijan in May – was not going to wait for the U.S. to set its own deadline; on July 29, 2005, Uzbekistan gave Washington 180 days to vacate Karshi-Khanabad, an order unanimously approved by the Uzbek Senate a month later. While this no doubt reflects President Karimov's displeasure over Washington's criticism of his dismal human rights record, it is doubtful it could have occurred without Moscow and Beijing's consent, if not active encouragement and support.

This action has caused Washington to look more closely at other multilateral forums being organized or supported by Beijing, including the inaugural East Asia Summit (EAS), held in December in Kuala Lumpur. Before looking at Washington's attitude toward the EAS, however, it is useful to say a few words about the Bush administration's views on multilateralism in general.

Pro-Multilateralism, With Caveats. Washington has historically viewed Asia Pacific multilateral organizations as useful vehicles both for promoting greater political and economic cooperation and for enhancing regional security. This support has one important caveat, however: No U.S. administration, be it Republican or Democrat, is likely to allow such institutions to be seen as substitutes for or as threats to U.S. bilateral alliances and other security arrangements. But, like its predecessors, the Bush administration does not see bilateral and multilateral efforts as being in tension; rather, they complement one another. East Asian multilateral organizations are seen as useful tools in pursuing U.S. national security objectives.

During its first four years, the Bush administration was also cautiously supportive of multilateral organizations, such as ASEAN Plus Three (A+3) and the SCO, which do not include the U.S., although, as noted above, it appears that, in its second term, it is starting to cast a more watchful eye, especially on those organizations established and/or dominated by China, to ensure that these do not represent efforts to diminish Washington's role or influence in Asia. And, as the U.S.-led international war on terrorism demonstrates, while Washington is eager to develop a multilateral approach in combating global terrorism, it has made it clear that this will not deter the U.S. from pursuing its objectives unilaterally if necessary.

In short, U.S. policymakers generally believe that Asia-Pacific multilateral organizations such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) "gathering of economies" are useful vehicles both for promoting greater political and economic cooperation and for enhancing regional security. Asian multilateral security mechanisms can serve as important vehicles for promoting long term peace and stability. They provide a framework for continued direct U.S. involvement in regional security matters. They offer a means for Japan, China, and Russia, among others, to become more actively involved in regional security affairs in a manner that is non-threatening to their neighbors. They also provide a forum for exposing North Korea to regional realities while facilitating bilateral dialogue between the North and South Korea, Japan, and the U.S., respectively. They also provide a mechanism for other regional actors to be heard, while contributing to a sense of regional identity and a spirit of cooperation and confidence building. Since Sept. 11, they have also become increasingly relevant for coordinating regional views and efforts in the war on terrorism.

Nonetheless, their utility remains limited, especially in the security arena, for two primary reasons. First, while steps have been taken since Sept. 11, 2001 to put some operational substance behind cooperative efforts, these organizations still largely remain dialogue mechanisms that talk about – rather than respond to or deal effectively with – emerging security challenges. And second, Taiwan has been systematically excluded

from many of these mechanisms and one of the region's greatest security challenges – cross-Strait relations – has been purposefully kept off the security dialogue agenda at Beijing's insistence. As long as these characteristics prevail, the prospects and promises of multilateral security cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region, at least from a U.S. perspective, will necessarily be limited.

Ad Hoc Multilateralism: the PSI and Six-Party Talks

If Washington has only limited confidence in institutionalized multilateral mechanisms (like the ARF, APEC, and United Nations), it is developing a clear preference for ad hoc or tailored multilateralism aimed at a specific task or objective and comprised of a "coalition of the willing." The multinational force assembled for the war in Iraq provides one example, as does the U.S.-instigated Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI).

