

A New Asian Community?

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Introduction

In 1997, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference sponsored a forum on China in the 21st century. The probability that China could emerge as one of the world's major powers was hinted at, but no one dared predict that it could become a reality in a span of 10 years. After all, for over a hundred years, China was considered "the sick man of Asia." And because of extreme poverty, some western historians portrayed China in the textbooks of my generation as "the living fossil of the world."

At that conference, the heads of state, political leaders, and academics from all over the world observed that China could become a major power only if it would overcome the colossal challenges of poverty, underdevelopment, and engage peacefully with the rest of the world. Nobody predicted that China would become an economic superpower.

I appeared to be the only one who prophesied that China would be more than an economic superpower in the 21st century, that China would supplant the United States of America in Asia. American power, stature, influence would diminish despite its policy of using its Asian and North Atlantic City Organization (NATO) allies to contain China. I concluded that in the 21st century there would be an "Asia without America," which was the title of my paper at the conference.

The U.S. in Asia

Contrary to my prediction, America today is still very much in Asia. When President Barack Obama became the U.S. President, the White House press made clear that America "is still an Asia-Pacific power" and "is still the leader of the Asia-Pacific region." However, most American analysts at the time admit that America's power, stature, and influence in the Asia-Pacific region have diminished considerably.

In his first presidential trip to China last November 15–18, 2009, President Obama told the Chinese students in Shanghai, "There are very few global challenges that can be solved unless the United States and China agree."¹

Indeed, President Obama went to China with a long list of pressing global, regional, and domestic issues.² They included global financial recovery and stability; reforming the international institutional architecture; climate change and clean energy; global energy and natural resource supplies; America's war in Afghanistan and Pakistan; America's occupation of Iraq; Iranian and North Korean nuclear programs; the balance of power in Asia and the western Pacific; revival of APEC; nuclear arms control; and a range of non-traditional security issues (public health, counter-terrorism, non-proliferation, piracy, human trafficking, drug smuggling).

Even Africa and Latin America were to figure on the Sino-American agenda. In addition, the bilateral agenda included a range of urgent trade protectionism and currency manipulation issues. Of course, there were the "perennial" issues of Taiwan, Tibet, and now Xinjiang. All these issues are also America's main foreign policy concerns.

President Obama's main agenda in China was to keep the overall framework of world order in U.S. hands while building a viable partnership with China in order to address not only the worldwide economic downturn, but also an ar-

ray of international and regional issues and problems. It was a crowded and complex global, regional, and bilateral agenda for the proposed partnership. Despite these specifics, the Chinese want to determine first whether the G-2 envisions an Asian peace that is to the mutual advantage of the U.S. and Asia or it involves uncertain diplomatic games with dangerous results for the rest of Asia.

China as Economic Superpower

Since China opened up to the world in 1978, it has quickly established itself as a global economic power. Numerous commentators have hailed the economic advancement gained since that time.³

According to a United Nation's report: "China's big advantage is that it is joining the multilateral system from a position of strength: spectacular success in export expansion; a sound and sustained balance-of-payments position; and abundant international reserves. Moreover, it is well placed to resist excessive import pressures linked to repressed consumer demand, which have derailed other liberalization episodes."⁴

Ordinary Chinese feel freer and more open, which in a large measure is the product of a continuing and accelerating technological advances. And within the span of 30 years China has created for its people new occupations, higher incomes, expanded opportunities, and new aspirations.

In economic terms China is the world's largest exporter and has overtaken Japan as the second largest economy in the world. It has the world's largest current account surplus and foreign exchange reserves. According to geo-politico-economic experts, China is a global economic superpower: it is big enough to affect the world economy. It is vigorous enough to be a factor in global growth. Its trade and capital flows have sufficient impact on other countries.⁵

Simply by virtue of its status as an economic superpower

China has become, in the perception of the U.S. and the European Union leaders, a major challenge to their power, stature and influence in the current world order, which they claim they created. China's growth and development have led to demands for change of the existing international architecture. And indeed, the move toward an all Asian Community is viewed by the West as competition under new rules and could endanger both the existing world order and their worldwide economic interests.⁶

On this issue, many Asians believe that the West keeps double standards: while it claimed the European Union and the NAFTA are good for the current world order, it has declared an all-Asian Community as detrimental to the order. In response Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi said: "both China and the other Asian countries should take creative and pioneering steps to pull the Asian economy out of the shadow of the global financial crisis."⁷

China as Driver of Economic Growth

American analysts claimed that the Chinese owe their good fortune to the West. For instance, after opening up, China has lifted millions out of the poverty line. Yet, China continues to pursue its own set of values under the rubric of "socialism with Chinese characteristics." For this reason alone, China is "not a responsible stakeholder in the international system." The Chinese, of course, do not agree.

