The U.S., Japan, and Asia in International Politics

Andrew K. Hanami

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The U.S., Japan, and Asia in International Politics

By Andrew K. Hanami
San Francisco State University
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For the United States and the West, Asia came of age in the 1700s as Britain established itself in India while they and other European powers set up spheres of influence in China, as well as throughout Asia. That large process came to a close with the United States forming a treaty with Japan. What the West did in its age of colonialism resulted in an Asia that has adopted many modern Western traditions, and now faces the West with greater confidence, independence, and questions today. It must have come as a surprise. From Asia's point of view, however, they have not so much westernized as taken on selective aspects of European and U.S. influences that accentuate aspects of their economy, society, and outlook. In some ways the Asian street remains traditional while its political elite and upper classes are westernized, besetting the region with certain incompatibilities, as well as new opportunities. Because Western states have lost (or in the American case in Japan, never permanently held onto) formal, direct governance, it has allowed Asia to evolve its own political orientation for itself, as well as toward the West. Thus in Asia we see the absence of the violent and disruptive reactions of European and American presence in the Middle East, where former Soviet competition, and now oil, color Washington's designs. Either Asia was never as valuable to the West as Middle Eastern oil is to the United States today, or its value was more allayed toward states less able to capture them earlier. What has resulted today is an Asia that is strong, vital, and expectant.

Richard Rosecrance said that the essence of international relations was action and reaction. I think that principle applies not only to in-the-moment relations, but longitudinally too. Asia has responded to Western footprints on its soil over the centuries. Asia may be ready to make some tracks on the West today.

It is said that the United States needs China to continue to purchase U.S. Treasury bills, just to keep the U.S. economy from further deterioration from the 2008–2009 financial meltdown. This is not quite true. China needs us as much as we need them. The same is true of Japan, who continues to hold the second greatest amount of U.S. Treasury bills, while heading the technology boom that U.S. and global development
continues to depend upon for the road ahead. What should not be lost in the current thinking is not that the United States and Asia are interlocked in a complex relationship whose results may be in dispute, but that it is a struggle at all. Two centuries ago this discussion would not even be taking place. Asia has grown up. The rise of China, some thoughtful scholars are beginning to say, is really the next piece of the rise of Asia. The Japan part has already taken place, and Japan will remain the world’s second leading economy for the foreseeable future. The China component has entered the picture, and India is asserting itself as well. Even the poorer countries of Asia are becoming factors in the global economy, and with piracy and terrorism, now we are beginning to see the link between rising capabilities and shifting objectives. The foreign policies of Asia are becoming too important to the world outlook of U.S. planners to be ignored.

Does the United States have the power to align their policies to augment ours? Do we have the wisdom to cull their efforts to result in positive consequences and fairness for all, or will we merely gather greater resources to forge a foreign-policy failure down a dark road?

The Barack Obama administration appears to be multicultural; for instance, Obama himself grew up in multicultural Asia. But Asia is a mix, with states like Indonesia being quite multicultural, while Japan and China remain among the two most homogenous states in the world, as Rupert Emerson used to remind us. Will Obama’s experience overcome the momentum of the Bush administration’s eight years, where the Texan began with a pro-Japan, anti-China policy and ended up with a containment/engagement strategy with China? The early Obama moves appear to confirm Asia as a centerpiece of his foreign policy. Earlier, Henry Kissinger said that the in the twenty-first century, the shift of the global center of gravity would be to Asia, not Europe. Obama’s first foreign visitor in the first days of his administration was the prime minister from Japan, and Obama’s first diplomatic emissary, in the person of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, went to Japan, Indonesia, and China. Asian experts have suggested that the Obama White House will hold on to Japan as a big piece of U.S. policy, but that China is to become a more permanent, engaged partner of the United States, rather than an intermittent participant. During the G-20 Meeting in 2009, prominent foreign policy writers Yoichi Funabashi said Japan’s economic and domestic political instabilities put Japan’s diplomatic powers at a “low state.” China may be trying to set up a bipolar “Sino-American” structure in the Asian Pacific, squeezing down Japan by compartmentalizing Japan under a political China–Japan condominium arrangement. President Obama stated that the U.S.–China relationship is the most important bilateral trading relationship in the world. This signals the Asian states that a “Group of Two” may be forming. To keep up, Japan is expected to contribute to the financial recovery of the region. Victor Cha has stated that without a
China–Japan alliance the Asian century “will not arrive.” The fact that Japan preferred the next meeting be held in the United States rather than Tokyo suggested Japan was taking a backseat in this era. This has created uneasiness throughout Asia, and not just for Japan, as the Chinese leaders themselves have shown a reluctance to accept such a relationship or role. Obama may have to retrench at some point. How he does, and where he does after learning their wishes, will change history.1

Since World War, accelerated through sixty years of history, Asia in toto has come to capture the attention of the United States, which traditionally had been fixed on Europe. The 1930s background reason is that when America did not pay attention to Asia, war broke out, and we found that war in that distant place still affects the United States. When Japan led the East Asian economies into an economic “miracle” in the 1980s, total trade shifted away from Europe and toward Asia, a surprise to many. Interest, politics, and policies often follow trade, and we tried to adjust to that. Just when we thought we had understood the Asian tiger, events overtook us. With 9/11, the United States fixed on Central Asia and the Middle East, but soon began to worry that international terrorism may be truly international, and not just confined to one or two countries or regions. Thus, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, America finds itself challenged by a changed world that was not planned. We find ourselves today bracketed by pivotal economic, political, and security questions on our Asian Pacific side, and if we do not find wise answers, we will all be worse off for it.

