# Possibilities of War:
# The Confluence of Persistent Contemporary Flashpoints and Worrisome New Trouble Spots

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## Introductory Thoughts

In 1985, the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University convened a distinguished group of international strategists, academic luminaries, prominent journalists, and accomplished policymakers to consider the prospects for conflict at the turn of the century, just fifteen years away. The group was asked to speculate about the possibilities for war in an undefined international environment over the horizon. After two days of extensive discussion, several features of the dialogue stood out. While there was considerable discussion about the possibility of a major conflict on the Indian subcontinent and persistent worries about the militarized situation on the Korean peninsula (global worries that continue to trouble us to this day), more interesting was the various prevailing assumptions along with the glaring omissions that were apparent among the group.

No one dared speculate about an end to the Cold War or the demise of a narrow bipolar alignment in global affairs. There was, however, considerable conversation about the prospects for major military clashes staged in order to safeguard dwindling supplies of various "strategic" resources like manganese and palladium. Much of the discussion was centered on a still divided Europe and the prospects for inadvertent or intentional conflict there. The discussants provided little consideration for the role of ideology in global affairs given the apparent demise of the attractiveness of communism as an organizing

concept for political life. There was no real reflection on global disease or the consequences of climate change. The technological advances that led to the revolution in military affairs were in their infancy and no one could imagine a breathtaking record of military achievements to follow in Panama, the Persian Gulf War (I), Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq (II, part I). The group was much closer in mindset and expectations to the tragedy of Vietnam or the dubious "victory" in Grenada than to the sterling record of military accomplishment poised just out of sight.

In short, the experience was a classic example of the limits of linear thinking, the unintended and sometimes subtle constraints imposed by "serious" policy audiences, and the tendency for "out of the box" thinking to appear very conventional in hindsight. As a young post graduate student, it was a very real reminder of how very hard it is to write or say something useful in such gatherings. The question of the future of major power conflict however, demands serious attention and it's valuable to at least lay out some factors in the international environment that bear watching in the years to come.

It is useful to ask three specific questions when it comes to the future of fighting: (1) what will be fought over; (2) who will do the fighting; (3) and with what will people fight. If the attacks of 9/11 have demonstrated anything, it is that the greatest threats to U.S. security in the period ahead probably come from non-state actors and that the U.S. homeland is perhaps the Achilles heal of global American hegemony. Any serious belligerent is likely to target the domestic society in some way as part of its overall strategy (this matter will be taken up by other speakers). It is also the case that increasingly virulent technologies (cyber-transmitted, chemical, biological, nuclear, and potentially nano-technologies in the not too distant future) are more and more available to highly motivated individuals with apocalyptic agendas. In this environment, it is sometimes difficult to imagine traditional state-to-state violence on a massive scale, but if 9/11 taught us another thing, it is to be prepared for surprises.

While there is currently considerable celebration over the general congeniality among the major powers in the international arena, there is considerable cause to question the durability of this concert of powers. The perception of China's rise is perceptible in the

Asia-Pacific region and elsewhere and would be more apparent to the U.S. if it were not so fully preoccupied with the awful developments transpiring in the Middle East. Indeed, the conventional wisdom on September 10,2001 was that the U.S. and China were heading for an almost preordained clash in the future and that the U.S. must begin to take steps to anticipate such a conflict. Perhaps the biggest surprise of the last few years is just how well Washington and Beijing have got on together given all the challenging issues they must continuously negotiate (Taiwan, trade, human rights, etc.).

There are likely to be innumerable scenarios that could trigger a major clash between one or more major powers in the years to come. I will not speculate in this paper about energy shortfalls and the rise of nationalism or the prospects for arms races and how each of these might trigger a major conflagration. Instead, the contention here is that perhaps the greatest contributor to potential conflicts in the near distant future is the prospect of a strategic failure for the U.S. (as opposed to a military failure) in Iraq and the larger Middle East. America bogging down for a sustained period is likely to lead to several potential outcomes, each of which will be explored in greater detail below. These are: innumerable regional problems as a consequence of our policies in the greater Middle East, U.S. preoccupation away from Asia (the setting for the most intense traditional interstate rivalries and the place where U.S. involvement is the greatest brake on overt rivalries), prospects for new nuclear proliferation, and a renewed reticence about the American exercise of force in pursuit of its interests.

