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“From Cold War to the Age of Unipolarity and Terrorism”

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America in East Asia:

From Cold War to the Age of Unipolarity and Terrorism

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Introduction

American foreign policy toward East Asia -- and the geopolitical organization of the region itself -- is a creature of the Cold War. But American policy toward the region has also exhibited remarkable continuity despite the end of that great conflict. In certain respects this is because the Cold War has not fully ended in East Asia. The Berlin Wall came down in Europe but the walls -- real and imagined -- remain in place across the Taiwan straits and the Korean peninsula. Indeed the strategic warming of relations with China during the 1970s was primarily a product of America's bi-polar struggle with the Soviet Union, and with the disappearance of the Soviet Union this rationale for strategic partnership with China is lost. In Asia, the end of the Cold War was less of a world historical transition than elsewhere.

But the explanation for continuity in American policy is also due to a larger reality. The United States is a global hegemonic power that has constructed a political-security order in East Asia -- as it has around the world -- and there is no alternative order that it or the countries in the region can conjure up that is more stable or mutually beneficial. Perhaps they will some day but not yet. American policy toward East Asia and the regional order that has evolved over the decades reflects this hegemonic reality: key countries in the region are dependent on American military protection and the American market. American extended deterrence and regional trade dependence are at the heart of this American-East Asian order.

The Bush's administration's post-September 11th radical turn in American foreign policy has unsettled relations around the world -- and raised questions about the stable and continuous postwar American relationship with East Asia. Hard-line and neo-conservative officials in the administration have articulated a vision of American foreign policy that depreciates the role of alliances -- bi-lateral and multilateral -- and raises the "war on terrorism" as the organizing mission of American foreign policy. Countries are either with the United States or against it. The preventive war on Iraq -- which represents the policy expression of these new ideas -- has divided

allies and placed the postwar structure of alliances and multilateral cooperation at risk. But this radical turn in American foreign policy is non-sustainable over the longer-term. Cooperative security approaches – manifest in the multilateral engagement of North Korea – cannot be avoided even by an administration that is eager to pursue an aggressive and unilateral assault on rogue states and terrorism.

In this paper I will do three things. First, I will sketch American policy toward East Asia – built as it is around hegemony, bilateral security ties, and soft multilateralism -- and trace how American policy has been evolving since the early 1990s. Second, I will step back and look at the broader liberal, realist, and neo-conservative grand strategies that the United States wields around the world and in the region. Finally, I look at the more recent efforts to maintain a hegemonic leadership position in the region by reinvigorating the bilateral US-Japan alliance, pursuing multilateral cooperative arrangements in security and economic areas, and searching for a lasting rationale for the American presence in the region.

American Policy toward East Asia

American policy toward East Asia is built around hard bilateral security ties and soft multilateral economic relations. Embedded in these policies are a set of political bargains between the United States and the countries within the region. The U.S.-Japan alliance is the cornerstone of the security order and APEC and the trans-Pacific trade and investment system is the cornerstone of the economic order. The hub-and-spoke defense system has its roots in the early Cold War and the failure of more multilateral security arrangements which were intended to mirror the Atlantic security pact.¹ The U.S.-Japan alliance was established to deter the expansion of Soviet power and communism more generally in the Asia-Pacific. This Cold War anti-communist goal led the United States to use its occupation of Japan and military victory in the Pacific to actively shape the region – doing so more successfully in Northeast Asia than Southeast Asia. The United States offered Japan – and the region more generally – a postwar political bargain. The United States would provide Japan and other countries security protection and access to American markets, technology, and supplies within an open world economy. In return, Japan and other countries in the region would become stable partners who would provide diplomatic, economic, and logistical support for the United States as it led the wider American-center postwar order.

