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PROSPECTS FOR COOPERATIVE SECURITY IN EAST ASIA:
FROM CHINESE PERSPECTIVES

by Xia Liping

ABSTRACT

Peace and economic development are still the main stream in East Asia. Regional strategic framework is continuing to develop towards multi-polarization. Growth of economic interdependence between countries and the end of the Cold War have made more countries accept the new security concepts. However, there are still some factors which can cause potential uncertainty and instability in East Asia. Relationships among major powers are in readjustment. The United States intends to establish a security mechanism in the Asia-Pacific region based upon its military alliances and with it as the leader. This is contrary to the main stream of peace and development in the world since the end of the Cold War. NMD and TMD will complicate the major power relationships and may cause a new arms race in East Asia. The development of arms in some countries (or regions) have been too fast. The process of relaxation on the Korean peninsula has begun, but there are still many uncertainties in the future. In the long run, in East Asia, cooperative security mechanisms may take shape with multi-levels (including regional level, sub-regional level and bilateral level), multi-forms (official and unofficial), and multi-functions coexisting.

INTRODUCTION

During recent years, security situation in East Asia has been relatively stable. Most of the countries in the region have been recovering from the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis. Economic interdependence between countries has been developing, and has increased the necessity for countries to cooperate with each other to resolve problems through peaceful means. The 1997 Asian Financial Crisis made countries in the region recognize that they should strengthen their economic cooperation to prevent future crisis, and has caused them to establish "ASEAN + three" mechanism. The process of relaxation between North and South Korea has also begun. Some multilateral mechanisms of security cooperation and dialogue in the region have taken shape. However, there are still some factors of potential uncertainty and instability in East Asia. In the world, the Korean Peninsula is the last place in which the Cold War has not ended. If the two Koreas are reunited in the future, it will have important impacts on the strategic framework in East Asia. Some separatists in Taiwan still intend to split Taiwan from China. Their intention and action for Taiwan independence have become the most dangerous factor in the region. Disputes of territory, border and maritime sovereignty between some countries of East Asia still exists. Major powers in the region also lack enough mutual understanding and trust between them. Faced with the situation, countries in the region should strengthen their cooperation in the security field, including the improvement of the existing multilateral mechanisms of regional security dialogue and cooperation as well as the establishment of some new ones.

MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF CURRENT SECURITY SITUATION IN EAST ASIA

The regional strategic framework of East Asia is continuing to develop towards multi-polarization. East Asia was the region, in which the trend of multi-polarization arose first in the world. In the early 1970s, the strategic triangle of China-US-USSR emerged. From the late 1980s, with the relaxation of US-USSR relationship and Japan as the major power, the strategic triangle of China-US-USSR was replaced by the strategic quadrilateral of China-US-USSR-Japan. In the strategic framework, the role and impact of the USSR had been much smaller than those in the bi-polar framework of the West and East in Europe. So the turbulence and collapse of the USSR had a smaller impact on East Asia than on Europe. A strategic framework of six powers, including China, the United States, Russia, Japan, ASEAN and a future reunited Korea is gradually taking shape. Among the powers, there are some triangles, including China-U--Russia and China-US-Japan, which are playing some role in the regional security situation.

The strategic balance in East Asia should be established and maintained. During the post-Cold War era, the balance of the U.S.-China-Japan triangle relations is the most important factor in maintaining stability and peace in the region. Any side of the three countries should not try to control another side. And the three countries, especially between China and the United States and between China and Japan, should increase their security dialogue and exchanges, so as to establish cooperative and mutually beneficial relations of "three wins" among them.

The 1997 Asian Financial Crisis has made East Asian countries deeply feel it necessary to strengthen regional economic cooperation and common development. One of the major purposes of the establishment of "ASEAN + three" framework is to meet the needs. During the informal summit meeting of leaders of "ASEAN + three" states held in Singapore in November 2000, Singapore Prime Minister put forward the conception of "East Asian Regional Cooperation", and the meeting agreed to study the possibilities of setting up East Asian summit meeting and establishing free trade and investment zone in East Asia. With the development of integration of trade and finance in East Asia, the possibility of establishing East Asian Free Trade Zone will increase. In order to fit in with the process, political and security dialogue and coordination in East Asia will also develop. In the future, "ASEAN + three" may become one of the main channels of East Asian cooperation. The trend of regional cooperation in East Asia will be an important part of world multi-polarization.

However, even if East Asia is becoming multi-polar, the United States will not be an equal power at least until 2015. On the other hand, if the United States succeeds in maintaining itself as the leader in East Asia for the long run, the trend of multi- polarization in the region will continue.

