

“U.S. Strategic Interests in Northeast Asia: 2009 and Beyond”

Alan D. Romberg  
Senior Associate and Director, East Asia Program  
Henry L. Stimson Center

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## **Introduction**

When the next president of the United States takes office in January 2009, he—or she—will face a world transformed from the one that confronted George W. Bush in 2001. In important measure, of course, that is a function of the events of 9/11, which generated a tectonic shift in world politics and American priorities. But it is also a function of advancing trends around the world that would have forced Washington to rethink its national security goals, priorities and relationships in any case.

Nowhere is this truer than in Northeast Asia. As everyone recognizes, the rise of China is a development of historic importance, one for which the Bush administration seemed singularly unprepared as it took office. Relatedly, the political evolution of Taiwan has proceeded on its own course, quite independent of Osama bin Laden and his terrorist plans, and that evolution has challenged Washington to manage its cross-Strait policies, and the maintenance of peace and stability, with increasing deftness and nuance. Japan has experienced a process not only of economic reawakening, but of political transformation. It is not a throwback to the aggressive, militaristic culture of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nonetheless, it is replete with aspects of a more assertive nationalism that has profound implications for future regional stability. And North and South Korea have gone through transitions that, though very different from one another, also have far-reaching importance for the region and for the United States.

Although this paper details some of the history that has led us to this point, the purpose is not merely to document or analyze these developments for their own sakes. Rather, the

goal is to illuminate how they have shaped American strategic perspectives and to assess their likely impact on the course of future U.S. policy.

### **The Rise of China**

When American “China hands” first vocally advocated reaching out to China in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the PRC was still viewed not only through the prism of ideological confrontation and the enmity of the bloody Korean War, but also (erroneously, as it turned out) as a Soviet strategic ally in Moscow’s expansionist foreign policy. But, even as they fought against strong political counter-currents in the United States that saw “Red China” as an implacable, barbaric enemy, these experts recognized China’s potential importance and the self-defeating nature of efforts to isolate it.<sup>1</sup> That said, self-evident as it appears today, it is unlikely that even the most visionary of those experts foresaw the rapidity of China’s transformation from an ideologically hard-line, economically backward nation that would experience domestic—and foment external—turmoil to a country successfully pursuing economic development based upon market principles and playing a major, increasingly responsible role in international trade, politics and security.

The people of the world who witnessed the brutal series of political and economic “campaigns” in the PRC’s early years, including the extraordinarily costly failure of the Great Leap Forward and the extreme cruelty of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, would have to be forgiven for not realizing that by the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century,

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<sup>1</sup> Ironically, Secretary of State Dean Acheson had sought to contain Sino-American enmity precisely because he saw the potential for a Sino-Soviet split and because he did not wish to create a legacy of irredentist Chinese claims against the United States.

though still intolerant of independently organized political or social movements, China would have accorded substantial individual freedoms to its citizens and that it would have joined as an observant member of most of the important international non-proliferation regimes. While they might have argued that logic would move China in that direction—and some did, especially as time went on—few would have readily predicted that the PRC would so rapidly position itself as a “responsible stakeholder” in world affairs.

Relations with the United States have played an important part in these developments, as China’s leaders have used both the improvement in the strategic environment those relations created and the opportunities they presented for greater access to the international system to accelerate China’s economic rise. Increasingly over time, Beijing has been attentive to ensuring that its greater power and influence do not appear threatening to the outside world—especially the United States. Indeed, the PRC has sought to convey the opposite impression, that it is promoting peace and stability.

Moreover, when China emerged from the worst excesses of the Cultural Revolution and found a threatening Soviet Union poised on its borders, it was ready for the transformation of Sino-American relations that Richard Nixon had in mind as he, too, sought to contain Soviet expansionism. Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai were not unopposed in their desire to enter into a tacit alliance with the United States; they faced even more strident opposition than Nixon did. But they understood that China needed this new strategic relationship and were willing to make some significant compromises and take notable political risks to create it.

In the late 1970s, as Deng Xiaoping not only sought to consolidate his political resurrection but also to set China on a sharply different economic course, he depended on formalizing the new relationship with the United States to provide the political, security and economic underpinning of his policy. And, like his predecessors, he was willing to make unattractive tactical bargains to do so, such as tolerating, at least for then, continuing American arms sales to Taiwan and a continuing robust U.S. relationship with the island in virtually all respects, albeit under the rubric of “unofficial” ties.

The point here is that both nations served their vital national interests by forging the new relationship, and they have invested much in it. And over the almost three decades since then, relations have advanced substantially along all axes, so that today China impinges on virtually all aspects of American life. Although George W. Bush has always acknowledged the importance of the Sino-American relationship and had endorsed the U.S. “one China” policy even during the Republican nomination campaign of 2000, when he took office in January 2001, in an approach quite distinct from that of his father, he sought to put U.S.-PRC ties on a somewhat lower rung on the U.S. priority list in East Asia, raising the alliances with Japan and Korea to first place.

Even before 9/11, however, Bush had to face up to the realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and China’s importance to American strategic interests. This was brought home to him on April 1, 2001, when a U.S. Navy EP-3 reconnaissance plane operating in international airspace off of China’s southern coast was bumped by a PLA navy plane, killing the Chinese pilot and forcing the Americans to make an emergency landing at a PLA airbase on Hainan island. As soon as the American crew were safely back on American soil, and

despite his anger that the EP-3 crew had been held for eleven days—that is, for four more days after agreement was reached on the terms of their release—Bush went out into the White House’s Rose Garden and proclaimed that China and the United States needed to find a better way to relate. As he put it: “Both the United States and China must make a determined choice to have a productive relationship that will contribute to a more secure, more prosperous and more peaceful world.”<sup>2</sup> And across the next several months, a series of high-level American visitors to China, including the U.S. Trade Representative and the Secretary of State, carried that message.

Almost a quarter century after the initial opening, and despite some important setbacks, China, too, was seeking a more constructive relationship. Following a mini-crisis over Taiwan in 1995-96, after Taiwan’s president, Lee Teng-hui, was allowed to visit his PhD alma mater, Cornell University, and gave a speech that touted “the Taiwan experience,” the Clinton administration had worked hard to repair relations. It was not giving Beijing carte blanche in Taiwan, but it recommitted to the “one China” policy and added specific conditions on dealings with Taiwan that gave that policy renewed meaning.<sup>3</sup> In the reconciliation process that followed, Clinton had joined PRC President Jiang Zemin in committing “to build toward a constructive strategic partnership.” But the momentum died out after an exchange of state visits in October 1997 and June 1998, and Bush entered office determined to separate himself from Clinton on China (as on almost every other aspect of policy). This was importantly a matter of politics. But Bush and his senior

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<sup>2</sup> “Remarks by the President Upon the Return from China of U.S. Service Members,” 12 April 2001 (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/04/20010412-6.html>)

<sup>3</sup> Alan D. Romberg, *Rein In at the Brink of the Precipice: American Policy Toward Taiwan and U.S.-PRC Relations* (Washington: Henry L. Stimson Center, 2003), 155-193.

advisors also apparently believed that Clinton had unnecessarily and recklessly elevated the China relationship at the cost of ignoring critical American alliances.

As already noted, Bush's priorities changed after the EP-3 incident, and five months later the tragic events of 9/11 substantially accelerated the tendency toward better, and more comprehensive, relations. This trend was buttressed by a number of other events. When, in late 2002, Lee Teng-hui's successor, Chen Shui-bian, made remarks suggesting a push toward Taiwan independence, Washington responded with pressure on Taipei to rein in, which was appreciated in Beijing.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, with a crisis brewing over confirmation of secret North Korean efforts to develop an enriched uranium-based nuclear weapons program, China became more engaged on that question, eventually hosting and actively promoting what became the Six-Party Talks. This was appreciated by Washington.

It was against this background, as well as positive cooperation with Beijing in the global war on terrorism, that the American president for the first time publicly embraced the full "mantra" of normalized U.S.-PRC relations when Jiang Zemin visited the Bush ranch in Crawford, Texas in October 2002.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In August 2002, Chen talked about "one country on each side" (of the Taiwan Strait) and of Taiwan going down "its own path." Over the next year he proposed a "brand new" constitution, taken to mean one that would eliminate the provisions theoretically linking Taiwan to the Mainland. And he put referenda on the March 2004 ballot on cross-Strait issues that had no immediate practical effect but that were seen as roiling the waters. (Those referenda failed because over half of Taiwan voters declined to participate in the vote.)