From the beginning, this bilateral security order has been intertwined with the evolution of regional economic relations. The United States facilitated Japanese economic reconstruction

¹ On the idea floated by the United States of a multilateral security institution in Asia in the early 1940s and during 1950-51 that was to be a counterpart to NATO, see Donald Crone, “Does Hegemony Matter? The Reorganization of the Pacific Political Economy,” World Politics, Vol. 45 (July 1993).

after the war and actively sought to create markets for Japanese exports, particularly after the closing of China in 1949. The United States actively sought the import of Japanese goods into the United States during the 1950s so as to encourage Japanese postwar economic growth and political stability.² The American military guarantee to partners in East Asia (and Western Europe) provided a national security rationale for Japan and the Western democracies to open their markets. Free trade helped cement the alliance, and in turn the alliance helped settle economic disputes. In Asia, the export-oriented development strategies of Japan and the smaller Asian tigers depended on America's willingness to accept their imports and live with huge trade deficits; alliances with Japan, South Korea, and other Southeast Asian countries made this politically tolerable.³

The alliance system – and the U.S.-Japan security pact in particular – has also played a wider stabilizing role in the region. The American alliance with Japan has solved Japan's security problems, allowing it to forego building up its military capability, and thereby making itself less threatening to its neighbors. This has served to solve or reduce the security dilemmas that would otherwise surface within the region if Japan were to rearm and become a more autonomous and unrestrained great power. At the same time, the alliance makes American power more predictable and connected to the region. This too reduces the instabilities and “risk premiums” that countries in the region would need to incur if they were to operate in a more traditional balance of power order.⁴ Even China has seen the virtues of the U.S.-Japan alliance. During the Cold War it was at least partially welcome as a tool to balance Soviet power -- an objective that China shared with the United States. But even today, as long as the alliance does not impinge on China's other regional goals -- most importantly the reunification with Taiwan – the alliance does reduce the threat of a resurgent Japan.

In the late-1940s, in an echo of today's situation, the United States was the world's dominant state – 45% of world GNP, leadership in military power, technology, finance, and industry, and brimming with natural resources. But the United States nonetheless found itself building world order around stable regional partnerships. Its calling card was its offer of Cold War security protection. But the intensity of political and economic cooperation between the United States and its partners went well beyond what was necessary to counter Soviet threats. The remarkable global reach of American postwar hegemony has been at least in part driven by the efforts of European and Asian governments to harness American power, render that power more predictable, and use it to overcome their own regional insecurities. The result has been a vast system of America-centered economic and security partnerships.

² See Stuart Auerbach, “The Ironies that Built Japan Inc.” Washington Post, 18 July 1993.

³ This argument is made in Robert Gilpin, The Challenge of Global Capitalism: The World Economy in the 21st Century (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), Chapter Two.

⁴ I discuss this logic of “security binding” in the next section.

The political bargain behind the East Asian regional hegemonic order was also aimed at making American power more predictable and user friendly. If the United States worried about finding partners to help wage the Cold War and build an American-centered world order, these partners worried about American power -- both domination and abandonment. Thus the East Asian regional bargain was also about the restraint and commitment of American power. The United States would agree to operate within bilateral and multilateral institutional frameworks and the junior partners would agree to operate within and support the American order.⁵ American hegemony would become more open, predictable, reciprocal, and institutionalized -- and therefore more benign and tolerable. But the United States would be able to lock other countries into operating within a legitimate and American-centered order.

The end of the Cold War and the shifting economic and political environment in East Asia has altered the region and presented challenges to this postwar regional hegemonic order. The geopolitical landscape has changed. The Soviet Union has collapsed and now Russia is a weakened great power -- too weak to play a dominant role in the region. The peace negotiations between the Koreas also is likely to lead to the reassessment of relationships and bargains. The end of the Cold War makes it more difficult for some Americans to understand why the United States continues to provide security protection to Japan and the wider region. But in other ways, the relations and bargains remain critical to regional order -- and they remain largely in tact. The United States is even more powerful today than it was in the past, particularly with the ongoing economic malaise in Japan and the growth of America's new economy during the 1990s. The United States is still the world's leading military power. Fifty percent of world military spending takes place in the United States and it accounts for 80 percent of world military research and development. The United States also remains the leading destination for East Asian exports. There is a wide array of regional vested interests -- on both sides of the Pacific -- in favor of open trade and investment. This creates on going incentives for the countries of the region to engage the United States and attempt to establish credible restraints and commitments on American power. The United States government clearly is convinced that its security and political presence in the region is as important as in the past, despite the end of the Cold War. The Nye Commission on the mid-1990s provides a critical intellectual and policy rationale for the continuation of the extended American leadership role in the region. As a result, the asymmetries of power and prevailing strategic interests make the basic bargain between the United States and its partners as relevant and valued as ever before.

