

NAPSNet Daily Report 15 March, 2000

Recommended Citation

"NAPSNet Daily Report 15 March, 2000", NAPSNet Daily Report, March 15, 2000,
<https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-daily-report/napsnet-daily-report-15-march-2000/>

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I. **United States**

1. US Defense Secretary's Asia Trip

Agence France Presse ("US DEFENSE SECRETARY LANDS IN TOKYO," Tokyo, 3/15/00) reported that US Defense Secretary William Cohen flew into Japan on Wednesday from Vietnam on a three-day visit to discuss the DPRK, the PRC and a disagreement over the cost of keeping US troops in Japan. Cohen is scheduled to meet Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi, Foreign Minister Yohei Kono and his Japanese counterpart Tsutomu Kawara in Tokyo on March 16. A Japanese foreign ministry official said, "the purpose of his visit is to discuss US-Japan security issues, as well as to exchange views on regional security surrounding Japan. The issue of host-nation support is very important for the United States and Japan and it is very likely that the topic will be brought up during their talks." Cohen will fly to the ROK on March 17.

2. Cross-Straits Relations

Agence France Presse ("MODERATE ZHU PUTS ON FORCEFUL FRONT AHEAD OF TAIWAN POLLS," Beijing, 3/15/00) reported that PRC Premier Zhu Rongji told US President Bill Clinton on Wednesday to stop making threats against the PRC. Zhu said at a press conference marking the end of the annual session of the National People's Congress that, "there must be a shift from threat to dialogue across the Pacific Ocean. No matter who comes into power in Taiwan in the election, we won't allow the independence of Taiwan to happen ... this is the bottom line." Analysts noted Zhu's restrained demeanor, but said he did not jeopardize his high standing on the international stage as a man the West can do business with. David Zweig, China watcher at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, said that although Zhu's statements on Taiwan were relatively moderate and covered both "hard line and soft line" positions on reunification, it was too early to tell if his statements would affect the outcome of Taiwan's presidential vote on March 16. Jean-Pierre Cabestan, director of the Hong Kong-based French Center for Research on Contemporary China, said that Zhu's statements were well balanced and his refusal to directly name the US was an attempt at toning down angry rhetoric already coming out of the PRC. Cabestan said, "Zhu wanted to bend the position of the Taiwan voters, while conserving good relations with the US. China needs the US for the WTO and does not want to antagonize the Americans."

3. Spratly Islands

Associated Press (Busaba Sivasomboon, "CHINA, ASEAN AGREE ON SPRATLYS," Cha-am, Thailand, 3/15/00) reported that a Thai official said Wednesday that the PRC and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have agreed to frame a common "code of conduct" for disputed territorial claims in the South China Sea. Senior officials of ASEAN and the PRC met in Thailand and agreed that the code would be designed to build trust and would not be legally binding. Seehasak Phaungketkeow, deputy director general of Thailand's East Asia department, said, "the problems between countries should be solved by bilateral agreement. The code of conduct aims to create a friendly atmosphere." Seehasak said Wednesday's that the talks were a successful start to negotiations. He added that the proposed code would cover four broad areas: how to handle disputes in the South China Sea, how to build trust and confidence, cooperation on marine issues and environmental protection, and modes of consultation.

The International Herald Tribune (Michael Richardson, "COHEN URGES HANOI TO HELP SETTLE CHINA SEA DISPUTE, SINGAPORE," 3/15/00) reported that US Defense Secretary William Cohen urged Vietnam and its Southeast Asian neighbors on March 14 to use their collective "leverage" to reach a peaceful settlement with the PRC over control of the South China Sea. Cohen stated, "one of the very important and beneficial aspects of ASEAN is that you have collective interests, and those

collective interests can in fact, if you act in concert, give considerable leverage in dealing with China in the future on a peaceful and cooperative basis." [Ed. note: This article was included in the US Department of Defense's Early Bird news service for March 15, 2000.]