Since the 1980s, Asia has become financially important to us. In 2006 scholars report that East Asian banks held $2 trillion in American assets, double that by 2009, with little change in sight. The region also represented 21 percent of global trade and more than 30 percent of global GDP. The U.S. economy represents 19 percent of global GDP. China and Japan hold the most American Treasury bills; the latter had been holding the biggest trade deficit with the United States for decades until overtaken by the former. The region also receives half of the total world foreign direct investment. Northern California alone, anchored by San Francisco, trades more with Northeast Asia than it does with the rest of the forty-nine American states. California is home to over three hundred Japanese firms, the most in the United States, with Illinois, Ohio, Oregon, New Jersey, and Georgia following with just a sixth of what is located in California. Though many have complained that China is manufacturing so much for us, we have asked for much of it, and American MNCs still hold globally 18 percent of world exports in manufacturing—it is just that many of our companies are manufacturing outside the United States and shipping products abroad, much of it in Asia. The United States is South Korea’s number one foreign direct investor (FDI), as well as its second and third export and import markets, and other Asian states hold similar trading relationships with us. Thailand and Singapore depend on exports to the
United States to buoy their economies. After two centuries of focus on Europe, Asia has become a manufacturer and trading partner with security questions unfamiliar to earlier U.S. policy makers. We did not have to learn about Europe. We had to learn about Asia. Because we are an optimistic, forward-looking people, and with the largest GDP, we assumed Asia would favor us and would prefer us indefinitely.

**AMERICAN DESCENT IN ASIA?**

But there was trouble in Asia in 2006. Surveys show that American “soft power” in East Asia was declining. This has been slowly happening over the last few years. The decline is because the use of American hard power is destroying American soft power, and because of certain shifting realities in Asia. In terms of sentiment, for example, there has been a sea change in feelings between North and South Koreans, and Americans have not adjusted to it. Today, the mantra is that many Koreans desire reunification. Over 86 percent of Koreans living today were born after the country was divided. They do not have memories of the war, and they do not see the North Koreans as the obvious enemy, or the United States as the obvious friend. Under pressure from South Koreans, the United States has agreed to redeploy at least some of its troops, because in the wake of anti-American demonstrations by young people, the welcome has become less warm. South Koreans fear a second Korean War; this one will be initiated by the Americans. In recent surveys throughout Asia, in fact, majorities only among the Japanese population maintain a favorable view toward the United States when compared with China. Against the tide of the new North-South Korean movement toward reunification, U.S. foreign policy priorities are that Washington does not desire to see a united Korea, since one outcome is that a larger Korea could come under the influence of China, or possibly Russia or Japan. The White House prefers that democracy accompany any reunification, making it closer to them, in their view.2

The American views on North Korea continue to upset the peninsula and contain ramifications for the region. U.S. satellites spotted preparation for the launch of a North Korean missile on June 16, 2006, apparently an ICBM class able to reach—at least in principle—California, it was said at that time. This is the first intended long-range missile launch since 1998. Just one year after that launch Pyongyang stated it would not again test an intercontinental missile. But it became rapidly apparent that they have done so. Then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice sent a message to China asking for their influence to persuade North Korea to not go ahead with the test, which reports say was imminent. Some have said that Pyongyang only is trying to get Washington’s attention because they desire U.S. security and trade guarantees. But the North Korean problem, whether it is active or on hold, unsettles the region. It is feared
they would resume exporting their technologies to states undesirable to the United States. Worse, if Pyongyang is confirmed as possessing a nuclear weapon and with a proven missile delivery system, the fear is that others in the region could opt for nuclear weapons themselves. Not only Japan, as has been widely speculated, but also South Korea, Taiwan and perhaps even Singapore would try to acquire nuclear weapons, just to balance the new local threat from North Korea. Winston Lord, former U.S. ambassador to China, has stated that this could put the prevailing American relations with the region “into question.” The United States would not like that.

Asia is difficult to integrate. The dispersion of Chinese culture over the past four thousand years and the Silk Road are the two main factors that link the states of Asia. But there are large regional differences, both north and south and end to end. There are extremes in mountains, flood plains, deserts, jungle, cultures, and uneven resources. The driving force in Asia is not just geopolitical, but historical and ideational. There are clashing religions, political ideologies, culture, “race,” as well as distance. Asia tends toward an imperial model, not a democratic model, and that makes it more difficult for them to deal with each other. It is a poor candidate for regional integration, or even regional management. Rivalries characterize Asia, and rivalries make the region more unstable than is commonly realized, and is worse than in Europe. Rising nationalism is driving rivalries further, and historical memories are kept alive and fuel animosities. Beijing periodically says Japan has never apologized sincerely for what it did to them in the last century. Apologies for initiation of past wars may help, but Japan has apologized scores of times the past two decades, including apologies by several of its prime ministers. Tokyo feels they have now reached apology fatigue because nothing good has come of it, in their view. There is the feeling in Tokyo today among its leaders that no further apologies will be forthcoming. China will never cease to call for apologies, leaders in Japan believe. Many in Tokyo believe the call for apologies is actually a cover to demand more development aid from Japan, and for the island nation to learn its place in a China-centered region. This does not augur well for good relations in the near future.

Differential growth rates have also led to jealousies, fears, and resentments. When Japan was the clear economic leader of the region, China was startled and dismayed. As China’s economy grew, Japan became resigned, then disheartened; now many search for a new accommodation. When China’s military began to modernize, Japan felt threatened. When Japan’s military modernized, China accused Tokyo of returning to its days of militarism. For hundreds of years, Japan and China have been considered traditional rivals for control of the Korean peninsula. Japan, with U.S. encouragement, is trying to help make South Korea into a little Japan, an extension of the U.S.–Japan relationship.
This increases the tensions. South Korea has a Western-style market, and for decades Japan has been sending investment, technology, and grant aid to Seoul trying to assist its development. In exchange, South Korea has served (the Japanese think) as a shield to North Korea, and a state that is more in the Western camp than in China’s, at least to the present. China in turn has improved relations with South Korea and believes it needs North Korea as a buffer state to hold off U.S. pressures. China also thinks that some developments in North Korea will deflect U.S. preoccupation with Taiwan, Beijing’s primary foreign policy problem of the last sixty years. Overall, after centuries of dormancy, China is attempting to restore its superior status in the region and wants others—especially Japan—to be deferential on matters important to Beijing. Tokyo, with its powerful economy and linkage to the United States, will not step aside. This is a recipe for antagonism. But there is peace in the region in large measure because there is an informal region-wide understanding that economic development is the number one objective. Asia wants to catch up. It believes it already faces a developed West. All Asia is looking to rise.

