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**“US Security Strategy in Asia  
and the Regional Security Regime  
A Chinese View”**

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# **US Security Strategy in Asia and the Regional Security Regime**

## **A Chinese View**

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The United States has been a major player and force in the Asia since the end of the Second World War in the 1940s. And the bilateral alliance system that the US has with Japan, Republic of Korea (ROK), Australia, and the Philippines, has been a major security structure or mechanism in the region. However, that US-led and US-centered bilateral system has never been sufficient nor comprehensive enough to serve as the overall regional security regime in the past, today, and in the future. For a longer term run and perspective, Asia does need and will develop a comprehensive and overall security regime in the future, with or without the United States.

### **I. US Security Strategy in Asia**

The US security strategy has remained to be stable and unchanged for relatively quite long time since the 1950s or early 1960s, that is the “forward deployment” of American troops in East Asia and Western Pacific, and US bilateral alliance with a number of countries in Asia and Western Pacific. Those are “cornerstone” of American security strategy in Asia, plus its relations with China, Russia and other countries in the region.

#### **1. “Forward Deployment”**

Since the end of the WWII, the U.S. has maintained forward deployment of troops in East Asia and the Western Pacific. This includes American military force in Japan, ROK, the Philippines before 1993, Australia, Guam, and the Seventh Fleet ships in Western Pacific and Indian Ocean. These forces are supported by American troops in Alaska, Hawaii, and the Third Fleet in East Pacific.

In later 1970s and early 1990s, the Carter and Senior Bush administrations did something to shift and cut American forward deployment forces in Asia to some certain degree. However, since early 1990s, there had not been any major changes of American forces in the region, compared with major American “forward deployment” troops cut from 300,000 in Cold War era to 100,000 in the post-Cold War time, including today. America has maintained basically 100,000 troops in East Asia and Western Pacific today, almost the same number in the Cold War era.

Recently, Pentagon has outlined the plan to cut the “forward deployment” forces in Asia, mostly from Republic of Korea. According to the plan, some 12,500 troops will be moved from ROK and some smaller number from Japan in the next few years till 2008.<sup>1</sup> The American “revolution of military affairs” (RMA or “Rumsfeld Revolution”) downplays the significance of stationing large number of military forces in the set areas, while emphasizes the mobility and capability of American forces in the world, especially quickly movement of the forces to the potential crisis areas such as Middle East and Taiwan Strait.

## 2. The Alliance System

Next to the “forward deployment” forces, another American “cornerstone” in Asia is the alliance system in the region. And the two are related together because even the “forward deployment” is dependent very much on the bilateral alliance system.

The system was established in the 1950s and early 1960s. It remained basically sound in the past forty to fifty years since then. However, some changes had taken place and weakened the system to certain degree. The major shift of the system took place in the 1990s when the Pilipino Senate refused to authorize the continuity of American troops in the bases in the Philippines. The large naval and air force bases there closed and close to 10,000 military troops and their dependents left the Southeast country in middle of the 1990s. Some hundreds of American troops have come back in the Philippines in recent years for helping the country to fight against terrorism, however, they are not same as the old days’ military presence in the country and looks American troops will not come back in such a large scale in the future “joint war against terrorism.”

Besides the strong bilateral alliance with Japan, ROK, and Australia, the U.S. has worked out some “arrangements” with Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia for America to use some facilities in those countries and store some military materials there. However, they are neither standard military alliance nor in the large scale of significance.

## 3. Bilateral Relations

In recent American national and Asian regional strategy reports and major statements, American political and military leaders also site American relations with

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<sup>1</sup> “Bush Announces Largest U.S. Force Restructuring in 50 years,” *Washington File*, August 17, 2004. pp.2~3.

other non-allied countries as something necessary “supplement” to American forward deployment troops and the bilateral alliance in Asia. Those relationships that are significant to American security strategy in Asia are US relations with China, Southeast Asia, and recently with India and Pakistan in Southern Asia.

### US and China

To be sure, American security strategy in Asia does not depend on its relations with the People’s Republic. However, its relations with China have great impacts to American security interest and goals in the region.