## The Consequences of Failure in the American Crusade in the Middle East

Former Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara was fond of saying that the Middle East was the graveyard of American diplomatic hopes and dreams, and this is a man who knows something about disappointment in global politics (as well as cemeteries). Now, the United States has embarked upon an ambitious mission to remake the Middle East, from rebuilding war-ravaged and leader-abused countries in Afghanistan and Iraq, seeking to settle the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, blocking further nuclear proliferation, pushing the region to embrace political moderation and reform, and hopefully improving America's image in the region in the process.

There are unintentional though unavoidable echoes of the "best and the brightest" of the Vietnam generation in this campaign as the U.S. embarks upon a global crusade (call it what it is) to help re-direct the course of one of the world's dominant civilizations and the institutions that have served it so poorly. This uniquely American sense of mission and manifest destiny is apparent in a range of endeavors worldwide but it is in the Middle East where U.S. ambitions approach the point of audacity. It is also in the Middle East where the consequences of strategic failure raise the greatest prospects for ensuing conflict that blurs the distinctions between state and non-state actors.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the stakes, both for the region and long term American security. Yet it is unclear whether the American leaders or people fully appreciate the magnitude of the task ahead or the risks involved. To be successful in creating a more secure, stable, prosperous, and democratic Middle East will likely require the perseverance and patience of the long, twilight Cold War struggle, the money and resources of the Marshall Plan, and perhaps even the military sacrifices of conflicts past, but hopefully never on the scale of Vietnam or Korea. This is a cross-generational project and we have gotten off to an auspiciously bad start.

The Middle East is a region that defies easy generalizations and one-size-fits-all solutions. Stretching from the deserts of the Maghreb to the waters of the Persian Gulf and beyond, the region encompasses enormous wealth and tragic poverty, political tyranny and religious extremism, strong security partners and ruthless terrorist networks. It will likely remain this way for some years to come. The Middle East is also the proverbial head waters of perhaps the most immediate and intractable threats to American security in the world today. U.S. grand strategy in the past was notable for several features, including the "dual containment" of Iraq and Iran through conventional deterrence, a long-standing policy to ensure the safety of oil flows from the Gulf, a robust commitment to the security of Israel, and periodic forays into the business of promoting a Middle East peace.

This traditional agenda had general bipartisan appeal and support, but the case for a more powerful set of policy objectives had been building for years, and the shock of 9/11

served as the catalyst for embracing a much more activist, even revolutionary, agenda for the region. While there are some clear areas of continuity, the new approach -- when viewed in its entirety -- represents both a substantial departure from previous efforts and a fundamental increase in American concern and commitment. The case for remaking the Middle East rests on five key policy objectives, and the U.S. is currently operating along each of these five distinct but interrelated tracks -- and one might argue failing distinctively on each. These are as follows:

*Pursue a Comprehensive Middle East Peace:* The U.S. has been committed at least rhetorically to finding a Middle East peace, in part as an appeal to Arab hearts and minds. One of the remarkable aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian struggle is that even after so many unsuccessful efforts at peacemaking, new initiatives can still rouse hopes, however faint. They may not be high for the eventual success of the "road map" and every politician on every side, including President Bush, has taken pains not to exaggerate the prospects. Indeed, everything that has transpired in the current process -- the summit meetings, the ceasefires, the pullbacks, the tapping of special American envoys and interlocutors, the subtle U.S. pressures behind the scenes -- has all been tried before.

For Hamas, Fatah, and Islamic Jihad, a temporary ceasefire is a tactic, not a religious conversion on the road to Damascus. The Israelis are nearing completion on their separation wall, and we are still a long way from actually uprooting a settlement. For most Israelis, the time when its citizens believed that a peace settlement was key to achieving fundamental security has long since passed. Israelis want their government to fight terror, first and foremost, and arguably Americans consider Israel's security to be the prime directive in our overall approach to the Middle East. The Bush administration, after initially keeping some distance from the peace process (which looked like anything but during the *intifada)* has now waded in at least part way and is engaged in the dialogue. Despite all the early talk of being sparing with Presidential prestige and notions of "ripeness" to prevent diplomatic overextension, the U.S. is now inextricably in the mix. Yet, there is near universal condemnation of the U.S. approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and there remains no real prospect for finding any common ground

given the current environment.

