

## The Strategic Environment: U.S. Power and Asian Regionalism

Ahn Byung-joon

Even as Asian countries adjust to the fact that the United States is the world's only superpower, nationalism is causing Asia to rise up against what is perceived by many to be the overbearing way in which Washington is projecting its power. Asia's regionalism was most recently expressed at its October 2003 summit, when it stated its intent to build an ASEAN community by 2020. Unless the United States shows more sensitivity to this pan-Asian nationalism, its presence in Asia will be in jeopardy. Hence Asia and the United States must find better ways of adjusting their mutual interests, values, and sentiments.

While Europe, once the heartland of nationalism, is entering a postnationalist stage and is ceding power to the supranational European Union, nationalism is becoming stronger in Asia as the region's countries strive to recover a measure of self-respect, in the wake of their experiences of colonial rule by Western powers and Japan, and to preserve a sense of pride in both the new nations they have built up and their rapid economic growth. In Europe, the Westphalian system is being replaced by a confederation called the European Union, but in Asia the nation-state system is being deliberately consolidated by such originally European notions as nationalism, sovereignty, and balance of power. It is when these aspirations have been ignored by the United States that Asia's nationalism has turned against it, even when a U.S. presence has been vital to maintaining peace and stability.

Nowhere has the seeming contradiction between U.S. power and Asian nationalism more vividly unfolded than on the Korean peninsula, which

is still divided into north and south. Here, as anywhere in Asia, when people's pride and aspirations to win respect are trampled underfoot by U.S. misbehavior, overt displays of nationalism are inevitable. A case in point is the tide of anti-U.S. sentiment triggered by a U.S. military court's acquittal of two U.S. soldiers whose armored vehicle killed two South Korean schoolgirls in June 2002. This incident occurred shortly after the South Korean soccer team for the first time reached the semifinals of the World Cup Soccer games that South Korea co-hosted with Japan. The national victory brought seven million cheering people out into the streets. But when in December the U.S. military found the two soldiers not guilty, over half a million protested in Seoul against the U.S. insensitivity—despite the knowledge that North Korea was at the time reactivating its nuclear weapons program.

This feeling of Wounded Nationalism is found not just in South Korea, but throughout Asia, and is reflected in the attempt by ASEAN + 3 (China, Japan, and South Korea) to form an East Asian Community independent of the United States, and in ASEAN's quest to build a combined economic, security, and social community by 2020.

## Emerging Balance of Powers and Regionalism in East Asia

From the mutual adjustment between United States power and Asian nationalism or regionalism is emerging a U.S.-led loose balance of power and an ad-hoc concert of powers in Asia. The former is at work in the area of bilateral relations among the region's four major powers—the United States, China, Japan, and Russia; the latter is found in the U.S. drive to elicit the support of Southeast Asian nations to prevent international terrorism, forestall the development of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in North Korea, and strengthen the link between the United States and East Asian nations in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum. That said, the East Asian order is not about to be absorbed into the sphere of U.S. hegemony because this domination is being challenged by the nationalism of East Asian countries, especially China and Russia. This is despite their apparent tacit acquiescence to U.S. leadership on certain issues. Meanwhile, the political forces driving Asia's nationalism are making the East Asian balance of power loose and multipolar, albeit under U.S. leadership.

## Ahn Byung-joon

Unlike Europe, which some people say has entered the Kantian world of perpetual peace governed by multilateral institutions, East Asia remains a Hobbesian world in which a security dilemma exists and is compounded by nationalist sentiment and historical enmity as the major powers and other actors compete for security and prosperity, mainly through bilateral relations. The prospects for East Asian security depend on the future of the North Korean nuclear issue in the short run, and on the future of China and Taiwan in the long run. Dampening the likelihood of open rivalry and major crises are the Asia-wide primacy of economic development, and the presence of U.S. military power in the region. To maintain stability, deter terrorism, and prevent the use of WMD in East Asia, it is thus essential that the United States sustain a steady leadership and cooperative relations, especially with China, by maintaining its military presence and renewing its commitment to building a pacific community while respecting Asian nationalism. In this connection, the following five points should be noted.

First, as the major powers are subscribing to realism in their foreign relations, there is emerging a loose balance of power among China, Russia, Japan, and the United States. However, terrorist dangers still loom in Southeast Asia, and territorial disputes remain on their peripheries: the Korean peninsula, the Taiwan Strait, the Northern Islands, and the South China Sea. Of these disputes, the North Korean nuclear issue is the most pressing as Pyongyang resorts to a policy of nuclear realism.

