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INTRODUCTION

U.S. relations with countries in Northeast Asia have been fundamentally affected by the events of September 11, 2001. In light of these new circumstances, the National Committee on American Foreign Policy (NCAFP) cosponsored a one-day conference on American Policy and Security Interests in the China/Taiwan/Korea Theater with the U.S. Army's Dwight D. Eisenhower National Security Series (ENSS). The participants included a number of experts, academics, and military officers who are interested and involved in U.S. foreign and security policy in the Northeast Asian arena. The conference consisted of four presentations: "An Overview of U.S.-China Relations," "The Taiwan Dilemma," "Prospects for a Northeast Asian Security Forum," and "The North Korean Nuclear Issue." Professor Donald S. Zagoria made introductory remarks and moderated the discussion that followed each presentation.

This report makes available a summary of the views and suggestions that were voiced at the conference. Each presentation summary is followed by a synopsis of the discussion.

AN OVERVIEW OF U.S.-CHINA RELATIONS

Ambassador Winston Lord led off with an overview of U.S.-China relations since 9/11. He said that there had been a major improvement in relations but that the critical question was whether that improvement represents a fundamental change or is simply temporary. The answer is not yet clear. He cautioned against going to extremes of euphoria or panic in assessing the relationship. It is likely to be a mixed relationship for many years to come.

Since 9/11 China has cooperated with the United States on terrorism, the North Korean nuclear issue, and nonproliferation. Its leaders have also been more muted on Taiwan, at least until recently, and there was no hostile reaction to the growing U.S. presence in Central Asia. For its part, the United States has softened its rhetoric on China as a strategic competitor, and there were two presidential visits to China. President Bush also warned Taiwan against any unilateral moves that would change the status quo in the Taiwan Straits.

China has a huge economic interest in cooperative relations with the United States, and it needs a calm international situation in order to focus on its domestic problems.

Despite all of these efforts at cooperation, clouds have recently returned. In recent weeks the United States has gone ahead with a resolution in Geneva condemning China's human rights record. The trade deficit, China's faulty World Trade Organization (WTO) implementation, and the outsourcing of jobs have become issues in the United States. Moreover, China's backtracking on democratic elections in Hong Kong and its heavy-handedness toward Taiwan are bound to harm relations.

In the near term, Ambassador Lord continued, U.S.-China relations are likely to be positive in spite of these problems. The Bush administration is preoccupied with Iraq, Afghanistan, and the upcoming election and does not want any problems with China. It also needs China's cooperation on the North Korean nuclear issue and on terrorism. Vice President Cheney will be heading to China in a few days. His trip symbolizes the U. S. desire to stabilize relations.

China, for its part, would like to maintain good relations with the United States. President Hu Jintao is still consolidating his power, China needs the United States to constrain Taiwan, and Beijing is looking toward hosting the Olympics in 2008.

Over the longer run, however, the Chinese will continue to be suspicious of U.S. containment, and the United States will be subject to swings in its views of China. As the Chinese military continues to grow, the China threat issue is likely to return. Moreover, the issues of nonproliferation and the situations in Tibet, Hong Kong, and Taiwan will continue to cause concern.

There are also perennial problems for the U.S.-China relationship. On Beijing's side, there will be concern about the growth of Taiwan's identity, which is in conflict with China's increasing nationalism. On the U.S. side, there will be continuing concerns about human rights and the need for political reform. Most important, as long as the two countries do not share values, there will be

a limit to the relationship no matter how many shared geopolitical interests there are.

The next few years, however, will provide an opportunity to consolidate U.S.-China relations. The United States will need to accept China's rightful role as a great power; there needs to be more strategic dialogue; and the United States needs to take a more multilateral approach in order to quiet China's concerns as well as the concerns of others about its excessive unilateralism.

China, for its part, needs to behave with restraint on the international scene generally and with respect to Taiwan in particular. Above all, China needs to pursue political reforms at home.

