

The United States, Global Realignment, and Korea

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A Brief Glory?

The end of the Cold War and the Soviet empire have left the United States in the enviable position of being the only superpower in the world. Despite the serious structural problems born of the strains of the Cold War period and the increasing competition from formidable rivals, its economic power is still global in reach, and provided its recuperative ability continues, United States will continue to exert decisive influence on the world economic order. The emerging new order of the World Trade Organization and the successful establishment of NAFTA could ensure, if skilfully managed, the continuation of American global economic dominance, if not hegemony, for the foreseeable future. In strategic terms as well, the American military power remains unchallenged. Only the American military power has global reach, and with proper use of the United Nations as cover, its exercise is assured for some time to come as legitimate and necessary. The discrediting of the rival ideology and the success of the capitalist market economy – a near hallmark of American presence in the world – reinforced its moral mandate for global stewardship. The enduring glitter of democratic institutions and practices guarantee its role as the paramount adjuster/mediator of the world's disputes and crises.²

Shifting Alignments?

However, in a world of historic transition without the firmly established new world order that replaced the familiar past, the nagging questions

1 This article represents the author's views, not those of any organization or institution.

2 For an excellent discussion of the ambiguities of the American position in the post-Cold War period, see, inter alia, Richard J. Barnet, "Reflections: The Disorders of Peace," *The New Yorker*, January 20, 1992, pp. 62-74. See also Graham Allison and Gregory F. Treverton, eds., *Rethinking American Security: Beyond the Cold War to New World Order* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991).

which must tax the policy-makers in Washington must be: "How long will our power last? How long will we be in a position to impose our own solutions to the world's problems? Will we have new rivals and competing alignments forged along radically different blocs of major powers in the world? How will that affect our position as the superpower? And hence, what will the world be like in the twenty-first century? What should the United States do to prepare for the coming changes and to protect its vital national interests?" Some of these fundamental questions, along similar lines, must have entered the quiet debate in Washington's highest policy circles at least since the late seventies, when the fissure lines in global politics began to herald the approaching end of the Cold War and its accompanying symmetric alignments. Along the way, and certainly highly historic in retrospect, there were ample signals for the approaching end of an era and the beginning of another period of complex readjustment.

Of these, several had a particularly disruptive impact on the existing Cold War alignment, thus fundamentally affecting the relative positions of the superpowers. One was West Germany's independent approaches to Moscow and Eastern Europe to effect the relaxation of East-West tension and ultimately help normalize relations between them (and perhaps quietly dreaming of unification one day). However, in the process, West Germany, by its policies since the mid-sixties, was instrumental in loosening the glue of the trans-Atlantic alliance which in turn strengthened the grass roots movement to question the relevance and efficacy of the American military guarantees for Western European security. The convergence, however, of the basic strategic interests between Moscow and Bonn were founded on the tandem trends of the mounting intra-bloc difficulties in Eastern Europe and the rising discontent in Western Europe over the state of the Western alliance and the doomsday scenario of nuclear deterrence in its defence. The ultimate outcome was the decline of the United States position in Europe as well as the increasing distance between Washington and its key continental allies. Subsequently, however, an equilibrium of a sort was restored when the United States and China began their strategic detente against the Soviet Union. Because of the transitory nature of their relationship, the Sino-American detente, too, began to wane, especially when the Soviet threat to China eased and the Washington-Moscow detente began.³

3 For a detailed discussion of this fundamental strategic change, see T. C. Rhee, "From Europe to China: West Germany's Ostpolitik and Nixon's Detente with China," (in 3 parts) *Sino-Soviet Affairs* (Seoul), Vol. IX, No. 4, Winter 1985/86, pp. 9-35; Vol. X, No. 1, Spring 1986, pp. 223-264; and Vol. X, No. 2, Summer 1986, pp. 171-210. For the United States' concern about West Germany's *Ostpolitik* and suspicions of German motives, see

The crumbling of the Cold War line-up is equally clear in the Asia-Pacific region. The real seed of change in Asia lies in the evolving relations among the United States, China, and Japan. The chronic feuds between Washington and Tokyo are so deeply rooted in fundamental structural differences that the solution will be harder to find as time passes. The trade frictions no longer occupy the center stage, as the realization dawned since the late seventies that the foundation of the trans-Pacific conflict is more deeply rooted in geopolitical factors and the historical heritage of the two nations' pasts. The tangible chasms of economic and political differences were aggravated by more basic cultural and ethnic elements, and vice versa. As Japan began to rise in power, differences became more stark and eventually intermixed with the *esprit of a new era*.⁴

As has been frequently indicated in the recent past, the problems which once seemed minor began to loom more difficult to manage as the strategic policy agenda of the two countries diverged more fundamentally and deeply. If the trend continues in the coming century, the United States and Japan will no longer find common ground to paper over their differences.⁵ As Japan's policy goals change and expand, matched by its resources and new priorities, the continued presence of the United States in East Asia and the Western Pacific will be increasingly more difficult to maintain in close co-operation with Japan.

Here the China Factor could pose added complications to the general strategic climate as far as the United States is directly concerned. China's rise to a new economic superpower status (the second in the world according to some experts) by the turn of the new century or at least in its first quarter,⁶ will be matched by its increasing military capability with clearly

Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1970); Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1982).

- 4 A popular weekly Japanese magazine, SAPIO, carried a feature article: "Japan's War: Were We the Only Evil in the World?" quoted in "The Pacific War – A Holy War Against the U.S." *Chosun Ilbo* (Seoul), August 14, 1995, p. 8. See also Alan Tonelson, "America, Germany, and Japan: The Tenacious Trio?" *Current History*, Vol. 94, No. 595, November 1995, pp. 353-358. See also, Gerald L. Curtis, ed., *The United States, Japan and Asia: Challenges for U.S. Policy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994).
- 5 *Inter alia*, Tonelson, *op cit*. In a way, therefore, the new Hashimoto Cabinet with nine of its key members ultra-rightwing nationalists with their own brand of radical revisionistic historical perception, might ultimately be comparable, in its historical significance, to the Lieutenant General Baron Tanaka (Giichi) Cabinet of 1927 which ultimately changed the direction of Imperial Japan from peace to confrontation, war, and conquest.
- 6 Cf. *inter alia*, William H. Overholt, *The Rise of China* (New York, London: W.W. Norton, 1993), pp. 346ff and *passim*: Steven Greenhouse, "New Tally of World's Economies Catalogs China into Third Place," *New York Times*, May 20, 1993, pp. A1-6; *The Economist*

defined ambitions in the region.⁷ Stung by the increasingly serious annual pinpricks of the trade disputes with Washington, intermixed with the MFN extension that is couched in "humiliating" human rights conditions (American "human rights imperialism", so Beijing), and now seriously compounded by the barely camouflaged signals from Washington over its newly revived "Two-China" policy⁸ in clear violation of earlier commitments under every president from Nixon to Bush, China's future policy orientation, particularly after the Hong Kong reversion, will be a matter of particular concern for the United States. How China will change after Deng Xiaoping and what its position will be towards Taiwan and the United States will be an important barometer for understanding Beijing's basic direction in the twenty-first century – and particularly vis-à-vis the major powers such as the United States,⁹ Japan, and Russia.

(London, Nov. 28, 1992) reported: "If China's economy grows as fast for the next 20 years as it has for the past 14, it will be the biggest economy on earth."

