



Pacific Symposium 2004

Meeting U.S. Security Objectives in a Changing Asia

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Strategic developments in the Asia Pacific are changing the region's security architecture, with important implications for the United States and the global community. The 2004 Pacific Symposium focused on two areas of concern. First, panelists discussed the key shifts in the geopolitical structure of the Asia Pacific region and the challenges and opportunities that traditional flashpoints and new security threats present for collaborative security approaches. Second, panelists discussed how best to attain U.S. security objectives by working with friends and allies, with particular reference to transformation and the U.S. strategic posture in the Asia Pacific region. Within this framework, the Symposium addressed important issues such as Taiwan's Presidential election, the North Korean nuclear issue, and the evolving roles of China and Japan in regional security affairs.

Key Changes in Asia's Geopolitical Structure

Participants on the opening panel addressed the changing geopolitical structure in Asia, focusing on China, Japan, South and North Korea. They noted that while U.S. foreign policy is presently overwhelmingly focused on the global war on terrorism and the democratic transformation of Iraq and the Middle East, Asia is undergoing its own transformation, driven in large part by China's economic dynamism and active diplomacy. When the U.S. foreign policy focus shifts back to Asia, it will encounter a significantly changed region.

Beijing has focused China's foreign policy on improving regional economic, diplomatic, normative, and security relations, thereby increasing China's regional power and influence. Concerns of a "China threat" have dissipated, but not altogether disappeared, in the region. Viewing the region as becoming China-centric, however, is too

simplistic— the growth of bilateralism and multilateralism is creating a multifaceted regional architecture. This calls for policy adjustments in Washington. The U.S. “hubs-and-spokes” foreign policy approach to the region needs to be updated, and become more nimble and sensitive. The U.S. can no longer sustain an approach that defines security and terrorism largely in hard terms; the ‘softer’ side of security must be better understood and given greater emphasis. China’s rising influence is not necessarily inimical to U.S. strategic interests. Indeed, the foreign policies of the two countries have never been as complementary as they have been since 9/11. Furthermore, the United States must be aware that a zero-sum approach risks alienating not only China, but also regional allies.

Japan is increasingly assuming greater responsibilities for international security and stability. For example, in February 2004, Japan made the unprecedented decision to send the Self-Defense Force to Iraq, an environment experiencing active combat. Rather than seeing this as a unilateralist move back to a 1930’s future, a more nuanced analysis would recognize that Japan’s new engagement in international security affairs is part of its support for and cooperation with its major ally, the United States. The continuation of the U.S.-Japan alliance serves as the foundation for recent changes in Japan’s defense and security policy. These changes date back to the 1998 legislation implementing Japan’s New Defense Guidelines and extend to legislation allowing Japan to support the U.S. in Afghanistan and Iraq. The recent developments should be seen as reactive steps to maintain the status quo (the alliance with the U.S.) by allowing Japan to be a better strategic partner of the United States.

The transformation of the U.S.-Republic of Korea alliance post-9/11 should be placed in context of the 1991 East Asian Strategic Initiative, which aimed to have South Korea transition to a leading role in its own defense in order to make the U.S.-R.O.K. alliance more equitable and hence more sustainable. The recent announcement of the relocation and reduction of U.S. forces based in Korea is long overdue, as is South Korea’s assumption of a leading role in its own defense. Combined with increasing U.S. military capabilities, the transformation of the U.S. presence and the alliance will enhance deterrence against North Korea and increase the security of South Korea.

South Korea's politics have traditionally been leadership driven and, over the fifty years of the alliance, the U.S. had been able to develop an understanding of the ruling political class. However, the election of President Roh Moo Hyun reflects a generational change in South Korea's political leadership. The U.S. lacks ties to and a good understanding of South Korea's "next generation" of political leaders. Preliminary polling data of newly elected first-term members of the National Assembly suggest changing perceptions that have policy implications. For example, while the United States is regarded with the highest level of trust (ahead of Russia, Japan and China), there is also a belief that the United States is the biggest beneficiary of the U.S.-R.O.K. alliance. The polling data also show that closer ties with China are expected for the future: 55 percent of those polled view China as a key future partner, and less than 45 percent held the same regard for the United States.

