East Asia is becoming a more important interest to the United States at the same time that it is becoming less stable as an arena of great power interaction. This is a bad combination, precisely the opposite of that in Western Europe. It is also not entirely obvious. Superficially, the region appears fairly peaceful at present, but the security order that will replace the Cold War framework is not yet clear.

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This paper was written for the Conference on Asia in Transition sponsored by the MacArthur Foundation at the East-West Center, Honolulu, in January 1993, and was also presented in seminars at the University of Chicago Program on International Politics, Economics, and Security; MIT Center for International Studies; Columbia East Asian Institute; and Harvard Olin Institute for Strategic Studies. The author is grateful to discussants in those sessions, especially Allen Whiting, Robert Ross, Andrew Wallace, and Charles Lipson. For criticisms of various drafts he also thanks Thomas Bernstein, Frederick Brown, Evelyn Colbert, Joseph Collins, Michael Chambers, Thomas Christensen, Gerald Curtis, Francis Fukuyama, Germaine Hoston, Robert Jervis, Chalmers Johnson, Thomas McNaugher, Masashi Nishihara, William Odom, Michel Oksenberg, Jonathan Pollack, Alan Romberg, Randall Schweller, David Shambaugh, Jack Snyder, Yoshihide Soeya, Arthur Waldron, Kenneth Waltz, and Ren Yue. Another version will appear in a volume edited by Robert Ross.

1. This article considers the area from Japan to Burma. South Asia is not discussed, although India may come to figure more in the East Asian balance of power. India has always been underestimated and too often ignored in U.S. strategic studies, but since it is still peripheral to East Asian strategic interactions, it is excluded in order to keep the analytical scope manageable.

2. Ambivalence about how the security situation in Asia should be assessed can be found even among seasoned experts. For example: "The United States and Russia have a growing community of interests. . . . China is fully preoccupied with its domestic problems. Japan, an economic superpower, is only beginning to apply that power for political purposes. . . . In sum the risk of a major power conflict in Asia is at its lowest point in this century"; but, "On the political front one worrisome fact emerges. For the first time in the twentieth century, U.S. relations with China and Japan are troubled simultaneously;" and, "given the likely power relationships in East Asia, U.S. policy can proceed with minimal concern about new hostile coalitions," yet "the current leaders of the People's Republic of China are telling both Russia and Japan that there must be closer cooperation to block a hegemonic America." Robert Scalapino, "The United States and Asia: Future Prospects," Foreign Affairs, Vol. 70, No. 5 (Winter 1991/92), pp. 26, 32, 36.

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In the Cold War, U.S. strategy in East Asia was driven by the titanic global struggle with Moscow.\(^3\) The Soviet collapse makes the answers to some basic questions less obvious than they once seemed. Is it now in the interest of the United States for China to succeed in economic liberalization and become prosperous? or for Japan to become a normal state, developing a ratio of military to economic power comparable to that of other large, rich countries? or for Korea to unify? or for Taiwan to democratize? or for Vietnam to remain poor? The answers depend on more fundamental questions. How will the distribution of power in the region evolve, and does it matter? Is it important to have a balance of power in East Asia—a distribution of national capabilities that is not obviously hierarchical\(^4\)—or do booming economies and liberalizing polities make traditional strategic calculations obsolete?

Far more than in the Cold War, when strategic debate became routinized and focused on a familiar menu of issues, these questions force analysis back to first principles about the causes of war and peace. Two broad traditions dominate thinking on this subject: realism and liberalism.\(^5\) Realism has been dominant in academic theory, liberalism in American politics, and both are entangled in all debates about foreign affairs. Assumptions about cause and effect in most arguments derive, often unconsciously, from these philosophies. Unless the underlying logic is examined rather than assumed, policy

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\(^3\) In the 1960s, Beijing was seen as an independent threat, but otherwise its role in U.S. strategy depended on its relation to Soviet power and trans-national Leninism. Washington opposed China in the 1950s largely because of its alliance with the USSR, and courted it in the 1970s and 1980s because of its enmity against the USSR.

\(^4\) This is the sense in which I use “balance of power” unless otherwise indicated. The term is notoriously ambiguous in common usage, referring variously to any distribution of power, a roughly equal (usually multipolar) distribution, international stability or equilibrium, deliberate policies to create or maintain equilibrium, automatic equilibrating tendencies in the international system, and other things. See Ernst Haas, “The Balance of Power: Prescription, Concept, or Propaganda?” *World Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (July 1953); Inis L. Claude, Jr., *Power and International Relations* (New York: Random House, 1962), chap. 2; and Martin Wight, “The Balance of Power,” in Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight, eds., *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays in the Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968).

\(^5\) All choices cannot be lumped under this dichotomy, which does not subsume serious alternatives such as Marxism-Leninism; however, since Marxism-Leninism never influenced American policymaking, and now exerts scant influence in other countries, that alternative is ignored here. For thinking about international conflict, moreover, Marx and Lenin shared many assumptions with the other schools. If classes are substituted for states, their view of conflict as natural and inevitable is quite similar to realism. Leninist regimes that twisted doctrine to support nationalism had quite realist foreign policies. Pure Marxism, though, believes in progress. When class conflict resolves with the arrival of communism (the stage of development after socialism), the Marxist view resembles the liberal in its assumption that peace and harmony become natural.
proposals often argue past each other because proponents take their premises for granted.

As with the relation between any general theory and specific cases, hardly anyone's views fit snugly within either paradigm. Policymakers also have no interest in endless scholastic debates about them. Making theoretical distinctions explicit, however, is the first step in clarifying the competition of logical frameworks that should replace the Cold War frame of reference. The implications of realist and liberal assumptions are not simple, because there are contradictions within the schools, as well as consistencies between them. This essay outlines how different combinations of assumptions about causes of war and peace produce different conclusions about which economic, political, and military developments in East Asia should be desirable or dangerous. My own position tilts toward realism but is syncretic in significant ways reflected in the recommendations at the end of the article. My main arguments are:

- The balance of power does remain important, and it is up for grabs. Economic, political, and military developments could vary and combine in so many ways that almost all significant possibilities are left open for the number of major power centers contending in the region and the identity of dominant states or coalitions.
- A truncated End of History in East Asia could be destabilizing rather than pacifying. If economic liberalization is decoupled from political democratization, it may underwrite conflict rather than cooperation.
- Although more attention has focused on the potential of Japanese power, the state most likely over time to disturb equilibrium in the region—and the world—is China.
- The United States will not be able to dominate East Asia militarily without paying costs that have been made unthinkable by the end of the Cold War.

6. Officials typically disdain as a naive academic conceit the notion that theory can inform policy. This view is rooted in practitioners' respect for their own experience; in the misconception that a general argument that does not fit all cases well, or any case perfectly, is self-evidently faulty; and in encounters with foolish academics spouting silly or unintelligible theories. Policymakers usually regard themselves as pragmatists operating case-by-case, without theoretical blinders. In reality, experience cannot predict what will happen unless either the future case is absolutely identical to one experienced (which never happens), or the policymaker filters experience through a theory. The difference between academics and officials is not reliance on theory, but whether the theory relied on is explicit or unconscious. For a promising effort to link theory and policy see Alexander George, Bridging the Gap: Theory and Practice in Foreign Policy (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace, 1993).
Realist diagnoses may be correct, yet may have to fall back on liberal prescriptions because the price of dominance is too high.

- The specific nature of U.S. strategic commitments in the region—especially in regard to Taiwan—is dangerously vague, and invites miscalculation by Asian adversaries and allies, and by our own leaders, in a prospective crisis.

**Assumptions: Power, Values, and Peace**

Realists believe that wars are awful but natural, and that states are subject to natural selection. Wars happen because there is nothing to prevent them when countries would rather defend conflicting claims than relinquish them. Without any supranational enforcer, states are the ultimate judges of their own rights and enforcers of their interests, material or moral, as they see them. Power determines whose claims prevail, so peace must flow from a distribution of power that convinces states that the costs of enforcing or resisting claims exceed the gains.7

Classic liberalism sees wars as unnatural, occurring because states fail to recognize their common interests in efficient market exchange, or because glory-seeking rulers are unconstrained by the will of their subjects, who bear the costs of combat. Peace can emerge from the spread of understanding that liberal norms make the potential for material gain greater from cooperation than from wasteful conflict. Ideas, once properly recognized and buttressed by law, enlightened custom, and institutions to foster cooperation, exert a power of their own.8

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Within the realist school, all agree that the distribution of national power is the most important concern of policy, but not about which distribution is most stable. There are three structural alternatives: multipolarity, bipolarity, or unipolarity. Classical balance of power theorists tend to favor the first, "neorealists" the second, and some others the third. This lack of consensus, as well as the various ambiguities about which strategies produce certain results, make realism quite indeterminate; it is much clearer about what the general problem is than about what the particular solutions should be.

Within the liberal school, there are three main variants. One emphasizes that economic liberty—free markets and trade, division of labor according to comparative advantage, and interdependence—makes countries avoid war in order to maximize material gain. Another sees political liberty as the source of states' confidence in each other's benign intentions; in the past two centuries constitutional democracies have virtually never fought each other. The third, "neoliberal institutionalism," focuses on the role of international organization, informal as well as formal, for cultivating the norms of coop-

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9. The latest wave, known as neorealism, focuses entirely on the international structure of power. Old realists consider domestic political and psychological factors as important in explaining decisions for war, but they too emphasize the external distribution of state power as the prime concern for policy.


11. This view derives inductively from the stability of the U.S.-Soviet balance in the Cold War and deductively from the argument that multipolarity makes alliance solidarity too important, and allows crises to escalate too easily when states drag their allies into confrontation. Kenneth N. Waltz, Theory of International Politics (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1979), chap. 8.


Whereas realism is inadequate as a guide to policy because it is indeterminate, the distinction between the first variant of the liberal paradigm and the second and third poses a potential problem. Whatever its impact on inclinations to war or peace may be, economic liberalism generates power, by virtue of its dynamic impact on national development. Therefore, if political liberalism or neoliberal institutional liberalism turn out to be stronger sources of peaceful behavior than is economic liberalism, economic liberalism might promote realists’ worst nightmares about the dangers of imbalance of power if it is decoupled from the other two variants of liberalism—as it could well be in East Asia.