- 7 The *New York Times*, October 26, 1994. On the growing Chinese military buildup, see, *inter alia*, Nayan Chanda, "Fear of the Dragon," *Far Eastern Economic Review* (hereafter cited as FEER), April 13, 1995, pp. 24-28; see also John Wilson Lewis. *China's Strategic Seapower: The Politics of Force Modernization in the Nuclear Age* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995). The growing Chinese interest in the Paracels and the Spratlys, along with increasing efforts to modernize air and naval forces indicate Beijing's long-term strategic ambitions southward towards the South China Sea and beyond – including the Strait of Malacca. See, *inter alia*, Michael Leifer, "Chinese Economic Reform and Security Policy: The South China Sea Connection," *Survival*, Volume 37, No. 2, Summer 1995, pp. 44-59.
- 8 On the folly of America's short-sighted, antagonizing policy towards China it, see, *inter alia*, Kenneth Lieberthal, "A New China Strategy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 74, No. 6, Nov.-Dec. 1995, pp. 35-49. Lieberthal wrote: "A strong China will inevitably present major challenges to the United States and the rest of the international system. In the past, the rise of a country to great power status has always forced realignment of the international system and has more than once led to war. One of America's most important diplomatic challenges, therefore, is to try to integrate China into Asia and the global political system ... Many in the United States ... hope that a Soviet-type collapse will produce a liberal democratic polity and a reduced Chinese threat. Far more likely, however, is that political disintegration would result in large-scale bloodshed, famine, and substantial migration. In short, although a strong, dynamic China will challenge American patience, skill, and interests, a failed China would produce even less welcome problems ... [Should] [China] hold together and continue its economic development, yet still perceive major threats to its security and internal stability, it will more likely become a nationalistic bully on the regional level and obstructionist on global issues. Some in the United States anticipate these developments and are calling for America to prepare the ground for a policy of containment. But a containment strategy would represent a major policy failure. It would divide Asia ... strengthen narrow nationalism, and reduce prosperity, security, and the prospect for peace throughout the region." pp. 37-38.
- 9 Former U.S. President George Bush met with Li Peng and Jiang Zemin during his brief visit to Beijing in January 1996. Bush reported that Jiang "warned him that improper

A hint of a major change can be detected in the evolving relationship between Russia and China. The Gorbachev-Deng summit in China in 1989 had no chance of developing further, not just because of the Tiananmen Square Massacre but because of the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union and the alarm that this historic event had ignited in the Chinese leadership concerning the safety/survival of Communism in China. Hence, the new rounds of brisk exchanges of high level leaders between the two since 1992, particularly between 1994 and 1996, could portend the beginning of new approaches between the two powers disgruntled with the emerging new global power reality.¹⁰

In fact, since the collapse of the Soviet Union and Yeltsin's presidency of Russia, Moscow's relations with China have made visible progress.¹¹ Although Russia's relations with Japan¹² hit a snag, contrary to Russia's expectations, owing to Japan's inflexible position and Russia's sensibilities of nationalistic pride and great power status/prestige, Russian-Chinese relations gradually found common ground for improvement despite earlier misgivings on both sides. Following the failed coup in Moscow in August 1991, there existed the fear of the unknown on both sides: the "Chinese leaders were dismayed" by the collapse of the Communist government in Moscow with its pronounced pro-Western policy tilt, potentially threatening China's own legitimacy, particularly in the wake of the disastrous political baggage of the Tiananmen Massacre and democracy revolts in China, while the Yeltsin government was disturbed by the suspected Chinese sympathy and support for the old-line conservatives and the restless

handling of the Taiwan issue could be 'very destructive' to Sino-U.S. ties." [AFP] *The Korea Times*, January 13, 1996, p. 4. According to a Chinese-American professor, Wang Li of Georgetown University, Qiao Shi, President of the National People's Congress, a possible contender for power against Jiang Zemin after Deng Xiaoping's death, has expressed the most clearcut Chinese policy to date on Taiwan and towards the United States. Qiao stated that China is making preparations for military operations against Taiwan whenever the need arises, and left the impression that the Chinese attack on Taiwan could come earlier than generally expected. *Ming Bao* (Hong Kong), January 12, 1996; *Dong-A Ilbo* (Seoul), *Chosun Ilbo* (Seoul), January 13, 1996.

10 The outcome of the recent election for the Russian Duma and the sacking of Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev on „charges“ of his pro-Western and pro-American proclivities and the appointment of Yevgeny Primakov (a hardliner with visible Cold War roles under the old Soviet Union) as his replacement indicates that Russia will follow more anti-West/American policy lines with ever closer strategic ties with China.

11 "Russia and China about to Sign 'Important Political Agreement' within the Year," *Dong-A Ilbo*, September 24, 1995; Oleg Shchedrov, "Russia, China plan big political treaty," *The Korea Herald*, September 24, 1995.

12 Cf. Joachim Glaubitz, *Between Tokyo and Moscow: The History of an Uneasy Relationship: 1972 to the 1990s* (London: Hurst, 1995); William F. Nimmo, *Japan and Russia: A Reevaluation in the Post-Soviet Era* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994).

military elements in Russia, and believed that China "had supported or at least sympathized with the plotters of the August 1991 coup". A year later, however, Moscow-Beijing relations had turned the corner and had visibly improved. In the year after the 1991 coup, China had regained composure vis-à-vis the perceived threat from Russia: the continuing chaos and economic crisis in Moscow and China's own regained stability and growing economic prosperity helped "diminish Chinese concern that the fall of socialism in Moscow would present a threat to their own legitimacy."¹³ Yeltsin's Russia, on the other hand, felt betrayed by the lack of assistance from the West, and decided to gradually forgo its reliance on the pro-Western/American policy and improve her relations with China.

Indeed, the Sino-Russian agreements on trade, military deployments, border redemarcation, and other co-operation, including the military, cover areas of potential strategic entente between Beijing and Moscow vis-à-vis the United States and other countries. The military agreements and exchanges, and the sale of Russian scientific and technical assistance to China¹⁴ must be viewed in conjunction with the recent revision of Russian military strategy¹⁵ and the discontinuation of its military down-sizing despite serious economic and financial constraints.¹⁶

13 Peggy Falkenheim Meyer, "Russia's Post-Cold War Security Policy in Northeast Asia," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 67, No. 4, Winter 1994-95, p. 500.

14 It was revealed in April 1994 by General Mikhail Kolesnikov, chief of Russia's General Staff, during his visit to China that Russia and China were "discussing plans to send Russian military specialists to China to train the Chinese in the proper use of Russian arms and to bring Chinese officers to Russia for training in military schools up to the level of the General Staff Academy." See Meyer, *op cit*, p. 502. The level and intensity of military exchanges between Beijing and Moscow today far exceed those during the early days of the Sino-Soviet alliance. Meyer, *ibid.*, pp. 502-503. For the Russian sale of weapons to China and the exchange of military technologies with China, see Anatoly Yurkin, "Good Prospects for Russo-Chinese Military Cooperation," *ITAR-TASS*, Sept. 13, 1995. For China's dispatch of "between 300 and 400" of its "defense specialists to work in Russia's aerospace research and development institutes," see Meyer, *op cit*, p. 503.

15 See, *inter alia*, "Elisabeth Rubinfiel, "Russian Military Asserts itself in New Doctrine," *The Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 4, 1993, p. A12. The new doctrine's highlights are: "1) Nuclear weapons are meant to deter conflict; 2) no pledge against first-use of nuclear weapons; 3) armed forces can carry out both defensive and offensive operations; 4) no specific ceiling on troop strength; and 5) military technology to be developed only in keeping with need and economic capabilities."

