



Statement before the House Committee on International Relations

“Asia’s Challenges: Past and Future”

A Statement by

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Asia is experiencing a period of dramatic tumult and change and the United States now confronts an extraordinarily dynamic northeast Asian region with a rising China; a resurgent Japan; an increasingly adventurous North Korea and alienated Republic of Korea; and a more Pacifically focused (and often unhelpful) Russia. Competition for petroleum, power, prestige have created an increasingly volatile political climate with the United States – arguably the most important piece of Asia's strategic jigsaw – essentially preoccupied away from the region at a time of enormous consequence.

After a protracted period of uncertainty, concerning the nature of the foreign policy challenges that are likely to confront the nation over the course of first half of the 21st Century, twin challenges are finally coming into sharper relief. For the next generation, Americans will be confronted by two overriding challenges in the conduct of American foreign policy: how to more effectively wage a long, twilight struggle against violent Islamic fundamentalists and at the same time cope with the rise to great power status of China. Each task, taken on its own, would be daunting and consuming, but coming concurrently as they inevitably will. These challenges are likely to be close to overwhelming for a government apparatus and national mindset better suited to single minded efforts.

This is the first time in the nation's history that foreign policymakers have had to cope with two such vexing and dissimilar challenges simultaneously. While it is true that during World War II we fought on two fronts in the Atlantic and Pacific against two very different foes – Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan – the military power employed to defeat the Axis was largely fungible and the tactics employed on each front were similar, adjusting for the inevitable variations of geography and terrain. Then, during the Cold War, the undeniable shaping experience of this generation of foreign policy and national security practitioners, the United States faced one organizing foreign policy challenge coming from the Soviet Union. This era is now undeniably over, as the U.S. confronts two extremely varied sets of demands, one driven by stateless Jihadist warriors and the other by a rising commercial, political, and military giant in the East.

Ever since the galvanizing attacks of 9/11, the United States has in turn attacked (literally) the problem of violent Jihadism, primarily through the application of military power in Afghanistan and Iraq (the latter now inextricably linked to the terror matrix, largely as a consequence of American actions). The mostly unanticipated demands of the

martial campaigns in the Middle East have had a corollary consequence beyond simply bogging down in unforgiving urban battlefields. The United States has been almost inevitably preoccupied away from the rapidly changing strategic landscape of Asia at a time when China is making enormous strides in its military modernization, commercial conquests, diplomatic inroads, and application of soft power. Rarely in history has a rising power gained such prominence in the international system, largely as a consequence of the actions of – and at the expense of – the dominant power, in this case the United States. Current American talking points continue to stress the need to “manage” China’s emergence as a dominant power, but it is perhaps more apt to describe China as a country that is increasingly attempting to manage American perceptions and actions while China seeks to consolidate its new found gains globally.

In the midst of this American preoccupation away from Asia, the ghosts of Asia's past are now threatening to imperil the region's promising future – a future that holds considerable consequences for western, and particularly U.S., economic and security interests in the region.

Over the past year, a series of incidents between Japan and China have sent relations between the powers plummeting. Among other developments, bitterness has been fuelled by the Japanese curtailment of bilateral assistance; repeated trips by senior Japanese politicians to Yasukuni Shrine to honor Japan's war-dead; the condoning, if not orchestration, by Beijing of public demonstrations against Japan; Japan's production of textbooks that gloss over burdensome historical facts; and greater military vigilance on both sides. All point to prospects for an even more serious rift between Tokyo and Beijing. The hope is that a new Japanese Prime Minister, coupled with a suddenly more engaging and less publicly critical China, will lead to a lessening of tensions and even a rapprochement between Tokyo and Beijing. Perhaps a newly installed Prime Minister Abe, in a bit of Asian theater, may decide to make his first overseas visit to China; a Japanese version of Nixon to China. But there is a very real worry that conversely, through a number of anticipated or inadvertent steps, China and Japan could see their relations worsen suddenly in the months ahead.

