

Today more than ever the economic and political rhythms of the Asia-Pacific region affect our national interests. Growing interdependence with the economies of the region is altering the international security landscape. The GNP of Asian countries presently amounts to a quarter of global GNP and may climb to half by the middle of the next century. Meanwhile, American jobs tied to the region's economy will double from 3 to 6 million in the next five years. Japan and China are the world's second and third largest economies, while India shows great potential. New concentrations of

Strategically, the interests of the major powers intersect in East Asia. The subregion is the nexus of three of five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council (China, Russia, and the United States), and Japan is a leading aspirant for that status. For the moment, none of these major powers sees the others as a threat. Historical and contemporary trends, however, as well as the virtual absence of regional security institutions, suggest that a long-term great power concert is far from certain, particularly if economic fortunes change. China is a rising power, at once eager to continue its economic boom and ultrasensitive to questions of sovereignty. Russia is a declining power whose weakness, ironically, poses a greater threat to the region than its military strength. Japan is a maturing industrial democracy still defining its identity within the international security realm. The United States remains the preeminent guarantor of regional stability, yet alone it lacks the resources to contend with the entire region. Adding these strategic factors to Asia's economic dynamism, many analysts view the region as the global crossroads of the next century. One thing seems certain: the United States will face greater competition and expend much effort to win the cooperation of other major power centers in the region.

At the same time, new patterns of competition are emerging. China's economic growth and opaque military modernization set the stage for the rise of a major regional power. Japan will retain its security relations with the United States but may inch toward greater autonomy. India appears ready to buttress its ambitions by expanded involvement in the global economy. The Korean peninsula seems likely to stay divided for some time, although it will eventually unite into a formidable power. Moreover, the members of ASEAN promise to grow in stature and potential, making it increasingly necessary to engage such countries as Indonesia and Malaysia.

Intense competition could lead to regional conflict. Asia has fault lines based on historical differences: territorial claims in the South China Sea, the future status of Taiwan,

Asia-Pacific Challenges

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wealth have led some nations of the region to redefine their contacts around the world. U.S. prosperity and security will be increasingly inseparable from this dynamic growth.

Because of widespread, sustained economic development the region is relatively peaceful. Gloomy predictions of famine, civil war, and state failure do not seem to apply to Asia. Despite the potential for large-scale conflict there, none has occurred since the Vietnam War. Instead, prosperity, productivity, and development have dominated the landscape.

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China's boundary disputes with India and Russia, the question of Korean unification, friction between India and Pakistan, turmoil in Cambodia, and Japan's quarrel with Russia over the Kuril Islands. Other conflicts could arise from economic competition, particularly in Northeast Asia. While there is no Bosnia in Asia, many territorial, maritime, and resource disputes could escalate. In Europe, NATO has weathered the discord over the violent breakup of the former Yugoslavia. In Asia, it is not clear that America's key alliance with Japan is equal to that level of divergence, and thus putting our compact with Japan on a solid footing for the next century must be a national priority.

At the same time, the United States must ensure that its security relations with South Korea withstand the lingering challenge posed by North Korea's nuclear and conventional programs and, on the other hand, a



U.S. Army (Robert W. Taylor)

sudden rush toward reunification. In the short term, Washington must continue to ensure full implementation of the October 21, 1994 Agreed Framework. If it endures, this accord will help focus more attention on working with

Seoul to provide a "soft landing" for Pyongyang as well as on the future of the Korea peninsula within the region.

Moreover, we must integrate China into both regional and international systems. There is no more critical security task than engaging that nation in transparency and confidence-building measures to increase great power cooperation in regional and global issues. Territorial questions remain a concern, given that actions taken with regard to Taiwan could bring China and America into confrontation. Similarly, the way in which China views the use of force and, conversely, its willingness to seek peaceful resolution of other territorial and resource disputes will be pivotal to a regional stability

upon which to found continuing economic growth and prosperity.

Asian states have reached an unspoken consensus that stability is essential in coping with domestic issues that may take years to resolve. In this context, all can agree that there is little to be gained—and much to lose—by altering the status quo. As Asia moves through this transitional period, a basis for a new regional security order will emerge. This order will inevitably reflect the aspirations and strengths of major Asian powers. Our challenge is to secure stability, and by doing so to secure our own interests.

The keys to this task will be severalfold: to recast our alliance with Japan in post-Cold War terms and put it on a firm foundation for the next century; strengthen our alliance with the Republic of Korea to bolster deterrence in the short run and provide long-term regional support; engage China in ways that link it to regional and international systems; promote ties with South Asia; advance multilateral institutions where they can make a difference (as in Northeast Asia); further relations with other regional allies, particularly Australia, our southern anchor; develop our relations with the dynamic states of Southeast Asia; and maintain a credible overseas presence both to reassure the region and to be ready for rapid crisis response.

Notwithstanding a more vibrant multilateral and regional security architecture, an important role remains for the Armed Forces. Even if a concert of great powers can be achieved and works well—both big *ifs*—the United States will have a key part in underpinning that stability, providing balance for regional powers, responding to aggressive middle powers, containing chaos from failed states, or building coherent regional support for contingencies in other parts of the world. If we are willing to adjust alliance relationships and able to use political and economic relations wisely, our forces will continue to be welcomed as agents of peace and stability. **JQ**