But greater security is needed, many scholars believe, because greater economies have come about, as well as the growth of their militaries. Washington feels that the U.S. presence is the key to keeping the peace and prosperity on the right track. Therefore, it is vital to keep Asia open to the United States so that Americans can stabilize animosities and optimize regional growth, while keeping Asia open to Japan as well. But the security dynamic in the region is odd. Though the United States has a security agreement with South Korea, for example, Japan does not. It is also well known that Washington has a formal security agreement with Tokyo. We also have degrees of security arrangements with many Asian states, including the Philippines, even after the bases have been vacated. Asian states have bilateral security agreements with the United States, but there are few security agreements between clusters of Asian states. U.S. allies in Asia are not allied with each other. This has been called the “hub and spoke” security system—Washington is the center of the wheel, the spokes attach to individual Asian states. This puts the United States at the center of Asia’s security architecture, but disputes between the “spokes” cannot be perfectly managed from afar. To make matters more complex, the United States does not expect to be a mediator or even a player, but rather expects to be the “dominant Asia player” through extended deterrence. Washington believes it can tailor deterrence to each state, which it calls “convergent deterrence.” The assumption here is that the interests of key states of Asia will “converge” with U.S. interests. But this logic will run into dispute sooner or later. The goal of the White House is to prevent the rise of any regional hegemonic leader, be it Japan or China. That could be a challenging, if impractical, goal.
CHINA’S RISE IN ASIA

Some in Washington believe China will “challenge the existing American order.” Some East Asian states in the new economic age are beginning to be less concerned with U.S. interests than in developing positive terms with Beijing. If China is hurt, they will be hurt. In that region, both by tradition and its relative insularity, there had been a natural tendency to bandwagon with China. Australia, South Korea, and Thailand have reaffirmed their ties with Beijing, creating what some have said is a balance within a balance. Because of China’s new comprehensive “economic, cultural, diplomatic, and strategic” engagement policy with its Asian neighbors (with the exception of Japan and Taiwan), China’s neighbors see Beijing now as a “good partner” and as a “status-quo power.” The White House will in turn have to deal with those attitudes as well. Americans will find it hard to believe, but at the political and economic level, China is outpacing our popularity in some Asian states. China is acting like it is not surprised; it feels it has considerable (and older) soft power of its own to offer.

John J. Mearsheimer, University of Chicago, says we can expect China, following hegemonic theory, to try to push the United States out of Asia, then take up the vacuum left for itself. America is such a distant country that Beijing feels U.S. presence cannot remain in the region forever, or for long. China, on the other hand, will always be there, and the other Asian states will eventually have to deal directly with that reality. China’s objective is to be a regional hegemon that can “dictate the boundaries of acceptable behavior” of its neighboring states. This includes the various islets around Chinese waters, which some scholars have reported may contain 17 percent of the world’s recoverable oil. In that way, it may also be able to get Taiwan under its control without resorting to war. Therefore, we can expect the United States, in reaction, to try to contain China and try to weaken it. China’s main neighbors, including Japan, Russia, India, South Korea, Singapore, and Vietnam also fear China’s rise, Mearsheimer says, and can be expected to join the United States as a counterweight. The American-led coalition is likely to try to hold on to an independent Taiwan not only for its political symbolism and economy, but because of its “strategic importance for controlling the sea lanes in East Asia.” That is where a real contest could emerge.

In recent years, U.S.–China relations have become quite complex. In the economic sphere, there is a great deal of enhanced activities, trade, investments, and manufacturing of exports, causing one scholar to write that China is interested in good relations with the United States “as a priority.” What this means is that Beijing seeks noninterference from Washington while conducting productive economic relations in pursuit of its long-term objectives. Thus in the short term, there seems to be economic reciprocity, even as security arrangements appear to go on as if the Cold War in Asia has not disappeared, as Robert Scalapino at Berkeley has stated. One observer has called America’s
relations with China today as “hedged engagement,” ready to do business, ready for confrontation. Others have called it “soft containment.” How much longer will China tolerate this policy?

The United States continues to witness its largest trade deficit with China, which Congress formally objects to, and sees a number of domestic practices we find unpalatable, including their handling of minority rights in Tibet and elsewhere among the lesser known provinces. Additionally, we see no improvement in China’s human rights practices, including the editing of certain Internet sites. China’s government blocked Internet access to any inquiries about Tiananmen during its twentieth anniversary on June 4, 2009, and its current young population has little knowledge of what took place during the pro-democracy movement of students only a generation ago. The issue of Taiwan seems stable for the moment, and the North Korean solution may have to wait until after Iraq is basically completed enough to free up U.S. troops. So until then, that issue is not considered imminent though it could be near term. Secret Service reports are still very concerned over China’s intellectual property rights violations, Congress has complained about the undervalued yuan, and some officials at the Pentagon and in the administration are suspicious of China’s growing military power. In addition, China’s recent ties to Iran, Sudan, and Venezuela have irritated the White House. But the overall relationship, principally because of trade, which creates its own momentum, remains in steady-state growth for the moment. The 2008–2009 global financial meltdown, which halted most worldwide trade, is likely a short-term phenomenon.