China owes its growth and development to the Chinese leadership and the Chinese people. In his speech at the UN high-level meeting on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) last September 25, 2008, Premier Wen Jiabao declared: "We in China have accelerated development mainly with our own efforts and through reform and opening-up. As a result, China has brought down the number of people in absolute poverty from 250 million to 15 million in less than 30 years. We have set up the system of village and commu-

nity self-governance for rural and urban residents and introduced government transparency, democratic oversight and direct election at the community level."

Despite criticisms and condemnations from the U.S., China is far more integrated into the world economic system than any other economic superpower. It matched the largest U.S. economy in global growth leadership during the record world expansion of 2004-2007. And given that the U.S. has not recovered from its economic meltdown, China is now the undisputed chief driver of today's world economic growth. This year, China overtook the U.S. as ASEAN's third largest trading partner behind Japan and the EU. China and the ASEAN are the largest U.S. markets in Asia today.⁸

To many American analysts, President George H. Bush's presumption in 1999 that providing a room for China in the U.S. defined and U.S.-led global order was in America's interest: "Trade freely with China and time is on our side."

Instead, the globalization of Asian economies under U.S. order, has led to the revision of Western capitalism into what some U.S. economists label as "a state led-capitalism inspired by Asian values."

Cognizant of these changes, President Obama said the Richard Nixon-Ronald Reagan-Bill Clinton-George W. Bush architecture "is buckling under the weight of new threats." This old architecture, which has been intended to preserve the American moment, insure America's world leadership, appears to be paving the way for China and India's emergence as potential competitors.

Many American legislators are claiming that it also led China to manipulate its currency and the outsourcing of American goods in China, which has taken away the jobs of millions of Americans. In short, when China was selling footwear, textiles and clothing, toys, travel goods and sporting goods, it was tolerable. But with China's involvement in the assembly of technology intensive products such as tele-

communication equipment and computers, exports of more advanced electronics devices such as office machines and automated data processing equipment and other industrial supplies such as solar cells, automobiles, and high speed trains, it was not acceptable.

Moreover, with China's rise, Asia is getting joined tighter and tighter through economic engagements. The Asian Development Bank reported that in 2009 intra-regional trade continues to reach more than 58 percent of total Asian trade. An intricate supply networks have linked manufactures across borders, intra-Asian trade and investment have reached a point where the region can drive its own growth irrespective of what might be happening to the U.S. and Europe. Just as economic prosperity transformed the Chinese people, instilling in the average citizen new aspirations, so do Chinese trading partners in Asia find reason to believe that their history could take on a new turn.

The World Bank has noted: "Asian countries that were destitute a generation ago now boast some of the highest living standards in the world. East Asia has already surpassed the Millennium Development Goal of reducing extreme poverty to half its 1990 levels by 2015." This means the region is ready for an all Asian Community.

U.S. New World Order

For U.S. State Secretary Hilary Clinton this is reason enough for America to reconstruct "a new global architecture that reflects and harnesses the realities of the 21st century," a new framework of world order under American leadership. Unlike President George W. Bush, who believed that "America can do it alone," Secretary Clinton asserts that in the new order, America will have to build "a network of alliances and partnerships, regional organizations and global institutions" to help keep America as a status quo power and to promote strategic changes that are favorable to Ameri-

can foreign policy objectives today.