This deterioration of relations could pave a treacherous path for the U.S. in the region. If trade and investment between these two leading economies and U.S. trading partners were disrupted, Asian economic growth would be undermined and the ripple effect would certainly be felt in the U.S. On the security front, Sino-Japanese tensions that could escalate into real conflict – perhaps over the tiny but strategically placed Senkaku-Diaoyutai islands – would put the US in a delicate position between its closest ally and the region's other big power. While some suggest that the depth of economic ties will help curb a crisis, there is enough volatility at the political level to suggest that an unintended rupture is indeed possible.

It is therefore necessary, if not urgent, for Washington to work more actively towards rapprochement and better co-operation between the three dominant states of the Asia-Pacific region: China, Japan and the U.S. The U.S. has generally been content to conduct

the lion's share of diplomacy at the bilateral level in Asia or stand by and watch the proliferation of the “Asia-only” gatherings in the region that ignore or exclude us.

Indeed, the United States has been content to work towards a very strong U.S.-Japan relationship and a quite durable Sino-American interaction simultaneously while generally accepting, without comment or involvement, a badly deteriorating Sino-Japanese relationship. This ultimately cannot be in the larger strategic interests of the U.S., and efforts should be taken foster improved ties between Japan and China.

Ultimately, it is remarkable how little strategic interaction there is between Tokyo and Beijing. Japan and China are especially furtive about exposing themselves in any high-stakes diplomacy involving the U.S. and the other power, and there is little momentum in Washington to extend the reach of its relationships in Asia beyond the bilateral level. But it is the U.S. that should augment its current strategy with a trilateral component. As a first step, the U.S. should call for a high-level meeting between Washington, Tokyo and Beijing. Such a trilateral meeting could be an important part of an emerging Asian diplomatic mosaic of interconnecting and overlapping institutions that if nothing else, creates ample opportunity for dialogue.

Critics of the trilateral idea warn that the U.S. should be mindful about creating a regional architecture that alienates other neighbors (particularly South Korea in this case), and must avoid giving China a forum that could enhance its regional prestige. This overlooks the primary point: it is in America's national security interest to ensure, and play a proactive role in, positive Sino-Japanese relations.

The U.S. has a clear interest in Japan being reconciled more honestly with its past, not as a favor to China but in recognition that latent anxiety toward Tokyo runs deep in some quarters of Asia. The issue of remembering and respecting Japan's war sacrifices is an inordinately complex issue that roils Japan's domestic politics and confounds her pundits, but it also the case that the Yasakuni issue has led to Japan losing some altitude and airspeed in the advancement of their important diplomatic work around Asia. The truth is, with the US engaged largely elsewhere, America needs Japan to be all that it can be in multilateral institutions and diplomatic gatherings to help augment the pursuit of our shared interests and values.

At the same time, the U.S. need not worry that trilateral initiatives would give China too much clout in Asia. While America has been focusing on regions such as Afghanistan and Iraq, China has been busy establishing itself as the next great power on the world scene. Beijing does not need U.S. help to enhance its regional stature; it is doing this on its own. The question, therefore, is not whether China will be a great power, but how the U.S. will help influence the direction that China takes in its new role. A U.S.-Sino- Japan strategic summit could go a long way toward promoting a co-operative, constructive China, rather than a challenging one.

The U.S., China and Japan have many mutual interests, including: a growing need for secure energy supplies; a common front in the war on terror; a goal of a nuclear-free

Korean peninsula; a desire to solve territorial disputes peacefully; an interest in seeing Asian economic growth and prosperity continue; and an overriding need to reassure the other states of Asia that the enormous Asia-Pacific region is big enough for Japan, China and the U.S. to coexist and prosper. Helping to define and shape the rules of the road for the Pacific century is a noble and important effort and one in which the U.S. should take the lead. Now is the time for the U.S. to get off the sidelines of big power diplomacy in Asia and bring the big three together.