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AND ASIA–PACIFIC REGIONAL
SECURITY

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The relationship between China and Japan is important but not trouble-free for both countries. Although there are common Japanese and Chinese interests in political stability, economic development and a peaceful international environment, and both see their bilateral relationship as critical, the dispute over the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands suggests deep antipathies exist between the two countries which can easily become difficult to control.

The bilateral relationship will be increasingly difficult to manage in the future for several reasons. The passage of time, subtle shifts in the relationship and the broader strategic issues now impinging on the attitudes of each to the other have reduced the importance of historic and cultural links and increased the sensitivity of the relationship. Both countries are concerned to a limited extent with the military modernisation of the other, and both see the actions of the other as having changed the strategic environment.

Provided the leaders on both sides can avoid an action–reaction process—and there are some signs that this need is recognised—Japan and China are unlikely to become overt adversaries. But neither are they likely to become close allies in the near future. A breakdown in the relationship, however, would have serious implications for regional security.
Introduction

In the immediate post-Cold War period, scholars and policy makers looking at strategic issues in the Asia–Pacific region tended to concentrate on Japan’s prospective military capacities and intentions. China’s strategic importance was judged to have diminished with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Yet, only a few years later, discussion about security issues in the region now centres on China.

Much of the literature continues to see regional security issues within the traditional strategic focus, the bilateral security relationships between the US and countries in the region. Although there are other important bilateral US arrangements with Australia, Korea and the Philippines, and broader regional security relationships such as the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA), the bilateral relationship between the US and Japan remains pivotal, with substantial implications for the regional security order.

The customary approach, however, misses some of the complex dynamics of the region’s new security environment. In the first place it focuses attention on a somewhat narrow military concept of security. Yet comprehensive security, particularly the security of resource supplies, has been central to Japan’s security concerns for a long time. China is also increasingly seeing that country’s economic, scientific and technological competence and international competitiveness as the basis of its growing national strength and security.1 Other issues such as health, crime, the environment and terrorism are also entering security discussions. Second, bilateral relations between the countries of the region, and specifically that between Japan and China, have so far received less attention.2 The security

* Comments on an earlier draft from Greg Austin, Pauline Kerr, Andrew Mack, Akihiko Tanaka and Wang Dayu are gratefully acknowledged; errors of fact or judgement remain mine.


relationship between Japan and China is critical to both countries but past military relations still colour their current relationship and new security concerns have emerged. An understanding of their attitudes and responses depends upon some recognition of historical and other factors influencing the way each reacts to the other's actions.

Third, it tends to consider regional security in a geographically constrained way, ignoring or underplaying the broader geopolitical context of the issues involved. Bilateral relationships, and the China–Japan relationship in particular, will remain basic determinants of the regional security environment. A strongly adversarial relationship between China and Japan would be regionally divisive and affect critically the various dimensions of regional security; a close relationship that dominated the region could be similarly disruptive. Such outcomes would be disturbing for the global role of the US. China and Japan will adjust their own foreign policy approaches as their links with other major powers, particularly with the US, evolve. A critical influence is the trilateral relationship between the US, China and Japan and what role the US plays in the region.3

Finally, the regional security debate has been enlarged through the multilateral security dialogue arrangements emerging in the Asia–Pacific reflected, in particular, in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) but also indirectly in the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum. The contribution of such arrangements through confidence building, transparency, economic and security cooperation is itself likely to depend upon stable bilateral relationships existing between China and Japan.

In this paper I start by looking at factors important in the current bilateral relationship, at influences that might shift the two countries either closer to each other or further apart, and at the triangular relationship involving the US. In doing so we need to recognise that a plurality of views exists within countries of the region. Given that policies (and attitudes) are based on perceptions and not on the closely related ‘objective’ realities, in a period lacking a common shared conception of a prospective regional order, even greater pluralism of views than usual is likely, not just among individuals but among institutions and agencies, and not just between those we call, respectively, realists and liberal internationalists. That


3 In due course, the relationship with Russia will also grow in potential importance, leading to a four way interaction, but that is not discussed in detail here.
mixed signals and a lack of consensus on how to achieve objectives, or even what the objectives are, emerge from each of the three countries should not be surprising. It makes detailed analysis more complex, but also more necessary.

The present China–Japan relationship

For almost a century to the end of the Pacific War, the stability of Northeast Asia was adversely affected by Japanese inroads into China. Historically, there has been little reverse aggression towards Japan. Nevertheless, in the post-Pacific War years, historic and cultural links, and Japan’s vague but significant sense of guilt towards China, as well as China’s growth potential, meant that China loomed large in Japan’s political, and increasingly strategic, thinking.

