

East Asia Security Framework

In the Perspective of China - Japan - United States Trilateral Relationships



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IN THE AGE of globalization and especially regional integration particularly in developed areas, East Asia is a unique architecture in which rare formal treaty organizations or unions exist between countries involved. The only formal collaborate effort is United States – Japan alliance formed after World War II, while security and stability in East Asia is maintained mainly by each bilateral and a few ad hoc multilateral engagements.

This essay will discuss and analyze this unique region from the perspective of three major powers present, United States, Japan and China, with ample historical and contemporary focus. My work will start from the formation, evolution of U.S.-Japan alliance and its policy standing and shift toward China, to China's reaction toward the alliance and larger geopolitical landscape after Cold War, which will lead to the conclusion analysis of the most uncertain factor in this triangle and East Asia region, CCP.

Part One U.S.-Japan Alliance's Liberal Deterrence Toward China

AFTER JAPAN WAS defeated in 1945 U.S. and war time western allies occupied the country and undertook drastic and complete democratic reform, while trailed most war criminals and established modern constitutional monarchy polity and a bicameral system. In 1946 election women were first fully allowed to participate and Japanese society was democratized and liberalized swiftly. In 1953, saw little war sentiment left and a growing democracy emerging, U.S. withdrew troops from Mainland Japan. Before Americans left, both of the countries signed *Security Treaty between Japan and the United States of America* (San Francisco Treaty) in 1951 which granted

continued sole U.S. military presence after Allied Occupation ends. Subsequently in 1960, formal military alliance was formed when *Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between Japan and The United States of America* (Washington Treaty) was signed in Washington D.C., under which besides reassuring “the United States of America is granted the use by its land, air and naval forces of facilities and areas in Japan”ⁱ, “Each Party recognizes that an armed attack against either Party.....would be dangerous.....that it would act to meet the common danger”ⁱⁱ. Obviously by military capacity and Japan’s constitutional restraints on Self-Defense Forces’ (SDF) overseas operations, the alliance is mainly to protect Japan and most importantly, retain Japan as a powerful U.S. military ally in Far East. Washington Treaty subjected to renewal in each country every ten years and is to date the only formal treaty framework in East Asia.

The Alliance’s China policy changed from time to time and experienced dramatic shift after Cold War. After relationship normalization and establishment of diplomatic relationships in 1970s, both U.S. and Japan regarded China as a deterrence forces against Soviet’s Asian expansion thus cooperated, though somewhat with great limitations, on security issues. In the 80s after China began to reform and open up, both U.S. and Japan invited China to observe military exercise, increased military officer visits while U.S. even occasionally sold China defensive weapons and shared intelligences. China also welcomed these initiatives, as in the initial reform era China badly in need of foreign investment and cooperation while it also faced with the common threat, Soviet Union; despite the threat itself by then was declining.

After communism collapsed China and U.S.-Japan military alliance lost their common enemy, meanwhile China’s clout in on spectacular rise since 90s, both economically and in managing international affairs. All these newly emerged elements shaped the Alliance’s China policy until nowadays, as what Chikako Kawakatsu Ueki of Waseda University called “liberal deterrence”, a hedging strategy, diplomatically speaking, including both polices of cooperation and completion. According to Kawakatsu Ueki,

“deterrence, economic interdependence and security interdependence” are three simultaneous actions of the Alliance’s liberal deterrence of China, which means a balance of hard and soft policies.ⁱⁱⁱ

The rationale for liberal deterrence is that, like investing in financial market, diplomacy players also act on expectations; and this is also very much relevant, at least in perceiving counterparts’ behavior, in today’s world, despite war as a foreign policy instruments had largely been reserved as a last resort. But indeed, when the expectation of the benefit of war is less than the expected cost from war together with expected benefit of trade, nations don’t tend to provoke a war. This interpretation had been put together into an inequality by Chikako Kawakatsu Ueki, as showed below:

$$EGW < ECW + EBT$$

EGW = Expected gain from war

ECW = Expected cost of war

EBT = Expected benefit of trade^{iv}

This inequality mathematically illustrated liberal deterrence policy, as military deterrence aims to increase the cost of war, which including the actual cost of fighting a war, the potential damage incurred by retaliation and defense as well as the opportunity cost of losing benefit that could have been gained through trade and economic activities. On the other hand, economic interdependent boosts the benefit from trade, while security interdependence decreases expected gain from war. This was U.S.-Japan Alliance’s China mentality in the 90s in the immediate period after Cold War.