Relationships among major powers are in readjustment. Since the end of the Cold War, major powers have been readjusting their mutual relationship so as to meet the needs of new international situation and their new strategies. For example, during recent years, China has made big progress in establishing partnership with other countries. It has established strategic partnership of coordination with Russia, comprehensive partnership with France and Britain, friendly cooperative partnership working for peace and development with Japan. The leaders of China and former US President Clinton declared that both countries would devote themselves to establishing constructive strategic partnership towards 21st century. At the same time, China has also established partnership with many third world countries, including neighboring countries. The partnership or strategic partnership is essentially different from the military alliances or strategic cooperation during the Cold War period. The latter was usually aimed militarily at the third country. Current strategic partnership is not aimed at the third party and is not military alliance. Its substance is to realize mutual friendship, to strengthen cooperation and not to confront with each other. The partnership should be based on equal footing and mutual respects. At the same time, it is not exclusive.

The United States intends to establish the security mechanism in the Asia-Pacific region with it as the leader and based on its military alliances, which is contrary to the main stream of peace and development in the world since the end of the Cold War. At present, in order to strengthen its leadership in the world and to maintain its position as the only superpower, the United States wants to continue to play the leading role in the Asia-Pacific region. It has used its forward-deployed military forces and defense alliances in East Asia and the Pacific as the main pillars to realize its purpose. The United States has maintained 100,000 troops in East Asia, and is strengthening their mobile capabilities and precision-guided attack capabilities.

At the same time, the US is enhancing its military alliance with Japan, South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines and Australia. The United State and Japan issued new US- Japan Defense Cooperation Guidelines in September 1997. In May 1999, the Japanese Diet passed three bills, which, together, make up the Guidelines. These provide for Japanese rear-area support for the United States in regional crises, including search and rescue operations; logistics support including the use of Japanese hospitals, ports, and airfields, and the provision of fuel and equipment; and the use of Japanese ships to evacuate Japanese citizens from conflict areas. (1)

Other reasons why the United Stares has been doing so include that the US is concerned China may become its future potential threat, and the US is also preparing for possible military intervention in the Taiwan Strait. The new US-Japan Defense Cooperation Guidelines expanded the scope of cooperation, providing for "cooperation in situations in areas surrounding Japan that will have an important influence on Japan's peace and security." (2) Thus the area for cooperation is not geographical but situational. Although at the beginning whether the region covered includes Taiwan was deliberately left ambiguous, since George W. Bush Administration came to power, it has been made clearer. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage said that if US-Japan Alliance is very close, it can check the disputes between China and Taiwan. (3)

The strengthening of US-Japan military alliance will spur separatists on Taiwan to go further towards Taiwan independence, which will increase the possibility of armed conflicts across the Taiwan Strait. Because Taiwan issue is the internal issue of China, I will not discuss it in detail in this paper.

The process of relaxation on the Korean Peninsula has begun, but there are still many uncertainties in the future. The situation on the Korean Peninsula has been tortuously developing towards political resolution. In June 2000, the North Korea and South Korea's summit meeting was an important breakthrough in the relationship between the two sides. In order to resolve the internal serious economic problems, North Korean leader Kim Jong-il will pursue policy of reform and openness to some extent. However, to maintain North Korea's internal stability will still be the top priority of Kim Jong-il's policy. So he will be quite cautious when he pushes forward some kind of policy of reform and openness.

On the other hand, because the growth of South Korea's economy has slowed down and the rate of unemployment in South Korea have increased, the sunshine policy of South Korea's leader Kim Dae-jung has been criticized by many South Koreans, who think Kim Dae-jung has been going too fast and has given too much to North Korea than he should. It has made it very difficult for President Kim Dae-jung to take any big step towards reunification in the near future.

Since George W. Bush Administration came to office, it has stopped the process of negotiation on Missile issues with North Korea and has begun to review US policy towards North Korea. It may take about half a year for Bush Administration to do so. At the same time, George W. Bush Administration has declared that it will make great efforts to develop and deploy the National Missile Defense systems (NMD) and Theater Missile Defense Systems (TMD). Because the United States has used North Korea as one of its excuses to deploy NMD and TMD, Bush Administration may not like to make a breakthrough in its talks on missile issues with North Korea in the near future.