But it is the future that concerns the White House, and because of its potential implications, it is a mixed relationship. It is a two-way, and perhaps inscrutable, relationship. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) continues to see Tiananmen as an “American-engineered plot to bring down socialism.” We saw it as a natural, internal evolution, stopped ruthlessly by the authorities. Americans feel we had nothing to do with it. Chinese students today still believe that the accidental U.S. air bombing, in which the United States was reported to be using an old tourist map of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade in 1999, was deliberate. China’s government does see that it needs its own form of capitalist reforms, but they see it only as a limited measure. Beijing does not think it needs to do much more than incremental change below the ruling-class level. One writer thinks China is in denial. Beijing continues to think that the fall of the Soviet Union, to use an analogy, was not inevitable, but inept. The Kremlin fell not because of its Communist ideology, but because Gorbachev was too “rash”—he pushed Russia into bankruptcy because of the extreme and pointless arms race with the United States. If China does not match the high pace of that arms race, it will be fine. The CCP, moreover, sees the old Soviet Union as an artificial state ready to topple over almost of its own weight, put together by the Red Army in Eastern
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Europe, but that China is an historic state with the PLA and Communist party at its center. China does not feel it has to change its ideology or ruling structure.\(^5\) Not much liberalization can be expected there in the near future.

**RUSSIA AND NORTH KOREAN PROBLEMS**

Russia has for some time had a strong interest in the region. In the seventeenth century, Russians first reached their Asian Pacific coast and felt the populations were exposed, and began trying to reach out to China, Japan, and Korea for trade and utilization of their labor and resources. These impulses continue today with big power politics. Russia tilted toward South Korea in the 1990s in search of profitable trade in the wake of their collapsing economy. They sacrificed North Korean feelings to do so, since Pyongyang sees the South as inferior. Putin sees the Russian Far East as a “battleground between Moscow and Washington as part of the struggle between socialism and capitalism.” Putin got help from a neighbor. Bush’s unilateral foreign policy style “pushed Russia and China further together” after 2001. This was not to America’s advantage. Russia understands it has been a weak player in Northeast Asia, but with arms sales to China it can introduce the continuation of tensions between China and the United States,, and in that way be a player in the region, especially with its current energy sales. Russia seeks to be a big power in the world, minimally, and looks for its opportunities to set the agenda in the region as a stepping stone toward that goal.

North Korea represents what strategic planners call the “pivot” of Northeast Asian security, because that is where Russia, China, Japan, and U.S. interests meet. North Korea became nervous about its security guarantees from China given China’s emerging economic “interdependence” with the United States and Japan, which helped lead it to push for nuclear weapons development. Because of Russia’s prior poor economy, Moscow came to insist from North Korea hard currency for its trade goods, rather than the useless barter items Pyongyang had been giving. This pressured North Korea to sell missile parts to Middle East states to obtain the hard currency needed. This included oil from Russia, which otherwise would have shut down North Korea’s limited industrial production, and its military facilities as well. China’s limited economic “gifts” to North Korea, which meet only a fraction of Pyongyang’s needs, is what Beijing thinks it can afford, given that North Korea shows no signs of doing more on its own. The minimal lifeline help is designed to pressure, or tutor, North Korea into adopting what it sees as the “Chinese model” of development. That is, hold on to the Communist part at the top while attempting to liberalize some aspects of the economy below and opening up to the outside world. But for North Korea, the outside world has always been limited to Northeast Asia. North Korea’s estimated GDP has been approximated
at only $17 billion; South Korea’s is $455 billion. Most of North Korea’s economy is spent on the military and its upper class.

Because North Korea was losing many economic ties with its former allies, it sought to replace them with U.S. support, the richest economy in the world (at least in the long term) by—oddly—developing its nuclear weapons program in order to get the United States to pay serious attention to it and acquiesce. But as North Korea processed its nuclear materials to high grades in 1994, it brought the United States not to the negotiation table, but to the brink of war. Washington even considered warning its citizens in the area to leave. Instead, it led to the 1994 Framework Agreement, which called on North Korea to halt its program in exchange for light oil reactors, fuel, and other aid, with the cooperation of Japan and South Korea. Pyongyang either thought the United States had reneged two years later or it was bent on developing nuclear weapons all along, and started up a secret program in 1997–1998. A few months later in 1998, North Korea fired a missile shot over Japan as a method, some scholars believe, to get U.S. attention back on them regarding security, trade, and aid. It has accelerated that process in 2009 with a very pronounced series of tests and missile firings. North Korea’s diplomatic style, insiders say, is that if it is engaged, it will cooperate. But if it is ignored or isolated, it will “lash out.” Bush’s 2002 “axis of evil” speech stigmatized North Korea but also angered South Koreans, who promptly became more decidedly anti-American because they thought America was looking for a fight that was not there. Little has changed since then.6

**AMERICA’S SECURITY STRUCTURE IN ASIA**

Over the years, the United States has formed the dominant security structure in Asia through bilateral arrangements with Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Australia, and Thailand. With Australia, the United States has increased diplomatic ties, joint military training, cooperation, and development in intelligence, and the United States has pre-positioned supplies there and some say, some modest “base-like” facilities sprinkled throughout the island nation. The Philippines, until recently the site of two large American military bases, and Thailand have been newly assigned as important allies in the war on terror, emphasizing the nonviolent policies of their majority Muslim populations. This no doubt includes Indonesia, which holds sentimental value for President Barack Obama. Though America lost its air force and naval bases in the Philippines, it has retrieved “visiting” rights for its vessels and a more expansive relationship is being worked on by Washington. We have given military helicopters to them to chase Abu Sayyaf, whom we have tagged as a terrorist group. The United States feels there should be stability and democracy in that country, and that the Philippines

