


Toward a Post Post-Cold War World

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By Ralph A. Cossa

I. Introduction

This article is contributed by Ralph A. Cossa, President of the Pacific Forum CSIS, a Honolulu-based non-profit research institute affiliated with the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. Cossa asserts that as tragic as the September 11th attacks may be, they nonetheless present a unique geopolitical opportunity to usher in a new global paradigm underpinned by a cooperative principle of eradicating international terrorism.

II. Essay By Ralph A. Cossa

Toward a Post Post-Cold War World
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The horrific attacks on the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon may help usher in the "post post-Cold War era" by creating an opportunity for a fundamentally changed relationship between Washington and both Moscow and Beijing. It also provides Tokyo with the incentive (and excuse) to take a major step toward becoming a "normal" nation and more equal security partner, while impacting Korean Peninsula events as well.

New U.S.-Russia Paradigm? The area where the greatest change is possible (and is occurring) is in relations between the U.S. and Russia. President Vladimir Putin was the first to call President George Bush to express outrage over the attack and pledge his support. Russian actions went beyond atmospherics. Immediately after the attack, U.S. military forces worldwide were placed on

high alert. During the Cold War, Moscow would have responded in kind. Instead Putin ordered Russian troops to stand down so as not to add to international tensions, a decision he personally relayed to Bush. As Bush later observed, "it was a moment where it clearly said to me that [Putin] understands the Cold War is over." To demonstrate his understanding, Bush added Putin to the list of close allies he called immediately prior to the initiation of military operations against Afghanistan - an equally extraordinary event.

Since then, Putin has agreed to share intelligence with Washington and to open Russian airspace to U.S. humanitarian and support flights; he even raised the prospect of Russian search and rescue support for U.S. combat operations, while increasing Moscow's support to anti-Taliban forces. Most significantly, Putin gave the green light to the former Soviet Central Asian Republics to allow U.S. military forces to stage out of bases there. Much has been written about China's concerns about a possible U.S. military presence in Central Asia, but the region remains first and foremost in the Russian sphere of influence. Russian acceptance (much less active support) of a U.S. military presence in its "near abroad" would have been unthinkable on Sept. 10.

It behooves Washington, however, to ensure Moscow (no less than Beijing) that it seeks no long-term military presence in this region. Access rights and staging bases in Central Asia may be critical to conducting sustained combat operations against terrorist camps (and the Taliban leadership) in Afghanistan. Establishing permanent U.S. military bases in the region makes little sense, however, and runs the risk of undermining the chances of genuine long-term cooperation between Washington and Moscow.

Missile Defense Compromise? Even with this new-found spirit of cooperation, contentious issues remain. Foremost among these is missile defense (MD).

Predictably, opponents of missile defense were quick, in the wake of Sept. 11, to point out that such defenses were useless against the more likely threats America faces today. Equally predictably, proponents argued that terrorists willing to conduct such heinous acts would certainly not hesitate to fire a missile at a U.S. city, were they to get their hands on one. Regardless of which argument one personally favors, in times of crisis Washington politicians and defense planners can be expected normally to err on the side of being more, not less, cautious. It appears inevitable, therefore, that some form of missile defense will remain a key component of Washington's overall homeland defense plan.

However, the debate over what form of MD will be adopted and how comprehensive an umbrella will be built is likely to be affected. Both the shock to the economy caused by the terrorist assault and the massive costs involved in developing a comprehensive homeland defense system provide additional incentive for developing a limited (less costly) system. Even before Sept. 11, it appeared that the seeds of compromise had been sown. After all, the size and sophistication of Moscow's nuclear arsenal gives it a great deal of flexibility. Moscow can easily live with a limited MD system aimed only at deterring attack from rogue states or responding to accidental or unauthorized launches. Meanwhile, Washington may also see the wisdom in delaying its decision to scrap the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty or become willing once again to enter into negotiations on its amendment.

Bush and Putin seem serious about wanting to redefine U.S.-Russia relations in order to finally put Cold War habits and constraints behind them. The war on terrorism presents them with a golden opportunity to do just that... if the Cold Warriors in both camps can be held in check.

An Opportunity for Improved U.S.-PRC Relations. The war on terrorism likewise presents Washington and Beijing with a common objective upon which to build greater strategic cooperation (even if none dare call it a "strategic partnership") - fighting international terrorism is one area

where U.S. and Chinese strategic objectives clearly overlap, given China's serious concerns about terrorism (in part supported by Osama bin Laden) in its western regions.

China joined the rest of the international community in condemning the Sept. 11 attacks and also acknowledged the appropriateness of a military response, provided it was directed at those proven to be guilty, avoided civilian casualties (always a U.S. objective), and was preceded by "consultations" with the UN. While Washington was likely not thrilled to have President Jiang Zemin calling other UN Security Council members to reinforce these preconditions, they were not particularly onerous and China did in fact endorse the attacks when they came.