All these variations within the contending schools complicate the prescriptions we might infer. There is no simple correlation between any of the paradigms and the propensity to use force. But on one vital point—the relative importance of national power and ideological values—the basic dichotomy remains relevant to strategy. Realists part company with liberals on the priority of maintaining for its own sake a favorable material power position, conceived in terms of military and economic capability relative to other countries. Liberals, in turn, are more reluctant to subordinate international law, political justice, or absolute prosperity to strategic competition and economic autonomy. Nurturing national power is unobjectionable only as long as it does not impair international cooperation. On the use of force beyond the direct defense of one’s own homeland, realists are most inclined to it when the balance of power is at stake, liberals when moral values are at stake. These differences should be highlighted for two reasons.

First, the question of for what objectives and on whose behalf a state should shed blood is the most essential aspect of security policy. In the United States, that issue was contentious enough during the second half of the Cold War, after it fought two hot wars in East Asia. Now, with the passing of the global threats of Soviet national power and transnational

16. For example, realists Henry Kissinger and Hans Morgenthau split on the Vietnam War, as did liberals Henry Jackson and George McGovern. More recently, proponents of intervention in Bosnia, Somalia, and Haiti have more often been found among liberals than realists.
communist ideology, there is no consensus whatever on this question, especially in regard to Asia.

Second, if realism is relevant, it faces an uphill battle in the policy arena because its logic is not automatically compelling to Americans. The Cold War was won without proving which of the two general paradigms was correct, since victory correlated with both the assertion of U.S. power and the adversary's acceptance of western ideals. Realism can explain why Gorbachev and his crew decided that glasnost and perestroika were necessary, but not why they gave away the Soviet empire in 1989 without a murmur. Liberal logic is deeply rooted in American society (which is why laissez-faire liberals in the United States are called conservatives). Realism is not; it is an acquired taste, offensive to many Americans when stated baldly, uncloaked in righteousness.

This was not a problem in the Cold War because at many points throughout that period Americans did not have to choose between the imperatives of power and of values. The communist threat, like the fascist threat before it, combined military power with anti-liberal ideology, allowing conservative realism's focus on might and liberal idealism's focus on right to converge in a militant policy. It would not otherwise have been as easy for the United States to play power politics so enthusiastically in the half-century after Pearl Harbor.

Winning the Cold War could not help but confirm liberal optimism about the natural progress of history toward peace. An axiomatic liberal consensus is riskier now, however, because without a clear adversary like the USSR it will not complement concern with military power and strategic activism as easily as before. Now the conceptual choices associated with the two main

18. Louis Hartz, The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955), argues that liberalism so infuses American political culture that it is taken for granted, and allows politically significant debates to take place only among schools within liberalism.

19. The exception to the consensus was the decade after the 1968 Tet Offensive, when liberals became disillusioned with intervention and argued that interdependence and negotiation rather than military muscle would best serve peace and stability. The debate crested in the Carter administration with the split between the dovish Cyrus Vance and the hawkish Zbigniew Brzezinski. The split was resolved in the hawks' favor after the invasion of Afghanistan, and the reborn consensus was confirmed with Reagan's election. In 1993, however, the Vance school got its revenge, as Warren Christopher and Anthony Lake, his old lieutenants, took charge of foreign policy. Lake described himself and President Clinton as "neo-Wilsonian," opposed to the "classic balance of power" perspective. Steven A. Holmes, "Choice for National Security Adviser Has a Long-Awaited Chance to Lead," New York Times, January 3, 1993, p. 16.
paradigms point more often in divergent directions. Nowhere is this more true than in Asia.

World Power, Regional Power, and Strategic Interests

The worldwide structure of power no longer governs the regional structure of power, as it did in the Cold War. Global unipolarity now coincides with regional multipolarity. No country but the United States can project large amounts of military force at all points in the world, but this unique capacity is fractionated by multiple commitments in different regions. Although the United States is in a military class by itself, it cannot act independently in many cases but needs the cooperation of allies to provide bases (such as Saudi Arabia for the Gulf War, or Japan and South Korea in East Asia). Moreover, without the challenge of another superpower to contend with, U.S. military forces are shrinking and likely to level off well below the baseline of the Cold War.

The divergence in U.S. and local trends illustrates the self-liquidating character of unipolarity. In East Asia, in contrast to the United States, militaries are growing. China especially has boosted its defense budget since the late 1980s. It is buying and selling weapons at a fast clip, seeking naval facilities closer to the Malacca Straits, and developing rapid-deployment battalions. This activity is not in itself evidence of malign intent, since China’s defense spending was depressed in the 1980s, and most countries increase defense spending as their economies grow. As for Japan, it “alone among

20. Other terms used in place of unipolarity include hegemony, hierarchy, and primacy. These connote more about the amount of control that goes with a dominant power position than I wish to assume at most points in this essay. For an activist view of the implications of global unipolarity for U.S. policy, see Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment,” Foreign Affairs, Vol. 70, No. 1 (Winter 1990/91).
the rich countries . . . is still increasing its defense spending in real terms.”

(See Table 1.)

The situation is similarly mixed in other dimensions of power. Globally, no other country approaches the United States in economic leverage, but this is not true within East Asia. Being Number One in the world in terms of gross national product (GNP), domestic markets, or other indices does not translate into local dominance. Politically, the demise of Marxism-Len-

### Table 1. Recent Defense Budget Trends: Great Powers and Middle Powers in East Asia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S.A.</td>
<td>291.4</td>
<td>272.95</td>
<td>270.9</td>
<td>258.87</td>
<td>-11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USSR</td>
<td>116.7</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>52.51</td>
<td>39.68</td>
<td>29.12</td>
<td>29.12</td>
<td>-44.5a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>28.73</td>
<td>32.68</td>
<td>35.94</td>
<td>39.71</td>
<td>+38.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China (PRC)b</td>
<td>6.06</td>
<td>6.11</td>
<td>6.71</td>
<td>7.31</td>
<td>+20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>8.69</td>
<td>9.29</td>
<td>10.29</td>
<td>10.45</td>
<td>+20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Korea</td>
<td>10.62</td>
<td>10.77</td>
<td>11.19</td>
<td>12.06</td>
<td>+13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. Koreac</td>
<td>5.23</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>-58.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viêtnamc</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>+34.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>7.01</td>
<td>7.06</td>
<td>6.94</td>
<td>6.96</td>
<td>-0.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTES: Figures in U.S. $ billions. Figures are for defense budgets, which indicate intended level of effort and for which more recent data are available, rather than defense expenditures. NB: Data do not correct for exchange rate fluctuations, hence exaggerate some changes; e.g., change for Japan calculated in yen is only 11.8%


c. Estimates.


Wealth, Power, and Instability

In contrast to most realists, I count ideology as an element of power, rather than just a matter of values, when it contributes to social mobilization, willingness to bear high costs for strategic rivalry, and incentives for alliance between countries. The only candidate to replace Marxism-Leninism as a competing global ideology is radical Islam, which hypothetically could coordinate movements in areas as diverse as the Middle East and North Africa, Nigeria, Pakistan, Indonesia, and some of the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, to team up with the regime in Iran. Nothing indicates the probability that coordination would be successful, however, and such a coalition would also lack the industrial power or geographic cohesion to stand up to Western military force.

24. In contrast to most realists, I count ideology as an element of power, rather than just a matter of values, when it contributes to social mobilization, willingness to bear high costs for strategic rivalry, and incentives for alliance between countries. The only candidate to replace Marxism-Leninism as a competing global ideology is radical Islam, which hypothetically could coordinate movements in areas as diverse as the Middle East and North Africa, Nigeria, Pakistan, Indonesia, and some of the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, to team up with the regime in Iran. Nothing indicates the probability that coordination would be successful, however, and such a coalition would also lack the industrial power or geographic cohesion to stand up to Western military force.


26. On derivative and intrinsic interests, see Richard K. Betts, “Southeast Asia and U.S. Global Strategy,” Orbis, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Summer 1985), pp. 354–362. The difference was related to the domino theory. One way of putting it would be to say that the United States committed itself militarily to NATO and the Mutual Security Treaty with Tokyo because it cared (intrinsically) about Western Europe and Japan, while it committed itself militarily in Korea and Vietnam because it cared (derivatively) about Western Europe and Japan.

Reduced attention to Asia as a military problem in the second half of the Cold War followed from U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam and reconciliation with China. (It is ironic how seldom anyone ever notes that the United States spent almost sixty thousand American lives, hundreds of thousands of Indochinese lives, and several hundred billion of today's dollars fighting the Vietnam War in no small part to contain China regionally, only to turn on a dime and embrace China in order to contain the USSR globally.) At the same time as the downshift in military activism, economic stakes were moving in the opposite direction: Asia was outstripping Europe as a U.S. trade partner. By now, two-way trade with East Asia is well over $300 billion, a third more than with Europe. (For U.S. trade with Asia as a whole, the difference is even greater.)

The galloping pace at which East Asia has been closing the gap in power potential can be seen even in the 1980s, after most Asian economies had taken off. (See Table 2.) In terms of the material stakes of most interest to hardheaded strategic realists, the population and growing wealth of East Asia should have boosted it over Europe on the list of priorities some time ago. That did not happen for several reasons, including inertia and, perhaps, a whiff of unconscious racism. Another reason was political affinity. Western Europe was a set of fraternal, stable democracies. In East Asia these have been rare.

