58. East Asian Defense Commitments

Policymakers should

- withdraw American military forces from South Korea over the next two years and terminate the mutual defense treaty at the end of that period;
- work with other nations in the region to dissuade North Korea (DPRK) from developing a nuclear arsenal, while planning for the possibility that Pyongyang might do so;
- communicate to the DPRK that any proliferation of nuclear technology to hostile actors would be considered an act of war, meriting immediate removal of the Kim Jong Il regime;
- begin a four-year phased pullout of American troops from Japan, beginning with forces on Okinawa;
- replace the bilateral U.S.-Japanese defense treaty with an agreement that allows emergency base and port access and maintains joint military exercises and intelligence cooperation;
- drop proposals for enhanced defense ties with Singapore, eliminate the AUSMIN agreement with Australia, and make clear to the Philippine government and people that the Visiting Forces Agreement and anti-terrorist assistance do not commit the United States to military action on behalf of the Philippines, especially in any territorial disagreement involving the South China Sea;
- promote regional security cooperation through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and other appropriate institutions; and
- drop Washington's implicit defense guarantee to Taiwan but sell Taipei any conventional weapons it deems necessary for its defense.

After the end of World War II, the United States established an extensive forward military presence and fought two wars in East Asia as part of its

strategy to contain communism. The Cold War ended a decade and a half ago, but America's defense posture has changed little. Washington long was committed to keeping at least 100,000 military personnel in East Asia and the western Pacific, apparently forever. The Pentagon's infamous 1995 assessment of security policy in East Asia (the so-called Nye Report) made the astonishing assertion that ''the end of the Cold War has not diminished'' the importance of any of America's regional security commitments. Only under pressure created by the unexpectedly difficult occupation of Iraq did the Bush administration propose in mid-2004 to remove 12,500 soldiers from the Korean peninsula.

That modest reduction did not reverse the Bush administration's policy of *increasing* U.S. military ties, such as involving Special Forces in Manila's fight against Abu Sayyaf guerrillas and escalating an implicit defense guarantee to Taiwan against China. Rather than expand America's military presence in East Asia, policymakers should initiate a phased withdrawal of American forces from South Korea and Japan and prepare to center Washington's reduced military presence in the central Pacific rather than East Asia.

Changed Threat Environment

American policy in the Far East has succeeded. For five decades Washington provided a defense shield behind which noncommunist governments throughout East Asia were able to grow economically (despite their recent setbacks) and democratically. Japan is the world's second-ranked economic power; Taiwan's dramatic jump from poverty to prosperity forced the leaders of the communist mainland to undertake fundamental economic reforms. South Korea now outstrips North Korea by virtually every measure of national power. After years of failure, the Philippines seems to be on the path to prosperity, while countries like Thailand have grown dramatically.

Major threats to America's allies and interests have diminished. There is no more Soviet Union; a much weaker Russia has neither the capability nor the will for Asian adventurism.

Elsewhere real, tough-minded communism has dissolved into a cynical excuse for incumbent officeholders to maintain power. More than 15 years after the Tiananmen Square massacre, China is combining support for greater economic liberty with respect for greater individual autonomy. So far Beijing's military renewal has been modest, and China has been

82978$CH58 12-08-04 09:16:32

assertive rather than aggressive, though its saber rattling at Taiwan remains of concern.

Southeast Asia remains roiled by economic and political instability, but such problems threaten no one outside the immediate region. Only North Korea remains a potential threat, but it is no replacement for the Soviet Union. Pyongyang is bankrupt and starving, essentially friendless, and, despite its willingness to wave the threat of an atomic bomb to gain respect, will only fall further behind the South. Moreover, sporadically warmer relations between the two Koreas after the summit between the South's Kim Dae Jung and the North's Kim Jong Il offer the hope, though obviously not the guarantee, of growing détente between the two states.

Some analysts privately, and a few publicly, say that Japan poses a potential threat to regional peace. However, Tokyo has gained all of the influence and wealth through peace that it had hoped to attain through war and the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere in the 1930s.

Moreover, the lesson of World War II remains vivid to most Japanese: in recent years the nation has been convulsed by political debates over such modest actions as providing peacekeeping troops to the UN operation in Cambodia, authorizing military participation in civilian rescues, and sending 550 soldiers for humanitarian duties in Iraq.

Even mainstream politicians committed to a somewhat more assertive posture—which has become increasingly respectable—have routinely sacrificed military spending to budget concerns. The Koizumi government has moved to modestly expand Tokyo's defense responsibilities, but they remain far below both Japan's economic resources and its strategic interests.