*Rebuild Afghanistan and Iraq:* After dashing to swift military victories in Afghanistan and Iraq, the U.S. is now slogging through very unsettling periods of nation-building in the former and occupation in the latter. Historians and commentators have begun to recite the eerie similarities between the triumphalist speeches by U.S. officials after the fall of Baghdad and much earlier statements from an era when Iraq was called Mesopotamia. When the British captured Baghdad in March of 1917, after hard fighting in which thousands of colonial Indian troops were killed, Major General Stanley Maude greeted the suspicious onlookers with a speech that could have been given by Paul Bremer: "Our armies do not come into your cities and lands as conquerors or enemies, but as liberators." Of course, this turned out not to be the case for Britain and it looks increasingly to be America's ultimate destiny as well. It is certainly instructive to look back on that earlier effort by the leading Western power of the time to refashion the Middle East, especially as the American efforts in Iraq appear increasingly beset.

Certainly the very recent days in the desert bear little resemblance to the last time America undertook occupations in Japan and Germany respectively after World War II. But surely the biggest worry for the U.S. will not be a long and unhappy occupation but rather a temptation to cut and run when the going gets (or stays) tough on the ground. The hope has been -- recent events clearly underscore that there is yet to be thoroughgoing plan -- that a successful transition to democracy and the establishment of a responsible, secular government in Iraq is still possible and can provide a powerful example to other authoritarian regimes in the neighborhood flirting with reform, a democratic domino effect across the desert.

*Block nuclear proliferation and the spread of other weapons of mass destruction to and from the Middle East:* Despite the furor over sixteen words and the inability to find evidence of a serious WMD program, is there any doubt that the United States went to war to prevent Iraq from developing weapons of mass destruction? A classic case not of preemption but of preventive war, the U.S. has already demonstrated a determination to head off new nuclear proliferation among rogue regimes, either in the Axis of Evil camp

or those camping nearby. Iraq, for all its difficulties, turns out to be the easy case in the region, as the U.S. considers much tougher choices over Iran and possibly others. The situation is further complicated by a host of transnational terror groups based in the region that seek to acquire these forbidden weapons. 9/11 provided a convincing reminder, if we needed one, of the dangers of these deadly technologies falling into the wrong hands.

Clearly, a strategy designed to mitigate arguably the single biggest worry for the United States in international security requires a multifaceted approach, including enhanced international cooperation in intelligence sharing, greater efforts to secure the still dangerous WMD inheritance of the former Soviet Union, a more serious approach to homeland security, and potentially Osirak-style and larger military options to deal with imminent proliferation. The long term plan is to dramatically reduce the demand for such weapons through social and political reengineering, but that still leaves us with urgent short term challenges, beginning in Iran.

*Promote political liberalization and the modernization of the Middle East states:* At the outset, it is important to declare that the United States on its own cannot reform the Middle East. Only the region's inhabitants can do that. But the idea has been that the United States can be a catalyst to help introduce change into the grim stalemate that currently exists between conservative, authoritarian governments and an increasingly restive Arab intelligentsia and middle classes that hanker for reform. The entire political system that has prevailed in the Muslim world since the end of the colonial era is under siege from both radical and moderate elements within societies.

Through much expanded and highly conditional foreign assistance, increased opportunities for trade and investment, greater insistence by the international community on accountability in terms of economic decision-making and implementing true government reforms, the United States, working with its western partners over a sustained period, can make a difference in the region. Yet, we have left to join this struggle very late in the day and with little national appreciation for the complex forces -- both political and religious -- that are swirling in the region like sand in the desert.

Ultimately, the U.S. must make an effort to better understand the deep complexities and mysteries of the Middle East to stand a better chance at succeeding at recreating the failed political, educational and economic institutions that have dominated the region for decades. Ironically, the Bush administration's Greater Middle East Initiative, while designed to promote all of the above, is thoroughly discredited in the region as a result of inexcusable U.S. missteps in Iraq.

*Improving America's Image Problem:* While it is tempting to simply focus on the rather self-referential question "Why do they hate us?" the Middle East reality is entirely more complicated. The main battle ongoing in the Middle East today is for the very soul of Islam, as expertly conveyed in Bernard Lewis' new book The Crisis in Islam. He describes not so much a clash of civilizations between Middle East and West but an internal struggle between radical Islam and its more moderate strains. As Jim Hoagland has written: "The American way of life, U.S. support for Israel, and Washington's military power provoke specific animosities towards the United States by the jihadists. But their rage against those they consider fallen-away Muslims is great. Apostates are the worst of all infidels. Arab leaders who exercise power through the nation-states created in the colonial era are turncoats and usurpers."

