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East Asia is a region bursting with superlatives. It is propelled by economic growth rates unrivalled by any other region. It contains the world's most populous nation and teems with over a quarter of its people. It is also the most heavily armed corner of the world, containing the forces of three major nuclear powers, the three largest armies, and the most overheated international arms market.

While a young America still hugged the Atlantic coast, we could and did ignore this vast region. Westward expansion changed that. As California and the Pacific Northwest swelled with new citizens, our gaze turned more and more to the Pacific and East Asia.

A Word from

As late as the early part of this century, we sat idly by as European powers and a rising Japan vied with each other in the region. We remained so disengaged that we occasionally served as a neutral peacemaker. By the 1930s this no longer sufficed. It was challenges arising in Asia, not in Europe, that led us into World War II.

After destroying imperial Japan's war machine, America became a blocking force to Soviet domination. In the most tempestuous years of the Cold War, we fought more conflicts and lost more lives in Asia than in the rest of the world combined. For forty-five years, our view of this region was solidified by Cold War realities. But with that era over it is time to find new bearings. The East Asia Strategic Initiative begun in 1989 was intended to start that process.

As this initiative recognized, our interests in this vibrant region are now so great that it is impossible for us to withdraw or take a back seat as East Asia moves into the next century. That is not just an external

the world's most dynamic
region needs dynamic solutions



the Chairman

DOD (R.D. Ward)

The Chairman greeting the deputy chief of the PLA general staff as the Secretary of Defense looks on.

view but one shared by East Asian nations as well. Nearly all agree that America's presence and power are an irreplaceable counterbalance to the region's greatest perils.

Today, our commitment is anchored on alliances with Japan and South Korea, the latter challenged by the regime to its north. But Asia is poised for great change. China is on a path of economic reforms that many think will catapult it to world power and lead at some point to political changes. Hong Kong will revert back to China in 1997, and there is the unresolved question of Taiwan. Russia—in the midst of its own economic and political reforms—remains every bit a great Asian power. For decades Moscow fed instability and conflict in the region. And, in the very heart of the region, the divided Korean peninsula will one day mend, hopefully through peaceful means although that is by no means assured. These are merely the future events we know about: in an uncertain world much more could occur.

The burgeoning markets of East Asia hold immense promise, but economic progress will only succeed if stability and peace are maintained. Can current security arrangements adequately preserve these conditions? Unlike

Western Europe, Asia is still a very divided region of the world. There are no NATO's or CSCE's where East Asian nations work collectively to calm one another's distrusts and insecurities. Today, these states take their cues from their perceptions of what others are doing or are adding to their arsenals. On the other hand, many believe that Europe and Asia are too different to expect that security arrangements that work in one area can work in the other.

Already the region has reached the point where economic relations have become far more integrated than security relations. Over the past five

years, the growth of trade between Asian nations has outstripped that with the rest of the world. Is it prudent to anticipate that economic relations will eventually lead security relations to a more stable plateau? If so, can existing security arrangements provide enough time?

These and other concerns need to be addressed. The world's most dynamic region needs dynamic solutions. That is why I am pleased that the JFQ Forum in this issue of the journal is focusing on the challenges to this region. There was a time when Americans viewed Asia as a distant and exotic land full of mystery. It is now our back yard—and, some would be quick to point out, it may well be our front yard in the next century.

JOHN M. SHALIKASHVILI
Chairman
of the Joint Chiefs of Staff