Rethinking American Strategy

So far neither the Bush administration nor Congress seems to have noticed the many dramatic changes. Indeed, the Bush administration's proposed $425 billion in military spending for 2005 is more than the next eight countries spend on defense. U.S. taxpayers spent more than $13 trillion (in current dollars) and sacrificed 92,000 lives to win the Cold War. With the dramatic diminution of security threats and the equally dramatic growth of allied capabilities, the American people should no longer be expected to surrender more dollars and risk more lives to police East Asia for as long as friendly states believe it to be convenient. However much it might be in the interest of other nations for Washington to defend them—and what country would not naturally desire that the world's

remaining superpower subsidize its defense?—it is not in America's interest to do so.

Unless the administration initiates a full rather than a partial troop drawdown, Congress should take the lead in adjusting U.S. overseas deployments. Legislators should reduce the defense budget as well as overall force levels and foreign deployments; Washington should develop a comprehensive plan for the phased withdrawal of all forces currently stationed in East Asia and the termination of U.S. defense guarantees to allied nations.

The starting point for a new East Asian strategy is disengagement from the Korean peninsula, the international flashpoint that could most easily involve the United States in war. Although North Korea remains unpredictable and potentially dangerous, the South should be able to defend itself. It now possesses twice the population of, around 40 times the gross domestic product of, and a vast technological lead over the North. Especially after having rebounded from the Asian economic crisis, the South is well able to spend whatever is necessary to make up for the withdrawal of 37,000 American troops. The North could then choose to engage in meaningful arms control or lose an inter-Korean arms race.

The potential for a North Korean nuclear bomb is unnerving. Pyongyang's increasingly obvious nuclear-weapons program has significantly raised tensions. That program is a violation of the commitments North Korea made in the 1994 Framework Agreement. Washington should continue working with China, Japan, South Korea, and Russia to encourage continued compliance by North Korea. More generally, the United States should work to reduce tensions on the peninsula. Washington should allow Seoul to take the lead in dealing with the North, supporting rather than undercutting South Korean efforts to draw the DPRK into a more responsible international role. At the same time, Washington should not only lift trade sanctions against the North but also normalize diplomatic relations—modest concessions that would offer the North ongoing benefits in return for adopting a peaceful course.

Although we should remain cautious about any promises by Pyongyang, engagement offers greater prospects of success than does plunging the peninsula into a new cold, or possibly hot, war. There are no good options if Pyongyang ultimately attempts to develop an atomic bomb, and a continued American conventional military presence is certainly not one. U.S. ground forces in the South would become nuclear hostages, enhancing the North's leverage over America. While the United States might be

willing to reluctantly tolerate North Korean acquisition of nuclear weapons, Washington should make it very clear that sale of nuclear materials, especially to hostile nonstate actors such as Al Qaeda, would be considered a casus belli, with regime change the result.

Time for a Setting Sun

Washington should follow a similar strategy in Japan, which no longer faces a superpower threat. Whatever dangers to Japan remain or might arise in the future, from, say, an aggressive China or DPRK, could be met by a modest Japanese military buildup. Of course, many of Japan's neighbors have long viewed Washington's presence more as an occupation force to contain Tokyo than as a defense against other threats. But the Japanese do not possess a double dose of original sin; their nation, along with the rest of the world, has changed dramatically over the last half century. The Japanese people have neither the desire nor the incentive to start another conflict, having come to economic prominence in East Asia peacefully.

Moreover, Tokyo is unlikely to accept a permanent foreign watchdog, and tensions will grow as the lack of other missions for the U.S. forces becomes increasingly obvious. Popular anger is already evident in Okinawa, where American military facilities occupy one-fifth of the island's landmass. Washington should develop a four-year program for the withdrawal of all U.S. forces from Japan, starting with those in Okinawa. At the end of that period, Washington and Tokyo should replace their mutual defense treaty with a more limited agreement providing for emergency base and port access, joint military exercises, and intelligence sharing.

The United States need not expand base access elsewhere in the region. Washington should drop proposals to increase defense cooperation with Singapore and tightly circumscribe the scope of its Visiting Forces Agreement with the Philippines, which was promoted by former president Joseph Estrada and other Filipino supporters as a mechanism for drawing the United States into any confrontation between the Philippines and China. The United States needs also to limit any future military training missions, sharply insulating American forces from involvement in domestic conflicts, such as that involving the Abu Sayyaf, essentially a gang of bandits. The United States has suffered no damage attributable to the closing of its bases in the Philippines, which had become expensive anachronisms, in 1992. Instead of upgrading U.S. military ties, Washington should be transferring security responsibilities to its allies and friends.