<sup>5</sup> Mr. Bush said: "I emphasized to the President that our one China policy, based on the three communiques [and] the Taiwan Relations Act, remains unchanged...[The] one China policy means that the issue ought to be resolved peacefully... and that includes making it clear that we do not support independence." ("President Bush, Chinese President Jiang Zemin Discuss Iraq, N. Korea," 25 October 2002, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/10/20021025.html>)

Bringing the story up to date, with the election of a Democratically-controlled Congress in November 2006, many observers have suggested that Sino-American relations will now undergo some strain, perhaps once again becoming a “political football” in U.S. election politics as it has so often been in the past. We can already see the Democrats are pushing trade complaints with greater intensity (especially those identifiable with job losses), and the same can be expected with regard to concerns over human rights issues, including Tibet. The Bush administration, either because of concerns of its own or in order to preempt Congress, has subsequently adopted a somewhat tougher stance on trade issues, for example bringing two cases to the WTO that appear to have struck a sensitive nerve in China. Perhaps even more than disagreement over the substance of the complaints, the sharp Chinese reaction has been because of objection to the process of taking these issues to an international forum rather than handling them bilaterally, as in the past. In any event, as the U.S. presidential campaign season unfolds—and it has already begun in earnest a year before the first primary ballot will be cast—there are some worried voices about the implications for Sino-American relations.

The PRC military build-up will also no doubt be given increasing scrutiny. But this is not simply because of the presidential campaign. One does not have to accept former defense secretary Rumsfeld’s seeming dismissal of legitimate PRC security interests to have concerns about the extent and purposes of the PLA modernization program.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> At the IISS “Shangri-la Conference” in Singapore in June 2005, Rumsfeld put it this way: “China’s defense expenditures are much higher than Chinese officials have published. It is estimated that China’s is the third largest military budget in the world, and clearly the largest in Asia. China appears to be expanding

Although other factors enter into the equation, it is in important part as a response to the PLA build-up that the United States has begun to shift deployments of more capable air and naval assets to the Pacific. This is not a “statement” that the United States sees China now or necessarily in the future as an adversary. But it is a prudent “hedge” against the uncertainty of where China is eventually heading. As a recent Council on Foreign Relations task force report noted, the United States and China are both hedging against the uncertainty of what the other country might do that would impinge on its important strategic interests.<sup>7</sup> And this will continue.

At the same time, neither country is looking for a fight, and, assuming that the Taiwan issue can be managed well (perhaps a large assumption in light of the political evolution in Taiwan discussed below, but not a heroic one), deepening of the U.S.-PRC “senior” dialogue undertaken in the latter years of the Bush administration would appear to be an important tool for airing concerns and—one might hope—generating action to address those concerns.<sup>8</sup>

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its missile forces, allowing them to reach targets in many areas of the world, not just the Pacific region, while also expanding its missile capabilities within this region. China also is improving its ability to project power, and developing advanced systems of military technology. Since no nation threatens China, one must wonder: Why this growing investment? Why these continuing large and expanding arms purchases? Why these continuing robust deployments?” (“Secretary Rumsfeld’s Remarks to the International Institute for Strategic Studies,” 4 June 2005, <http://singapore.usembassy.gov/060405.html>)

<sup>7</sup> “U.S.-China Relations: An Affirmative Agenda, A Responsible Course,” Task Force Report No. 59 (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, April 2007) (<http://www.cfr.org/content/publications/attachments/ChinaTaskForce.pdf>)

<sup>8</sup> A similar effort was begun—actually at a somewhat higher level—in the Clinton administration, but it eventually petered out.

Until a political change takes place in cross-Strait relations, however, the PRC will continue to insist on maintaining the capability to deter—and if necessary defeat—Taiwan independence, and the United States will continue to insist on maintaining the capability to deny China the opportunity to compel unification through use of force. Moreover, even assuming a substantial improvement of relations between Taiwan and the Mainland, the PRC will hold onto those capabilities that it feels will guarantee it cannot be intimidated by foreign powers. This includes, no doubt, advances that will be made in information and other high-tech warfare fields as well as space capabilities. On the latter, the recent ASAT test, however inconsistent with some long-standing Chinese diplomatic positions, and however badly bungled in terms of public explanation, undoubtedly reflected a strongly perceived military need to offset otherwise overwhelming American advantages through the use of satellites. But such developments in PLA capabilities will, of course, generate yet further advances on the U.S. side, as well.

Thus there will be limits on the ability to manage deployments on both sides in ways that are credibly characterized as defensive in nature rather than reflecting hostile intent. Indeed, even beyond the highly sensitive and neuralgic issue of Taiwan (see below), the United States and China harbor mutual strategic suspicion that will take a long time to overcome. Many in China believe that the United States seeks, if not to “contain” China in the Cold War sense of the term, at least to limit PRC opportunities to achieve greater influence and to limit its global reach. Americans are concerned about China’s ultimate strategic intentions, both in terms of the power balance in East Asia, but also on a broader scale.

Nonetheless, with sufficient political will, and operating in a responsible manner, reducing that suspicion and configuring deployments to minimize concerns should be possible to at least some meaningful degree, even as hedging continues apace. And this should contribute significantly to an overall deepening of Sino-American ties across a broad spectrum of mutual interests.

The “senior” (or strategic) political dialogue under way for a couple of years now will be helpful in this respect, if conducted well. But the old adage about actions speaking louder than words applies here, and if the truly wish to minimize tensions and maximize cooperation, both nations will need to approach the entire range of their policies beyond their borders with a wider perspective in terms of how any given move will affect perceptions of the other side.

### **The Democratization of Taiwan**

The U.S. “one China” policy has been in place formally since the Shanghai Communiqué of February 1972, although the U.S. willingness to support any cross-Strait relationship agreed to peacefully and non-coercively by the two sides actually predates the Nixon administration. It is important to understand that the “one China” policy does not endorse reunification. Nor, of course, does Washington endorse Taiwan independence. Indeed, the United States takes no position on the ultimate shape of Taiwan’s relations with the Mainland. What it does, however, is to insist that neither side seek to unilaterally to change the status quo or, indeed, take any steps that could upset peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait or make peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues more difficult.

With the democratization of Taiwan starting in the late 1980s, the related (but not identical) issues of “Taiwanese identity” and “Taiwan independence” have risen to the fore in the political debate. This debate was initially shaped by the determination of a “native Taiwanese” population to displace the “Mainlander”-dominated Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang or KMT) that had ruled over the island since the 1940s. Given the makeup of the KMT at the time, the competition had an important ethnic character. And one way for the Taiwanese to express their opposition to the KMT was to focus on the cause of Taiwan independence, an issue that had been around for decades but that had not taken firm root on the island in earlier times.

The KMT held onto power in the first democratic presidential election in 1996, but due to a combination of circumstances, including splits on the KMT side, the independence-oriented Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) won in 2000 and, again in unique circumstances, held onto power in 2004. The DPP, and the administration of President Chen Shui-bian, has touted the cause of Taiwan independence, but it has sought to avoid a showdown by taking the position that Taiwan, “known as the Republic of China,” is already a sovereign, independent state and does not need to trigger a PRC reaction by “declaring independence.” The KMT has continued to take the position that ultimate unification with the Mainland is desirable, but only after the Mainland democratizes and raises its per capita income far above where it is now.

Both major parties have been forced by public opinion, however, to accept that, whatever the parties’ own preferences, at the end of the day the people of Taiwan should decide their future relationship with the Mainland through a democratic process. In the

meantime, a steady stream of public opinion polls show that an overwhelming majority of the people of Taiwan want to maintain the “status quo,” only moving toward some final resolution at an undetermined but presumably distant time in the future.

Although the United States strongly supports the democratic process in Taiwan and, as a matter of both policy and law,<sup>9</sup> maintains a strong interest in Taiwan’s security, it takes no sides in the political competition in Taiwan. Washington occasionally weighs in either if the political climate appears to be blocking necessary steps by Taiwan to provide adequately for its own self-defense, or if the government or political parties seem to threaten U.S. national security interests by stirring up contentious cross-Strait issues, especially those related to sovereignty. In such cases, Washington believes it has “standing” to speak up because, whether openly acknowledged in Taiwan or not, the United States is looked upon as the ultimate guarantor of the island’s security. If Americans could be asked to send their young people to fight and die on behalf of Taiwan, they feel they have a right to ask, on the one hand, that Taiwan avoid provoking war in the first place, but, on the other hand, that the government in Taipei adopt policies that maximize the likelihood that any such intervention, if necessary, would be effective.

Beijing has helped contain the problem by deciding that fiery independence rhetoric alone, while perhaps hindering substantial improvement of cross-Strait relations, will not be a *casus belli*. Moreover, for the foreseeable future, at least while the Mainland is focused on developing a modern economy, the PRC’s main concern will be to block *de*

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<sup>9</sup> Taiwan Relations Act, Public Law 96-8  
([http://usinfo.state.gov/eap/Archive\\_Index/Taiwan\\_Relations\\_Act.html](http://usinfo.state.gov/eap/Archive_Index/Taiwan_Relations_Act.html))

*jure* independence, not to press for reunification. More than that, the definition of *de jure* independence has been narrowed by Beijing to focus almost exclusively on changes in Taiwan's constitution that effectively would create an independent state or foreclose the option of eventual reunification.

