

“Asian Security Environment after the 9.11 Terrorism”

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1. Security in Northeast Asia retains the characteristics of modernity –in contrast to the post-modern security context of Europe. By this I mean that the nation-state is the main focus of security both as actor and as the primary source of threat perceptions. Above the state there is neither security community nor any transnational institutions that might mitigate the anarchic nature of international politics. Below the level of the state the challenge of non-state actors causes less concern than in other parts of Asia.
2. Northeast Asia is very heavily armed. There are huge military forces, some armed with high-tech equipment, ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction. There is also an ongoing increase in the overall military capability of sub-regional states, despite the decline of Russian forces and the erosion of North Korea’s conventional war fighting ability.
3. The United States is dominant in the region, both because of its global military reach and because of its alliances with Japan and South Korea and its friendship with Taiwan. As a result, Northeast Asia is greatly affected by shifts in U.S. strategy, such as the newly articulated doctrine of preemption. Some aspects of the more domineering U.S. approach came in response to the threat of terrorism, which has bloodied even the greatest military power the world has ever seen. Other aspects of the Bush administration’s approach to security affairs derive from the remarkable unipolarity of international politics, opening up the potential for imperial leadership.
4. Within Northeast Asia many territorial disputes still exist, including highly militarized disputes in the divided nations of South/North Korea and China/Taiwan. Japan has territorial disputes with Russia, South Korea, China and even Taiwan. Russia and China have resolved most of their border problems, but the issue retains the potential to flare up again. South Korea and China also have a maritime dispute.
5. Japan is incrementally becoming more vigorous as a security actor, both within the region and beyond. The emergence of Japan as militarily active occurred during the Cold War, from the late 1970s into the 1980s, as Japan joined in efforts to contain the Soviet Union through strengthened Self-Defense. In the post-Cold War, Japan enhanced its security policy in two dimensions: in security cooperation activities (especially multilateral dialogue) and in support of U.S. military capability under the U.S.-Japan Alliance. After 9/11, Japan became even more active across both

dimensions, and appears likely to continue this course. PKO, security dialogue, defense exchanges, joint exercises, international HRO/DRO, anti-piracy cooperation, and other CBMs all continue to arouse defense and security authorities in Japan. At the same time, participation in operation Enduring Freedom, cooperation on missile defense, possible contributions to an Iraq campaign, and an ongoing search for broader U.S.-Japan collaboration point to a strategy to further consolidate the Alliance.

6. China is growing and continues military modernization, both operationally and strategically. In the early post-Cold War period, the expectation of multipolarity led Chinese to strongly resist the consolidation of the U.S.-centered unipolar order. Although China remains too weak to function as a “strategic competitor” of the United States, its ambition created a regional pseudo-bipolarity, wherein China became the hub of resistance to U.S. dominance. After 9/11, however, China seized the opportunity to escape this position and recast itself as a supporter of the United States’ status as the main bulwark of the existing international order, in which China has vested interests. If this endures, it is the most significant effect of 9/11 in Northeast Asia.

7. North Korea, under immense economic pressure, reacted to the Bush administration as a political and military threat. Pyongyang has sought security and leverage in WMD-related brinkmanship, opening insincere dialogue time and again in an apparent attempt to exploit outside hopes for rapprochement. The callous and cruel regime will show no hesitation to allow its own subjects to starve or freeze to death, nor will it quail at murdering citizens of other nations to ensure the political survival of Kim Jong-Il. Therefore further pressure, even cutting off food aid, is unlikely to improve its behavior. Nor can we expect generosity to reap any warming of ties, only more extortion.

North Korea can be deterred, however. Close coordination among Japan, the United States, South Korea, China, and Russia is necessary.

8. After the end of the Cold War allowed a shift in the PRC’s focus to maritime security and reunification, Taiwan initiated a quest for security assurances from the United States (and Japan). Thanks to democratization, these efforts have been quite successful. Thanks to Washington’s strong rhetoric and substantial arms sales, Taiwan has a high degree of military security, and now faces more severe economic threats. The impact of 9/11 has been to allow the focus to shift away from China’s threat to Taiwan, easing the intensity of the arms race and security dilemma without basically changing its character.

9. Terrorism has presented a common threat to all nation-states and a challenge to globalization. The broadly status quo orientation of actors in the region offers hope that they can emphasize their cooperation against new dangers, but the divergent definitions of security – preserving the well-being of citizens; regime survival; prestige and national glory – may undermine this fragile basis. If states in Northeast Asia focus on each other as security threats, their conflicts of national

interest will harm the overall security environment. As states feel less secure, they will more easily fall into a negative security spiral. If the United States can play an active role as security guarantor, with acquiescence or support from regional entities, Northeast Asia may be able to build from stability to peace.