China remains both positive and negative in American security strategy in the region. The positive elements locate on the issues and areas of counter-terrorism, coordination or cooperation on Korean issues including nuclear issue, non-traditional security problems such as search and rescue and many others. In recent years, the areas of Sino-US coordination and cooperation have been growing, especially in the war against terrorism and maintaining peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.

In the war against international terrorism, China actually can do little to help Americans directly. China does not have too much “intelligence” about international terrorism to “share” with Americans. Nor China like to provide troops, money and materials to the US in latter’s war on terrorism. What China can do and has done is very much indirect coordination and cooperation with the U.S. in the war against terrorism. They are including providing more than US\$150 million to Afghanistan in its rebuilding after American operation in October 2001, political support and economic aid to Pakistan in its front-work against terrorism. China has cooperated with American counterparts in checking international financial flows and law enforcement cooperation and coordination, in the efforts against international terrorism.

In other strategic and security area of non-proliferation, China has worked together with the United States in opposing nuclear tests in South Asia since 1998, and in trying to resolve North Korean nuclear issue since 2002. China has worked very hard to bring the six countries of DPRK, the US, ROK, Japan, Russia and China itself together for the “six-party talks” over North Korean nuclear issue in the passing years. Three rounds of talks have taken place in Beijing, and the planned September 2004 talks have been delayed due to differences between DPRK and the United States.

In the important area of US stationing troops and maintaining bilateral alliances in East Asia and Western Pacific, China in recent years has soften its position toward those key issues to American security strategy in the region. Chinese leaders, governmental officials and officers now talk little about American forward military deployment in Asia and bilateral alliance with Japan, ROK and Australia. Compared with the strong criticism in the middle 1990s, in recent years there have been little words from the Chinese side on the subjects.

However, China is still a critical concern of American Asian security strategy even after “the 9/11.” Along with the North Korea, China is one of the two countries that American strategists and military have “planned” a possible war with in the future. Although since September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, and American strategic focus/priority has been shifting to the war against terrorism, China remains as a long-term strategic concern and target of American security strategy in Asia. Taiwan situation in recent years have increased the possibility of a Sino-US war over Taiwan issue, especially since President Gorge W. Bush stated on April 25, 2001 that the US “would do whatever to protect Taiwan” when the island is attacked by the Mainland.

Therefore, the strategic and security relations between the U.S. and China remain unclear, uncertain, and dangerous sometime since the end of the Cold War in late 1980s and the early 1990s, though the two countries engage in economic, political, and security cooperation in many other areas.

#### US and Southeast Asia

Besides Northeast Asia, the Southeast Asia is another major area of American Asian security strategy. After the Vietnam war, the United States no longer has a strategic target in the sub-region, its strategic priority lies on strengthening and developing security cooperation with the countries of Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

According to American statements, the U.S. no longer emphasizes bases in the region of Southeast Asia. Instead, the U.S. has been interested in seeking “facilities” to restore strategic goods and the “rights” to use the air and sea facilities in case when they are needed. In the post-Cold war era, the U.S. has made a number of agreements with Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia for the purpose. In the Philippines, the U.S. has some hundreds troops in the country for helping the Pilipino government and military in their war against terrorism in recent years. However, it seems unlikely that the U.S. will restore its bases and send large scale military force in the Southeast country anytime in the foreseeable future, as it did before the early 1990s.

#### US and India/Pakistan

The South Asia had not been a major strategic area to American security strategy in Asia for long time till recent years. However, it becomes increasingly significant to the United States even before “the 9/11.” Both Americans and Indians have talked lot about their “strategic partnership” in recent years before and after “the 9/11,” and after “the 9/11” and in the war against the terrorism, the country of Pakistan becomes strategically important again to the United States. US Secretary of State Collin Powell announced that the U.S. takes Pakistan as a “strategic alliance” during his visit to that country last spring, which made the Indians unhappy.

It is quite understandable for why Pakistan becomes strategically important to

American security strategy in Asia, because Pakistan is a “frontier” country in the war against international terrorism, the number one strategic priority to the Americans, at least for the time being. Without the support, cooperation, and involvement, it would be very hard, if not impossible, for Americans to undertake the military operation against Taliban in October 2001, to rebuild Afghanistan after the operation, and to avoid the terrorist force come back in Afghanistan and in Pakistan itself. Therefore, Pakistan is and will remain to be a “strategic” importance to American security strategy in Asia, including South, Central and West Asia, as long as the war against terrorism is going on.