Given these circumstances, although there is an ever-present risk that the government in Taipei will misread where the PRC's "red lines" actually are and risk bumping up against them in the mistaken belief that what they were doing was safe, there are few in Taiwan, including the current government, who would purposely take steps that would clearly risk triggering conflict. That means that, while Washington needs to remain alert to moves it believes approach the danger zone, the U.S. strategic problem is less urgent than it might otherwise be.

Still, the danger of war has not been eliminated, and as the PLA has undertaken an impressive modernization program over the past eight to ten years, the United States has felt compelled both to augment its own capabilities and to bolster its support for Taiwan's self-defense efforts. As discussed above, this will likely continue for some time to come, especially if there is not a new cross-Strait political framework that enhances confidence on both sides that their worst nightmare will not be realized—for Beijing, a formal move to Taiwan independence, and for Taiwan, military intimidation or actual use of force against the island.

Ma Ying-jeou, the KMT nominee and leading contender for president in 2008, has indicated he would like to reach an "interim agreement" with Beijing: a Taiwan pledge not to move to independence in return for a PRC pledge not to use force. Even if he is

elected—and there are many complications that could foil his bid for office including his on-going trial on corruption charges as well as the nomination of a formidable ticket on the DPP side—it may prove very difficult to translate this idea into reality. And even if an agreement is reached, before unification comes about—likely at a minimum some decades down the road—one cannot conceive of the PRC giving up its deterrent capability against the possibility that a Taiwan leadership with a different view on moderation versus provocation will come back into office in the future.

So, Taiwan will need to keep modernizing its forces, which will almost certainly involve U.S. arms sales as well as growing American “software” involvement in upgrading Taiwan’s military capabilities. And the United States will need to continue to strengthen its own military capabilities as a hedge against a future change in PRC direction. As we have already said, although this should not block substantial progress, it will necessarily complicate the U.S. task of deepening strategic cooperation with Beijing.

Before turning our attention elsewhere in the region, it is probably worth a moment to ask why Taiwan’s security is so important to the United States, and why this remains, therefore, the one issue in the world that could lead to major power—perhaps even nuclear—war.

First, there is, of course, a long history of U.S. support for Taiwan’s security, going back to the end of World War II. One does not readily turn away from that, even though the diplomatic and political realities—and relevant U.S. policies—have changed dramatically over time. In fact, some of those changes such as the democratization and economic

“miracle” in Taiwan, are factors in favor of protecting the island against forced surrender to the Mainland rather than abandoning it.

Second, any PRC use of military force in the region would be destabilizing and harmful to American political, economic and security concerns. So, deterring such an act and maintaining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait is very much a U.S. strategic interest.

Third, even though the United States has no legal or political commitment to come directly to Taiwan’s aid,<sup>10</sup> refusal to stand up to such a use of force would set off tremors throughout the region, undermining the credibility of U.S. diplomacy, specifically including U.S. treaty commitments to allies such as Japan and Korea. Critically involved here is the question of American extended nuclear deterrence and the deflection of any inclination in Tokyo, Seoul or Taipei, to develop indigenous nuclear weapons capabilities.

And fourth, although the United States will accept any agreement on cross-Strait relations peacefully and non-coercively arrived at, the U.S. economic and political stake in Taiwan is high. When PRC officials or experts seek to drive home the point of the PRC’s importance to the United States and Taiwan’s relative unimportance, they may be surprised that the response from Washington is not as clear-cut as may have been thought.

That is, the PRC is obviously of enormous and growing importance to the United States across an increasingly broad spectrum of issues. But Taiwan has the world’s 19<sup>th</sup> largest

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<sup>10</sup> Some people think there is such a commitment under the Taiwan Relations Act, but there is not.

economy, has the 16<sup>th</sup> largest trade volume, and is the ninth largest U.S. trading partner. It also holds the world's third largest foreign exchange reserves. It is a vital producer of key computer and other high-tech products.<sup>11</sup> It also has deep family ties with the United States, with perhaps 500,000 Taiwanese-Americans residing in the United States and countless thousands of others having received a U.S. education.

The strategic implications of Taiwan's security go beyond U.S.-PRC issues. Although not usually directly addressed in U.S.-Japan alliance documents, the United States obviously would look to support from Japan in the event of any conflict over Taiwan that the United States decided to enter. This is discussed in greater detail immediately below, but it is worth noting in this context that the handling of Taiwan's future relationship with the Mainland has potentially profound implications for political as well as security relations in the region, and for the U.S.-Japan alliance.

### **Japan: The Most Important Relationship in the World, Bar None**

Former American ambassador to Japan, Mike Mansfield, was known for his characterization of U.S.-Japan ties as the “most important relationship in the world, bar none.” He included in this assessment the vast trade and investment links—at the time far outdistancing anything with China, a common commitment to democratic values and,

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<sup>11</sup> According to the Government Information Service in Taiwan: “As of the end of the second quarter of 2006, Taiwan led in production of large-sized LCD panels, with its global share of unit shipments exceeding 45 percent. Although the production value of Taiwan's semiconductor industry as a whole grew by a modest 1.7 percent in 2005, it nevertheless maintained a 67-percent global market share in the integrated-circuit (IC) chip contract manufacturing sector...as well as 45 percent of the IC packaging market and 60 percent of the IC testing market.” (“Taiwan at a Glance, 2007,” Government Information Office, available at <http://www.gio.gov.tw/taiwan-website/5-gp/glance/ch7.htm>.)

critically, the military alliance under the 1960 Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security.

Under that treaty, it was agreed that U.S. forces could use bases in Japan to operate against threats throughout the region:

For the purpose of contributing to the security of Japan and the maintenance of international peace and security in the Far East, the United States of America is granted the use by its land, air and naval forces of facilities and areas in Japan.<sup>12</sup>

The September 23, 1997 “Guidelines of U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation,” the first post-Cold War revision of the 1978 Guidelines for how the alliance would actually function, provided for cooperation under “normal circumstances,” actions in response to an armed attack against Japan, and cooperation in “situations in areas surrounding Japan that will have an important influence on Japan’s peace and security.”<sup>13</sup> The last, which is of greatest relevance to this paper, was not spelled out in terms of specific areas covered. Rather, the Guidelines said, “[t]he concept, situations in areas surrounding Japan, is not geographic but situational.”

While Japan recommitted itself to its exclusively defense-oriented policy and its three non-nuclear principles (not to possess, produce or permit the introduction of nuclear weapons into Japan),<sup>14</sup> the United States reaffirmed its nuclear umbrella:

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<sup>12</sup> Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between Japan and the United States of America, Article VI (<http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/q&a/ref/1.html>).

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/security/guideline2.html>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/un/disarmament/nnp/index.html>

In order to meet its commitments, the United States will maintain its nuclear deterrent capability, its forward deployed forces in the Asia-Pacific region, and other forces capable of reinforcing those forward deployed forces.<sup>15</sup>

Some nervousness has arisen in Japan over time about the validity of the extended deterrence commitment, especially in the wake of the July 2006 North Korean missile tests and Pyongyang's nuclear test in October. So the commitment was reaffirmed with some emphasis in the May 1, 2007, "2+2" statement:

U.S. extended deterrence underpins the defense of Japan and regional security. The U.S. reaffirmed that the full range of U.S. military capabilities—both nuclear and non-nuclear strike forces and defensive capabilities—form the core of extended deterrence and support U.S. commitments to the defense of Japan.<sup>16</sup>

As time has passed, at the periodic "2+2" meetings,<sup>17</sup> the intensity of cooperation and the specificity of roles and missions has increased enormously. Nonetheless, the first time regional concerns were mentioned in any detail was in early 2005.

At the 19 February 2005 "2+2" meeting, the two sides agreed on a set of twelve "common strategic objectives" in the region.<sup>18</sup> Among those were three relating to China:

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/security/guideline2.html>

<sup>16</sup> "Joint Statement of The U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee: Alliance Transformation—Advancing United States-Japan Security and Defense Cooperation," 1 May 2007 (<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2007/may/84084.htm>)

<sup>17</sup> Comprised of the U.S. and Japanese defense and foreign ministers

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/security/scc/joint0502.html>

- Develop a cooperative relationship with China, welcoming the country to play a responsible and constructive role regionally as well as globally.
- Encourage the peaceful resolution of issues concerning the Taiwan Strait through dialogue.
- Encourage China to improve transparency of its military affairs.