Second, Asia's regionalism remains weak at the institution-building level. The bulk of international cooperation in East Asia is the result of the balance of power attained, and alliances or partnerships formed, through bilateral interaction. There is neither collective security nor a formal concert of powers. Efforts to foster cooperative security and multilateral institutions by ASEAN remain a "talk shop," with institution-building attempts to broaden Asia Pacific (APEC) and East Asian (ASEAN + 3) economic cooperation and to expand the rule of law still at an embryonic stage because of conflicting national interests and identities, coupled with a lack of political leadership.

Third, if an Asian community is to be built, it is imperative that Japan and China reach political reconciliation, but there appears to be a Sino-Japanese rivalry emerging over the question of influence in ASEAN. The realization is yet to dawn that economic imperatives for cooperation should prevail over the nationalistic imperatives of rivalry if there is to be peace and prosperity in Asia.

Fourth, given the present situation, the major powers and other countries in the region have little choice but to accept a U.S.-led, ad-hoc concert of powers in the interests of ensuring a nuclear-free Korean peninsula, a terrorism-free Southeast Asia, and the revival of the APEC process for regional cooperation. To this end, China's constructive role is crucial. The six-party talks (involving the United States, China, Japan, Russia, North and South Korea), begun in August 2003, and APEC attended by all powers seem to be moving in this direction.

Fifth, the United States must seek an Asia Pacific partnership with East Asia by reassuring its allies of its commitment to maintaining a presence in Asia and by integrating its adversaries into the grouping. In order to do so, the United States should pay more attention to Asia's nationalism and regionalism, and sustain a steady and consistent leadership to ensure stability, prosperity, and democracy in the region.

## Realism and Loose Balance of Powers in East Asia

Since the end of the cold war, unipolar politics dominated by the United States has been the order of the day. In East Asia, the United States is the dominant power, its defense spending being greater than that of the other great powers combined. The resultant interaction between Washington's dominant power and Asia's rising nationalism and regionalism has prompted the four major powers to subscribe to a form of realism in their foreign policies.

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States has been openly pursuing a form of offensive realism, to which other powers are adjusting in various ways. China is most conspicuously seeking classical realism; Japan, constrained by its constitution, has since the Gulf War been shifting its foreign policy from liberalism to defensive realism in an attempt to expand its international role within the framework of its alliance with the United States; Russia has been exhibiting opportunistic realism since the collapse of the Soviet Union in a bid to keep its major-power status while trying to reintegrate a nation-state at home; and North Korea is displaying nuclear realism in its struggle for survival.

The situation in East Asia is fraught with the danger of military confrontation and an arms race as a result of the uncertainty concerning the Korean peninsula, Taiwan Strait, Northern Territories, and South China Sea. The potentially most dangerous of these areas is the Korean peninsula,

## Ahn Byung-joon

because of Pyongyang's nuclear challenge. Here, too, as in other areas, the U.S. forward military deployment is serving as a stabilizing force by providing security reassurance to its allies and by deterring armed conflicts, the proliferation of WMD, and terrorist attacks by its adversaries.

### Offensive Realism: The United States

As the world's sole superpower, the United States is shifting its global security strategy from containment and deterrence to preemptive activities under the name of offensive realism.

The shift was clearly stated in the 2002 *National Security Strategy of the United States*. The document states that the United States will not allow any potential adversaries from pursuing a military buildup in hopes of surpassing the power of the United States. Since it is dangerous to wait for terrorists to attack first, it is made clear that the United States will not hesitate to act alone and exercise its right of preemptive self-defense. What should be noted here is that Washington has vowed to apply this doctrine of preemption to perceived threats posed by WMD, and has labeled North Korea the world's principal purveyor of ballistic missiles, and a developer of WMD. In other words, the United States is practicing offensive realism to preserve its dominant position, and its war against Iraq represents the implementation of its preemptive war strategy.

The U.S. alliance with Japan and South Korea forms the cornerstone of its regional strategy as it seeks to engage in and lead Asia. With China, the United States is now seeking constructive engagement by taking a common stand against terrorism and the proliferation of WMD. In a similar vein, the United States is trying to integrate Russia into the Western international system by expanding areas of common interest, including the reduction of strategic weapons. By advocating democracy and a market economy, the United States is presenting itself as fostering a balance of power that favors freedom.