The United States in many ways has stumbled into a central role in a contest between the two main branches of Islam: the Shiites, a minority who rule as a majority in Iran but are downtrodden elsewhere and the Sunni majority that dominates commerce and politics in most Arab states. Americans are somewhat uncomfortable acknowledging the role of religion in politics (both at home and abroad) and as a result we have focused our attention on the region's political class and used the military as the primary tool of policy. Ultimately, the key to winning this battle is for the U.S. to assist in the mobilization of a revitalized Islamic mainstream that embraces public life and civic responsibility. This is certainly no easy task and our tools for influencing the outcome of events are limited. Further, the images of prison abuse from Iraq that have spread like a desert storm throughout the region have severely set back efforts to improve America's standing in the region.

A powerful case can be made that despite our efforts, we are failing -- and failing badly - across each of these interrelated tasks. If these trends continue, there are likely to be several severe consequences. Authoritarian Arab regimes in the Middle East will cling more tenaciously to power. Powerful regional players like Iran are likely to be emboldened. In an effort to stem the negative tide, the U.S. will devote more resources and attention to the Middle East at the expense of other regions (notably Asia). It is even conceivable that Islamic jihadists could gain greater power inside existing state structures in countries like Pakistan or even Iraq. Even if the U.S. acquits itself well on the battlefields of Iraq it is still possible to face a strategic failure of manifest proportions. Such a major setback would likely make it much more difficult to contemplate subsequent military actions elsewhere given growing public questions and misgivings.

## New Nuclear States?

For nearly half a century, a central aspect of U.S. diplomacy and national security strategy has been preventing the spread of nuclear weapons. Over the last decade, this pursuit has focused primarily on stopping unsavory regimes such as North Korea, Iran, and Iraq from acquiring or developing a nuclear capability. After September 11th, there was new urgency to stop terrorists from getting their hands on such destructive power. Yet, for all the attention given these usual suspects, there has been remarkably little consideration of another class of future potential proliferators: those states that in the past chose to forgo the nuclear option, but for a variety of reasons could in the future revisit that decision and pursue a nuclear capability.[1] There is a real risk that the concerted diplomatic efforts during and since the Cold War aimed at slowing, halting or reversing nuclear proliferation may be starting to unravel -- this time involving so-called "responsible" states that decades ago decided against developing a nuclear capability.

Countries such as Egypt, Germany, Japan, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Syria, Taiwan, and Turkey have an been mainstays in the non-nuclear club even though some of them quietly flirted with nuclear weapons in the past. However, a combination of security guarantees, domestic politics, and international pressure has usually been enough to

[1] For an excellent treatment of why many advanced industrial countries chose *not* to seek nuclear weapons, see Mitchell Reiss, Without the Bomb (Columbia University Press: New York, NY, 1988)

dissuade them. In the simplest terms, the potential costs outweighed the perceived benefits.

But much has changed that could upset the delicate balance of incentives and disincentives that were so laboriously put in place during and after the Cold War. There have been rapid changes in the international system and there are major new sources of global upheaval and uncertainty, including:

- The now distant end of a bipolar, "stable" global environment in which security guarantees were a central part of the U.S.-Soviet standoff;
- New nuclear states in India and Pakistan;
- The dominant preeminence of American power and concerns about the future strategic direction of the United States;
- Weak and potential failed states and havens of lawlessness and instability throughout an "arc of instability" from South America to Africa, the Caucasus, and Southeast Asia; and
- New threats from terrorists with global reach.

A serious American setback in the Middle East could well be an ultimate catalyst to drive nuclear reconsiderations in the not too distant future.

Each of the states named above has experienced enormous domestic changes in recent years and can anticipate more uncertainty ahead. For many, the surrounding regional situation or larger international environment has become less stable and in some cases more ominous. For instance, talk of a nuclear option was virtually unthinkable in Japan a decade ago, but there has been, more recently, a rising chorus of commentators both in and out of government that publicly support open debate around the highly contentious matter of Japan's potential nuclear future. It would be an exaggeration to suggest that a collection of comments and opinion pieces indicate a nuclear program on the horizon, but it would also be imprudent to rule out a future with more nuclear powers without more careful study and examination.

