

**THE NORTH PACIFIC'S BERLIN WALL--
HINDRANCES TO REGIONAL COOPERATION**

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Note:

1. This paper was contributed to *NIRA Policy Research*, Vol.17, No.1, 2004.
2. The views expressed in this paper represent the personal opinions of the author do not necessarily reflect NIRA's position.

Long before the Berlin Wall was erected, a major barrier was built in Asia--the Great Wall of China, designed to keep out "barbarians" from the North. In the long run, neither of these walls served their purpose effectively. Diverse intruders entered China, the most powerful coming from the West by sea. East Germans had ample opportunity to learn about developments in more open societies, including West Germany, without having to cross their wall.

Today, however, there are more formidable walls in the North Pacific of a different type. Negative attitudes derivative from recent history continue to plague Chinese-Japanese relations as well as those between the Koreas and Japan. Territorial or divided state issues, the key ones products of World War II, provide additional barriers. Two powerful illustrations are North-South Korea and China-Taiwan. The DMZ symbolizes a current wall, increasingly crossed but far from being dismantled. Similarly, the Taiwan Straits is freely traversed by many, but for Chinese and Taiwanese, this body of water represents a boundary reflecting the political impasse that currently exists.

It should be noted immediately, however, that in the case of Korea, the crisis involving North Korea's nuclear program has evoked cooperation among others as well as division. The six party talks, whatever their ultimate outcome, are testimony to the efforts of the concerned nations to pursue dialogue as an alternative to conflict.

Korea could have remained unified at the end of World War II, but it would have been entirely under the influence of the Soviet Union. Russia, entering the Pacific War in its final days, moved swiftly toward the Korean peninsula. The nearest U.S. forces were on Okinawa. Because Russia and the U.S. were wartime allies, however, Moscow agreed to share the occupation of Korea with the Americans.

The subsequent complex efforts between 1945 and 1948 to reunify Korea failed and two separate states came into existence. Shortly thereafter, the Korean War broke out when the North under Kim Il-song attacked the South, having received Stalin's approval. Subsequently, first the United States, then China, were involved. Huge casualties and massive destruction ensued, but total war between the two major combatants was averted. However, a new U.S. policy toward Taiwan resulted, kindling a second major issue for the future.

At root, the present Korean crisis stems from a combination of fear and failure on the part of the North. Its fear of the United States, particularly in the aftermath of the Iraq war, seems genuine. It is possible that the DPRK has decided that nuclear weapons represent its best defense. Equally important, however, is the fact that given the economic failure of the North, it has only one bargaining card to bring to the negotiation table, namely, threat. It has now escalated threat close to the summit, indicating that it is prepared to advance both its missile and nuclear programs unless its conditions are met.

Those conditions, addressed principally to the United States, are for a non-aggression treaty and economic assistance in a variety of ways. For its part, the United States insists that the North must completely, verifiably, and irreversibly abandon its nuclear program, after which augmented assistance can be discussed. Clearly, the key issues are verification and the respective timing of the North's actions and those of the United States. These issues will test not only the flexibility of the two principal parties, but also of the other members of the six party dialogue. Thus, talks must be continuous among the five outside parties as well as between them and the North. China having greatest leverage on the DPRK because of being the chief external source of food and energy for Pyongyang, is in an especially critical position. In the long run, however, the role of the ROK is vitally important

since its interaction with the North, if positive on balance, holds economic promise given its proximity, cultural ties, and stage of development. Thus, the creation of a special economic zone centering upon Kaesong, designed to attract South Korean enterprises, seems promising.

The Korean issue represents the most immediate challenge to peace and security in the region. What are the future prospects? Since the variables are many, predictions are hazardous. One possibility, often predicted, is the collapse of the North due to deepening economic problems and emerging political divisions. While collapse cannot be ruled out, it does not seem probable at this time. Economic conditions are deplorable, but they are not growing worse at present, and external assistance continues. While significant changes recently took place in key political positions, with a younger generation replacing certain veterans of the past, there is no indication of a cleavage between Kim Jong-il and the military, his bastion of support. There have been no high level defections recently, and while the number of refugees has shown some increase, economic hardship, not political dissidence is the key factor.

Only a policy of stronger and universally applied economic sanctions could increase the chances of collapse, and while some Americans favor such a course, seeking a change of regime, such a policy is not supported by either China or South Korea. For China, the task of handling a huge flow of refugees and adjusting to the loss of a buffer state would be formidable. For South Korea, the costs involved in rehabilitating the North, where living standards are barely one-tenth those in the ROK, would be massive. Moreover, the risks in absorbing some 22 million people who have only known an hard authoritarian system would put major strains on the South's still fragile democracy.