DISCUSSION

One participant observed that it would be a mistake to underestimate the significant political changes that have taken place in China during the last two decades. There has been a great loosening of controls. Although China is unlikely to become a democracy in the foreseeable future, students and intellectuals are now able to criticize government policy and to raise questions. Moreover, the elite have pushed forward with constitutional changes on human rights and private property. But there is a general resistance to democracy because of the fear of instability in such a huge and diverse society.

Another factor that needs to be taken into account, continued this participant, is the rise of nationalism in China. This was evidenced in the student reaction to the spy plane incident, and it is manifest in the attitude toward issues such as Taiwan.

The same participant noted that China is now governed by a fourth generation of leaders who are technocrats and pragmatists and not ideologues. They will focus on domestic issues because they know that only a substantial improvement in the domestic economy will provide political stability. But their fear of instability will limit their political reforms.

Finally, he noted that it would be wise for the United States to try to involve China in a multilateral approach to problems in Asia

and not limit this approach to the North Korean nuclear issue. At the same time, the United States must continue to maintain a favorable balance of power in Asia through its bilateral alliances with Japan and South Korea and stabilizing relations with countries such as Russia and India.

Several participants noted that there is a weak base of support in the United States for relations with China because of the general anti-China perspective in Congress. According to one participant, the U.S. Congress will not be satisfied until China becomes a multiparty democracy.

Another participant noted that the U.S. military perceives hesitation and limits on China's part in engaging in a true strategic dialogue with the United States. China has told the United States that if it wants to increase military-to-military cooperation, the United States will need to reduce its reconnaissance around China's borders. Another participant observed that the United States and China have different ideas about deterrence. China seeks to deter its adversaries by maintaining secrecy while the United States, the stronger power, seeks to deter through openness.

There was some discussion about China's "charm offensive" in Asia and how effective it has been. China is improving its relations with virtually all of its neighbors. But, as one observer noted, this charm offensive has not completely won over China's neighbors. The smaller states of Southeast Asia are concerned about China's military and economic power and want the United States to help maintain the balance of power in the region.

Finally there was some discussion about the need to have a broader strategic dialogue with China. One participant offered the view that such a dialogue is going on in the form of much more frequent telephone conversations between Secretary Powell and Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing on day-to-day issues such as North Korea and terror.

THE TAIWAN DILEMMA

Former American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) Chairman Richard

Bush, now head of the Northeast Asia project at Brookings, led off the discussion on the U.S.-China-Taiwan triangle. Some American observers, he said, have characterized China-Taiwan relations after the reelection of independence-minded President Chen Shui-bian as a “perfect storm” that could lead to a confrontation. A growing Taiwan national identity and China’s quest for unification (a product of its own sense of nationalism) have created the potential for a collision. The United States is hoping to stop the train wreck because it fears that Taiwan can draw us into an unwanted war and that China will overreact to political developments on Taiwan.

Probing the causes of the recent increase in tensions between China and Taiwan, Bush said that the first factor has to do with political dynamics on Taiwan. Soon after his first election in March 2000, President Chen moved to the middle of the road and worked closely with the United States. But as he approached the prospect of reelection in March 2004, Chen moved closer to his “fundamentalist” base in the Democratic Progressive party (DPP) and came up with the slogan of one country on either side of the Taiwan Strait, a formula that raised alarm bells in Beijing. More recently he has advocated writing a new constitution and passing it via a nationwide referendum.

A second cause of recent tension has been China’s heavy-handed policy. China did not respond to Chen’s overtures after he was inaugurated in 2000 and instead sought to isolate him by playing “united front” tactics — courting his opposition but refusing to have any dialogue with him or his ruling party.

The question now is whether newly reelected President Chen will move back to the center and try to repair relations with the United States or will he move toward independence? China seems to believe that Chen is determined to move toward independence and, moreover, that he has a timetable in the form of his announced plan to have a revised constitution by 2006 and a referendum on it in 2008.