With regard to some of the potential threats in Asia, the United States is developing missile defense capabilities and planning to rationalize its forces deployed in South Korea and Japan in such a way as to enhance their mobility and capability to meet what Washington considers to be imminent crises in other areas. This shift is designed to meet missile threats from North Korea and terrorist activities in Southeast Asia. In addition, the United States in 2002 extended military aid and training to the

Philippines for the first time in a decade, and recently resumed military cooperation with the Indonesian military. Washington is worried that Southeast Asia may become a major player in the Al Qaeda terrorist network and a source of political instability because of ongoing ethnic and religious conflicts.

### Classical Realism: China

Since 1978, when China commenced economic reforms and began to open up, it has been a power on the ascent. China is exhibiting assertive nationalism in the form of a new self-confidence, having accomplished the highest economic growth in the world in addition to its age-old quest to redeem itself in the eyes of the world following its humiliating experiences in the nineteenth century. In its foreign relations, China is displaying classical realism by advocating a multipolar world in dealing with other great powers and with the United States in particular.

This was clearly shown in the new security concept that Beijing unveiled in 1997. Although it reiterates the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, it does not recognize the legitimacy of the new U.S.-Japan security declaration and the defense cooperation guidelines. Instead, it claims that China is sovereign in the Taiwan Strait and the South and East China seas, stressing the importance of military modernization. According to a recent Pentagon report submitted to Congress in July 2003, China has deployed some 450 short-range ballistic missiles that are aimed at Taiwan and, possibly, U.S. forces. During the 1990s, Beijing annually increased its military expenditure by over 17 percent, and is currently spending some US\$65 billion annually.

Economically, China is seeking to integrate itself into the U.S.-led globalized family of nations to obtain investment, technology, and know-how. By so doing, it has recorded year-on-year economic growth of over 7 percent since the Asian financial crisis in 1997, and has attracted over 70 percent of the foreign direct investment (FDI) distributed in Asia and the Pacific region. After joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, China became what the *Los Angeles Times* has called the “Peoples’ Republic of Products,” exporting items worth US\$510 billion in 2001, 15 times more than in 1980 and representing 23 percent of its GDP. Some 41 percent of these exports went to the United States and produced a trade surplus of US\$103 billion. In 2002, China had a US\$68 billion deficit with

## Ahn Byung-joon

the rest of Asia, including Japan. In 2003, China became the third nation after the United States and Russia to put an astronaut into Earth orbit using its own rockets. By inviting the Summer Olympic Games to Beijing in 2008, and trying to complete the ambitious Three Gorges damming program on the Yangtze river, designed to prevent the annual floods and produce one third of China's electricity by 2009, and by hosting the World's Fair in Shanghai in 2010, China's assertive nationalism is on an upswing. Moreover, the new leadership under Hu Jintao recently set another ambitious goal of quadrupling its US\$1 trillion economy within 20 years, a national drive for power that was only temporarily moderated by the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

Beijing's first priority lies in maintaining good relations with the United States. The September 11 terrorist attacks propelled China to improve relations with the United States, especially after Washington supported Beijing's bid to place an Uighur separatist organization in Xinjiang on a United Nations terrorist list and resumed military-to-military dialogue with Beijing. There is reason to believe that, at least for the time being, China has begun to tacitly accommodate U.S. power and leadership in fighting terrorism and WMD. For example, in his talks with President George W. Bush in Crawford, Texas, on October 25, 2002, President Jiang Zemin lent support to Bush's quest for a peaceful solution on the North Korean nuclear weapons program by saying that China believed that the Korean peninsula ought to be nuclear weapons-free. Hu reiterated this position in July 2003, at a summit with South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun. In the realm of economics, however, there is increasing friction over exchange rates and trade, as the 2004 U.S. presidential election draws closer.

In contrast to the seemingly improving Sino-U.S. relations, Sino-Japanese ties are riddled with stresses and strains because of the two countries' historical distrust and contemporary fear of each other. The presence of such tension was reflected in the meeting between Jiang and Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi Jun'ichiro on the sidelines of the APEC summit in Mexico in October 2002. Jiang is reported to have raised the matter of Koizumi's visits to the Yasukuni Shrine by saying that the visits are perceived as offensive by China's 1.3 billion people. The issue prevented Koizumi from paying a state visit to China on the thirtieth anniversary of the normalization of Sino-Japanese diplomatic ties. Although Hu thanked Japan for its assistance in fighting SARS when he met Koizumi at the St. Petersburg Summit in June and at the Bangkok APEC in October 2003, no announcement was made regarding a visit by Koizumi to China.