Proliferation Security Initiative. The PSI was first laid out in a speech by President Bush in May 2003 and formalized at a 11-nation meeting (involving Australia, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, the UK, and the U.S.) in Madrid a month later. It is "a global initiative with global reach," under which coalition members have agreed "to move quickly on direct, practical measures to impede the trafficking in weapons of mass destruction (WMD), missiles, and related items." As such, it is clearly "task-oriented." It represents cooperation for a specific, clearly-defined purpose, as opposed to dialogue for dialogue's sake or in support of more generic objectives. In September 2003, in Paris, the original core participants agreed on a Statement of Interdiction Principles "to establish a more coordinated and effective basis through which to impede and stop [WMD] shipments . . . consistent with national legal authorities and relevant international law and frameworks, including the UN Security Council." At least 60 nations have expressed support for these principles; Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, the Philippines, Russia, and Singapore are among the Asia-Pacific nations that have participated with the U.S. in PSI air, ground, and (mostly) sea interdiction exercises to develop and demonstrate the capability to prevent illicit trafficking in nuclear weapons and fissile material.

Six-Party Talks. The best example of task-oriented ad hoc multilateral cooperation in Northeast Asia is the Six-Party Talks, established at Washington's insistence, to deal with the specific issue of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The talks were also intended, and served, to multilateralize what many initially viewed as a bilateral U.S.-DPRK problem.

The creation of the six-party process, in this author's opinion, may represent one of the Bush administration's finest diplomatic hours. [Please note that I am addressing here the *creation* of the multilateral process, not its results to date.] This initiative draws from the lessons learned during the first North Korea nuclear crisis, where – despite close coordination and consultation – Washington was widely perceived as unilaterally cutting a deal with Pyongyang before sticking Seoul and Tokyo with the bill. While Pyongyang argued for bilateral consultations (and a separate U.S.-DPRK non-aggression pact),

Washington rightfully insisted this time that participation by Seoul and Tokyo was "essential." It also acknowledges the important role that China, and to a lesser extent Russia, must play if multilateral security guarantees are to be part of the final solution (as most would agree they are). Finally, the Bush administration recognized and tried to work around Pyongyang's strategy of trying to play all sides against one another by presenting different, conflicting messages depending on the audience.

The Bush administration clearly believes that a multilateral approach represents the most logical avenue toward crafting a long-term solution that not only achieves Washington's immediate goal of stopping nuclear proliferation but also addresses the needs and concerns of North Korea's immediate neighbors. The creation of the six-party mechanism provides a framework for broader Northeast Asia multilateral cooperation in the future. If the talks succeed, most parties agree that a more formalized mechanism must evolve to implement the agreement, provide necessary security assurances, and monitor compliance, as well as facilitate whatever aid packages are associated with the final accord. If the Talks fail, some would argue that there will be an even greater need for some form of institutionalized cooperation in order to manage the danger posed by a presumably (and self-confessed) nuclear weapons-equipped North Korea. If and how the six-party mechanism transitions into a more institutionalized Northeast Asia forum will help determine the degree of future security cooperation in this East Asia subregion and Washington's involvement in it.

The EAS: Much Ado about Something?

This brings us to the December 2005 inaugural East Asia Summit. The debate continues: Was the summit, held in Kuala Lumpur on Dec. 14, "much ado about nothing," as many critics are already claiming, or "a historic event whose future impact is likely to be as significant as the first [1976] ASEAN summit," as Barry Desker, head of Singapore's Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, argues?

The answer is: it's too soon to say. While it remains unclear what the EAS will eventually become, it is already quite clear what it will not be: it will not form the base of the much-heralded but still dormant East Asia Community. That role will remain with the more exclusive A+3 gathering, comprised of the 10 Southeast Asian states plus China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea. It is also highly doubtful that it will, or wants to, pose a threat to U.S. interests.

The EAS host, Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi, made it abundantly clear that the 10 ASEAN countries and their Plus Three partners constituted the core, noting that "You are talking about a community of East Asians; I don't know how the Australians could regard themselves as East Asians, or the New Zealanders for that matter." "We are not talking about members of the community," Badawi continued, even though Australia, New Zealand, and "our immediate neighbor" India have "common interests in what is happening in the region." The architects of East Asia community-building, he clearly inferred, would all be Asians, with the A+3 (vice EAS) participants

providing the base. The EAS would provide a vehicle for outsiders to endorse the process; it "could play a significant role," but would not drive the process.