II. Republic of Korea

1. DPRK-Japan Talks

The Korea Times ("NK AGREES TO LOOK INTO 'MISSING' JAPANESE" Seoul, 03/14/00) reported that the DPRK promised on March 13 to start investigations into "missing" Japanese while Japan formally announced the resumption of food aid to the DPRK. Japanese Red Cross officials told their DPRK counterparts that "tangible progress" would help in future talks on normalizing relations, said a Japanese official after the completion of one day of talks. One anonymous official said, "the North Korean side explained if missing people should be discovered they will notify Japan without delay." He said that DPRK officials promised that the DPRK would carry out in-depth, nationwide searches for the missing Japanese while thanking Japan for its offer of 100,000 tons of rice aid. The official said that Japanese officials promised that Japan would try to locate the whereabouts of 100 Koreans who went missing in Japan before 1945. The two sides also agreed that future Red Cross talks between Japan and the DPRK would work to help 16 Japanese women who went to live in the DPRK earlier visit family members in Japan in May. Tokyo-based experts on March 13 were not hopeful about the diplomatic prospects of the Red Cross talks, stating that Japan is unlikely to find out what has happened to the citizens it believes were kidnapped, and had only a slim chance of establishing diplomatic ties any time soon.

2. DPRK-US Talks

The Korea Times ("LEE, ALBRIGHT DISCUSS NK TERRORISM ISSUE" Seoul, 03/14/00) reported that US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, at a joint news conference with ROK Foreign Minister Lee Jung-binn in Seoul, announced the opening of US-DPRK discussions on terrorism. Albright said that Michael Sheehan, director of the US office to counter terrorism, had taken up the subject in talks with the DPRK in New York. Albright said that the talks recessed for the two delegations to consult with their governments. Lee said that the ROK had not been a target of DPRK terrorism for years. A UN spokesman said on March 13 that UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan welcomed "the increasingly positive signs" on the divided Korean peninsula and strongly endorsed the quick resumption of a dialogue between the DPRK and the ROK. The spokesman said that Annan was ready "to contribute to the efforts aimed at reducing tensions and promoting mutual confidence in the region" upon request and looks forward to a DPRK visit to Washington.

3. DRPK Refugees

Joongang Ilbo (Kim Jin, "PROPOSED REFUGEE CAMP FOR NORTH KOREAN DEFECTORS UNLIKELY TO BE LOCATED IN CHINA," Seoul, 03/14/00) reported that ROK Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Lee Jung-bin held a meeting on March 13 for ROK correspondents in Washington to talk about recent calls for the establishment of a refugee camp in a third country to protect DPRK defectors. Lee said, "the North Korean refugee problem is a highly complex diplomatic issue, and a refugee camp alone would not ensure the safety of North Korean escapees." He also said that the ROK government views such a move as unrealistic because if such a camp were set up, it could not be located in the PRC nor Russia. Lee continued, "both China and Russia insist that determining

which North Korean defectors should be granted refugee status is a complex and ambiguous matter. As such, the two countries are unlikely to agree to setting up a refugee camp for North Korean defectors, as proposed by some commentators in Korea and outside."

4. ROK-DPRK Relations

The Korea Times (Lee Chang-sup, "KIM PROPOSES FREE INTER-KOREAN TRAVEL," Seoul, 03/14/00) reported that during a speech on March 14 at the 56th commencement of the Korea Military Academy in Seoul, ROK President Kim Dae-jung renewed his pledge to accept any DPRK proposal conducive to opening bilateral dialogue at the governmental or any other levels. Kim also proposed free travel between the ROK and the DPRK and appealed to the DPRK to "open their minds and come to the ROK-DPRK conference table to usher in a new chapter of history during which 70 million Koreans will cooperate with each other and freely travel between the South and North." Kim said that such a DPRK policy will be carried out against a firm backdrop of anti-communism and a full alert to crush any possible armed provocation from the DPRK. He also stressed his strong belief that any type of dialogue between the ROK and the DPRK will help the two Koreas cooperate with each other and reconcile. Kim stated that the foremost goal of his inter-Korea policy is securing peace and dismantling the Cold War legacy on the Korean peninsula. He continued, "this will translate into the 70 million Koreans on both sides being able to live free of the danger of another war. When peace prevails, the North will be able to build its economy, feed its people and maintain stability in their everyday lives."