Even less relevant are the Australia–New Zealand–United States (ANZUS) accord, which went into deep freeze in 1984 after New Zealand blocked port access by nuclear-armed and nuclear-powered American ships, and the annual Australia–United States Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN). ANZUS, created in the aftermath of World War II, was directed less at containing the Soviet Union, which had no military presence in the South Pacific, than at preventing a new round of Japanese aggression. But since Tokyo had been decisively defeated and completely disarmed, later to be fully integrated into the Western alliance, ANZUS was outmoded the day it was signed.

Which leaves AUSMIN. But Australia faces no meaningful threats to its security. An attack by a serious military power—China, India, Vietnam—is a paranoid fantasy. An Indonesian implosion might flood Australia with refugees, but not hostile troops. Anyway, Australia, blessed with splendid isolation and economic prosperity, can easily provide whatever forces it deems necessary to defend itself.

Washington should simply discard AUSMIN. Australia and America should maintain mutually beneficial military cooperation, such as intelligence sharing and emergency port access. At the same time, Canberra should enhance its own military role in the region—as it now shows some signs of doing.

Regional Security Cooperation

Indeed, the United States should encourage expanded regional security discussions. Either through ASEAN or another organization, smaller countries throughout East Asia should develop a cooperative defense relationship with Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, and especially Japan.

Fear of the latter ignores five decades of dramatic changes. Tokyo could do much to improve regional security. A measured military buildup, focused on defensive weapons and conducted in consultation with Japan's neighbors, would help prevent the creation of a dangerous vacuum following the departure of American forces, which is feared by proponents of continuing U.S. dominance. Washington's position should be that of a distant balancer, leaving its friends to handle their own affairs and most regional contingencies but poised to act if a hegemonic threat arises that allied states cannot contain.

The United States could aid in the creation of a more effective regional security framework by encouraging the peaceful resolution of various boundary and territorial disputes. None presently seems likely to lead to

war, but all impede better bilateral and multilateral cooperation. To help dissipate international tensions, Washington should offer its good offices to help mediate the Japanese–South Korean squabble over the Takeshima/Tokdu islands, the Japanese-Russian quarrel over the ''northern territories'' (the Kurile islands), and the multifaceted dispute involving China and several other countries that claim the Paracel and Spratly islands. Most important, the United States should make clear that resolution of those (and other similar) controversies is up to the interested parties, not America. Such a ''tough love'' policy forced Australia to assume the lead role in establishing a UN peacekeeping force in East Timor in the aftermath of that territory's messy divorce from Indonesia.

The end of Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union allows Washington to take a more balanced position vis-à-vis the People's Republic of China (PRC). Washington should continue to promote good political relations, expand the military dialogue, and encourage additional economic reform.

However, the United States need not fear bruising the PRC's sensitivities when discussing China's foreign arms sales, human rights abuses, attempted bullying of Taiwan, and interference with America's internal affairs by seeking to block even private visits to the United States by Taiwanese officials. America should speak frankly on those issues, and Congress should resist pressure to limit trade with and investment in China. While nothing is inevitable, extensive economic ties offer what is probably the most powerful tool for weakening central communist control in the PRC.

U.S. leaders also need to carefully calibrate policy toward Taiwan. (See Chapter 61.) The election in 2000 and reelection in 2004 of Chen Shuibian of the Democratic Progressive Party, which has long championed Taiwanese independence, has further increased tensions across the Taiwan Strait.

The United States does not have sufficient interests at stake to risk war with nuclear-armed China over Taiwan. However, Washington, after making clear that it believes the status of Taiwan, whether reunified with the mainland or independent, is up to the people of Taiwan to decide, should sell the island whatever conventional weapons Taipei desires to purchase for its own defense.

Conclusion

East Asia is likely to grow more important to the United States in coming years. That makes it essential that Washington simultaneously

82978$CH58 12-08-04 09:16:32

reduce the military burden on the American economy and force its trading competitors to bear the full cost of their own defense. Otherwise, U.S. firms will be less able to take advantage of expanding regional economic opportunities. More important, the United States will be more secure if friendly powers in the region, instead of relying on America, are able and willing to contain nearby conflicts.

Jettisoning antiquated alliances and commitments and reducing a bloated force structure does not mean the United States would no longer be an Asian-Pacific power. After bringing its forces home from South Korea and Japan, America should center a reduced defense presence around Wake Island, Guam, and Hawaii. The United States would remain the globe's strongest military power, with the ability to intervene throughout East Asia if necessary. However, American policy would be dictated by the interests of the American people, not those of the populous and prosperous security dependents that Washington has accumulated throughout the region.

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