The current Six Party Talks offer the prospect of a peaceful resolution of the Korean nuclear crisis, but the coalition is under increasing pressure because of differing priorities and assessments of the DPRK. For example, in the latest United Nations Human Rights Commission meetings, the South Korean delegation refrained from condemning Pyongyang's human-rights abuses. Absent Kim Jong-il experiencing a religious-like conversion and given North Korea's lack of credibility as a negotiating partner, coupled with U.S. requirements for intrusive verification of any agreement, it is difficult to see a near-term resolution of the crisis.

A participant raised the idea, tabled last autumn by the Chinese government, of turning the Six Party Talks into a Northeast Asia regional security mechanism. The panelists noted that such a regional security mechanism might be a hybrid of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), emphasizing dialogue over enforcement mechanisms, with the goal of establishing mutual confidence-building measures. However, panelists felt that the ongoing Six Party Talks are unlikely to evolve into a quasi-security arrangement, partly due to Japanese wariness of North Korea.

Taiwan's Presidential Election and Implications for U.S. Policy

The March 2004 Taiwanese election, in which President Chen Shui-bian was re-elected by a narrow margin, has significant implications for the United States. President Chen's stated intention to push for a 'new constitution' is problematic. Although framed in terms of "good governance" and a commitment to "maintain the status quo," this requires accepting Chen's definition that the status quo is that Taiwan is already a "sovereign, independent state." China rejects this definition, and Taiwan's effort to press this claim through the process of constitutional reform could threaten peace and stability.

Although China exercised restraint and prudence during the campaign, it was greatly disappointed by Chen's re-election. The post-election statement from China's Taiwan Affairs Office that China "would not sit idly by" in case of disorder in Taiwan not only cast China as a belligerent bully, but also fed the perception in Taiwan that China's threats to use force are not credible. China does not trust President Chen and is therefore likely to follow a hard-line approach that may be counter-productive.

The United States has a crucial role to play in restraining both sides, and must act to preclude either party from taking unilateral steps to change the status quo in ways that might provoke the other side. There was general agreement that the concepts underlying 'strategic ambiguity' should be reinforced. Taiwan should not assume that it can count on U.S. support if it engages in provocative behavior; China would be foolhardy to assume that the U.S. would not intervene if it attacks Taiwan. The United States should be direct and clear that it does not accept either party's position on sovereignty, while emphasizing the benefits of a flexible approach and the negative consequences of irresponsible actions.

Challenges and Opportunities— Traditional Flashpoints and New Security Threats

This panel addressed North Korean proliferation, tensions across the Taiwan Straits, and the security implications of weak governments in South Asia.

Dealing with Pyongyang on proliferation issues raises a number of strategic issues. For example, one panelist argued that the Bush administration has to set more realistic priorities in dealing with Pyongyang on the nuclear issue. The current approach of demanding DPRK agreement on “Complete, Verifiable, and Irreversible Dismantlement” (CVID) as a pre-condition for U.S.-DPRK bilateral talks not only fails to provide either concrete incentives or a diplomatic “escape hatch” for Pyongyang, but also lacks credible “sticks” because of the lack of regional and international support. The highest priority is to freeze North Korea’s plutonium production, which poses the immediate proliferation risk. The North’s highly enriched uranium (HEU) program can be dealt with on a slower track since it appears to be years away from producing weapons grade material.

U.S. strategy needs to be prepared for both success and failure. While diplomatic solutions and steps for inter-Korean reconciliation are pursued, talks with other players—including China—about the consequences of a nuclear North Korea should be continued. Strategies that allow for better outcomes must be implemented, even if Pyongyang might cheat. For example, the lessons learned from 1994 show that some verification methods worked better than others; these more effective methods should be the priority in negotiations. Such an approach recognizes the fact that no matter how intrusive, there are no measures that can guarantee North Korean compliance.

Participants noted that the “One China” framework has allowed the United States to avoid making hard strategic choices between China and Taiwan and has served the interests of all parties reasonably well. However long-term trends may force the United States to rethink its policy. Taiwan’s democratization is making Taipei more responsible to the will of its people -- even if Taipei wanted to pursue a ‘backroom’ deals with Beijing over sovereignty, this is no longer an option. The assertion of a Taiwanese identity is strengthening a trend toward viewing Taiwan as a separate and independent entity. Taiwan has also been taking creeping steps towards independence.