III. People's Republic of China

1. PRC-DPRK Relations

People's Daily ("FOREIGN MINISTER TANG TAKES QUESTIONS FROM PRESS," Beijing, 3/11/00, P6) reported that PRC Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan said on March 10 that DPRK leader Kim Jong-il's visit to the PRC Embassy in Pyongyang was a desire he had expressed a long time ago. Tang also said that DPRK Foreign Minister Paek Nam-sun's forthcoming visit to Beijing was a return visit from when Tang visited the DPRK not so long ago. Tang said, "this is normal exchanges between two foreign ministers." Tang refused to comment when asked whether the PRC would help arrange a summit between the DPRK and the ROK.

2. PRC View of DPRK-Japanese Talks

China Daily (Hu Qihua, "NATION RESENTS US RESOLUTION," 3/15/00, P1) reported that PRC Foreign Ministry spokesman Sun Yuxi said at a news briefing on March 14 that the PRC welcomes the progress made by Japan and the DPRK. After negotiations between the Red Cross Societies of Japan and the DPRK, the two countries issued a joint statement in Beijing on March 13, with agreements on home-visits of Japanese spouses living in DPRK, and investigations into missing Japanese and Koreans missing before 1945.

3. ROK Helicopter Purchase

China Daily ("S. KOREA SEEKS HELICOPTER BIDS," Seoul, 3/15/00, P6) reported that the ROK on March 14 invited seven foreign defense firms from the US, Russia, South Africa and Europe to take part in a US\$1.8 billion project to build new combat helicopters by 2004. An ROK defense ministry

statement said, "the project features introducing large attack helicopters, to be the core part of the army's air combat capability, from abroad." The US firms Boeing Company, Sikorsky Aircraft Corporation, and Bell Helicopter-Textron, the Russian firms Kamov and Mill Moscow Helicopter Plant, the South African firm Denel, and the French-German consortium Eurocopter were those invited.

4. The Taiwan Issue

People's Daily carried a commentary ("STEPPING UP PREPARATORY WORK FOR EARLY SOLUTION OF TAIWAN ISSUE," 3/13/00, P3) which said that an early solution to the Taiwan issue, coupled with the realization of the complete reunification of the motherland, "is the tide, the trend and the great justice, reason and benefit of the country and nation." The article continued, "our principle for solving the Taiwan issue is 'peaceful reunification, one country, two systems'. Based on a political and strategic consideration, we have stated that there should be a timetable for resolving the Taiwan question, which cannot be postponed indefinitely. We should earnestly intensify our efforts of doing work with Taiwan people and do a good job in winning their hearts, this is of important significance for the final solution of the Taiwan issue."

5. PRC View of Missile Sale to Taiwan

China Daily (Shao Zongwei, "MISSILE SALE DRAWS FIRE," 3/10/00, P1) reported that the PRC urged the US on March 9 to immediately halt all arms sales to Taiwan. PRC Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhu Bangzao said at a news briefing that the arms sale seriously infringes on the PRC's sovereignty and interferes in the PRC's internal affairs. He added that the sales would also stir "elements favoring independence for Taiwan," and create a major source of tension across the Taiwan Straits. Zhu demanded that the US abide by the three Sino-American joint communiques and the commitments it made.

6. PRC-US Disputes on the Tibet Issue

People's Daily ("NATION RESENTS US RESOLUTION," Beijing, 3/15/00, P4) reported that PRC Foreign Ministry spokesman Sun Yuxi expressed strong resentment and firm opposition on March 14 against the US Senate's March 9 resolution designating March 10, 2000 as "National Day of Tibet." Sun said that the resolution disregards the facts and basic norms of international relations and demanded that the US Senate honor the US commitment that Tibet is an inseparable part of the PRC. Sun continued to demand that the US immediately stop interfering in the PRC's internal affairs by meddling in the Tibet issue.

7. PRC-US Economic Relations

China Daily (Zhao Huanxin, "OFFICIAL URGES US TRADE VOTE," 3/14/00, P1) reported that the PRC was close to concluding bilateral negotiations with World Trade Organization (WTO) members and is calling for unconditional permanent normal trade relations (PNTR) status from the US. PRC foreign trade minister Shi Guangsheng said on March 13 that the PNTR is an issue affecting the implementation of Sino-US bilateral arrangements. Shi said that an unconditional resolution of the PNTR issue for the PRC is the basis for implementation of a Sino-US bilateral pact signed last November. He continued, "if the US misses this opportunity, it will lose the tremendous market of China and will be giving it away to its competitors."