The Chairman's Statement underscores, twice, that ASEAN will be the "driving force" behind East Asian community-building. The KL Declaration on the Summit declares that future meetings "will be hosted and chaired by an ASEAN Member Country." Beijing had suggested that it host the second round but ASEAN remains as concerned about sharing driving privileges with its other community members as it does allowing outsiders a greater say in the community-building process.

Building an East Asia Community. The Chairman's Statement and KL Declaration both acknowledge that building an East Asia community is "a long term goal," indicating that first priority will go toward building "a strong ASEAN Community which will serve as a solid foundation for our common peace and prosperity." In an apparent attempt to address one of Washington's potential concerns about this new regional grouping, the KL Declaration also noted that the EAS would be "an open, inclusive, transparent, and outward-looking forum in which we strive to strengthen global norms and universally recognized values." Washington's membership would still require it to accede to the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), something the Bush administration (like its predecessors) has been reluctant to do. Observer status appears possible, however (and is more likely to be sought by Washington).

Still undefined is how the EAS (or the A+3, for that matter) will interact with broader regional organizations such as the ARF or APEC (which includes Washington and the EU among its members). Hopefully, this will be one of the modalities to be addressed by EAS participants when they convene next in December 2006 in Cebu, Philippines.

The U.S. and the TAC. In the interim, Washington should not only begin exploring the possibility of seeking observer status, but should also be asking itself why it continues to resist acceding to the TAC. The oft-stated contention that this would somehow undercut America's Asian alliances appears unfounded: two of Washington's Asian allies – Thailand and the Philippines – are charter members of ASEAN, while the other three – Australia, Japan, and the Republic of Korea – have now acceded to the TAC without any perceptible impact on Washington's network of bilateral alliances.

As a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), Washington has already endorsed the purpose and principles of the TAC "as a code of conduct governing relations between states and a unique diplomatic instrument for regional confidence-building, preventive diplomacy, and political and security cooperation." Perhaps it's time to take the next step, in order to demonstrate Washington's commitment to regional prosperity and stability and to underscore U.S. support for East Asia community-building.

Rising Nationalism. While much attention has been paid to the Bush administration's reaction to East Asia community-building, the biggest threat to this effort comes not from

Washington but from within the "community." The sad truth is, East Asia community-building, with or without Washington's support, is not going to be easy, given rising nationalism in Japan, China, South Korea, and elsewhere. Even within ASEAN, there are clear differences of opinion regarding the focus and intent of the EAS, especially between Indonesia and Malaysia. Meanwhile, unless and until Tokyo, Beijing, and Seoul can more effectively channel or control their respective nationalist tendencies, it is difficult to image a true East Asian community taking shape.

The primary catalyst for today's tensions has been Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro's continued visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, along with lingering disputes over textbook renditions of history. Japanese textbooks have come under the most scrutiny, given the approval of one controversial textbook series in particular (which has been adopted by less than one percent of Japan's public schools), but textbooks in South Korea and especially China would also fail most objectivity tests (and we won't even try to add North Korean textbooks to this mix).

Prime Minister Koizumi argues that he is merely honoring his campaign pledge to continue paying tribute to Japan's war dead – there are over 2 ½ million souls interred at Yasukuni, unfortunately including 14 World War II "Class A" war criminals; the source of the controversy. But, Koizumi has also sworn to preserve, protect, and promote Japanese national security interests, and his continued annual visits to the shrine are making this increasingly impossible to do, at least when it comes to promoting harmony in the immediate neighborhood, much less attempting to create a sense of East Asia Community, the presumed goal of A+3 and the EAS.