The alliance may have lost its Cold War function but it remains critical in forestalling security dilemma-driven conflict and arms races in the region and it makes the United States a more predictable and institutionalized superpower. APEC also serves this function. The United States gets some insurance through APEC that regional economic relations will remain trans-Pacific (rather than intra-Asian) in scope and move in the direction of liberalization and

⁵ This argument is explored in G. John Ikenberry, After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major War (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

openness. In exchange, other countries in the region get some insurance against American bilateral discrimination and they get an institutionalized forum to help shape how the United States operates within the region. The bargains behind the regional hegemonic order are evolving but they are also being recreated.

America's Grand Strategies – Realist, Liberal, and Neo-Conservative

Behind American thinking toward East Asia stands at least two intellectual traditions -- and a newer, neo-conservative grand strategy. The oldest is a realist grand strategy, of course, and it is exhibited in the balance of power and containment policies that the United States has pursued. The original rationale for alliance partnership in East Asia was driven by this realist geopolitical logic. This realist view still informed the basic American approach to East Asia -- and it is embraced by other Republican and Democratic administrations.

There is also a liberal orientation that has informed policies that have sought to create various sorts of integrative, reciprocal, and highly institutionalized relationships. This tradition has stressed the importance of multilateral organization of economic relationships and it has placed a premium on the encouragement of democratic reform in defeated or transitional states. The liberal orientation toward order is also concerned with the management of power, but it brings a richer set of ideas about how economic interdependence, democratic community, political socialization, and binding institutions can contribute to stable and mutually agreeable order. America's "liberal grand strategy," grounded in a particular reading of history, economics, and politics, is built around at least three elements of policy engagement, which seek to "open up," "tie down," and "bind together" countries so as to generate stable order.⁶

Opening up means directing the forces of trade and investment, cultural exchange, and transnational society into the closed politics of strong state rule. "These linkages bring with them powerful forces for change. Computers and the Internet, fax machines and photo-copiers, modems and satellites all increase the exposure to people, ideas, and the world beyond China's border," as former President Bill Clinton explained in October 1998. Call this idea "strategic interdependence." The idea is to create realms of wealth and autonomy within the economy and society, which encourages political pluralism and erodes the iron fisted control of the communist party. Expanding trade and investment also creates new and more vocal "vested interests" in closed societies who want to maintain continuous and stable relations with the outside world.

Trade and investment in China is meant to bolster the position of civil society and the

⁶ This "liberal grand strategy" is discussed in G. John Ikenberry, "America's Liberal Grand Strategy: Democracy and National Security in the Post-War Era," in Michael Cox, G. John Ikenberry, and Takashi Inoguchi, eds., American Democracy Promotion: Impulses, Strategies, and Impacts (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 103-126.

non-state sectors, thereby creating more political counterweight to the party and the military. The other objective of strategic interdependence is to create dependencies and “vested interests” within the country who favor stable and continuous relations. This is often seen most clearly in the economic realm: international business leaders grow in number and importance in the target country and raise their collective voices in favor of political and economic openness and friendly relations. Again in regard to China, the anticipation is that rising economic dependence on the flow of trade and investment will restrain China’s geopolitical actions. This remains the view of the Bush administration.

Tying down means inviting other governments to get involved in international organizations such as the WTO and APEC. Here the idea is to create expectations and obligations on governments through membership in regional and global institutions. Political conditionality for gaining membership in these organizations can itself create leverage, but the expectation is also that once inside the institution, government officials will slowly be socialized into embracing its principles and norms. The variety of multilateral security fora in East Asia – most importantly the ASEAN Regional Forum – are seen as playing a small role in socializing regional governments, providing mechanisms for conflict resolution, and fostering some small sense of common identity.

Binding together means establishing formal institutional links between countries that are potential adversaries, thereby reducing the incentives for each state to balance against the other. By binding to each other, surprises are reduced and expectations of stable future relations dampen the security dilemmas that trigger worst-case preparations, arms races, and dangerous strategic rivalry. Also, by creating institutional connections between potential rivals, channels of communication are established which provide opportunities to actively influence the other’s evolving security policy. Even today, the United States and its European and Japanese partners ward off rivalry and balancing among themselves by maintaining their security alliances. It is the binding logic – more so than the response to external threats – that makes these institutions attractive today.