16 Russian Defense Minister Pavel Grachev announced in late 1993 that the downsizing of the Russian forces would stop at 2.1 million by the end of 1994, and this force level would be maintained. Originally, the force reduction was scheduled to reach 1.5 million by the year 2000. [AP & Reuter] Per *Hankuk Ilbo* (Seoul), January 1, 1994. On the still formidable Russian strategic forces, a highly significant revelation was made in 1993. According to reports from *The New York Times*, "A top Russian official [Viktor N. Mikhailov of the Ministry of Atomic Energy] says Moscow's nuclear arsenal peaked seven years ago at

The lurking specter of renaissance Russian nationalism¹⁷ that is reflected both in Vladimir V. Zhirinovskii's political movement and the national ethos that it symbolizes (and the subsequent spread of similar thinking to other erstwhile more moderate political elements¹⁸, the Russian military¹⁹ and diplomatic thinking, particularly exhibited in Yeltsin's response to

45,000 warheads – 12,000 more than generally believed. [He also says] the Russian stockpile of highly enriched uranium is more than twice as large as commonly believed ... The Russian inventory of bomb-grade uranium is now said to be more than 1,200 metric tons ... Surprised [American] analysts say the remarks could rewrite parts of the cold war's history, with one suggesting that the West's blindness to the arsenal's size was an intelligence failure that might have had disastrous consequences. The large numbers lead you to worry that some of the planners may have had a first strike in mind ... [Mikhailov added] that Moscow's stockpile is larger than the combined totals held by the United States, China, France and Britain ..." *The New York Times* added that the Western analysts "had previously thought [that the 45,000 number was] the size of the world's combined nuclear arsenals at their apex – 50,000 weapons spread among the Soviet Union, the United States, France, Britain, China and Israel"; "Lurking in and around the Russian arsenal, apparently, is a huge quantity of weapon material – the newly described 1,200 metric tons of uranium that is highly enriched. That amount is enough to make 75,000 atomic bombs of the power that destroyed Hiroshima, or to energize a host of hydrogen bombs that would be even more deadly." [Emphasis added] September 26, 1993, pp. 1, 7. On the description of Russia's nuclear "Doomsday" Machine [The so-called "Dead Hand" nuclear retaliatory system], see William J. Broad, "Russia Has a Nuclear 'Doomsday' Machine, U.S. Expert Says," *New York Times*, October 8, 1993; Bruce G. Blair, "Russia's Doomsday Machine" [OP-ED], *New York Times*, October 8, 1993, p. A21. See also, Michael R. Gordon, "The Guns May Be a Bit Rusty but the Nuclear Arms Are Still Polished," *ibid.*, Nov. 29, 1993, p. A7. Cf Sheila Tefft, "Chinese Leader's Visit To Russia Will Boost Military, Economic Ties," *The Christian Science Monitor*, Sept. 2, 1994.

- 17 Cf. Robert J. Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism in Russia* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).
- 18 The electoral victory of the Russian Communist Party under Gennady Zyuganov (with 22.30% of the votes) and the second best showing by the Liberal Democrats of Zhirinovskii (with 11.18% of the votes) may be an important indication of things to come, namely, a Russian turn towards anti-Western ultra-nationalism. In this context, the victory of Zyuganov can be regarded as another triumph of nostalgia for Russian nationalism and Imperium under the disguise of a much changed communism.
- 19 For a glimpse of the deep frustration and anger felt by the Russian officer corps about the collapse of the old empire and the emasculation of the once mighty Soviet military power, see, *inter alia*, "Letter from Officer X," *Time*, January 23, 1995, pp. 20-21. A well-placed army officer wrote: "... *What Americans don't understand is that while they have been secretly trying to achieve the collapse and disintegration of Russia – though they take pains to deny it – they have only increased the possibility that the tired, exhausted and embittered Russian armed forces may one day explode, with dire consequences – not only for the U.S. but also for the world ... Only naive people who do not know Russia might believe that our military will accept the position of second best in the world. We seek to be equal to the strongest. Yeltsin has denied us our most precious professional feeling: a sense of pride in our own might. The military will never forgive him for that.*" [Emphasis added]

Japan's continuing request for the reversion of the Northern Territories) represent the general psychological state and policy trends in Russia after the loss of its once vast empire and the humiliation that it feels it has suffered at the hands of America's peremptory handling of world affairs.

The top secret strategic contingency planning for the U.S. military during the Bush Administration (under Secretary Richard Cheney and General Colin Powell) as revealed in the *New York Times* in early 1992²⁰, provides an inadvertent insight into American strategic thinking for the post-Cold War era. The 1994 decision by President Clinton to retain the Bush Administration's nuclear arms policy indicates Washington's cautious approach to a strategic insurance against unforeseen contingencies. Under the Clinton plan, despite the past cuts, the highly classified United States nuclear war plan will still "aim at destroying roughly 2,500 Russian targets" in the event of all-out war, presumably because of the re-emergence of imperial Russia.²¹ In this context, Washington's long-term strategic vision of a new East Asian order, based on a comprehensive settlement of all pending issues with North Korea may have to be understood in the context of the medium- and long-term United States preparation for facing the new international realities, created by powers with revisionistic intentions.

Indeed, the silent mourning of the collapse of the empire, the state of anarchy and social confusion that accompanied the drastic decline in living standards will form the dangerous core of the Russian national psyche²² that could soon rekindle the explosive mix of resurgent nationalism. The natural expression of the profound sense of depression will be through

20 Patrick E. Tyler, "Pentagon Imagines New Enemies to Fight in Post-Cold-War Era: Planning for Hypothetical Wars and Big Budgets," and "7 Hypothetical Conflicts Foreseen by the Pentagon," *The New York Times*, February 17, 1992, pp. A1, A5.

21 R. Jeffrey Smith, "Clinton Decides to Retain Bush Nuclear Arms Policy," *Washington Post*, Sept. 22, 1994. President Clinton's decision in August 1995 to seek a "zero yield" test ban that bars even the smallest nuclear explosions in the upcoming Geneva negotiations for a comprehensive test ban (CTBT) has a qualifying caveat: namely, the attached reservation to the presidential decision that the United States will exercise "supreme national interest rights" to "withdraw from the treaty and conduct tests if the United States ever loses confidence in the safety of a critical nuclear weapon."

22 Cf. Gregory Freidin, "'Weimar Russia' in the Making?" *Los Angeles Times World Report*, January 14, 1996. Professor Freidin of Stanford University wrote: "In short, a new authoritarian or even totalitarian regime may enter Russia, not through a coup, as in 1917, but through the ballot box ... Like Weimar Germany, Russia has experienced, by losing its superpower status, a national humiliation: like Weimar Germany, it has been gripped by an economic crisis, compounded by a rupture in its social fabric, and like Weimar Germany, Russia has sustained bloody political upheavals, most notably the dissolution of the Soviets, in the fall of 1993, and the seemingly interminable war in Chechnya ..."

a quiet, prolonged attempt by the Russians to restore their wounded national pride. Although Russia's immediate economic future depends on charity from the West and particularly the co-operation of the United States, a more fundamental solution may be sought through the quiet, long-term attempt to rearrange the global alignment – an alignment that will be based on fundamental changes in Europe and Asia in the next few decades.²³

Collectively, the sense of grievance and/or dissatisfaction commonly felt (albeit for very different reasons in each case) by China, Russia, Japan, and reunified Germany could become a historic catalyst that would usher in a long-term evolution of a brand new and highly disruptive world order in the twenty-first century.²⁴

In projecting the future American difficulties in Asia and the Pacific, Japan's emerging new role could be pivotal. What could be in store in the trans-Pacific relations between the two biggest, yet more often disharmonious "economies," could be almost entirely dependent on the changes in Japan's overall policy position.²⁵

The history of the relations between Washington and Tokyo can be reopened for a fresher new look. What began in the late sixties as a relatively minor feud over textiles and transistors and the resultant American trade deficits (insignificant in today's terms) with Japan, became embroiled in a myriad of ever deepening differences ranging from the reversion of the Ryukyus to the status of American military bases and the Vietnam War. As Japan's economic miracle expanded since the eighties (even beyond Herman Kahn's once disbelieved *The Emerging Japanese Super-*

23 Cf. Andrei Kozyrev, "Partnership or Cold Peace," *Foreign Policy*, No. 99, Summer 1995, pp. 3-14; Kevin Fedarko, "Back to the USSR?" *Time*, July 25, 1994, pp. 40-43; see also, Peggy Falkenheim Meyer, "Russia's Post-Cold War Security Policy in Northeast Asia," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 67, No. 4, Winter 1994-95, pp. 495-512.