The core principle of America's alliance "is shared responsibility. Each nation must step up to do its part. An American leadership does not mean we do everything ourselves. America's security and prosperity depend more than ever on the ability of others to take responsibility for defusing threats and meeting challenges in their own countries and regions."⁹

Indeed, judging from Secretary Clinton's foreign policy speech and from the recent developments and events in Asia after China has rejected President Obama's offer of G-2 partnership, America has since then turned to its Cold War allies in Asia such as South Korea, Japan, some members of the ASEAN to pursue American foreign policy objectives in Asia which are:

1. To prevent expansion of ASEAN+3 into an all Asian Community. And to make sure that despite China's growing strength in both economic and political influence, it should not become the actual driver and shaper of the emerging Asian order. Preventive steps were initially accomplished through: America's return to Asia, resurrection of the APEC Summit in Singapore, the U.S. becoming a bona-fide member of the ASEAN by signing the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, host the first ever U.S.-ASEAN summit, the U.S. signed the Guam International Agreement that helps sustain strong U.S. military presence in the region.
2. To work out a counter proposal that instead of an all Asian Community, an Asia-Pacific Community with America as the driving force. In the words of Defense Secretary Robert Gates, America wants to make clear that "U.S. is not a visiting power in Asia, but a resident power... There should be no doubt that the United States itself is a Pacific nation."
3. To push for an ASEAN+10 under American leadership rather than an ASEAN+3, which was paving the way to an all Asian Community. Again according to Secretary

Clinton: "...working with allies and partners is critical to solving some of the most pressing challenges of the 21st century." Nowhere is this more accurately put into action than in U.S. claims to be defending the territorial claims of small Southeast Asian nations and warding off aggression by the Chinese dragon.

4. To pursue its overseas involvements, through the offer of hard power or military force to its allies, partners, and multinational institutions to implement American foreign policy objectives in Asia. Correspondingly the move toward more sophisticated military weaponry, with greater dependence on the latest technology of surveillance and predator planes in place of U.S. ground forces, is an adoption of the Nixon Vietnamization or principle of comparative advantage: Asian allies and partners 'provide the people to die, while the U.S. supply the weapons to kill.' Indeed in the two recent developments involving North and South Korea, Japan and China, it was evident to political observers that "the U.S. is re-igniting the cold and hot wars in Asia."

U.S. Hand in the South China Sea

The *New York Times* on July 23, 2010 carried this headline: "Offering to Aid Talks, U.S. Challenges China on Disputed Islands."¹⁰ Then it went on to report: "Opening a new source of potential friction with China, the Obama administration said Friday that it would step into a tangled dispute between China and its smaller Asian neighbors over a string of strategically significant islands in the South China Sea... Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton speaking at an Asian regional security meeting in Vietnam, stressed that the United States remained neutral on which regional countries had stronger territorial claims to the islands. But she said that the United States had an interest in preserving free shipping in the area and that it would be willing to facilitate multilateral talks on the issue... The announcement was a significant victory for the Vietnamese, who have had deadly clashes in

past decades with China over some of the islands. Vietnam's strategy has been to try to 'internationalize' the disputes by bringing in other players for multilateral negotiations."

Clearly, Washington is trying to win over ASEAN in preparation for an alternate architectural proposal for 2011, when Jakarta will chair ASEAN, and President Obama will use the meeting to deliver the coup de grace of assuming the leadership of ASEAN.

Unmistakably, in order to preserve American leadership and at the same time to prevent China from taking the leadership in the region, the U.S. will go at any length to sow discord among Asian powers by opening up old wounds and resurrecting old territorial issues. Secretary Clinton has repeatedly promoted the proposition that Asians cannot resolve their differences peacefully and successfully without America's role as the "impartial arbiter" or security guarantor. The Vietnamese who welcomed the Clinton announcement are bewildered at America's sudden benevolence toward them and bitter attack against the Chinese.

No doubt the recent developments in the sinking of the Cheonan, a South Korean corvette, in the Korean peninsula, the subsequent U.S.-South Korean naval exercise in the Yellow Sea and the China-Japan confrontation over the arrest of Chinese fishermen in the Diaoyu-Senkaku area, are clear illustrations of the U.S. strategy of using Cold War allies and new partners to provoke China militarily.

Any potential clash between North and both South Korea and the U.S. could lead to another war in the region, which would involve China. The clear American objective: the U.S. will remain as the paramount power in Asia, while its allies are persuaded to pursue their indigenous interests within global interests under U.S. leadership.

The same purpose can be inferred in the recent Tokyo-Beijing confrontation, Secretary Hilary Clinton had egged on Japan's new foreign minister, Seiji Maehara, to hold the Chi-

nese ship captain, assuring him that "America's treaty obligation to defend Japan from foreign attack would include any moves against the islands where the Chinese Captain had been arrested."