Despite the anodyne character of the words, themselves, China found the reference to Taiwan deeply troubling.<sup>19</sup> Officials in Washington and Tokyo tried to downplay the significance of the reference by noting that calling for peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues was the long-standing—and frequently stated—position of both countries. This was true, but what was also true was that this was the first time an alliance document had directly referred to Taiwan since the United States and Japan had established diplomatic relations with the PRC and accepted a “one China” policy in the 1970s.<sup>20</sup>

Unlike the U.S. alliance with the Republic of Korea (ROK), which is discussed below, there is little doubt that Washington and Tokyo hold a common vision of the purposes of the alliance. “[A]t its core,” as the May 2006 “2+2” statement put it, the alliance is

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<sup>19</sup> Although Beijing would have been unhappy in any case with what it inevitably saw as interference in China’s “internal affairs,” the initial reaction was probably colored by a report in the *Washington Post* the day before the “2+2” statement was issued. That report said that, according to a draft, the joint statement would declare Taiwan a “mutual security concern,” suggesting that it was focused on a military response to any PRC threat to Taiwan. Calling it “the most significant alteration since 1996 to the U.S.-Japan Security Alliance,” the article cited some assertive rhetoric by Japanese officials. One of those officials was the then-acting secretary general of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, and now prime minister of Japan, Abe Shinzo. Abe was quoted as saying: “It would be wrong for us to send a signal to China that the United States and Japan will watch and tolerate China’s military invasion of Taiwan...If the situation surrounding Japan threatens our security, Japan can provide U.S. forces with support.” (Anthony Faiola, “Japan to Join U.S. Policy on Taiwan; Growth of China Seen Behind Shift,” *Washington Post*, A01, 18 February 2005)

<sup>20</sup> Reference to Taiwan has not been repeated, including in the 1 May 2007 “2+2” statement (see footnote 16, above), which also laid out “common strategic objectives,” something the intervening two “2+2” statements did not do. Many commentators raised questions about the implications of this omission. However, not only did the 2007 document specifically “reconfirm” the allies’ commitment to the common strategic objectives agreed to in 2005, but Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice directly affirmed that, on this matter, “There is no change in policy.” (“U.S.-Japan 2+2 Joint Press Availability,” 1 May 2007 (<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2007/may/84114.htm>))

“the indispensable foundation of Japan's security and of peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region and the linchpin of American security policy in the region.”<sup>21</sup> But at the same time, in the post-Cold War, post-9/11 world, both governments stressed the alliance’s role in dealing with “new and emerging threats [that] pose a common challenge that affects the security of nations worldwide” and highlighted “the increasingly close cooperation” between Japan and the United States “on a broad array of issues.”

Although both allies still believe in the importance of effective deterrence against North Korean ambitions on the Peninsula and the need to maximize the potential for U.S. response to any DPRK southward aggression, concern with the North’s nuclear weapons program has obviously come to overshadow most other defense concerns, especially in Japan’s mind. This is hardly unexpected, because now the North Korean threat is not merely to the ROK but directly to Japan, including to U.S. forces based there. Indeed, one might well argue that the North’s missile and nuclear threat is more relevant to Japan than to South Korea or any other country.

There is, of course, a heavy political overlay to the hostility between Tokyo and Pyongyang, one with deep historical roots as well as more contemporary origins. The late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century history of repressive Japanese colonialism in Korea rankles on one side, the abduction of Japanese citizens to North Korea in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on the other. Each side seems to have a finely honed knack for getting under the skin of the other, and so efforts to normalize relations, including through the Six-Party Talks, will likely be unpleasant and prolonged—at least until an overall

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/security/scc/joint0605.html>

nuclear resolution appears to be in sight, at which point making bilateral progress will actually matter.

In the meantime, however, the North's ability to reach out and touch Japan with proven conventional missiles, and potentially with nuclear-armed missiles, is of concern not only to the government of Japan, but also to the United States. It was an important factor in upgrading the alliance through accelerated ballistic missile defense and other cooperation after Pyongyang launched a long-range Taepo-dong I missile over Japan in August 1998. And with the breakout in the nuclear realm, at least theoretically posing an issue for Japan's own nuclear choices, this became a matter of broad regional security concern. Together with concern about what the United States might do with North Korea after "finishing" with Iraq, China's foray into proactive diplomacy over the DPRK nuclear issue was no doubt partly a function of Beijing's concern about regional proliferation, particularly in Japan and perhaps in Taiwan (and even South Korea) as well.

So, the ability of the U.S.-Japan alliance to maintain credible deterrence against North Korea is a matter of considerable importance for regional stability, and it will remain a centerpiece of the Japanese-American bilateral relationship for the foreseeable future.

Political complications arising out of such things as former Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro's Yasukuni Shrine visits and current Prime Minister Abe's statements on "comfort women" are not trivial from Washington's perspective. They have left the impression among other Asians that perhaps the United States "doesn't care" about these serious matters and have thus complicated American diplomacy. But in the

larger scheme of things, even as American friends urged Tokyo to move past—and avoid resurrecting—such sensitive issues, the underlying shared economic, political and security interests will serve to keep the alliance vital.

That being said, as we turn to Korea, it is important to note that with Japan, as with Korea, there are aspects of the relationship, particularly the military relationship, that need substantial attention. Just as American and Korean officials like to do, American and Japanese officials like to point to all of the problems that have either been resolved or are on their way to resolution. Implementation of such agreements as relocating the Futenma Marine Corps Air Station, and redeploying 8,000 U.S. Marines and their dependents from Okinawa to Guam, has not proven easy, but taken as a group, the accomplishments are substantial.

Nonetheless, this does not gainsay the concerns over successful management of an alliance of equal partners, especially when the day-to-day burdens on civilian communities all seems to fall on one side. But there are also substantial costs to American taxpayers as well as the disruption of family life and other burdens that the U.S. side bears. There is no easy way to draw up a balance sheet, but there is no question that the political impact on Japanese society is far greater than on American society, and there is a rich history of putting patches on the discontents that arise rather than dealing with them in a fundamental way. That may be beginning to change, but anyone talking with local officials in Japan or even with Self-Defense Force officers will quickly realize there is a long way to go.

## **Korea—the South**

The vast majority of Koreans and Americans highly value the U.S.-ROK friendship, in general, and the alliance, in particular. Still, one frequently hears sniping from each side about the unreasonable attitude of the other on this or that issue, whether economic, political or military. And the complaints are not necessarily over trivial issues.

Aside from the issue of North Korea, about which more in a moment, one of the most fundamental difficulties is in the management of Korea's desire for not only an equal role in the alliance but also a lead role in many dimensions, now that the ROK has achieved so much as a vital democracy with a robust market economy and a highly capable military force. This aspiration need not cut across U.S. goals, and it can be viewed as a complement to the American desire in the post-9/11 world to have maximum flexibility in using its finite resources to effectively provide what is still the lion's share of the "public good" of regional and global security. But in some respects it does lead to different perspectives as well as an uncomfortably different dynamic from that of the past. The issue is not the legitimacy of one perspective or the other, but whether—and how—to accommodate the differences while maintaining a sound alliance.

The perception of a common enemy during the Cold War—mainly in the form of North Korea rather than even the Soviet Union—was an important glue holding together an alliance between two quite different societies with different political systems and different values. The success of this effort was a major achievement, but

it also created a difficult legacy. The so-called “386” generation in power in the ROK today remembers with some considerable resentment the American support for military-dominated governments in Seoul. Those in policy positions, including President Roh Moo Hyun, have made clear over time that they truly value the relationship with the United States, but they are not satisfied that its current structure best serves Korean interests. Moreover, they want greater freedom of action outside the alliance.

The underlying orientation of each nation is understandable, but an uneasy atmosphere has developed in which each side looks with a somewhat jaundiced eye at the goals and methods of the other. The totally inadequate “consultation” that took place before the United States announced it was consolidating and then redeploying southward forces formerly stationed near the DMZ not only created deep concerns in Korea—either that the United States was abandoning Korea or was laying the ground for an attack against the North—it also left a sour taste about the high-handed behavior that characterized U.S. dealings. In part, of course, the U.S. approach stemmed from a sense that Korea was not being sufficiently understanding or cooperative as the United States sought to maximize its “strategic flexibility” to balance its myriad global security responsibilities. American officials eventually acknowledged the shortcomings in the U.S. approach, and they subsequently engaged in much more genuine consultations, which led to mutually acceptable outcomes on U.S. force positioning. But the cost in terms of mutual resentment was not totally overcome, and some people directly involved in the process believe it contributed importantly to

some of the problematic statements and initiatives that later came from the Korean side.<sup>22</sup>

Among those problematic developments were President Roh Moo Hyun's statements about Korea playing a "balancing" role in the region and about the need for the United States to obtain ROK permission before using Korean bases for any military operations in Northeast Asia. These statements more than implied that the two countries did not share a vision about the alliance's stated purposes, including how they could together, in the words of the U.S.-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty, "strengthen the fabric of peace in the Pacific area."<sup>23</sup> One might argue that *of course* the United States would need permission to use Korean bases for launching forces directly into combat. But Roh's felt need to say so publicly and pointedly at the very least weakened the deterrent effect the American presence in Korea might have elsewhere in the region, and it deepened the sense of strategic divergence.