24 Cf. Alan Tonelson, "America, Germany, and Japan: The Tenacious Trio?" *Current History*, Vol. 94, No. 595, November 1995, pp. 353-358; Gary L. Geipel, "Germany and the Burden of Choice," *ibid.*, pp. 375-380; James Kurth, "Germany and the Reemergence of Mitteleuropa," *ibid.*, pp. 381-386; Jeffrey E. Garten, "Japan and Germany: American Concerns," *Foreign Affairs*, Winter 1989-90, pp. 84-101.

25 Cf. Robert Harvey, *The Undefeated: The Rise, Fall & Rise of Greater Japan* (London: Macmillan, 1994); Gerald L. Curtis, *The United States, Japan, and Asia: Challenges for U.S. Policy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994); Michael Mandelbaum, ed.; *The Strategic Quadrangle: Japan, China, Russia, and the United States in East Asia* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1995); Francis Fukuyama and Kongdan Oh, *The U.S. – Japan Security Relations after the Cold War* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 1993).

state)²⁶ and its political voice became louder and sharper, the mounting trade frictions led to a broader range of rancorous disputes. Good will on both sides eventually waned, as the public opinion polls in the seventies and the eighties began to show palpable signs of increasing mutual discomfort and hostility.²⁷

The increasing incidence of independent mindedness of a Japan that can and will say "No" to America reflects Tokyo's urge to break free from the United States.²⁸ Tokyo's unhappiness with the United States was demonstrated through its deliberate attempt to shift its market to an exclusive "yen bloc"²⁹ to be established in Asia. At the same time, Japan's quiet yet substantial plans for a military build-up seemed to have included the possible development of nuclear weapons and longer-range strategic missiles.³⁰ The long-ruling Liberal Democrats have made persistent efforts to create a national consensus, tolerating the strategic vision for Japan. With the advent of the new coalition government of Prime Minister Murayama in 1994, Japan's Socialists made the most dramatic turn-around on key national security issues – including the status of Japan's Self-Defense

26 (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1969). See also Eamonn Fingleton, *Blindsight: Why Japan is Still on Track to Overtake the U.S. by the Year 2000* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1995).

27 The mushrooming of publication on both sides of fictional as well as non-fictional books dealing with the new war between the United States and Japan indicates the fundamental psychological turn of events in the affairs of the two countries. To cite just two popular books in the West/United States and in Japan: George Friedman & Meredith Lebard, *The Coming War with Japan* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991) and Simon Winchester, *Pacific Nightmare: How Japan Starts World War III* (New York: Birch Lane Press, 1992).

28 Cf. Morita Akio and Ishihara Shintaro, *NO to Ieru Nihon: Shin Nichibei Kankei no Hosaku [The Japan That Can Say 'No': A Card for a New U.S.-Japan Relationship]* (Tokyo: Kobunsha, 1989); Ishihara Shintaro & Eto Jun, *Danko [No] to Ieru Nihon [Japan That Can Say 'No' Resolutely]* (Tokyo: Kobunsha, 1992).

29 Cf. Edward J. Lincoln, *Japan's New Global Role* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1993), *passim*, but especially pp. 183-86. See also, Kishore Mahbubani, "Japan Adrift," *Foreign Policy*, Fall 1992, cited from *Japan and the Pacific Rim* (Global Studies Series) (Guilford, Conn.: The Dushkin Publishing Group, 1993), pp. 121-128.

30 The immediate possibility of Japanese nuclear armaments is generally ruled out. However, only a generation ago, according to Charles J. Hanley of the Associated Press, a committee of "wise men" picked by the Japanese government weighed the question of atomic bombs for two years: "Should Japan build an atomic bomb?" A secret discussion took place at the Karuizawa Resort and the wise men decided not to manufacture the bomb at the time – "No, not now." However, discussions take place routinely these days at the National Institute for Defense Studies, "strategic discussions [including] scenarios involving a nuclear-armed Japan." Charles J. Hanley, "Japan keeps open 'unthinkable' option: Government prepares for nuclear arms," *The Washington Times*, May 12, 1995. See also, Richard J. Samuels, *"Rich Nation, Strong Army": National Security and the Technological Transformation of Japan* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994)

Forces. The historic significance of the Socialists' *volte face* and their expected demise cannot be overestimated: Japan has come full circle since the late thirties.

More serious Japanese-American conflict seems almost inevitable (no matter what official Washington believes or fantasizes)³¹, although no one can confidently predict the circumstances which could trigger such a rupture of relations (or rather their slow tortuous death), or just how it would all end – particularly its impact on the future direction of both nations. One thing, however, is certain. Japan will take an increasingly independent, and conflicting, line of policy from that of the United States, and the ultimate outcome can only be highly detrimental to the future of American political, military, and even economic presence in East Asia and the Western Pacific.³²

For instance, if as a result of the increasing political tiffs with Washington, Japan makes slight adjustments in its politics towards Russia and China, and achieves major breakthroughs with them, the continued American presence in East Asia will suffer a mortal blow. This can, indeed, happen between Japan and Russia over the Southern Kuriles [the Northern Territories] if Tokyo accepts the Russian formula of gradual and phased reversion. If such a major breakthrough becomes an integral part of Japanese policy (and provided there is a preceding breakthrough with China through a fundamental rapprochement), it could have an immediate major strategic impact on other powers. Conceivably, as in the case of nuclear rearmament, a mere political decision by Japan, albeit difficult, separates the conjecture from reality.

A similar progressive development could be envisioned between Japan and China, if they can smooth over some of their outstanding differences. Much will depend on Japan's attitude and the shape of its other ties with the United States. In fact, despite the potentially serious differences over Taiwan and the military build-up on both sides, much of their foreign policy agenda depends on each other's good will and co-operation. This will be true particularly as regards Japan's quest for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. Similarly, China's economic plans will require the continued flow of Japanese capital and technology. Beyond that there

31 Cf. Frank Ching, "Rape Case Imperils U.S. Bases," *FEER*, Nov. 2, 1995, p. 31; Edward W. Desmond, "Yankee Go Home," *Time*, Nov. 5, 1995, pp. 14-19; Chalmers Johnson, "Pentagon's colonial pretensions thrive in Asia" [*Los Angeles Times Service*], *The Korea Herald*, Nov. 5, 1995.

32 On the ensuing policy debate occasioned in great part by the rising tension between Tokyo and Washington, see Joseph S. Nye, Jr., Chalmers Johnson, and E.B. Keehn, "The U.S. in East Asia: Stay or Go? – Two Views on Security," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 1995, pp. 90-114.

are grander, not always symmetric designs on both sides, which will require more forward looking postures towards each other. Even more fundamental is the rising national debate in Japan which calls for Japan's "Return to Asia" – a drastic departure from an old Japanese policy since the Meiji period, namely "*Datsu-A-ron*" ("Escape from Asia Policy"). Such a reorientation of Japan's basic policies could very conceivably involve progressive entente with China. And China, as reported in *Asahi Shimbun* in 1994,³³ undoubtedly hopes to draw Japan closer to its position, as a matter of long-term policy, in order to jointly deal with the United States on major world issues. If, indeed, the convergence of Chinese and Japanese policy posture is possible in the future, the disagreement over the Taiwan issue will not necessarily impede their rapprochement.

Under the circumstances, then, the central question, quietly asked and even more quietly answered in the United States and elsewhere in the world, would be whether or not the changes born from the demise of the Cold War might one day lead to revolutionary changes in global alignment, including the birth of a strategic entente among the Russians, Chinese, and Japanese. The interesting and highly critical point is whether or not reunified Germany might under certain circumstances join forces with the evolving Eastern Hemispheric alignment,³⁴ owing to factors that have ruled the changes in Europe since 1945.