Is another Korean war a prospect? Despite the North's harsh rhetoric and

repeated threats, it seems unlikely that DPRK leaders would pursue a course leading to suicide. While the North could do great damage to the South at the outset, in the end it would be pulverized by American and South Korean military power. As for a conflict initiated by the U.S., Washington has repeatedly asserted that it has no plans for military action. Given its current involvements in the Middle East, and more important, the views of its Northeast Asian allies and major powers, unilateral action seems highly unlikely.

Thus, despite its difficulties and frustrations, the dialogue route seems the most logical course. If some form of bilateral or multilateral assurance can be given to the DPRK that military action will not be taken assuming it does not use force, but coupled with the North's acceptance of a completely verifiable abandonment of its WMD programs, the basis for an evolutionary course for the North involving diverse forms of external assistance and cooperation among the concerned nations will have been established.

Almost certainly, the course just sketched will not be easily achieved. Retreats as well as advances are likely, and much will depend upon the attitudes and policies of the DPRK. It is also critical for the five concerned nations to work together, with maximum policy coordination. A lengthy impasse, with the North pushing ahead with its WMD programs, would pose grave problems and undoubtedly induce serious debate as to the required response, both in the United States and elsewhere. Yet for the present, the focus must be upon achieving a pragmatic resolution of the key issues, with compromises on certain fronts accepted.

If the Korean situation requires change, the Taiwan issue for the present is best served by a preservation of the status quo. In the near future, there is no possibility of the peaceful political union of China and Taiwan, given the position

of the two governments and the trends with respect to public opinion, especially in Taiwan. Yet economic integration is rapidly taking place, along with a progressive political shift in China from hard authoritarianism to authoritarian pluralism, permitting a wider range of political expression.

Recently, convinced that time is on its side, China has shifted from an emphasis upon threat to efforts to attract the people of Taiwan by encouraging dialogue and cultural interaction. However, it continues to strengthen its military forces in the vicinity of the Taiwan Straits. Moreover, in the recent past, Chen Shui-bian, head of the Taiwan government, has further antagonized Beijing by appealing to Taiwan nationalism through a series of proposals including that of amending the Taiwan constitution.

The position of the United States with respect to Taiwan is one of critical importance. U.S. policy has remained essentially unchanged since first enunciated more than two decades ago. The United States recognizes one China (undefined), opposes any use of force to resolve the issue and also any Taiwanese declaration of independence, supporting a peaceful resolution that has the support of the Taiwan people. It provides Taiwan with the military means judged necessary to defend itself, with the equipment sold in recent times being restricted but progressively more modern. From time to time, moreover, Washington has given Taipei advice, most recently, privately urging that the idea of constitutional revision be abandoned.

The Taiwan issue will continue to pose complexities for the China-U.S. relationship. Beijing constantly refers to it as the central issue confronting the two powers. It seems unlikely, however, that tensions will mount to the point of conflict. The current fourth generation of Chinese leaders are displaying a strong proclivity toward putting the first priority on domestic issues, with the pledge to better the

livelihood of the Chinese people. Foreign policy is tailored to reducing tension in the region and cooperation both bilaterally and with a variety of multilateral bodies. Nonetheless, the future is hinged to domestic developments both in China and in Taiwan. Possibly, at some point in the future, a step could be taken toward federation or confederation, with the issue of sovereignty set aside for future resolution. Such action, however, is not feasible at this time. Hence, a combination of patience and moderation is required.

Other territorial issues exist, and the South Kurils or Northern Territories controversy between Japan and Russia is the most significant. This issue has precluded a formal peace treaty between the two nations ending World War II. No resolution acceptable to both parties is in sight, given the strong nationalist sentiments. However, this controversy does not constitute a serious threat to peace. Indeed, in the period ahead, the economic integration of Northeast Asia is likely to advance rapidly, with one of its aspects being the oil and gas reserves of the Russian Far East. This region will become a Natural Economic Territory (NET) derived from the reciprocal assets and needs of the Russian Far East, Japan, the Korean peninsula, and Northeast China. While such a development will be conducive to the advance of cooperation in various ways, one should not ignore the rise of economic contention that is accompanying the process of globalization. The failure of the WTO Cancun meeting is a graphic illustration of rising problems. Further, the outbreak of serious economic controversies between the United States and China relating to the huge U.S. trade deficit, agricultural protectionism, and the fragility of legal protection are further evidence of the fact that the economic path ahead will not be smooth.

Meanwhile, as noted earlier, Northeast Asia continues to harbor suspicions and animosities derivative from the past. Japanese leaders' visits to

Yasukuni Shrine, controversial textbooks, and most importantly, Japan's expanded military program have evoked strong criticisms from China and the two Koreas. Gradually, cooperation on certain issues is developing, but it may take a generational change and successful multilateralism to improve the political atmosphere significantly.