The problem is very hard to solve because China does not trust Chen and Beijing will not back down on its precondition for dialogue — that Chen accept the one-China formula that he rejects.

There are several core issues involved in this conflict. The first is the sovereignty issue. China continues to press its one-country, two-systems formula, which means that Taiwan is a part of China. Chen and his DPP insist, on the other hand, that Taiwan is already an independent, sovereign state, and they reject the one-country, two-systems idea. In sum, Taiwan wants China to acknowledge Taiwan's sovereignty, and China refuses to do that. Some kind of confederation may be the ultimate solution, but at the moment China does not accept such an idea.

The second core issue has to do with China's growing military power and Taiwan's dependence — some would say overdependence — on the United States. As China's military power grows and Taiwan buys more weapons from the United States, a classic security dilemma is emerging. China would need to offer Taiwan a very good deal to get Taiwan to give up its U.S. security guarantee.

Politics is another core issue. A Taiwan identity is growing in Taiwan, in part as a reaction against Kuomintang repression and in part as a reaction against China's heavy-handedness. On the Chinese side, nationalism is growing too.

Finally, both sides seek to leverage the United States in order to get it to tilt toward its side of the conflict, and this breeds distrust.

The problem for the United States is how to manage this conflict. The United States works hard to urge restraint on both sides and to reassure both Beijing and Taipei. It hopes that President Chen will deliver a moderate inaugural speech on May 20 and that China will respond positively to that speech. At the same time, the United States is reassuring China that it adheres to the U.S. one-China policy.

Although a train wreck is possible, it is not inevitable. President Chen does not have a free hand to put through a new constitution via a referendum. The current referendum law does not allow this and would have to be changed. But it is unlikely that Chen will have a strong enough political position to do this unless he wins control of the Legislative Yuan in December.

Also, Chen's political opposition, the pan Blue, will probably try to stop him from moving too boldly toward independence.

If President Chen does move toward a new constitution, as is likely, one problem may well be that the United States and China will have divergent views on this process. China will worry about any new constitution, whereas the United States will look at the content of the new constitution. The United States will want to know whether the new constitution focuses on a change in domestic political institutions in Taiwan or seeks to cut the cord with Beijing. The U.S. goals will be to shape Taiwan's revision of the constitution in such a way that it will be narrowed to a reform of domestic political institutions and to shape China's perceptions of this process. President Chen will then have to decide whether he wants to work with Washington to help it achieve its goals.

DISCUSSION

One participant concluded that a train wreck is not inevitable and that the United States can manage things. He does worry, however, about U.S. arms sales to Taiwan. He stated that this is a problem that U.S. policymakers do not talk about when they make policy on China-Taiwan relations because somehow it seems to be outside the "policy process." The same participant also worries that the Department of Defense wants to reintegrate Taiwan into the U.S. defense posture and that this too is outside the "policy process." Moreover, he continued, there is a powerful drive in the private sector to sell weapons to Taiwan, even those weapons that the Taiwanese themselves are not so interested in. For example, senior military leaders in Taiwan think that the long-range radars that were recently sold to Taiwan meet U.S. but not Taiwanese needs. This participant concluded by saying that "hidden agendas" are not helpful in easing tensions in the Taiwan Strait and that China will become desperate if its leaders come to the conclusion that we cannot manage the Taiwan issue.

Another participant argued that there is no plan to revive joint military planning with Taiwan, but as China's military capabilities grow, the U.S. response might look like something it is not.

Yet another participant is worried about the unstable political situation that occurred in Taiwan right after the election. President Chen won the election by a razor thin majority, and the opposition has still not endorsed the result. The opposition demanded a recount and called for an independent commission to investigate the shooting incident. Unless President Chen mends fences with the political opposition soon, China will be tempted to play on these differences by appealing to the opposition and isolating Chen. This would be bad for any effort to improve Cross-Strait relations.

