# US EAST ASIAN REGIONAL SECURITY FUTURES: POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS AND NEGATIVE FACTORS

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**US EAST ASIAN REGIONAL SECURITY FUTURES:**
**POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS AND NEGATIVE FACTORS**by Zhu Chenghu *

**ABSTRACT**
Following the end of the cold war, a lot of positive developments have been witnessed in the regional security in the East Asia. These developments include the continuous relaxation of the tension in the region, which resulted from the Soviet and Russian withdrawal from the region and the end of superpower confrontation; political solutions to the hot spots, positive development in the situation on Korean Peninsula in particular; sustained and rapid economic development; profound security cooperation at different levels and on different issues; and the emerging regionalism in both economic and security fields, etc.
However, there are still some negative factors in the security future in the region. They are unstable relations among the major powers, structural problems in the East Asia, arms race and proliferation, non-tradition threats, etc. Therefore, a sound security situation in the future in the East Asia depends heavily on the establishment of new security concepts, enhancement of security cooperation, collective efforts in countering proliferation, a practical and feasible program for the ARF and the peaceful unification of the splitting countries.

## I. POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS IN THE EAST ASIAN REGIONAL SECURITY IN THE RECENT YEARS

To study the East Asian regional security into the future, one should first of all have a retrospect of the positive developments in the security situation in the region in the recent years. Such a study will help foster a true and clear understanding of sound aspects of the situation and increase the confidence in the regional security, thus contributing joint efforts to the maintenance of the peaceful and stable regional security situation.

1. Continuous relaxation of the tension

Following the end of cold war, Russia had greatly reduced its armed forces in the Asian-Pacific region, by withdrawing its military presence from Vietnam and Mongolia, and by reducing its armed forces in the Russian Far East. The Russian actions had not only reduced its military pressure on its neighbors, but also led to the diminishing of the military confrontation between the two superpowers. The end of the superpowers' military confrontation has promoted the further relaxation of the security situation in the region. Thanks to the joint efforts of the countries concerned, the relaxation is still continuing.

2. Political solutions to the hotspots

The end of cold war has made entirely different impact on the European and the East Asian security situation. On the one hand, the principles and norms of the West for a new international order have catalyzed disorder, disintegration and wars in Europe. On the other hand, the East Asian region has entered the post-war ear in real sense. This is mainly manifested in the political solutions to the hot spots. The war in Cambodia settled politically. The end of civil war in Cambodia has helped to bring about continuos improvement of the relations among the nations in the region, finally leading the full coverage of all the Southeast Asian nations by the ASEAN. Thanks to the joint efforts from the countries concerned, the situation in South China Sea has also brought under the control through the political dialogues and consultations.

What the author wants to mention in particular is the development of the situation on Korean Peninsula. Last year, a miracle was witnessed in the relations across the 38th parallel. There have been not only meetings and talks at different levels, including the summit, but also some practical measures for the improvement of the relations between the North and the South and for national reconciliation. These efforts of both Koreas have not only helped to ease the situation on the Peninsula and improve the relations of the two sides, but also helped to relax the security situation in the entire East Asian region and improve the relations between DPRK on the one hand and the United States and Japan on the other. Although it is too early to say that the two Koreas will be unified very soon, yet the recent progresses in the relations between the North and the South are very conducive to the long-lasting stability, peace and prosperity in the East Asia.

3. Sustained and rapid economic development

In the past 20 years or so, the Asian-Pacific region has been very dynamic in the economic development. Its average economic growth rate is about 6%. The sustained rapid economic growth in the region has not only attracted many investors, taken in large amount of investments, promoted rapid growth of the trade among the nations in the region, increased the regional economic cooperation, but also increased the internal stability of the countries in the region, deepened their interdependence, thus creating conditions for enhancing the political and security cooperation among them and for the political solutions to the disputes on the basis of dialogue and negotiation. All these have effectively promoted regional stability and peace and improved the security situation.