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6. This is a reference to the quote by Bush, which was intended to highlight the threat posed by both North Korea and Iran to the security of the United States and its allies. The quote was part of a speech given on January 10, 2002, in which Bush identified North Korea and Iran as part of an “axis of evil.” The quote was met with significant controversy and criticism, particularly from South Korea, which was an important ally of the United States at the time.
should be like Japan. Washington also is aiding Thailand because it wants their help to demoralize the military junta in neighboring Burma, where Bush felt there may be possible terror cells. This may be more action to help “drain the swamp,” as the Republican president had once stated. The United States has also developed security ties with India, Pakistan, Singapore, and Mongolia—an encirclement policy designed to “contain” China, an old Cold War tactic. These security ties involve arms and technology sales, military assistance, and military exercises. Even with Vietnam military exchanges have been set up, and through Central Asia, the United States continues to have air bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan currently linked with American efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In addition, the deeper Pacific is being further militarized. Guam, already an American base, is undergoing a major military upgrade for possible conflict involving China in Taiwan, the Korean Peninsula, the Indian Ocean, or another conflict in the Middle East. Expanded fleets of American B-1, B-2, and B-52 long-range strategic bombers, fighter aircraft, and in-flight refueling tankers for extended power projection, and the appearance of sizable numbers of American’s front-line nuclear submarines and fighting surface ships, have settled into Guam. An American aircraft carrier group is even being considered for that location, and U.S. Marines are shifting over from Okinawa. This is a heavy-duty shift. In addition, comparable U.S. military enhancements are being undertaken in Hawaii, Alaska, and up and down the West Coast of America. Partly in response to anti-U.S. troop demonstrations in South Korea and protests in Okinawa, the United States is realigning some of its assets. But it is not pulling out of the region. The United States has created or re-created three main layers of containment around China on its eastern shores—Japan, Guam/Hawaii, and the West Coast Pacific ports. This shows the United States is hunkering down for the long term.

China’s relationship with America’s most important ally in the region, Japan, also is becoming decidedly worse, according to leading scholar David Shambaugh. He says “if relations between China and Japan are not stable, East Asia is not stable,” because those two states are the two major states of the entire area. The United States needs to try to “arrest the downward spiral” as soon as possible, or it could jeopardize U.S. interests in the region. But the internal, bilateral antagonisms run so deep it is doubtful that the United States can do much, Shambaugh believes. Some scholars have called for a “concert of power” for Asia, where a number of powers determine policy for the region. That would tend to settle the area. But Shambaugh replies that a “Concert of Asia,” mirrored after the nineteenth-century Concert of Europe, is not a likely possibility. China is ascendant, Japan is already ensconced and still feels it is the most important economic state in the region. North Korea is developing nuclear
weapons and a nasty disposition and feels it is a power that should be recognized, and other states will not take a back seat in this context across every issue. It is not a region of equal, or near equals, and many states do not even agree as to the region’s relative ranking among themselves or are jockeying for better.

At one point, Japan tried to improve its relationship with China and felt it was progressing. In the 1980s, Japan stepped up its aid packages to China to sponsor Beijing’s economic development in hopes that an era of friendship could be created in the wake of their troubled past. Leader Deng Xiaoping’s cordial personality during that period seemed to get the Japanese what they sought. But in the mid-1990s with Deng’s passing, China took a nationalist stance toward Japan, ostensibly over a variety of issues and rapidly began building its missiles and naval capabilities, including testing of nuclear weapons. This could be because, as Victor Cha has said, states that are going through leadership transitions tend to allow hard-liners to take charge. Dismayed and angered, in 2001 the newly elected Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi felt that appeasement was not working. He decided to make a clear turn—he sought enhanced security, and he did so by further consolidating Japan’s security relationship with America at a time when Japan might have gone another way. This raised eyebrows in Beijing and elsewhere in Asia, but it was China’s prior response to Japan that set these events in motion. The prime ministers who have since succeeded Koizumi have continued that policy.

ANTTI-JAPANESE DEMONSTRATIONS

In 2005 there was worldwide media coverage of what appeared to be a sudden series of anti-Japanese demonstrations by the Chinese population. CNN’s coverage showed footage that suggested the Chinese government was behind it. Free bus rides for anyone wishing a ride to join the demonstrations were reportedly made available by the government. However, Zho Jianrong, a thoughtful scholar teaching in Japan, states that the demonstrations began with small groups and only swelled to thousands later, and thus could not have been government-led. He notes that the demonstrations, interestingly, took place mainly on weekends. That is when people have time. In Shanghai, 100,000 demonstrators came out, but medium-sized cities witnessed crowds too. This suggests it was a population-based series of demonstrations, not the government. Rather, the Internet helped initiate and coordinate the demonstrations. A San Francisco group of Chinese instigated these demonstrations, he said, using their computers. Zho points out that 19 percent of China is now “middle class,” or 200 million people; they are “nationalists” and want China to take a more assertive posture toward other countries. Between the 1970s–1980s the “Chinese had a very low self-esteem,” he explains. The excesses of the Cultural Revolution wrecked the economy, three-quarter of its sitting
bureaucrats, and hope. But the recent prosperity has reversed that. The younger, wealthier generation wants to stand up and push back at a world they perceive had pushed on them for so long.

Part of China’s anger is that after the Sino-Japanese war, Japan asked for “high” war indemnities, and thus after World War II, expected the same from Japan. The Western powers, however, saw at the time that war indemnities in World War I led to World War II, so they did not make high reparations a part of the postwar plan for Japan, Germany, or Italy. Then Koizumi’s visits to the Yasukuni Shrine that houses Japan’s war dead, including many dubbed war criminals in the Tokyo trials, make Japan seem as if it did not regret its behavior in World War II to the Chinese. Koizumi feels an outside country is trying to influence what prime ministers do inside their own country. Beijing reacted negatively in 2009 when the current Japanese prime minister merely sent a note to the Yasukuni Shrine, hopeful for peace. Chinese critics have also lashed out at Japan’s whitewashing over its actions in World War II in its textbooks, an almost yearly event, but American scholars have pointed out that Chinese textbooks are also filled with equally large omissions. Angry Chinese middle-class youth represent the core of the anti-Japanese demonstrations, Zho believes. This is despite the fact that China is Japan’s largest trading partner, and Japan is the number one supplier to China of precision components for manufacture of electrical appliances. This is a case of economy vs. cultural and historical differences, and for the moment at least the positive economic relations are not having their way. Through 2009, the angry crowds have not returned, perhaps signaling a degree of détente over this matter, but it remains just below the surface and can easily return.