In the 21st century things changed a little bit as China quickly builds a strong economy which surpassed Japan in 2010 and politically reached quasi-superpower status^v with some responsible international actions, the Alliance is gradually considering serious security cooperation with China while as social stability became

the number one task of CCP at home, an war initiation from China became remote. Thus, currently, the formula describing liberal deterrence policy can be adjusted, based on the same rational, as Kawakatsu Ueki put forward:

$$EGAb < ECAb + EBT + EBSCo$$

EGAb = Expected gain from aggressive behavior

ECAb = Expected cost from aggressive behavior

EBT = Expected benefit from trade

EBSCo = Expected benefit from security cooperation^{vi}

In the following part I will present three recent confrontations and engagement to explain how this strategic hedging works, it is a mixed of engagement and integration vis-à-vis dissuasion and deterrence.

Firstly, how deterrence works. One of the great brinkmanship game is that parties engaged must maintain high credit, mis-signals are dangerous if trigger misperception of lowered expected cost of aggression. This is why the Alliance is able to deter China's outright invasion of Japan but is unable to stop disputes over Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, simply because the Alliance's signal and credit on protecting Japanese Mainland is high and absolute, U.S. will certainly intervene if Japanese Mainland is attacked, but not necessarily have the will to spend massive resources to defend a remote, uninhabited "ocean rock".

Then, security interdependence is important. Post 9/11 days saw another honeymoon period of security interdependence in East Asia, comparable with Cold War era but without a different reason, U.S. global war on terror. Not only because China's sharing of terrorism information is important (after all Afghanistan is bordered, though tiny, with China and there are indeed al Qaeda ramifications in Xinjing), but the Americans and Japanese need China to balance and regulate North Korea, especially after the 2003 report on its underground nuclear program. China chaired

Six Party Talks which started amid the nuclear crisis, though basically failed, is a multilateral effort especially suited East Asia geopolitical circumstances. I will discuss this point in detail in Part Two.

Perhaps the most important card comes from the third dimension, economic interdependence, which is what CCP relies on for authoritarian power and CCP's new legitimacy after crashing down 1989 democratic movement. According to Kawakatsu Ueki's statistics^{vii}, 67% of China's economy is depended on overseas trade (23% of which came from trade with U.S. and Japan), comparable figure for U.S. and Japan range from 10% to 20%. By 2008 China and Japan totaled trade of \$ 266.4 billion which exceeded Japan-U.S. trade. China is Japan's largest trading partner, while Japan and U.S. are respectively China's number one and third trading partner. Also as Professor Thomas F. Schaller pointed out during a public talk in Hong Kong^{viii}, China now holds 11% of U.S. foreign debt, and surpassed Japan in September 2008 as America's largest Treasury bond holder. The three economies are deeply independent. Warfare in such a framework is unimaginable.

Part Two CCP Ruling Power Legitimacy and China's Hedging

FOREIGN POLICY IS usual shaped by domestic politics; this is especially true in totalitarian regimes because dictators tend to turn domestic problems outward for districting public anger. This is why Soviet Union, or Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov and a few PBSC oligarchs invaded Afghanistan in 1979, and is also why Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1991. China, as a country different from U.S. and Japan and most of the rest of the world, is ruled by the communist party. CCP controls everything, certainly including foreign policy and the managing of this triangular relationship. Thus before discussing China's hedging, which itself is also unique from what I presented about the mix of competition and cooperation, I first need to draw attention to its ruler.

CCP's communism regime under Mao Zedong, which is based on class struggle, deprivation of people's property, nationalization of private wealth as, elimination of civil society, and to a large extent murdering of nonbelievers, gradually lost its legitimacy after Deng Xiaoping carried out reform and opening up policy in late 1978. This reached peak in the 1989 democratic movement which ended with Tiananmen Massacre that further damaged CCP's power base among the public. After the fall of Soviet Union and collapse of communism worldwide, CCP needed to possess new footings of ruling power both at home and abroad for maintaining its goal – to be a perennial ruling party in China. In the early 90s, the new footings for legitimacy were identified as domestically building a surging economy and safeguarding national unity, and international being a responsible emerging power (instead of turning problems outward like the fallen dictatorships). In another words, CCP's propaganda centered on one theme after 1989, which is only CCP can develop Chinese economy, unify the multi-ethnic nation and contribute to the Third World and a harmonious world internationally.