## Defensive Realism: Japan

Faced with the longest recession since the end of World War II and following the lost decade of the 1990s, Japan is still in the throes of recession and deflation. The profound sense of Wounded Nationalism it is experiencing derives from its frustration, feeling of vulnerability, and lack of confidence in its economic and political life that is a stark contrast to Japan's buoyancy in the 1970s and 1980s, when the country was so proud of having caught up with the United States by having built an economic superstate. When he assumed power in April 2001, Koizumi promised something of revolution in his call for reform and restructuring of the Japanese economy. But, at the end of his first two-year term, he had achieved little and was still struggling to dispose of over US\$420 billion in bad loans and fight deflation by reinvigorating the unproductive business sector. Doubts persist regarding the likely success of steps to bring the bad loans under control and end deflation by 2005. But, despite the staggering economic problems, there is little sense of crisis in Japan.

Against this background, some conservatives are calling for the restoration of Japan's national honor by emphasizing such symbols as the national flag and anthem, and most of them favor a constitutional amendment that would allow Japan to exercise the right of collective defense abroad. Others, meanwhile, are calling for future-oriented cooperation with neighboring countries. Koizumi's approach mirrors his lack of decisiveness: He visited the Yasukuni Shrine again in April 2002, and then proposed a broad Asia Pacific security and economic community when he visited Southeast Asia and Australia.

On balance, recent trends in Japanese foreign and defense policy seem to be shifting from mercantile to defensive realism. Thus Tokyo has renewed its alliance with Washington as a hedge against military threats, and has also cultivated its partners in the Middle East to hedge against economic dangers. Japan has expanded its independent political and military influence by using its economic clout and has incrementally increased its political standing by sending peace-keeping units to Cambodia and East Timor, and by engaging in antipiracy and mine-sweeping activities. All this has been in an attempt to break out of its traditional reactive box—in which it responds to foreign, mostly U.S., pressure—and boost its voice as a great power. Tokyo sent its Maritime Self-Defense Force with three destroyers to Diego Garcia during the antiterrorism campaign in Afghanistan. Then, in December 2002, Tokyo dispatched an Aegis destroyer

## Ahn Byung-joon

to the Indian Ocean ostensibly to replace the deployed destroyers despite the views of opponents who claimed that the measure amounted to an act of collective defense, forbidden by the constitution. In June 2003, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the leading opposition Democratic Party jointly passed emergency bills that increased the central government's powers to mobilize private property in wartime. When Washington decided to wage a war against Iraq in March 2003, Tokyo grudgingly supported it, despite substantial objections from the Japanese public, so as not to shake the foundations of its bilateral alliance. In July, the LDP rammed legislation through the Diet allowing the Self-Defense Forces to send an armed forces contingent of up to 1,000 personnel to "non-combat areas" in Iraq in the face of objections by the opposition.

Koizumi's surprise visit to Pyongyang on September 17, 2002, to secure Kim Jong Il's explanation about North Korea's abduction of Japanese nationals is another case of Japan's search for an independent foreign policy. But Kim's refusal to allow the children of those abductees, who were able to come back to Japan, to join their parents is stalling the resumption of Japanese normalization talks with the North. In addition, immediately after North Korea had revealed its secret uranium-enrichment program on October 16, 2002, Koizumi declared that there will be no economic aid or normalization until the North dismantles its nuclear weapons program. Japan's quest for an independent policy is, thus, constrained by North Korea's nuclear program.

In order to enhance a more effective leadership role in East Asia, Japan must revitalize its economy as soon as possible, especially since China is asserting its leadership of Southeast Asia, once a sphere of Japanese influence.

## Opportunistic Realism: Russia

In the face of its transition from imperial decline to national integration, Russia's policy toward East Asia is ambiguous and one of opportunistic realism as it strives to attain political stability and develop its economy in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet empire. The fragility of the country's stability was underlined following the Chechen guerrilla siege of a Moscow theater in October 2002 when President Vladimir Putin declared that Russia would strike wherever terrorists might be located to defend the Russian federation. It was to regain great-nation status and receive

economic help from the West that Putin recognized the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO's) eastward expansion and climbed on the U.S. bandwagon to campaign against terrorism immediately following the incidents of September 11, 2001. But Russia has pursued an opportunistic policy toward East Asian countries, especially North Korea and Japan, as it has strived to bring the potential of its Far Eastern region into the mechanism of Asia-Pacific economic integration.

