



IIPS

Institute for
International Policy Studies
▪ Tokyo ▪

IIPS International Conference

“A New Horizon for Japan’s Security Policy —Basic Concept and Framework”

Tokyo, November 30 and December 1, 2004

**“US Security Strategy in Asia and
Prospects for an Asian Regional Security Regime”**

**By
Dr. Masashi Nishihara
President
National Defense Academy
Japan**

IIPS Conference on “A New Horizon for Japan’s Security Policy,”
Tokyo ANA Hotel, November 30-December 1, 2004

SESSION 2

**US Security Strategy in Asia and
Prospects for an Asian Regional Security Regime**

Masashi Nishihara
National Defense Academy

“Asia Shift” and the Second Term of the Bush Administration

Common wisdom may suggest that the reelection of President George Bush in November this year is likely to reinforce the general trend of “Asia shift” in the US global security policy, which has been taking place during his first term. This is because sources of security threats are considered to be greater in Asia than in Europe. The region may increasingly face two major security issues, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and the spread of terrorism instigated by radical Moslems, not to mention regional ethnic and religious conflicts.

Yet it is too early to say with certainty that the United States will move toward that direction, because the resignation of Colin Powell as secretary of state and James Kelly as assistant secretary of state for East Asia and the Pacific leaves uncertain how the second-term Bush administration will deal with the region. The newly nominated secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice, has had longer experiences with European affairs than Asian affairs. How President Bush will compose a security policy team for Asia in the White House, the State Department and the Defense Department will be an important factor. Asian specialists such as Torkel Patterson and Michael Green will no doubt play an important role, but they are today in the White House. It will be interesting to see who will support Rice in the State Department as Asian affairs experts.

The other reason why the Bush administration's Asia shift is uncertain is that during his second term President Bush may be forced to pay greater attention than before to European and Eurasian affairs in view of the fact that terrorism by radical Moslems has surged there in recent months. The Chechen massacre in September and religious tensions in the Netherlands instigated by the murder of a prominent anti-Islam Dutch film-maker are rising concerns for the United States. The current political turmoil in Ukraine is an added strategic concern for the European Union and the United States. Bush will also find political benefits in seeking to restore his relations with Europe, notably with France and Germany, which were damaged over the Iraq war.

The US Strategic Tradition: the Balance of Power

The traditional security strategy by the United States is to deter any hegemonic power from emerging to threaten the US position in the world and certain strategic regions, notably Asia. When Japan became a dominant power during the 1930s and the first half of the 1940s, Washington crushed it by overwhelming force, even atomic bombs. When the Soviet Union and China formed a dominant alliance during the first half of the Cold War, Washington beefed up Japan as its key fortress in the Pacific. When the Soviet Union severed its political relations with China in late 1960s, the United States built a grand coalition with Japan and China to balance the Soviet power. These historical moves suggest that if China becomes a strong military power, the United States is likely to build up ways to balance China.

It is difficult to see the United States today actually attempting to balance China. The Bush administration, which started to regard China as "a strategic competitor," has since moved to mend relations with China and sought cooperation from it on war on terrorism. Beijing gave tacit endorsement of the US war against Iraq. The United States also depends upon China for the management of the Six-Party Talks, although it is not satisfied with China's reluctance to press Pyongyang harder than before.

Yet today, the way in which the United States has built security ties and deployed its own troops in Central, South, and Southeast Asia since 9.11 looks a little bit like a strategy to encircle China, although Washington has explicitly pronounced no such intention at the moment. Washington has built

close security ties with Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Mongolia, and India. According to the London-based IISS (International Institute for Strategic Studies) report, *The Military Balance 2004-2005*, the United States has 950 troops in Kyrgyzstan, 14 in Tajikistan, and 900 in Uzbekistan. The US bases in these countries are primarily to help fight terrorism there and in Afghanistan. The United States has worked with Mongolia to modernize the latter's armed forces and to conduct bilateral and multilateral exercises with Mongolian forces. Washington has also established significant naval cooperation with India. India has approved of letting the US navy use its naval yards in the Arabian Sea. It has also provided escorts for US ships sailing through the Malacca Strait. The armed forces of the two countries have conducted joint exercises.

The United States Navy and Air Force now enjoy access to Singapore's facilities. Singapore has made one of its special piers available to American aircraft carriers. Perhaps the US-Vietnam military relations are still embryonic but Vietnam's defense minister has visited Hawaii and Washington, while the commander of the US Pacific Command has called on Hanoi. That commander, Admiral Thomas Fargo, proposed a Regional Maritime Security Initiative (RMSI) in Vancouver in May 2004. This initiative is intended to protect concerned states against "illicit maritime activities" in Southeast Asian waters. Singapore has expressed concern about possible future links between pirates and Al Qaeda-connected terrorists.

As was mentioned earlier, these security relations being forged between the United States and many countries around China do not target at balancing China but aim at building a network of counter-terrorist operations. However, the military relations between the United States and Taiwan are clearly intended to balance China's power. Both Washington and Taipei are concerned about China's growing military capabilities. The former is supporting the latter with advanced weapons, including *Patriot* PAC 3 missiles, so that China will not resort to force in "liberating" Taiwan.

Japan plans to introduce in the near future US-supported advanced defense missile systems, including PAC3 (for Ground Self-Defense Forces) and SM3 (for Maritime SDF) missiles, against North Korea's missile attacks. However, once the systems are deployed, they can also watch China's missile attacks as well.