On the other side, the meaning and significance of “strategic partnership” between the U.S. and India is less clear compared with such a relationship between the U.S. and Pakistan. The saying of relationship between the worlds’ two largest democracies does not suggest anything real in strategic sense. Therefore, it has been quite confused and unclear for what does the “US-Indian strategic partnership” mean?

One explanation, at least to some Chinese strategists’ understanding, that if there is anything real strategically in the US-Indian strategic partnership, it must be the common interests between the U.S. and India in coping with the “rising China” next door to India. This understanding believes that the rationale and purpose of US-Indian strategic partnership are aiming at China, and try to check or even contain China now and in the future.

## II. The US and An Asian Regional Security Regime

Since the end of the Second World War in 1945, the United States has played a major role at least, and a leading role at the most, in regional security structure in Asia. Any future regional security regime in Asia will be difficult or impossible for not having the U.S. to continue to play a significant role in it. At the same time, there is also the possibility that the U.S. security role in Asia might be decreasing, and it is not totally unlikely for Asians to develop a regional security regime without the country of the United States, by option of Americans or Asians, or by chance in the long term future.

### 1 . A Bilateral Alliance Regime

The U.S. has always took its bilateral alliance system in Asia as the foundation/cornerstone as the country’s regional security strategy and regional stability. It certainly would like to maintain the system after the Cold War and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, although with some adjustments now and in the future.

However, not every country in Asia has accepted the US position, or in other words, the American bilateral alliance system could not and cannot become an acceptable, designable, and workable regional security regime in Asia in the past, today, and the future.

First, compared with the NATO system in Europe which covers most of the countries in Western Europe and whole Europe, the American bilateral alliance system in Asia includes only few countries in the region, thus it does not even look like a “regional” security regime.

Second, the bilateral alliance system is a bilateral in nature, it is not a regional system. When anybody reads the articles, guidelines of those alliance/treaties, one would find they are basically serve the purpose to protect the allied countries, not serve the whole region.

Thirdly, some countries like China, DPRK, have always opposed the alliance system because they believe the system was built up in the Cold War time and served the purpose of East-West confrontation, and a military/security alliance always has a third country as the target. Many other Asian countries do not oppose the system, but do not believe that the bilateral alliances serving the purpose to protect themselves, or even do not need such a protection, especially in the post-Cold War era.

## 2. An Asian NATO?

Some people, at least some American and Asian academics, recognized the bilateral nature and the limitation of the American alliance system, and suggest that put all those bilateral alliance together to set up an American-centered multilateral security regime in the region – the so called “Asian NATO.”

This idea has not become a governmental policy of the allied countries, and it would be impossible for it to develop into a regional security regime in Asia even it becomes an official policy of the nations and eventually is established.

Because there are huge differences among the American allied countries in Asia. ROK, Thailand may have different understanding and positions with Japan, the U.S. and Australia on regional security affairs, and policies toward China, North Korea, and many other matters of regional security.

Also, as stated above, it is hard, if it is not impossible, for four or five countries in a region to form a security “regime” and then state that the few-country-structure is an overall regime for a large region of more than twenty countries. It is one thing for whether the five countries can agree on the formation of the multilateral alliance, and it is still quite another then to say whether it can be accepted and actually serve the purpose as a regime which maintains the peace and stability in Asia.

## 4. The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)

So far the only widely accepted official regional security approach is ARF (ASEAN Regional Forum). Although it is still a “forum” and the major function has been limited to exchange views and dialogue among the countries, it does have the capacity to develop into a major regional security regime in the future.

First it is an official security cooperation body. It is only official multilateral security approach in Asia. Other multilateral processes such as APEC (Asia-Pacific

Economic Cooperation), APT (ASEAN Plus Three), have been mainly in the areas of economic cooperation.

Second, ARF is a regional security process. With membership of the nineteen countries currently, the process covers almost all the nations in Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, and some countries in South Asia, plus countries of the U.S., Canada, Australia, Russia, and EU. No other security process has such a regional coverage and acceptance in the region.

Thirdly, the ARF countries have basically agreed on the direction that the process should be going on, that is from CBM (confidence building measures) to the stage of preventive diplomacy. This means that ARF can develop into a workable, problem resolving body, from the current process of “dialogue” on security matters. Certainly this is going to be long process, and whether it will develop into such a decision-making regime remains uncertain.