Although Japan had largely followed the Cold War imperatives of US policies, Japan and China had maintained some bilateral economic links well before the China–US bilateral relationship was normalised in 1972. After normalisation, Japan sought greater economic links. Politically, normalisation led to a general understanding of a need for sensitivity on both sides, with an ambiguous formula of ‘letting minor difficulties be and agreeing on major common interests’. Perhaps as important, however, was the sensitivity that geographic propinquity inevitably involved, that constrained a hostility that distance—as between the US and China—permits. The China–Japan relationship remains a sensitive one, if not always handled by either side with sensitivity. While both countries have generally sought a cooperative relationship, fears, ambivalences and uncertainties remain. In China, as Ian Wilson has indicated, there is little consistency in the attitude or policy towards Japan. Japan is seen as ‘a cruel invader, an economic model, a military threat and an important source of aid, investment and technology’.

Customarily, particular weight is put on historic and cultural links—the mixed feelings on both sides of inferiority and superiority. For China, a sense of superiority stems from its historic cultural influence but more recent experience reflects economic and technological inferiority; for Japan there is an acceptance of China’s past cultural tutelage but also a belief in the superiority of an advanced economic society. While national interest will normally override these effects, they have often influenced each country’s understanding of the other’s attitudes and responses. Yet time, subtle shifts in the relationship, and the broader strategic issues now impinging on the attitudes of each to the other, are reducing the importance of these historic and cultural links.

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5 Wilson, ‘SinoJapanese Relations in the Post-Cold War World’, p.91.
How minor the ‘minor difficulties’ are at any time has, in any case, tended to fluctuate according to the political imperatives. On the major issues, there was little strategic competition between Japan and China during the Cold War. For the most part, just as the Soviet threat underpinned the US–Japan relationship, it also underpinned the Japan–China relationship.

The underlying interest of both countries in basically non-adversarial and cooperative relationships now reflects the dominant influence of their mutual economic interests. For China, its economic development depends primarily upon the US and Japan. Japan is crucial to that development and to its modernisation, especially as a source of capital, technology and managerial skills, increasingly as a market outlet, and as an offset to possible US pressures or denials. For its part, Japan needs China to buttress its structural economic change, as well as for market outlets. As Japan's domestic costs have risen, its exchange rate strengthened and confidence has returned, post-Tiananmen, in China's domestic stability, Japanese investment has increased, particularly around Shanghai, Dalian and further north, areas familiar to Japan from the past.

Militarily, both China and Japan are substantial powers. Both at present lack significant military power projection capacity. China in particular is not an advanced military power and although it is moving to improve its power projection capabilities, improvement remains modest. Moreover, Japan had moved to a degree to acknowledge its role in World War II, however much less than China would have wished, particularly through the Emperor's expressions of regret during his 1992 visit to China. Since the 50th anniversary of World War II in 1995, and the difficulty of achieving a satisfactory Japanese Diet resolution, China has been more outspoken about the war history issue. It continued to protest expressions of continuing Japanese ‘militarism’, such as statements from time to time by Japanese ministers downplaying the war experience, and visits to the Yasakuni Shrine, although it responded at a relatively low level, at least initially, to the most recent visit by Japanese Prime Minister Hashimoto.

Consequently, China had, until recently, been giving less attention to the ‘minor’ components of the relationship. Hostility to Japan's involvement in UN peacekeeping, for example, gradually diminished; and more recent statements on Japan's UN ambitions have been less obstructive. China's earlier expressions of anxiety over Japan's own military developments had been muted as those military developments were judged to be limited, economic growth in Japan slowed, economic progress in China continued and trade with and investment by Japan in China increased.

Particular Japanese actions, such as supporting US theatre missile defence arrangements, attracted strong criticism—it was seen as reducing the effectiveness of China’s small nuclear arsenal. China’s concerns have increased again, how far is
still unclear, in light of shifts in the US–Japan relationship which are seen as directed against China. Chinese leaders still seem uncertain what these shifts mean for Japan’s ‘defence’ posture, its possible use as a shelter behind which Japan’s military capacity can be increased, and as a component of a containment ‘strategy’. In general, however, concerns about Japan’s power and potential strategic influence and its technical capacity to affect China’s vital regional interests have re-emerged.

Japan’s ambivalent views of China have similarly changed, although unevenly. It is now more willing to assert its concerns and express its differences. For example, it reacted strongly over China’s nuclear tests. Various exchanges of visits, including that of the Emperor, had indicated until recently a clear desire to strengthen relationships. Japan for its part, faces no credible direct military threat from China. While it has taken to date a relatively measured view, it watches China carefully, and its concerns have risen more recently, less from a fear of direct military conflict, although the proximity of China’s missile exercises in March 1996 to the north of Taiwan was a particular worry, than over China’s potential to destabilise the region, and to threaten Japan’s regional interests.

Japan’s stated concerns have risen due to China’s military modernisation, most particularly the continuing development of ballistic missiles (hence Japanese interest in theatre missile defence although North Korea’s missiles are probably still more important); rising Chinese nationalism; and concern about China’s approach to the Spratlys, because of the implications for unresolved territorial disputes with China over the Senkaku Islands or Diaoyu-tai and for the freedom of sea lines of communication (SLOCs) in the South China Sea. In two other issues, Japanese public opinion has been influenced significantly. The initially strong reaction to China’s nuclear testing may have diminished given China’s agreement on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty; China, however, underestimated the adverse impact in Japan of its missile exercises at the time of the March 1996 Taiwan presidential election. Japan was not as well informed of the specifics of the exercises as the US, or indeed Taiwan, and that created its own insecurities; and the Japanese sympathisers of Taiwan were especially disturbed.