Beijing also sent a team of counter-terrorism experts to Washington to explore ways the two sides could cooperate, amid positive signs that China was willing to share "useful intelligence" with Washington. What was most troublesome about China's response was its initial attempt to create linkages between Chinese support for the U.S. with American support for China's own fight against "terrorism and separatism," which seemed to imply a Taiwan quid pro quo. This line of thinking was not pursued during Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan's visit to Washington, but has served (as was no doubt its purpose) to make Taiwanese nervous about possible under the table deals. Obviously, no U.S. administration, much less this one, would contemplate such a deal.

The real moment of truth in possibly redefining Sino-U.S. relations should come when Presidents Bush and Jiang meet in Shanghai. On some issues, like the need to combat international terrorism, they will easily agree. On others, like Taiwan, they no doubt will continue to agree to disagree - Bush can be expected to underscore both Washington's "one China" policy and the need for a peaceful solution. The key to determining if a new Sino-U.S. strategic relationship is possible will be found in the nature of China's caveats regarding the war on terrorism and on China's statements regarding missile defense. If Beijing is wise enough to seek and then accept assurances from Bush that Washington is committed to a limited MD system that will not put China's nuclear deterrent at risk and then expresses willingness to enter into a dialogue that acknowledges there are legitimate security concerns on both sides, this could open the door for the "normal, constructive, and healthy" relations Beijing professes to seek with Washington.

A More Normal Japan? Immediately after the attack, Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro went on record stating that Japan would "spare no effort in providing assistance and cooperation" in support of America's war on terrorism. He followed this up with even stronger commitments to provide intelligence and military logistical support during his late September visit to New York and Washington (along with much-needed aid to Pakistan and the Afghan people).

Backing up these assertions, Koizumi has introduced new legislation that will allow the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to provide logistic and other noncombatant support to U.S. forces conducting counter-terrorist military operations, while putting forth measures to permit the SDF to provide enhanced protection for U.S. forces and facilities in Japan. Polls show the Japanese public is behind Koizumi's efforts - the fact that several dozen Japanese citizens were among those killed in New York no doubt provides additional incentive to support the U.S. anti- terrorism effort.

Even before Sept. 11, Koizumi had signaled his desire to move Japan beyond the limits imposed by the current interpretation of Japan's Constitution regarding his nation's support for the U.S.-Japan alliance and Tokyo's involvement in other collective defense efforts. However, it appeared unlikely that he would expend the political capital required to effect the change, given the need for painful economic reforms. The war on terrorism has provided Koizumi with the change to take a major step toward becoming a "normal" nation, not just to avoid a repeat of the "Gulf War syndrome" (when Tokyo was criticized for just writing a check), but because he sincerely believes the time has come for Japan to become a more equal partner to Washington and a more active participant in

international affairs. Nonetheless, it appears doubtful that Japan will seek or agree to become involved in direct combat operations - this would take a major reinterpretation or revision of the constitution and also goes well beyond what Washington appears to be seeking in terms of support for the war on terrorism.

Interestingly, the response from Beijing and Seoul to Tokyo's expanded (albeit non-combat) military involvement in the war on terrorism has been refreshingly muted. More true to form, Pyongyang has issued a strong condemnation.

Korean Peninsula Implications. President Kim Dae-jung strongly condemned the terrorist attacks and immediately expressed his intention to "fully support" U.S. retaliatory actions. Kim also proposed that the two Korean states adopt a joint resolution opposing terrorism at their high-level North-South talks in mid-September, a suggestion that was ignored by North Korea. Nonetheless, North Korea joined the South in condemning the terrorist action, even sending a letter of condolence to Washington.

Pyongyang had been offered a golden opportunity by the Clinton administration to get itself off the State Department's list of state sponsors of terrorism, but failed to seize this chance. As a result, DPRK critics have been quick to point to Pyongyang's continued presence on this list as Washington plots its comprehensive campaign against international terrorists and the states that support them. While there are no indications that the Bush administration intends to further complicate an already difficult task by adding North Korea to its target list, one hopes that increased world attention on states that sponsor terrorism will provide Pyongyang with the extra push needed to take the actions necessary to remove itself from this list, including the expulsion of Japanese Red Army terrorists who have enjoyed safe haven in the North for decades.

If Washington is not likely to focus its anti-terrorist efforts on Pyongyang, it is equally unlikely to expend much effort to further convince Pyongyang to resume its dialogue. Secretary Powell has already stated that the Bush administration is prepared to resume talks anytime, anywhere, with no preconditions. While it would welcome a resumption of dialogue, Washington is not likely to go beyond its current offer and seems comfortable about letting the ball lie on Pyongyang's side of the net.

In sum, as horrific as the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks were, they have helped set the stage for the creation of a post post-Cold War era of cooperation among like-minded nations. While success is by no means assured, the opportunity exists today to create a new global paradigm, built upon the common goal of ridding the world of international terrorism.

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