Russia concluded a new friendship treaty with China in 2001. Under this strategic partnership, Moscow supplies Beijing with arms including the latest fighter jets, guided-missile destroyers, and stealth submarines. But, when Moscow chose to abandon the Antiballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 2001, it apparently did not properly inform Beijing of its decision, although on a visit to China in November 2002, Putin pledged to strengthen the strategic partnership with China by expanding its military and economic cooperation beyond the 2001 trade figure of US\$10.67 billion by endorsing the Chinese call for a multipolar world.

Russia's relations with Japan remain poor because Putin is yet to honor President Boris Yeltsin's 1997 commitment to settle the Northern Islands question by the year 2000 for fear that the return to Japan of the islands might trigger irredentist national movements in other republics including Chechnya. Koizumi's summit meeting with Putin in January 2003 failed to make any progress in the territorial dispute even though an action plan was signed calling for long-term cooperation in trade and energy development. By proposing an oil pipeline project that would carry Russian oil from Siberia to either Japan or China, Moscow is busy playing Japan off against China, to maximize its economic interests.

The primary aim of Russia's foreign policy in East Asia is to maximize its economic and political interests. While cultivating more active economic cooperation with South Korea, for example, Putin met with North Korea's Kim three times during the 2001–2002 period, and sought to mediate between the two Koreas by trying to resolve the missile and nuclear issues. Moscow, once skeptical about Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program—which, it said, posed little threat—is now trying to mediate between Washington and Pyongyang. But, because the military forces it has deployed in the Far East are deteriorating, it has only limited diplomatic leverage.

The opportunistic slant of its realism can be seen in its dealings with both the United States and the countries of what Bush calls the “axis of evil.” For while Russia did strike a decisive deal with the United States on

## Ahn Byung-joon

reducing nuclear warheads, it has continued to expand its political and economic relations with Iraq, North Korea, and Iran. In December 2002, Russia brushed aside strong U.S. criticism of its having helped Iran build a nuclear weapons plant, and decided to go ahead with the US\$800 million nuclear reactor project. Yet, with U.S. help, Russia became a member of the Group of Eight (G8), and has received about US\$10 billion from Japan, Canada, and other Western countries to convert its use of nuclear materials to peaceful purposes, but how it disposes of its nuclear stock-piles remains to be seen.

### Nuclear Realism: North Korea

It would appear that, in the interests of regime survival, to attract international attention, and exact concessions from the United States and Japan, North Korea is resorting to nuclear realism. Thus, of all the regional issues—concerning the Korean peninsula, the Taiwan Strait, the Northern Territories and the South China Sea—North Korea's nuclear weapons program is emerging as the biggest challenge. This is particularly so since Pyongyang reactivated its nuclear weapons program in violation of the agreement it reached with the United States in 1994. While China and Taiwan currently seem more interested in promoting bilateral economic exchanges and maintaining the territorial status quo, North Korea's nuclear brinkmanship is casting an ominous pall over the peninsula and placing a damper on prospects for Japanese-North Korean normalization talks, not to mention the normalization of U.S.-North Korean relations.

Given the above, it can be seen that there exists a loose balance of power among the region's four major powers as they compete for position. Possessing about 30 percent of the world's products and accounting for 40 percent of defense spending, 45 percent of the Internet traffic, and 75 percent of the world's Nobel laureates in science and medicine, the United States is leading East Asia. With China and Russia recently having drawn closer to it, should the United States disengage completely from East Asia, there would result a power vacuum that would lead to strategic rivalry between Japan and China, intensifying nationalist conflicts and the region's arms race. From this perspective, East Asia's international relations are indeed reminiscent of those of nineteenth-century Europe.

## Asian Regionalism

It is against this background that ASEAN has promoted Asia's regionalism in such groups as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and ASEAN + 3, while Japan, Australia, and South Korea have sought to foster an Asia Pacific community by strengthening APEC. Unlike Europe, most of Asia's international relations are being conducted through bilateral relationships, like the U.S.-Japanese and U.S.-South Korean alliances, or other interactions such as Sino-U.S. and Sino-Russian relations. Asia's regionalism is, thus, not institutionalized, so as long as the territorial disputes and diverging regimes remain, it is unlikely that East Asia shall develop a regionwide architecture for collective security, thus leaving regional institutions for security and economic cooperation weak.

### Balance of Power: Bilateral Alliances and Relations

To a large extent, the U.S.-Japanese alliance plays a role similar to that of NATO in terms of maintaining regional stability and ensuring the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. Should the U.S.-South Korean alliance unravel as a result of rising anti-U.S. sentiment, there would be repercussions on the U.S.-Japanese alliance. And the Sino-Russian friendship treaty of July 2001 also is a bilateral cooperation agreement rather than an alliance.