4. Profound security cooperation

Thanks to the relaxation of the situation and improvement of the relations between the countries in the region, security cooperation at different levels, on different issues and in the different frameworks has been very dynamic in the past few years, the security cooperation in the framework of ARF in particular, of which all the East Asian nations are members. Thanks to the joint efforts, ARF has been playing a very positive role in enhancing the mutual understanding and mutual trust. Since its founding in 1994, remarkable achievements have been materialized in CBMs on the basis of consultation and dialogue. The members of ARF have reached a lot of consensus in the CBMs. They agreed to exchange views on regional security situation and security concepts, carry out dialogues on defense policies, exchange information on military exercises, invite observers to the military exercises, call for the registration of conventional weapons, discuss the global and regional nonproliferation, circulate the information on the defense exchanges, promote the engagement of the senior officers and defense education institutions, explore the maritime security and cooperation, strengthen the cooperation between search and rescue agencies, run training classes for the peace keepers and exchange experience in disaster relief. These CBMs are important component of the security cooperation in the region.

Besides the security cooperation in the framework of the ARF, there are also other forms of security cooperation in East Asia. In the bilateral cooperation, there are different ways of US cooperation with its allies in the region. There are different levels of cooperation between China and the United States in different fields. There are also other forms of bilateral cooperation, such as the Sino-Vietnamese cooperation in the peaceful settlement of the border disputes, that between China and Russia in delimiting the boundary, that between China and Japan in establishing different CBMs in different fields. In the past few years, we have witnessed the multilateral cooperation, such as the security consultations between the United States, Japan and China, Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue, etc.

The security cooperation at different levels and in different forms have contributed a lot to the peace and stability in the region.

5. Emerging regionalism

After the end of the cold war, the development of the regionalism in East Asia could be found in both economy and security. The economic regionalism in the region is developing simultaneously with the globalization. Economic regionalism may lead to the security regionalism.

Regionalism is not new in other regions like Western Europe or North America, where the countries concerned have not only established economic cooperation organizations, like EU and Free Trade Zone in North America, but also corresponding mechanism to ensure the economic cooperation in the regions. These have not only increased their economic competitiveness, but also increased their capability to prevent and deal with any economic crisis which might occur. Because of the tremendous diversities in the region, regionalism in East Asia is still yet to be developed. There is neither economic cooperation organization, nor mechanism to ensure the economic cooperation in the region. Therefore, many scholars and statesmen have urged to establish an organization of economic cooperation and corresponding mechanism, so as to rail the economic cooperation among the countries in the region on the right track. They believe that without such an organization and mechanism, it is difficult for any country in the region, including Japan, to compete with the other two economic zones, and difficult for any country in the region to prevent the occurrence of economic and financial crisis like that happened in 1997, and also difficult for the region to manage the crisis once it happens. Fortunately, thanks to the efforts of the scholars and statesmen, consensus is being reached on the establishment of such an organization. Many scholars and statesmen have suggested to develop the present "10+3" into such an organization. If that suggestion is materialized, the economic regionalism will develop rapidly. This will in turn promote the development of the security regionalism in the region.

## II. NEGATIVE FACTORS

The countries and people in the East Asia have enjoyed peaceful security environment for pretty long time. However, we have to see that in the regional security situation, there are still some problems, which are quite negative to the maintenance of peace and stability, and to the further improvement of the security environment in the region.

1. Unstable relations among the major powers

In the years following the end of the cold war, people in the region have witnessed the improvement of the relations between the major powers of the United States, Russia, Japan and China. Different forms of strategic relationship or partnership have been established between them. Yet, in each of the 6 bilateral relations among the four major powers, there are some problems. If the problems between them are not handled properly, they may reverse the situation in the region. For example, some major powers are still sticking to the cold war perceptions. They always try to take some other countries as their enemies. To contain the enemy, they persist in enhancing the military alliances which were the outcome and product of the cold war, and try to seek absolute security by trying to dominate advanced technologies. This sort of actions is not conducive at all to the CBMs and to the establishment of mutual trust. On the contrary, it may lead to new confrontation between major powers.