Broader Japanese concerns include fears of the potential for instability in China and the apparent lack of control of population flows (with implications for refugee flows to Japan), and for environmental damage from acid rain or the fall out from a nuclear accident blown to Japan by the prevailing winds. North Korea, however, has been, on balance, a positive factor in the relationship. Despite wanting China to do more, Japan generally accepts that China has played, and will continue to play, a restraining role with respect to the North.

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Japan's relationship with the US, immediately post-Cold War, reflected a short period of assertiveness, during which 'the Japan that could say no' was just an extreme form of a tentative show of independence. The Gulf war and its implications for Japan’s resource dependency, threats from North Korea, and China’s military assertiveness over Taiwan have moved Japan back to its currently more comfortable—yet not totally comfortable—relationship with the US.

Yet Japan continues to expand its economic links with China: since 1993, Japan has been China's major trading partner, China is now the second most important destination for Japanese foreign direct investment, and earlier fears of domestic political instability on the mainland have diminished. Japan emphasises the importance of China's economic development for the sake of its internal stability and to integrate China into the international community. It has put little public emphasis on political reform and human rights in China. This, together with China's difficult relations with the US, may be why China had, until recently, taken a softer line on past sins and current 'minor' factors, including what Japanese observers termed 'Chinese restraint' in responding to initial Japanese criticism of Japan's cuts in bilateral aid to China.

That the criticism increased in the light of Japan’s cuts in bilateral aid to China probably reflects several factors, but particularly China's long held irritation that Japan had not given significant weight to China's leniency with Japan over reparations when relations were normalised in 1972.

Despite the problems of the relationship, however, China has accepted that the relationship with Japan, whether it is cooperative or not, will be a major factor in its international position; an unfriendly relationship could be a major hindrance to its developmental objectives. For its part, despite its move closer to the US again, Japan recognises the growing importance of China to its economic future but perhaps even more to its political and strategic environment.

Future relations

The question for the future is what would be likely to change the current, basically stable, relationship. Since there is no organising security framework of the kind provided during the Cold War by the common Soviet enemy, and no ideological basis for policies—except perhaps from the US—questions of future fears are more difficult to define. Among the possible factors considered here are: how far the strategic concerns of each country are affected by the other; and how far economic issues are likely to be complementary or competitive.

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7 Asahi Shimbun, 6 September 1995.
8 See, for example, the Kyodo News Agency report of President Jiang Zemin's talks with the then Prime Minister Murayama on 22 October 1995 in New York, in which the aid and reparations issues were explicitly linked: BBC Monitoring Service: Asia-Pacific, 23 October, 1995.
Looking first at the traditional security concerns, it has long been true, but is now even more the case, that the two countries’ current foreign policies and military policies and postures owe at least as much to factors other than concerns about each other. Now the extent to which their current differences could intensify depends significantly upon their relationship with the US. Overall, China faces no major military threats, a relatively new situation for it. China will insist on protecting its sovereignty over Taiwan and, to a lesser extent, its ocean borders. It sees itself vulnerable on its northern borders to any rise in Russian nationalism or to religious or separatist pressures from the erstwhile Soviet republics. It also has a constant worry about the Tibet, Xingiang and Mongolia cards being played by outside powers, although Japan is not among them. It remains wary about India.

The current China–Japan relationship, although largely based on economics and basically complementary, is asymmetrical—Japan is more important to China than the reverse. When Hong Kong returns to China in 1997, Japan will be substantially more dependent upon China’s market but provided the one country, two-systems concept prevails, the difference may not be significant. The inevitable hiccoughs in 1997 and beyond in the process of China’s takeover of Hong Kong, however, could put added strains on the relationship, and slow investment in the territory.

Several factors have become important in the short run. The Hashimoto–Clinton discussions on the US–Japan security relationship, the seeming decline in the Japanese sense of guilt over its Chinese war-time actions, the sustained efforts of right wing Japanese groups over the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, and Japan’s own military modernisation, have stimulated strong responses from China that blur the differences between ‘minor’ and ‘major’ differences. The changes, although small, in the US–Japan relationship have been seen as significant by China, if not moving towards containment at least to a form of preventive diplomacy. The Chinese stated concerns revolve around the possibility of military conflict over the Senkakus/Diaoyu-tai and, more fundamentally, possible Japanese involvement in any conflict over Taiwan, with also some concerns emerging about China’s sea lane security.