There was some discussion about whether the United States should involve itself more in trying to mediate between China and Taiwan. One participant said that this was not a good idea because both sides would seek to manipulate the United States. If they want to talk to each other, they don't need a third party. Others argued that the United States should continue to set the parameters of the conflict, for example, telling the Chinese that we are against the use of force and telling the Taiwanese that we do not support independence.

PROSPECTS FOR A NORTHEAST ASIAN SECURITY FORUM

Ambassador Stapleton Roy led off a discussion on the prospects for a Northeast Asia Security Forum. He began by observing that Northeast Asia is a part of the world in which four great powers are deeply involved — the United States, China, Japan, and Russia. Moreover, three of the four are armed with nuclear weapons. Also, there remain two divided states in the region — Korea and Taiwan. Consequently, there is a serious potential for conflict among the great powers.

Moreover, South Korea is rapidly becoming a significant power in its own right, and North Korea now poses a threat to the global nonproliferation regime.

Roy then reviewed the history of the region over the past 100 years and pointed out the frequency of war — the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, which began the separation of Taiwan from China; the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905; the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910; the Japanese and U.S. intervention in the

Russian Civil War right after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917; the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and of China in 1937; the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941; the Soviet attack on Japan in 1945; and the Korean War of 1950.

Therefore, continued Roy, one distinguishing characteristic of the region is the frequency of conflict and the direct involvement of the major powers in those conflicts. In this light, he said, Northeast Asia is the most dangerous region in the world. The Middle East involves only secondary powers. In Northeast Asia there are big powers with issues between them that have spanned the centuries.

Since the end of the Korean War in 1953, conflict has been avoided in Northeast Asia. With the end of the cold war stemming from the collapse of the Soviet Union, relations between the powers have improved. All the major powers now have relatively good relations with one another and with the smaller powers. For example, South Korea has normalized relations with both China and Russia. Moreover, Russia is no longer seen as a threat. South Korea is now seeking a rapprochement with North Korea, and North Korea is beginning to experiment with economic reforms.

All of this raises the question of whether it is desirable to seek a mechanism to stabilize the security situation in Northeast Asia and to help prevent a return of great power rivalry. In the past many wars started as a result of Japan's rising power. Now China's power is on the rise. Moreover, China and Japan have a natural rivalry, and there are many tensions beneath the surface. China and Japan are competing for Russian energy. Consequently, an argument can be made for developing a mechanism to stabilize Northeast Asia.

Before rushing ahead, however, prudence suggests scrutiny and skepticism. There are a number of questions. First, what kind of mechanism should be developed? Should it be narrowly concerned with security issues, or should it cover broader economic and cultural issues? Should such a mechanism be compatible with existing U.S. bilateral alliances with Japan and South Korea? Would such a mechanism enhance the security of the region even if the United States retains its bilateral alliances? Or would a multilateral arrangement necessarily weaken U.S. bilateral alliances? Is such a

multilateral arrangement compatible with current U.S. security approaches in the region? The United States might consider such a multilateral arrangement as a constraint on its forward deployed forces.

On the other hand, there is the question of whether we can just drift along without making any changes in the region's security architecture even though the region is changing very rapidly. China is becoming very successful in using its "soft" power. Some South Koreans now think that the United States is a bigger threat than North Korea. Economic relations among the Northeast Asian powers are growing very rapidly, and some of the multilateral arrangements do not include the United States, for example, the ASEAN-plus three forum. In sum, there is a new environment emerging in Northeast Asia, and the United States needs to adapt to it or it will be damaging for U.S. interests.

In conclusion, Roy said that the United States needs to liberate its mind. It should not reject a collective security mechanism if such a mechanism is helpful in inhibiting emerging new threats. Of course, the United States should not abandon its bilateral alliances and throw out the old security architecture. The United States will continue to require a forward presence in the region in order to engage early on issues that affect its interests.