From the long run, because North Korea has paid more importance on economic development and need economic aids from both South Korea and the United States, it will be more willing to sign a formal peace treaty. Some American scholars even said: "there is a better than even chance that there will be a South-North peace treaty before 2005 (and most likely before 2003)." (4)

NMD and TMD will complicate Major powers' relationship and may cause a new arms race in East Asia. Now the United States is paying great importance on developing NMD and TMD. President George W. Bush has vowed to deploy NMD since he came to office. He said the United States will never balk at abolishing the ABM Treaty in order to develop NMD. Defense Secretary Rumsfeld has been an active advocator for NMD and TMD. Since he got into office, he has spared no efforts to push forward the Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD). At present, Russia, China and even some US European alliances have opposed the plan of the United States to deploy NMD. They think if the US deploys NMD and abolishes the ABM Treaty, that will disrupt the strategic balance in the world and spur arms race into outer space. So US deployment of NMD would seriously complicate the relationship among the major powers. China will have to react strongly and take some countermeasures if the United States deploys NMD.

And if the United States deploys TMD in East Asia or make the decision to deploy NMD, arms competition in the region will be aggravated. Some other countries will feel it necessary for them to develop similar weapon systems and to increase the number of their missiles or to improve the capability of their missiles as well as nuclear weapons in order to offset the influence of TMD and NMD. This will lead to a new phase of arms race in East Asia.

If the United States transfers the TMD systems to Taiwan, that will significantly enhance Taiwan's overall capabilities of offense and defense. It will enable Taiwan to directly threaten the air-space security over the Taiwan Strait and China's mainland. If the United States puts Taiwan under its TMD protection, it will lead to de facto "para-military alliance" between the United States and Taiwan. That will be a grave breach of the obligations the US undertook when it established diplomatic relations with China, namely, to abrogate its mutual defense treaty with Taiwan. Putting Taiwan under US or US-Japan TMD umbrella will signify a major policy change by the US on Taiwan issue, which will definitely produce negative impacts on China-US relations. The result will be evident: more serious troubles in China-US relationship.

At the same time, TMD technologies can also be used for ballistic missiles. If the United States transfers TMD missiles, parts or technologies to its allies and Taiwan, this will be very serious proliferation of weapons and missile technologies. Under the circumstances, other countries will feel it unnecessary for them to comply with the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR).

Furthermore, if the United States transfers TMD systems or technologies to Taiwan, this will give a wrong signal to the separatists on Taiwan. They will think if they declare Taiwan independence and the mainland takes military reactions against them, TMD of the US, Japan and Taiwan itself can protect them from missile attacks from the mainland. As the result, the separatists on Taiwan will go forward towards Taiwan independence. That will upgrade the level of military confrontation and increase the possibility of armed conflicts between the two sides across the Taiwan Strait.

Growth of economic interdependence between countries and the end of the Cold War have made more countries accept the new security concepts, but arms of some countries (or regions) have been developing too fast. During recent years, with the rapid development of trade and economic exchanges in the region, economic interdependence between East Asian countries has been much closer. This factor and the post-Cold War international situation have made China and other countries gradually changing their security concepts and accepting new ones. Those new security concepts include: comprehensive security; "security is mutual "; cooperative security; Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs); transparency and etc. For example, although China and some ASEAN countries, such as the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam and Brunei, have disputes on the sovereignty of the Nansha Islands, China put forward the proposal to shelve their disputes and to exploit the natural resources cooperatively. At present, China and ASEAN countries are making their efforts to reach the Regional Action Norms in South Sea. Another example is that China and Vietnam signed the Treaty of Land Border and the Treaty of Beibuwan at Sea between the two countries in December 1999 and December 2000 respectively, which has resolved their land border and Beibuwan at sea disputes.

However, some countries including the only superpower still has the cold war mentality, which has imposed negative impacts on East Asian regional security.

Furthermore, after the end of the Cold War, although during the first half of 1990s the arms transfer to East Asia was reduced, since the second half of 1990s the arms transfer to the region has been increasing. Some countries (or regions) are developing their arms forces too fast. Especially from 1991 to 1998, US arms sales to Taiwan had reached to 20 billion US dollar, which made Taiwan become the biggest arms recipient in the world. Those may lead to the "action and reaction" arms race and increase the possibility of armed conflicts in East Asia.

POSSIBILITIES AND MODELS FOR ENDURING COOPERATIVE SECURITY MECHANISMS IN EAST ASIA

Since the end of the Cold War, multilateral mechanisms of regional and sub-regional security dialogue and cooperation have made some progress in East Asia. In the region, security dialogue and cooperation are developing at multi-levels, through multi-channels, and through both Track One and Track Two. The Track One includes the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the "ASEAN + 3", the "Four Party Talks", the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) and etc. The Track Two includes the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP), the Northeast Asian Cooperation and Dialogue (NEACD) and etc. Track Two mechanisms usually can create favorable conditions for Track One mechanisms and are supplemental to Track One Mechanisms.