Sino-U.S. relations involve both cooperation concerning certain common interests (preventing terrorism, arms proliferation) and conflict (over Taiwan, human rights, and missile defense). Since the September 11 incidents, however, Sino-U.S. relations have improved as Beijing has avoided confrontation but sought cooperation with Washington to preserve its economic access to the United States. China appears to be responding positively to U.S. requests for cooperation in eliminating the threat of terrorism and WMD, as well as the North Korean challenge. As the November 24, 2002, port call by the USS *Paul F. Foster* to Qingdao symbolizes, the United States has resumed some of the military ties with China that had been frozen since the April 2001 collision between a U.S. Navy spy plane and a Chinese fighter jet over the South China Sea.

By contrast, the state of Sino-Japanese relations remains strained, as nationalist sentiments grow on both sides with each side worried about the perceived threat posed by the other. China's rise as a military and

## Ahn Byung-joon

leading economic power could easily allow it to replace Japan in Asia, in turn making Tokyo feel threatened. In China, too, there is a rising tide of fear of a revival of Japanese nationalism, as is exemplified by Beijing's persistent objections to Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni Shrine. Jiang, for example, told Koizumi three times at the 2002 APEC meeting that his visits to the shrine were a major obstacle to improving Sino-Japanese relations.

On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Sino-Japanese peace treaty in August 2003, there were some signs of better bilateral relations. Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing came to Japan and agreed with Foreign Minister Kawaguchi Yoriko to cooperate on the North Korean nuclear issue, and expressed sympathy for those who had been abducted. Then Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Fukuda Yasuo went to Beijing and met Hu and other officials. Despite the top-level visits, however, there was no agreement on an exchange of visits by Koizumi and Hu.

Under such circumstances, it is difficult to attain any degree of collective security among the four powers. With no perception of a common threat, a collective security system like that of NATO is not likely to be realized in East Asia any time soon. In dealing with the North Korean crisis, too, each of the four powers is more interested in seeing the situation from its own perspective. Nor can there be an Asian grouping like the Concert of Europe that was in place from 1815 to 1885, because the major powers do not agree on the territorial status quo, or share a homogenous political regime and accept a leader as was the case in nineteenth-century England. China, for example, is still reluctant to accept U.S. leadership when it comes to East Asian security.

The success of ASEAN, too, seems to have derived more from its efforts to stay out of the cold war and avoid big power rivalry. Even within ASEAN, bilateral rather than multilateral cooperation is increasing, especially in terms of sharing intelligence on terrorism, although a few coordinated and collective efforts are made through ASEAN structures.

## Regional Institutions: ASEAN, ARF, APEC, ASEAN + 3.

Despite all good intentions, ASEAN, APEC, and ARF remain weak institutions. Although some scholars describe ASEAN as an epistemic community, it falls far short of this ideal and lacks a common identity, and it has become very clear—since the currency crisis of 1997–1998, the East Timor crisis of 1999, and the 2002 terrorist attack in Bali—that ASEAN

lacks leadership and solid consensus on such issues as the fight against terrorism, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Since September 11, the ASEAN member states have separately cooperated with Washington in its fight against international terrorism, and at the June 2003 ARF meeting in Phnom Penh their commitment was renewed. But the group only really acted as a unit, and departed from its principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of its member states, when the ARF meeting declared the detention of San Suu Kyi to be a setback both for ASEAN and Myanmar.

By no means is this to deny ASEAN's contribution in engaging the major powers and other extra-regional countries in the endeavor to build confidence and develop preventive diplomacy. ARF in particular has become a meeting place for not merely the outside powers, but also such isolated countries as North Korea. It has also contributed to socializing Chinese diplomats about the finer points of multilateral cooperation to the degree that China finally has agreed to discuss with ASEAN the Spratly Islands and sign the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC), and has offered to hold a security-policy conference with ASEAN. These achievements have enabled ASEAN to attract the attention of both China and Japan, and allowed ASEAN at its summit in October 2003 to sign the Bali Concord II committing the ten member states to establishing ASEAN economic, security, and social communities by 2020. It was at this meeting that China and India became the first outside powers to accede to TAC in a move by ASEAN to build a partnership with these rising powers that have been attracting investments and trade.

