



## A Road Map for Asian-Pacific Security

By Gary J. Schmitt

*This is the second of two Outlooks on the Obama administration's foreign policy approach to Asia. Neither the Clinton nor Bush administrations took full advantage of the growing impetus among the states of the Asia-Pacific region to work through multilateral forums. The Obama administration appears to be following the same pattern. Today a hodgepodge of institutions and forums exists in Asia, but none of them addresses the strategic needs of the region. The United States needs to find ways to maximize its influence through new regionwide forums and institutional arrangements. A two-tiered multilateral approach could benefit the nations in the region and the United States.*

There is a broad consensus that President Barack Obama's recent, first trip to Asia lacked any notable successes. The president left Japan with a major dispute over U.S. military bases there still unresolved; he attended the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit but was unable to announce any substantive new trade initiatives; he visited China and made little to no substantive progress on Iran, climate change, or trade and lost ground on human rights; and, in South Korea, the president essentially spun his wheels, leaving Seoul without providing any fresh ideas about how he will deal either with the problem of North Korea or the signed (but not ratified) free-trade agreement with South Korea. All in all, the president's trip to Asia was, as one policy expert noted, "high on optics . . . but low on policy substance. . . . The visit lacked any policy deliverables."<sup>1</sup>

If there is any positive note to be taken from the trip, it is that the administration has spent a considerable amount of time and attention visiting and engaging key countries of the region. The

problem is that engagement is not sufficient; it is a process, not a substitute for policy.

Indeed, the administration's only larger vision appears to be its policy of "strategic reassurance" with China—a policy designed to reassure Beijing that the United States has no intention of trying to forestall China's rise to great power status and, more broadly, that the administration is willing to accept China as something of an equal partner in addressing key global problems. The hope is that this will lessen prospects for tension and make it more likely that China's rise is in fact peaceful.<sup>2</sup> But the problem with this approach is that it is premature. China might become a "responsible stakeholder," but it is not one yet. In the meantime, its growing military and economic power worries our friends and allies in the region. Nor does this Sino-centric emphasis take account of the other significant trends in the region, such as India's rise, the significant expansion of democratic governance in Asia, and Asian nations' desires to create more effective multilateral structures.

In developing forums and institutional arrangements with Asian nations, America should take better account of these other important but largely ignored trends. What follows is a new road map for America's longer-term, strategic approach to the region.

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## The New Realities of Asia

More people live under democratic rule in Asia than in any other place on the globe. Asia is also home to the two fastest-rising powers in the world, China and India. Yet neither America's system of alliances nor the region's multilateral organizations sufficiently accounts for these new realities.

In 1980, of the major countries in East Asia, South Asia, and the Asia-Pacific region, only five—Japan, India, Sri Lanka, New Zealand, and Australia—could be described as democratic and free. The total population of those five states was just shy of nine 900 million. Today one can add to that list Indonesia, South Korea, Mongolia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, Nepal, East Timor, Malaysia, and Taiwan, with almost 2 billion people living under democratic (if not always perfect) rule.

China and India are returning to the prominence they once held in global economic affairs. At the beginning of the 1700s, China, Europe, and India each accounted for approximately 25 percent of the world's economic output. By the 1900s, China's and India's shares of the world economy had dropped to less than 10 percent each. But with market reforms in place, both economies have taken off; China's gross domestic product (GDP) may equal that of the United States sometime in this century's third decade, and India could reach that marker a few years later. Equally impressive is their respective growth and investment in high-end technologies and expanding military capabilities. China's declared defense budget has seen double-digit increases for nearly two decades, approaching 18 percent growth over the past two years. Similarly, India's military expenditures have more than quintupled since the early 1990s. Both China and India are rising, and rising fast. As the National Intelligence Council has noted, "The likely emergence of China and India as new major global players—similar to the rise of Germany in the 19th century and the United States in the early 20th century—will transform the geopolitical landscape, with the impacts potentially as dramatic as those of the previous two centuries."<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, there has been a proliferation of multilateral institutions and forums in the region—the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Plus Three (APT), the East Asia Summit (EAS), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), APEC, and the so-called six-party talks. Yet, the United States has played an active role in only

the last two, with the former limited to economic affairs and the latter an ad hoc arrangement among northeast Asian powers whose purpose is to address the North Korean nuclear problem.<sup>4</sup> Apart from an occasional statement by Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush on their vision for a "fellowship" of Asian democracies, on the whole the United States has been generally reluctant to move beyond its system of bilateral treaty relations or reexamine what multilateral organizations might best suit the changed Asian strategic environment.<sup>5</sup>