In East Asia, development levels of countries are very different. There are developed countries, Newly Industrial Entities (NIEs) and developing countries. Culture and value are very divergent. There exist disputes of territories and maritime interests between countries. Especially the two countries, which have not been reunited in the world, are both in the region. So the establishment of multilateral security cooperation in the region should be in line with the characteristics of the region, and should not copy models of other regions as well as values of Western countries.

Some basic principles of establishment of multilateral security cooperation in East Asia should be affirmed according to the characteristics of the region and experiences obtained from the history and the current process.

* Mutual respects of sovereignty and territorial integrity and mutual noninterference in other countries' internal affairs. One of the most important experiences of member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is not to interfere in each other's internal affairs in any form and in any excuse. In 1994 at the annual conference of the Institute for International Strategic Studies (IISS), Singapore Foreign Secretary said that one of the main reasons why there had been no war among ASEAN countries for 25 years was that they had insisted on the principle of noninterference in internal affairs.
* Dialogue and consultation on equal footing and to resolve territorial and other disputes through peaceful means. Before the final resolution of territorial and maritime territorial disputes, the disputes should be shelved and any country concerned should not take any action, which may be regarded as provocative act. They should make their great efforts to establish Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) so as to create favorable conditions for the final resolution. They should also make efforts to create favorable conditions to cooperatively exploit natural resources, if possible, such as in South China Sea.
* Establishment of multilateral security mechanisms under the guide of the theories of common security and cooperative security. During the post-Cold War era, with the rapid development of mutual economic interdependence between countries, security is also mutual. At present, no country can increase its sense of security under the condition of sacrificing the security interests of other countries. Furthermore, many security problems, such as environment pollution, greenhouse effect, drug trafficking, terrorism and so on, are transnational and are unable to be resolved through traditional military means. So common security of all countries in the region should be the objective of regional multilateral security cooperation.
* To advance gradually. To establish multilateral security cooperation mechanisms in East Asia should progress step by step. For example, the ARF regarded its three major functions, namely CBMs, preventive diplomacy and then seeking for ways to resolve conflicts, as the three phases of its development. At present, the ARF is going from the first phase, CBMs, into the second one, preventive diplomacy.
* With the establishment of regional multilateral security cooperation mechanisms, the role of bilateral military alliances should be reduced. Because military alliances are usually aimed at one specific adversary or potential one, and only seek for the security of a part of countries. In fact, it puts security of some countries on instability of other countries and will be unable to meet the needs of situation during post-Cold War era.
* Starting with the increase of mutual understanding and trusts among major powers. That will be the precondition of establishment of CBMs and effectiveness of regional multilateral security cooperation mechanisms.
* Making great efforts to develop economic exchanges and cooperation among countries on the basis of principles of equality and mutual benefits. This is the basis of regional security cooperation and an important part of establishment of CBMs.
* Arms control and disarmament should become an important part of multilateral security cooperation mechanisms. Because military technologies of developed countries are much advantageous than those of developing countries and developed countries have exported large amounts of sophisticated weapons to developing countries, they should take special duty to stop deploying and transferring the sophisticated weapons, which may cause the region unstable, to East Asia.
* At present, the international community and countries concerned should make their great efforts to help to bring about a formal peace agreement between North Korea and South Korea within the mechanism of the Four Party Talks. Both China and the United States can play the role as guarantors of the agreement. After the peace agreement is signed, the Four Party Talks can be expanded to include Japan, Russia and even Mongolia, so as to become a sub-regional multilateral security cooperation mechanism in Northeast Asia.
* From the long run, in East Asia, cooperative security mechanisms may take shape with multi-levels (including regional level, sub-regional level and bilateral level), multi-forms (official and unofficial) and multi-functions coexisting. An increase in cooperative security in the region is likely in the next 2-3 years, because growing economic interdependence between countries, especially between major powers, will make them pay great efforts to avoid conflicts, to maintain stable relationship and to seek for cooperation in security fields, although sometimes they have tensions in their relations. The ideas of "ASEAN + 3" and ARF are the most likely to work, and, the "ASEAN + 3" will develop into "East Asian Regional Cooperation" mechanism, which may play an important role in the future regional cooperative security mechanisms.

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(1) Robert D. Blackwill and Paul Dibb, edit., America's Asian Alliances, published by the MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, 2000, pp.38.
(2) Ibid.,pp.39.
(3) Common New Agency, January 23, 2001, Washington, DC.
(4) Ralph A. Cossa and Alan Oxley, The US-Korea Alliance, Chapter 4 of America's Asian Alliances, published by the MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, 2000, pp.70.

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