AN AGE OF UNCERTAINTY: BUILDING A POST-COLD WAR U.S. SECURITY STRATEGY FOR EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

Alexander A. Sergounin

The contours of the future U.S. security policy in the Asia-Pacific is a vexed question both in research literature and among American elites. There is no conformity either in threat perceptions or concrete methods of security policy. However, the region is recognized by all competitive groups as a critical area for U.S. national interests presently and in the foreseeable future. This article explores the major security challenges that America faces in the region; including China-Taiwan and other local conflicts, conventional arms race and nuclear proliferation, generational transition and nontraditional threats. The article reviews Clinton administration policy in the region and explains the nature of the U.S. domestic debate on the Asia-Pacific.

It is commonplace to argue that the international relations system is at a crossroads. The end of the cold war and the collapse of socialism have initiated profound changes in the world. However, the significant shifts that are now reshaping the world pose new challenges to strategic planners. Bipolar structure was replaced by a less stable multipolar structure with new centers of power (Japan and China in Far East Asia). The emphasis of world politics and of U.S. security strategy has shifted from U.S.-Soviet global competition to regional issues. The Asia-Pacific exemplifies such a region of paramount interest and increasing significance for the United States in the post-cold war era.

This research has four purposes: First, to examine U.S. security interests in Far East Asia; second, to identify present and future challenges to American security in the region; third, to review recent American policy in East and Southeast Asia; and finally, to depict U.S. national debates on regional security issues.

U.S. NATIONAL INTERESTS IN THE REGION

First of all, Asia and the Pacific hold tremendous economic importance for the United States and its allies. According to Winston Lord, assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, "Asia is the key to the eco-

Alexander A. Sergounin is a professor of political science and head of the Department of Political Science at the University of Nizhny Novgorod, Russia.
nomic health of the United States and to the everyday lives of Americans. It is the most lucrative terrain for American jobs and exports.\textsuperscript{1}

The Asia-Pacific region is the world’s largest consumer market, America’s biggest export market, and home to approximately $65 billion in U.S. direct investment. Five of America’s top ten overseas trading partners are Asian states. In 1993 U.S. trade with the Asia-Pacific region totaled over $374 billion and accounted for 2.8 million American jobs.\textsuperscript{2}

Moreover, Asia is at the forefront of a global revolution in information and communication technologies, with important implications for U.S. competitiveness and American defense technologies.\textsuperscript{3} U.S. exports to every economy of seventeen members of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation process (APEC) grew by at least 50 percent in the five years from 1987 to 1992. In 1992, U.S. trans-Pacific trade exceeded U.S. trans-Atlantic trade by 50 percent and U.S. exports within APEC now account for almost 60 percent of U.S. merchandise exports.\textsuperscript{4}

Far East Asia represents an extremely important market for U.S. military products. In 1993 the United States recorded more than $10 billion of foreign military sales to the countries of the region.\textsuperscript{5} It is interesting that in 1960 virtually all those purchasers of that $10 billion were recipients of grant military assistance from the United States.

The Far East also holds enormous strategic significance. It remains an area of immense concentration of military power, including many of the largest armies in the world. It is home to five of America’s treaty allies. American forces, 100,000 strong, support vital U.S. national interests and treaty commitments there.

American leadership regards East Asian alliances as critical to the success of U.S. strategy in the post-cold war era. The United States has a stake in maintaining the alliance structure as a foundation of regional stability and a channel for U.S. influence. Building more mature security relationships with American allies in the Pacific will promote U.S. long-range interests.

At the same time, the United States plays a unique role in the region. The United States has served as the regional balancer since World War II. The United States can simultaneously maintain good relations with Japan, Russia, China, South Korea, and all of the states of Southeast Asia. To U.S. leaders’ mind, no other power can assume that role. Charles W. Freeman, assistant secretary of defense for international affairs, notes, “As the balance of power adjusts following the demise of the Soviet Union, how the United States approaches East Asian security issues will in large measure determine whether challenges to regional security are successfully met.”\textsuperscript{6}

The strategic importance of the region is growing also in connection with threats to American security that are periodically emerging on the horizon—North Korea’s potential development of nuclear weapons, tensions on the