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This is not to say the United States has been entirely passive in the face of change. The Bush administration set about strengthening ties with key allies, most notably Japan and Australia. This meant working more closely with Tokyo and Canberra on a bilateral level, while also conducting joint ministerial meetings among the three capitals and trying to create a new consultative relationship with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) for our Asia-Pacific allies. Washington also began, in the face of the continued expansion of and improvement in Chinese military capabilities, to increase its own air and sea forces in the region and to increase military-to-military ties with a number of states in the region. As Daniel Twining, a former State Department official, has pointed out, the United States undertook a subtle effort to improve strategic ties with India, Indonesia, and Vietnam with the goal of "facilitating the ascent of friendly Asian centers of power that will both constrain any Chinese bid for hegemony and allow the United States to retain its position as Asia's decisive strategic actor."<sup>6</sup> So, while it is true that the Bush team did not sit idly by in the face of Asia's strategic evolution, it is also true that America was still largely relying on its Cold War "hub-and-spoke" system of bilateral security ties with Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand, and whatever innovative steps the last administration took, the relationships remained basically consultative, lacking the establishment of formal ties and institutions that might help

states withstand changes in governments and changes in political and international winds. In short, the Clinton and Bush administrations' approach to allies in the region was an opportunity lost.

### Asia's Muddled Multilateralism

The problem in the Asia-Pacific region of course is not that there are no other institutions or forums outside of those involving America's bilateral ties to its allies. The problem is that none seem to address the strategic needs of the region adequately.

The oldest and most important multilateral forum in Asia is ASEAN. Now made up of ten members (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar/Burma, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam), ASEAN celebrated its fortieth anniversary in 2007. The forum was established at a time of considerable tension in the region as a result of the not-so-cold war in Indochina and ongoing territorial disputes among a number of states. The guiding ASEAN principle was noninterference in the domestic affairs of other states. This principle was in the interest of the then-member governments, each of which was, at the time, ruled by autocrats of one form or another. ASEAN decision making was, in turn, to be by unanimity. Although these principles helped stabilize the region and enabled economic progress, the question is whether they are adequate today.

Some think not. In the run-up to the 2007 ASEAN annual summit, there was a move afoot to create an "ASEAN Charter" that would bind members to liberal democratic principles and governance and modify ASEAN's consensual decision-making processes. The proposed charter would have had the salutary effect of allowing newer democracies, such as Indonesia, to embrace a regional norm that would further solidify their own rule. At the same time, the charter's drafters recognized that new initiatives to harmonize economic and security policies across the region were unlikely to be implemented by governments with radically different philosophies. In brief, the goal of the new charter was to set in place something along the lines of the 1957 Treaty of Rome, the founding document of what eventually became the European Union (EU). What the ASEAN members ultimately adopted at the summit fell well short of that goal—reaffirming the principles of "non-interference" and unanimity among member states. The members provided no practical mechanism allowing ASEAN to take a tough stance on such

issues as human-rights violations or coups in member states.<sup>7</sup>

The fact that ASEAN's charter ended up where it did is not surprising. When the Treaty of Rome was signed, all the signatory states were democracies, and their security was grounded by membership in a U.S.-led NATO. ASEAN still reflects a mix of regimes (and will likely continue to do so for some time) and sees itself as involved in a very careful balancing act between an increasingly powerful China that resides in its backyard and the superpowerful but distant—and sometimes distracted—United States.

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ASEAN's goal with respect to China has been to avoid being locked into some sort of soft tributary relationship by creating a web of economic, cultural, and defense ties with Beijing. But, again, the question is, will such a strategy work over the long term? In the early 1990s, China's GDP was roughly equal to that of all member states of ASEAN combined; today, China's GDP is more than twice that of ASEAN. Similarly, in the early 1990s, China's military was backward and poorly equipped, with only minimal power projection capabilities; today, after nearly two decades of reform and new procurement, China's military is beginning to look like that of a great power. And while "ASEAN can be expected to work harder at shoring itself up as an effective regional organization in order to better manage increasing interdependence with China,"<sup>8</sup> the issue is whether it has the institutional wherewithal or resources to do so adequately.

In signing on to various nonbinding agreements with ASEAN, China has committed to very little. For the time being, the ASEAN Regional Forum's "preferred strategy of managing problems rather than solving them . . . serves China's rather than ASEAN's long-term strategic interest."<sup>9</sup> Moreover, if China's power grows as expected, the so-called ASEAN way of consensus may actually cause the region to fall into the subordinate relationship it would like to avoid. Tactically, with a consensus-first approach to addressing issues, ASEAN gives China a virtual veto over new initiatives

within the region by having friendly ASEAN members put a halt to anything with which Beijing disagrees.

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Whatever the current and prospective problems with ASEAN may be, at least Southeast Asia has an organization through which the member countries can communicate with each other on a regular and sustained basis. The same is not true for Northeast Asia: that region does not have a permanent institutional arrangement.

The six-party talks, which include the United States, Japan, South Korea, Russia, China, and North Korea, are specifically tasked with addressing North Korea’s nuclear weapons program. Ever since the advent of the talks in fall 2003, there has been a steady drum-beat among area specialists for turning this forum into a more enduring structure, perhaps along the lines of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).<sup>10</sup> Certainly, such a forum would have plenty of issues to address: a possible North Korean regime collapse, Korean unification, refugee flows, transparency in military affairs, and energy supplies are just a few.