More Immediate US Concerns: North Korea and Taiwan

More immediate US concerns are, however, about the Korean peninsula. Having run on the platform of tough counter-terrorist measures, President Bush will probably push harder the policy to deter North Korea's production of nuclear weapons and prevent North Korea from proliferating nuclear and other sensitive technologies to other aspiring "rogue states." For this purpose, the United States wants to see successful work at the Six Party Talks (SPT). Newspaper reports indicate that there may be another meeting of SPT before the end of 2004. However, North Korea's agreement to the meeting in the near future is questionable. Pyongyang probably wants to wait until the second-term Bush administration comes up with any new policy statements. It is likely to postpone the next meeting until after January 20, 2005. North Korea seems to think that time is on its side, that prolonged talks will give an opportunity to develop nuclear bombs, and that once they are made the United States would be forced to accept them. This is like the case with Pakistan.

Taiwan is another problem for the United States. President Chen Shui-bian has announced plans to adopt by 2008 a new constitution, which will prescribe the island as an independent state, signifying the explicit recognition of Taiwan's national sovereignty. This will create a new tension across the Strait of Taiwan. Washington would not support Taiwan's efforts for such constitution, although it will continue to provide military support for Taipei.

Both the problems of North Korea and Taiwan will affect the security environment of Northeast Asia, which naturally influences Japanese security policy. The security environment for Japan has worsened due to the political tensions between Tokyo and Beijing and the recent incident in which a Chinese nuclear submarine intruded into Japanese waters.

A full picture of the US military transformation program is yet to be seen. The Pentagon reportedly plans to take out some 60,000 troops from Europe and send them back home or to relocate some of them to "the arc of instability," covering the Middle East, Central and South Asia, and East Asia. The proposed relocation of the 5th Army headquarters from the State of Washington to Zama outside of Tokyo will help strengthen the US position

vis-à-vis the Korean peninsula, in case the United States should want to reduce its troop level in South Korea. The Pentagon has announced plans to reduce the current strength of 37,000 troops on the peninsula to 25,000 by 2005. It also plans to relocate its troops from their present bases north of the Han River to the south of the Han River, terminating the “tripwire” strategy. Reportedly the Pentagon is considering to relocate the US air force headquarters from Fussa outside of Tokyo down to Guam. This way the US air force can stay safely outside of North Korea’s missile range.

The military transformation plan is designed to relocate US troops to safer sites in the Western Pacific and yet to be able to meet enemy attacks with mobile and effective troops. This transformation will probably prepare the Pentagon to cope with rising Chinese power as well. It is to reinforce the US plan for Asia shift.

An Asian Regional Security Regime

Since the 1990s, those nations concerned of the Asia-Pacific region have introduced several region-wide frameworks for regional security. Yet all of them are only useful to the extent that they provide venues for consultation and confidence-building. They have not operated to solve specific security issues. These frameworks include the **ASEAN Regional Forum (AFR)**, **Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)**, **ASEAN plus Three** and a proposed **East Asian Community**. Other similar efforts are also made to promote regional dialogues at Track II or Track One and Half level. They are, for instance, the **Council on Security and Cooperation for the Asia and Pacific (CSCAP)**, which is composed of “member committees” of the region, and the **Shangri-La Dialogue**, which the IISS organizes annually in Singapore.

Any regional security regime will be unsuccessful without the participation of the United States, as it plays a predominant role for regional security. In this sense, groupings such as the ASEAN plus Three and a proposed East Asian Community will not be able to accomplish much on security matters. The ASEAN has strengthened its **Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC)** by inviting China, India, Russia, and Japan to join it. The ASEAN is seeking outside powers to join its **Treaty of Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (SEANWFZ)**. These treaties become more

significant if they are joined by the United States.

ARF meetings are primarily composed of foreign ministry officials and thus weak in military debates. If ARF should adopt a scheme that has military representatives at SOM (senior officials meeting) level, it will improve the quality of consultations. Yet formal frameworks such as ARF tend to constrain the exchange of candid views. The Shangri-La Dialogue, on the other hand, whose first meeting took place in May 2002, is a highly useful scheme in that about twenty defense ministers or their equivalents attend, allows for more free exchange of views than ARF.

While a region-wide security regime is not fruitful, subregional, frameworks will be more productive. They include the **Five Power Defense Agreement**, the **Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)**, and the **ASEAN Security Community**, and the **Six-Party Talks**. Many of the institutional arrangements whose initiatives have been taken by the United States and its like-minded nations suggest more action-oriented devices for the Asia Pacific region. They are the **Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR)**, the **Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI)**, and a proposed **Regional Maritime Security Initiative**.

Still the most reliable security schemes in the region are the network of bilateral alliances which the United States have nurtured since 1951, with the participation of South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, the Thailand, and Australia. The US-Singapore security agreement should also be added here.

A New Horizon for Japan's Security Policy

To sum up, the United States under the Bush Administration of the second term will pursue complex security policies toward East Asia: to use Japanese, Korean, Chinese and Russian powers to seek a non-nuclear or denuclearized North Korea, while balancing a powerful China against Taiwan and maintaining the security of Asia-Pacific sealanes.

President Bush and the new Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice may have to pay greater attention to European affairs and to continue to maintain a strong grip on Iraq and Palestine, but he nevertheless is likely to reinforce the Asia shift. There are sufficient sources of security threat in Asia, including the proliferation of WMD, Islamic terrorism, inter-Korean tensions, China-Taiwan disputes, surging pirates, and so forth.

There is no regional security regime that is action-oriented, and formal regional security frameworks such as ARF that do exist today are less productive than the Track II framework for security talks such as the Shangri-La Dialogue. Specific issue-oriented schemes in which the United States play a strong role seem to work better.

President Bush may take a bolder attitude toward North Korea's nuclear issues and send a strong message to China that it is concerned about China's growing military power. These postures will serve as a new horizon for Japan's security policy. Japan will have to respond to the new environment.