To some extent, China’s actions—its increasingly strong response to Japanese actions and attitudes—may also be seen as preventive diplomacy of a kind, as a means of warning Japan not to go too far. Yet there are also underlying changes in the relationship that could cause problems in the future. Domestically, recent Chinese economic and political changes have been dramatic and are likely to continue so into the future. Although China’s leaders can play an important role in

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shaping Chinese public opinion, they have to be cautious about overly strong public reactions to external events which would limit leadership policy flexibility. Recent Japanese changes have been more subtle both domestically and as it tries to define its role in international activities. What the effective return of the more hawkish LDP since 1993 means remains unclear since it is at present still constrained by the more pacifist attitudes of its coalition partners, led by ex-premier Murayama. Nevertheless, Japanese electoral system reform changes have, much more than for China, raised the political importance of public opinion—and the scope for political populism which could affect the relationship, by concentrating, in particular, on shorter term issues rather than longer term interests.

For Japan, the conditioning influences in its international relations are seen increasingly to be Western rather than Asian (and rather than Chinese). Moreover, the pro-Taiwan interest groups in Japan have grown in importance. Their active support for the Taiwanese has been buttressed by a wider public support for Taiwan and by a decline in the importance of the pro-Chinese lobby. For China, there is some substance in the view that they view Japan with little trust and in many cases ‘with a loathing rarely found in attitudes towards America’.

Just as Japan’s actions over the US relationship, Taiwan and the Senakokus/Diaoyu-tai have sensitised China, China’s actions over Taiwan, coming on top of the Spratlys, has sensitised Japan. There are substantial bilateral dialogues on political and military questions. Nevertheless, Japan watches China’s military modernisation and weapons acquisition programs carefully, and with a degree of potential concern. Hence the continued emphasis by Japan on the importance of transparency in China’s military modernisation.

The growing economic relationship will remain important as a basis for a continuing cooperative relationship. Despite some Japanese concerns about China’s potential economic competitiveness, the wider expectation would seem to be that the technological gap will remain large enough in Japan’s favour not to disturb Japan. Overall, significant economic competition is not likely to be a major factor in the relationship for the foreseeable future. Both Japan and China have economic security concerns. In general, these relate to needs for markets to earn foreign exchange, to supplies of food and natural resources, and to secure communications.

Although sharing a sense of apparent vulnerability to interference in lines of communication and particularly sea lanes, those common concerns could pose problems for the relationship and for regional security. Japan has been careful not to take sides on the question of sovereignty in the South China Sea but has

expressed anxiety about China’s actions there and the risks it sees to its transport routes, especially for oil.\textsuperscript{12} China’s major transport routes go through the same area, and it is similarly expressing the need to protect its lines of ocean communication. Moreover, its dependence on food and particularly oil imports will be growing rapidly in the decades ahead.\textsuperscript{13} Most of its oil import requirements will be sourced from the Middle East as will be the case for Japan and other major regional oil importers, such as Korea and Taiwan.\textsuperscript{14}

Japan may be willing to depend upon the US maintaining its ocean freedom, although there have been Japanese statements arguing the need to extend its naval involvement in this field beyond the existing range of 1000 nautical miles. While such actions by Japan would generate anxieties, particularly in Southeast Asia, reactions would be even stronger were China similarly to build up a naval capacity designed to protect its shipping. It might feel obliged to do that, given that it would be less comfortable simply relying on the US to protect its freedom of ocean navigation. Such a move would also make more likely Japan’s enlargement of its naval capacity. Competition between China and Japan could also emerge in their relations with Middle East oil exporting countries. Both are currently seeking to strengthen their relations with those countries, as they seek to ensure future supplies of oil. This is unlikely to have serious implications for their relationship unless differential treatment by those countries occurs, particularly if a result of third party pressure.\textsuperscript{15}

At the same time, however, China’s leaders want economic and military modernisation to fulfil their obligation ‘to restore the nation’s greatness, to protect its unity and to prevent its humiliation’,\textsuperscript{16} and to protect it against Western policies, often seen as designed to keep it weak. Yet, China’s historical sense of vulnerability to the outside world now extends beyond the political impacts to its economic, scientific and technological vulnerability. Much of this relates to concerns about the use, or threats of use, of economic sanctions by the US (and perhaps some of the US allies).

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} Stuart Harris, ‘China and Regional Economic Development into the 21st Century’, paper presented to the CPPCC 21st Century Forum, Beijing (4 September 1996).
\item \textsuperscript{14} Fereidun Fesharaki, Allen Clark and Duangjai Intarapravitch (eds), \textit{Pacific Energy Outlook: Strategy and Policy Imperatives to 2010}, Occasional Paper, Program on Resources (Hawaii: EastWest Center, March, 1995).
\item \textsuperscript{15} There are, of course, broader strategic implications.
\end{itemize}
 Yet to China and Japan, the position of the US—and its continued presence—has become more important as a constraint on the other. China does not want to see the end of the US–Japan security relationship—at least not for some time (presumably until it feels a great deal stronger). This is in part as a means of keeping a balance between the countries in the region and, particularly, providing a constraint on Japan's possible militarism. It accepts that without the protection of the US nuclear umbrella, Japan would enlarge its own military capacity thereby pressuring China (and others) to do the same. This view remains despite a recognition that the US–Japan defence relationship is increasingly directed against China, a conclusion drawn first from the US East Asian strategy document, but reinforced by subsequent developments. China has commented critically on the changed terms of the US–Japan Security Treaty, and its move from being concerned with the defence of Japan to being, as in the Clinton–Hashimoto declaration, ‘the foundation of peace and stability in the Asia–Pacific region’. One commentator saw friction from the changed US–Japan relationship affecting China–US relations more than those with Japan unless there was a move to involve the JDF overseas in regional security issues, but this probably depends in practice upon the nature of the relationship with each of the two countries.