Whatever the potential merits of perpetuating the six-party talks (or a modified five-party version that would exclude North Korea), the missing element right now is an agreed-upon set of principles that would guide any such organization. It is useful to remember that the OSCE’s predecessor, the Commission on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), was established on the basis of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975 and included a lengthy list of declarations and texts covering issues as disparate as security, economics, science, the environment, and human rights.<sup>11</sup> Complicating the comparison to the OSCE further, however, is the fact that, whatever the magnitude of a potential war between the West and the Soviet empire at the time, Europe itself was relatively stable, divided between two great military blocs. The Helsinki accords were largely meant to codify that situation, not establish a problem-solving institution.<sup>12</sup>

This does not mean such a forum would be without utility, but it is limited—as both the Bush and Obama administrations have learned in addressing the North

Korean nuclear issue. Negotiations over the most difficult issues will undoubtedly involve an ever-shifting alignment of partners as each state enters the discussion with its own set of priorities. With no overarching and agreed-upon strategic paradigm in place, the forum will remain an ad hoc diplomatic forum of the willing.<sup>13</sup>

China’s willingness to participate in multilateral forums is a significant change from its Maoist days, when Beijing’s diplomacy was far more distrustful of formal entanglements. Nevertheless, it would be an exaggeration to say China’s recent change signals a profound transformation of its strategic perspective. Beijing picks and chooses its multilateral forums with care. In the case of a prospective Northeast Asian security forum, built upon the six-party talks, for example, China is presumably interested because it would potentially elevate its regional stature and make the U.S.-Japan alliance less central.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Beijing was initially interested in the idea of the EAS (the pan-Asian forum held annually since 2005 by the leaders of sixteen countries)<sup>15</sup> but became far less so when Japan, Indonesia, and Singapore insisted that the democracies of India, Australia, and New Zealand be invited as well. Instead, China’s diplomats give far more attention to those forums where China’s own relative weight is significant and the U.S. role is less prominent or nonexistent, as is the case with APT and the SCO.<sup>16</sup>

All of this suggests that Chinese multilateralism is highly instrumental. In short, it is not driven by some new commitment to liberal internationalism but by old-fashioned realpolitik and China’s desire to stem interference in its own domestic rule.<sup>17</sup> This is not to say that Beijing cannot be convinced to be more cooperative and that institutions might not help in that regard, but it does suggest that cooperation with China will be on terms that are more narrowly conceived than many might hope.

Nor does this suggest that Washington’s own policy in the region has always shown a deep commitment to liberal internationalism. As mentioned above, for the most part, the United States has stuck with a security architecture that revolves around its treaty-defined, hard-security commitments to Japan, South Korea, and Australia, as well as its less-defined bilateral commitments to the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, and Taiwan. The United States has also boosted its ties to Indonesia, Vietnam, Pakistan, and India in recent years. A bilateral and unilateral approach to the region, of course, provides Washington “with greater autonomy than a multilateral approach” and reflects the long-standing view that the region’s history and diversity

preclude any serious attempts at effective multilateralism.<sup>18</sup> Which is to say, Asia is no Europe.

As a result, recent administrations, including both the Clinton and George W. Bush White Houses, have stood largely on the sidelines when it comes to the region's own efforts to establish multilateral bodies. They neither fought the trend nor made much of an effort to support it. The Obama administration has seemingly broken with this policy to some extent by deciding this past summer to sign ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC).<sup>19</sup> Whether this indicates a true reordering of Washington's willingness to support new, effective multilateral structures is an open question, especially since the treaty itself commits the United States to the principle of noninterference in the internal affairs of other signatories and, as such, actually reaffirms the present state of Asian multilateralism.

As for the region's other major powers—Japan, Australia, South Korea, and India—their relationships with the United States are more uncertain now than perhaps at any time in recent memory. New governments in Canberra and Tokyo have raised doubts about the future centrality of security ties with Washington, with Australia wondering about America's staying power and Japan's new government publicly suggesting a regional order that does not include the United States.<sup>20</sup> And both Australia and Japan are also working through a vastly more complex relationship with China and neighboring countries. There is even more ambiguity about South Korea's future security vision: ties with China have grown significantly, but so have concerns about China's potential dominance. And an increased sense of Korean nationalism is an uneasy fit with a Japan that wants to become a "normal" player on the regional and world stage. Finally, there is India, a rising power in its own right. It believes it is already in a strategic competition with China and, hence, is looking to expand multilateral and bilateral ties in the region, albeit reluctantly, given its own history of diplomatic self-reliance. Both the Clinton and Bush administrations saw India as a potential new partner in their hedging strategies against China, but candidate Obama seemed far less interested in deepening strategic ties.<sup>21</sup> And while Obama's first state dinner was held in honor of Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh's visit to the United States, it came on the heels of a visit to Asia in which Obama failed to mention India's role in his vision of Asian stability and, in a joint statement with the Chinese leader Hu Jintao, seemed to endorse a Chinese oversight role for South Asia, while ignoring India altogether.<sup>22</sup> Hence, it is far from clear at this point what the new administration's plans will be for

strengthening ties with India. Nor is India's own position without ambivalence; as Indian commentator and strategist C. Raja Mohan points out, "India's recent attitudes toward the United States have swung between expectations of a natural alliance between two democracies to fears of subordination in a potential partnership with the world's sole superpower."<sup>23</sup>