The U.S. has been a member of the ARF process, and it is possible for the country to play a bigger role in the process if it choose to do so, and work together well with others in the process.

## 5. The Six-Party Talks and Regional Security Cooperation In Northeast Asia

As the 6-Party talks on North Korea nuclear issue going on, there is the preference and design from American, South Korean, Japanese, and Russian sides to develop the 6-Party talks into a permanent process of Northeast Asian security dialogue and cooperation. However, the North Korean and Chinese positions are not clear yet. North Korea’s major concern and goal is the United States, the security threat, economic sanction and assistance, and normal relations with the US. It may not interest too much in a multilateral development in Northeast Asia. And China cares both North Korean position at one hand, and worries about US military alliance with Japan and ROK at the other, and thus has a deep doubt about a multilateral approach on security when half of the members are military alliance on one side.

The Chinese academy seems to be more willing towards a Northeast Asia security approach. As put by Professor Pang Zhongying at *China Daily* recently, “Northeast Asia should not base its security measures on just bilateral framework any more,” and “the nuclear stalemate on the Korean Peninsula could be turned into a catalyst for the establishment of a multilateral security system in Northeast Asia.....Regional peace can only be achieved through the collective and objective actions of the countries in the region.”<sup>2</sup>

## 6. The ASEAN Plus Three (APT)

Among the multilateral activities, approaches, processes, organizations or institutions in East Asia, the APT is the only one which is truly East Asian regional multilateral process. All others are either sub-regional or cross-regional which include non-Asian countries. Till now, the APT has been a multilateral approach for economic

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<sup>2</sup> Pang Zhongying: “Building Regional Security System,” *China Daily*, March 26, 2004, p.A6.

cooperation, and its direction is not clear, nor certain. Its membership and areas of cooperation seem to be open. It has the possibility to become a comprehensive regional mechanism covering multilateral cooperation on both economic and political/security areas in East Asia, and even whole Asia in the future.

The APT was formed by ASEAN in middle of the 1990s. ASEAN is a sub-regional multilateral organization in Southeast Asia which was established in 1967. The original members of ASEAN are Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. It has been expanded to ten members in 1999, then formally includes the other four Southeast Asian countries of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam.

ASEAN's meeting with the "outside" members is called ASEAN + 1. That means ASEAN, the ten members as a whole now, is one side, and one of the other countries is another side. At the early stage of ASEAN + 1 meetings, the outsiders were Japan, Korea. China joined the process in 1996, and India became the other "one" in 2003.

In 1994, the ASEAN invited Japan, ROK and China to attend a meeting after ASEAN's own meeting, that actually is the informal birth of ASEAN + 3. In 1995, the ASEAN summit formally proposed a summit meeting between ASEAN and China, Japan and ROK. In each year of the recent years since 1997, ASEAN did not only hold "bilateral" summit meetings with each of the three outside countries, but also had the annual "informal summit meeting" with all the outside dialogue states together, since all of them were in the same place at the same time. That comes to the formalization of "ASEAN plus Three" meetings and process. Before 1999, ASEAN +3 meant 9 + 3 when Cambodia was not a formally member of ASEAN, that was ASEAN 9 plus China, Japan, and ROK. After all the four other Southeast nations formally joined ASEAN in 1999, then ASEAN +3 becomes 10 + 3.

The APT process has made a number of important and some substantial progresses in the short period of past seven years since 1997.

- The annual informal summit meeting of the APT since 1997 has become the most important event of the process. It has been the highest gathering and decision-making body within the framework. In the 1999 summit meeting held in Manila, the thirteen leaders of ASEAN + 3 issued a Joint Statement on East Asian Cooperation, which sets the future direction of the approach. In the statement, the thirteen countries agree to promote cooperation in economy, finance, human resource development, science and technology. They also pledge to continue dialogues aimed at lasting peace and stability in the region.<sup>3</sup> Guided by the statement, the APT countries are expected to accelerate trade, investments and technology transfer, encourage technical cooperation in information technology and e-commerce, and inspire active participation in the development of East Asia's growth areas.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Shao Zongwei, "Nations Aiming for Same Goal," *China Daily*, November 29, 1999, p.1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