Meanwhile, the failure of the U.S. to speak out on this issue, combined with the (correct) impression that the U.S. stands firmly behind Koizumi and his quest for acceptance of a greater political and security role in East Asia, has translated into increased ill will against Washington, especially from its other key East Asia ally, South Korea. President Bush was questioned repeatedly during his November 2005 Asia tour about his reaction to the "antagonizing" visits. He repeatedly ducked the question, responding instead that "I believe a useful role for me, as someone who is friendly with the three leaders involved, is to remind people that it is best to put the past behind and move forward in the future." Unfortunately the high-profile visits make putting the past behind impossible.

By almost any measurement, Tokyo's relations with Beijing and Seoul are considerably worse today than when Koizumi assumed office. While his Korean and Chinese counterparts must share the blame, primary responsibility rests with Koizumi. More importantly, the opportunity to reverse current downward trends also resides in the Japanese prime minister's hands.

I have long defended Prime Minister Koizumi's right to go to the shrine; during each of his personal visits, Koizumi has delivered a strong anti-war message, calling attention to Japan's militaristic past and pledging "never again." Unfortunately, the symbolism of the visits has completely overshadowed the message, making it easy for

Koizumi's detractors to politically exploit the visits. (This is not to imply that the visits do not offend the sensibilities of many in Korea, China, and, for that matter, in Japan; they do! But it is equally undeniable that they have become a political stick with which to beat the anti-Koizumi, anti-Japan drum.)

As a result, the time has come for Prime Minister Koizumi to stop exercising his right to visit Yasukuni for the sake of the greater good . . . but only if the leaders of China and South Korea are prepared to make an equally bold diplomatic gesture that will finally let all three countries focus on the future instead of being continually blinded by the past. I have argued that Koizumi should announce that he is willing, out of respect for his neighbor's sensitivities, to curtail his visits to Yasukuni. He should then call on his Chinese and South Korean counterparts to meet in a three-way summit to discuss both history and the future.

Unless some bold gesture along these lines takes place soon, genuine movement toward an East Asia community will likely remain stalled, at least until September 2006, when Prime Minister Koizumi is expected to step down. Should he decide to stay on or should his successor find it necessary to repeat his Yasukuni visit pledge (a distinct possibility), the prospects for East Asia community-building will remain bleak.

Conclusion

As we enter the Year of the Dog, I believe the United States remains committed to remaining a key member of the broader Asia-Pacific community, as it has been for at least the past half-century, for the simple reason that it is in America's national interest to do so. In this regard, I should note that the Pentagon's current emphasis on global "transformation," which has resulted in a planned one-third reduction of U.S. military forces on the Korean Peninsula and smaller, less dramatic adjustments in Japan and elsewhere, is not an indication of lessening interest or commitment but is rather based on a realistic assessment of future threats and the need to maintain a smaller, less intrusive footprint, in order to help sustain an overseas presence in the future.

Its reputation for unilateralism notwithstanding, the Bush administration is likely to also remain generally supportive of East Asia multilateralism, including those organizations like the A+3 and EAS that do not directly involve Washington, provided that they are not seen as vehicles for excluding the U.S. from the region or aimed at diminishing its influence. In this regard, Washington is more likely to watch the behavior and intentions of specific members than judge the organizations as a whole. The U.S. is likely to also remain committed to reinvigorating the ARF and APEC; President Bush is likely to continue his perfect attendance at the APEC Leaders Meetings and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, having received much (well-deserved) criticism for skipping her first ARF meeting, is expected to be at the 2006 ministerial.

Sino-U.S. relations are likely to experience continued ups and downs but it remains unlikely that Washington would embark on an active policy of containment against the PRC absent some drastic action by Beijing, such as an unprovoked military

strike against Taiwan. The focus will be on crafting a common definition of what constitutes a "responsible stakeholder." Likewise, while the Bush administration will continue its theme of promoting freedom and democracy both globally and regionally, it is unlikely to attempt to actively bring about regime change even in North Korea, much less in China or other less-than-fully democratic East Asia countries. On the multilateral front, it is likely to place special emphasis on task-oriented ad hoc coalitions of the willing, such as the PSI, aimed at effectively dealing with regional and broader challenges, rather than just talking about them.

About the Author

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