In China, there is a growing nationalism and, fear among senior leaders of being perceived as ‘soft’ on Taiwan. Beijing has a more pluralistic approach towards foreign

policy decision-making, with business groups and local political leaders more involved. Third, greater efforts are being taken to develop a military option for reunification, with Beijing seeking the ability to delay and deter U.S. intervention until Chinese forces are able to achieve decisive military results in a Taiwan contingency. These trends are destabilizing the security environment and placing U.S. policy under increasing strain.

In Southeast Asia, a number of security concerns deserve attention and action. First, Islamic extremism and militancy are creating new challenges for law enforcement, particularly in Malaysia and Indonesia. At the same time, separatist movements are draining governments of their resources even as they are still addressing the economic effects of the Asian Financial Crisis. A variety of transnational security threats, including narcotics trafficking, small arms proliferation, and refugee flows, are intensified by lax border security. Complicating a cooperative security approach is the fact that many states in South East Asia are reluctant to share intelligence with each other. Many of these new security threats require innovative new solutions and some, such as HIV/AIDS in the military in Malaysia, Burma and Thailand, also threaten to weaken key elements of the national security apparatus.

In the discussion session, it was noted that U.S. counter-terrorism policies and other foreign policy initiatives in Asia are not always complementary. For example, among the root causes of terrorism are lack of economic opportunity and poor educational systems. However, U.S. assistance initiatives like the Millennium Challenge Account program have stringent criteria for applicant states. Countries including Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia are unlikely to qualify for Millennium Challenge grants given their record of human-rights abuses and other governance problems. Yet Jamal Islamiya was known to have a cell based in Cambodia, and further U.S. development assistance would help Phnom Pen mitigate some of the conditions that allow terrorists support and safe haven.

China's policies towards Taiwan were raised in the discussion session. Thus far, China has focused on the twin policy objectives of deterring Taiwanese independence and promoting unification with China. Deterring independence rests heavily on Chinese

military threats; China has not done enough to emphasise the benefits of reunification or the common histories and cultures shared across the straits.

Collaborative Approaches to Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region

Only in the late 1980s did regional institutional building become popular in Asia. Since then, regional institutions have developed and are pursuing new areas of cooperation. For example, both APEC and ASEAN are moving away from their traditional economic focus to work on transnational security concerns. These developments are new, but not necessarily 'path-breaking; they are actually 'path-dependent' and part of longer-term change. For example, norms were already in place to discuss recent counter-terrorism and anti-piracy policies, but suspicions still limit the scope of regional cooperation. While APEC is broadening its agenda to discuss 'soft' security concerns like energy, the discussion of harder security measures is off the agenda. Second, even under the new ASEAN+3 model, it remains difficult to discuss meaningful security developments because of the commitment to traditional notions of sovereignty.

As a case study, the Philippines illustrates key facets of cooperation in the War on Terror. The Philippines has a broad-based approach to counter-terrorism, using military, anti-money-laundering, trans-national anti-piracy countermeasures and poverty-reduction plans. This has included joint training exercises between Armed Forces of the Philippines and elements of the U.S. Pacific Command; the U.S. Department of State training of Filipino police forces, and the U.S. Agency for International Development funding projects in the southern Philippines. The Filipino experience speaks to a 21st Century environment in which national security can no longer be realized on a purely national basis.

Central Asia has been part of China's broader regional security strategy for some time. Considering the size, unsettled political climate and untapped resources of the region, China's interest is unsurprising. Through the Shanghai Cooperative Organization (SCO), China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan have been working, to address the 'three evils' of terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism. The SCO is

also evolving as an economic organization— working on E-business, foreign direct investment and customs facilitation in the region. In September 2003, the SCO Counter-Terrorism Center opened in Tashkent, reflecting a willingness to deepen regional cooperation on security issues.

Participants contended that in the near to medium term, China's efforts in Central Asia do not present a pressing challenge to U.S. regional interests. Many Central Asian states also want to cooperate with the United States, particularly on the "three evils" of terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism. Over the longer term, the United States and China could be at odds on issues like energy and political reform in Central Asia. Participants suggested that the United States pursue cooperative strategies with China and Russia including partnerships on counter-narcotics, lower level military exchanges and encouragement of transparent government.

Energy issues in Central Asia have not been a focus of the SCO given the "tyranny of distance" and the massive extraction costs. Until these practical problems are overcome, there will be no multilateral approach to Central Asian energy. However, this does not preclude the possibility of bilateral solutions, like the Kazakh and Chinese agreements to build a pipeline.