- The Final Report of APT Research Group was concluded in 2001. It raises seventeen measures of cooperation in the near future and nine areas for middle and longer term goal, including studying the possibility of establishing East Asian Free Trade Area and the Summit Meeting of East Asia.<sup>5</sup>
- Under the informal summit meeting framework, the APT has so far established eight mechanisms of ministers' meetings, or in other words, the dialogue processes. These include financial, economic, foreign affairs, agriculture, labor and welfare, environment, health, and travel (tourism) ministers of the thirteen APT countries. Under the ministers' meetings, there are high level official working meetings, private sectors' meetings, and news media and academic networks.
- The financial ministers and central bank governors of the APT hold meeting once every year since 1999. They usually discuss the global and regional economic and financial situations, and exchange views on financial cooperation among the East Asian countries. The meetings have reached some agreements for financial cooperation, and some programs such as training have been under way.

A substantial development and cooperation of APT is the "Chiang Mal Agreement" in 2000. That agreement establishes a currency assistance system within APT members. Through the bilateral agreements under the agreement, APT nations will provide assistance to others when some members have currency difficulties. The agreed amount of currency will be provided now reaches to US \$35 billion. This is an APT united action to deal with possible Asian-financial-crisis problem

- Foreign ministers' meeting of APT has been held annually since 2000. The ministers take the opportunity to discuss political, economic, and security situations in the region, exchange views on regional issues, and study the measures for promoting regional cooperation. The 2000 meeting issued a joint statement to support de sovereign and territory integrity and national unity of Indonesia. The 2002 meeting discussed about enlarging and deepening East Asian cooperation in economic, political and security areas, and foreign ministers of the thirteen countries spoke about their countries position on those issues.
- The minister-level "East Asia Development Meeting" was held in Tokyo in August 2002. This is a dual-minister meeting within the APT framework, with each member state sent a foreign and an economic ministers or vice ministers to the meeting. The major issues at the meeting are political-economic ones in the region.
- APT health meeting on SARS took place in Beijing in early June of 2003. Officials and experts of the thirteen countries exchanged experiences and view about SARS, discussed measures and cooperation against the disease. A special meeting among APT health ministers' meeting on SARS was taken

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<sup>5</sup> Wang Xiaoguang, "Zhu Rongji Chuxi Dongmeng Yu Zhong Ri Han Lingdaoren Huiyi (Zhu Rongji Attends ASEAN + 3 Leaders' Meeting)," *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily), November 5, 2002, p. A1.

place in Cambodia in June 2003. The meeting discussed about the joint measures and cooperation among them in fighting against the SARS. The meeting issued a joint statement.

- APT also has established the process in other areas, including dialogue, consultation, and cooperation against illegal drugs, smuggling, organized and transnational crimes.
- In trade area, there is no regional-wide efforts have been underway, however, three parts of free trade area talks have been underway within APT. They are FTA of ASEAN, China and ASEAN FTA talks, and Japan-ASEAN FTA incentive. An East Asia region-wide free trade area (EAFTA) is possible when those three FTA talks complete and implemented.

Although is only seven years' old, the APT has made steady progress and has become the central, more substantial, and real Asian multilateral mechanism. It is the most promising multilateral approach which has the possibility to develop into a European Union-style regional integration in East Asia and whole Asia in the long-term future, as a final goal and possibility.

One of the most important advantages of the APT is its feature, character, and reality as a whole and real Asia multilateral approach.

Even without South, Central, and Western Asia as members of the process, the APT is now the most inclusive and comprehensive multilateral approach in Asia. ASPEC, ARF, Asia-Europe Dialogue, and CSCAP (Council on Security Cooperation in Asia-Pacific) all have more members involved than the APT, but they are not just Asian. All of them involve some other countries or group of countries outside Asia. And among those Asian multilateral approaches, ASEAN, the 4-party talks and the 6-party talks, NEACD (Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue), and SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization), only APT involves and includes most of the Asian countries. Now the membership of APT includes three of all the five nations in Northeast Asia, and all ten countries in Southeast Asia. Together with current thirteen nations, APT covers the area with 1,700 million people and economic strength (GDP) of US \$7 trillion in current exchange rate of 2003. Thus the APT is so far the most comprehensive and inclusive multilateral approach in East Asia.

