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Important Shifts Coming in Asian Security

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In New England, where I grew up, late August is the month when even on the beach in the heat of the day, one will occasionally feel a brief, cool breeze, presaging, as it were, the autumn to come. One does not feel those in late July, when it is really summer, but they are regular reminders of how seasons change as Labor Day approaches.

In a similar fashion, I have sensed in foreign relations this summer what I might call the occasional breeze from Asia that feels different from what I have been accustomed to for most of my career, which began in the late 1970s. No wind, no obvious change, just the little hint of something in the air that might presage a change of seasons in international politics as well.

The United States, Japan, and Taiwan are in the midst of this process, which will be the topic of my remarks this evening. I will look specifically at three new developments that the breeze seems to carry: namely, first, a new sense of the international importance and permanence of Taiwan; second, a growing, genuine concern about the spread of ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons in Asia, and third, a renewed understanding of just how important Japan is in all of this, and how difficult are the decisions she must now face.

But let me first say how deeply honored I feel to have been invited to give this talk. Allow me also to acknowledge our friends, first from Taiwan. I could say much about your country and its recent achievements, but let one item suffice. I noticed the other day in the Chinese paper that Huadong Normal University in Shanghai had rated all the institutions of

Observers are watching three important shifts in Asian security.

- First, Taiwan is again being recognized as of critical importance to the security structure of East Asia, even though that status is not officially admitted. One significant factor is the recent change in Hong Kong and the consequent discrediting of the "One Country, Two Systems" model.
- Second is China's military buildup. In the next few years China will be rolling out a whole new series of nuclear and missile systems, of high quality and reliability, and perhaps in larger numbers than most experts are predicting. Adding to the regional tensions, North Korea will maintain her nuclear capability.
- Third is a change in Japan. The Japanese people and political class are beginning to grasp the fact that they face a challenge to their national security, the tools for dealing with which they currently lack. As an advanced democracy, like Britain, Japan could (and should) become an equal ally of the United States. China realizes this and has adopted a new tone of politeness toward Tokyo.

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higher learning in Taiwan and China—and guess who came out as number one? National Taiwan University. Well deserved!

I would also like to acknowledge our friends from Japan. No relationship in the world is more important than that between Tokyo and Washington. Among the greatest contributors to strengthening this relationship has been Ambassador Hisahiko Okazaki, whom I have been privileged to know for many years, and who, with his institute, his colleagues, his writings and influence, and the many young people for whom he is mentor, is a key figure in keeping this all-important relationship on track.

Let me also acknowledge my American colleagues. I am proud to be associated with such a distinguished group. And may I thank the Heritage Foundation for its wisdom in choosing to sponsor this meeting, not to mention the vast amount of hard work associated with preparing it.

But enough of what are genuinely heartfelt thanks. Let me return to that breeze. What is producing it? It has three sources, I think.

Growing Acceptance of Taiwan

The first source is what I will call the growing acceptance of Taiwan as a permanent member of the international community. Of course we don't see this reflected yet in official usage. Our as-it-were ambassador in Taipei presides over an establishment far smaller than an American embassy and far less grand so far as protocol is concerned, a source of irritation, I hear, to the current incumbent. This is intentional, however, for the whole arrangement was planned to be temporary.

As cannot be stressed enough, when the current U.S. relationship with China was established more than twenty years ago at the end of the 1970s, the almost universal assumption was that by breaking relations and ending the defense treaty we were administering a fatal blow to Taipei that, after a decent interval, would lead ineluctably to a deal, most likely over the heads of the people of Taiwan, bringing the island into some sort of subordinate relationship with Beijing. The State Department in fact made no plans for any other contingency. And if you doubt what I say—that derecognition was intended to be fatal—I'd invite you to listen to

former Ambassador Chas Freeman's comments in a debate, with me, at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York on April 19, 2000, which is available on the Internet.