Given the diversity of strategic approaches to alliances and multilateralism by the two major powers in the region (China and the United States); given the uncertainties of some of the other major powers (Japan, South Korea, and India) about exactly what roles they will play regionally; and, finally, given the diversity of regime types among the remaining powers, it is no surprise that the region has been described as having a "fractured security structure"<sup>24</sup> and a more muddled than coherent and viable framework for the future.

## What Is Next?

For all the confusion when it comes to understanding the current state of multilateral and bilateral relations within the Asia-Pacific theater, there are three undeniable trends that must be addressed if any new architecture for the region is to have a chance of succeeding. The first is Asia's own desire to create an Asian community of some sort. The past decade has seen various fits and starts on this matter, reflecting both the difficulties of creating such a community and the ever-present pressure to move forward given the growing interdependence and interlocking policy agendas among the states in the areas of economics, security, health, terrorism, and the environment. The second trend is the continuing growth of Chinese power, which demands a policy of both engagement and hedging on the part of its neighbors and the United States. Finally, the spread of democracy in the region has sparked past U.S. interest in seeing the democratic Asia-Pacific states become something of a "community" of their own.

Reconciling each of these trends seems virtually impossible. Complicating matters further are debates over issues such as "Asia-Pacific versus East Asian regionalism." Should Asia's community consist of Asian countries alone, or should it include the likes of Australia, a Pacific nation with vital interests in and ties to Asia? How will Washington's traditional alliance-orientated strategy in Asia and its fondness for ad hoc multilateralism (as in the case of the Proliferation Security Initiative)<sup>25</sup> fit with the region's increasing movement toward multilateralism? And finally, what, precisely, is the character of that multilateralism? As

Asia hand Ralph Cossa notes, one would be hard-pressed to define the “nature of the organizing principles and objectives behind” forums like the EAS or the APT.<sup>26</sup> Given these issues and the cross-cutting trends noted above, it is hardly a surprise that the previous two administrations largely took a wait-and-see approach to multilateral developments in the Asia-Pacific region. And there is the possibility things will naturally fall into place to America’s advantage in the region—with a rising autocratic China leading the region’s democracies (and any number of its smaller states) to turn to the United States without much effort on Washington’s part.

There are, however, opportunity costs if Washington decides to wait for things to fall into place. First, unlike the Soviet Union, China is unlikely to present itself as the kind of overwhelming threat that moves nations to jump on the U.S. bandwagon. To the contrary, both the United States and countries in the region will be heavily engaged with China in the decades ahead, especially economically. The result will be a more complex set of relationships that will likely lead more to policy drift than to states making hard strategic choices. Second, China’s power in the region will undoubtedly increase relative to that of the United States. As China’s power increases, the United States ought to be looking for ways to maximize its influence through regionwide forums and institutional arrangements. Well-crafted multilateral organizations can be force multipliers and can help allied states think more seriously about broader common security needs than bilateral relationships typically can. Finally, there are costs to not taking full advantage of the opportunities that positive trends—such as the spread of liberal economics and politics in the region—can present. Taking advantage of these trends, however, requires creating organizations that shape and lock in change. The most dramatic recent example has been the creation of a Europe “whole and free” through the expansion of both NATO and the EU into Central and Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

But creating a NATO or EU-like structure for the Asia-Pacific is perhaps a bridge too far. The differences historically, culturally, and geopolitically among the states of the region are probably too significant to accomplish such a feat. Indeed, one of the strongest comments to this effect was then-deputy secretary of defense Paul Wolfowitz’s statement to journalists in May 2002 that he “certainly” did not “envision a NATO-like security structure in East Asia. NATO . . . started, obviously, from a Cold War period when we were allied together

against a common enemy. . . . East Asia is a very, very different situation where the diversity of countries, the diversity of interests doesn’t call for that kind of structure.”<sup>27</sup> Accepting the fact that the differences between the situation in Asia and Europe are great does not, of course, mean that there are not parallels to be drawn. Nor should we assume that, over time, institutions cannot lessen existing differences and modify a nation’s behavior. To hear Asia specialists tell it, Japan’s history problem makes it virtually impossible for it to be accepted by other states in the region as a “normal” country, let alone a leader reflecting its relative level of power. Yet Japan’s history problem is not unlike Germany’s following World War II; today, former Allied and Axis countries that killed millions of each other’s citizens are part of one union, whose borders and economies are open to each other. Again, it would be wrong to draw strict parallels between Europe and Asia, but it would be equally incorrect to adopt a form of geocultural determinism that ignores the art of the possible when it comes to Asia and the Pacific.