What specific factors would inspire a country to retreat from a well-established non-

nuclear national identity in favor of an arsenal that includes atomic devices and the means for their delivery? The most likely case would probably involve several factors interacting and reinforcing in complex ways. Five key international and domestic factors that could lead to a reversal in a country's nuclear posture are:

1. Direction of U.S. Foreign and Security Policy
2. Breakdown of the Global Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime
3. Eroding Regional or Global Security Situations
4. Domestic Imperatives
5. Increasing Availability of Technology

Of course, no single feature of the new strategic landscape may give one great pause. Instead, the various ways multiple factors might accumulate and reinforce one another will account for many of the new dangers. For example, there have always been terrorist groups, but there has never before been the simultaneous concentration of terrorist groups with global reach, the diffusion of bomb design information, and the possibility of unaccounted nuclear material from the former Soviet Union. Another example is the increasing ease with which a country like Pakistan can miniaturize a nuclear device with assistance from China and place it on top of a ballistic missile purchased from North Korea. This type of transnational trade in weapons of mass destruction and related technologies is a growing development and one that can exponentially increase the threat of nuclear proliferation. These technical and regional factors coincide with an unstable international period, in which there are concerns about the direction of U.S. foreign policy and anxieties about the sustainability of the global nonproliferation regime (an exhibit being the apparent international nonchalance in the matter of North Korea's brazen flouting of International Atomic Energy Agency mandate).

The U.S. and others have tended to underestimate the prospects for new nuclear proliferation and the potentially escalatory dynamic these steps could trigger in delicate regional situations. Already the prospect of a North Korea with a substantial nuclear arsenal is triggering a cascading insecurity -- and reconsideration of security related options -- throughout Asia.

The potential for nuclear proliferation among states that had formerly forsworn the option deserves study and attention from U.S. policymakers; it is timely to consider what collection of incentives -- or erosion of disincentives -- might provoke a country that we now place squarely in the non-nuclear camp to reconsider their nuclear options. Identifying the potential factors that could lead to a new round of proliferation among these countries should now be seen as a critical new feature of American intelligence collection and analysis, preventive diplomacy, and U.S. decision-making on issues ranging from national strategy to public diplomacy.[2] A profound American setback in the Middle East could well provide a nudge towards a "nuclear tipping point" that would usher in a world with several more nuclear powers, with all the attendant possibilities for conflict associated with that potentially ominous development.

## Dynamic Asia -- Preoccupied America

Asia enters the 21st century on the cusp of major strategic change. Japanese commentators have taken to referring to the 1990's as "the lost decade" because of their own protracted economic malaise, while others have appropriated the term in describing the lackluster progress in Asian multilateralism in the security realm. While that moniker obscures the many important developments in the decade -- such as the potentially calamitous Asian economic crisis and a host of other security predicaments -- the last ten years have set us up to expect a degree of predictability and rationality in the progression of Asian events. The end of the Cold War in Europe brought with it a host of strategic challenges, including managing the reunification of Germany, establishing the rationale and procedure for NATO enlargement, and dealing with the difficult consequences associated with the disintegration of Tito's Yugoslavia. There was nothing comparable in strategic terms in Asia, at least in an immediate sense, and yet this period of supposed strategic placidity has led to expectations in some quarters that present trends will continue into the future.

[2] Certainly there are those who believe that nuclear proliferation can be stabilizing and that the developments described in this chapter are not cause for alarm, but rather for optimism -- see, for example, Kenneth N. Waltz, "Chapter I: More May Be Better," in Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate.* W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1995, Page 1. However, we assume that the U.S. desires to - and should - continue its long-standing policy of limiting nuclear proliferation.

However, the near future in Asia is likely to represent a significant departure from the past. That is, Asia stands on the cusp of significant strategic change. Indeed, the sense of continuity in Asian political and security trends has tended to obscure developments that point to potentially significant strategic changes ahead. Some of these could well lead to big power competition and even overt conflict.