As discussed above, almost all other comprehensive multilateral approaches involve Asia so far are more than Asia. This is not to say they are not good, not necessary to the Asians. APEC, ARF, CSCAP, Asia-Europe Dialogue all have promoted economic, political, security, cultural cooperation among Asian countries and societies, and the dialogue and cooperation between Asia and other parts of the world. These processes have contributed greatly to the growth of multilateralism and regional and global integration. Therefore, these multilateral approaches certainly should be continuing and developing.

However, as Asians started to talk in the 1980s, Asia also needs some sorts of its own multilateral approaches, just as all other parts of the world have their own regional processes. This is not trying to be excluding but only recognizing the fact

that Asia, like all other parts of the world, has its own issues, problems, and interests, thus it needs some sort of its own multilateral approaches to deal with those issues and problems. Outside involvements are helpful, but they should not and cannot replace Asians' own multilateral processes.

And among the existing comprehensive, most inclusive regional multilateral approaches, the APT is a real Asian approach. It is Asians' own efforts, involves to most of Asian countries. Thus if Asians want, need and should have their own multilateral regional approach or mechanism, the APT is the right and only one here in Asia today.

The membership of APT now includes almost all the countries in East Asia except Mongolia and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). This is not a big problem when the two countries want to be included and when other members of the APT find it ready to include the two East Asian countries. And it is possible for the APT to expand to include South and Central Asian countries in the future.

Based on today and future conditions, intentions and policies of Asian countries towards the APT and other regional multilateral approaches, a realistic approach for the APT is stressing economic cooperation/economic security first. Economic cooperation is everyone's interests, and Asian countries have showed great interests to promote economic exchange, cooperation and institution in recent years, especially after Asian Financial crisis in 1997. And Asians have strong intention to have a Asian own economic cooperation mechanism, even at the same time they accept and support the global institutions such as the IMF (International Monetary Fund), WB (World Bank) and WTO (World Trade Organization), and larger and cross-regional economic groupings such APEC. Asian financial crisis tells Asians clearly that they need help themselves, and they need an Asian economic/financial institution to help them when they have serious problems, at the same time they accept and look for global institutions to offer them some sort of assistance.

Economic issues are increasing becoming security issues because management of economic development, policy integration, financial stability, energy security, network and information security all become security issues to Asia and the world. And at the age of globalization, Asians cannot ensure their economic security without cooperation with others.

The other promising area for APT to do, besides economic cooperation and security, is the areas of non-traditional security issues. Countries have little problems but common interests and positions in dealing with transnational security issues such counter-terrorism, fighting illegal drugs, smuggling and organized crimes, environmental protection, search and rescue. When the APT has the experience and consensus on those non-traditional security or "soft security" issues, then it is logic and nature for it to go into the area of "hard security" issues in the region. APT can do something in regional peace-keeping, including peace-keeping training, non-proliferation, maritime security. Countries also have common interests to ensure regional security in those areas. Security problems solving will be the most challenging and remote goal of APT or any regional security multilateral mechanism

in the region.

The APT has been accepted by almost all the East Asian countries and it shows a great potential to develop into a major or even the most important multilateral mechanism in whole Asia in the future. However, looking at the approach in the past and today, the APT still has lot of difficulties and problems to become a workable regional mechanism. It definitely has a long way to go.

One of the biggest problems facing the APT is its nature when it was established and the members have agreed on since.

The APT so far has been mainly a dialogue, a forum for economic and economy related cooperation approach. The areas of it have been expended to other issues in recent years, but so far is not a regional political-security approach. It is still has a long way to go even in the areas of meaningful economic cooperation in East Asia.

The direction-setting “The Joint Statement of East Asian Cooperation” issued at the 1999 APT summit clearly emphasizes economic cooperation as the central theme, task, and goal of the approach. The areas that have been set are economy, finance, social and human resource development, science and technology, culture and information, development, transnational issues, political and other areas.<sup>6</sup> Guided by the statement, the thirteen countries agree to accelerate trade, investment and technology transfer.<sup>7</sup> Till 2003, the APT process has focused eight major areas for promoting cooperation. They are economy, finance, agriculture, labor, tourism, environment, health, and foreign affairs. The process is ready to expend its dialogue and cooperation in other areas such as counter-transnational crimes and other non-traditional security matters.