A question was raised as to whether an East Asian economic community was developing, given the ASEAN+3 and SCO models. One panelist answered that historically, multilateralism has not enjoyed much success in the region, especially multilateral structures imposed by external powers. At its core, community building relies on the acceptance of a common identity and common values -- economic performance is insufficient to establish a community. China's diplomatic success with the SCO is unlikely to be replicated elsewhere in the Asia Pacific region. Moreover, the SCO, unlike other Asia-Pacific regional institutions, is focused solely on land-borders.

Operationalizing U.S. Security Policies: Working with Friends, Allies and Partners

The panel examined key issues and developments that affect U.S. security interests, and cooperative approaches to security. The topics included failed states, military exercises, counter-terrorism strategy in Asia and the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI).

Participants contended that failed states cannot meet the paramount public good for their citizens: security. Failed states are often the result of decision-makers who choose to maximize their individual benefit and power at the expense of their country's well being. Such was the case with Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, and Tajikistan. Failed states should not be confused with weak states (which are on the lower end of the Human Development Index) or collapsed states (like Somalia, which has territorial borders, a seat at the United Nations, but nothing else representing statehood). There are peculiar cases, like North Korea, where the state is inherently weak, but able to exert domestic control through a rigid state apparatus. These states should not be defined as strong states, as they are unable to provide fundamental needs such as the daily food for their population.

It is important to utilize indicators for impending state failure, because preventing state failure is much less costly than resuscitating a failed state. A model for action could be the Australian intervention in the Solomon Islands. After alerting the international community to the deteriorating situation in the Solomon Islands, Australia, the dominant power in the area, intervened to prevent a complete collapse.

Multilateral military cooperation creates confidence and enhances interoperability—important force multipliers for safe and efficient partnerships. Enthusiasm for multilateral military cooperation is relatively low in Asia compared to other regions, such as Europe. However, the U.S. has recently expanded the scope and the number of participants involved in multilateral military exercises. This requires efforts to find common ground among armed forces with differing capabilities and political constitutions. The pursuit of the War on Terror raises sensitive questions with regard to multilateral cooperation. For example, in anti-piracy and anti-narcotics trafficking operations, the issue of intelligence sharing is becoming increasingly salient. Multilateral

military cooperation is not a “one-size-fits-all” approach. Illustrative is the development of multilateral military cooperation among Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia on transnational security concerns, which does not rely on U.S. leadership.

Asia is a central theater in the War on Terror. Terrorist bombings in Indonesia and abductions by Philippine terrorist groups have had serious security implications both within the countries themselves as well as within neighboring countries in the Asia-Pacific region. They also took a secondary toll on the economic well-being of the individual countries by raising issues of internal stability, discouraging foreign direct investment, and diverting tourism. Counter-terrorism efforts can only succeed with the cooperation of willing and able partners. To this end, a combination of steps have been taken with allies, including military training through Joint Combined Training and the Anti-Terrorism Assistance Program; background checks through the Terrorism Interdiction Program, and economic support through the Financial Assistance Program. There have been considerable successes in terms of on-the-job training.

PSI is a set of activities; it is not an organization. PSI is concerned with the interdiction of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and related materials— including missile delivery systems— by cargo, ground or air. PSI is consistent with national legal authorities. To this end, national authorities are using legal frameworks in new ways. For example, if harbor regulations are abused, national authorities are encouraged to intervene with WMD interdiction in mind. Thus, PSI provides the benefit of another layer of security, augmenting the tools already in place. A side benefit of PSI has been its role in encouraging proliferating states to change their policies. For example, Libya’s decision to change its stance on proliferation is in part due to the greater monitoring capability of PSI, whose interdiction measures exposed the state’s illegal actions. It is surprising how quickly PSI has been implemented, and there is much room for the initiative to grow. A major task is to work out how to give those that perform the interdictions the ‘triage capabilities’ to understand WMD-related technology.

Questions were asked about Taiwan's PSI role in regards to North Korean ships. One panelist felt that the sovereignty issues would complicate Taiwan's efforts to participate in PSI activities, but emphasized that multilateral agreements were not the only way to develop these techniques. Another panelist felt that PSI was more of a national-level mechanism, and not an international organization, giving Taiwan ample room to become involved.