How significant the changes are in US–Japan security relations depends upon whether they are looked at in terms of capabilities or intentions. In themselves, the changes may not be substantial and can be seen as logical in a context of a changed regional security order, with no known enemy. This assumes intentions have not changed. Given the frequent talk in the US of containment, and the more assertive Japanese stance towards China, Japanese public support for Taiwan and the rise of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands issue, some anxiety by the Chinese may be more easily understood. The Chinese have noted statements suggesting changed intent. A Japanese foreign ministry official has been cited as saying that a strengthened Japan–US security system would ‘contain’ China from employing military force to resolve the Taiwan problem.

Japan has moved closer to the US in part because it perceived its future security situation in less benign terms, with China’s actions a factor. Japan’s shorter term security concerns relate most specifically to the possibilities of conflict

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on the Korean peninsula, the development of nuclear technology in the North or the breakdown of the North’s economy and the consequent possibility of refugees. Ultimately, reunification of the two Koreas is not something Japan welcomes warmly with (or, to a lesser extent, without) nuclear weapons.

A more immediate anxiety is that any conflict over Taiwan, apart from the regional instability it would cause, would be politically difficult for the Japanese government, despite Japan’s endorsement of the ‘one China’ policy. Strong historical and current political and economic links with Taiwan and Taiwan’s lobbying in Japan has led to sizeable parliamentary support in Tokyo. While public Japanese comments on the March 1996 Taiwan crisis were cautious, China suspects nevertheless, not without at least some basis, that elements in Japan are encouraging Taiwan’s recognition moves.

Japan’s overall security dilemma is that while in the shorter term it gains substantially from the growth in the Chinese economy, that economic growth increases China’s potential for greater power and influence—and greater political and military assertiveness. It is for this reason, and its own national interest, together with its own experience of what happens when a country is isolated internationally, that Japan is generally concerned by measures having an overt appearance of containment; it is why it remains behind the idea of integrating China in the region through ARF and APEC and supportive of China’s efforts to be part of wider multilateral processes, such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Yet its own actions have not always been fully consistent with this approach.

Regional impacts

China’s suspicion of the US now is such that given its fear of US hostility it will continue to look to balance its US relationship with Japan, along with closer economic and political relationships with other potential rivals of the US, including Russia and Germany.\(^\text{21}\) There may be some truth in the suggestion, for example, that the recent agreement between China and Russia during President Yeltsin’s visit was ‘playing the Russian card’.\(^\text{22}\) Yet there are also cautions in Russia about China’s future role and Japan is also seeking, slowly, to improve its relations with Russia.\(^\text{23}\)

To reduce its traditional security risks, China has been successfully reconciling differences along its many borders, particularly those with Russia and the CIS

\(^{22}\) Ming Pao (Hong Kong), 5 April 1996 (FBIS-CHI-96-072-12/4/96).
states, and has reduced tensions with India. It has hedged its bets on the Korean peninsula by developing closer relations with the South, while maintaining (and more recently improving) relations with the North. It has been nurturing relations with others in Southeast Asia despite the concerns over the Spratlys. Even its relations with Vietnam, while still not warm, have been modified. Given its difficulties with the US, it has also looked to expand further its relations with Europe.

China is likely to be reluctant to shift too close to other powers in Northeast Asia, given its strong desire for independence of action (including the absence of commitments to others) and the ambivalence of China's attitude to each of those powers, including Japan. It is more likely to look for ways to play one off against the other should the need arise. Its economic development and potential puts it in a stronger position should problems emerge, while military modernisation has not yet been given the priority that a major concern with military security would suggest. Yet, although China's position with respect to other Northeast Asian countries had moved in its favour, the Taiwan issue has reinstated military strength as an issue and weakened China's position.

In the case of Southeast Asia, much of the strength of the support for APEC and the ARF is as a means of limiting the impact of major power influence. The countries of Southeast Asia in particular are concerned about the uncertainty of the future involvement of all major powers including, but not only, China and Japan. China and Japan have both had troubled historic links with Southeast Asia, as with the Northeast Asian countries, that remain major influences. The fear of a resurgent Japanese militarism, if diminishing, remains in Southeast Asia. For China, Southeast Asia has been a traditional area of influence but the problematic Chinese, often aggressive, diplomacy and support for insurgencies has left residual resentments and suspicions. China's overt involvement in the Vietnam and Cambodian wars has left its mark, and differences remain over the South China Sea. There is, however, a concern that the US and Japan 'should not be seen as a 25 and a recognition that instability in China will cause major problems for Southeast Asia, including destabilising flows of refugees.