Other explanations for the lower military priority of Asia were less inconsistent with balance of power criteria. Material stakes do not automatically dictate levels of military effort. Geographic conditions made the cost of deterrence much higher in Europe than in Asia, in terms of treasure, though it proved much lower in terms of blood. At least half of cumulative U.S. peacetime defense expenditures (including most of the strategic nuclear force) could be fairly attributed to the European commitment, although it was in

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28. For example, in 1964–66, when the move to large-scale intervention occurred, China was the focus of official statements on Vietnam between three and five times as often as the Soviet Union was. F.M. Kail, What Washington Said: Administration Rhetoric and the Vietnam War (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1973), Appendix.
30. Fungibility of forces makes any nominal allocation of expenditures to specific regional commitments contentious, but internal U.S. planning generated force requirements largely for war in Europe. In the early 1960s planners were directed to develop capabilities for a so-called "2½ War" scenario, in which Europe would be only one of the total. The results still allocated about 60 percent of ground force divisions and fighter-attack wings to NATO. William W. Kaufmann, Planning Conventional Forces, 1950–1980 (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution),
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Table 2. One Decade of Shifting Power Potential.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NATO Europe</th>
<th>East Asia</th>
<th>All Europe</th>
<th>All Asia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GNP(^a)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>3,728</td>
<td>2,516</td>
<td>7,427</td>
<td>2,716</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>4,610</td>
<td>4,117</td>
<td>9,032</td>
<td>4,454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% change</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>64.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per Capita GNP(^b)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>11,480</td>
<td>1,656</td>
<td>9,400</td>
<td>1,128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>13,410</td>
<td>2,349</td>
<td>10,720</td>
<td>1,557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% change</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>41.8</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population(^c)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>324.7</td>
<td>1,519.0</td>
<td>790.2</td>
<td>2,406.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>343.8</td>
<td>1,752.4</td>
<td>842.8</td>
<td>2,859.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% change</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTES:

c. Millions.


Asia that we fought two long, nasty wars after 1945. The conventional Soviet military threat was more manageable in Asia than it was in Europe. In Europe, the challenge was to block an armored advance over land to the English Channel that could extend Communist control over Germany, France, and the rest of the continent, taking a large portion of the world’s industrial power into Moscow’s ambit. In Asia, Japan was the only modern industrial power for most of the Cold War, and it was protected, as England had been against Napoleon and Hitler, by a buffer of water. China was the sole major state directly threatened by Soviet invasion. The People’s Republic was only an ally of convenience for the United States, and just a tacit one at that. The country’s strategic depth also made its complete conquest less likely.

For whatever reasons, Asia’s importance as an objective strategic interest, as stakes on the global board, seldom paralleled its profile in American

1982), Tables 1 and 2, pp. 6–7. Later, the Nixon Doctrine reduced the criterion to “1½ Wars,” of which Europe was the one. It was also an open secret that the United States had a “swing” strategy, by which military forces in the Pacific would move to Europe in the event of war there.
military policy after 1945. More military effort was invested in the region in the first half of the Cold War, when it was less important than Europe, than in the second half, when it was becoming more important. Except for the 1960s, however, when the military commitment was excessive (the Vietnam War), the levels of effort were not out of line with the threats to the stakes. Will this remain true if, as argued at the outset, U.S. interests in East Asia are rising while the region's stability is declining?

The higher stakes are matters of arithmetic. East Asia has about a third of the world's population, a growing share of total world economic product, and the largest portion of American trade outside the Western hemisphere. If policymakers continue to place a higher value on Europe, despite the retreat of the Soviet military threat, it will be for reasons of cultural affinity or something else, but not because of material interest. If the rationale behind U.S. interventions and peacetime presence in Europe in this century was to prevent a hostile power from dominating a vital center of the world's wealth, productivity, and markets, the same logic should apply in East Asia.

But what is the hostile power that should imply a military corollary to the economic stakes? Is there now a natural balance in the region, so that no local state can dominate even if the United States does not act to maintain equilibrium? The evidence of instability is less straightforward than are the stakes. In one sense, stability in the region has never been so good. For more than a century East Asia has been an international subsystem where up to five great powers have interacted, and at the moment they all have decent relations with each other. But of the six dyadic relationships among the current four great powers (U.S.-Japan, U.S.-China, U.S.-Russia, Japan-China, Japan-Russia, Russia-China), none has been consistently stable and friendly, and all have eventuated in combat at some point in this century. Today there is only one scene of contention where all the great powers' interests intersect—Korea; elsewhere they cooperate or compete in various combinations. Moreover, the regional countries have become actors on the world scene and are no longer just acted upon. This reduces the leverage of the outside great powers. Finally, as the end of the Cold War takes rising middle powers such as South Korea and Taiwan out of the arena of superpower competition, they develop the capacity to maneuver, and thus more countries can complicate international relations.31

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31. I owe much of this paragraph to discussions with Michel Oksenberg.
The most important local countries remain the great powers: China, Japan, and Russia. When the Cold War subsumed strategic competition in Asia we did not worry about China and Japan as independent actors (except for the decade between the Sino-Soviet split and Sino-American rapprochement); without the Soviet threat, it is hard to see why either China or Japan should not become more independent. This does not mean that the great powers cannot avoid direct conflict and feel content to secure defense of their interests with minimal military means, even if economic nationalism prevails. As James Kurth suggested in the waning days of the Cold War:

If a Pacific Basin international system based upon the concepts of international mercantilism and finite deterrence were to come into being . . . the United States would no longer be the core country in the Pacific region. . . . Without the U.S. open market and the U.S. Seventh Fleet, the United States would be of little importance to Asia and the Pacific. Japan and China would become the core countries.32

This would keep the United States out of war in the area as well as a liberal system would, but it would keep it out of liberal economic relations as well. It is also unlikely that “finite deterrence” could mean anything but nuclear armament for all the players. What alternatives are there for the United States, and how does military power fit in?

U.S. military commitments in East Asia should be a higher relative priority than they were after the Vietnam War, if only by default, because military requirements for European defense have plummeted. But the increase in relative priority coincides with an absolute decline in forces, so there is not likely to be any redeployment to the Pacific. U.S. planning for major war is no longer “threat-based.” No longer does the Pentagon identify a superpower whose location and forces provide the standards by which to measure the adequacy of its own, which can then subsume the capabilities that turn out to be needed for unforeseen minor contingencies. Instead, the United States is moving to maintain a “base force” of standing capabilities for limited contingencies, and a foundation for “reconstitution” of the Cold War level of forces should a new major adversary emerge.33 To the extent that identified

threats do play a part in current military planning, they lie outside Asia, for example Iran or Iraq. Those countries cannot threaten western survival as the Soviet Union did (although this will change if they get large numbers of nuclear weapons). The only countries anywhere in the world that could recreate a superpower-sized threat early in the twenty-first century are the other great powers of East Asia: Russia, China, and Japan.4 (See Table 3.)

Power Centers and Instabilities

The future roles of China and Japan highlight how critical the choice of realist or liberal models of international relations is, because some developments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ground Force Divisions</th>
<th>Main Battle Tanks</th>
<th>Combat Aircraft</th>
<th>Principal Surface Combatants</th>
<th>Submarines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S.A.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>1,320</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>564</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>101+</td>
<td>5,850</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>22+</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Korea</td>
<td>24+</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. Korea</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>732</td>
<td>3+</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>73+</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>7+</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTES: Excludes independent brigades/regiments/battalions, light tanks, patrol/coastal combatant ships. “+” after numbers indicates high ratios of such smaller units to the large ones tabulated. Tabulations do not indicate relative combat power, due to qualitative disparities and asymmetries in untabulated capabilities.

a. Pacific Command (PACOM).

b. Number not available for PACOM; 15,629 main battle tanks (MBT) listed for total U.S. inventory.

c. Siberian, Transbaykal, and Far East Military Districts.


34. Even if the German Problem were reborn, Germany is more constrained by geography and continental institutions than are the large Asian powers.
will look desirable in terms of one and disastrous in terms of the other. By the assumptions of the liberal model, the main problem is to promote liberalization, especially political and economic liberalization in China, and free trade among all. Liberalization in one sphere reinforces the other; as countries become more prosperous they are more likely to become democratic. Thus, it is in the security interest of countries to help each other become rich, even if that widens differences in national capability. If political and economic liberty become universal, peace will be secure and differences in national power beside the point. Commercial competition should displace military competition. The economic development and expanding trade that characterize Asia point to opportunities for mutual profit between the United States and local countries. National competitions for power waste resources, at best, or generate conflicts artificially, at worst.

For realists, ideology is barely relevant. Political fraternity will wilt under other pressures, and differences in power will resolve conflicts of interest. Even if the pacifying effect of political liberalism is accepted, there is the problem that market efficiency may operate within authoritarian polities, yielding material strength without ideological discipline. For realists, it is not in a country’s strategic interest for others to get rich unless they can be counted on to remain militarily weak or diplomatically allied. To realists, liberal theory overestimates the value states place on absolute as opposed to relative gains:

For the United States, which future is preferable: one in which the U.S. economy grows at 25 percent over the next decade, while the Japanese economy grows at 75 percent, or one in which the U.S. grows at only 10 percent while that of Japan grows 10.3 percent? Robert Reich . . . posed that choice in 1990 in a series of meetings with graduate students, U.S. corporate executives, investment bankers, citizens of Massachusetts, senior State Department officials, and professional economists. A majority of every group, with one exception, expressed a preference for the latter outcome. The economists unanimously chose the former, and . . . were surprised that other Americans would voluntarily forgo fifteen percentage points of economic growth in the interest of hampering the progress of one of America’s principal trade and financial partners.35

It is good for a country other than one’s own to have impressive military power as long as the two countries are bonded by the imperative to cooperate

against a common threat. Otherwise, its friendship depends on the vicissitudes of international developments, and the wealth that is convertible into military power makes it a potential threat. By liberal logic, other countries are more dangerous if they are lean and hungry than if they are fat and happy. Realists, however, worry that prosperity may just make them muscular and ambitious.