Based on the urgent need for power legitimacy, China set four major pillars of foreign policy in the 90s, which is “the establishment of good relations with the great powers, the maintenance of stable relations with neighboring countries, the improvement of relations with Third World countries, and the strengthening of its multilateral approach to diplomacy.”^{ix} For two decades, China avoided confrontation with the Alliance who is from time to time exercising liberal deterrence policy, except on rare occasions when CCP's ruling power legitimacy were threatened, like in the 1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis' military confrontation with U.S.. A trend worth note is that in biannually published Chinese defense white paper between 1998 and 2006 the U.S.-Japan alliance was continuously mentioned as a negative, destabilizing and complicating factor. Both U.S. ballistic missile defense system and Japan's expanding military role was highlighted from time to time. Yet in 2008 paper the Alliance was only described as a “concern” in East Asia.^x Also, China tried to expand into a multilateral framework, though with difficulties, to diversify its security stake from

the Alliance. In 2003 second North Korea nuclear crisis, it is China who initiated and Chaired the Six Party Talks and tried, though largely failed (except the release of Japanese citizen abducted by Kim Jong Il), to deter the North, to seek East Asian peace and stability multilaterally. China's hedging attitude toward the Alliance is in accordance with its other foreign engagement, like in border negotiation with Russia, CCP, or Jiang Zemin himself^{xi} secretly acknowledged Russia's legitimacy on the Tsar era occupied Qing Dynasty territory in the Russian Far East, for avoiding conflict and maintaining good relations with Russia, who continued to sell weapons to China after Tiananmen Massacre.^{xii} In the two decades after Cold War, China initiated "strategic partnership" relationships with major world powers (despite it is no more than a euphemism for "neither friend nor enemy")^{xiii}, gradually acknowledged U.S. superpowers status, and stopped supporting communist parties in other countries to topple their government^{xiv}. International community is increasingly expecting China to take larger responsibilities, and the retiring Hu Jintao clearly was promoting China's international image as such a "responsible quasi superpower" during the 2000s.^{xv}

China's hedging toward U.S.-Japan alliance mostly focused on avoiding confrontation and seeking larger multilateral, ad hoc and functional engagement to tackle common threats facing the region, instead of proposing formal, charter-confined treaty organizations. East Asia is a region, except U.S-Japan, bounded by different bilateral talks and a few informal multi-party engagements for solving commonly faced short-term obstacles (may not necessarily be military or political short-term challenges, like in the 2004 South and Southeast Asia tsunami the temporary "hotline" Tsunami Core Group involving U.S., India, Australia and Japan, who saved hundreds of lives in the initial nine days while quickly dismissed thereafter.)

PERHAPS THE MOST unstable factor in the triangle and East Asia region is the domestic problems of China. China is certainly the most unstable country internally,

because it is not a democracy with many long-lasting and newly emerged problems, many of which are inherent under an authoritarian power. As China's economy and international influence grew strong, the linkage between external and internal security had been continuously declining. In the near future, CCP may not be able to turn internal problems outward, economic growth might be the only one left for legitimacy. Unemployment has risen much higher in China than that in U.S. or Japan with 10 percent of an estimated 130 million migrant workers had been struggling to earn a subsistence need.^{xvi} If for any reason, material, international clout or market, Chinese economy fails to maintain 8% or more annual growth rate, or even will have to face a recession, political unrest and popular quest for freedom and political rights will be inevitable. With the hope for political reform being mostly crashed in the 17th Party Congress and completely eliminated in this year's 18th Party Congress^{xvii}, social inequality, corruption, ethnic minority frustration and power abuse deeply rooted in the lopsided economic growth will remain little hope to be addressed.

What a country China will be, democratic or continued one party tyranny, is the most uncertain element affecting medium to longer term China – Japan – United States trilateral relationships.

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Notes

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- ⁱⁱ Article V, Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security Between Japan and The United States of America, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/q&a/ref/1.html> (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan)
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- ^v Willy Lam, *China's Quasi-Superpower Diplomacy: Prospects and Pitfalls*, 2009 (Washington DC: Jamestown Foundation)
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