Since September 11th, a third set of ideas have emerged in Washington -- so called, neo-conservative grand strategy. The neo-conservative vision of world order is built on unrivaled American military might and a belief in American exceptionalism. Beyond this, while the pundits and policy makers who make up this radical school of thought tend to share four convictions. First, the United States should increasingly stand aloof from the rest of the world and use its unipolar power – most importantly, its military power – to arbitrate right and wrong and enforce the peace. In a Hobbesian world of anarchy, the United States must step forward as the order-creating Leviathan. The United States will refuse to play by the same rules as other states but this is the price that the world must pay for the American unipolar provision of security. America’s older, postwar approach to order – organized around alliance partnership, multilateral cooperation, binding ties, and strategic bargains with other key states – falls away.

This new global aloofness is reflected in Secretary Rumsfeld’s aphorism that “the

mission determines the alliance” rather than the other way around. The United States will determine what is a threat and how to respond -- and relevant and willing partners will be invited to join in. Gone is the notion that the alliance determines the mission. New fundamentalists are not against security partnerships – but coalitions of the willing will be formed only if other countries sign on to America’s unilaterally-defined goals. This global aloofness is also reflected in the October 2002 National Security Strategy report’s new doctrine of preemption where the United States claims a new right to use force “to act against emerging threats before they are fully formed.” Gone are the old justifications of war based on self-defense and imminent threat enshrined in Article 51 of the United Nations charter. “When it comes to our security,” President Bush affirmed, “we really don’t need anybody’s permission.”⁷

Second, the new fundamentalists argue that military power -- and the willingness to use it robustly in pursuit of the national interest -- must be put back into the center of American foreign policy. Early neo-conservative thinking in the 1970s made this a central tenet -- American foreign policy in the post-Vietnam era had become too liberal, too soft, and too unwilling to confront Soviet expansionism. Power must be put back in the service of American principles and the national interest. During the Clinton years, the new fundamentalists argue, the United States was not taken seriously as a global military power – commander-in-chief Clinton sent a few cruise missiles to Baghdad on several occasions but never threaten real force -- and when enemies stop fearing the United States, they are emboldened to strike.

Third, new fundamentalists are frustrated with the entangling rules and institutions of liberal internationalism – so they advocate pulling back from treaties and international agreements that jeopardize American sovereignty and constrain the exercise of power. The neo-conservative pundit, Charles Krauthammer calls it the “new unilateralism” – “After eight years during which foreign policy success was largely measured by the number of treaties the president could sign and the number of summits he could attend, we now have an administration willing to assert American freedom of action and the primacy of American national interests. Rather than contain power within a vast web of constraining international agreements, the new unilateralism seeks to strengthen American power and unashamedly deploy it on behalf of self-defined global ends.”⁸

Some advocates of this view simply appeal to the new realities of terrorism: in a new era where small groups of determined individuals can unleash massive violence against the civilized world without warning, the old system of rules and multilateral cooperation must give way to action – whatever it takes to get them before they get us. Other new fundamentalists offer more political-philosophical attacks on multilateralism and rule-based order. In one of the most

⁷ Quoted in Dan Baltz, “President Puts Onus Back on Iraqi Leader,” The Washington Post, 7 March 2003, p. A1.

⁸ Charles Krauthammer, “The New Unilateralism,” The Washington Post, 8 June 2001, p. A29.

far-fetched versions, Under Secretary of State John Bolton, prior to joining the administration, argued that a great struggle was unfolding between what he calls Americanists and Globalists.⁹ Globalists are depicted as elite activist groups who seek to strengthen “global governance” through a widening net of agreements on environment, human rights, labor, health, and political-military affairs and whose not-so-hidden agenda is to enmesh the United States in international laws and institutions that rob the country of its sovereignty. Americanists, according to Bolton, have finally awoke and are now seizing back the country’s control over its own destiny. This is a cartoon view that evinces not just a healthy skepticism of multilateralism; it sees American resistance to the encroachment of those rules and agreements as a patriotic duty.