Despite the inevitability of competition between Japan and China in Southeast Asia for influence, the possibility that this competition could have serious adverse effects seems limited, particularly given the region's disinclination to be aligned

24 Vietnam Radio noted the 'successful' outcome of the (initial) sea border talks with China; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 16 July 1996.
with any great powers, China and Japan among them. That assumes, of course, that the China–Japan relationship remains stable, and that the countries in the region do not have to take sides. Given that, Japan’s already large economic influence in Southeast Asia will continue to grow; and any fears of Japan’s future actions are directed as much to its economic behaviour as to possible military developments. Its economic influence is unlikely to be matched by China, even allowing for the widespread presence of ethnic Chinese business interests.

There remains a fear in the region about Japanese remilitarisation; ASEAN states remain sensitive to Japan’s role in regional security and generally oppose any significant extension of its security role. A stronger maritime defence posture would be seen as destabilising by some ASEAN states, except, according to one analyst, within the US–Japan security relationship.27 Southeast Asian states recognise that Japan is constrained both by its constitution and perhaps by the US, although they are also aware, somewhat uneasily, that some parts of the US system are pressing Japan to take a more substantial security role.

China is, of course, not so constrained and there is a wariness about China’s potential for regional domination. Concerns about Japan tend to diminish as the concerns about China increase. The intensity of the concern over the Spratlys has diminished. China has been careful to assure the region that it is prepared to resolve the issues peacefully or to set sovereignty questions aside for the present; it would not wish to see the countries in the region as part of a containment policy nor damage its international image as a supporter of developing country interests. The question of Vietnam will be important in the future—Japan has considerable investments in Vietnam, and some in ASEAN saw Vietnam’s accession to ASEAN, as a strengthening of ASEAN’s overall position regarding China. Yet Vietnam has also been critical of US–China policy.28

Some ASEAN countries have been concerned by reports of China’s military and other support for Burma’s SLORC regime. A further concern relates to reports of China’s interest in naval facilities in the Irrawaddy Delta, argued to reflect an interest in establishing a presence in the Indian Ocean.29 The implications of a more overt India–China naval rivalry would be significant both for ASEAN and, presumably in due course, for Japan as part of its supply routes to and from the Middle East and Europe. Japan has itself shown a particular interest in investment in Burma.

28 See, for example, the Vietnamese *People’s Army Daily*, (Reuters News Service, 16 July 1996).
Alternative futures

The basic assumption in most discussions about China is that China is unlikely to abandon its policy of opening to the outside world. On this assumption, China sees outward looking market-based economic reform as fundamental to meeting its longer term economic growth and national development objectives. Yet the consequent interdependence, while leaving China vulnerable to international pressures, as many in China complain, as well as vulnerable to global business cycles, also means that a peaceful international environment remains a high Chinese priority.

What circumstances would change the current relatively balanced situation? I look at three possibilities. First, a substantial US withdrawal from Japan in particular, and the region in general; second, prolonged leadership strife or inertia in China; and third, a rise in hard-line nationalism in either China or Japan.

US withdrawal

There are few signs at present that the US will ‘withdraw from the region’, whatever that might mean in practice for an unavoidably Pacific naval power. For a time after the end of the Cold War, with the unifying cement of opposition to the Soviet Union gone, the survival of the US–Japan alliance was often in question. Apart from the continuing economic disputes between the two countries, the basis on which a security relationship, often judged to be one sided, would survive, was seen as difficult to identify. That a new basis seems now to have been found, a threat from China, is a potentially disturbing change.

The possibility of a significant decline in regional US interest and commitment cannot be ignored, however, if we think in terms of one or two decades ahead. And any such decline could be enough to be seen as leaving a policy vacuum. One scenario would see continuing trade conflicts, including those arising from competition in China and other third markets, undermining public support for the US–Japan relationship in both countries. Moreover, while the importance of the protests against US troops on Okinawa can easily be overstated, it would be equally easy to underestimate the negative aspects for many Japanese of continued basing of US troops in Japan. The US for its part may similarly be increasingly irritated and eventually withdraw its troops from a Japan unwilling to accept what the US regards as appropriate commitments associated with the security arrangements. If, in such circumstances, Japan were to revise its constitution, Japan could then build up its military capacity, including perhaps developing a nuclear capacity, particularly if it remains concerned about developments on the Korean peninsula.

This is an added reason China is opposed to Japan’s involvement in theatre missile defence arrangements. China would then probably respond by accelerating its own military build-up, perceiving a need to ensure that Japan or Russia did not
seek to fill any gap left by the US. It might move closer to Korea in the process, but that would increase Japanese unease since, like China, it does not rule out Korea as a possible future threat, particularly were it to move closer to China. The countries in Southeast Asia could then respond with additional arms build-ups to provide a stronger denial capability while, at the same time, moving closer in accommodating China.