According to an American analyst, "In essence this is what President Obama and Hilary Clinton are saying to America's Asian allies, 'go on take those contested islands from the Chinese, if the Chinese fought back militarily, we will go to war against them.' It is America's treaty obligations to defend Asia against foreign attack." If the aims of American policy are granted, Secretary Clinton's assurance means that henceforth American bullets and nuclear bombs can secure Japan's safety.

Fortunately the Japanese government followed its own appraisal and released the Chinese captain. Unfortunately for the U.S., the Japanese leadership had realized that if they yielded to American egging, they could be fighting America's proxy war against China. They understood that the American security umbrella no longer ensures peace but provokes war. The Japanese leadership saw that the security alliance could lead to the very dangers wrought by the Japanese imperial army during WWII of wasting Japanese lives, cities, and even destroying Japan's social, economic and political fabric.

Economic Cooperation Not Destabilization

Indeed, in East Asia, only Japan has seen in recent history such unusual turnaround of economic fortune under the U.S. global order. In the post-World War II Asian success story, Japanese products in electronics, cameras, cars, and heavy equipment have displaced American goods in the Asian and many European markets.

Japan traversed one of the great speculative stock and property bubbles of all time in the 1980s. It was the first Asian country to challenge the long economic dominance of the West. Then when Japan bashing by American legislators

started, the bubbles exploded in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and the Japanese economy went into an unstoppable degeneration that even gargantuan government budget deficits, zero interest, pump priming, or a discharge of easy money have been unable to reverse.

For a quarter of a century now, Japan is held in low growth and deflation. It appears that in view of worldwide economy downturn, the Japanese are beginning to understand that economic cooperation with an all-Asian community appears to be the most promising route to recovery for Japan.

Some observers believe that in view of the Diaoyu-Senkaku confrontation, "Japan and China now stand at ground zero, and the landscape is bleak, vast nothingness." Yet, trade and economic cooperation between the two countries in the past few years have proven that in foreign relations, there are many levels of engagement.

Tensions, diplomatic confrontations and frustrations over the contested islands in the region had arisen in the past, but the Japanese and Chinese leaders in the interest of preserving peace for development in the area had discussed their differences amicably. Lessons of the past have given Japanese and Chinese wisdom and new insights, and very likely they will let the lessons of history run its course in the future.

The Chinese for their part, throughout the confrontation, used soft power or economic power to talk their way into the release of the captain. There was not the slightest hint of flexing military muscle. What is clear from the latest round of actions is that the U.S. has been stoking tensions between China and the other Asian powers.

Clearly part of the U.S. strategy in the reassertion of its leadership in the Asian region is to de-stabilize the region by restoring the propaganda issues of the Cold War and therefore destabilize its economic development and expansion.

The U.S. uses every opportunity to provoke deeper crisis in Asia to show Beijing that unless it accepts the U.S. offer of junior partnership, the U.S. will vex China with the use of its smart power, a combination of diplomatic, economic and military moves until China sees the American light.

U.S. vs. China Currency

The U.S. also officially charged that China has been manipulating its currency. Yet, the American congress conveniently overlooked that President Reagan is one of the great manipulators of all time. He presided over two of the biggest currency interventions in history: the Plaza agreement, which devalued the dollar in 1985, and the Louvre accord of 1987, which brought this devaluation to an end.

As Dominique Strauss-Kahn, president of the World Bank, noted, "we shouldn't believe that all the imbalances in the economy today would be solved if the value of Yuan was changed."

Time Magazine's Fareed Zakaria wrote: "On Sept. 29, the House of Representatives passed a bill with overwhelming support from both Democrats and Republicans. It would punish China for keeping its currency undervalued by slapping tariffs on Chinese goods. Everyone seems to agree that it's about time. But it isn't. The bill is at best pointless posturing and at worst dangerous demagoguery. It won't solve the problem it seeks to fix. More worrying, it is part of growing anti-Chinese sentiment in the U.S. that misses the real challenge of China's next phase of development."¹¹

The fact is that the rules of global capitalism have changed irrevocably since many American financial institutions collapsed in 2008. As early as 1999, American Nobel Prize winners in economics themselves have declared that "structural problems with the U.S. rather than China's currency were responsible for the current difficulties facing the world's largest economy... and if the U.S. refuses to accept

this, it will find its global leadership slipping away."¹²

Indeed, the *New York Times* reported last October 3, Japan, Brazil and many other countries "have taken measures to devalue their currencies... the fact remains that the rest of the world is beginning to mimic the technique China has perfected: manipulating currencies for national advantage, while resisting political pressure from trading partners."¹³