Why did things not turn out as so many in Washington and Beijing expected, and why do I now speak of "growing acceptance of Taiwan"? One reason is, of course, Taiwan's democratization. Another is the continuing effort of Taiwan's admirers in the Congress and elsewhere, which in 1979 and the years following has managed to deliver just enough and force just enough support for Taiwan to avoid real danger, much to the frustration of those who were waiting for the fruit to drop.

In international affairs, however, as Hans Morgenthau points out, virtue gets you very little. Taiwan's advances in governance and human rights have in fact gained her little traction in the international community. So how to explain the recent shift in attitudes towards the state?

Taiwan is again being recognized as of critical importance to the security structure of East Asia. That status is not officially admitted, and Taiwan representatives are rare at international forums. But if you were to rate diplomatic postings realistically, according to their actual importance to security, I think Taipei would be possibly in the top five, certainly in the top ten, for the United States (and in the top three or four for Japan).

But the largest factor—what strategists call "the decisive weight"—has appeared only in the last two months. This is the change in Hong Kong and the consequent discrediting of the "One Country, Two Systems" model which, until recently, many people, even in Taiwan, promoted as the solution to the political disagreement across the Strait. The half a million people who turned out on July 1 to demand democracy put an end to that. Beijing now faces a challenge, which as I have written, is either/or. Either they somehow crush Hong Kong's democratic aspirations, or they grant them. Neither option is appealing to Beijing.

But in the meantime, widely shared and utterly unrealistic ideas about how the two states might reconcile are finished. The world now has to consider about where, realistically, we move next.

China's Military Buildup

Now let me return to that breeze. The second source is something far less cheery: namely, the growing realization in the region and in Washington that China's formidable program of military modernization and improvement is real, and is bringing real consequences.

China exploded her first nuclear bomb in 1964 and launched her first earth satellite in 1970, thus demonstrating many decades ago that she possessed the technical ability to become a major nuclear power. But for a variety of reasons, the actual push to do so, though having of course a very long lead time, became evident and received massive augmentation only in the period following the Tiananmen Massacre of 1989, probably a product of the increasing need of the Party to keep the military happy.

As all of us here are aware, one of the most worrying manifestations of this new push has been the deployment of intermediate-range missiles to threaten Taiwan, and indeed the firing of several of them. The number of these missiles is growing. It is now estimated at about 400, which is to say one missile for every 55,000 residents of Taiwan. China also uses intermediate-range missiles to target U.S. bases in the region, in Okinawa in particular, and has also acquired ex-Soviet anti-ship missiles, against which we have no defense.

These together create a new situation. The U.S. forces which have maintained peace and balance in the area since the end of the Second World War are now vulnerable to destruction by missile attack. And attempts to resupply are likely to fail, given that the same missiles can assure area sea denial capability.

Clausewitz observed that in human affairs the Newtonian law of action and reaction applies, but with one important caveat. This is that since we are not dealing with, say, brass weights in a laboratory, but rather human minds, the reaction will be the product not of specific laws, and thus predictable, but rather of the strategic imagination, and thus unfathomable.

In 1998 that view was confirmed when India and Pakistan both detonated nuclear weapons and made it clear that they were joining the nuclear club. Pakistan is easy to explain. She is a small state

that fears India and sees nuclear weapons as the ultimate guarantee of security. But India? The explanation given in Washington at the time was reaction to Pakistan. But anyone who spoke, as I did, to Indian officials involved knew the truth. The Chinese nuclear buildup had sufficiently worried India, a country having no great power allies, that they had decided they needed a genuine deterrent.

Let me note in passing that the emergence of a nuclear-armed India is probably the greatest strategic setback China has encountered since 1949, when she failed to establish relations with the United States. Whether China could have been prevented is difficult to say, but certainly not helping Pakistan build bombs would have helped, not to mention building fewer bombs herself.

But oddly, neither the Chinese buildup nor even India's move to become a robust military power led to much serious action in the West. But now the nuclear danger is being forced on our attention by two small players, North Korea and Iran.