DISCUSSION

One participant said that the Clinton administration had come to conclusions similar to the speaker's. It wanted to explore a multilateral security forum in Northeast Asia while maintaining its bilateral alliances and forward presence. It is not a question of either/or. This participant, as well as others, said that a Northeast Asia security forum might emerge out of the current Six Party Talks involving North Korea if those talks turned out to be successful. The same participant said that the Clinton administration was acutely aware of the pressures in East Asia to develop regional institutions that excluded the United States and sought to counter those pressures. For example, in order to counter Malaysian Prime Minister Mahatir's call for an East Asian Economic Caucus with-

out the United States, the Clinton administration created the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1994. ARF, however, is too big and has not lived up to its promise.

Another participant said that he doubted that there could be any multilateral military cooperation in the region in the absence of a common threat. This is why SEATO failed.

Yet another participant said that a multilateral economic regime would make sense because of growing economic relations among the powers in the region. Also, he thinks that the Six Party Talks may eventually evolve in the direction of a security order for specific objectives, for example, to prevent the spread of nuclear proliferation in Northeast Asia.

THE NORTH KOREAN NUCLEAR ISSUE

Professor Robert Scalapino introduced the discussion on the North Korean nuclear issue. Rather than being a revolutionary state, North Korea has manifested the attributes of a very traditional society. Until recently it sought to practice isolation reminiscent of the Hermit Kingdom, as Korea was known in history. Further, it has had an absolute monarchy, with dynastic succession now in evidence. Thus the challenge is how to bring this traditional society into the modern world.

On the positive side, it is clear that the North Korean leadership has decided that economic changes are imperative. Until the early 1990s, North Korea depended heavily on aid from the Soviet Union. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the onset of adverse weather conditions, drastic economic decline occurred, beginning in 1995. Famine and disease took a huge number of lives. After 1999 a modest improvement occurred, but the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) is still heavily dependent on external aid for food and energy supplies, and China is the chief provider.

In June 2002, North Korea began to undertake economic reform timidly. Wages and prices were raised as much as fifty times to match black-market rates and place a great premium on productivity. Lagging production, however, led to inflation. Nevertheless, the

open market was expanded, and efforts were undertaken to stimulate agricultural production. Energy shortages, however, continued to hamper industrial productivity.

Meanwhile, economic relations with South Korea have grown. The North has encouraged Southern tourism to Mount Kumgang and, more recently, to other points. Further, there has been an effort to induce Southern investment in the Kaesong special economic zone, on the Republic of Korea (ROK) border. Recent political instability in the South has slowed progress, but economic talks have resumed after having been canceled.

On a broader front, the North Korean leaders have shown little flexibility as yet. The North has demanded a bilateral non-aggression treaty with the United States. In response, a multilateral agreement on the non-use of force has been offered, but as yet this has been rejected by the North. Similarly, Pyongyang has insisted on “simultaneous” action by the United States and others in response to the North’s moves toward dismantling its nuclear program. The North’s neighbors have proposed a three-stage process calling for reciprocal moves by others in response to the North’s progressive actions. Stage one would involve a declaration of freezing the nuclear program; some increase in economic aid would ensue. Stage two would be the verifiable freeze and dismantlement of all phases of the nuclear program. The North would rejoin the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and allow inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to undertake thorough inspections. It would be accompanied by more extensive economic and political actions by all of the North’s neighbors, including a nonaggression agreement. Stage three would involve the fully verifiable end of the North’s nuclear program, accompanied by political recognition by the United States and others as well as more extensive assistance with respect to energy and food.

As yet this proposal has not been accepted by the North; nor has it indicated flexibility in other respects, although during Kim Jong-il’s recent trip to China, he reportedly said that the North would be patient and willing to continue to engage in negotiations on the key issues.

At present there is some uncertainty about the degree of unity that exists in the North with respect to its basic strategy toward the United States and others. There is no evidence, however, that serious fissures exist or that collapse is likely. The ties between Kim Jong-il and the military seem strong, and there is a “military-first” policy in effect. There have been no high-level defections in the past several years. Almost all defections at lower levels are due to economic reasons.