2. Structural problems in the East Asian economy

Although East Asian economy has been growing very fast, yet the financial crisis started in 1997 has fully indicated the fact that the Asian economy is very fragile because of the following reasons: Firstly, the economy in most of the countries in East Asia is problematic in structure. This economy has been very successful and developing very fast in the industrial era, because the countries have been able to adept themselves to manufacture industry in the past decades. But in the information age, manufacture itself is not enough. The situation in the past few years has demonstrated that it is very difficult for the countries in East Asia to take the lead in the IT industry. Most of the countries are facing the similar challenges in adjusting their economic structure, otherwise it will be very difficult for them to sustain their high-speed economic development. The economic problem has brought about internal turbulence and new instability in some countries in Southeast Asia. Secondly, many countries in the region have attached great importance to the globalization of the world economy, but neglected the other trend of the world economy, that is the regionalism. Therefore, the countries in East Asia have done very little to promote the development of the regionalism in the region. As a result, there is no organization of economic cooperation among the countries in the region, not to mention the mechanism to ensure the effective economic cooperation among the countries in the region. Thirdly, because of the lack of an organization for economic cooperation, it is very difficult, or even impossible, for the countries to cooperate and coordinate their policies in case of crisis. Because of this, security cooperation is difficult to go deeper.

3. Arms race and proliferation

After the end of the cold war, tremendous achievements have been witnessed in international arms control and countering the proliferation of WMD in the world. However, the East Asia has been the most dynamic region in arms build-up and proliferation. Because of the military confrontation on Korean Peninsula and across the Taiwan, the parties concerned have been trying their efforts to build up their arms, thus leading to the arms development and race in the above-mentioned regions. Furthermore, some western countries, the United States in particular, have fueled the arms race and proliferation in the region. The United States has not only exported large quantity of high-tech weapons to the countries and region in East Asia, but also pushed forward the TMD program there. Instead of strengthening the security of US forces in East Asia and its allies in the region, the US TMD program is, in fact, catalyzing the new distrust among the countries in East Asia, and may trigger a new round of arms race in the region, which may violate the peace and stability in the region, and therefore will be a disaster for the countries in the region.

4. Non-traditional threats

Since the end of the cold war, the traditional military threat has been diminishing gradually with the end of the military confrontation between the United States and Russia, yet the non-traditional threats are arising. In the recent years, non-traditional threats have been found in terrorist attacks, piracies, drug-smuggling, uneven development, worsening environment, political instability in some countries, hacker attacks through computers, etc. Although these threats are non-traditional, but they are very realistic and practical. They are posing threats to almost all countries in the region. If these threats are not properly handled in concerted efforts, they may seriously undermine the peaceful and stable security situation in the region.

## III. THE SECURITY FUTURE IN EAST ASIA

It is believed that so long as the countries in the region continue their efforts to maintain the momentum in their contribution, the peaceful and stable situation could be maintained. But one has to argue that the future of the security in the region depends to a great extent on the following:

1. Establishment of new security concepts

Since the end of the cold war, the countries have been exploring a security mechanism, which can on the one hand ensure the security of every member, and promote lasting peace and stability on the other. It is quite obvious that it is impossible for such a security mechanism to be established on the basis of the security concepts in the cold war years. Therefore it is a very urgent task not only for the scholars in strategic and security studies, but also for the governments of the countries in the region to establish new security concepts on the basis of the changed situation. In light of the reality in the Asian-Pacific region, the countries concerned have reached following consensus on new security concept. (1) The security concept in the new era emphasizes that security should be comprehensive, instead of merely military security. (2) Security includes external security and internal security. The national economic development, internal stability and social progress are important contents in materializing national security. (3) The core of the new security concept is to respect and maintain the sovereignty of all sovereign states. (4) The best way to materialize security is sincere cooperation, instead of confrontation.