The Administration is striving manfully to stop these programs. I hope they can. But if I may, let me share my honest opinion. These programs will not be stopped. Right now, the word is that diplomacy and sanctions are going to stop them. I doubt this very much. I think that, whatever happens, North Korea is going to be a nuclear power, if only because the North Korean army will never give up its nuclear program and nobody in Pyongyang, including the Dear Leader himself, has the power order them to do so.

I believe the same even more strongly with respect to the Iranians, who are just as good at science and technology as the North Koreans, as well as infinitely more accomplished diplomats. Nor do I believe that any good military options exist in either case.

Some in Washington believe that China in fact holds the key to the North Korean program. But what exactly do we expect China to do? If they simply lay down the law to the North Koreans, they will be told where to go. So then what? Do we really expect that the Chinese would either bring down the North Korean economy and state or use military force against her? I find both inconceivable.

So far, the American approach to the emerging nuclear problem has stressed non-proliferation,

which simply has not worked. Strategists give the name “extended deterrence” to assurances given by country A to country B that country A will go to nuclear war and see itself destroyed in order to protect country B. If you are a country B and you don’t believe that, then you want to have your own nuclear weapons in case country A backs down at the critical moment. But is the promise of such an American “nuclear umbrella” credible today? I think not.

China already has the capability to hit perhaps twenty U.S. cities, which would take us all the way from New York (metropolitan area a little short of eight million) to Boston (about 500,000). By 2010 she will be able to hit perhaps sixty, which would get us all the way down to Newark, N.J. (population about 268,000). This threat will greatly constrain our decision making. It will make the idea of an American “nuclear umbrella” utterly implausible.

Now if countries do not believe someone else is going to protect them, they take steps to protect themselves. When they choose nuclear means to do so, that is called “proliferation.”

Among the countries that have already made that decision because they don’t really believe in American extended deterrence are three of our oldest and closest friends and allies: namely, Britain, France, and Israel—all of which insist on maintaining their own robust and independent nuclear forces.

Along with nonproliferation, our other response to the new situation has been the attempt to develop anti-missile systems. Indeed, ask how we are expecting two of our most important friends, Japan and Taiwan, to cope with the nuclear and missile threat I have described, and the answer is: deploy an effective missile defense system.

But there is no such thing as an effective missile defense system. For one thing, no matter how good a hypothetical system, some missiles will get through and do great damage. Second, any system is vulnerable to saturation.

Now don’t get me wrong. I strongly support missile defense, and for two reasons. The first is that if and when that technology is invented—and it has not been invented yet—I want the U.S. to be the country that does so. Second, having an ability to stop even some incoming missiles raises the size of strike that a state must launch if it is starting a war.

Politicians don’t like to do that. They love to hear how a handful of missiles will do the job, but get cold feet if they are told they will have to launch hundreds.

In the next few years China will be rolling out a whole new series of nuclear and missile systems, of high quality and reliability, and I would predict in larger numbers than most of our experts are predicting. North Korea will maintain her nuclear capability.

Washington is now seriously concerned, after years of signing presidential findings that blocked sanctions against China for helping Pakistan with her nuclear program. But my sense is that we have awakened too late.

The Importance of Japan

Which brings me to the third source of the new breeze I am feeling. This is a change in Japan. The Japanese team is far better qualified than I am to speak of this. But my sense, and I may be wrong, is that the Japanese people and political class are beginning to grasp the fact that they face a challenge to their national security, the tools for dealing with which they currently lack—both in hardware and in ideas.

The United States, moreover, is beginning to realize that it needs an equal partner in Asia, a country that in case of crisis would actually help and not dither. Japan is not that country yet—all one need consider is the host of restrictions about what she is allowed to do, not to mention the limits of what she is capable of doing, even in a crisis in which her own vital interests were deeply involved.