8. PLA Modernization

People's Liberation Army Daily (Luo Yuwen and Lu Tianyi, "JIANG URGES PLA MODERNIZATION," Beijing, 3/10/00, P1) reported that PRC President Jiang Zemin urged the PRC's armed forces to push their modernization to a new stage and enhance their combat readiness and defense capability to a new level under conditions of modern technology, especially high technology. Jiang made the call when attending a meeting of all People's Liberation Army (PLA) deputies to the Ninth National People's Congress. Jiang said, "by the end of last year, the target to demobilize 500,000 PLA soldiers set at the 15th National Congress of the CPC had been realized." He also said that the army shoulders a great historic responsibility, namely, to protect state sovereignty, unity, security, and people's peaceful labor, and to provide a strong guarantee for reform, opening up policy implementation and socialist modernization. Jiang added that the army should fulfill its fundamental obligation to safeguard state sovereignty and security, and meanwhile take an active part in the country's economic development.

IV. Australia

[Ed. note: In the week beginning 3/6/00, the Australian began a 7 day series of articles on Australia's relationships with Asia under the title AUSTRALIA AND ASIA-AT PEACE OR ADRIFT? Below are summaries of some of the major arguments presented in this series.]

1. Australia-PRC Relations

The Australian (Lynne O'Donnell, "MIDDLEMAN HOWARD FITS THE DIPLOMATIC BILL IN CHINA," 3/9/00, P.7) reports that the PRC Government views Australia as a bridge between East and West. Visits by Chinese leaders to Australia since John Howard took over as Prime Minister are an overt demonstration that closer ties between the two nations are seen by both sides as a platform for greater Australian regional engagement. Beijing does not perceive any quantum policy shifts by Canberra away from constructive engagement with the region. Indeed, the Chinese appear relieved that the Howard Government has adopted a less trail-blazing approach than its predecessors to interaction with its neighbours. China appears to accept that Australia is a close and consistent ally of the US. In broad terms, Australia is seen as a bastion of democratic ideals, free market principles and Western values. Historical links to Europe still mark Australia as an essentially white nation, but one where there is a growing influx of Asian migrants, helping foster greater understanding of neighbours' concerns. As such, Australia is seen as an emerging bridge between East and West. As one Chinese commentator put it, "militarily and politically Australia follows the United States. Economically, Australia has close ties to Japan and wants to extend its economic influence in Asia. Culturally, Australia wants to keep her links to Europe. Australia has to learn how to balance these three forces."

2. Straits of Taiwan

The Australian (Lynne O'Donnell, "CHINA TO CANBERRA: HANDS OFF TAIWAN," 3/10/00, P.6) reports that the PRC has issued a strong warning to Australia that relations will be severely damaged if Canberra supports a US intervention in a crisis in the Taiwan Strait. Australia would breach its commitment to the one-China policy if it supported a military operation over Taiwan. China put Australia on notice that Beijing would expect Canberra to remain at least neutral should a conflict break out on the issue.

The Australian (Greg Sheridan, "WHAT IF BLUFF AND BLUSTER TURNED TO BIFF," 3/10/00, P.17) reports that last year Australia was worried that if the US found itself in conflict with the PRC over Taiwan it would expect Australia's support. If it didn't get that support, that would mean the end of the US-Australia alliance. This led directly to a huge strategic reassessment, and now Canberra has what it thinks is a full and coordinated strategy. "Of course the reality is that in any conflict Australia would side with Washington. But the object of Australian policy is to prevent such a choice ever having to be made and to handle, with what might be termed 'strategic ambiguity, a series of contingencies short of conflict." Where Beijing may be seriously miscalculating in its current approach is the effect its bullying might have in the US. Congressional opinion against ratifying the PRC's entry into the World Trade Organisation is hardening; congressional support for increased weapons sales to Taiwan is also hardening; European opinion against the PRC is also growing. Each US presidential candidate has felt obliged to make significant comments critical of the PRC. "Those contingency plans of Canberra better be pretty good."