So, the question is: what is possible?

### **Tier One: A CSCE for Asia**

Perhaps the first step in thinking through a multilateral structure for Asia is to recognize that the diversity of regimes in the region means there will be real limits to what a multilateral organization or forum can accomplish. But that was equally true when the high representatives of thirty-three European countries, the United States, and Canada signed the Final Act of the CSCE in Helsinki on August 1, 1975. While the Cold War was perhaps a little less frigid when the accords were signed, the line between East and West in Europe was still one of concrete and barbed wire, with millions of men under arms in two opposing blocs—NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

The Helsinki Accords, as they came to be called, were divided into three “baskets.” Basket I dealt with questions related to European security and included a declaration of principles designed to guide relations among the signatories. Key among these principles were abstention from the threat or use of force, the territorial integrity of states, a proposal for a dispute resolution system, and a modest set of confidence-building measures entailing notification of military maneuvers and the voluntary exchange of observers at military exercises. Basket II concerned cooperation in the fields of economics, science, and the environment, while Basket III, among other things, required states

to act in conformity with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to respect “the inherent dignity of the human person” and the right of individuals “to know and act” on these rights, including the freedom to emigrate from any country. Artfully written and not legally binding, the Final Act did, nevertheless, help create an overall framework for a more stable Europe.

Can a similar accord be crafted for Asia? In fact, Asia is, in some respects, more than halfway there already. On February 24, 1976, the heads of five Southeast Asian states (Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines) signed the TAC. The guiding principles of the treaty were “mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity and national identity of all nations; the right of every State to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion or coercion; non-interference in the internal affairs of one another; settlement of differences or disputes by peaceful means; the renunciation of the threat or use of force; and effective cooperation among themselves.”<sup>28</sup> Since 1976, all member states of ASEAN as well as China, India, Japan, Pakistan, Russia, South Korea, and Australia have signed the accord. And, as noted previously, at its summit in November 2007, ASEAN took the next step in institutionalizing the principles of the TAC by adopting a formal charter for the organization that establishes an ASEAN secretariat headed by a secretary general as well as standing committees in the areas of economics, sociocultural affairs, and political security. And while the charter renews the original ASEAN commitment to noninterference in the internal affairs of member states and renounces aggression or the threat of force, it also includes commitments on the part of member states to “market economies,” “economic integration,” “good governance, the principles of democracy and constitutional government,” “respect for fundamental freedoms,” and “the promotion and protection of human rights.”<sup>29</sup>

Of course, because ASEAN’s process of decision making by consensus did not change, some viewed the charter as having failed to lay the groundwork for a more dynamic and liberal Asian community. But this may well be the charter’s virtue. Scaled-up and modified as needed, the charter could serve as the defining element for the larger Asian community, whether that community is defined as participants in APT or the EAS. More modest in what it could do or enforce, such a charter would be more acceptable to the diverse regimes in Asia and the Asia-Pacific region. And, indeed, if the rest of Asia were to signal a willingness to establish an organization along the lines outlined above, China would be hard-pressed to explain to its

regional neighbors why it would not join, especially given the fact that the United States would not be a member.

Although more modest in vision, an Asian charter and organization would still, to a large degree, fulfill Asia’s continuing desire to become a “community” of some kind.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, there are plenty of matters that Asia’s nations can and should address together. Disaster relief, the environment, trade, maritime safety, and territorial disputes are just a few of the issues that such an organization could usefully address. The bottom line is that globalization and transnational problems have put a premium on multilateral cooperation. And while such a multilateral forum would be limited in its capacity to tackle more divisive issues, such as the status of Taiwan, it could provide a normative base line for state behavior that would bring increased stability to the region.

## **Tier Two: Asia-Pacific Forum of Democracies**

A CSCE for Asia has its advantages, but in the end, it will be of limited utility when it comes to shaping and directing the region’s future. Engaging in dialogue and setting norms are important, but neither can deepen or expand the gains made by democrats in the region—nor, frankly, can America’s bilateral security ties with Japan, South Korea, or Australia. These are, as Australian scholar Nick Bisley notes, “fairly blunt” security instruments and a poor bridge to policy matters of concern to the democracies in the region.<sup>31</sup> And while a NATO for Asia might be out of the question at the moment, a new multilateral “club” of Asian-Pacific democracies ought not to be. In some respects, the region is already primed for such an organization. Public opinion polls taken across the region by the East Asia Barometer, for example, indicate that democracy is the preferred form of government by a majority of populations residing outside of China.<sup>32</sup> In addition, a slow but maturing series of ministerial meetings has taken place between Japan, Australia, and the United States since 2006. Japan also inked a strategic accord with India in 2006 and signed a formal security pact with Australia in 2007. And, before the recent changes in governments both in Washington and Tokyo, the two asked Australia to consider expanding the trilateral sessions into a quadrilateral dialogue including India.<sup>33</sup>