Nakanishi Terumasa, a veteran Japanese scholar, replies that the anti-Japanese movements of 2005 were not because of textbooks or even Koizumi’s visits to Yasukuni Shrine, but rather because of “Japan’s bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council.” He points out that China’s Communist leaders turned out large numbers of demonstrators in a way that was reminiscent of how the leadership recruited the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution a generation earlier, when Mao used students to take down the Party, as they were not following his edict. China’s demonstrations, in other words, are aimed at UN member states who are considering Japan’s Security Council seat, with the message “how can the UN promote a country that has not come to terms with its fascist past?” This has historical precedent, Nakanishi says. When Japan was considered for one of the four permanent member seats in the Council of the League of Nations decades earlier, China protested then also. China, a Confucian culture, is trying to tutor the world about what the world should think about Japan and using international opinion against Japan. Nakanishi feels it is a cultural war. China cannot be up unless Japan is down.
China hopes to keep Japan out of the UN seat so that it can try to maintain Japan in a lower status, or as a continuing former “enemy” state from World War II for all time. This is its way, under the current circumstances, of also hurting the United States, as they well know that Japan will likely vote the way of the Americans on key foreign policy issues, and this will simply prove to be more difficult for China. Status, for the Chinese, is also a very important cultural value, and they may not wish to share equal social status or international status with Japan in a permanent UN Security seat. In such a seat, the Chinese ambassador may have to be seen by Chinese television talking with, communing with, doing business with the Japanese ambassador as if he were accepted, and they may not desire that. A leading Japan scholar, Kent E. Calder, writes that the “legitimacy” of China’s Communist Party as a ruling party is connected with its special history as a national defender in the war against Japan in the 1930s, and that it is hard to step away from that today. In addition, in a domestic sense, China must rail at both Japan and the United States to keep its population “united” against outsiders, since there is so much dissatisfaction at home. Rural incomes are one-fifth of what they are in big cities, and antigovernment demonstrations (whose existence the government has tried to hide) are said to number in the thousands nationwide per year. We know in past centuries China’s leadership was preoccupied with internal order. Could that concern still be operative today?

The United States has asked Japan to use its economic power, including its official development aid (ODA), to assist in the development of all the states of Asia. But between 1990–2002, Japan’s economy has gone through what they are calling the “lost decade,” in which Japan’s economic growth slowed to just 1 percent per year. The Persian Gulf War in 1990–1991 frightened the Japanese consumer into thinking oil from the region would be cut off, which halted economic activity and helped spur the economic downturn. The Kobe earthquake, sarin gas subway attack, and Asian Financial Crisis also produced a drag. In addition, Brian Reading cites a number of built-in domestic factors that contributed to Japan’s declined economy. There was a good deal of speculation from the profits stemming out of the hot economy of the 1980s. The Japanese yakuza also got involved and extended a practice called “greenmail,” the practice of buying a 20 percent share of a company, then forcing the company to buy back its shares at a higher price. Even if stocks crashed, yakuza and their clients expected to be compensated. This practice affected even the big financial houses like Nomura Securities, but also Toyota, Nissan, Matsushita, and Hitachi. Japan also did not tax savings accounts from its population; thus people opened up multiple accounts in “non-bank banks,” or post offices (which in Japan amount to being the world’s largest bank) just to keep from being taxed, restricting flows into government coffers. Regular banks had to cover many shortfalls, and rather than default the borrower, they
simply rolled over the loans until the debt got out of control. Japan lost its elasticity in providing the development aid it might have used to steady itself up.\textsuperscript{10}

\section*{JAPAN IN THE U.S. WAR ON TERROR}

Japan’s motivation to support the American-led war on terror stems not only from the state’s abhorrence at the events of 9/11/2001, but also because Japan feels a similar assault took place on its city towers in World War II, which still is imprinted upon the Japanese imagination. But it is compensation for its lack of participation during the Persian Gulf War, sending no troops and using its “checkbook diplomacy” only, that is a main ingredient in its Iraq troop dispatch. More importantly, as Christopher W. Hughes, University of Warwick, suggests is Japan’s need to “demonstrate solidarity with its U.S. ally, which now views itself as under direct attack.” Japan’s efforts, however, has been primarily in nation building, not front-line troop dispatch. Japan is concerned of the further spread of WMDs, which it would like to see kept to a minimum, but also is participating because it requires U.S. support of Japan in any future North Korean problem. So Japan has little choice but to do its share in the war on terror. Moreover, there has been a shift in Tokyo’s orientation. In the 1990s Japan had been following a foreign policy of being a global “civilian power,” utilizing its economic resources, with no resort to military power for international situations or projects. This was an approach to maintain its security connection with the United States while exercising a kind of Japanese soft power to achieve international status and represent an alternative model. But regional and world events in recent years caused Tokyo to see that civilian power should be put on the back burners. Civilian power was not working. Tokyo must have been startled when it had espoused its theory of the flying geese over Asia, in which Japan was the lead goose leading others to prosperity, to look back and see who was not following.