Prospects for China and Japan thus have radically different implications for stability, depending on which models of the causes of war and peace are superimposed on the future. Those prospects have been obscured until recently because analysts tended to consider the power of both in terms of how they lined up in the global conflict with Moscow, and to see them as junior partners. The U.S. reconciliation with China, which turned the tables and made the Soviets confront the strategic planning problem of a two-front war as the United States had earlier, allowed Washington to remain one of the two principal powers in the area even as it withdrew a huge chunk of the forces it had deployed in the area between 1950 and 1972. By the end of the Cold War, only about 17 percent of U.S. military manpower was allocated to Asia, only about 6 percent was deployed forward in the region, and 70 percent of those deployed forward were in Japan and Korea.³⁶

Now both Russia and the United States are less dominant in the region. Russia is preoccupied with internal transformation, and its power is drastically reduced from that of the Soviet Union. As a group of sober Russian strategic analysts put it:

Having retained more than four-fifths of the territory of the USSR, Russia nonetheless accounts for slightly over one-half of the population. It controls (taking into consideration production decline) less than one-half of the Soviet gross national product for 1990. In terms of most parameters . . . Russia has become a middle-sized country. In Europe this is the equivalent of France, Great Britain, and Italy; in Asia, of India, and Indonesia.³⁷

To the extent that Russian foreign policy focuses on Asia, it is focused much less on East Asia than on Central Asia and the multiple disorders on Russia’s

southern borders. In the near future, Russia’s weakened condition facilitates more cooperation with China (by reducing the threat that Beijing might worry about) while enhancing incentives for it. For example, Russian civilian products are not competitive internationally, and the country’s only industrial comparative advantage is in weapons manufacture, but these products are frozen out of the western market while the West tries to prevent either Moscow or Beijing from selling more arms elsewhere. In the longer term, if Russia solves its problems, balance of power concerns are likely to bring back at least modest tension between the two great powers of mainland Asia. Moscow will inevitably be a strategic heavyweight in the region, especially when and if its own economic and political situation stabilizes, but its clout is unlikely to grow as fast as Beijing’s or Tokyo’s.

The United States remains formally committed to a strategic role in the Pacific, but its military presence has again been attenuated as the flag has come down from Philippine bases, land- and sea-based tactical nuclear weapons have been removed, and defense budget cuts trim the number of forces regularly on station elsewhere in the neighborhood. U.S. political rhetoric minimizes change, but military movement highlights it. There is an important difference on this point between Northeast and Southeast Asia. American deployments in Korea may last for a long time, and those in Japan would be the last to go. The U.S. military role in the northern area has not shifted from substance to symbol, but in the southern part of the region it shifted clearly in that direction after 1973. Whether this matters is a question that brings us back to the opposing implications of the liberal and realist models.

Two potential changes would most focus the issue. These would be China’s achievement of a high level of economic development (close to Taiwan’s or South Korea’s) and Japan’s development of a normal amount of military power (a share of national product allocated to the military comparable to the share devoted by other wealthy countries). For those guided by liberal

39. “Instead of being coopted and integrated, the powerful political and economic interests connected with the Russian armaments industry are being pushed in an anti-Western direction. A side effect of these policies will be, of course, a further shift towards relatively indiscriminate arms sales . . . particularly to China.” Karaganov, “Russia and Other Independent Republics in Asia,” p. 26.
theories of the causes of war and peace, such outcomes would be desirable at best and harmless at worst; for American realists, either one should be disturbing.

Even under the conventional economic measurements that kept estimates low, China has grown at an impressive pace since embracing the market. According to the most authoritative U.S. figures for 1991, China’s real GNP grew 7 percent, its industrial output 14 percent. In 1992, by one report, the growth rate was a whopping 12 percent. If we take more recent International Monetary Fund (IMF) calculations based on purchasing power parity rather than exchange rates (see below), the results look far more dramatic. *The Economist*, which makes the case that most official statistics for China are meaningless, claims that the average annual growth rate has been nearly 9 percent for fourteen years, and that China’s true output is already at least a quarter of U.S. GNP. Its marginal savings rate is also among the highest in the region.

It is not inevitable that recent average rates will continue indefinitely, but if they do, the long-term prospects for the balance of power—global as well as regional—are staggering. Consider the implications of Table 4, based on the most conservative estimates of China’s recent economic performance. If the country ever achieved a per-capita GNP just one-fourth that of the United States (about South Korea’s ratio today), it would have a total GNP greater than that of the United States. That in itself is a limited indicator, since it would not equate to comparable disposable income, but it would still be an epochal change in the distribution of world power. By the same token, Japan’s smaller population mitigates the implications of its per-capita income. Japan would need double the American per-capita GNP to exceed absolute U.S. GNP. Similarly, the prospect of Russia’s economic development poses

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44. Population itself is not a source of power. Indeed, at present China’s population is a source of weakness, and will become a greater one if its growth is not curbed. The point is that population makes for power when it is associated with an advanced economy. It is not because of its per-capita income that the United States is the most powerful country in the world; several countries rank higher on that index, but no matter how efficient a Switzerland or Sweden may be, they can never be superpowers. Countries with the most power potential in the twenty-first century will be the ones that combine high rankings in productivity, population, and resources; those with the most actual power will be the ones from among that group who marshal the most military power from that potential.
Table 4. Prosperity and Power Potential.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>China</th>
<th>S. Korea</th>
<th>Japan</th>
<th>USA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Per capita GNP ($)</td>
<td>547.0</td>
<td>4,920.0</td>
<td>22,900.0</td>
<td>20,910.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(% of U.S.)</td>
<td>(2.6)</td>
<td>(23.5)</td>
<td>(109.5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total GNP ($ billions)</td>
<td>603.5</td>
<td>210.1</td>
<td>2,820.0</td>
<td>5,201.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(% of U.S.)</td>
<td>(11.6)</td>
<td>(4.0)</td>
<td>(54.2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population (millions)</td>
<td>1,102.4</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>123.2</td>
<td>248.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(% of U.S.)</td>
<td>(443.1)</td>
<td>(17.2)</td>
<td>(49.5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of U.S. per capita GNP needed to equal total U.S. GNP</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>582.7</td>
<td>201.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


less threat to a balance of power than does China’s. Even by the conservative estimates, the prospect of China as an economic superpower is not remote. If the IMF calculations are to be believed, that eventuality is much closer. By those numbers, China’s economy is four times larger than previously estimated, and the third largest in the world already.45

With only a bit of bad luck in the evolution of political conflict between China and the West, such high economic development would make the old

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Soviet military threat and the more recent trade frictions with Japan seem comparatively modest challenges. The West will need more than a bit of good luck to avoid clashing with China politically. This is true according to either set of assumptions about international relations, realist or liberal. For realists, Chinese power was not a problem for Asia in the second half of the Cold War because the Soviet Union was pinning China down. With that constraint reduced, the only alternatives will be to accept Chinese hegemony in the region or to balance Chinese power. The latter course need not and should not mean a new Cold War in Asia, but it does imply cautious moves toward containment without confrontation—polite containment, which need not preclude decent relations. (Diplomatic discussion should be about “equilibrium” rather than “containment,” a loaded term.) If that is infeasible or undesirable, then realists will have to learn to live with Beijing in Asia as other countries have learned to live with the U.S. colossus in the western hemisphere,46 or hope for the division of Chinese power through the breakup of the country. Disintegration is hardly a fanciful prospect; overcoming disunity has been a historic Chinese problem, a violent one for much of this century, and the current unevenness of development in the country increases centrifugal strains.47

The other theoretical approach does not make the question less vexing unless we assume that Chinese politics joins the End of History. Liberal theory is nonchalant about power imbalances only in regard to liberal polities or economies, so unless China embraces democracy and free trade, it may, for internal and ideological reasons, evince all the nasty vices in foreign policy that structural realism ascribes to imperatives imposed by the inter-

46. China might seem less of a problem since it has not intervened as often in neighboring countries in modern times as the United States has, but it has still used force against neighbors and engaged in coercion a number of times since 1949. Moreover, China lost large amounts of territory in the last century and a half and, as Michel Oksenberg suggests, nationalism could emerge “as a substitute for Marxism as a unifying ideology.” Quoted in Kristof, “China Builds Its Military Muscle,” p. A8.

national system. But the liberal solution for pacifying international relations—
liberal ideology—is precisely what present Chinese leaders perceive as a
direct security threat to their regime.

Normal Development as a Threat

So should we want China to get rich or not? For liberals, the answer is yes,
since a quarter of the world’s people would be relieved from poverty and
because economic growth should make democratization more likely, which
in turn should prevent war between Beijing and other democracies. For
realists, the answer should be no, since a rich China would overturn any
balance of power. But what can we do about it anyway? American leverage
on Beijing after the Cold War is not overwhelming. Active efforts to keep
China poor or to break it up are hard to imagine, and would be counterpro-
ductive by exacerbating antagonism. Realists at best can passively hope for
Chinese economic misfortune. Otherwise, we had better hope that liberal
theory about the causes of peace pans out, so that what is good for China
turns out to be good for everyone. As with all too many of the problems of
security in East Asia, we may begin with a realist diagnosis but be forced
into banking on liberal solutions, simply because the costs of controlling the
balance of power may be too high.

As for Japan, its democracy ostensibly eliminates grounds for anxiety in
one of the liberal perspectives, but limitations in the openness of trade still
leave the country as a problem for either liberalism or realism. The main
reason that recent trade frictions between Tokyo and Washington have not
become a security problem as well as an economic one is that Japan is an
unevenly developed great power. Cold War bipolarity obscured the discrep-
ancies among the country’s economic, military, and political weights. The
situation grew increasingly anomalous as Japan grew richer; it can only seem
even more peculiar as the end of the Cold War finishes sinking into every-
one’s consciousness.

The United States may continue to provide the security guarantee that
allowed Japan to remain militarily limited, but the reason to do so will steadily
become less obvious as time goes on and the residue of Cold War strategic
mentality dissipates. Or, even with attenuated American protection, Japan
might dispense with a high level of military power of its own if the threat
that it worried about in the Cold War—the USSR—is not replaced by some
other. Without U.S.-Russian military domination of Asia, however, can China
avoid becoming such a potential threat? The old reasons that Tokyo’s political
and military roles should remain incommensurate with the country’s wealth
were peculiar. While it is not at all inevitable that the country will turn away
from this peculiarity—it is deeply rooted in Japan’s postwar aversion to
militarism—there is no reason to assume that new circumstances will not
push Tokyo toward more normal great power status. If the economic, polit-
cal, and military roles were to come into balance, strategic relations would
be revolutionized in East Asia and beyond.