What are some of the likely indicators that point to change on the horizon? The rise and fall of major states and the process of 'hegemonic transition' has historically been associated with periods of upheaval (the perception of American hegemony coupled with the rise of China and absence of Russia). Strong historical rivalries and endemic political distrust among leading states can also be indicative of underlying problems that threaten to break out on the surface (essentially in all of Asia). Political incoherence -- or worse yet the disintegration of a state -- in a regional setting can be very disruptive to larger political dynamics (North Korea and Indonesia). Regions that experience large disparities in economic performance also bear watching (the successful Malaysian defection from the IMF programs undertaken by Thailand and South Korea). The rise of a religious fundamentalism in the cultural fabric of the region (much of Southeast Asia). The potential success of a major ongoing negotiation (between North and South Korea?) or a diplomatic failure (between China and Taiwan or India and Pakistan?) can have an enormous impact on the outlook of a region. Further, a sudden introduction of new military technology (such as the large numbers of short-range PRC missiles pointed at Taiwan or an ambitious anti-ballistic missile program envisioned by the U.S.) can be very significant. The lack of a functioning multilateral security structure (compare the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) with NATO) or even a commonly shared set of regional security norms (witness the difficulty in establishing a basic code of conduct for managing competition in the Spratly Islands and the South China Sea) can also prove to be detrimental to the preservation of peace and stability in a larger regional setting.[3]

Asia is simultaneously experiencing all of these conditions, and several of them are

[3] For a recent description of the emerging East Asian security architecture and the risks and possibilities associated, see Kent E. Calder, 2001. "The New Face of Northeast Asia." *Foreign Affairs.* Volume 80, No. 1: 112-117.

intensifying and interacting in unpredictable ways. The period of supposed strategic placidity (at least on the surface) of the last decade is corning to an end, and the potential for non-linear, discontinuous change is of a much higher level of probability now at the start of the 21st Century.

The reality, of course, is that the seeds of current potential change are found in previous developments. Some of these previous events or trends were overlooked or misunderstood at the time, while other developments can only be fully recognized or appreciated in retrospect. While some commentators have tended to downplay the consequences for Asia with the conclusion of superpower competition, the end of the Cold War in fact triggered a series of crucial events in Asia whose ultimate manifestations will only be fully realized in the coming years.

The end of U.S.-Soviet competition and rivalry removed the most obvious rationale for Sino-U.S. cooperation, and ever since, leaders in Washington and Beijing have struggled to identify the foundation upon which a strategic partnership could be built.[4] Japan, slowly but inexorably, has begun to question some of the manifestations of its longstanding security arrangements with the U.S. and its own defense identity in Asia as the new realities of the post-Cold War world have become better understood by the Japanese people and politicians.[5] North Korea, the last remaining vanguard of an outmoded form of socialist organization, found itself truly isolated after the demise of the Soviet Union and the onset of market sensibilities in Beijing. As a result, the hermit leadership was left to increasingly (and desperately) rely on its *juche* philosophy of self-sufficiency and contemplate more daring diplomatic gambits (accepting the four party talks and embarking upon high stakes North-South and U.S. Summitry).[6]

The Cold War's demise also made it increasingly difficult to depict various Southeast Asian states, notably Indonesia, as pieces on a global chessboard. The presumed necessity of bolstering undemocratic regimes for the sake of internal stability and

[4] David Shambaugh. 2001. "Facing Reality in China Policy." *Foreign Affairs.* Volume 80, No.1: 50-64.
[5] Japan has struggled with the issue of autonomy for 'years, as comprehensive examinations of their defense procurement plans demonstrate. See Michael J. Green. 1995. *Arming Japan: Defense Production. Alliance Politics and the Postwar Search for Autonomy.* Columbia University Press: New York. 147-149.
[6] Nicholas Eberstadt. 1995. *Korea Approaches Reunification.* M.E. Sharpe: Armonk, New York. 133-137.

maintaining regional balances was blasted to bits, and the allegations about foreign-backed internal subversion lost much of their appeal in Western capitals, particularly in the United States. The way the Cold War ended also led many in the region to assume two things about Russia: one, that Russia's focus would continue to be almost exclusively on European developments (and not Asian diplomacy), and two, that Russia was in decline -- and not likely to reemerge -- as an important actor to be taken seriously again any time soon (two suppositions that could well be challenged in the future). Finally, the U.S. began the decade of the 1990's in apparent decline, its energies allegedly wasted on a costly, protracted global competition with the Soviet Union, only to emerge by the end of the decade as the uber-power, unmatched in every dimension of national capabilities.[7]

Asia embarks upon the new century with a dubious distinction. While the much-overused moniker "The Pacific Century" conjures up images of commercial promise and political dynamism, the reality is that Asia is a dangerous place. For the first time in modem political history every major challenge to peace and stability in the international arena is currently found in greater Asia. Any of three situations could trigger a major conflagration virtually overnight: there is the still dangerous division of the Korean peninsula; the increasingly tense and unpredictable situation across the Taiwan Strait; and the dangerous nuclear competition on the subcontinent between India and Pakistan. Europe in comparison seems absolutely peace-loving, with troubles in the Balkans for sure, but overall, relatively stable in historical terms.