3. Australia-Japan Relations

The Australian (Robert Garran, "WESTERN TILT WORRIES JAPANESE FELLOW ALIENS," 3/7/00, P.82) reports that Japan remains a strong and loyal ally of Australia, with the economic and political links creating what for both countries is one of their most positive and valuable relationships. But beneath the surface in Japan, many of the officials and academics who follow Australian affairs are baffled at what they see as the Howard Government's tilt away from Asia and towards the US and Europe. The direct cause of disquiet was Japanese irritation at what they saw as polite but unrelenting pressure for Japan to make a bigger contribution to the trust fund that would help pay for the East Timor deployment. The other concern is what has been widely taken to be a new "Howard doctrine" - the notion arising from an interview with John Howard which suggested that Australia would act as "deputy sheriff" to the US in the region. In spite of Mr. Howard's denials that he ever used that phrase, and his insistence that Australia was nobody's deputy, the idea has stuck. There is a sense in which both Australia and Japan have never really been accepted by Asia as apart of the region, and many in Japan argue that we should use our shared sense of alienation and uncertainty as impetus to achieve proactive regional cooperation.

4. Australia-Indonesia Relations

The Australian (Don Greenlees "LEADER'S NAME MUD IN JAKARTA," 3/6/00, P.14) reports that the frequently whispered truth of Australia's partners relationship with Indonesia is that it is made worse by one man: John Howard. "Indonesia's political elites, rightly or wrongly, have arrived at the conclusion the Prime Minister is disinterested in Asia and would rather play to a domestic gallery than maintain close relations with our northern neighbour." Indonesians from all walks of life were deeply wounded by the East Timor experience. There are complex and conflicting emotions at play: hurt national pride; a loss of confidence in the verity of a unified archipelago; a sense of being betrayed by their military and that Indonesia might be in the wrong; and the opposing desire to defend the country from foreign (especially western) interference. Australia's leadership role in East Timor was necessary, but it awakened sentiments in Indonesia that will take a very long time to calm. Some people will never forget.

5. Australia-Thailand Relations

The Australian (Peter Alford "THAILAND SINGS THE PRAISES AT A STEADFAST ALLY," 3/6/00, P.14) argues that the Thailand relationship has been the Howard Government's big diplomatic

success story in South-East Asia. The bold stroke was Canberra's swift decision to contribute US\$1 billion to Thailand's IMF rescue package in 1997, in striking contrast to the inaction of the US. This was reinforced by Howard's visit to Thailand in 1998, when he impressed his hosts with a ringing endorsement of the bilateral relationship. How much the situation has changed - and to Australia's advantage - is demonstrated by the fact that it fell to Thailand's Foreign Minister, Surin Pitsuwan, to produce a satisfactory ASEAN response to the East Timor crisis. Had it not been for Dr. Wurin's efforts, Australia ASEAN and Indonesia would all have been embarrassed, albeit for vastly different reasons, by token and grudging Southeast Asian participation.

6. Australia-Malaysia Relations

The Australian (Peter Alford, "LEARNING TO LIVE WITH MAHATHIR," 3/7/00, P.8) reports that dealing with a famously prickly Prime Minister is the central problem in our relationship with Malaysia. Some aspects of Australian government foreign policy have pleased Malaysia, especially the fact that Australia is no longer scrambling to participate in every regional initiative. No one was more irked than the Malaysians by Labor's aggressive Asian diplomacy. But the relationship remains fraught. In Australia, diplomacy towards Malaysia has changed to one of grim determination to sit out the 74-year-old and to actively contest his regional interventions that prejudice Australian interests. At the same time business and educational links remain strong. However, Mahathirism has been very successful in promoting Malaysia's interests abroad and energising the core Malay community at home, and this has not escaped the next generation of leaders. The resurgence of Islamic hardliners has become a core reality of Malaysian politics and is unlikely to encourage UMNO to go further down a "secular western" path, which many Malay Muslim critics say Dr. Mahathir has already traveled too far.