U.S. Defense Policy in Asia

The core assumptions and main outlines of U.S. defense policy were discussed. International relations appear to be entering a period of persistent conflict. President Bush has noted that the United States is a nation at war. This situation requires protection of the homeland, an offensive strategy aimed at disrupting and rooting out terrorist networks, and a commitment to meet the intellectual challenge posed by a culture of hostility to western liberal values.

U.S. strategy has four interlinked goals: securing the United States with as much early warning as possible; maximizing strategic assets to increase freedom of action; the maturing of strategic alliances; and the strengthening of an international security environment that promotes order and security.

These goals are tested by four challenges. First, traditional state-based threats cannot be overlooked. Today, the United States has a preponderance of power, but U.S. defense policy must prepare to meet traditional challenges should they arise. Second, the U.S. must be able to deal with irregular threats as seen in Iraq and Afghanistan. Third, the U.S. must be prepared to deal with catastrophic threats that attempt to paralyze U.S. power by attacking the U.S. public and allies. The United States is building mechanisms to counter ballistic missile threats and deal with asymmetrical attacks. Fourth, the U.S. must address threats that aim to employ low- and high-technology means to disrupt U.S. society and military operations.

Current U.S. strategy is changing to meet the challenges of the strategic relationships of the Asian region. In terms of South Korea, planning is underway on the best means to establish Seoul's leadership for the security of the Peninsula. With Australia and Japan, transfer of missile defense technologies and more combined training programs are possibilities. Singapore, an essential transportation hub, is a critical partner for the deployment of U.S. forces. The Philippines presents the challenge of how to establish defense infrastructure for new threats. New opportunities have also arisen to work on security cooperation with China.

More work is required to protect critical bases; forward defense is impossible without protecting these sites. Asia presents the "tyranny of distance" as the United States seeks to maximize its own strength and reach in the region, while increasing the capabilities of regional partners. At the same time, the United States must improve its proficiency in irregular warfare, and make stronger efforts to deny adversaries sanctuary, even when the enemy is "hiding in plain sight" in urban areas.

Transforming Forces and U.S. Force Posture in the Asia Pacific Region

Defense transformation is fueled by the same forces that are so rapidly changing social and economic life; namely networking enabled by rapid advances in information technology. Information-driven networks will produce dramatic changes in how the United States fights, how the Department of Defense does business, and how the United States plans and works internationally.

Some practical examples of how transformation will affect Asia-Pacific defense relationships are already evident. Transformed forces have an improved capability for prompt action and stronger command structures. These attributes allowed Australian forces to take the lead in East Timor operations, while U.S. forces played a secondary role that could have been rapidly expanded if required. This kind of flexibility will permit U.S. forces to be postured differently without diminishing their ability to support allies. The flexibility of transformed forces will increase as services modernize and integrate, becoming more modular and more capable of joint operations. The

increasingly powerful role of the Joint Force Commander is the result of these processes. Joint Force Commanders also must use transformation to improve the ability to work closely with allies, developing standard operating procedures for multinational planning and augmentation teams.

There are concerns, that due to the high costs of technology, defense transformation may widen the gap between the United States and its traditional allies and partners. U.S. strategy is not based on U.S.-centric transformation, but is linked to and supportive of indigenous transformation processes among U.S. allies. This does not mean that friends and allies need to replicate the United States transformation process; rather, it means that states should use their respective comparative advantages and share those advantages to the extent possible. For example, Singapore is a world leader in data-mining, a critical component of the transformation process and one which Singapore can use to strengthen transformation cooperation with her allies.

In sum, it was argued that transformed U.S. forces could help overcome some operational limitations imposed by time and distance in the Asia-Pacific region in ways that would be responsive to allied defense needs. In addition, transformed forces should be better able to operate with allies. ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ Pacific Symposium – 2004 Rapporteur – Ms. Courtney Richardson. Final report reviewed and revised by Institute for Strategic Studies' fellows and staff: Ambassador Rust Deming, Dr. Stephen Flanagan, Dr. Christopher Lamb, CAPT William Mason, Dr. James Przystup, and Dr. Phillip Saunders.

ⁱⁱ The opinions, conclusions, and recommendations expressed or implied within this report are solely those of the participants and do not necessarily represent the views of the National Defense University, the Department of Defense, any other U.S. Government agency, or any agency of a foreign government.