Perhaps the most important place to start in identifying signs of strategic change in the Asia-Pacific region is the United States. There are several critical factors to watch here. American power and influence is apparent in every aspect of international life, including military affairs, international commerce, and global information and culture. Nowhere is this U.S. influence more palpably felt and understood as in Asia. In many ways, this is a truly remarkable turnaround from the political-military aftershocks of the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 and the economic recovery from the late 1980's era of economic malaise. This unprecedented power -- referred to in some Asian capitals as

[7] Richard N. Haass. 1999. "What to Do With American Primacy." *Foreign Affairs.* Volume 78, No.5: 37.

simply 'hegemony' -- has led to intricate thinking about ways in which Asian countries can both take advantage of American influence while seeking to contain or undermine it at the same time. U.S. leadership is generally appreciated and desired by most Asian states, just not so much of it. Currently, American power and influence are seen as too important to the smooth functioning of the global economy and international political system to allow for simple obstructionist approaches. A mix of self- interested cooperation -- to go along with the subtle and not so subtle undermining -- is a necessary part of any sophisticated strategy. One Asian Ambassador in Washington explains, "The current analogy between U.S. global dominance and Microsoft's commanding market share is very compelling. Like Microsoft, we want to see U.S. power weakened, but at the same time we use and appreciate the operating system it provides." This proclivity to seek to counter certain manifestations of American power will probably continue; certainly while this period of U.S. predominance lasts. Indeed, the contradictions in Asian attitudes towards the U.S. will likely be a continuing feature in Asian security diplomacy.[8]

Yet the biggest fear currently associated with the U.S. is that the quagmire in Iraq will draw America away from Asia at a time of potentially historic changes. Asians are constantly looking for evidence -- such as the recent announcement that several thousand army personnel will be leaving strategic positions along the DMZ for Iraq -- that the U.S. is more focused elsewhere. This prospect of the U.S. engaged elsewhere for a decade or so is deeply unsettling to much of Asia and already there are signs of new coping strategies emerging.

The strategic uncertainty identified above, associated with the changing security landscape, has led many Asian states to hedge, diplomatically and militarily. This region-wide hedging takes many forms, including the pursuit of ambitious diplomatic agendas with key states, notably China, and simultaneous efforts to sustain stronger security ties with the U.S. (including assisting the U.S. in out-of-area pursuits as part of a larger American foreign policy agenda). However, the most obvious way to hedge in the

[8] Calder, 2001: 114-122. Ted Galen Carpenter. 1999. "Roiling Asia," *Foreign Affairs.* Volume 77, No.6: 2-6.

security sphere is by seeking to acquire greater military capabilities. There are a number of trends to watch closely. Japan and China provide an interesting contrast in this regard. China still has a relatively outmoded military, but their leadership is clearly investing in "pockets of excellence," primarily in missiles, fighter aircraft, and C4I for possible future contingencies in the Taiwan Strait. Since the Taiwan Straits crisis of 1995-96, the Chinese political and military elite has become increasingly preoccupied with developing capabilities and plans for possible military options against Taiwan in the future.[9]

Japan on the other hand has a relatively sophisticated military – it is equipped with high performance fighter aircraft, Aegis class destroyers, and a well-trained army -- but has been engaged in a protracted internal deliberation as to whether to amend the nation's restrictive constitution when it comes to the use of force in situations beyond simple self-defense. Japanese self-defense forces have already deployed to support operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Simply put, China has the will, but not yet the capabilities, while Japan has long possessed the wherewithal, but not yet the national consensus. These two contrasting trends in the two most powerful nations of Asia will have a crucial bearing on the security situation in the region as a whole.