The ASEAN + 3 grouping also falls short of being a rule-based multilateral institution, let alone a solely East Asian community, mainly because it has neither a political base nor leadership structure that allows members to develop a sense of community, for neither Japan nor China is prepared to accept the other as leader with a view to achieving regional cooperation. The group was formed by ASEAN member states in 1999 to protest the U.S. refusal to accept the setting up of an Asian monetary fund that Japan had proposed. This result of the feeling of Wounded Nationalism and the drive to build an Asian community is in conflict with the principle of open regionalism espoused by APEC, which is now languishing due to the lack of decisive leadership by the Bush administration.

At the sideline of the ASEAN summit in October 2003, the leaders of Japan, China, and South Korea pledged to promote a security dialogue to maintain stability in East Asia. Japan's Koizumi, China's Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, and South Korea's Roh agreed to cooperate to ensure that the

## Ahn Byung-joon

Korean peninsula would remain nuclear-free, set up a joint committee to monitor activities, and submit a progress report to future summit meetings. These proposals have the potential to become the building blocks of a Northeast Asian community but, despite the encouraging moves, most regional cooperation thus far has been in the form of economic cooperation. This East Asian economic interdependence alone is not sufficient to stem the rising tide of nationalist sentiment, mainly because Japan and China are unable to share the leadership and facilitate regional cooperation.

## Sino-Japanese Rivalry over ASEAN

It is essential that Japan and China reach political reconciliation to help build an Asian community. However, Sino-Japanese rivalry has been developing in ASEAN since China began to expand its political and economic influence into Southeast Asia, where Japan had enjoyed dominance as a result of its deepening economic and political cooperation. To a certain degree, the economic imperatives of Japan and China help moderate political conflicts and facilitate cooperation between them, but they do not prevail over the nationalist imperatives to the extent that they can build trust and form a community spirit in the region. Economic interdependence does not necessarily lead to political and security cooperation. After all, China's assertive nationalism would seem to derive from its rapid economic growth.

In trying to foster a free trade area (FTA), Japan and China are engaged in a fierce competition over ASEAN: Japan is speeding up a series of bilateral agreements with other Asian countries, while China is initiating a regionwide agreement with ASEAN to be reached within ten years. When at the ASEAN + 3 meeting in Phnom Penh in November 2002, China's Zhu signed a framework agreement to build a free trade area with ASEAN by 2010, Japan's Koizumi immediately countered with a proposal to foster a comprehensive partnership with ASEAN. This jockeying for position was also seen at the Bali summit. China's Wen signed TAC and Japan's Koizumi also signed a framework agreement on beginning formal trade negotiation in 2005 to establish a regional free trade area by 2012.

In this competition, Japan still retains certain economic and political advantages over China in Southeast Asia, having more to offer in terms of technology, human resources, investments, plants, and machinery. While Southeast Asian countries are upgrading their industries, ASEAN shares

more economic complementarity with Japan than with China. In addition, the more Southeast Asian democratic institutions mature and civil society develops, the greater will be their political bonds. Perhaps this is why Japan is fostering more comprehensive cooperation not only in trade, but also in bilateral and multilateral political and security issues with ASEAN countries.

If Japan and China are to reach a meaningful political reconciliation, however, they need to overcome certain historical and contemporary obstacles. It is imperative that Japan find a way to liquidate the historical legacy of invasion and colonialism to a degree acceptable to China, South Korea, and other neighboring countries. It is also imperative that China become more democratic and observe the rule of law so that its military and political decision-making processes become more transparent and accountable. Until then, it might be more realistic for the United States to remain the stabilizing force in East Asia.

### **U.S.-led Ad-hoc Concert of Powers**

Since any violent change on the Korean peninsula is destined to disrupt the fragile balance of power in East Asia, it is urgent that the major powers and other concerned parties encourage an ad-hoc concert of powers (Russia, China, Japan, the United States, and the two Koreas) to ensure a nuclear-free Korean peninsula. China's role would be crucial in such a concert, since the United States is trying to find a peaceful solution to the North Korean nuclear issue. One approach would be for the United States to reassert its leadership and build cooperative linkages between itself and East Asian countries at the APEC level.

At the 2002 APEC meeting, South Korea's President Kim Dae Jung, Bush, and Koizumi called upon North Korea to dismantle its nuclear program, a plea that was later repeated by all 21 APEC members. Then, on November 29, 2002, China's Jiang and Russia's Putin also issued a joint communiqué requesting that the non-nuclear status of the Korean peninsula be preserved, a principle that was reaffirmed by the ARF meeting in Cambodia in June 2003, and by the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in Bali in July 2003. Thus, there seems to be emerging a de facto concert of powers regarding the preservation of a nuclear-free Korean peninsula.