In the “tactical” dimension on the war on terror, Japan tasked forces to assist U.S. forces in Afghanistan on land, air, and sea around the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea as well as the supply lines from Japan, Australia, and the United States. Japanese forces also transported humanitarian aid for Afghan refugees in 2002 and transported Thai workers needed to repair U.S. airfields in Afghanistan. But in the initial assault in 2001, Tokyo hesitated sending its two Aegis ships, purchased from the United States earlier, because as Japan’s best capital ships they could be called upon by U.S. ships for “additional (military) missions” in the battlefront. Tokyo did not want to risk that. Ultimately, Japanese forces arrived after main combat in Afghanistan was over. Throughout, Japan’s role has been noncombat logistical support. One can expect that to continue for the foreseeable future in these operations.
In Iraq, Japanese troops were sent primarily into safe locales with the purpose of conducting postwar Iraqi reconstruction. None of the troops were part of the initial invasion. Prime Minister Koizumi’s rapid March 2003 description of U.S. initiation of war in Iraq as relayed to George W. Bush as an “expression of understanding” for the U.S. policy was taken as a good gesture. In diplomatic matters, Japan is historically very slow to issue even the simplest statement, as much consultation must take place among the leading faction members. For decades, writers have commented that Japan’s diplomatic style has been incongruent with Western diplomats. Excessive consultations must take place before even the simplest edict can be released, frustrating outsiders. It is a wonder that Japanese forces actually settled into Samawah. The 600-member Japanese force set up medical care, water treatment, schools, and infrastructure repair activities. They arrived armed. They brought with them “pistols, rifles and machine guns,” and in addition “light anti-tank munitions and APCs.” These weapons were regarded strictly as non-threatening in nature.

In fact, they were regarded generally as very minimal weapons for the mission. Japanese forces, however, relied on Dutch peacekeepers for protection within their camp, citing Japan’s strict rules for lack of overseas engagement (historically, the Dutch were the only foreigners allowed to operate ports in Tokugawa, Japan, during the seventeenth century, and the Japanese seem to feel comfortable with the Dutch). The Japanese stay inside their base camp. In 2004 Japan dispatched its Osumi “aircraft carrier,” which caused such a stir around Asia several years ago because it was Japan’s first carrier built since World War II and a “sign” of new Japanese aggression. The carrier was used to ship supplies between Japan and Kuwait for Japanese forces in Iraq. It also delivered vehicles and heavy equipment. It is hard to say whether this was overkill or just a show. Formally, Japan has maintained that it is acting from “UN-relevant mandates,” and not strictly from U.S. requests. But that is only a Japanese cover to mask its allegiance to American interests. From 2006 reports, continued through 2009, Japanese peacekeepers have trained Iraqi doctors and nurses, built roads, conducted water purification including repairs of broken water pipes, repaired and built on various construction sites, contributed to local employment (a very important function), and transported humanitarian aid to 122 locations. The soldiers have also made efforts to establish good relations, playing soccer with local children, an activity that some off-duty U.S. soldiers have also done.11

A GATHERING STORM IN CENTRAL ASIA
The United States dislodged the Taliban from office in Afghanistan in 2001, and with a limited attack at Tora Bora, cornered a few al Qaeda operatives but allowed the main
leadership to escape, including Osama bin Laden and his top lieutenants. They have since scattered thinly throughout the southern regions and the Northwest Territory of Pakistan and continue to issue threats, if not some decentralized operations, from their new, hidden bases. Pentagon officials have been quick to point out the positive steps we have taken to diminish terrorism in that country in the interim. But the structural problems and certain glaring facts have not gone away. That state, and the areas around it, seem able to bring forth more obstacles to U.S. operations, and the end there, as with Iraq, is not in sight. Even five years later, after major fighting has ceased and most writers assumed the international terrorists there were on the decline, on June 17, 2006, 10,000 U.S. forces, along with Canadian, British, and some Afghan units, were forced to attack a newly discovered Taliban stronghold in the biggest operation since 2001. The Taliban had been increasing their ambushes and bombings of government and U.S. positions throughout southern Afghanistan, forcing a response. U.S. forces mounted a five-week campaign to try to sweep through this newly discovered stronghold, though the U.S. commander said the operation will have to continue and expand.

The underlying problems may overwhelm national planners. Unemployment in Afghanistan is 80 percent in places, and there is widespread poverty. International aid workers have called Afghanistan “almost the poorest state in the world.” Eighty-five percent of its people are rural. War has destroyed their crops, including cotton, once a good source of income. This feeds into the opium-producing activity, among the few crops that can grow on a battlefield, and enhances the power of the warlords, many of whom either support, or are, the Taliban. The warlords have little stake in any centralized government, and warlords need wars to thrive. There have been more than 1.6 million deaths in this region since 2001 in local conflicts. Casualties continue.

There are also dangerous neighbors intruding into Afghanistan, causing the potential for major upsets to American foreign policy interests. Russia had been aiding a former Northern Alliance leader, General Mohammed Fahim, with money, tanks, and military components. Fahim’s army is separate from those being trained by the United States, which suggests it is not under, nor is it working with, U.S. forces or interests in mind. Russia is also reported to have taken the only known surveys of oil and gas energy locations in the country and is keeping them for itself. Iran has been spotted sending its Revolutionary Guard members to the heart of the insurgency, and the Saudi Arabian financiers have been sending funds to Taliban groups based in Pakistan. States that are our allies are playing both sides of the street. India is also trying to cut off Afghanistan to Pakistan in the west, and Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) is believed to be providing sanctuary to Taliban leaders in safe houses to attack U.S. forces in the area. American generals in Afghanistan have said that “90% of attacks
they face are coming from groups in Pakistan.” This creates conditions for further civil war and the continual propping up of the Taliban, and indirectly al Qaeda, in a never-ending struggle. A prominent American general stated, as the Obama administration began to form its policy on Afghanistan, that it will be a problem for the United States for decades.

Afghanistan is currently governed by an individual that Washington has helped select and supported, but President Hamid Karzai only governs Kabul, its capital city, and requires a private group of ex-military contractors to help him with his own security at all times. The 2009 presidential elections in Kabul will not likely change things. Individual warlords, many of them unfriendly to America, govern the countryside. Afghanistan is part of a larger subregional context and is easily affected by them. Afghanistan is adjacent to five Central Asian republics that are run by dictators of the former Soviet Union. These governments operate by military fragments, and there is fighting between them and within them. These are considered by Western analysts as “failing states” based on patronage systems, feeding traditional animosities that communism had previously covered over. There are disputes over borders, water, gems, drugs, clans, lack of resources, elite hording, and government persecution of Islam leading to extremist creations, and these groups can easily be pushed into other localities, including Afghanistan. Even international aid became a source of conflict and corruption as different groups fought to capture incoming aid, then resold them to others at high prices.