But truly to construct in Asia (what the Bush administration called in its National Security Strategy) “a balance of power that favors freedom” will require more than ministerial meetings and bilateral accords. As others have noted, “there is a perception in Asia that America’s laser-like focus

on defeating terrorism causes it to talk past allies primarily concerned with fueling Asia's economic dynamism." In contrast, Beijing has talked economics first and "its influence has increased accordingly."<sup>34</sup> A good place to start, then, is the creation of a free-trade area between the United States, Japan, and the other democratic states of the Asia-Pacific region. Membership in the arrangement would be governed by adherence to a set of liberal criteria in governance as well as trade.<sup>35</sup> As with the EU, the lure of access to markets should provide an incentive structure for states to become (and stay) members in good standing. In addition, the organization could establish tools, as in the OSCE, to monitor elections, provide peacekeeping forces, coordinate humanitarian operations and nonproliferation efforts, and generally provide a forum for enhanced but still voluntary security cooperation. As such, it would not attempt to replace existing bilateral security treaty arrangements but would serve as a substantial "soft power" overlay tying the countries together.

Taking a two-tiered multilateral approach in Asia means that the states in the region are not forced to choose between China and the United States. Countries can have a foot in both forums, creating a multilateral architecture that reflects the need both to engage China and to hedge against its rise.

There are further advantages to such an approach. First, it provides a forum for Japan to ease into becoming a "normal" country fitting its desire to play a larger role on the world stage but in a way that reassures other states of its limited and pacific intentions. Second, it provides India a mechanism for maintaining its formal independent foreign and defense policies—a point of pride for the rising power—but in a manner that allows it to work more closely with the United States as it sees fit. Instead of force-feeding the relationship with grand bilateral programs and initiatives, this arrangement allows New Delhi and Washington to build from the bottom up. Third, a regional democratic forum could bridge the gap between Seoul's understanding of its security in terms largely confined to the peninsula and Washington's view of the issue through a broader strategic lens, helping to reintegrate South Korea into its more natural association with the other democratic powers in the region. Fourth, a club of democracies could finally help prevent Taiwan's slide into deeper international isolation by providing a place for it to interact and cooperate with the other democracies in the region. Finally, establishing a multilateral organization with liberal political criteria for maintaining membership and structured incentives for doing so can be important in consolidating democratic

gains in countries like Indonesia and in potentially preventing the kind of backsliding one sees in states such as the Philippines or Thailand.

China will complain that such an arrangement is a form of containment. To meet that complaint, or at least mitigate it somewhat, Washington should define this new effort as providing public goods to the region that would otherwise either be provided serendipitously or not at all—a point that has the benefit of actually being true. That said, Beijing already reads Washington's existing presence in the region, its move into Central Asia, and its new ties to India and Vietnam as a form of encirclement. And, to the extent that China's military and economic power continues to grow, American administrations will increasingly be forced to take concrete steps to reassure allies and friends of its presence in the region if they want to avoid the collapse of the prevailing security architecture in the Asia-Pacific region. It would be more prudent to design a multilateral architecture that takes advantage of the democratic strengths we have now than to play the great power game in an ad hoc and reactive fashion. If, over the coming decades, China does not liberalize, Washington will have set in place a framework that will allow the United States to speed security cooperation in the region as it becomes necessary. If China does liberalize, there will be a ready-made structure for it to integrate itself into the existing liberal international order.

## Conclusion

The problem with Washington's current approach to Asia-Pacific multilateralism is that it has neither kept up with China's increased levels of engagement throughout the region nor sufficiently kept ahead of that country's growing hard power. The United States has appeared to be a day late and a dollar short in reacting to trends and events in the region.

And the Obama administration appears to be following the same pattern—being slow to open up new trade arrangements, giving muted attention to the security concerns raised by China's military buildup, and appearing to accept the present hodgepodge of Asian multilateral forums as satisfactory tools by which to engage the region. In addition, the Obama White House has generally been more reluctant to follow the Clinton and Bush administrations' lead in viewing India as a potential great power ally. And, finally, Washington has talked a good game over the years about the revolution in democratic governance in Asia but has done little to reinforce it or

take advantage of it—a failure the Obama administration appears likely to continue as it downplays the strategic importance of human rights and democratic governance.

How long Washington can ignore these underlying trends and realities is difficult to measure. But the longer they are ignored, the more America's own strategic situation will deteriorate. China will continue to grow, our allies will grow increasingly skittish, and, in the absence of American partnership, India will seek its own way in the region that may or may not be conducive to interests and the region's stability. The reality is, much is afoot in the Asia-Pacific, and unless Washington takes more of an active hand in defining a new security architecture for the area, it will find it increasingly difficult to exercise American leadership there. The two-tiered approach to the Asia-Pacific region spelled out above is intended to provide a better road map for current and future U.S. policy. It is a framework that recognizes the complexity of U.S. and neighboring states' relations with China, while at the same time reassures the region of our commitment to stay engaged on the basis of principles that serve our long-term interests and those of our democratic partners in the Asia-Pacific.