At one point, very senior Roh administration officials were arguing that the ROK really did not need the substantial U.S. support any more to deter North Korea; they could handle it pretty much on their own, and any lacunae would soon be remedied.

This raised even more sharply the issue of the purposes of the alliance: if the United

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<sup>22</sup> For example, one former senior U.S. official confirms that, on taking office, Roh expressed satisfaction with the current alliance arrangements and, despite his call for greater equality, saw no need for basic changes, including with respect to wartime operational control of Korean forces. (Private interview) On the other hand, an advisor to Roh has argued that, in early 2003, even before Roh took office, as the United States was ramping up to war in Iraq and many believed North Korea was next, Roh expressed the desire to get back wartime OPCON to prevent a disaster. ("Troop Control Handover was in the Bag in 2003," *Chosun Ilbo*, 19 September 2006, disseminated by Open Source Center—hereafter OSC, KPP20060919971118)

<sup>23</sup> Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of Korea, 1 October 1953 (entered into force 17 November 1954), The Avalon Project at Yale Law School (<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/korea/kor001.htm#art1>)

States was not needed (or at least not needed very much) to cope with contingencies on the Peninsula, and if it was not welcome to use Korean bases for regional contingencies off the Peninsula, what was the alliance for? There has been some rethinking of these positions in Seoul, at least while the North Korean nuclear issue remains unresolved. But despite the four years taken to develop a "Vision Document" for the alliance, it has been described by one involved American official as "plain vanilla." Perhaps for that very reason, it has remained largely confidential. In any event, the fact remains that there is still no publicly accepted common vision.

The sharpest issue in the differing approaches, of course, relates to North Korea, where there have been obvious disagreements over each country's approach to the diplomacy of the issue and to some extent even over the goals. Interestingly, the DPRK nuclear test of October 2006 appears to have caused some U.S.-ROK convergence, at least on tactics. There has been a serious recalculation and stiffening in Seoul, and the Bush administration has undergone a turnabout, apparently deciding at long last to engage seriously in negotiations with the North. But the fight is not over in either capital as to how far each should go in its newfound toughness (in Seoul) or reasonableness (in Washington).

Moreover, while South Korea would like to be in the lead on Six-Party diplomacy, the simple fact is that the North is focused on the United States and deals with the ROK to obtain benefits on an "as needed" basis. This is not easy for South Koreans to accept, or a situation the United States particularly relishes. But it is a reality, and for now, at least, Seoul will need to live with its discomfort and Washington with its sense of

being burdened. Both will need to handle their bilateral dealings on these matters with great sensitivity.

Beyond that, efforts to force the pace of moving South Korea into the “lead role” in the alliance, and the United States into a “supporting role,” have taken their toll, as well.

Both sides have long since agreed that such a transformation was natural and necessary at the appropriate time. This has been discussed for many years, and in 2002—before Roh Moo Hyun took office—a dialogue began on the issue of how increasing responsibility for alliance missions—and eventually wartime operational control (OPCON) over Korean forces—could be handed over to Korea as ROK armed forces developed the appropriate new capabilities. In mid-2004, ROK Minister of National Defense Cho Yung Kil talked about the “gradual transfer of missions” from the USFK to ROK Armed Forces,<sup>24</sup> and a number of missions have, in fact, been transferred since then.<sup>25</sup>

This process suffered disruptions caused by a number of incidents, including the tragic accident in which two teenage Korean girls were killed by a U.S. military vehicle during a training exercise in mid-2002, but the intention to pick up the pace again remained. Still, as late as mid-2005, after several months of public discussion in Korea, senior

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<sup>24</sup> Cho Yung Kil, “The Republic of Korea’s Modernization: Its Goals and Future Direction,” IISS Conference Document, June 2004 (<http://www.iiss.org/conferences/the-shangri-la-dialogue/shangri-la-dialogue-2005/2004-speech-archive/second-plenary-cho-yung-kil>)

<sup>25</sup> Terence Roehrig, *Restructuring the U.S. Military Presence in Korea: Implications for Korean Security and the U.S.–ROK Alliance*, KEI Academic Paper Series, January 2007, Volume 2, Number 1 (<http://www.keia.org/2-Publications/Roehrig.pdf>). Fourteen U.S. military bases were turned over to Korea under the Land Partnership Plan following the completion of environmental clean-up work in early April 2007, and nine more were scheduled to be returned by the end of the year. (“Seoul, Washington Hold Talks on Wartime Control Transfer, Role of U.N. Command,” *Yonhap*, 17 April 2007). In all, the U.S. is to return 59 bases to South Korea by 2011. (“S. Korea Completes Takeover of 14 U.S. Military Bases,” *Yonhap*, 13 April 2007).

officials in Seoul indicated they had in mind effecting actual OPCON transfer by the time the ROK force modernization program was completed in 2020.<sup>26</sup> But suddenly, in October 2005, while arguing that “[t]he ROK-US alliance will continue to develop further into a comprehensive, dynamic, and reciprocal alliance in the future” Roh Moo Hyun took everyone by surprise when he stated that:

During the Korean dynasty, our ancestors' attempts to maintain peace and independence by depending on outside forces all failed...

I have emphasized self-reliant national defense to date because this is such a natural and fundamental thing that a self-reliant and independent country should possess...

The recently announced national defense reform plan contains this very will on self-reliant national defense. ..

In particular, the army will be reborn as an independent force, both in name and reality, which is responsible for the security of the Korean peninsula with its own strength *through the exercise of wartime command and control rights.*<sup>27</sup>

A Blue House spokesman explained the next day that “[r]ecovering wartime operational control is a key to an independent defense” and that President Roh had “repeatedly emphasized it as a part of his agenda for the future.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Private conversations in Seoul, mid-2005.

<sup>27</sup> “Full Text of ROK President's Speech at Ceremony Marking 57th Armed Forces Day 1 Oct,” Seoul *YTN Cable TV* in Korean , 1 October 2005 (translated by OSC, KPP20051001053002). Emphasis added.

On the other hand, according to one analysis, although Roh had brought up the subject of “regaining” wartime OPCON in the past, this was the first time he had called for the “exercise” of such rights.<sup>29</sup> Immediately the Korean press jumped on this, seeing the implications for the alliance and potentially, therefore, for ROK security. One paper editorialized:

No one would argue with the president's vow that we must increase our ability to be responsible for our own national defense. But the issue of wartime operational control authority must be approached with more prudence, as it would be a fundamental change in the present command and control system...[and] because of the effects a change would have on the Korea-U.S. military alliance, the core of our security... We must look objectively at our situation, a divided nation surrounded by military superpowers. Emotional calls for "autonomy" could in reality damage our autonomous national defense in the true sense of the term.<sup>30</sup>

Transforming this unified command arrangement caught the Korean military by surprise. Although articulated by their head of state, some tried to argue that this was a concept, not a plan. Korean defense officials noted that no talks had been scheduled with the United States to discuss implementation of the idea into practice and said

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<sup>28</sup> Yeon-Wook Jung and Sang-Ho Yun, “President Roh Backs Military Reforms,” *Dong-A Ilbo*, 3 October 2005.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. Roh had foreshadowed this position as recently as two weeks earlier when he was in New York for a UN “World Summit.” He told a gathering of Korean residents that “it is now...time” to begin to make a change in which Korea would hold primary responsibility for Korean national defense, with the U.S. moving to a supporting role. (Lee Joo-hee, “Roh says Korea-U.S. alliance getting better,” *Korea Herald*, 15 September 2005)

<sup>30</sup> “Emotion and Security” (Editorial), *JoongAng Ilbo*, 2 October 2005.

things should not be rushed. As one defense official put it, the president's vision of a self-reliant military “is still just that—a vision.”<sup>31</sup>

Their caution was shared by many American senior military officers, especially those who had held command in Korea. As General Leon LaPorte, commander of the U.S.-ROK Combined Forces Command, put it as he was departing his post a month after Roh’s speech, the CFC unified wartime operational control has been a “cornerstone of deterrence” on the Peninsula.<sup>32</sup>

As the world quickly learned, however, President Roh meant what he said, and Korea tabled a proposal for the transfer of wartime OPCON of Korean forces by 2012. The American defense secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, apparently ready to lighten the U.S. burden in Korea as he implemented “strategic flexibility” on a global scale, and in the face of a growing number of complaints on both sides about the day-to-day functioning of the alliance, not only welcomed the proposal but decided to go Roh one better: this could be done by 2009.<sup>33</sup> As the controversy raged, Deputy Under Secretary of Defense

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<sup>31</sup> Brian Lee, “Roh Calls Again for Control of Troops in War,” *JoongAng Ilbo*, 2 October 2005.