According to Michael Hudson, former Wall Street Economist and professor at the University of Missouri: "The great question in global finance today is thus how long other nations will continue to succumb as the cumulative costs rise into the financial stratosphere? The world is being forced to choose between financial anarchy and subordination to a new U.S. economic nationalism. This is what is prompting nations to create an alternative financial system altogether."¹⁴

William Holstein, a famous author of *In the Jaws of the Dragon*, noted: "One school wants to believe that Japan is in trouble because it vindicates their ideology of free-markets and other aspects of the Anglo-Saxon form of capitalism that they espouse. Japan has failed because it didn't embrace their views. As a corollary, the only thing that needs to be done to get the American economy back on track is to "fix" the issue of China's currency. Then everything will be fine. (The debate about China's currency is so reminiscent of the debate about the yen.) In the final analysis, we all recognized that driving up the value of the yen did not really "fix" the Japan problem..."

To Holstein, it's not just a question of getting China to fix its currency." America has to realize "that many players in East Asia and South Asia, plus Brazil, have emerged onto the world stage, and that their arrival means the U.S. faces much stronger, more systematic competition than ever before. We must find ways to continue moving up the technology ladder, while easing our dependence on imported energy, im-

proving our export capability and improving the skills of our workforce. This requires us to make our institutions perform better and more cohesively."

In plain language: "America has been squandering money it borrowed from the Chinese. Instead of criticizing China's monetary policy, U.S. President Barack Obama should acknowledge the financial skill being displayed by the new world power and learn a few useful lessons."¹⁵

The U.S. has a long record of thwarting rising challengers, on occasion accepting massive costs and risks to do so. America carried out this course of action in the Korean peninsula, Iran, Vietnam, the Gulf War, and Iraq when it has been the wealthiest industrial center and the nation with the most powerful military establishment in the world. Even so, America's defeat in Vietnam should have imparted the lesson that the strongest nation cannot impose its unjust will on a determined people fighting for independence and against an unjust war.

Unfortunately, such attempts at hegemony have persisted to this day as in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, in the midst of America's economic downturn. As the American media have repeatedly reported, despite the passage of over \$1.5 trillion rescue packages, unemployment remains at 10 percent, and underemployment at 18 percent for over a year now.

Steven Horwitz, an American professor of economics wrote: "The total federal debt is nearly \$13 trillion, \$8.6 trillion of which is held by the public, with the rest held by government entities. Gross domestic product (GDP) is something over \$14 trillion. That ratio of debt to GDP isn't pretty... The CBO estimates that at the end of 2020 publicly held debt will be a staggering \$20.3 trillion – 90 percent of GDP – with total debt being notably higher than that."

The *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, and *Los Angeles Times* reported that the U.S. has 310 million citizens;

239 million are one step back from economic ruin; 77 million Americans are living from paycheck to paycheck; 100 million are wondering how they are going to pay their bills. Worse, several states have declared bankruptcy of their treasury, where state governments have been forced to dismiss 30 percent of their teaching staff, police force, firemen, and city hall employees.

Today, according to a Gallup survey, one out of seven Americans find it difficult to budget their weekly expenditure for food. The U.S. Congressional Budget Office reports that by 2011 gross domestic federal debt will surpass 100 percent of GDP, the highest in U.S. history. The only good news is for the 1 percent Americans who are "rolling around \$1.3 trillion."

It is difficult for Third World leaders to see why democracy and exercise of human rights are such great prizes for their citizenry when 2.3 million Americans are behind bars or 1 out of 100 adult Americans are in jail. The U.S. government has to spend \$5 billion a year for the upkeep of its prisoners.

Soft Power vs. Hard Power

Pepe Escobar, a famous geo-political analyst, compared China's soft power to America's hard power: "China's economy is thirsty, and so it's drinking deeper and planning deeper yet. It craves Iraq's oil and Turkmenistan's natural gas, as well as oil from Kazakhstan. Yet instead of spending more than a trillion dollars on an illegal war in Iraq or setting up military bases all over the Greater Middle East and Central Asia, China used its state oil companies to get some of the energy it needed simply by bidding for it in a perfectly legal Iraqi oil auction... Meanwhile, in the New Great Game in Eurasia, China had the good sense not to send a soldier anywhere or get bogged down in an infinite quagmire in Afghanistan. Instead, the Chinese simply made a direct commercial deal with Turkmenistan and, profiting from that country's dis-

agreements with Moscow, built itself a pipeline which will provide much of the natural gas it needs."