But are the Japanese, as we say, “potted plants”? Are they a country that will simply lie back and allow another country to dominate them? My sense is absolutely not. The Japanese are proud of their country and devoted to maintaining its absolute independence. By the same token, in modern times, the Japanese have understood (as the Chinese have not) the crucial importance of alliances to security, and have sought them out, sometimes wisely (as with England), sometimes less wisely (as with Germany and Italy). My sense is therefore that, as an advanced democracy, like Britain, Japan could (and should) become an equal ally of the United States. A century ago the British might have called them

“good in a tight spot.” I agree. China, I think, is very worried about these developments, as can be seen from a certain new tone of politeness toward Tokyo, detectable in some but not all of Beijing’s policies.

I expect these three factors—new understanding of Taiwan’s permanence and importance, a serious grasp of the implications of the arms race now underway in Asia, and changing sentiments in Japan—to lead to a rebalancing of the Asian security system.

Conclusion

Let me conclude these reflections with two observations. The first respects the implications of the series of policies hitherto adopted to deal with the problems I have outlined in the military field. Arms control has not worked, nor has negotiation, nor has nonproliferation. Missile defense may be useful against a mistaken launch or a handful of Scuds, but it is utterly inadequate to deal with the emerging threat.

What we have to think about is deterrence, not a word currently in vogue. Donald Kagan provides an excellent account of it, and its failure in ancient Greece, in his numerous books. Deterrence means frightening the other fellow with all the ghastly things you can do to him and that he cannot stop, to such an extent that he dare not attack. Deterrence is ugly and frightening, but during the Cold War it was the basis of peace. It prevented nuclear holocaust.

Does deterrence necessarily have to be nuclear? I am not sure. All that is required is that it be terrifying—enough to freeze the enemy in fear so that he does not move against you. The United States has developed a broad array of precision-guided munitions and other such weapons that are not nuclear, but which are nevertheless capable of inflicting, to a limited target, damage at least as great as a nuclear bomb could, without causing the deaths of millions of innocent civilians.

This is the one glimmer of hope I see here. It may be possible for us and our Asian allies to assemble a non-nuclear deterrent that is every bit as frightening as a nuclear one would be—yet which would not put large numbers of ordinary people at danger.

Of course, it is precisely the holocaust aspect of nuclear weapons that gives them much of their fearsomeness. Yet, would not an array, as it were, of poison or tranquilizer darts, able to paralyze an enemy, perhaps get us at least some of the same deterrent power?

My second observation is this. For many years we were locked in a nuclear standoff with the USSR. It was terrifyingly dangerous and several times we nearly went over the edge. Yet now that is history. And why? Not because of negotiations, track two dialogues, multilateral forums, strategic arms limitations treaties, summit talks, or any of the other diplomatic paraphernalia of the Cold War—though those were perhaps key to keeping the confrontation from quite literally exploding. No, what saved us was the fact that the Russian people surprised us all by realizing that Communism did not work, and that the attempt to impose Communism on themselves was harming their national interest. A remarkable generation of leaders—Gorbachev, Yeltsin, Yakovlev, and so forth—then did what had to be done and changed the regime.

The change in Russia was part of a massive and mostly successful wave of regime change that even flooded as a tide into China, but which there was beaten back. But I am not sure that the democracy movement was really crushed in 1989. Sensibly, the reformers put their heads down for a while. But the issue of political freedom is not going away: it is a leitmotif of the last hundred years of Chinese history, a repeating decimal. I believe change is coming in China and if that change is anything like the remarkable achievement we have seen in Russia, then real hope exists that the grimmer aspects of the scenario I have spun this evening will remain purely hypothetical. Let us hope so.

—Arthur Waldron, *Lauder Professor of International Relations at the University of Pennsylvania*, delivered keynote remarks at *The Heritage Foundation* on August 21, 2003, marking the opening of the “U.S.–Japan–Taiwan Trilateral Strategic Dialogue” sponsored by *The Heritage Foundation*, *Taiwan ThinkTank*, and the *Okazaki Institute (Tokyo)*.