

Ensuring East Asia security

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Abstract (Document Summary)

History shows that, until the end of the Cold War, East Asia's security situation was determined by the relations between the major powers, and that East Asia's stability was maintained by the changing balance between those powers.

The practice of these policies and attitudes has resulted in three basic forms of the post-Cold War security mechanism for East Asia, namely, hegemony, balance of power and co-operative security.

First, co-operation between the powers in the post-Cold War period has been increasingly enhanced, and a relationship based on comprehension and co-existence has gradually been forged between them. Nearly all the powers are faced with common or similar security threats within or beyond East Asia. Meanwhile, an inter-dependent relationship has been formed in the process of economic globalization, though it is usually a kind of unequal interdependence.

Full Text (905 words)

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In terms of post-Cold War conditions, there exist some factors of instability and the possibility of turmoil or even military conflict in East Asia.

Compared with post-Cold War Europe, East Asia has two problems that deserve our attention.

First, there is nearly no traditional security threat in Europe. But in East Asia the problems of traditional and non-traditional security are equally serious.

In terms of traditional security, the Korean Peninsula and territorial disputes between some East Asian nations are all potential flashpoints, for which we foresee no possibility of a fundamental solution in the near future.

The existence of traditional security problems is the key reason for the trend toward strengthening traditional military alliances in the post-Cold War era.

Moreover, there still exists the struggle between different social systems as, with the exception of Cuba, all the existing socialist countries are in East Asia.

The United States is not willing to fundamentally abandon its Cold War policy towards East Asia,

which often contributes to intensifying regional tensions.

The growth of non-traditional security problems, including terrorism, separatism, unrest or conflicts aroused by racial confrontation, trans-border criminals and environmental issues, are also obvious. The severe threat to the regional stability by such non-traditional security problems has become the driving force of promoting security co-operation among the concerned countries.

Second, Europe has some security mechanisms and organizations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which can still effectively solve the continent's security issues. East Asia does not have similar security mechanisms and systems. The United States, which has great influence in this region, has never dominated the regional security affairs as it has in Europe.

The US-Japan alliance, as a tool to contain the Soviet Union and China during the Cold War, is fundamentally different from NATO.

Unlike NATO, the US-Japan alliance sometimes plays a role in destroying the regional stability due to its Cold War mentality.

No European countries have been as willing as Japan to rely so heavily on an alliance with the United States for protection. But it was Japan that brought unforgettable suffering and disaster to this region during World War II, and the country's steadfast refusal to honestly face up to that history is the main reason it has never won the trust of its Asian neighbours.

The complexity of East Asia's security situation has mirrored some basic features of the development in this region, which on one side indicates the Cold War security concept and structure would remain, and on the other, fuelled by regional economic integration, bodes well for the establishment of a new security situation and structure to maintain the basic stability of the whole region.

History shows that, until the end of the Cold War, East Asia's security situation was determined by the relations between the major powers, and that East Asia's stability was maintained by the changing balance between those powers.

The relations between the major powers continue to play a pivotal role, but with new features.

Towards East Asia the concerned powers have attitudes or policies that are mutually influential or conflicting.

For example, the United States continues to pursue unipolar domination or hegemony in East Asia. But China, Russia, and even Japan advocate directly or indirectly multipolarization. The United States attempts to establish a security system based on military alliances. Nevertheless, some nations of this region advocate the formation of a security system based on co-operative strategy.

The practice of these policies and attitudes has resulted in three basic forms of the post-Cold War

security mechanism for East Asia, namely, hegemony, balance of power and co-operative security.

Since all three originated from the need of their respective domestic politics and national strategy and are viewed as a reaction towards the complicated security environment of East Asia, they are all vital and will co-exist and co-develop in this region for a long time.

Of the three, the balance of power currently plays the major role in maintaining the basic stability of East Asia, but in the long run co-operative security will be increased and become the dominant feature of the region's security system. This also means the impact of US hegemony will decline.

First, co-operation between the powers in the post-Cold War period has been increasingly enhanced, and a relationship based on comprehension and co-existence has gradually been forged between them. Nearly all the powers are faced with common or similar security threats within or beyond East Asia. Meanwhile, an inter-dependent relationship has been formed in the process of economic globalization, though it is usually a kind of unequal interdependence.

This development has led to the strengthening of co-operation and decreasing hostility between the major powers, of which the development of the Sino-US relationship is a typical example.

Second, due to the increasingly serious non-traditional security threat, the security issues of East Asia can only be solved by means of co-operation.

No country can effectively cope with problems such as terrorism, regional disturbance, smuggling and drug dealing by merely relying on its own power or traditional military alliances. With the deepening of regional economic integration, no unilateral policy will work, which has been proved by the developments of the international relations in East Asia in recent years, in particular since the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001.

It is therefore a reasonable and desirable option for East Asia to set up a security system with co-operative security as its main objective.