The likelihood of a substantial US decline in interest in the short and even medium term future is probably small given US regional interests and its major power projection capacity in the Asia–Pacific from within its own borders. Much of the serious discussion of US withdrawal was when Japan, rather than China, was central to thinking about the region. Yet in the longer term, even if the Chinese belief that the US will decline in relative importance is exaggerated, the question is how to handle the process of making more space for China in the region in its not unreasonable national objective of being treated internationally in ways commensurate with its size, history and geopolitical status.

If the US were to try to limit China's growth in influence, US–China relations would grow in difficulty, with implications for regional security. If the US does accept the need for a mutual accommodation that involves some move back by the US from its current dominant position, and that accepted greater regional influence for China, particularly if accompanied by a peaceful reunification on the Korean peninsula, the nature of the US presence might change. The balancing role might become less appropriate. Political competition between China and Japan may then become more overt. While that could spill over into competition in the field of military capability, both countries are economically vulnerable and this will provide a major constraint on both their actions.

**Instability in China**

Future pressures on Chinese leaders and the administrative system in managing China will be enormous. The difficulties of maintaining governmental control while the inevitable growth of economic power of the provinces continues, will probably intensify. Difficulties of sustaining internal cohesion will remain given the problems of a growing population, the need to bring to the ‘800 million’ Chinese outside the main urban areas more of the fruits of economic development, growing demands for food and energy, and growing environmental problems. This would be accentuated were the wide expectation of weaker leadership (‘no-one will have the authority of Deng’), and any significant leadership division over policy directions, to materialise.

Pressures could come from internal or external sources. The internal pressures could simply be the tensions caused by the rapid economic modernisation being exacerbated by prolonged leadership uncertainties, and factional struggles in China could be associated with any of a variety of factors: policy weakness, slow economic
growth, high inflation, corruption as well as political disorder, bureaucratic paralysis, and weakened central control of financial and hence provincial governance.

External pressures could come through a sustained global economic downturn, increased protectionism (general or targeted on China), including continuing exclusion from the WTO, or over-taxed capital flows for infrastructure needs, particularly if affected by political instability or attempts by other powers, such as the US or Taiwan, to foment instability.

Depending upon the extent of any domestic disorder, whether from external or internal causes, the military could become significant beyond defence and security matters. At the same time refugee flows could become substantial and instability could flow over into other parts of the region.

The probability of such an eventuality is, however, small. For the Chinese leadership, domestic stability and economic development are top priorities. They legitimise the government (and the Party) and increase the international status China regards as critical. This means that China's statements that it seeks a peaceful security environment are likely to be genuine in the next decade or two at least and that great efforts will be made to maintain domestic stability.

The rise of nationalism

Nationalism is already on the increase in China and Japan, with important consequences for the regional security environment. There are divided views in both China and Japan about the appropriate path to take internationally, including with respect to each other. Some in China see the reform process negatively, as countering the objective of maintaining political unity, and making China vulnerable to foreign influence—if not undermining the Chinese governing regime. Although this is less a concern in the relationship with Japan, the global economic triad of the US, Japan and, at times, the European Union is seen by important sections of the Chinese elites as aiming to maintain control of the international system and to leave China isolated. For the nationalists, greater international interdependence leaves China vulnerable to continued humiliation at Western hands.

Both China and Japan want to play a larger role in world councils. As in China, there are groups in Japan who want Japan to be more independent and assertive internationally. These see the US (and Europe) in their approaches to economic relations with Japan as demeaning to Japan's national pride. Their conservatism is also concerned with the West's swamping of Japanese values and, as Western influences grow, some look increasingly to their Asian links, often seeing Japanese–Chinese ties as a counter to Western or US pressures.
Nationalism need not be a concern if it is what Ignatieff calls civic nationalism, a nationalism that simply reflects national resilience and self-confidence. The problem arises when it goes beyond that point and becomes aggressive. To some extent, whether nationalism becomes aggressive depends upon external factors and influences. Particular concerns have emerged of late that impact directly on China’s and Japan’s nationalist sentiments—mainly a consequence of US actions. More recently, the actions of each of the two countries toward the other have also contributed to nationalist sentiments. Taiwan in particular and perhaps the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, could continue as important stimulants to aggressive nationalism in both countries.

While Japanese resent aggressive US trade actions, US Congressional actions regarding Taiwan, Tibet and the WTO are seen as threatening most directly what China sees as its broad security interests and its national dignity and identity. More generally, the US approach of issuing demands and imposing conditions, and its use of human rights and a subversive use of ‘peaceful evolution’ are viewed as designed to undermine the Chinese political system. Similarly the US actions over Taiwan have stimulated a degree of nationalism and anti-US feeling. For their part, the Japanese have resented continuing aggressive US trade actions while domestic concerns remain about the US military presence.