The clear and present danger isn't that America will go to war against China. It is, rather, that America would use enough allies and partners eager to give China problems that could delay its industrial development and thus impede its rise as an Asian power, and the formation of an all-Asian Community. America tries to destabilize China in anyway it can such as creating trouble in Tibet, Xinjiang, and now over the territories in the South China Sea in the hope of making the country ungovernable.

The U.S. continues to accuse China as aggressively posturing. Only a month ago, U.S. Admiral Mike Mullen expressed concern over Chinese defense buildup saying China has made "fairly significant investment" in developing new equipment including satellites, aircraft and anti-ship missiles.

Although the challenge posed by China in security terms to the U.S. is not as deadly as conservative Americans want the rest of the world to believe, it is nonetheless an important cause for American concern. Despite China's yearly increase in defense expenditures to modernize its military establishment, it lags behind U.S. in weaponry development and other metrics of military power by light years.¹⁶

The U.S. military:

- has over 800 facilities or bases in more than 40 countries;
- has 11 aircraft carriers that patrol the world;
- has 190,000 troops in 46 countries;
- controls 70 percent of the world's arms market;
- has 99,295 people connected with U.S. forces in Japan; and
- spends US\$250 billion each year to maintain its global military presence.

U.S. budget deficit of \$1.75 trillion in 2010 does not include \$640 billion for Pentagon's Afghanistan and Iraq oper-

ations. U.S. defense budget of \$708 billion for 2011 is bigger than the combined budget total of the 35 countries that come under it.¹⁷

In comparison China's defense budget for 2011 is close to \$92 billion, an increase of 17 percent from the 2010 \$78 billion. China has no military bases outside its territories, since it opened up to the world. China has no aircraft carriers. China has depended upon the political-diplomatic and economic elements of national power to pursue its foreign policy objectives.

No doubt China has accepted U.S. military primacy in Asia but it will not yield to American use of pressure to mold China in its own image. China has its own view about priorities in a democracy, which is peace and development in order to create harmonious societies.

Perhaps, the most beguiling policy of the Obama administration is that while America's economy is declining, he and the Pentagon chiefs believe that America with large defense expenditure can simultaneously fight several wars and win on all fronts.¹⁸ So far, America has not won the war in Iraq or in Afghanistan,¹⁹ and it might even lose Pakistan as an ally. Paradoxically, as the strongest nation in the world, it cannot stop the drug war in its Mexican borders.²⁰

It appears that President Obama's greatest fear is that history will mark him as the president who presided over the end of the American Empire. His fear is that the 21st century would belong to others: to the calculating dragons of China, the software elephants of India, the busy tigers of Korea and ASEAN, and that America's children might not live as well as their parents. The fear isn't without justification.

The *New York Times* reported: "Polls show that not only are Americans increasingly worried that the U.S. will have a lesser role in the years ahead; they are more and more convinced that China will dominate. Just 27 percent of U.S. voters now think the U.S. will still be the most powerful na-

tion in the world at the end of the 21st century, according to a March Rasmussen poll report. In a Pew poll conducted in April, 41 percent of Americans said China was the world's leading economic power, slightly more than those who named the U.S."²¹

Much of the fear grew out of something more serious – an aging America, its ineffectual institutions, and its decaying infrastructure from roads to bridges, to ports, harbors and airports, the anatomical equivalent of arteries clogging up. Of course the American moment will not allow the Obama leadership the thought that under his watch America's place could be moved to the margins of a new world order.

21st Century is Asia

The reality is, the rise of an all Asian Community is beyond American economic, political or military machination. Nor will a new Obama architecture of an Asia-Pacific Community, if ever it gets established at all, prevail. In Asia, the desideratum is no longer security cooperation or economic cooperation; Asians believe that in the 21st century, the right to a peaceful environment, comfort, material and spiritual well being must be accorded to all Asians.

Conversely, the question of whether China could realistically expect to become paramount in Asia is another matter. No doubt a China that remains engaged with the global economy has the potential to generate more economic and military power than any great power in history. But Beijing to many observers is also "coming of age in heavy strategic traffic."