## Notes

1. Comments by Victor Cha in "Topic A: Foreign Policy Specialists Assess Obama's Trip to Asia," [washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/11/20/AR2009112003594.html), November 22, 2009 available at [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/11/20/AR2009112003594.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/11/20/AR2009112003594.html) (accessed December 14, 2009).
2. Robert Kagan and Dan Blumenthal, "'Strategic Reassurance' That Isn't," *Washington Post*, November 10, 2009, available at [www.aei.org/article/101292](http://www.aei.org/article/101292).
3. *Mapping the Global Future: Report of the National Intelligence Council's 2020 Project* (Washington, DC: National Intelligence Council, 2004), 47, available at [www.dni.gov/nic/NIC\\_globaltrend2020\\_s2.html](http://www.dni.gov/nic/NIC_globaltrend2020_s2.html) (accessed December 14, 2009).
4. The United States is also a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum (ARF), established in 1994. But its diversity of membership (now consisting of twenty-seven participants) and "lowest-common-denominator" approach to addressing security issues has resulted in Washington's taking far less interest in the forum than either APEC or the six-party talks. See Akikio Fukushima, "The Asian Regional Forum," in *The Regional Organizations of the Asia-Pacific: Exploring Institutional Change*, ed. Michael Wesley (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 76–95.
5. On the Clinton administration's vision for a fellowship of Asian democracies, see Bill Clinton, "Building a New Pacific Community" (speech, Waseda University, Tokyo, July 7, 1993), available at [www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=46813](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=46813) (accessed December 15, 2009). For the Bush administration's vision, see *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2002): 25–26, and candidate Bush's statement during the 2000 campaign that the United States should "work toward the day when the fellowship of free Pacific nations is as strong and united as our Atlantic partnership." George W. Bush, "A Distinctly American Internationalism" (speech, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, CA, November 19, 1999), available at [www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/bush/wspeech.htm](http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/bush/wspeech.htm) (accessed December 14, 2009).
6. Daniel Twining, "America's Grand Design in Asia," *The Washington Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (2007): 80.
7. David Martin Jones and Michael L. R. Smith, "Making Process, Not Progress," *International Security* 32, no. 1 (2007): 182. See also Ralph Cossa, "One (Very) Small Step Forward for ASEAN," *Japan Times*, November 26, 2007.
8. Carlyle A. Thayer, "Southeast Asian Reactions to China's Peaceful Development Doctrine: Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand," *NBR Analysis* 18, no. 5 (2008): 13.
9. David Martin Jones and Michael L. R. Smith, "Making Process, Not Progress," 178–79.
10. See, for example, Ian Bremmer, Choi Sung-hong, and Yoriko Kawaguchi, "A New Forum for Peace," *National Interest* 82 (Winter 2005–2006): 107–12; and Michael Schiffer, "Time for a Northeast Asian Security Institution," *PacNet* 59 (December 8, 2006), available at [www.stanleyfoundation.org/publications/opeds/pac0659.pdf](http://www.stanleyfoundation.org/publications/opeds/pac0659.pdf) (accessed December 15, 2009).
11. For the text of the Helsinki Final Act, please see *Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe Final Act, Helsinki* (1975), available at [www.osce.org/documents/mcs/1975/08/4044\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/mcs/1975/08/4044_en.pdf) (accessed December 14, 2009).
12. Of course, after the fall of the Soviet Union, the CSCE transformed into a more proactive organization, the OSCE. But with transformation of the Russian state into a pseudodemocracy, the OSCE's ability to act as a problem-solving organization has come to a virtual halt.
13. John S. Park, "Inside Multilateralism: The Six-Party Talks," *Washington Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (2005): 75–91.
14. If membership were kept to the original five or six states of the six-party talks, a Northeast Asia security forum would also potentially make South Korea a kind of "swing" state, subtly accelerating the problems that now exist in U.S.–Republic of Korea relations.
15. The East Asia Summit consists of the ten member states of ASEAN as well as Japan, South Korea, China, India, Australia, and New Zealand. The first annual summit was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on December 14, 2005. Russia has applied for membership.

16. ASEAN Plus Three (APT) consists of the ten member states of ASEAN plus Japan, South Korea, and China. The first meeting was held in 1997, convening the leaders of ASEAN and their counterparts from China, Japan, and South Korea on the sidelines of an ASEAN summit in Malaysia. The primary driver behind the meeting was that year's Asian financial crisis. The Shanghai Cooperative Organization (SCO) is made up of six member states: China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Iran has also applied for membership. In 2001, in St. Petersburg, the members signed the SCO Charter, which set out the organization's structure, purpose, and form of operation.

17. Hongying Wag, "Multilateralism in Chinese Foreign Policy: The Limits of Socialization," *Asian Survey* 40, no. 3 (2000): 485–86.

18. Nick Bisley, "Asian Security Architectures," in *Strategic Asia 2007–08: Domestic Political Change and Grand Strategy*, ed. Ashley J. Tellis and Michael Wills (Washington, DC: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2007), 348.