The effects of rising nationalism in either country are hard to predict. In either case, they could turn against the other but are more likely to have broader impacts. For Japan, it is likely to lead to shifts in its military posture, with adverse responses from China. In the case of China, the fall of Hu Yaobang was in part attributed to his unduly soft line with the Japanese and his downplaying of the resentments of recent Chinese history; while expressions of Japanese nationalists often reflect belief in Japanese national superiority over China. Nevertheless, a major stimulus to nationalism is likely to be US and other Western pressures and attitudes. While this could bring China and Japan close together, the differences in basic attitudes of the two countries are sufficient for that to be improbable. The rise of nationalism in either country is likely, however, to be unhelpful both to a cooperative bilateral relationship and to a stable regional security environment.

Again, the probability of significantly adverse developments is not high but it is perhaps the area of greatest potential concern.

Endpiece

China and Japan have currently peaceful and basically cooperative, but not close nor trouble-free, relations with each other and, for the most part, good relations

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with other major regional powers. Both Japan and China are participating actively, with increasing ease in the case of China, in the regional forums—the explicit security forum, the ARF, and the economic forums (APEC and PECC) which have confidence building characteristics of a security nature. In the process of shaping their post-Cold War foreign policies, there are common Japanese and Chinese interests in political stability, economic development and a peaceful international environment.

Nevertheless, the China–Japan relationship will be increasingly difficult to manage for several reasons. For both countries, the concentration on the ‘major’ issues and the neglect of the ‘minor’ was easier when the Cold War provided a national focus, when domestic politics in both countries were more easily managed, and when expectations about China’s future growth were more limited. In the new regional security order, the sensitivity of the bilateral relationship has increased. That both countries are, to a degree, responding, if still at this stage in a limited way, to the perception of the other’s military modernisation and to what appears to be a changed strategic environment which each sees as a result of the other’s actions, could lead to increased tensions in the relationship.

Nevertheless, provided the leadership on both sides can avoid a kind of security dilemma acceleration of action, response, reaction, we are unlikely to see Japan and China becoming overt adversaries, but neither are they likely to become close allies in the foreseeable future. The one possibility would seem to be a context in which Japan moved to increase its military presence in the region in response, for example, to a US unwillingness to assure its trade routes. In such relatively unlikely circumstances China would presumably respond. A strong offset to this potential for heightened bilateral tension is the growing economic interaction between the two countries. This is not only important to the national interests of both countries but provides a domestic constituency for maintaining cooperative relationships.

Japan wants a larger regional political role. China is not satisfied with an existing world order dominated by the US. In particular, it wants a multipolar world. Both are likely to compete for regional power and influence but that need not create problems provided the competition is managed effectively or major external disturbances do not disturb the situation.

While China is one of several countries with regional power, that power remains limited and for the foreseeable future it is likely to pursue good relations with others in the region provided it is not forced to respond to what it sees as adverse external pressures. Its critical need for stable relations with Japan will be one factor encouraging it to take a basically moderate approach to the maritime issues in the South China Sea over unresolved ocean issues, even though good relations with the ASEAN counties will be the more important factor—for reasons
which include avoiding any idea of groupings of developing countries pursuing a containment policy towards China.

An objective of Japan’s security policy towards China has been to facilitate the development of a stable China integrated into the emerging community of Pacific nations. Japan could change its own defence policy significantly as a result either of rising and aggressive nationalism, or if the US nuclear umbrella were to be withdrawn, but neither seems probable at present. Japan has shifted its approach to a degree both in its relations with the US, and in its 1996 White Paper, which now cite China as a security concern.31

Provided, however, that China’s military modernisation does not move into a substantially higher gear associated with an increased Chinese assertiveness or in response to Japanese actions, and that its nationalism will be inspired simply by the cultural ideals and beliefs that reflect the successes of Chinese modernisation and not by aggressive appeals to patriotism, the changes are not likely to be major. While there is a danger of aggressive nationalism in China increasing its influence, as there is in Japan, how far this develops will depend in part upon the internal leadership in both countries, and in part upon the actions of countries other than China and Japan. For China, the inevitable domestic impacts of Western influence will provide ammunition for conservative elements but these are likely to be controlled providing external actions do not put in doubt in China the whole question of China’s interdependence and its status in the world.

Should there be a breakdown in the bilateral relationship, not only are regional arms build-ups likely but competition will increase for influence among ASEAN and other regional states. This would put at risk regional security in the non-military sense that both countries see as important as well as in the military sense. At risk, in particular, would be the general acceptance of the rules based international system, not just in the economic but in the political and strategic fields as well.

This brings us back to the importance of the multilateral dialogue processes. These are essential for building and maintaining regional confidence but also in contributing to bilateral relations among regional countries and particularly to the triangular relationship between China, Japan and the US. Japan has long seen that process as important. China is similarly, if more slowly, coming to recognise its value to China.

31 ‘China warrants caution in defense report’, Japan Times, 20 July 1996. It may well have been expressed more strongly but for the coalition partners restraint on the earlier National Defense Program Outline on which it built and which was the subject of considerable argument. See ‘Ruling bloc at odds on defense policy’, Japan Times, 29 November 1995.
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