China has been the North’s sole ally in recent years. Its food and energy aid are of indispensable importance. Privately the Chinese are unhappy with the fact that the North has lagged in undertaking economic reforms and with the bizarre political system that exists. At the same time, however, China does not want a Northern collapse. Nor does it want a conflict to ensue. Both events would be strongly adverse to China’s national interests. As a buffer state, the North has signal advantages to Beijing.

South Korea also wishes to avoid war or collapse. The costs of absorbing more than 22 million people who have known only an antiquated authoritarianism would be huge, both in economic and political terms. The South would prefer an evolutionary process whereby the North can be modernized gradually and its systems — economic and political — made more compatible with those of the South over time.

Meanwhile, Russia is seeking to re-enter the political scene in East Asia. President Vladimir Putin has encouraged visits and an improvement in Russia-North Korea relations while improving relations with the South. Russia has actively participated in the Six Party Talks. But as long as its economy is in disrepair, especially in the Russian Far East, Moscow’s involvement is likely to be modest, at least in the near future. Its gas and oil resources, however, will ultimately play an important role in the entire Northeast Asian region.

Japan’s role is currently complicated by the abductee issue. After the North admitted that it kidnapped some 13 Japanese citizens in earlier times, it allowed the five survivors to visit Japan. When they

asked for and received asylum in Japan, however, the North refused to permit their families to join them. This issue remains unresolved and has caused Japan-DPRK relations to be minimal.

In the United States opinion has been divided over whether the North is irrevocably committed to being a nuclear state or whether the nuclear issue is a bargaining chip to be played at the negotiation table. In any case, it seems likely that a genuine fear of the United States ensued after President Bush defined North Korea as one of the “axis of evil” and the United States invaded Iraq. After the latter event, Kim Jong-il disappeared from view for more than fifty days, raising questions about his attitude and those of other members of the elite. Some Americans believe that although the North will continue to participate in discussions, it will await the results of the U.S. elections in November, hoping for a more flexible regime, before making any decisive modification in its position.

In any case, it is imperative that a multilateral approach to the issue of North Korea be pursued and that cooperation between China and the United States be deemed especially crucial. Washington must also work with its allies in Seoul and Tokyo. Recent relations between South Korea and the United States have been delicate. Although President Roh backed the alliance and even supported sending a small contingent of ROK troops to Iraq, divisions between the Blue House and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs resulted in the dismissal of the foreign minister, reportedly on charges that he was too “pro-American.” The subsequent political ferment over impeachment, not yet resolved, has added to the difficulties. Nonetheless, both the United States and South Korea are likely to resolve or live with differences and maintain the alliance in this troubled, uncertain period. It is imperative that negotiations with the North, via both the Six Party Talks and sideline work groups, be continued and that the United States demonstrate flexibility.

DISCUSSION

One participant observed that there is a great deal of skepticism in China about the extent of the North Korean nuclear program.

Also, China's goal in North Korea is regime reform, not collapse. North Korea needs to lower its military spending and move away from its military-first program but this would require Kim Jong-il to alter his relations with the military.

Another participant observed that there has been some progress in the Six Party Talks. The other five parties are coming closer to U.S. views.

One participant argued that it is unrealistic to expect China to do more than it has already done. China should be given credit for initiating and hosting the Six Party Talks. Moreover, there are real limits to Chinese influence on North Korea.

Another participant noted that the United States needs to be more flexible within the Six Party framework.

CONCLUSION

A conference presenter briefly summarized the day's discussions. Overall, the relations among the major powers in the region are, on balance, favorable. But there are a number of issues among the major powers that could lead to tension and thus require attention.

The specific security issues in Northeast Asia mainly revolve around North Korea and Taiwan. Both are complex issues. No immediate solution is likely in either case. Vis-à-vis Taiwan, we need to live with the status quo and to try to bolster it. In the case of North Korea, we want change — the peaceful dismantling of North Korea's nuclear program. Both issues will require careful management.

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