<sup>32</sup> “Wartime Command Key to Korea’s Defense: USFK Chief,” *Chosun Ilbo*, 13 November 2005. It would seem LaPorte was laying down a marker not to move too fast on actual transfer. And, in fact, the subject was not mentioned in the communiqué issued four days after LaPorte’s remarks, following a summit meeting between Bush and Roh. (“Joint Declaration on the ROK-US Alliance and Peace on the Korean Peninsula,” 17 November 2005, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/11/20051117-6.html>)

<sup>33</sup> Despite the reservations of senior military officers on both sides, defense ministers had already agreed “to appropriately accelerate discussions on command relations and wartime operational control,” (37th Security Consultative Meeting Joint Communiqué, 21 October 2005, [www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2005/10/d20051021uskorea1.pdf](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2005/10/d20051021uskorea1.pdf)). Moreover, the idea of turning wartime OPCON back to Korea by 2009 had been surfaced by the United States as early as a Security Policy Initiative meeting in early July 2006. (“US Wants to Return Wartime Command to ROK ‘Sooner’,” *Chosun Ilbo*, 18 July 2006, disseminated by OSC, KPP20060718971194) On 17 August, in the run-up to the October SCM meeting, Rumsfeld reportedly wrote to his Korean counterpart formally confirming the U.S. position the first time. (“U.S. to hand over Troop Control in 2009: Rumsfeld,” *Chosun Ilbo*, 27 August 2006, disseminated by OSC, KPP20060827971100)

for Asian and Pacific Affairs Richard Lawless told a congressional committee that, “[w]hile 2009 may appear ambitious, it is achievable we believe.”<sup>34</sup> At one point Roh indicated he could go along with a shorter timeframe for the switch than he originally proposed—perhaps by 2010 or 2011—especially given U.S. pledges to fill any gaps that might still exist in ROK capabilities due to the accelerated timetable and in light of the fact that U.S. forces were due to complete their move south to Pyeongtaek in that period.<sup>35</sup> However, despite Roh’s argument that Korea could take back OPCON “even now,” the fierce opposition, including street demonstrations by former military officers, civilian defense officials, national security and foreign policy officials and non-governmental experts over the unrealistic nature of the 2009 timetable eventually led the Seoul government to press Washington to accept the original proposal for a spring 2012 transfer date. And after a lengthy and difficult negotiation,<sup>36</sup> the United States finally agreed in late February 2007 to the Korean position.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> “United States–Republic Of Korea Alliance: An Alliance At Risk?” Hearing before the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, 109<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 27 September 2006, (Serial 109-231), 46 ([http://commdocs.house.gov/committees/intlrel/hfa30142.000/hfa30142\\_of.htm](http://commdocs.house.gov/committees/intlrel/hfa30142.000/hfa30142_of.htm))

<sup>35</sup> “Special Interview by President Roh Moo-hyun with Yonhap News Agency,” 9 August 2006 ([http://english.president.go.kr/cwd/en/archive/archive\\_view.php?meta\\_id=for\\_your\\_info&id=a5784b18c5bf50bd13677117&m\\_def=3&ss\\_def=5](http://english.president.go.kr/cwd/en/archive/archive_view.php?meta_id=for_your_info&id=a5784b18c5bf50bd13677117&m_def=3&ss_def=5)). Roh took the occasion once again to underscore that the issue was one of sovereignty and national dignity: “Operational control is the basis of self-reliant national defense. The point is that self-reliant national defense is the essence of sovereignty for any nation. Unless there a serious problem, a nation must have operational control as a necessary condition even if it may have had to pay a certain price for it.”

<sup>36</sup> At the 38<sup>th</sup> October 2006 SCM, the timing of OPCON transfer remained so contentious that it was simply agreed it would take place between 15 October 2009 and 15 March 2012. (“The 38th Security Consultative Meeting Joint Communiqué,” 20 October 2006, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2006/10/d20061020uskorea.htm>)

<sup>37</sup> Final transfer is to take place by 17 April 2012. (“Secretary Gates Holds Consultations with ROK Minister of National Defense,” Department of Defense News Release No. 215-07, 23 February 2007, <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Feb2007/d20070223sdrok.pdf>) It is generally believed that U.S. flexibility on the transfer date was not unconnected to Secretary Rumsfeld’s departure from office.

Early on in the bilateral discussion, it became clear the CFC would be disbanded, with the Americans and Koreans to have independent chains of command. The “combined command” function would be replaced by a liaison office. It may be that North Korean inability to pursue extended conflict, and its avoidance of war, will save everyone from having to find out how much inferior this arrangement will be to the current one. But it is more than a little difficult to see how a liaison office (to be called a “military cooperation center”) can be nearly as responsive and effective in crisis situations as the current CFC “gold standard” unified command arrangement, as U.S. military officers have commonly described it. Roh Moo Hyun has argued that the new arrangement will provide the foundation for transforming the alliance into a “newer and more efficient joint defense system.”<sup>38</sup> And Deputy Under Secretary Lawless has expressed the view that the new arrangement could become an even more highly valued “platinum standard.”<sup>39</sup> But the concern of many is that it may turn out to be a shiny but far less valuable “nickel silver” standard.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> “Roh Says Recovery of Wartime Operational Control to Renew Korean Military,” *Yonhap*, 2 March 2007 (disseminated by OSC, KPP20070302971058).

<sup>39</sup> Remarks to the US-Korea Institute (SAIS) conference, “The United States and the Republic of Korea: Dialogues on the Relationship,” 4 May 2007 (audio available at [http://www.sais-jhu.edu/mp3\\_player/richardlawless050407.htm](http://www.sais-jhu.edu/mp3_player/richardlawless050407.htm))

<sup>40</sup> In order to allay concerns, the Blue House Office of the Senior Secretary for Security Policy and the Ministry of National Defense put out a briefing paper in September 2006. A key point was that the “military cooperation center” would ensure smooth cooperation between the two countries. The only exception, the paper noted, was that that center “does not possess command authority over units [currently] under the [CFC].” (“Joint Defense System Led by the ROK with US Support—How it Will Change After the Transfer of Wartime Operational Control,” Blue House, 7 September 2006, translated and disseminated by OSC, KPP20060907045001) Some believe this would not be such a small exception in the event of a military emergency.

Four days later, over one hundred former Korean diplomats countered with a statement that argued, among other things, “The wartime command control holds the key to the nation’s existence and prosperity and cannot be overwhelmed by the meaningless slogans of nationalism and independence. It should never be abused in domestic politics.” (Lee Joo-hee, “Opposition Grows to Control Transfer,” *Korea Herald*, 11

Some people on both sides hope that if the opposition GNP wins the presidency in December 2007 (taking office in February 2008), the timetable can be renegotiated, stretching the transfer date out at least until the North Korean nuclear issue is completely resolved. Retired senior military officers continue to criticize the schedule,<sup>41</sup> and a National Assembly study group was launched in late April 2007 with the purpose of opposing the transfer until the North has completely abandoned its nuclear programs by the scheduled transfer date.<sup>42</sup> How this turns out, of course, remains to be seen. Lawless expressed optimism that, with the careful progress under way, and with implementation to start in earnest by the beginning of 2008, the next Korean administration will be reassured by the success of the process and will therefore abandon any inclination to stretch it out.<sup>43</sup>

In any case, while this is but one issue among many that trouble successful alliance management, it is both a practical and symbolic issue that points to potential problems in sustaining the alliance into the indefinite future. At a minimum, it is very obvious that

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September 2006.) As indicated elsewhere, thousands of former officers took to the streets to express their opposition, and numerous former senior national defense officials, editorialists and scholars wrote scathing critiques.

As early as eight months earlier, in January 2006, even the state-run Korea Institute for Defense Analyses (KIDA) called for institutionalization of a permanent peace framework before it could be considered safe to transfer wartime OPCON. (“ROK Military Think Tank: Peace Must Come Before Wartime Control,” *Chosun Ilbo*, 23 August 2006, disseminated by OSC, KPP20060823971195)

<sup>41</sup> “Former Generals Criticize Seoul-Washington Deal on Wartime Control Transfer,” *Yonhap*, 26 February 2007 (disseminated by OSC, KPP20070226971056)

<sup>42</sup> Kim Young-gyo, “Lawmakers step up opposition to wartime control transfer,” *Yonhap*, 19 April 2007 (<http://english.yna.co.kr/Engnews/20070419/61000000020070419142725E7.html>).

<sup>43</sup> Remarks to the 4 May 2007 SAIS conference, op cit. A series of Security Policy Initiative (SPI) meetings has been under way for some time to discuss implementation; one was held in mid-April, another is scheduled for early June, and they will continue on a regular basis. (“Seoul, Washington Hold Talks on Wartime Control Transfer, Role of U.N. Command,” *Yonhap*, 17 April 2007)

there is a great deal of work to do both to restore the mutual confidence that is fundamental to maintaining the political commitment to the alliance as well as to successfully implement the transitional measures such as relocation of U.S. forces and transfer of wartime OPCON of Korean forces.