Central Asian government instability can lead to civil war, antireligious/Islamic attacks, Islamic reaction and extremism, and new bases for terror. Anti-Soviet or anti-Russian feelings in this region have historically come from religious or Islamic sources. This phenomenon is a long-standing antagonism, and was not created by Osama bin Laden; it will not disappear if and when he is caught. Central Asian Islam is “very close to mainstream Middle East and South Asian Sunni Islamic movements.” One scholar has stated that Tajik Islam is the “last expression of the Persian culture” affecting Central Asia since 1000 A.D. In this area, the danger is that there is always present a “dynamic of jihad” that can produce endless Talibans. If they fix on the United States, Washington will have a lot more on its agenda than it currently realizes.

INDIA AND A “STRING OF PEARLS”

India’s global value has increased significantly in recent years. We know about its economic rise. What is less known are its military capabilities and its problems. In a joint U.S.–India war game exercise late in the Bush administration, Indian fighter jets “defeated” U.S. F-15s in mock battles “90% of the time,” shocking U.S. observers.
Upon briefing George W. Bush, Condoleezza Rice additionally concluded that India’s neighbor China was a “strategic competitor,” and not the “strategic partner” that the Clinton administration regarded it as. The White House quickly surmised that India should be part of the “American formula to counter China.” Moscow’s fall after 1992 altered the Indian mood toward it and created an opening with the more powerful United States. The growth of rival China also figured into India’s calculations. India fears “encirclement” from a China–Pakistan alliance as well as an enhanced competition with China for energy resources in the region. India sees China constructing a “string of pearls” in the form of ports, sea vessels, and agreements with points surrounding India in a struggle over the local “mastery of Asia.” Because of China’s thirty-year-long “one child policy,” some German scholars say China will “get old” before it “gets rich.” Fewer younger Chinese will have to support aging parents and grandparents, and that will bankrupt the Chinese economy.14

India sees the region to its west as “volatile” and an “arc of extremism.” Along with China as well as the Central Asian states of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, India feels surrounded by growing security concerns. Currently, India faces sanctions on the “import of advanced technologies,” which it hoped would be relaxed after its signing of its 2006 “nuclear deal” with the United States, but that still has not happened. The United States has restricted international sales of advanced technologies since the time of India’s slant toward the Soviet Union and its first nuclear tests in 1974. New Delhi feels it is unfair that now China has “greater access to U.S. high technology” than India. India seeks similar nuclear technology and space technologies as well. For its part, Washington is looking to induce India to be its “new strategic ally in Asia.” India, however, wishes to avoid being a “Japan-style ally,” dependent on the United States. It prefers to be a “strategic partner,” with foreign policy independence. America wants India to not test its nuclear weapons further. India has twenty-two commercial nuclear reactors. The United States wants international inspections of them. India has few uranium deposits and is dependent on U.S. supplies. But the United States wants limits on reprocessing its nuclear fuel. With further growth, New Delhi believes China has not become more democratic, but rather China has become “more sophisticated in repressing dissent” on media, academics, and over the Internet. Because China is “balancing” against India, New Delhi’s response has been to build a “constellation of democracies in the Asia-Pacific region”—with Japan, Australia, and the United States, and has also included Russia. The plan will likely continue because India’s multiculturalism, as well as possibly the “counter-balance” to China’s rise, will lure President Obama to it. Both India and the United States are seeing eye to eye on this issue, but it will also stir the Asian pot to a hotter simmer.15
A U.S.–Japan–India partnership would “contain China from all sides,” a prominent scholar, Brahma Chellaney, writes. A Japan–India “strategic collaboration” is key to the future of Asia, he argues. This is necessary because China is acting to “contain” Japan at the strategic, not trade, level. China has just opened its newly built deep water port at Gwadar, giving Beijing its first Arabian Sea “foothold” ever. China intends in part to use this new port as a land pipeline for oil, avoiding the sea-lanes of Malacca and Taiwan Straits which are “U.S.-policed shipping lanes.” The shipping lanes between India and Japan constitute the “new Silk Road” for India, and thus it is building its navy. Japan’s bilateral relations with India are projected to become more important than the U.S.–Japan relations in ten years, according to former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The American position in Asia is at stake. The rise of China, India, and Japan could eclipse it unless Washington edges in. It is China’s and India’s rise that is important, but also the political rise of Japan, which is the “most undernoticed development in the world.”

Asia as a whole in 2009, in sum, is a dynamic and contrasting region. U.S. foreign policy will be in for a rough ride on all fronts. East Asia exhibits both economic and political changes. India is realigning with the United States, though that in itself is causing anxieties both to its north with China and to its west with Pakistan, a sign of a true systems effect. South Asia and Central Asia, now emphasized in military terms by the Obama foreign policy direction, are being conceptualized as a “single theatre,” but exhibiting long term developmental as well as security challenges. The Asian economies are thought to be able to pull out of the 2009 financial crisis first because of the greater proportion they are adding to their stimulus packages. China’s exports to the United States account for only 5 percent of its GDP, according to British reports. Sixty percent of China’s imports, mostly high-tech components, come from Asia and are then exported out to rich countries. China is number one with fiscal stimulus at 5 percent of GDP, Japan and Asia are at 3.5 percent, the United States at 2 percent, and the rest of the world at 1 percent. Asia’s economic recovery of 1998 was not led by exports but by consumer spending. Asia’s growth could be 7 percent in the next five years. The instabilities in the western sectors of Asia, however, may only be beginning.

NOTES
2. Morton Abramowitz and Stephen Bosworth, “America Confronts the Asian Century,” Current History, April 2006, pp. 147 & 151–2; and Varun Sahni,