7. Australian Policy toward Asia

The Australian (Paul Kelly "HOWARD MISSES OPPORTUNITIES," 3/6/00, P1) argues that Australia's relations with Asia are undergoing a distinct change - the combination of a new regional outlook and John Howard's conviction that the "frantic" period of Asian obsession is over. "The most important long-term consequence for Australia is the growth of a new sense of East-Asian regionalism - which does not include Australia, Canada or the US. This regionalism remains an embryonic instinct within Asia, driven by deep forces, notably the recent financial crisis. But it has the long term potential to marginalise Australia. It coincides with a revival of the old-fashioned Asian stereotype of Australia as a western enclave, US-allied, British-derived. "The most important foreign policy shift under Howard is the far greater weight given to Australian public opinion. It permits only one interpretation - that Australia has no need to adapt to Asia, which, if true, is an historical end to our long process of adaptation. It would be wrong, however, to think that Australia's regional relations are in a dire condition. The truth is that they reflect the complex pluralism within Asia, but it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Australia's regional links are in a state of drift. "Australia's economic success was the platform on which to create a more dynamic and contemporary Asian perception of Australia. Yet this opportunity has not been realised. The Howard Government has too often sent a contradictory message that revived the memory of an old-fashioned Australia. The next stage in the process might take Australia by surprise - a subtle by growing Asian cultural assertiveness in tandem with economic recovery."

The Australian (Greg Sheridan "A FADING BLIP ON REGION RADAR," 3/7/00, P.8) argues that five or six years ago, Australia was an intimate part of every significant dynamic in the region. Today, regional countries see Australia as important for the size of the economy and the prowess of its military, but also as sailing away from the region, disengaged, making less and less intellectual and

political contribution to regional issues, being less and less a centre of ideas or influence. Our soldiers have done well in East Timor, and the region respects that, but SE Asian leaders have been dumbfounded by the clumsy and often offensive mishandling of every aspect of the politics and rhetoric surrounding Australia's E. Timor venture. The single worst episode, although by no means uncharacteristic, was the thankfully shortlived "deputy sheriff" Howard doctrine. The most interesting organisational, cultural and political dynamics at work in the region now are East Asia-only dynamics. Asia-Pacific regionalism, the vision of Hawke and Keating and Evans, including the US and Australia, and a natural for us, is in at least partial eclipse, while the idea that we might join any of the East Asia- only stuff is on no one's radar screen. The pattern of the Prime Minister's overseas trips, so heavily weighted in favour of England and the US, also sends a powerful message to the region.

8. Government Views of Australia-Asia Relations

The Australian (Dennis Shanahan "ALL WARM AND FUZZY OVER ASIA," 3/6/00, P.14) interviewed Prime Minister John Howard on his view of the current state of Australia-Asia relations. Howard argued that Australians are now "utterly at peace" with our relationship with Asia because we are no longer "frantic" about the region, and that an "artificiality" in our attitude towards Asia has gone. He believes Australia's difficulties with China over being seen as a tool of the US have been overcome and that we are getting a modest dividend as a result. Mr. Howard says we "see ourselves as partners, as participants, as friends, but also see ourselves as having an existence in a series of relationships which extend beyond Asia. We're just Australians in this part of the world having a Western background, and having a lot of affinity with many of the countries of Asia."

The Australian (Alexander Downer, "WE CAN STAND PROUD IN OUR REGION," 3/9/00, P.11) contained a response by Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, to some of the criticism made of Australian foreign policy. Downer argued that Australia's relations with the Asia-Pacific region have moved on to a more stable and relevant footing as the Government has positioned Australia to be a practical contributor to our region. "Those who cling to a myopic view that Australia must genuflect to gain acceptance in our own region are out of touch with Australian and regional sentiment." There have been a number of achievements over the last few years. We made a significant contribution to the management of the regional economic crisis. We have built closer links with Thailand and the Philippines. "With China, we have moved our relationship on to a more sustainable basis with the establishment of a structured human rights dialogue. We have established political-military talks, and Australia has become a preferred destination for thousands of Chinese tourists. Most importantly, we have also hosted the first visit to Australia by the Chinese head of state. We have established a political-military dialogue with South Korea and hosted a visit by President Kim Dae-Jung. The Government has ensured that Australia's relationship with Japan has been strengthened. "Despite the occasional self-important critique from some of your correspondents wishing that Australia would abandon everything that we as a nation hold dear - our values, our outlook, our sense of what is right and proper - the Government will continue to work to make Australia a more relevant contributor to the region around us."