19. U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, Office of the Spokesman, "United States Accedes to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia," news release, July 22, 2009, available at [www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2009/july/126294.htm](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2009/july/126294.htm) (accessed December 14, 2009). See also Mark E. Manyin, Michael John Garcia, and Wayne M. Morrison, *U.S. Accession to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC)*, report prepared for the Congressional Research Service, July 13, 2009, available at [www.assets.opencrs.com/rpts/R40583\\_20090713.pdf](http://www.assets.opencrs.com/rpts/R40583_20090713.pdf) (accessed December 14, 2009).

20. Andrew Shearer, "Australia Bulks Up: One Result of a Smaller U.S. Military Budget," *Wall Street Journal*, May 6, 2009. See also Dan Blumenthal and Gary J. Schmitt, "The New U.S.-Japan Alliance: Washington Will Have to Work Harder, but the DPJ Will Stay Loyal," *Wall Street Journal Asia*, August 17, 2009, available at [www.aei.org/article/100908](http://www.aei.org/article/100908).

21. Gary J. Schmitt, "The Obama Administration's Approach to Asia: Early Signals," *AEI National Security Outlook* (October 2009), 2, available at [www.aei.org/outlook/100075](http://www.aei.org/outlook/100075).

22. See Dan Blumenthal, "Obama's Asia Trip: A Series of Unfortunate Events," *ForeignPolicy.com*, November 18, 2009, available at [www.aei.org/article/101327](http://www.aei.org/article/101327). For a more positive take on the Indian prime minister's meetings with Obama, see Ashley J. Tellis, "More than Symbols," *Indian Express*, December 9, 2009, available at [www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=24288](http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=24288) (accessed December 14, 2009).

23. C. Raja Mohan, "Poised for Power: The Domestic Roots of India's Slow Rise," in *Strategic Asia 2007–08: Domestic Political Change and Grand Strategy*, 204.

24. Nick Bisley, "Asian Security Architectures," 342.

25. The Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) is a global, ad hoc effort of participating states that uses existing laws and treaties

to stop trafficking of weapons of mass destruction, their delivery systems, and related materials to and from states and nonstate actors of proliferation concern. Started by Bush in May 2003, PSI now involves some ninety nations.

26. Ralph A. Cossa, "East Asia Community Building: Time for the United States to Get on Board," *Stanley Foundation Policy Analysis Brief*, September 2007, available at [www.stanleyfoundation.org/publications/pab/CossaPAB07.pdf](http://www.stanleyfoundation.org/publications/pab/CossaPAB07.pdf) (accessed December 14, 2009).

27. Paul Wolfowitz, "Comments Delivered at the International Institute for Strategic Studies Conference on East Asia Security" (speech, Foreign Press Center Building, Washington, DC, May 29, 2002), available at [www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=3471](http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=3471) (accessed December 15, 2009). See also, Christopher Hemmer and Peter Katzenstein, "Why Is There No NATO in Asia? Collective Identity, Regionalism, and the Origins of Multilateralism," *International Organization* 56, no. 3 (2002): 575–607.

28. *Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia*, Indonesia, February 24, 1976, available at [www.aseansec.org/1217.htm](http://www.aseansec.org/1217.htm) (accessed December 15, 2009).

29. ASEAN, *Charter of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations* (Thirteenth ASEAN Summit, Singapore, November 20, 2007), available at [www.aseansec.org/21861.htm](http://www.aseansec.org/21861.htm) (accessed December 15, 2009).

30. "In subtle ways, people across East Asia, like Europeans after World War II, are beginning to think of themselves as citizens of a region." See Joshua Kurlantzick, "Pax Asia-Pacific? East Asian Integration and Its Implications for the United States," *Washington Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (2007): 68.

31. Nick Bisley, "Asian Security Architectures," 349.

32. Robert Albritton and Thawilwadee Bureekul, "Social and Cultural Supports for Plural Democracy in Eight Asian Nations: A Cross-National, Within-Nation Analysis" (Asian Barometer Working Paper Series No. 31, National Taiwan University and Academia Sinica, Taiwan, 2005), available at [www.asianbarometer.org/newenglish/publications/workingpapers/no.31.pdf](http://www.asianbarometer.org/newenglish/publications/workingpapers/no.31.pdf) (accessed December 15, 2009). See also Paul Wiseman, "Asian Nations Cultivate New Sense of Democracy," *USA Today*, March 13, 2008.

33. For an overview of these trends see Michael J. Green, "Democracy and the Balance of Power in Asia," *American Interest* (September/October 2006): 95–102; Daniel Twining, "America's Grand Design in Asia," 79–94; and "Strong Backing for India's Inclusion in Security Arrangement," *Press Trust of India*, March 15, 2007.

34. Daniel Twining, "Playing the American Card," *The Weekly Standard*, October 1, 2007.

35. See Francis Fukuyama, "The Security Architecture in Asia and American Foreign Policy," in *East Asian Multilateralism: Prospects for Regional Stability*, ed. Kent E. Calder and Francis Fukuyama (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 249.