Fourth, the new fundamentalists also incorporate Wilsonian ideas into their vision in urging the spread of democracy. This is not just idealism – it is good national security policy. If democracy and the rule of law are established in troubled countries around the world, they cease being threats. This argument was given a conservative imprimatur in Ronald Reagan’s celebrated 1982 speech to the British Parliament in which he called for the promotion of democracy as a fundamental global security imperative. In the hands of new fundamentalists, this aspiration has become, in Pierre Hassner apt phrase, “Wilsonian in boots.”¹⁰ The promotion of democracy is not left to the indirect, long-term forces of economic development and political engagement – but, when necessary, it is purveyed through military force.

America’s East Asian Policies in the Post-Cold War Era

Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has pursued a variety of policies in East Asia, blending mostly realist and liberal ideas. The Clinton administration may not have had a fully formed grand strategy in place, but it was informed by liberal ideas nonetheless. Clinton officials described their policy toward China at one point as “constructive engagement.” At the same time, this approach to China did not preclude the Clinton administration from sending two carriers to patrol the waters off Taiwan, and it was willing to debate how to press China on human rights and trade problems. Obviously, distinctions between “containment” and “engagement” are too simple to capture the mix of policies available to the United States.¹¹ We

⁹ John Bolton, “Should We Take Global Governance Seriously?” *Chicago Journal of International Law*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (2000), pp. 205-22.

¹⁰ Pierre Hassner, “The United States: The Empire of Force or the Force of Empire?” *Chaillot Papers*, No. 54 (September 2002), p. 43..

¹¹ An American strategy toward Asia was spelled out in a February 1995 Defense Department report, and it emphasized four overriding goals: maintain a forward presence of 100,000 in the region; put America’s alliances with Japan and Korea on a firm basis; develop multilateral institutions such as the ASEAN Regional Forum to foster great security dialogue;

can look at American foreign policy toward East Asia in this light.

The Bush administration is still evolving a strategy toward the region -- it has not yet issued a major new security strategy report along the lines of the 1995 and 1998 Clinton reports. The so-called Armitage report of October 2000 is still probably the best summary of administration thinking about the region.¹² There has been an attempt to reestablish Japan as America's core strategic partner in the region and dispense with the notion of a "strategic partnership" with China. Indeed, the ambition appears to be to make Japan a heavier and more involved military partner in the region -- sharing intelligence and expanding Japanese functional duties in the region. The initial steps by the Bush team have also been to signal a harder line position toward North Korea. Missile defense is also an issue that is creating controversy and how it plays out will do more than any other issue to shape the balance of continuity and change in American policy toward the region. But the major thrusts of the new administration also involve liberal ideas: the alliance will remain the core of America's commitment to the region; the United States will support soft multilateral dialogues in the region; trans-Pacific regional economic relations will be championed; and trade and investment flows will be encouraged in American relations with China.

In the economic area, the United States has had a very consistent policy of fostering expanded economic ties with China; encourage cross-cutting trade and investment patterns within the region among the various economic centers; and raise the level of multilateral political management of intra-regional economic relations. In many ways, the evolution of the East Asian region is already being driven by the forces of trade and investment. Japanese foreign investment exploded in the mid-1980s within Asia, reversing the earlier Western orientation of Japanese economic relations. At the same time, the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia have also created a complex production and trade network in the region. The result is a growing intra-regional economy, not dominated by either the United States or Japan. The very complexity and cross-cutting character of these relations is driving greater political and security engagement in the region.¹³ The American policy appears to be aimed at deepening trade and investment interdependence, and encouraging institutional groupings, such as APEC, to reinforce the open and "soft" character of Asia-Pacific economic regionalism. The United States has also

and encourage China, for a position of strength, to define its interests in ways that are compatible with its neighbors and the United States. Department of Defense, United States Strategy for the East-Asia Pacific Region (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 1995).

¹² "The United States and Japan: Advancing Toward a Mature Partnership," INSS Special Report, 11 October 2000.

¹³ Yoichi Funabashi, Asia Pacific Fusion: Japan's Role in APEC (Washington, D.C.: Institute for International Economics, 1995); and T. J. Pempel, "Gulliver in Lilliput: Japan and Asian Economic Regionalism," World Policy Journal, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Winter 1996/97), pp. 13-26.

consistently sought to make sure that Asia-Pacific regionalism encompasses the Western Hemisphere and not just Asia.