The end of the Cold War in Europe and German reunification places Germany in a completely new context. The background to German reunification and the collapse of the Soviet empire evoked fundamentally different reactions from the major powers. These differences reveal their conflicting motivations and policy goals. Gorbachev's refusal to use the Soviet forces to prop up the tottering regimes in Eastern Europe, especially East Germany, paved the way for German reunification. This was in sharp contrast to the strong opposition or revealingly reluctant acquiescence from West Germany's NATO "allies." The opposition was particularly

33 September 26, 1994.

34 On this point, Gary Geipel of the Hudson Institute wrote in *Current History*, November 1995, pp. 375-380 ("Germany and the Burden of Choice"): "By its [Germany's] acquiescence, misbehavior, or leadership ... only Germany now can shape virtually every major decision and trend that is of consequence for Europe as a whole. Despite its centrality, but more accurately because of it, Germany inspires very little middle ground among those who observe it. This is unfortunate if it leads us to conclude ... that Germany is not merely powerful but predestined to follow a certain path. One group of serious scholars [argue] that it is Germany's undying vocation to pursue an eastward-oriented hegemony in Europe that ultimately will rupture the European Union and detach Germany from its Western moorings." (p. 375). See also, *idem*, *Europe 2005: The Turbulence Ahead and What it Means for the United States* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hudson Institute, 1995)

strong from Margaret Thatcher's Britain and François Mitterand's France, although they soon reversed their opposition for lack of choice and mainly because West Germany was now too powerful to restrain. Much the same ambivalence was shown by the Bush Administration.

The collective German memory of all this, and, at the same time, Germany's gratitude to Gorbachev and the Russian people, seem to have had an important role in determining the German economic assistance to Russia to help tide over the enormous financial difficulties that accompanied the withdrawal of Russian forces from German soil and rebuild the Russian economy. The sheer volume of German economic assistance and investment in Russia far outweighs that of all other countries. The growing closeness of Germany and Russia in this regard dovetails with the historic, traditional German role as the arbiter of the European balance of power in *Mitteleuropa*.

If and when the German ties with Moscow become firmer and even expanded, and if the on-going Franco-German rapprochement and entente is reconfirmed by President Jacques Chirac, this could transform the political landscape of Europe, fundamentally affecting the long-term position of the United States on the continent. Since 1945, Soviet foreign policy aimed at weaning the Germans away from the Atlantic-Western Alliance by offering reunification in exchange for German neutrality.

Accordingly, if and when the differences between the United States (and close American "friends/allies") and Germany widen, and German influence in the multilateral European institutions increases (with the unified German house in much better shape) and her policy becomes more autonomous, the pace of German-Russian co-operation could quicken, with accompanying global strategic implications.

In the face of such a shift in global alignment, the American strategic quandary would be considerable, and the United States' need to meet the challenge could drive Washington in an entirely new direction. In fact, despite the continuing presence of the United States in a much transformed NATO and CSCE, and the Group of Seven structure, the long-term prospect of its role in Europe is by no means clear. The chronic crises with Japan and the deterioration of relations with China (and the renewed friction over Taiwan)³⁵ indicate to the United States that it must explore a new order of things to counter the visible trends which could upset its global role.

35 Cf. Martin L. Lasater, *U.S. Interests in the New Taiwan* (Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press, 1993); Robert G. Sutter and William R. Johnson, eds., *Taiwan in World Affairs* (Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press, 1994)

The U.S. vs. the "Korea Problem": A Peek into Washington's Future Intentions?

A proper understanding of the United States' strategic concerns over the Korean problem may enable a revealing glimpse of Washington's overall views on the long-term trends of strategic development in the Eurasian continent. What the United States may wish to achieve through the settlement of the North Korean nuclear issue could ultimately be the fulfilment of a grander design for the indefinite extension of its political and military presence/role in East Asia in the context of fundamental changes afoot in the Eurasian land mass. The resolution of the Korean problem (beginning with the Agreed Framework with North Korea in Geneva and the activation of KEDO) is thus the tip of a major overhauling of the global political order, spanning into the next century.

What is the nature of the Korean Problem – highlighted by North Korea's nuclear weapons program? To appreciate this question, fundamental analyses of the major powers' positions towards "Korea" may be in order. The immediate issue of North Korea's nuclear weapons program is a mere obfuscator of deeper problems. The crux of the problem is undoubtedly the geostrategic/geopolitical value of the Korean peninsula to all the powers directly involved in the region: namely, China, Japan, Russia, and the United States. The first three powers are continental and directly adjacent/contiguous to Korea, while the USA, although an outside power, has played the most important role historically in the region – a role, the continuation or the absence of which could mean the difference between the continuation of activist globalism and neo-isolationistic "America Firstism." The latter would mean the end of the American presence and role in East Asia and the Western Pacific – and necessarily a vastly diminished role in Europe – and the return to the continental United States of the interwar years, before Pearl Harbor and President Franklin D. Roosevelt.³⁶ Given the potentially divisive and even explosive issues that dominate the United States' relations with China, Japan, and Russia, the geopolitical value of the Korean peninsula in the American scheme of future policy could be inestimable.

What are the basic perspectives of the major powers towards the Korean peninsula? In a nutshell, Russia (and the old Soviet Union) has viewed Korea (at least since the 1880's)³⁷ as a vital area of its historic

36 Cf. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "Back to the Womb: Isolationism's Renewed Threat," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 1995, pp. 2-8.

37 Cf. George Alexander Lensen, *Balance of Intrigue: International Rivalry in Korea & Manchuria, 1884-1899*, Vols. I & II (Tallahassee, Florida: University Press of Florida, 1982).

sphere of interest (if not of influence) – and a valuable geopolitical buffer against Japan and the United States. Although severely weakened and preoccupied with internal problems (including the problems of the "Near Abroad")³⁸, Russia cannot afford and will not easily tolerate fundamental changes in the Korean peninsula such as the indefinite continuation or further expansion of American hegemony or excessive Japanese influence.³⁹ In this regard, Russia's concern in the Korean peninsula would be akin to its opposition to NATO's extension into former Eastern Europe. A unified Korea, based on the extinction of the North Korean state would be seen as a permanent loss of a vital security buffer – especially when Russia is so weak and disorganized. Moscow can be expected to react as if a strategic part of its own territory had been violated by an outside power. Despite the obvious differences between Korea and the Kuriles, the Russian position on Japan's Northern Territory issue is an indication of the future Russian reaction to an unwelcome development in Korea, harmful to its long-term strategic interests. In this context, Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander N. Panov's 1994 visit to North Korea (and the replacement of Foreign Minister Kozyrev by Yevgeny Primakov) must be seen as Russia's attempt to restore relations with North Korea, severely disturbed since Moscow's normalization with Seoul and the collapse of the Soviet Union. The significance of Panov's agreement with North Korea must be assumed to transcend mere economic assistance/co-operation. Given the potential significance of the evolving situation, one must assume deeper strategic

38 Cf. "West Feeling Effects of Former USSR's Many Problems – Experts Warn of Nightmare Scenarios. Ranging from Frontier Wars to M-Disaster" (Reuter), *The Korea Times*, Jan. 19, 1996.