After emphasizing the potential danger that China poses for a balance of
power, it might seem that realism would prescribe full Japanese armament
so that Tokyo could balance Beijing. Unless a bipolar contest between those
two Asian giants emerges as the only alternative to Chinese primacy, how-
ever, such a prescription misreads the situation. Despite the unbalanced
nature of Japan’s power, its lopsided economic clout already gives it the
weight of a hefty great power in a multipolar balance. In the near term, if
Japan suddenly starts spending two to three times as much on defense and
stocks up on nuclear weapons, it will be playing not a balancing role in the
region, but a dominating one. The only good reason to want Japan to be a
military superpower to balance China in the longer term would be if that
were to become the only alternative to a multipolar balance, that is, if Russia
and the United States ceased to provide strategic counterweights to China.

Some Americans still want Japan to improve its military and contribute
forces to enterprises like the 1991 war against Iraq. They berate Japan for
“only” shelling out money for the Persian Gulf War, rather than lives, and
argue, “The key question Americans should ask themselves is: ‘How long
are we prepared to be loyal allies of Japan and act as volunteer Hessians
serving Japanese interests, without demanding genuine military reciproc-
ity?’”\footnote{Edward Olsen, “Target Japan as America’s Economic Foe,” Orbis, Vol. 36, No. 4 (Fall 1992),
p. 496. For a moderate argument in this vein, see David B.H. Denoon, Real Reciprocity: Balancing
U.S. Economic and Security Policy in the Pacific Basin (New York: Council on Foreign Relations
Press, 1993).} They are right about the question but wrong about the answer, which
should be: “As long as possible.” Nothing significant is in the post–Cold War
U.S. defense budget for the defense of Japanese interests that would not be
there anyway for other purposes. Once Tokyo starts spending blood as well
as treasure to support international order, it will justifiably become interested
in much more control over that order.
As of now, Japan’s foreign policy stance bears similarities to what would have been called liberal isolationism in an earlier era; it is based on the logic of “civilian” power.\textsuperscript{49} American realists should encourage that stance, not disparage it. Nor should they let theoretical dogmatism preclude taking advantage of exceptions that all great theories have; there is no need to assume that international pressures inevitably dictate that Japanese leaders must become military realists. After all, if Moscow could trade in a realist foreign policy for a liberal one, there is no reason that Tokyo has to do the reverse, or that it must do so sooner rather than later.

The notion that it would be better for Japan to be a regular military power is strategic Old Thinking, the echo of concerns about burden-sharing in the global conflict with communism. When containing Soviet power was a difficult and expensive mission, getting Japan to share the burden made sense. When the burden has been lifted, however, so has the guarantee that Japanese security interests can never diverge from ours. Thinking about Japan as a replacement for the Soviet threat to keep American strategists gainfully employed would be compulsive realism, and perhaps the prevalent trepidations of other Asian nations about Japanese power are a bit hysterical. (After Tokyo’s precedent-breaking decision to send troops for the UN mission in Cambodia, Singapore’s Lee Kuan Yew was reported to have said that encouraging Japan to engage in peacekeeping was like offering a drink to a recovering alcoholic.) But even if a more heavily armed Japan were to behave as meekly abroad as when it was an American strategic dependency, it is difficult to think of a U.S. interest in the balance of power that would be served, unless Washington withdraws from the region and relies on Tokyo as its proxy.

Neoliberal institutionalist logic, which emphasizes the self-reinforcing dynamics of integrative activities, makes a reasonable case for encouraging a normal role for Japan. Promoting Japanese military participation in multilateral peacekeeping would make especially good sense if the alternative were Japanese remilitarization outside such a framework. As Jack Snyder suggests in response to the Lee Kuan Yew line: social drinking is all right; it is drinking alone that we should worry about. But there is as yet no appreciable impulse to remilitarization from within Japan. Multilateral military integration for Japan should be the U.S. fallback position, not the current objective. A

growing political role for Japan could be encouraged and accommodated within non-military international institutions.\(^50\) Why not postpone Japan’s development of normal power until the Japanese press for it themselves?

The argument for Japanese military power makes more sense in terms of liberalism, or in terms of economic nationalism divorced from military considerations, than it does in terms of traditional U.S. strategic interests. In one view, the Japanese got a commercial edge over the United States by allocating to civilian investment the extra five-to-eight percent of GNP that was the difference between the Japanese and the U.S. allocation to defense throughout the Cold War. If one believes that only economic power is important, one could want the Japanese to spend more on military forces in order to level the economic playing field. Since its long-standing alliance with Washington and its democratic political system prevent Japan from becoming a military threat to the United States, by this reasoning, it can hardly be worse for Tokyo to divert resources to military power than for Washington to do so.\(^51\)

In absolute terms, Japan’s defense budget already ranks high: between third and sixth in the world in recent years (and even second, by some estimates, after the Soviet collapse and the increase in exchange rates).\(^52\) This makes the disproportion in spending all the more significant. Japan has been spending relatively less on military power than any other major state—less than a sixth of the effort of the Cold War superpowers (as a fraction of GNP), and between a fifth and a third of the rates of Britain, Germany, France, China, and India. (See Table 5.) While the Western powers’ military efforts

\(^50\) “For example, of the 150-plus slots allocated to Japan in the United Nations Secretariat, only 88 are now filled.” Joseph S. Nye, Jr., “Coping With Japan,” Foreign Policy, No. 89 (Winter 1992-93), p. 109.

\(^51\) Chalmers Johnson does not promote Japanese militarization but sees vested interests in traditional U.S. military strategy as partly responsible for our failure to confront Tokyo’s economic challenge. He wants Americans to “recognize that Japan has replaced the USSR as America’s most important foreign policy problem,” and sees adaptation blocked by “entrenched interests in the preservation of the system of inequalities that characterized Japanese-American relations during the 1960s. . . . the interests of the defense establishment in the role of America as a hegemon athwart the Pacific, of the diplomatic establishment in Cold War dualism, of . . . the Atlanticists in not having to come to grips with problems for which they do not have the requisite skills.” Chalmers Johnson, “Japan: Their Behavior, Our Policy,” National Interest, No. 17 (Fall 1989), pp. 26-27. If the United States and Japan do become more confrontational economically, however, and at the same time modify the traditional one-sided security relationship, does it not become more probable that military tension could arise?

\(^52\) Unusually high personnel costs help prevent this level of expenditure from providing a comparable amount of combat power at present. One obstacle to Japanese remilitarization is the difficulty of recruitment to fill even currently low levels of mobilized manpower.
Table 5. Relative Levels of Military Effort by Major States: Military Expenditures as Percentage of GNP.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S.A.</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USSR</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.K.</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. Germany</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


NB: Data for USSR and China are soft; many other sources estimate higher figures for the USSR.

are now declining, however, Tokyo's is not. Japan's capacity in high technology also suggests that it would have a comparative advantage over most other countries in fielding a modern force if it focused on that goal.

For a realist, a normally armed Japan, unless it is pinned down by a powerful common enemy, is a potential threat. It would be the strongest military power in Asia, and the second-ranking one in the world. The fact that Japan is democratic, in this view, does not bar it from conflict with other democracies53 (not to mention that some observers doubt whether Japan really is or will remain a democracy in western terms).54 To keep Tokyo a uni-dimensional superpower, however, means that the United States would have to avoid provoking the Japanese in the economic sphere and avoid making them feel fully responsible for their own fate. All of that cuts against

arm-twisting over bilateral trade issues, while such pressure is made more likely by U.S. domestic politics. Can American political leaders convince voters either that unfair Japanese trade practices are a myth, or that the United States should “coddle” the Japanese because some academic theory implies that otherwise the United States might have to fight them again? Here liberal theory could rescue realism, if arguments for free trade in U.S. domestic politics were used to help reduce diplomatic friction with Tokyo.

If Japan’s power does develop fully, its political friction with other Asian countries—most significantly, China—would grow more than with Washington. When Tokyo had an independent military policy during the past century, that policy was driven by China. All three of Japan’s wars (1894–95, 1904–05, 1931–45) originated in disputes related to China. The whole question of balance between these two countries has been a non-issue since 1945 because of the Washington-Tokyo alliance, and stability in Asia has depended on the lack of strategic competition between China and Japan.55

Asymmetries would make it hard to estimate the balance of conventional military capability in such a competition, because China is more of a continental power, reliant on ground forces and quantity of weaponry, while Japan is more of a maritime power, reliant on naval and air forces and quality of technology. Confusion about which one had a military edge could be especially destabilizing. Rough parity is more conducive than clear hierarchy to miscalculation and to decisions to gamble on the resort to force.57

For Japan to be a big league player, it would have to have nuclear weapons. Neorealists like Kenneth Waltz are happy with that prospect because they see nuclear deterrence as stabilizing, and believe it makes anxieties about conventional military balance beside the point.58 If that is convincing, balance of power theorists can simply endorse nuclear proliferation as the solution.

55. Japan’s 1987 decision to breach the symbolic ceiling of one percent of GNP for defense spending alarmed the Chinese because it seemed inconsistent with the warming of superpower relations, and was interpreted as demonstrated intent to become a “political power.” Jonathan Pollack, “The Sino-Japanese Relationship and East-Asian Security: Patterns and Implications,” China Quarterly (December 1990), pp. 718–719.
56. Fred C. Ikle and Terumasa Nakanishi, “Japan’s Grand Strategy,” Foreign Affairs, Vol. 69, No. 3 (Summer 1990), pp. 84–85. As Michael Chambers points out, this could have been due as much to their own underdeveloped capacity to project power as to Cold War constraint.
57. Blainey, Causes of War, chap. 8. If it is clear which power in a confrontation is superior to the other, bargaining leverage should be irresistible, since the weaker one knows it can get nothing from resisting except defeat in war.
to security dilemmas in Asia, and let the United States pack up its strategic bags and come home. It is not clear, though, how many statesmen have the courage of Waltz’s convictions.