In the political area, the United States has supported the expansion of wider and deeper institutional relations between China, Japan, Korea, the United States, and the ASEAN countries – at least as these contacts are manifest as “track two” exchanges. The United States has reaffirmed its commitment to bilateral security ties but it has offered some support for multilateral and minilateral dialogues that are consistent with these underlying security ties. Support for Chinese membership in the WTO and various regional dialogues are meant to provide ways to foster agreement on regional norms and standards of conduct. One argument made by American officials during the Clinton administration is that institutions should be arrayed so as to enmesh the regional powers in a series of regional and global institutions serves to establish explicit standards and expectations of government behavior in the wide realms of human rights, political accountability, property rights and business law. Yard sticks are erected that, often in subtle and indirect ways, allow governments and private groups to both support and criticize government policy and politics in neighboring countries. This in turn helps foster political community. Another argument is that a denser set of regional institutions provides forums and arenas for governmental and political elites to interact – thereby providing opportunities for the “socialization” of these elites into common regional norms and expectations.¹⁴ Finally, institutions can also provide functional problem solving mechanisms that bring together leaders and specialists across the region to find common solutions to problems. This is the old liberal argument about functional integration and the “spillover” of technical problem solving into more widely shared political bonds.¹⁵

The final area is regional security relations. The U.S.-Japan alliance (and the U.S.-Korean pact as well) provides a vehicle for the United States to play an active role in the region. In this sense, they serve the same function as NATO does for American involvement in Europe. These alliances also stabilize relations between the United States and its Asian partners. The deepening of the U.S.-Japan alliance does appear to be driven by these multiple logics of tying down and binding together. The United States and Japan agreed to enhance security cooperation in the U.S.-Japan Joint Declaration on Security in 1996, and Japan enacted the U.S.-Japan Defense Guidelines in order to make the security treaty effective in 1998. The Taiwan Straits crisis in 1996 and North Korea’s missile launching in 1998 both served to intensify American and Japanese efforts to reaffirm and update the alliance.

An important development in American thinking about its post-Cold War security

¹⁴ Iain Johnston, “Socialization in International Institutions: The ASEAN Regional Forum and I.R. Theory,” in G. John Ikenberry and Micahel Mastanduno, eds., The Emerging International Relations of the Asia-Pacific Region (forthcoming).

¹⁵ Philippe C. Schmitter, “Three Neo-Functional Hypotheses About International Integration,” International Organization, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Winter 1969).

involvement in East Asia came with the 1995 Nye Report, which made an argument that America's military umbrella in the region had real and important consequences for the stability and functioning of regional political and economic relations and on the success of America's economic, political and security goals, including issues such as non-proliferation. Its famous phrase that "security is like oxygen" sums up the rationale that was advanced.¹⁶ The report made the case that the U.S.-Japan alliance and the engagement of China remain in the long-run interest of the United States – America's security presence had direct and indirect impacts on the stability of the region and on the ability of the United States to achieve its interests. Serious intellectual and policy challenges to this view have not lasted, at least within the American defense and foreign policy community.

This is a very thorny issue. The goal must be to bring China into an institutional security order in Asia, thereby binding China to the other major powers in the region. This would be a huge accomplishment, the most dramatic step possible in insuring that the rise of Chinese power is accomplished without provoking "security dilemma" reactions that destabilize the region and tip the region into military conflict. But this new strategic partnership with China must be accomplished without undermining the stable security relations that the United States has with Japan and Korea. These proven alliances – with their multiple functions – should not be exchanged for a regional security forum. The challenge will be to define objectives, steps, and a long-term process that can simultaneously integrate China into a regional security order and maintain the benefits of the current bilateral treaties.

¹⁶ See Joseph S. Nye, "East Asia: The Case for Deep Engagement," Foreign Affairs, (July/August 1995). For later reflections, see Nye, "The 'Nye Report': Six Years Later," International Relations of the Asia-Pacific, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2001), pp. 95-103. For background, see Yoichi Funabashi, Alliance Adrift (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1999).