39 In a contribution to *Chosun Ilbo*, a Seoul daily, V. Zhirinovskiy stated: "We (Russia) want a powerful, friendly, unified Korea. We also want an 'independent' Korea. We do not wish to see a kind of Korean unification that will mean the presence of American forces near the Russian borders. The unified Korea that Russia wants is one that can play the role of a political and economic balancer against Japan ... We feel repelled by a Korea that always takes sides with the United States in the international arena. This is an important and serious problem. It is so particularly because [South] Korea has now become a member of the UN Security Council ... The Yalta Conference treated Korea as an aggressor state. Germany was divided because it was an aggressor. However, Korea – not Japan – became the victim of division. We agree that Russia was responsible for it. We also confess our responsibility for the great sacrifice of Koreans in the Korean War. We are neither pro-North or pro-South Korea, we are po-Russia. We support Korea's unification. But our support is limited to unification that will bring the reduction of tension in the Far East. We are not satisfied with the present state of Korean-Russian relations. Russia has lost its erstwhile position in North Korea. And yet we have gained nothing from our relations with [South] Korea either ..." December 15, 1995. Representing the views of aggrieved Russian nationalism and nostalgia for the lost empire, Zhirinovskiy's statement is revealing of Russia's views on Korea and other related issues.

understanding between Russia and North Korea over the general security of the North Korean regime (perhaps in co-ordination with China) in the context of continuing United States-North Korean diplomatic dialogue and South-North relations. Failing that, Moscow would be increasingly more disposed to act in concert with China to avert abrupt changes on the Korean peninsula that can either be destabilizing to the existing order while Moscow's hand are tied, or outright detrimental to Russia's vital strategic interest in the region, including Eastern Siberia and the Maritime Provinces.

In long-term perspective, however, China is and will be the most important state to watch. China will be forced to act violently should she have to confront a unified Korean nation, primarily in the American and/or Japanese sphere of control. For Beijing, a unified Korea – especially through absorption of the North by the South – will constitute a serious menace to its vital security situation. Although unconfirmed, a Hong Kong publication reported in October 1994 that China had conducted a large scale military exercise involving its land, air, and sea forces around the Liaotung Peninsula in August of the same year. The large scale exercise, conducted mainly by the elite Shenyang Military Region, was apparently based on a contingency scenario, in which large scale landing operations are to be conducted on the South Korean coast in the event of a renewed war in Korea involving American forces. The same report mentioned a visit to China in June, before Kim Il Sung's death, by a high level North Korean military mission headed by Chief of Staff Choi Kwang. China was said to have assured North Korea that it "will not tolerate American-South Korean invasion of North Korea." But unlike the war in 1950, when China's air and navel forces were inferior, China will exercise a full range of strategic options, including landing operations against the South Korean coastline. Several days later in October 1994, another Hong Kong paper wrote that the biggest combined military exercise in twenty years was being conducted along the Chekiang coast, opposite Taiwan; and that the large scale exercise involved new weapons recently imported from Russia, including SU-27s and IL-76s, and nuclear-powered vessels and guided missile destroyers. A similar exercise also took place in September along the Fukien coast.⁴⁰

Russia, and particularly China, will favor a divided Korea as long as they suspect the United States harbors hegemonic regional ambitions (with global implications), primarily at their expense. An independent and "friendly" North Korea is vital to their national security interests as long as the present strategic conditions persist in East Asia. The collapse of the

40 *Ilsingdao Daily* (Hong Kong), Oct. 6, 1994.

Soviet Union changed the whole dimension of global politics. It put an end to the strategic equilibrium, which in turn enabled American hegemony and peremptory unilateralism. Despite its long historical hostility and conflict with Russia, it is clear that China views the collapse of the Soviet Union as detrimental to its national interest in that the Soviet collapse removed all restraint on American unilateralism – most particularly on Taiwan. From Beijing's perspective, the clear American violation of the letter and spirit of the Shanghai Communiqués on Taiwan and almost "official" revival of the "Two China" policy are the direct result of the breakdown of the Cold War era equilibrium due to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the unleashing of the arrogant American exercise of naked power in blatant unilateralism. For instance, China feels certain that President Clinton's decision to upgrade Taiwan's international status would have been impossible had the old Soviet Union retained its superpower status in an even equilibrium with the United States. The Republican landslide in the mid-term election in 1994 merely exacerbated the existing trends in America's China policy. The de facto "Two China" policy of the United States, the recent normalization of relations between the United States and Vietnam, and the American military training of the Philippine forces to defend the disputed Mischief Reef of the Spratlys could very well be seen in Beijing as a thinly disguised move to check and contain China – clearly hostile signs in America's policy. Under the circumstances, it would be particularly difficult for China to accept the possibility of South Korea-dominated unification of Korea that would automatically extend the reach of American power deep into the Asian continent.

Reunification of Korea might have been tolerable before the collapse of the Soviet Union as long as Moscow was able to maintain strategic equilibrium vis-à-vis the United States and Japan. However, Korean reunification, most likely to be an absorption of the North by the South, is no longer tolerable if it means a unilateral strategic benefit for the United States and/or Japan. China, as well as Russia, feels that the collapse of the global equilibrium made the world unstable and peace fundamentally less secure. Much the same view has been expressed by European states in recent years – in criticism of arbitrary American decisions affecting the world.

The nub of the Korean Problem is Pyongyang's secret attempt to develop nuclear weapons despite its commitment to the NPT regime.⁴¹ Because of the special context of Northeast Asia there would have been several serious regional and global consequences, if North Korea's nuclear

41 Cf. Michael J. Mazaar, "Going Just a Little Nuclear: Nonproliferation Lessons from North Korea," *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 2, Fall 1995, pp. 92-122.

program had been successful. First, it would have seriously undercut the effective extension of the non-proliferation structure in 1995 when the NPT came up for renewal. The spillover effect of such an eventuality would have been enormous. To be sure, there were cases where the NPT system was pathetically bypassed: India, Israel, South Africa, Pakistan, Iraq and possibly Iran. Iraq, potentially the most serious case thus far – other than North Korea – was temporarily resolved through the Gulf War. Immediately before the collapse of Apartheid and the birth of Nelson Mandela's new South African government, South Africa revealed that it had destroyed all of its nuclear devices on its own. Because of its unique historical background, the nature of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the firm security guarantees by the United States, and the reasonable success of the peace process with its neighbors, Israel's nuclear program, although reputedly sizeable, seems to be effectively under control. A degree of confidence in India's responsibility makes India's nuclear capability much less threatening to the key members of the nuclear club. Particularly in the context of China's capabilities, India's nuclear program was treated as a proper counterweight by the powers who were worried about China's long-term ambitions towards its southern neighbors. And so is Pakistan's. It is claimed that the problem with North Korea, as with Iraq and Iran and others, is quite different. North Korea (because of its overall situation in the area) cannot be trusted to be responsible with nuclear weapons, if it were to possess them. Because of the severity of its internal and external difficulties, Pyongyang is perceived to be capable of reckless acts with nuclear weapons.⁴² The consequences of North Korea's potential recklessness creates enormous strategic problems for Pyongyang's neighbors and the United States. For this reason, all the major powers have been unanimous in opposing its nuclear weapons program. Differences among the powers exist only as regards how to stop North Korea's nuclear program.

Secondly, there is the certainty of serious proliferation once North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons is either confirmed or even seriously suspected. Proliferation would have an immediate impact on regional stability with global consequences. Most assuredly, South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan would follow; and Japan's nuclear armaments could trigger dangerous reactions from Asian states, but particularly from China and Russia. A much more dangerous situation would be created in East Asia than the old Cold War conflicts. For this reason alone, all the great powers agree that the North Korean nuclear program has to be stopped effectively.

42 *Inter alia*, refer to Moon Young Park, "Lure' North Korea," *Foreign Policy*, No. 97, Winter 1994-95, pp. 97-105.

The extraordinary difficulty in enforcing North Korea's nuclear abstinence is Pyongyang's critical weakness, even fragility, which could threaten North Korea's very survival as an indispensable buffer state for China and Russia. The fear of sudden collapse (felt by not only Kim Jong Il's North Korea but also by China and Russia), similar to what happened in Eastern Europe, particularly in Romania, makes Pyongyang cling to its unclarified goal of nuclear weapons.⁴³ Are the weapons the military equalizer against the combined forces of the United States and South Korea? A doomsday instrument for collective suicide with South Korea? Or are they the instruments of diplomatic bargaining to achieve its non-military objectives such as diplomatic normalization with the United States and the West, and economic co-operation and assistance to save its economy from the brink of catastrophe?