Chinese-Japanese bipolarity would be a problem for liberal theory as well, if China does not liberalize, since those who tout the “separate peace” among democracies recognize that they fight frequently and with alacrity against non-democracies. Chinese elite attitudes have also not accepted the positive-sum logic of free trade, but remain mercantilist and zero-sum in outlook. Chinese leaders encounter great difficulty in accepting the fact that state sovereignty has been overtaken by an era of interdependence in which national boundaries are highly permeable.

By realist criteria, a China and a Japan unleashed from Cold War discipline could not help but become problems. Japan is powerful by virtue of its prosperity, which in turn depends on penetrating foreign markets, which creates political friction with competitors. Because of its bigness and central location in regional geography, China evokes the structural theory of the German Problem; even without evil designs, the country’s search for security will abrade the security of surrounding countries. Geographically, the “Middle Kingdom” is close to virtually everyone in East Asia. It is also the strategic pivot between the otherwise distinct subregions of Northeast and Southeast Asia. Individually, countries on the mainland cannot hope to deter or defeat China in any bilateral test of strength; collectively, they cannot help but worry China if they were to seem united in hostility.

If China becomes highly developed economically, the problem would change. Asia would be stable but unhappy, because a rich China would be the clear hegemonic power in the region (like the United States in the western hemisphere), and perhaps in the world. If China remains economically limited, the Americans and Russians recede further from the area, and Japan normalizes the balance among its roles, Japan will be the dominant power in Asia.

For these reasons, and because of Japan’s desire to avoid becoming a normal great power, many governments in East Asia dread the prospect of American withdrawal. If a symbolic U.S. presence suffices—and some spokesmen in Asian capitals imply that it would—there is no reason that the

United States cannot remain one of the principal strategic players.\textsuperscript{61} It is not probable, however, that a simply symbolic military involvement will suffice outside Korea. There it works because it represents a tripwire.\textsuperscript{62} The same presumption cannot exist in Southeast Asia because offshore forces cannot be positioned as a tripwire, because of the legacy of aversion still flowing from the old Indochina War, and because the United States has not cultivated deterrence by indicating its willingness to fight either of the potential threats in the subregion (China or Vietnam). The time that U.S. commitment would actually matter would be when someone called on it to deter or defend against such a specific challenger. At such a moment a symbolic role could well be exposed for what it was—a hesitant and weak commitment, accepted within the United States only by unelected elites (and a fraction of them at best). The United States has been in that position, however, since 1975. When Vietnam had an army of 180,000 in Cambodia in the 1980s, and clashed with Thai troops several times in border skirmishes, Washington remained formally committed by the Manila Treaty to defend Thailand. Was anyone then really confident that the United States would go to war in a big enough way to save Thailand—meaning combat on the ground—if the Vietnamese moved westward? The pretense served by token presence and symbolic commitment can continue, but it scarcely matters unless a test comes.

Southeast Asia is the area of East Asia where U.S. military engagement is least likely, although Washington has a disconcerting habit of going to war over places it had not anticipated (for example, Kuwait) and even where officials had publicly indicated we would refrain (Korea in 1950). Southeast Asia is also where diplomacy to improve balance of power is impeded by visceral American bitterness over the fruitless war there two decades ago. By balance of power criteria, the United States should have repaired relations with Vietnam long ago. Although Vietnam cannot be expected to contain China on its own, there is no strategic reason anymore to keep Hanoi weak. There are of course ample emotional reasons,\textsuperscript{63} but winning the Cold War


\textsuperscript{62} The tripwire concept is capsulized in the answer given by General Foch in 1910 to General Wilson's query about the minimum British force that would be useful to the French: "A single British soldier—and we will see to it that he is killed." Quoted in Barbara Tuchman, \textit{The Guns of August} (New York: Dell, 1963), p. 68.

\textsuperscript{63} The POW/MIA issue can never be resolved satisfactorily. Testimony of former U.S. officials in summer 1992 and discovery in Soviet archives of the translation of an apparently incriminating
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should be counted as more important than not winning the Vietnam War. In the new postwar world, the prospect of economic development makes the power potential of Vietnam, with a population of nearly 70 million, more significant than any other mainland country in Southeast Asia, with the possible exception of Thailand.

Since Vietnam is no longer an extension of Soviet power and influence, no longer occupies Cambodia, has demobilized half of its huge army, has moved to liberalize its economy and (to a lesser degree) its polity, and faces China on its northern border, it is also far less of a threat to the interests of the United States or its friends in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) than during the Cold War. This would change in the unlikely event that Hanoi decided to reoccupy Cambodia, but Chinese capacity to punish Vietnamese adventurism is stronger than the converse. In the bipolar Cold War world, it may have made sense for the United States to want Vietnam to be weak and vulnerable. In the new postwar world, there is no reason to want that unless Chinese dominance is preferred to some measure of balance.

One way in which limited U.S. military engagement could prove most potent, and U.S. diplomacy most decisive, would be in a situation of regional multipolarity where Washington shifted to playing the role of makeweight or external balancer, as Britain sometimes did on the continent of Europe. That way the United States might be the most important strategic player without having the most potent military force in the region. U.S. deployments, nevertheless, would still have to be substantial rather than symbolic. As time goes on, the rising capabilities of the local states will make the threshold of substantial presence harder for a post-Cold War U.S. defense budget to meet.

It is hard, however, to imagine Washington playing the game of agile external balancer, tilting one way then another, rather than faithful ally. Such unvarnished realism seems out of liberal character. (Divorced from the criterion of defending democracy, how would the mission be described to American voters and taxpayers: defense of markets? defense of economic competitors?) Despite realist criticism of American legalism and moralism, however, the United States is not totally unaccustomed to dumping friends and embracing bitter enemies for balance-of-power purposes. Taiwan discov-

North Vietnamese document, whether genuine or not, reinvigorated old suspicions. It is also impossible to prove the negative, that is, that Hanoi never held back any prisoners, in any hiding place, for any time after 1973.
ered that in the 1970s. The most delicate question posed by a balancer role is what it would mean for U.S. relations with Japan, since it implies moving away from the Mutual Security Treaty. Washington would have to make an exception for Japan; otherwise, the move to balancing would be counterproductive, provoking Tokyo to rearm and act independently. With an exception for the Mutual Security Treaty, then, the U.S. role as balancer would be between China and Russia. That, however, implies an unstable tripolar configuration. Playing balancer while still firmly linked with Tokyo could, instead, encourage more Russian-Chinese cooperation, and reversion toward the bipolar groupings of the early Cold War. If the local powers—especially Japan—move more independently anyway, there may be little choice. Otherwise, facile proposals for an American balancer role overlook too many pitfalls.

Cleavages and Casi Belli

Even those who lack faith in liberal guarantees of peace must consider interests as well as power in estimating the odds that states will clash. International anarchy and national anxiety about power are necessary but not sufficient conditions for war. Some conflict of interest, some substantive dispute, some *casus belli* has to enter the equation to provide the impetus to violence.\(^6^4\) One of the reasons for optimism about peace in Europe is the apparent satisfaction of the great powers with the status quo. While Eastern Europe may be a mess, traditional nationalist, ideological, religious, communal, or resource conflicts appear to have been wrung out of the relationships among France, Germany, Britain, Russia, and Italy. And in Asia, no great power is now as revisionist in its aims for the general international order as Japan was before World War II.

East Asia is less beset by traditional *casus belli* than volatile regions like the Middle East or South Asia. For example, the relative ethnic homogeneity of the major East Asian states reduces the potential for irredentism.\(^6^5\) Yet there is still an ample pool of festering grievances, with more potential for gener-

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64. The fact that intentions matter as well as capabilities is part of the reason that “balance of threat” theory improves on balance of power theory. See Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).
65. There are still problems of this sort that are not trivial: divided Mongols and Kazakhs, repressed Tibetans, or communal tensions in smaller states like Malaysia.
ating conflict than during the Cold War, when bipolarity helped stifle the escalation of parochial disputes. Endless numbers of scenarios can be dreamed up, and those that are far-fetched provide no useful guidance. But three are worth mentioning to illustrate two simple points. First, far from improbable possibilities exist for miscalculation and escalation. Second, in two of the three cases there is little visible discussion or planning, at least in American circles, for the strategic questions posed by such instabilities.

One example is the discord over who owns the Spratly Islands, in the South China Sea. (See map, p. 33.) China claims all of them, in conflict with claims by Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei. In one sense this issue is trivial and hard to see as the source of major conflict, since the islands are tiny, barren, and isolated. (There are similar disputes over the Paracel Islands as well.) That insignificance, however, abets miscalculation and unintended provocation. Moreover, if important amounts of oil or seabed minerals turn up in the area, greed will compound national honor as potential fuel for conflict. The other claimants would probably be unable to contest determined Chinese efforts to occupy the islands. That would leave two alternatives: to roll over and accept the Chinese conquest, conceding PRC dominance in the area, or to regroup and retaliate on some other issue. It is not fanciful to see another Sino-Vietnamese war, or a heating up of the Sino-Japanese dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyutai Islands in the East China Sea, growing out of the Spratly dispute. Has any part of the U.S. national security establishment seriously considered what if anything to do if China fights with the Philippines and Vietnam over a couple of the Spratlys, Tokyo reacts by fortifying the Senkakus, and Beijing threatens retaliation if the Japanese do not pull back?