On another front, China's rapid rise in both economic and strategic power has opened up concerns by its neighbors, north and south. With ideology having declined in recent years, nationalism has become the chief means of inducing public unity and allegiance. Could China, seemingly destined to become East Asia's foremost power in the decades ahead, revert to its former "Middle Kingdom" psychology and seek to implant itself throughout the region, first economically, then strategically? Or will it remain committed to its pledge of abiding by the five principles of peaceful coexistence? Rising concern, albeit, largely subdued, has manifested itself from Southeast Asia to the Russian Far East.

Moreover, one should not ignore the concerns being raised about the United States, the world's sole superpower at present.

With China frequently the most vocal, but with others sometimes silently agreeing, the U.S. is charged with unilateralism, disregard of such international bodies as the UN, and interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states. In contrast to its policies in the Middle East, however, in Northeast Asia, the United States has stressed multilateral approaches to most key issues and dialogue rather than conflict. Indeed, in this region, U.S. policy rests upon two foundations at present, a balance of power and a concert of powers. The U.S. security alliances with Japan, South Korea, and certain Southeast Asian nations remain strong, albeit, with changes in force and base disposition underway due to the revolution in military affairs (RMA). Moreover, strategic cooperation with Russia has improved and

even with China, military exchanges have taken place. Nevertheless, many observers sense that it is the future uncertainties relating to Chinese foreign policy that serve as the chief reason for U.S. balance of power policies. At the same time, however, the U.S. has actively promoted a variety of coalitions composed of states having a common interest in the resolution of a specific issue or set of issues. Witness the three party and four party dialogues (the U.S., Japan, and the ROK with China in the latter group), as well as the current six party talks. More formal bodies such as ARF are also evidence of the U.S. commitment.

Despite the growth of multilateral undertakings, formal and informal, the North Pacific, and in broader terms, East Asia, remain very far from achieving the capacity for policy- making achieved in West Europe. This is precluded by the array of differences in culture, political institutions, and stage of economic development. There are new issues, however, so urgent and so demanding of regional cooperation that a new era of closer interaction may be on the horizon.

Perhaps the most critical issues are those that have been broadly labelled "human security." Today, resource availability and use, pollution, and demographic trends are of mounting concern. Water shortage is an acute problem in parts of China and in the Russian Far East among other regions. The availability of other resources such as timber and sea products has also become a rising problem. Meanwhile, pollution is a health hazard not only in many of East Asia's major urban areas but in rural sectors as well. The rapid aging of societies like Japan represents another strain on the social order. These are problems where common interests generally outweigh differences, hence, where seeking remedial actions involving greater cooperation is eminently feasible.

Meanwhile, the issue of terrorism in its various forms now poses a formidable problem and while Northeast Asia has been minimally affected up to

date, a sense of grievance and the union of extremist commitments with the ever easier availability of formidable weapons exempts no state or region from this challenge. Fortunately, cooperation on this problem is advancing, but in the final analysis, stringent security measures alone will not suffice. Combatting extremism must be coupled with ameliorating legitimate social, economic and political grievances.

There are two other current factors promoting tension. One, noted earlier, is the problem of failing and faltering states, with the resultant consequences impacting neighbors and others. Again, the North Pacific as a region has recently been affected by this occurrence only in the case of North Korea. However, in Southeast Asia, the problem is more common with Myanmar a prominent example, but with threats emanating from Cambodia and even Indonesia. The question of external involvement inevitably arises if the crisis is acute or lengthy. Perhaps in recent times, Africa has depicted the problem in its most acute form. If in protracted domestic conflict, hundreds of thousands of people are slaughtered or driven into exile as refugees, should so-called "humanitarian intervention" take place and if so under what conditions and with what stipulations? Fortunately, East Asia does not seem likely to present the problem in its most acute form, but as North Korea and Myanmar illustrate, the issue of intervention in some form such as via economic sanctions is clearly present.

Finally, a tremendously complex set of issues is emerging connected with the radical changes taking place in military technology and strategy---the so-called revolution in military affairs (RMA). Even as the United States and Russia are struggling to reduce the stockpiles of traditional nuclear weapons, and efforts are being made to enforce and if possible, broaden the Non-Proliferation Treaty, new weapons of mass destruction, some smaller and more easily

transported, along with new technological developments relating to missiles, are en route. Thus, more complex security issues are emerging together with the blurring of the existing distinctions between nuclear and non-nuclear states.

These are the issues that a 21st Century world must face. The North Pacific represents a critical region testing our capacity for progress in dealing with the challenges to peace and security, domestic and international. It is here that the world's four major powers interact closely. It is here that the current economic and political revolution is unfolding most rapidly, with global implications. New attitudes and institutions are thus required, and the generation now coming to maturity must meet these challenges.