The trouble is that North Korea's Orwellian government makes it impossible for the outside world to correctly discern its intentions. Moreover, what complicates the solution is the position of China and Russia. It is certain that China and Russia deeply suspect the real motives of the United States in the Korean peninsula.⁴⁴ For Japan as well, involved as it is in a festering economic conflict cum ever widening political differences with Washington, the United States' intentions in Northeast Asia are unclear, making wholehearted Japanese co-operation with Washington difficult. All this makes effective co-operation impossible or extremely difficult among the major powers, although they all agree that North Korea must refrain from having bombs. In this context, before the signing of the Agreed Framework in Geneva, North Korea's adamant refusal to accept special inspections of the undeclared nuclear facilities in Yongbyon duly increased the international quandary. Furthermore, Pyongyang's continuing efforts to improve the range of its short and medium range missiles, thereby posing a threat to the South China Sea and most of Japan, have a particularly chilling effect on regional stability.

Before the agreement in Geneva, Washington's dilemma, however, was that its fallback measures of international sanctions against North Korea were not really a feasible option as long as China undercut the effect by continuing essential supplies to Pyongyang – foodstuffs and oil. Despite its opposition to North Korea's nuclear weapons, Beijing will continue to undercut any chances of international economic sanctions as long as it suspects that American motives are highly damaging to its national security interest. Especially in light of the increasing conflict between Wash-

43 *Ibid*, No. 97, Winter 1994-95, p. 104.

44 For instance, see "China Says It Opposes NK [North Korean] Bid to Sign Peace Treaty with US," *The Korea Times*, Sept. 27, 1995.

ington and Beijing over Taiwan, it would be foolhardy to expect wholehearted co-operation from China on the question of North Korea. A similar position is taken by the Russians as well, as hinted by Alexander Panov's recent mission to North Korea. Here China and Russia are forced to present a common front against the American effort to resolve the North Korean problem – unilaterally and to its exclusive benefit. The crux, therefore, is not the nuclear weapons that North Korea might or might not wish to develop. The crux of the uncertainty is the nature of future geopolitical conditions in East Asia that the United States may want to create through the resolution of the North Korean issue.

The American Aim – From Strategic Changes in East Asia towards a New Global Realignment?

The post-World War II Pax Americana has been hinged on two U.S.-controlled geopolitical anchors – Western Europe (through NATO) and East Asia (through the stability of alliance with Japan). However, through the major geopolitical changes since the late sixties and particularly since the end of the Cold War, the twin pillars of United States global predominance have eroded almost to a point where the United States can no longer be sure of its future supremacy.

What is at stake is the equilibrium that has made American supremacy possible for the last half century. The United States fears that the emerging new alignment might not allow the continuation of its dominant role. Especially if the present trends in East Asia continue unchecked, the American pullback across the Pacific to the Alaska-Aleutian-Hawaii Line would become virtually unavoidable. These possibilities, however remote, will gradually force the United States to at least rethink its long-term strategy and make the quiet preparation for an ultimate historic shift in its fundamental policy towards the Asia-Pacific region. Strategically, the Alaska-Aleutian-Hawaii Line will seriously jeopardise American influence in the Pacific and Asia. If that were to happen, the United States would lose two secure anchors for its global domination and influence. The uncertain future in Europe and the uncertain development in Asia will be an unmitigated disaster for the long-term geopolitical goals of the United States.

Herein lies the value of the Korean peninsula and the inestimable importance of solving the North Korean problem – if only as the beginning of a grand new American policy stance. If the United States succeeds in disarming North Korea's nuclear arsenal, and subsequently achieves normalized relations with Pyongyang along with economic ties, it will gain

several major benefits for reordering the political line-up in Asia. First, by providing North Korea with economic co-operation and assistance, Washington could lay a new foundation for amicable relations with that country, with further potential for expanded ties of strategic importance. On the other hand, with diplomatic normalization, North Korea would have access to U.S. and Western economic co-operation and assistance – investment, science and technology, and the opening of each other's markets. Once that is done, North Korea's return to the NPT would be assured and Pyongyang would consent to gradually reveal its past nuclear activities, which would assure the NPT's extension beyond 1995. This would in turn assure the United States a long-term position as the supreme military [nuclear] power in the world.

The understandings reached between Washington and Pyongyang in Geneva in August in the wake of former President Jimmy Carter's visit to North Korea and his meetings with Kim Il Sung, opened the way for further high level talks in Geneva in October. If things develop along the lines of the August/October agreements [*the Agreed Framework and KEDO*], the ultimate settlement of the North Korean nuclear issue would be something like the following. First, North Korea will freeze all its nuclear programs, thus assuring the United States of its present and future transparency. Second, Pyongyang will shut down its existing graphite reactor, capable of producing weapons-grade plutonium, and stop construction of two additional graphite reactors. Third, North Korea will agree not to process 8,000 spent uranium fuel rods, a procedure that could yield enough plutonium to produce several bombs. Further, North Korea could agree to move the fuel rods to a third country for safekeeping. And fourth, it will accept IAEA inspections to assure that its nuclear program is peaceful. The touchy issue of guaranteeing past nuclear transparency will be solved gradually after the settlement of the most urgent issues. Once North Korea settles the immediate issues on the agenda, the United States in return, in conjunction with South Korea and other countries, will provide a number of compensatory benefits to North Korea: the opening of liaison offices in Washington and Pyongyang as a preparatory measure to an ultimate official normalization, the necessary provisions, including financing of two light-water reactors to replace graphite reactors and some sort of an arrangement to provide energy to replace the North Korean loss from shutting down its existing reactors. If all goes well, even with the expected time lag in view of American election year and the two major elections in South Korea in 1996 and 1997, these steps will be followed by economic co-operation and assistance.

Despite the expected ups and downs, if and when the United States becomes reconciled with North Korea along these lines, the ground will be set for a long-term readjustment of the geostrategic position of the United States in Northeast Asia. A historic linkage thus established with North Korea could provide an important opening for the United States. Through its improved ties with North Korea, in spite of China's suspicion and apprehension, the United States could cultivate closer strategic relations with Pyongyang. On the other hand, the relaxing of the old Cold War alliances, no longer suited to the new post-Cold War world, could severely weaken, if not entirely nullify, the special relations that existed between the United States and South Korea. Besides, ideology no longer plays a pivotal role in cementing special ties, and non-military issues further re-formulate the context of Washington-Seoul connections. Indeed, the signs of strain and division between Washington and Seoul have become quite evident through the difficult negotiations over the North Korean nuclear issue, KEDO operations and the supply of rice for the grain shortage in North Korea.

Additionally, the changing regional and global strategic environment has released the United States from the traditional foreign policy paradigm of the Cold War era. The result is, at least for the foreseeable future, that Washington will tend towards the new "game" of equi-distant diplomacy for exclusive "American national interests." In the eyes of Washington, Seoul and Pyongyang would have equal strategic importance, and, depending on the shape of Washington's relations with Seoul, the ties that the United States forges with North Korea could rapidly escalate in importance from something elemental to unexpectedly intimate. By maintaining close ties with both Koreas, and particularly intimate relations with Pyongyang, the United States could "use" the entire peninsula for "containing and deterring" China, Japan, and Russia.⁴⁵ Given Korea's difficult historical relations with her three immediate neighbors and her paranoid nationalism towards them, Korea's role of a strategic balancer (thanks to its geographic location) could benefit the United States enormously in maintaining its presence in East Asia and the Western Pacific.⁴⁶

A long time ago, during the Carter Administration, a press report hinted at a top secret National Security Council memorandum by

45 It is this consideration that harasses thinking by Russians like Zhirinovsky. See above.

46 The latest. U.S. Defense Department document, written under the supervision of Assistant Secretary of Defense Joseph S. Nye, Jr. *United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region* (1995), reveals such strategic thinking by the United States. Cf. Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "East Asian Security: The Case for Deep Engagement," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August, 1995, pp. 90-102.