9. Asian Regionalism

The Australian (Paul Kelly, "THE MEGA-TIGER IS NOW OUR MAIN GAME," 3/8/00, P.13) suggests that stirrings of a new Asian regionalism demand a renewed engagement with our neighbours. There has been concern in Canberra at a speech by the Secretary-General of ASEAN, Rodolfo Severino, suggesting that it would soon be time to dispense with the annual leader's meeting of APEC nations. If Severino had his way, it would be hard to imagine a greater blow to Australian diplomacy and

vision. This speech confirms that a body of opinion exists in ASEAN that wants to dismantle APEC as a political force. Severino's aim is to have APEC as a low-key economic group working more in harmony with ASEAN's interest. The critique of APEC is based on three elements: an enduring ASEAN jealousy; the absurd expansion of APEC which has weakened its coherence; and the momentum for a new "Asians only" East Asian regional body. Severino's speech should not be exaggerated. It symbolises a new, deeply confused mood within Asia. But it is a mood where Australia is distinctly less important and the Howard Government is now clearly seen as less committed to Asian engagement than its predecessors. This is a pivotal perception. The political force driving East Asia today is the legacy from the Asian financial crisis. This crisis has generated a revived East Asian regionalism that is hardly grasped in Australia. The logic is clear: the capital markets attacked Asia as a region so Asian nations must bind together to fireproof their region. Plans for Asia's economic integration and political collaboration are growing. For Australia, there are three points to make. First, the new Asian regionalism has nothing to do with the success or failure of the Howard Government. Second, Australia cannot by definition join any "Asian only" political group and it would be folly to try. Third, there is now convincing anecdotal evidence that Asian elites see Australia as distinctly less engaged with the region than before. Australia urgently needs a new and constructive debate about our Asian links. This is the real issue and it can only be confronted by an acceptance that E. Timor was never the main game.

10. Adrift in Asia: Summing Up

The Australian (Greg Sheridan, "HOWARD SLIPS OUT OF THE BIG PICTURE," 3/10/00, P.6) summed up its week-long series on Asia. It reasserted its view that there has been an undoubted slackening of regional engagement. The intimate cooperation with Tokyo and Seoul over APEC and other aspects of regional architecture is in decline. In Northeast Asia, the idea that we are effectively a subset of the US, and more or less incapable of independent strategic judgement, was deeply reinforced by the Howard doctrine "deputy sheriff" fiasco. There is also a consequence in Northeast Asia of our loss of influence in Southeast Asia. We have destroyed our strategic relationship with Indonesia. And we have a ministry that doesn't travel much in Asia. Add that together and our claim in Washington to have vastly superior insight and political understanding of Southeast Asia to that which the Americans have is simply unsustainable. As a result, our influence in Washington is less than it was. A loss of influence in Washington translates for us as a loss of influence in Northeast Asia as well. Similarly, the Howard Government presented the Timor operation as a fundamental break with past policies of Asian engagement. This was a decisive but foolish option, which turned Timor into a symbol of rejection of Asia rather than a symbol of commitment to Asia. Northeast Asians understandably feel that if we cannot manage our Southeast Asian relations, we are of little added value in regional terms. We are not now seen as a significant shaper of regional ideas, institutions or trends, or indeed as an insider in the region at all. "Our loss of intellectual leadership in APEC is important in this content, for it was in APEC in particular that we delivered important, widely differing but useful results for Korea, Japan and China, and also longed the habit of big picture for regional cooperation."

The NAPSNet Daily Report aims to serve as a forum for dialogue and exchange among peace and security specialists. Conventions for readers and a list of acronyms and abbreviations are available to all recipients. For descriptions of the world wide web sites used to gather information for this report, or for more information on web sites with related information, see the collection of [other NAPSNet resources](#).

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