Proposed by the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, the ninth informal summit of the APT in October 2003 in Bali, Indonesia, agrees to study the feasibility of an East Asia Free Trade Area. “All this will pave the way for the ultimate formulation of an East Asian Free Trade Area,” the Chinese Premier believes.<sup>8</sup> The Chinese side did propose political and security dialogue within APT process. Premier Wen said at the meeting that security issues remain prominent in the region, and that terrorism and other trans-national problems are increasingly become real challenges to all the countries. He calls APT to do more on multilateral security dialogue and cooperation on security issues in the region.<sup>9</sup> Other members have also been interesting on discussing and cooperation on non-traditional security issues, but it is the approach which has virtually done nothing on so called “traditional security” area.

The other most important limitation and difficulty for the APT today and future lies at the national strategies of its member states, and bilateral relations among them. ASEAN as a whole and its ten members as individual state, China, Japan, ROK, all have their own concerns about regional cooperation in general and APT in

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<sup>6</sup> “The Joint Statement on East Asian Cooperation,” *Renmin Ribao*, November 29, 1999, p. A7.

<sup>7</sup> Shao Zongwei: “Nations Aiming for Same Goal,” *China Daily*, November 29, 1999, p. A1.

<sup>8</sup> Sun Shangwei: “Leaders Push Teamwork,” *China Daily*, October 8, 2003, P. A1.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

particular. There have been increasing common ground among those countries in Asia, but they are far from consensus for where and when the APT and other regional multilateral approaches should go.

America is certainly one of the major factors affecting, if not determining, the development of any multilateral approach in Asia. And till now APT seems to be acceptable to American policy makers, partly because the APT has been at early stage and focus on economic issues, and also because America Asian strategy bases heavily on the bilateral arrangements with Japan, ROK, Australia and other Asia-Pacific nations and those bilateral alliances seem to be strong right now. However, if APT goes further in its economic grouping and security cooperation, Americans may find to be nervous to see a regional security mechanism is developing without American participation, just as the current attitude and position of the United States toward the Europe efforts to build its own security/defense structure.

However, Americans should or have to realize, soon or later, that a regional economic and security arrangement in Asia without direct US involvement is inevitable in the long term run, simply because as in other regions such as Europe or America, Asia needs its own economic and security mechanism to care itself, to help each other. Regionalism is a basic and strong part of globalization, and the historical trend will be going on with or without American support. The idea and proposal for an East Asia cooperation such as EAEC has been introduced for long time since later 1980s, and in almost ten years since its introduction, most of Asian nations took very cautious position towards it, partly because they cared about American concerns. But the 1997 Asian financial crisis indicates clearly that Americans do not care Asians too much, for it did not act to the crisis as it had done to Mexican financial crisis not long time ago before the Asian one, when the US offered about \$30 billion help to Mexico. Therefore, since Americans do not care too much about Asia, why Asians should always care American concern about East Asian grouping?

The more solid reason for Asians to go ahead with their grouping is the hard fact that Asians trade more among themselves then they trade with the United States in recent years. This may be a revolution in East Asian economic relations, and this reality definitely changes the mind-set of Asians on their foreign economic relations at least.

It is pretty certain that the APT approach has been established, accepted and it will continue to grow in the region. However, the question will be how strong the approach will be coming and what is the direction of the approach?

The most likely scenario for APT in the next five to ten years seems to be maintaining as an economic-centered regional multilateral approach, and working towards more cooperation on transnational/non-traditional security areas in East Asia. Even with some important limitations and difficulties, it seems that compared with other multilateral approaches in the region, APT has and is continuing to grow more quickly and substantially then others such as APEC and ARF. In next five and ten years, APT looks like it can and will keep the momentum of growing quickly and

substantially in East Asia. And the area is likely to expand to include South Asia.

It has taken more than five decades for Europe to develop from cooperation in few areas to a real economic and political community, and trying to develop into a security and constitutional union now and in the future. In the interdependent and globalized the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it may not need to take so long for Asians to develop an “East Asian Community.” However, the regionalism in East Asia is still at very early stage and it needs long time and tremendous efforts to grow.