While America cannot impede the rise of an all-Asian community, neither can China automatically emerge as the leader and driving force in an all Asian Community. China's economic rise has not brought it close to the level of the global power of the United States. In economic terms, China is the world's largest economy after the U.S. Nevertheless,

the idea of an all Asian Community requires more than economic cooperation.

Most Asian leaders are still haunted, troubled, and obsessed by historical animosities such as territorial boundaries and ideological divergence which had led to the rise of misunderstanding, mistrusts, conflicts and wars. This explains why despite repeated attempts at unification by both the North and South Korean leaders they have not united. Indeed the success story of the EU, which has been the subject of university seminars, forums on new regional architectures, should have led China, Japan, India, and South Korea to establish a common market or sign an FTA.

These countries, until now, still fly into a rage over disputed territories.

Rhetorically, Asian leaders see clearly the advantages of such an all Asia FTA. But it appears that they are deterred by long memories of past conflicts or even imagined betrayals. When China and India fought over Aksai Chin in 1962, it took them 25 years to renew their official relationship.

To spite China and please the Americans, Japanese prime ministers visited the Yasukuni shrine and thus led the Chinese people to renew the call for Japan to apologize for the wartime atrocities the Japanese imperial army inflicted on the Chinese people. Japan and Korea fight over the territories in the East Sea and even the nomenclature of the sea. Koreans want the Japanese to compensate for sexual enslavement of Korean women by the Japanese occupation forces in Korea. Japan is still contesting Russian claim to the Kuril Islands. Many Southeast Asian countries have conflicting claims with China, Vietnam, and Taiwan over the territories and waters in the South China Sea. India and Pakistan are still fighting over Kashmir and Jammu.

In the realm of commerce, Asian countries have been mainly economic competitors. The more advanced economies compete head to head in the same export industries

such as Japan and Korea, while these same economies are facing new competition from up-and-coming emerging nations China and India that are rapidly climbing up the economic ladder.

Indeed, the growing economic power of China, has led the West to exploit the long memories in Asia, which has opened up old wounds, and past wrongs, and have led to the emergence of new tensions, even new confrontations. Distrust have made it possible for the U.S. to merely raise the specter of Chinese or Japanese leadership in the region to alarm and create unease among the other emerging Asian powers. Unfortunately, societies that cannot leave their past or make peace with former rivals cannot also move on to face new challenges. By tradition those who do not look back cannot look forward. But those who get caught in the past cannot craft new roles for themselves in a fast changing world.

Most trying of all is the obstinate unwillingness of many Asians to undergo considerable sacrifices at home in order to support official position with their neighbors, despite all the pronouncements that they have learned the lessons of history well. Contemporary Asian leaders gloss over this side of the Asian dilemma. Also overlooked are the more hopeful developments that under conditions of peace, the dynamics of social, economic, and political change have been proven viable in most Asian societies.

Conclusion

The time of reckoning has come for Asians. Asian societies and politics have reached the juncture where the needs for cooperation are so great that the issues of poverty and economic development cannot be achieved readily without cooperation. No doubt the perception of Asians today are now sharper, they have a deeper understanding of the colonial tactics of divide and rule, as well as economic competi-

tion under a capitalist economic order. There is not a student, housewife, politician, or leader, who cannot list down their country's economic difficulties, ranging from hunger, poverty, unemployment, underemployment to the lack of shelter, educational opportunities, and health services to fight all sorts of diseases and ailments. And for which the peoples of Asia have paid the price of death and destruction. Rather than being given a "breathing space," they have been held back and even prevented from shaping their own destinies.

Asians have learned the lessons of Western oppression and risen above retribution or settling of scores. But Asians have not learned to live with the triumphs, danger and discomfort, the inevitable complement of new strength and responsibility.

The question therefore arises on which road will Asia take – economic development or political distrust? Will Asians let go of political differences, as the founding members of the EU did in order to achieve a high degree of integration that brings great mutual economic benefits? Or will they hold on to old simmering tensions, the substance of Western divide and rule, and embark on new political contests created by the West that degenerate into conflicts that will spoil recent economic gains? It is no crime to be poor when poverty is the common condition; it is immoral when you belong to a remnant from which most of mankind has been able to liberate themselves. The hour of choice has arrived, with all the forewarnings and lessons of the past. Let us hope that the choice will not lead once more to the tragedies of the past or let the unhappy past obtrude into the new vision of an all Asian Community.

Endnotes

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