

## Asia's Emerging Security Environment

A REPORT FOR ASIAN FORUM JAPAN

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**ASIA** *will almost certainly be the principal focus of American security strategists for the next several decades, for it is in Asia that the most profound challenges to defense and military planning will emerge. Five challenges, in particular, will be especially difficult:*

### ENERGY SECURITY

Asia is fast becoming the largest consumer of energy in the world; nearly all Asian nations, especially the largest economies (e.g., Japan, China, South Korea, Taiwan), are almost totally dependent on imports of energy; and the great majority of this energy will of necessity have to come from the same place—the Persian Gulf. This issue is about a lot more than sea lane protection, though this is certainly a concern. In a broader sense, the energy security challenge is about how the energy strate-

gies of the different energy-dependent states will converge, intersect, or collide, for example in the event that supplier states in the Persian Gulf descend into chaos.

### MANAGING RISING CHINA, OR CONTAINING FRAGILE CHINA

China's robust economic growth and, consequently, its growing regional and global ambitions are a new factor on the Asian strategic landscape. To date, China's long-term strategies are at best unclear. How will it deal with its neighbors, including Taiwan? Will it use its economic dominance to pursue regional goals that frighten other members of the Asian community? How do we think about a China that proves to be fragile rather than robust? What kind of security issues might arise if China's political coherence were threatened by disorder?

## PROLIFERATION OF WMD

In any scenario for Asia in 2025 or so, it is easy to imagine at least 5-6 new nuclear capable (real, partial or virtual) Asian states. In addition, off-the-shelf technology and the breakdown of non-proliferation regimes—which will be faster as the number of nuclear-capable actors grows—will make some non-state actors nuclear threats, too. If Japan were to become a nuclear weapons state, it could likely set off a chain reaction around Asia: Australia, South Korea (or unified Korea), Indonesia, Malaysia and, hence, Singapore, among others. Few strategists in Asia are thinking about how to understand this highly proliferated world in terms of the strategies the actors employ, the new meaning of nuclear weapons under these conditions, or the possibility of nuclear use.

## MARITIME SECURITY

Maritime Asia is likely to be a central battleground in the war on terror and against forces that seek to jeopardize Asian security across a wide arch from the southern Philippines to the Bay of Bengal, that is, along the “arch of crisis.” Piracy, terrorism, drugs, crime, arms dealing and other pathologies intersect mightily in this region. As prominent and strategically placed maritime nations that will be affected by these maladies, Japan and India, along with the United States, have key roles to play in combating them. Their contribution to the design and implementation of maritime security strategy is potentially significant.

## NEW SECURITY ARCHITECTURE FOR ASIA

One of the obvious problems for Asia will be the inability of existing multilateral organizations to promote security other than through arcane discussions of international law and pleas for every-

one to behave. ASEAN, APEC, SAARC, ARF and others are without real power. A new security compact will be required that a) provides some measure of military force; b) keeps the US in Asia and engages it; and c) reaches out to new players (e.g., India, Vietnam, perhaps Myanmar). This need will become more acute if the US-Japan relationship weakens for any reason or if US troops leave Korea. Either or both events will change the security landscape for most Asian players. Moreover, a new security architecture beyond a strong US-Japan alliance will be necessary to address security threats at a greater distance, especially in the “arch of crisis” running from the southern Philippines to the Bay of Bengal.

*To these security challenges, one can easily append many others, for example:*

- The disintegration of Asian states into economically unviable and politically chaotic autonomous regional entities with no strong political center and political and economic interests beyond their borders. Pakistan, Indonesia, and even Russia are possible candidates
- Different variants of Korean unification (i.e., hard or soft landings), with an increasingly outward orientation and playing a traditional spoiler’s role as a pathway to confrontation in NE Asia
- The return of Iran as a key player in Asia, with the potential to form alliances that contradict US interests or, conversely, as a potential US ally
- Accelerating demographic forces (e.g., growth, age distribution, mass urbanization) that make stable regimes and growing economies throughout much of the region problematic

- The persistence of Taiwan as either a beacon of democracy—an ideological alternative to China—or a representation of the failure of the US to stand by its commitments in the region
- The upsurge of Islamic militancy, anti-globalization ideologies, and ethno-nationalism throughout Asia
- Environmental security issues that transcend borders and could tax internal resources or produce conflict, and the greater likelihood of major environmental catastrophes from preferred types of development (e.g., coal-fired or nuclear power)

*For American, Indian and Japanese security planners, the imperative to understand the dynamic new Asian strategic landscape could not be higher, nor has cooperation in understanding it ever been more urgent. In the immediate future, we must find ways to explore a range of critical questions, preferably in concert:*

- What forces that are not yet clear might shape/drive strategies in Asia in the next 20-30 years? What visible trends seem likely to exert a significant influence? What key trends can be identified by looking *back* in time?
- Who are the critical actors likely to be?
- What kinds of scenarios for alternative religious futures can we imagine? What do the pathways leading to those futures look like, and are there signposts along those pathways to suggest that we are en route to one alternative future or another?
- What are some possible alternative futures that are sharply different from those indicated by

apparent trends? What might start the world down the path to these futures? What might the implications of these futures be?

- What critical uncertainties remain, that is processes, events or influences that, if resolved, might shift the direction or pace of forces in one direction or another?
- What kinds of strategies might actors design to compete in these alternative religious worlds? Where might these strategies intersect, converge or collide?
- Where can conflict occur in these worlds? Alternatively, can we imagine new kinds of alliances or relationships? What will be the objectives of these alliances?
- What “wildcards” might radically alter the character or trajectory of developments? ▼

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