2. Enhancement of security cooperation

For a security architecture meeting with the demand of the changed and changing situation in East Asia, the members in the region have to strengthen their cooperation. The huge diversities in the region have brought about a lot of obstacles to the security cooperation. It is advisable for the nations in the region to carry out security cooperation from easy to difficult. Therefore the author would suggest that they start their cooperation first from the economic field. The reality has shown us that the economic cooperation not only brings benefits to the parties concerned, but also increases their interdependence, which is the basis for further cooperation in the security field. Without sincere cooperation, one may be difficult to imagine that the peace and stability can last very long. The UN Charter and other widely accepted norms on international relations should be the corner stones for the cooperation. To promote the sincere cooperation, countries concerned have the responsibility to create environment and atmosphere, which are conducive to the strengthening of cooperation.

In the foreseeable future, different security structures will continue to coexist. The existing bilateral security arrangement will continue to exist. But multilateral and sub-regional security arrangement will also continue to mature. In the not long future, there may appear some new security structure. Therefore, countries in the region, the major powers in particular, have to adept themselves to the emergence of the new security situation and arrangement

3. Nonproliferation

Proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction has always been a challenge to the countries in the region. Nowadays, it poses more imminent threat to the region than it did before. The 1998 Indian and Pakistani successive nuclear tests have produced very negative impact on the nonproliferation efforts in the region. If one looks into the future, he may be impossible to be very optimistic with the nonproliferation situation in the region. Firstly, some of the countries or region, which are likely to possess nuclear weapons, are in this region. Secondly, the TMD and NMD programs may force some countries in the region to race against each other in high-tech weapons, thus triggering a new round of arms race. Thirdly, most of the existing nonproliferation regimes have been worked out by the major western powers, therefore they are discriminating and not fair enough. Fourthly, the wide use of depleted uranium bombs in both Gulf and Yugoslavian Wars may prompt the countries concerned to possess weapons of mass destruction. All these may have very negative impact on the nonproliferation in the region. To maintain the peaceful and stable security situation, all countries should join their efforts in countering proliferation, and strengthening the nonproliferation regimes on the basis of consultation.

4. Peaceful unification

Both Korean Peninsula and China are artificially split. This splitting status may bring about the most serious shock or even a reverse in the security situation in the future. Because:

(A) Both Korean Peninsula and Taiwan are of very important significance in the strategies of the major powers in the region. The interests of the major powers interweave here. Any slight incident may invite the involvement of the big powers, thus complicating the situation and the incident may be easily internationalized.

(B) On both Korean Peninsula and across Taiwan Strait, there are military confrontations. All the confronting parties have strong military powers, which are big in size, sophisticated in weapons, high in vigilance and pretty perfect in readiness. Armed conflict between them will be of very high intensity and may involve more than two countries, should such a conflict arise.

(C) There are unstable factors in all of the four confronting parties. Intensification of their internal problems may give rise to a sudden change of the situation and thus undermining the stable security environment.

Having seen the danger of the splitting status, both Korean Peninsula and China are doing their efforts to promote unification. The outside forces should contribute their efforts in promoting the process of peaceful unification. On Korean Peninsula, two Koreas should be encouraged to discuss the issues concerning peaceful unification independently without any foreign intervention. On Taiwan issue, the two sides should begin to talk about peaceful unification without any foreign intervention. Peaceful unification serves the interests of all countries concerned, and therefore will be an all-winning outcome.

5. A practical and feasible program for ARF

The future regional security in East Asia depends heavily on what role the ARF will play in the future. The practice since the founding of ARF in 1994 has proved that the ARF is the only official security cooperation forum in the Asian-Pacific region, its role and position in the region is irreplaceable. In the future, ARF will undoubtedly continue to play important role. The major powers in the region should modify their policies a little bit so as to adept themselves to the situation in which major powers are led by the countries which are smaller in size and weaker in strength. The ARF itself has to be practical. It should work out a feasible program for the future. In working out the program, the members should fully take into account of the reality and diversities in the region. It should never introduce the mechanism for the intervention of the internal affairs of its members.

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