Despite the unanimous calls by the APEC coalition, in December 2002 North Korea expelled the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

## Ahn Byung-joon

officials monitoring its nuclear weapons program in Yongbyon and restarted a reactor that can produce plutonium after announcing its withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Subsequently, Pyongyang admitted at the April 2003 U.S.-China-North Korea talks in Beijing that it had already begun reprocessing spent fuel rods. It would appear that Pyongyang is using its nuclear program as a means for ensuring the survival of its regime by driving a wedge between Japan and the United States, and between South Korea and the United States.

China has begun to cooperate with Washington in its search by taking the path of proactive diplomacy to mediate the impasse between North Korea and the United States, and may hold the key to solving the impasse as it is keeping North Korea on life support by making up for the shortfall in food, energy, and other necessities. According to one study, China is supplying 88 percent of all North Korean oil and 90 percent of its non-aid food imports. China can hardly deny all responsibility for the North's nuclear program since North Korea obtained the uranium-enrichment equipment from Pakistan in 1998 in exchange for missile technology, and Pakistan received its nuclear know-how from China. Nevertheless, as China has sought to preserve stability in North Korea as a buffer against U.S. and Japanese power, it has been reluctant to put pressures on the North for fear that this might lead to a messy regime collapse and a massive inflow of refugees into China's northeastern provinces.

Now that China is playing a constructive role in fighting international terrorism and nuclear proliferation, in addition to helping resolve humanitarian issues involving North Korean asylum seekers, it should be possible for Beijing and Moscow to join a concerted effort calling for a nuclear-free Korean peninsula. By calling on the United States to preserve the Agreed Framework with North Korea in the 2002 Jiang-Putin communiqué, China has tacitly recognized U.S. leadership in this matter. In fact, better Sino-U.S. and Sino-Japanese relations are in the interests of East Asian stability.

If the six-party talks on the North Korean nuclear issue held in Beijing in August 2003 yield substantial results in the period ahead, that will mark the beginning of a U.S.-led ad-hoc concert of powers that could be transformed into a regular six-party conference for the discussion of such subjects as regional stability, nuclear nonproliferation, and other problems facing Northeast Asian countries. Assuming that the United States sustains a steady leadership, this ad-hoc concert can be practiced at APEC as well. Were cooperation through multilateral consultation to result, it might

lead to a truly regional East Asian security structure that could encourage military transparency and cooperation by serving as a forum for defusing other crises, which would, in turn, pave the way for the setting up of an Asia Pacific community to include East Asia and the United States.

## Conclusion

It would appear that it is better to work toward an Asia Pacific Community by closing the gap between U.S. power and Asian nationalism as President George W. Bush personally witnessed during his trip to six Asian countries in October 2003, since the stabilizing role of the United States is vital to preserving peace, prosperity, and democracy in East Asia. Without a U.S. presence, Asia is likely to be unstable, given how long it is likely to take to build an East Asian Community. That said, the United States and Asia can no longer take each other for granted, and must take each other's interests and sentiments into consideration. Only then can they build a sense of community for their mutual benefit.

To this end, the United States must appreciate Asia's role vis-à-vis its security as well as its economic and political interests. If, indeed, the world economy's center of gravity has shifted to Asia, it is imperative that Asia and the United States rekindle the sense of a Pacific vision in which they can share common interests, values, and sentiments rather than try to go their separate ways. Washington should try to resurrect APEC as an effective strategic and economic linkage between the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and East Asia. Moreover, if the U.S. presence in Asia is to continue, the United States needs to place its interaction with Asia on a par with that of Europe in terms of priority in foreign policy and public sentiment.

To do so, U.S. civil society, universities, the business community, and the government must overcome their lack of knowledge and interest concerning Asia. U.S. ignorance about Asian culture, society, and politics must be eliminated and Washington must stop sending mixed messages and showing only episodic concern for Asia. The attitude of U.S. political leaders, especially in Congress, must be corrected and it would serve the Bush administration well were it to pay more attention to the Korean peninsula and appoint a Korean policy coordinator as did the administration of Bill Clinton, so that the United States might focus on the Korean issue on a continuing basis.

## Ahn Byung-joon

The United States should learn that Asia does matter to the daily life of its citizens, and it should not just be a case of Asians being eager to learn from the United States. An Asia Pacific Community would be of far greater benefit to all than is the present tripartite world in which Asia, the United States, and Europe are on a collision course. Global security and economic regimes are being weakened by the rising tide of unilateralism, nationalism, and regionalism; so if the United States wants to maintain a presence in Asia, it must respect Asia's nationalism.