### **Korea – the North**

Finally, let us turn to North Korea, the issue of greatest contention between the United States and some of its partners and in some senses the greatest potential danger at this time. The contention comes from a different conception of what the problem is and what to do about it. Although the deterrence that has helped maintained the peace in Korea for over 50 years remains in place, and the likelihood of war remains very low, the danger comes from the lack of certainty about where the North is heading with its nuclear weapons program and the negative dynamics that could be set in motion if the Six-Party Talks break down.

After six and a half years avoiding a serious negotiating position, the Bush administration finally determined in late 2006 to adopt an approach that could—could—produce a settlement of the nuclear issue. At least it was willing to test North Korean intentions.

The 19 September 2005 Joint Statement of principles<sup>44</sup> laid out an important roadmap for what resolution might look like, but even at that point, the United States had not embraced a workable strategy for getting there. So the U.S. still appeared to its partners, especially in Seoul and Beijing, as too rigid.

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<sup>44</sup> The text of the Joint Statement is available at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2005/53490.htm>.

At the same time, the Roh administration had gone the “Sunshine policy” one better, adopting a stance that struck Americans as all carrot and no stick. Even Kim Dae Jung’s position of “flexible reciprocity” required eventual North Korean action, something that the Roh administration appeared, to many at least, not to be concerned about.

The North Korean nuclear test of October 2006 had the perverse effect (from Pyongyang’s perspective) of driving the American and South Korean (and Chinese) positions closer together. That is, Seoul and Beijing began to get tougher, and Washington began to become more reasonable. The net effect is that the North is now in a situation where, once the badly-managed BDA issue is resolved, Pyongyang will be under considerable joint pressure from all of its Six-Party counterparts to follow through on the commitments of 13 February 2007 Initial Actions agreement<sup>45</sup> and keep progress going toward the agreed goals of September 2005.

The prospect is for fulfillment of Phase I obligations by sometime in summer of 2007 and movement to Phase II. However, the rather optimistic picture painted by Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Christopher Hill, regarding making up for lost time (from the BDA debacle), and finishing Phase II by the end of 2007, is probably not realistic.<sup>46</sup> Phase II calls not only for “a complete declaration of all nuclear programs” but also the “disablement of all existing nuclear facilities.” In each of those

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<sup>45</sup> “Initial Actions for the Implementation of the Joint Statement,” full text available at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2007/february/80479.htm>.

<sup>46</sup> Remarks to the US-Korea Institute (SAIS) conference, “The United States and the Republic of Korea: Dialogues on the Relationship,” 4 May 2007 (audio available at [http://www.sais-jhu.edu/mp3\\_player/chrishill050407.htm](http://www.sais-jhu.edu/mp3_player/chrishill050407.htm))

major requirements—“complete declaration” and “disablement”—there is more than enough room for debilitating disagreement.

Everyone could be surprised, but the likelihood is the North will not include uranium enrichment equipment in its declaration. That does not mean everything will break down. What Pyongyang might seek to do is to “own up” to having procured some equipment and materiel usable in uranium enrichment (centrifuges and aluminum tubes, at the very least), but claim that they are not part of a “nuclear program” and thus need to be dealt with outside the framework of the declaration. DPRK Vice Foreign Minister Kim Kye-gwan’s reported optimism that the issue can be successfully resolved suggests that the North may have something like this in mind, and, therefore, one cannot rule out that Pyongyang could in some fashion deal adequately with the uranium enrichment issue, even if not as part of a formal inventory process.<sup>47</sup>

On the question of “disablement,” it is virtually certain that there will be long debates about what is involved and how reversible the action would be.

So, on both these scores, while one ought not assume that completing Phase II by the end of the year is out of the question, it is a very “iffy” proposition.

All of this assumes, of course, that the commitments *to* North Korea would also be carried out faithfully and in a timely fashion, which has not always proven to be an easy undertaking. As of the moment, for example, Japan has opted out of any financing arrangements for either the first, small tranche of heavy fuel oil or the later, larger

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<sup>47</sup> Verification and inspection, and the eventual destruction or shipment of such items out of North Korea would still have to be part of the resolution, whatever the guise under which it proceeded.

supplies of HFO or its equivalent. Tokyo has set a requirement for “progress” on the abduction issue as the price of participation at this stage. Moreover, it has indicated it will not normalize relations with Pyongyang—and thus not provide what could be as much as US\$10 billion in development assistance, envisaged as a significant part of the incentive package for the North once denuclearization is entirely achieved—unless the abduction issue is “fully resolved.”

One problem is that “progress” and “full resolution” have not been defined, and if the first DPRK-Japan working group meeting in Hanoi is any indication, moving ahead will be very difficult. On the other hand, until the other parts of the package have come together, especially the denuclearization piece, despite the annoyance others feel at Japan’s unwillingness to participate in any way in the financing at this point, it does not really matter all that much. At the final stages, however, a continuing lack of agreement between the DPRK and Japan could matter a great deal.

Despite the frustration at the impasse, the United States will continue to be supportive of Japan’s overall goal of resolving the abduction issue and bringing closure to the families that have suffered for so long. Beijing has also expressed support for this goal, although China obviously seeks to keep the abduction issue from being directly raised in Six-Party plenaries or identified in Six-Party documents so as to minimize the prospect of a negative reaction from Pyongyang.

For the United States, South Korea’s willingness to maintain discipline in its approach to the North is also of considerable significance. There has been appreciation for Seoul’s recent insistence that bilateral North-South progress be linked to progress in the nuclear

negotiations, specifically to fulfillment of Phase I obligations. But the verbal dueling on this issue, including between Ambassador Alexander Vershbow and Unification Minister Lee Jae-jeong, reflects both concern in Washington about whether Seoul will adhere to this linkage and a perception in Seoul that the United States is inappropriately, and counterproductively, interfering in inter-Korean affairs.<sup>48</sup>

Assuming that the tasks under Phase I will be completed, this issue will recede for now. But if the estimate about the difficulty of Phase II is correct, there will be ample opportunity for such disagreements to surface again, perhaps in ways that will get enmeshed with some of the other difficult U.S.-ROK bilateral issues discussed earlier.

How the Bush administration will approach further steps envisaged in the 19 September 2005 Joint Statement and the 13 February 2007 Initial Action plan remains to be seen. If Phase I is completed and disablement begins in Phase II, it is quite possible that the United States will support early commencement of negotiations on permanent peace arrangements as called for in both documents. As Ambassador Vershbow made clear at one point,<sup>49</sup> however, the completion of peace arrangements could not come before resolution of the nuclear issue, a position this writer shares.<sup>50</sup>

It also seems that the Bush administration does not envisage normalization of relations with the DPRK early in the process, but rather only in the context of complete resolution

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<sup>48</sup> “Vershbow and Lee Jae-jung Disagree on North Korea Issues,” *Dong-A Ilbo*, 4 May 2007.

<sup>49</sup> Brian Lee, “Vershbow: Bush wants a peace treaty by 2008,” *JoongAng Daily*, 10 May 2007.

<sup>50</sup> Alan D. Romberg, “Permanent Peace on the Korean Peninsula: Quixotic Quest or Source of Stability?” *Korea and World Affairs*, Vol. 30, No. 3, Fall 2006 (available at <http://www.stimson.org/pub.cfm?id=337>)

of the nuclear issue.<sup>51</sup> Excessive delay would be a mistake, as having some official American presence on the ground in the North would be useful for a number of reasons, although trying to bring it about would be highly politically contentious in the United States. However, it might not make much difference what the U.S. position is. As opposed to 1994, when Pyongyang agreed to establish diplomatic liaison offices pending establishment of full embassies (a position from which it later backed off), the North has said that it currently has no interest in half-way normalization steps. Thus, even if the Bush Administration were willing to contemplate a diplomatic relationship at the liaison office level, it might not be accepted. Even so, given the potential benefits for both sides, that should not be taken as the final word, nor should it deter Washington from making such a proposal.

The issue of any level of diplomatic relations raises the larger question of whether the North will see in the Bush administration's new approach a unique opportunity to reap a harvest in the form of transforming the relationship. If Pyongyang assumes it could simply pick up with the new U.S. administration in 2009 wherever it leaves off with Bush, that could be a serious misjudgment. Any new American administration will not

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<sup>51</sup> In a press briefing after his visit to Pyongyang in late June, some three weeks after this paper was presented in Seoul, Ambassador Hill said the following: "We would like to see additional meetings of the working groups, including the two bilateral working groups, the U.S.-DPRK Bilateral Working Group and the Japan-DPRK Bilateral Working Group, both so that there would be progress made in the normalization process with the understanding that the full normalization will not take place until there's full denuclearization." What is envisaged under the rubric of "progress in the normalization process" before full denuclearization remains to be seen. ("Briefing on His Recent Travel to the Region and the Six-Party Talks," Christopher R. Hill, Washington, DC, 25 June 2007. The full briefing transcript is available at <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2007/87332.htm>.)

only need time to assess the situation and determine its policy, but the domestic politics of reaching out to the North could well be less favorable than they are now.