Several other Asian states -- including Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, and South Korea -- were in the midst of significant military modernization efforts in 1997 when the economic crisis hit. Most of these plans for upgrading capabilities in combat aircraft and naval platforms were subsequently shelved. Only now, as their economies rebound, are some Asian states looking again at incremental modernization programs. Overall, Asia still has relatively modest national arsenals, with only China taking significant steps to build national military capabilities through internal procurement, extensive purchases from Russia, and clandestine cooperation with Israel.[10]

It is often said that Asia has only one true multilateral security institution, the ASEAN

[9] William M. Carpentar. 2000. "The Taiwan Strait Triangle." *Comparative Strategy.* Volume 19, No.4: 331,335.

[10] For a description of the relationship between the Asian economic crisis and military spending in Asia, see Glenn Shloss. 2000, "Market for War turns Bullish," *South China Morning Post.* March 15: 15. For analysis of recent Chinese arms acquisitions, see Shirley A. Kan. 2000. "China's Foreign Conventional Arms Acquisitions: Background and Analysis." *CRS Report Order Code RL30700.* October.

Regional Forum (ARF hereafter), but the reality is there are no true multilateral security institutions in Asia. This absence is not an accident. Asian states large and small have been reluctant to entertain the creation of a security architecture that either sacrifices national sovereignty or legitimizes any form of collective security. Existing region-wide institutions such as the ARF promote multilateral dialogue, not collective defense arrangements. Peace and stability since the end of the Vietnam war in 1975 has rested on the forward deployment of substantial numbers of U.S. forces (roughly 100,000 soldiers, sailors, and marines) and a diverse collection U.S. bilateral security ties with Japan, South Korea, Australia, Thailand, and the Philippines. Virtually no country in Asia is fully satisfied with this proposition, but the continuation of the status quo has often seemed a better bet compared with the alternatives (i.e., some security framework that potentially condones military actions in a crisis). ARF has expanded its scope of activities into areas like exchanging defense white papers and sanctioning search and rescue workshops, but the progress has been slow in recent years, particularly when collective attentions in Asia were focused more on economic recovery than multilateral security.[11]

This lack of a genuine security framework is acceptable as long as the United States is present and engaged. Yet a prolonged strategic stalemate for the U.S. in the Middle East could cause even further hedging, with states either cozying up to China, seeking greater unilateral capabilities, or both. These circumstances create situations that are ripe for misunderstanding and miscalculation and could well provide the setting for future clashes between major states.

## America Uncertain?

With the very recent history of robust American unilateralism and demonstrated military supremacy, it is difficult to image a U.S. that is much more reluctant to exercise force in a sustained, thoroughgoing fashion. Yet, it is not inconceivable that one of the many

[11] For a discussion of the benefits and limitations of Track II diplomacy in Southeast Asia see Herman Joseph S. Kraft. 2000. "The Autonomy Dilemma of Track Two Diplomacy in Southeast Asia." *Security Dialogue.* Volume 3 I, No.3: 343-356. For a description of the evolving relationship between the ARF and defense cooperation in Southeast Asia, see Sheldon W. Simon. 1998. "Security prospects in Southeast Asia: collaborative efforts and the ASEAN Regional Forum." *The Pacific Review.* Volume II, No.2: 195212.

negative consequences of failure in Iraq -- to accompany emboldening our fundamentalist opponents, creating greater instability among the oil producing countries of the Middle East, distracting our attention from other global problem areas, and possibly setting back the very course of political reform we are seeking to promote -- will be a more timid America that is less confident about the circumstances that call for the employment of substantial military power. Such a development would almost certainly be seen as an opportunity by some state such as a rising China, a regionally unchallenged Iran, or others, to test American power.

While non-state actors such as al-Qa'ida or other Islamic splinter groups are likely to pose the most significant threats to global security, the prospect for more conventional conflict between states -- particularly in Asia or the Middle East -- should not be dismissed.

Innumerable things are likely to trigger traditional conflicts between states in fifteen years. Insecurity about energy supplies, worries associated with new proliferation, and the prospects of profound turmoil in the Middle East are all certainly possible, perhaps even likely. All these problems will either be triggered by or exacerbated by an American failure in Iraq.

It is difficult to imagine a strategic setback in Iraq that could match the intensity or duration of the Vietnam War's aftermath. Yet, in scarcely a decade, the U.S. position in Asia had nearly completely recovered. The last two decades have been something of a golden age for American power in Asia-Pacific region. It is difficult to imagine the U.S. retaining its influence or recovering its prestige so quickly in the Middle East should we suffer a similar strategic fate in Iraq.