A second difficult case, a residue of the Cold War, is a potentially different problem in its own right: Korea. Of all the places in the world where U.S. forces were deployed on behalf of a client state, South Korea is probably the one where deterrence was most effectively and efficiently achieved. It was effective because there was more certain reason to believe that deterrence was necessary there (that is, that in the absence of the U.S. commitment the adversary would attack) than against the Soviet Union. Since the direct attack

66. Beijing and Taipei have overlapping claims, both in the name of one China.
in 1950, Pyongyang has frequently demonstrated its risk propensity in more consistently reckless provocations than any other government in the world: trying to assassinate the South Korean president (in the 1968 Blue House raid, and again in 1974, when Park Chung Hee’s wife was killed in the attempt); seizing the U.S.S. Pueblo in 1968; hacking American officers to death in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) tree-cutting incident of 1976; murdering half the South Korean cabinet with a bomb in Rangoon in 1983; feverishly digging infiltration tunnels under the DMZ; and blowing up KAL Flight 858 in 1987. The presence of American forces has been a permanent and potent reminder of how close Kim Il Sung came to absolute disaster when he tried to invade. The deterrent has been efficient, in turn, because it is small and functions primarily as a tripwire.

Today, pessimists worry about a North Korean nuclear weapons program. Would any government be more willing to do wild and crazy things with such weapons than the one that so regularly perpetrates acts like those mentioned above? Optimists, on the other hand, see Korean unification around the corner. That is plausible if the North Korean regime collapses, perhaps after Kim Il Sung dies. Whether that happens or not, the problem with the nuclear issue is that no likely outcome can be comfortable for other countries.

Even if North Korea were to reverse course, and submit again to the full strictures of the NPT, there would be no better reason for assuming compliance than there was in regard to Iraq before 1991. Pyongyang would have to accept unprecedented and absolutely unlimited inspections to give the West any reasonable confidence that its nuclear activities could be fully monitored. Experience with Iraq made astoundingly clear how much nuclear activity a zealous and secretive government could keep hidden. Yet no government accepts unlimited inspection, which is a virtual abrogation of sovereignty, except in a surrender agreement. The Iraq case also makes clear why preventive attack, however attractive an option it might become, should be written off. Initial confidence that the six-week air war in 1991 had destroyed Iraq’s nuclear potential turned out to be terribly wrong. Confidence that buried and hidden facilities in North Korea had been found and eliminated would require not just air attack, but invasion and occupation of the country.

If Korea does unify under Seoul, however, the new government will have powerful incentives of its own for a nuclear deterrent. First, it would be much harder for the United States to maintain its military role in the country
if the North Korean threat were gone. Second, the Seoul regime would have new borders with both China and Russia. Third, relations with Japan, always testy, would probably worsen, as Tokyo’s apprehensions grew about the prospect of a stronger Korea. Some have speculated that one reason the South Koreans were initially less exercised than Washington about the North Korean nuclear program was that they would not mind inheriting it.

For the third example, suppose democratization continues in Taiwan, as even most American realists hope. What if the result is that Taiwan’s independence movement overpowers the Kuomintang, and Beijing fulfills its threat to act militarily to prevent secession? Has the U.S. government seriously tried to figure out what it should or would do in such circumstances? The U.S. Taiwan Relations Act genuflects to “peaceful” reunification, but Washington has made no clear commitment about how it would react to military conflict. For liberals, it was not too hard to dump Taipei in the 1970s when it was an authoritarian regime itself, and when its conquest was not imminent, but a democratic Taiwan would be harder to abandon to a repressive Beijing in a moment of crisis. For realists, nothing could seem more within Beijing’s legitimate sphere of influence than the island that all sides have so far recognized as part of China, and it would seem hard to justify major war and the risk of nuclear escalation to defend it after having abrogated the defense commitment so long ago.

Pressures in both directions—defending Taiwan, or standing aside—would be extreme, because the consequences either way could be catastrophic. At the same time, Beijing could hardly be expected to assume that Washington would intervene, given the evolution of policy since the Shanghai Communique; Chinese leaders would have at least as good an excuse to miscalculate as Kim Il Sung in June 1950 or Saddam Hussein in August 1990. This is the scariest of the potential crises.

Traditional preoccupation with Europe, the painful memory of the price of indulging ambitious strategic aims in the Vietnam War, and the late-Cold War entente with China all disposed most American strategists against thinking very hard about potential situations such as those mentioned above. Similarly, the residue of Cold War thinking for pessimists, and the euphoria

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68. Taiwan’s opposition independence party has protested moves toward rapprochement between Taipei and Beijing (such as high-level talks), and has announced in Singapore that “we assert to China and the world; Taiwan is not a part of China.” Quoted in Nicholas D. Kristof, “China and Taiwan Have First Talks,” New York Times, April 28, 1993, p. A8.
over the advance of liberalism for optimists, make it seem fanciful or de-
mented to worry about balancing the power of Germany, Japan, China, or
other Cold War friends. But the Cold War is over, and so is the particular
realist calculus that went with it; the pacifying logic of liberal theory does
not convince everyone as an alternative; and it is doubtful that East Asia will
liberalize enough anyway to make new violence improbable. Thinking harder
about bad cases is hardly hysterical.

Prospects

The United States now has more leverage in more places on more issues
than any other state. This is because there is no other comparable pole, as
there was during the Cold War. That fact, in turn, naturally erodes American
democracy’s inclination to pay significant costs to call the tune in all the
regions that it could. Erosion, though, could take a long time before it alters
power configurations substantially, or could be reversed by emergence of a
significant threat.

The problem for policy is that the analytical basis for prediction cannot
limit the range of conditions within which choices will have to be made.
Every one of the three basic structural patterns of distribution of power could
plausibly evolve. Moreover, realist theory is divided over which should even
be preferred. There is also the fourth possibility of a neoliberal solution in
which institutionalization of cooperation comes to modify anxiety about rel-
ative power, and to cause peace, although the plausibility of that outcome
varies inversely with the odds that more intense casi belli will develop. The
four general possibilities are:

UNIPOLARITY
Unipolarity could develop in two opposite ways. In one, the United States
would reenter the region in force, on a scale comparable to the 1950s and
1960s, and become the dominant power. In the other, it would withdraw
completely, as Britain did from east of Suez a quarter century ago. The former
choice is less probable than the latter. In the latter case, the dominant power
would be Japan, in the near term, if it arms more heavily and takes a more
active political role, or China, in the long term, if its economic development
continues at high rates. The least likely of the great powers to develop a
hegemonic position would be Russia, although that could happen if China
breaks up and Japan remains restrained and non-nuclear while the United States withdraws. Japan's peculiar strategic passivity, however, has been premised on the Mutual Security Treaty, so the latter combination of developments is hard to imagine.

Domination of Asia by a single great power would be uncomfortable for all but the dominant one, but once accomplished would dampen prospects for major war, for the reasons that Geoffrey Blainey suggests about the stability of hierarchy: "Wars usually end when the fighting nations agree on their relative strength and wars usually begin when fighting nations disagree on their relative strength." This accords with Robert Gilpin's view that a bipolarity that emerges as a rising power challenges a declining hegemonic state is likely to lead to war, and conflicts with Waltz's argument that bipolarity is stabilizing. It is also a helpful reminder that what is good for stability—that is, strong inhibitions on resort to force—does not necessarily go with what is best for individual countries' independence.

Local states, however, are not likely to allow one among themselves to achieve dominance without a fight. Unlike the states of the western hemisphere who live with the U.S. colossus, several states in East Asia have the capacity to contest a rising threat. As Arthur Waldron has noted, China's role might not be to dominate the region. Rather, in the process of asserting hegemony, Beijing may stimulate arms races (with Japan, Taiwan, Korea, and others) that it does not win. Such a process, complicated by disagreements about what the structure of the system was (with China considering it hierarchical, others seeing it as multipolar), could be quite volatile.

If the system were insecurely hierarchical, and edged toward bipolarity rather than wider balance, it might become more dangerous for the reasons Gilpin suggests in his interpretation of history as a series of hegemonic transitions. Or, if Waltz is correct, and the Cold War analogue is more appropriate than the Peloponnesian, bipolarity could make the structure stable. Even the Cold War model is not entirely reassuring, however, since stability in that case did not begin to emerge until 1963, after fifteen years of probing and scary crises over Berlin and Cuba worked out the bounds of strategic interaction.

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69. Blainey, Causes of War, p. 122 (emphasis in original).
BIPOLARITY
Depending on which countries develop their regional power in all its dimensions, bipolar combinations could include any pair among the four current great powers of the area (United States, Russia, China, Japan). Probably the least dangerous combination would be the two peripheral to the region, the Russians and Americans, but without a Cold War between them it is hard to see why they would want to invest as much military and political capital in the region as the states who are fully located there. The most probable bipolar pair, and potentially the most antagonistic, is China and Japan. That would be the one with most potential for war among great powers (for example, with Korea as a bone of contention, as it was a century ago), unless the two somehow established a condominium (which I have heard no regional experts argue is likely).

MULTIPOLARITY
Multipolarity would continue the present situation or some variation with at least three among the United States, Russia, China, and Japan. India could also figure in the balance. As the middle powers develop further, the situation could become more complicated if alignments are fluid. The majority of states might also coalesce against the most troublesome. Except in the unlikely event that Japan’s politics and society turned toward militarism again, the great power most likely to feel surrounded and beset would be China.

Multipolarity seems the most likely pattern, if only because it leaves open the widest number of possible combinations. Theory is not consistent on the question of whether multipolarity is more or less stable than the alternatives. Much writing about the classical European balance of power saw multipolarity as most stable for preserving the main actors and preventing major war (although small wars or dismemberment of weak states, especially in the eighteenth century and earlier, were sometimes the price of general equilibrium). Most agree, though, that if multipolarity exists, a balance of five or more powers is more stable than a tripolar configuration, because the
latter can be turned upside down by a shift in alignment by one state. Only if India becomes a full player in East Asia would there be five such power centers. That is less likely than that the United States would drop out and leave a tripolar combination of Russia, China, and Japan. Thus the odds that the particular form of multipolarity will be stable, combined with the odds that some form of multipolarity will exist, are not reassuring.