At the same time, the North would be mistaken to believe that the United States is so desperate for a deal that it can be leveraged into major concessions. It is true that, on the tactical level of moving through Phase I of the February agreement, Washington has shown greater flexibility than most people assumed possible and that some consider wise. But for the North to take advantage of this tactical situation to achieve the security of a transformed relationship it has long sought would require that the North make the “strategic decision” one keeps hearing about. That is, it must decide to give up all nuclear programs, fully implementing not only both phases of the Initial Actions agreement but also the various steps of real denuclearization laid out in the September 2005 Joint Statement. Otherwise, those in Washington who favor pressure over negotiation will once again gain the upper hand.

At this point, the North takes the position that, while it remains committed to its promises in the Joint Statement, it is not prepared to move ahead on the actual denuclearization steps involving weapons and fissile material until the United States abandons its “hostile policy” toward the DPRK. And, as indicated, in Pyongyang’s view this can only come through the transformation of the U.S.-DPRK relationship. This was the position in 1994 and it should not be surprising that it is the position today. That picture may have been complicated by the North’s nuclear test. While, on the one hand it gave the North “standing” to claim it returned to negotiations in a stronger position, it might also have

convinced the military—who hold much power in Pyongyang—that the DPRK should not give up the deterrent that the “demonstrated” nuclear capability provides.

At a minimum, it is likely that the North’s “default” position will be to hold onto what it has—even if it disables the capability to quickly acquire more—until it feels it has a credible substitute guarantee of survival that allows a change in that position. One cannot know at this point whether there is any guarantee that would suffice, but it is fairly certain that anything short of a transformed relationship with the United States will not provide it.

One could argue that the DPRK’s current course will eventually lead it to economic disaster and political collapse, and that it would be well advised to change that course if given the opportunity. One could further argue that the recent change of heart in Washington affords just such an opportunity, whereas waiting for a new American administration could squander whatever chance there is. But that argument is probably easier to subscribe to from outside the DPRK than it is from inside.

In any event, if the process drags out beyond 2008, as seems likely, then the new American administration will have to face up to several critical questions. The issue being raised about the Bush administration’s willingness to “tolerate” and “contain” a nuclear North Korea rather than pursuing total denuclearization is therefore really better directed at the next administration. Even if the goal remains total denuclearization (as it most likely will, widespread Asian doubts notwithstanding), that will obviously take considerable time, probably measured in years. If so, will the next administration be willing to “front load” some of the steps the United States is to take (such as

normalization of relations) in order to try to induce or pave the way for a satisfactory outcome (even while avoiding providing rewards to North Korea that should only come with full denuclearization)?

Even if the concept today is to begin permanent peace talks soon but not conclude them until denuclearization is achieved, will that still seem a wise course several years hence?

For Bush as well as his successor, at what point will the United States be willing to try some friendly persuasion with Japan to take a more realistic position on the abduction cases assuming that the North can be persuaded to be more reasonable about revealing the fate of the missing? We can already see suspicion building in Tokyo about the U.S. abandoning support for Japan's position;<sup>52</sup> it would be better to work on this earlier rather than later, after mistrust has taken root.

If the Six-Party Talks stall out, or at least are doing no better than treading water, will the United States and China be able to avoid engaging in mutual recriminations, focusing instead on cooperative efforts that could bring more pressure to bear on the North without tipping it over the line and generating a dangerous backlash?

## **Conclusion**

Despite the substantial challenges the United States faces in managing its relationships in Northeast Asia and protecting its national security interests, it is this observer's contention that those national interests will eventually drive the next U.S. administration

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<sup>52</sup> Nae Kurashige, "Japan is Perplexed at the US Secretary of State's Remark on the Abduction Issue and Concerned that Japan will be Left Behind," *Asahi Shimbun*, 12 May 2007 (translated by OSC, JPP20070512023001)

at least in the direction of the right choices. The fact that the countries of the region also see their own interests wrapped up in better intraregional relations means that, unless something unanticipated shifts the game board, the United States ought to be able to maintain—and strengthen—its alliance relationship with Japan at the same time it is deepening and broadening its ties with China. Avoiding the worst political instincts of some to turn economic and trade issues into points of mutually self-defeating contention will require self-restraint, not always available in great supply in any country in election years. But after 2009, things should calm down.

Moreover, the United States also ought to be able to promote better relations between Japan and its near neighbors, though obviously the overwhelming share of responsibility for that lies in the hands of those directly involved. And it ought to be able to work with the next administration in Taiwan and its counterpart across the Strait not only to maintain peace and stability, but to promote even more fruitful cross-Strait exchanges of all sorts. In the right circumstances, perhaps even an end-of-hostilities agreement could be worked out. This is not an argument for any particular shape to the ultimate political outcome across the Strait, which will only come far in the future, in any case, and which is certainly not the affair of the United States as long as it does not involve use or threat of force or coercion. But it is to argue that, if the authorities on both sides adopt pragmatic positions, even while not yielding on principle, we ought to be able to move beyond the one-upmanship that characterizes the situation today and that raises constant concerns about the fragility of cross-Strait peace.

Korea could, in many ways, present the most challenging issues for the United States. It goes without saying that it will require steady and yet creative approaches to bring the North Korean denuclearization effort to a successful conclusion. If the current American course can be maintained—and one should not blithely assume there is a unified view about that in the current administration—then, whatever the degree of progress by January 20, 2009, the next American president should have a more promising base from which to work.

U.S.-South Korea relations, by any objective standard, should be among the closest and most mutually beneficial in the world. But both sides have shown an unfortunate tendency in recent years to let the inevitable frustrations in a rapidly evolving alliance relationship affect its successful management, and this has occasionally led to unnecessary and decidedly unhelpful steps on both sides. In most cases, the situation has been recovered before it has gotten totally out of hand. But as former foreign minister Han Sung Joo has said, “complete healing will not be easy.”<sup>53</sup>

So this is not a time for reassuring platitudes. Rather, it is a time for reflection and wisdom based on good will, common values and shared interests. Nothing less than that will work.

Finally, it is a fair observation by critics that the United States lacks a regional strategy. Americans have only begun to recognize the depth of interconnectedness among the various elements of U.S. interests in the region. In important measure this recognition is

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<sup>53</sup> “Korea-U.S. Alliance ‘at Tipping Point’,” Interview, *Chosun Ilbo*, 7 August 2006.

growing through the vehicle of the Six-Party Talks, and it is not accidental that proposals for development of a Northeast Asian regional security mechanism have gained stature through those talks. In approaching such a mechanism, however, one needs to be realistic about its purposes and potential—and its limits.

It cannot be expected to deal with the hard-core, traditional security issues such as providing deterrence against the use of force in and around the Korean Peninsula or maintaining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. If tensions heat up between Japan and China, or Japan and Korea, over conflicting territorial or ocean resource claims, a regional mechanism would seem unsuited to resolve those disputes.

It can, however, foster cooperation on non-traditional security issues such as terrorism, proliferation, environmental degradation, piracy, and human trafficking. It can also play a role in setting “rules of the road” to help avoid incidents at sea or in the air. And through the development of habits of cooperation, it can contribute to the growth of mutual assurance about the strategic intentions of the dialogue partners, including through confidence-building measures such as greater military transparency, notification of exercises, and invitations to observers.

All of that said, bilateral relations will remain essential in U.S. strategic thinking for a very long time to come. The growing ties of interdependence with China will only become deeper and more crucial over time, even if they are not always smooth. Successfully managing the Taiwan issue—with both Beijing and Taipei—will be absolutely critical.

Fostering even stronger alliance relations with Japan and Korea will be principal American preoccupations. As discussed, there are warning signs about the future that, if ignored, could portend changes with enormous—and generally negative—consequences. That need not be, however, and it will be a top U.S. priority to work with Tokyo and Seoul to ensure that the alliances are revitalized and more clearly seen by the concerned governments and publics as making decisive contributions to their security and well-being. Finding ways to engage China constructively with those alliances will be a challenging yet key task.

The next American president cannot take any of this for granted. Even if Iraq and the greater Middle East still dominate the headlines, as they very well may, much of the future of the entire world will be decided in Northeast Asia. The United States must exercise leadership and vision if it is to help shape that future in a positive way. But it must also exercise that leadership and vision in a way that respects and helps fulfill the legitimate aspirations of others. Perhaps, for America, that is the greatest challenge of all.