Zbigniew Brzezinski which envisioned the strategic role of the Korean peninsula for the United States in East Asia and beyond. The memorandum stressed the long-term goal of establishing friendlier United States ties with North Korea as an ingredient for a major adjustment in the strategic line-up in Asia. Whatever the exact contents of that memorandum of the late seventies, it is historically clear that the United States has had a long-standing vision of Asia and the Pacific as the major areas for its rising destiny since the beginning of the republic.⁴⁷

The final shape of the settlement of disputes that is slowly emerging between North Korea and the United States will turn out to be a diplomatic revolution in that it represents the final opening of Washington's relations with a state with which it has had no diplomatic ties since 1945. In that long period of non-relations, much change has taken place in both states – most of which was of a deep psychological nature. The searing psychological scars of the Vietnam War, the reality of economic limitations and the relative decline of politico-military power, the demise of ideology as an ubiquitous determinant, and the re-emergence of the concept of traditional national interests compel the changes in United States strategic perspective; while the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Communist Bloc, revolutionary reforms in former Communist countries and China, and the crisis of survival in North Korea make it amenable to wide-ranging overtures from the United States and the West.

The agreement envisioned will merely be a stepping stone towards a greater leap forward – towards evolution on both sides, heralding a new chapter of 'great power' inter-relations in strategic East Asia for decades to come. These future changes will be enormous whether or not North Korea survives as an independent player in the region. To be sure, its sudden collapse would expedite the realignment of the great powers – a realignment that is potentially more detrimental to those whose interest is best served by the preservation of the status quo, or slow changes and gradual adaptation to them. However, North Korea's continued existence will have an equally transforming impact on the new alignment as the vital national interests of the United States and North Korea converge for their respective, possibly conflicting, goals. The new convergence would mean that neither the United States nor North Korea will remain engaged in previous commitments of the Cold War period, whose validity and applicability are no longer relevant to today's or tomorrow's needs.

⁴⁷ Cf. Arthur Power Dudden, *The American Pacific: From the Old China Trade to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), *passim*.

South Korea Adrift in the Swirl of Changes – Late 19th Century Repeated?

In the late nineteenth century, Yi Dynasty Korea was faced with the intense rivalry of the great powers in search of an exclusive role on the strategic peninsula. That such a rivalry existed should not be surprising given the conditions of European and world politics, (rooted in "Imperial" search for markets, raw materials and cheap labor, and exercised through naval power)⁴⁸ and the direction of each major power under those circumstances. Nor was it surprising that Korea was not ready to face the crisis in view of the decline in her dynastic fortunes due mainly to pathetic incompetence and misrule by the Yi royal house. What is highly instructive for Korea of the late twentieth century is that Yi Korea, at the end of the nineteenth century, was totally ignorant of the world outside. And being so completely uninformed of the world it had to face, it was simply incapable of effectively facing the crisis and emerging from it intact. The paralyzing policy of seclusion and the fantasy of the ruling circles ultimately caused one of history's most ridiculous collapses under Japanese colonial rule. What is sadly similar between then and now is that despite South Korea's vaunted economic growth, South Korea's present ruling elements are equally guilty of intellectual paralysis and incompetence. The Seoul establishment simply will not and cannot comprehend the enormous changes the world has undergone since the late eighties. Without correct comprehension and adjustment, Seoul's fundamental policy framework remains ossified within a rigid Cold War mentality. It neither understands the significance of the end of the Cold War, nor the collapse of the Soviet Union, nor the unification of Germany nor, most importantly, the quiet but distinct changes that are occurring in the basic orientation of American policy.

In the late nineteenth century, Yi Korea overestimated the power of Qing China, when, in fact, Qing was an impotent and dying empire incapable of preserving its own survival. It overestimated the power and dynamism of Russia, when, in fact, Imperial Russia was itself a fading force bereft of internal integrity. Much the same misunderstanding ruled Seoul's nineteenth century rulers concerning the severely limited power and interest of Britain, France, and Germany, at least in East Asia. A

48 Cf. A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960); René Albrecht-Carrié, *A Diplomatic History of Europe Since the Congress of Vienna* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973); Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*; George Alexander Lensen, *Balance of Intrigue: International Rivalry in Korea & Manchuria, 1884-1899*.

tragic miscalculation was made of the purpose, intention, and capability of the United States in East Asia, particularly in Korea. All of these miscalculations, born of ignorance, and compounded further by an unjustifiable underestimation of Meiji Japan's new power and aggressive intentions towards Korea, proved lethal for Korea's fortunes. The consequence of this accumulation of incompetence was 35 years of Japanese colonial rule. Today, especially as a result of the diplomatic bungling in 1994, the Seoul government miscomprehends the intention and underestimates the power of China, and grossly overestimates the consistency of America's Cold War commitment to Seoul despite the revolutionary changes since the late eighties. Equally, it refuses to understand the strategic sensitivities of Russia towards its eastern rim, especially the Korean peninsula. It believes vainly in Japan's co-operation and fails to account for Japan's new policy orientation. Like the Yi royal house of the past, Seoul's entrenched ruling establishment today repeats the same follies of the past in order to preserve and sustain the status quo of its "personal" power, status, privilege, and wealth. Bridges collapse; roads are washed away; newly built apartments collapse; luxury department stores tumble into rubble; gas pipelines explode in the heart of urban areas; subway construction sites explode, cave in, and collapse; trains derail; people's taxes are systematically stolen by tax officials; the educational system is in disarray and decay; the legal system stonewalls, cowers (before political pressure), whitewashes, and covers up military mutinies and massacres, the grand thefts of billions of funds, and all manner of man-made disasters strike randomly. An increasing number of foreign tourists avoid Korea despite a national campaign to attract them with the slogan of "Visit Korea Year," and yet the ruling establishment in Seoul rules by deceit and sophistry (under the meaningless slogans of "Segyewha" (Globalization) and a myriad of other empty ones), blissfully ignorant of the real world outside.

Whether by design, in the case of the Cold War's last mindless hardliners, or by default in the case of the uninformed, the game is a magnificent replay of the sad follies of the past. The deadly myopia is so flagrant and so entrenched that Seoul's leader have been totally paralyzed in their ability to comprehend the sea changes and adjust accordingly. Their rhetoric and pretence of comprehension obscures the tragic repetition of the late nineteenth century.

If the present trend continues without genuine rectification, Seoul will antagonize forces of the future that could have the greatest impact on the fate of the peninsula, and curry favor with the forces that have either expended their past glory and/or lost the tenacity and ability to maintain the past level of influence. Seoul will be banking on a non-existent prop. Con-

sequently, Korea's future could be bargained away by the powers without its participation or contribution. Exactly such a disaster took place in October in Geneva thanks to the unilateral dealings between the United States and North Korea. The historical significance of "Geneva in October" cannot be lightly dismissed, because it portends an ominous repeat of the tragedy of Korea's diplomacy in the last century. The four major powers in East Asia, particularly the United States, will be weaving new webs of geostrategic alignments to serve their respective and conflicting vital national interests. As in the late sixties and early seventies when, sensing major changes in global equilibrium/alignment through West Germany's *Ostpolitik* and the Sino-Soviet conflict,⁴⁹ the United States took corrective action to restore the balance of power, similar strategic measures could well be taken by Washington first in the Korea peninsula in the context of its global agenda. On the other hand, in that "great game" of the powers in the twenty-first century, the Korean Peninsula could once again become the new "Balkans" of East Asia or the Baltic States before World War II.

49 See T.C. Rhee, "From Europe to China: West Germany's Ostpolitik and Nixon's Detente with China," (in 3 parts) *Sino-Soviet Affairs*, Winter 1985/86, Spring 1986, and Summer 1986. (See Note 3 above).