There is one potential pattern of multipolarity that would be ideal, and that merges conceptually into the institutionalist option discussed below: a consensual pattern modeled on the nineteenth-century Concert of Europe. This would depend on delicate diplomacy, but is not out of the question if the great powers are basically satisfied and can resolve minor grievances by compromise and offsetting concessions. While there is disagreement about whether a concert must rest on a balance of power,72 the two are certainly compatible. While such a system may have some of the self-reinforcing advantages touted by liberal regime theorists, however, there is little evidence that it can survive the emergence of significant conflicts of interest, and thus that it is anywhere near as much a cause of stability as a reflection of it. The Concert of Europe also depended on a fair amount of ideological homogeneity (not yet evident in East Asia), and when such consensus waned, so did the Concert. Moreover, the right of big states to set the rules for small ones was a more explicit principle than is practical to admit in the more modern international climate.73 Some sort of concert would be desirable in Asia, although no one should depend on it to solve more than modest disputes. In 1991, however, when Gorbachev proposed something like it—a five-power regional security conference of the United States, the Soviet Union, China, Japan, and India—the idea proved unpopular because it “smacked most inopportune of a great-power deal, something that is clearly unpopular in the world right now.”74

What stands out so far is the raft of uncertainties about what distribution of power in East Asia is either likely or desirable. This raises the incentives to look beyond realism for solutions. Neoliberal institutionalism, in linking the logic of self-interested cooperation to the concerns of security policy, offers some other hypothetical possibilities for fostering stability. One hope is that development of regional economic cooperation or integration, for example in ASEAN, will have spillover effects in reducing apprehensions and facilitating confidence in political security (in a sense the reverse of the sequence in Europe, where NATO and security cooperation eased the progress of European unity in other spheres).

Moves to make a security forum out of the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference—which includes the United States, Japan, Canada, and South Korea—are modestly promising, as are the revival of the Five Power Defense Arrangement, which ties Britain, Australia, and New Zealand to Singapore and Malaysia, and the growth of intelligence cooperation among ASEAN states. Inhibitions against more integration are strong, however, and even if multilateral security organization succeeded in the ASEAN region, that still leaves out most of East Asia.

Other possibilities have been broached. In 1990, Australia and Canada proposed a Conference for Security and Cooperation and a North Pacific Security Dialogue. Others have proposed utilizing the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) process to deal with security matters. The Bush administration, preferring continued emphasis on bilateral arrangements, opposed such moves, but the Clinton administration has endorsed them. There is scant evidence, however, that favorable attitudes about developing discussion forums will extend toward more explicit security organization, and some countries have explicitly indicated that they are not interested in agreements for collective action, especially binding defense commitments. The leap from economic multilateralism to multilateral security planning is not yet in sight.

Neoliberal analysis has sometimes emphasized the difficulty of constructing effective multilateral institutions in the absence of hierarchy, when no dominant power bears disproportionate costs in providing collective goods. The United States did so in Asia at the height of the Cold War when it provided the bulk of resources for the United Nations Command in Korea, undertook the one-sided Mutual Security Treaty with Japan (obliging Washington to defend Tokyo, but not the reverse), and shepherded the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), the broadest alliance in the region, through its two decades of existence. The United States is not about to shoulder such burdens now, nor is any other great power.

The most ambitious institutionalist alternative to relying on balance of power to keep peace, hypothetically, is a genuine collective security arrangement. The idea became vaguely popular again as a result of the end of the Cold War, and has been broached in regard to Asia by Soviet and other proposals, but it does not offer much for Asia. First, the fundamental logic of the concept is dubious. It is no accident that collective security schemes have seldom if ever worked elsewhere, and that the situations in which the concept is said to have been validated (NATO’s organization for deterrence, or the UN wars for Korea and Kuwait) are ones in which hegemonic or balance-of-power dynamics operated behind the facade of collective security rhetoric. Second, Asia is behind Europe in the development of integrative organizational forms that could be appropriate foundations. The Asian counterparts to NATO, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), the Western European Union (WEU), or the European Economic Community (EC) have been found in Southeast Asia, just one corner of the huge region. The most significant security analogue, SEATO, is defunct. Third, and most fundamental, no consensus on norms or status or supranational order is shared by all major states of East Asia.

Policies

Either general approach to explaining international relations, realism or liberalism, leaves open many possible predictions for Asia. Only more specific
theories within these broad schools offer clear predictions, which means that there is not yet any wide analytical consensus to serve as a basis for prescription. I nevertheless venture some recommendations consistent with a prudent synthesis of the theories. These recommendations are offered in terms of U.S. interests, rather than the disinterested perspective of a Man from Mars. Thus, for example, the prospect of hierarchy would worry me only if the dominant power is other than the United States. American hegemony in East Asia is not however, on my list of preferred options, because it is not worth the cost of attempting to achieve it.

In regard to objectives, we should think in terms of one main goal, a conventional but heavily qualified one. First, the principal U.S. strategic aim should be to prevent the emergence of a hierarchical regional system under any dominant power other than the United States. This is not just because the United States has economic interests in East Asia that might be obstructed. The implications of a locally hegemonic power go beyond the region. A China, Japan, or Russia that grows strong enough to overturn a regional balance of power would necessarily also be a global power that could reestablish bipolarity on the highest level.

Second, this strategic aim should not necessarily take priority under all circumstances. Efforts to prevent dominance by a single power center in East Asia should be limited if the contender for dominance has a genuinely democratic government. The level of tradeoffs with nonstrategic interests (for example, absolute economic gains), or of acceptable costs and risks in strategic competition, should vary with the odds that a rival (in terms of national power) will be unfriendly and dangerous. There is good reason to believe that such odds are lower with kindred democracies. This is not beyond doubt, especially for realists, but restraint is still recommended because friction with such countries risks being counterproductive by damaging the grounds for amity while failing to achieve the desired outcome in the realm of power.

Empirical support for the pacifying impact of constitutional democracy is firmer than for the assumption that economic interdependence breeds peace.79 In a reasonable synthesis of realist and liberal theory, therefore, a

79. See the compilations in the appendices to Doyle’s “Liberalism and World Politics”; and Zeev Maoz and Bruce Russett, “Normative and Structural Causes of Democratic Peace, 1946–1986,” American Political Science Review, Vol. 87, No. 3 (September 1993). In a thorough review of theories on causes of war, Jack Levy concludes that, “This absence of war between democratic states comes as close as anything we have to an empirical law of international relations,” and that “liberal economic theories are consistent with the absence of wars among democracies but would
country with a liberal economy but an illiberal polity should warrant at least as much concern as the old Soviet Union ever did, since it poses the prospect of economic power without political restraint. The possibility of this combination in China’s future, together with the country’s size, makes it the great power in the region about which U.S. strategists should worry most over the long term.  

Gambling that democracy will underwrite peace is a reasonable risk, but compounding the wager by gambling that wealth will produce democracy some time in the future is compromising balance of power norms too much. Linkage of trade terms to internal political reforms, with careful consideration of counterproductive effects, may not always be wrong-headed.  

In the Cold War, realism subordinated U.S. concern with human rights in China to strategic cooperation against the Soviet Union, but after the Cold War, supporting liberal political values in China is compatible with concern about balance of power.

In regard to policy, institutions to foster cooperation should be promoted, since they may help and cannot hurt, as long as such efforts do not lull governments into indifference to imbalanced power. That danger is not likely. It is most probable that if such institutions do develop and prosper they will, as in Europe, emerge from alliances based on common political and strategic interests, rather than transcend or subvert them.

In regard to power politics we should think in terms of a sequence of options and fallback positions. First, if a concert of great powers in East Asia is feasible, we should seek it. Second choice would be regional bipolarity under the old Cold War leaders, Russia and the United States, although this
option is not very plausible. Third in acceptability should be a multipolar balance which continues to include the unusual U.S.-Japan alliance, allowing Japan to contribute less than its economic share to the military balance. Regarding China and Russia, Washington should pressure whichever of the two most threatens others in the region. Fourth choice should be to accept regional dominance by any of the other three great powers if it is, by that time, a securely democratic state. Fifth preference should be bipolarity of some combination of local powers. Our last choice should be to promote a global coalition to contain whatever non-democratic superpower develops and comes to dominate East Asia.

For most of these alternatives it makes sense for the United States to retain close to its current level of forces in Northeast Asia. Numbers in Korea could be thinned out slightly (although there is not much left to cut) since it does not take much to provide a tripwire. It would be mistaken, however, to eliminate the U.S. presence there before cutting it to the bone everywhere else in the world except the Middle East. Investment in deterrence should vary not just with the stakes at issue but with threats to them: although U.S. interests in Korea are not as great as in Europe, instability and sensitivity of deterrence are higher in Korea, so the strategic payoff from deployments there is greater.

In regard to Southeast Asia, the United States should stay out of direct combat over the Spratlys, but make clear that it reserves the right to provide military assistance to countries whose claims are negated by force. Washington should end economic warfare against Vietnam and encourage that country’s development in order to help balance Chinese power and to support tendencies to political liberalization in Hanoi; such a double gamble, too risky in regard to a big country like China, is not as risky in regard to a weak one like Vietnam. As for Taiwan, Washington should plan to provide arms in the event of a clash between Taipei and Beijing, but not to enter the fight directly. The first point should be made clear to Beijing, the second need not be, in order to allow uncertainty to buttress deterrence.

In any case, the U.S. government should examine directly its commitment to Taiwan and decide, one way or the other, about how far to go. If the decision is that Taiwan’s autonomy should be defended with American force, that should be made clear to Beijing. What should be avoided at all costs is the dangerous but all-too-precedented combination of pre-crisis ambiguity followed by a decision to intervene directly against attack; such a stance reduces deterrence and invites miscalculation and escalation.
Asia’s relative importance to the United States has been obscured by the traditional U.S. interest in Europe, recent preoccupation with the Middle East, and the residue of distaste from the Vietnam War. Emerging questions about balance of power in the region have been avoided because of liberal faith in the progress of peace and realist habits of mind grounded in the Cold War. Potential *casi belli* in the area have been overlooked by most Americans because interstate violence in East Asia (except for the Indonesian invasion of East Timor) was driven by global bipolarity, now defunct. These oversights should make Asia the most fertile ground for adjusting and reinventing strategic concepts in the post–Cold War era.