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RICH REGION, STRONG STATES: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SECURITY IN ASIA

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Domestic Dynamics

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SUMMARY

This policy brief focuses on the domestic contributions to foreign policy and security actions by a number of the major states in Northeast Asia. Without question, a nation's grand strategy and its foreign policy choices will result from the intersection of broad structural pressures and domestic political calculations. In some instances, the impact of domestic politics and regime variation will count for little compared to the overweening power of structural constraints. Yet the policy choices of large to medium-sized countries, particularly those in which regimes undergo substantial alteration, will almost always reflect the significance of those changing domestic power arrangements.

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In the wake of major domestic and international changes, most especially the end of the Cold War and 9/11 for all, but additionally the collapse of the asset bubble in Japan and the transition from military authoritarianism to democratization in the ROK and Taiwan, all of the countries in question saw sharply divided domestic coalitions pressing for often diametrically opposed courses in national security and foreign policy. This brief begins by noting the limits of classical realist interpretations of international relations in Northeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific. It then addresses the importance of ‘comprehensive security’ as a driver for all of the countries in question. Finally, it examines the broad domestic clashes over foreign and security policy in each of four key democracies in the region and closes with a few general observations about the salience of regional domestic politics.

REALISM AND NORTHEAST ASIAN SECURITY

Traditional realist analysis tends to downplay domestic political factors as shapers of the most important regional and/or global interactions among states. Rather, key strategic decisions are presumed to be driven by a nation-state’s material resources as it seeks to advance its ‘national interest’ in a zero-sum game with other nation-states under conditions of global anarchy. The nation-state thus opts, with a high degree of moral flexibility, for some combination of alliance formation, balancing, and bandwagoning in its efforts at sustaining the national regime and advancing its security. Domestic political drivers are treated as secondary considerations to the global systemic forces shaping state behaviors. States strategize based on the nature of the global system and the global balance of power. Thus, when the Soviet Union and its Eastern European allies collapsed, scholars were quick to note that the international system had moved from bipolarity to unipolarity. Within the context of East Asia, realists of various stripes were quick to suggest that regional conflict would logically follow in the wake of the changing global and regional dynamics.

The region is rife with a number of unresolved territorial disputes, most of them legacies of World War II and the Cold War. These remain sources of ongoing rancor and military threats. Similarly tension producing are historical memories of past wars, occupations, and military actions, which regularly poison contemporary relations. Further frictions within the region are its divergent political and economic systems, along with quite disparate religions and cultural traditions. Without question, sharp differences mark the approaches and goals of most states in the region as each pursues regional order and security peace. Most re-

cently, a number of maritime territorial disputes have triggered staccato bursts of outrage, xenophobia, and coercive diplomacy that have fed the narrative that the region teeters on the brink of widespread conflict and the outbreak of shooting wars. But in reality, most disputes over the past two decades or more have ended quietly and with minimal exchanges of fire between military (or coast guard) forces. As is worth remembering, the region has remained free of state-to-state shooting wars since the Korean armistice in 1953.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ECONOMICS IN REGIONAL SECURITY CONCEPTIONS

East Asia is economically rich and typically composed of strong states. It is worth underscoring the fact that virtually all of the prevailing political elites across the region (with the noteworthy exception of the DPRK and Burma) define national security in a manner that transcends the narrow confines of traditional “hard security” as measured by alliances and military capabilities. Most East Asian regimes have instead defined their national security more comprehensively, taking account of such elements as economic development, environmental protection, food security, energy security, and the like. Such a conceptualization by no means eradicates hard security or coercive diplomacy from the regional toolbox of foreign policy options, but the broader conceptualization means that hard security is only one component in the more complex tapestries of national security and state power. And particularly since the end of the Cold War, economic growth and development have been at the core of the security conceptualizations and legitimacy of most elites across the region. In the words of William Overholt:

For centuries, the principal route to wealth and power had been conquest of neighboring territory. Wealth came from seizing neighbors’ golden temples and taxing their peasants. The dawn of the Asian miracle transformed this ancient reality. Now wealth and power accrued to whoever grew the faster by reforming the domestic economy. Conversely, the arrival of modern military technology put the quest for power through war at risk of achieving Pyrrhic victories.¹

The significance of this point is echoed and expanded in the comparative regional study done by Etel Solingen, who has shown how the East Asian focus on economic development has been underwritten by

¹ William H. Overholt, *Asia, America, and the Transformation of Geopolitics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 18–19.

domestic regimes oriented toward globalization, internationalization, and economic development, in stark contrast, for example, to the far more nationalistic, introspective, and security-minded states of the Middle East.² The “security order” in Northeast Asia, as a consequence, is increasingly being shaped by a regional focus on economic development and by the deepening regional production network linkages that weave the individual fortunes of most countries in the region into a collective fabric.

DOMESTIC DRIVERS AND DEMOCRACY

In assessing the extent to which domestic drivers shape regional security strategies, it is vital to note that several of the major states, most notably Japan, the ROK, Taiwan, and the United States, are democracies. For any potential strategy to prevail as actual policy, that strategic conceptualization must obtain support from those who have political power. In democracies that grasp on power is typically impermanent. As a consequence, foreign policy in democracies inevitably requires leaders to make strategic calculations with at least one eye cocked on domestic politics. In all four of the democracies with an important strategic presence in Northeast Asia, domestic controversies over foreign policies designed to forge the ideal “grand strategies” have been extensive; the result has often meant sharp turns in national strategic behavior with changes in administrations. Thus, in the four key Asia-Pacific democracies, foreign policy since the Cold War has not stopped at the water’s edge. Rather, sharp differences over grand strategy and foreign policy direction have been key components of the electoral strategies of competing forces in all four. Most often these differences have been driven by the quite diverse socio-economic coalitions that have elevated the particular ruling party to power.

Three of the most clear-cut examples of domestic politics driving foreign policy can be seen in contrasting the policies pursued by the Bush administration to those of the Clinton administration regarding the DPRK and Asian regionalism; the hard-line confrontational approaches toward the DPRK (and other regional states) taken by Lee Myong-bak in the ROK after ten years of engagement by Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun; and the economic engagement policies pursued by Ma Ying-jeou of Taiwan toward the PRC following much harsher cross-Strait interaction under his two predecessors. Finally, though less starkly bifurcated on

foreign policy per se, Japan’s regional security policies also reveal profound domestic differences, heavily driven by debates over economic reform that have spilled over to foreign policy. The prime ministership of Koizumi Junichiro (2001–2006) is perhaps the most clear-cut fulcrum around which the debates occurred.

The United States

The United States, because of its centrality to much of the security activity in Northeast Asia, deserves to be highlighted, particularly as its domestic political divisions resonate with similar tensions in the ROK, Japan, and Taiwan, and as its domestic politics have shaped U.S. policies toward East Asia in important ways over the last two decades.

A major break in America’s Asian policy took place between the Clinton and Bush administrations. In the wake of the Cold War, Clinton had emphasized reduced military spending and force projection in favor of geo-economics as the heart of his domestic, foreign, and East Asia policies. To this end, he reached an economic deal with his Republican opponents that raised taxes and provided for a long-term balanced budget that was passed on to his successor. In Asia, the Clinton administration continued the long-standing policy of guaranteeing that both China and Japan felt secure from one another and that no regional hegemon (other than the United States) emerged. In projecting geo-economics and multilateralism into East Asia, the Clinton administration encouraged U.S. engagement with APEC and the ARF. On the nettlesome issue of DPRK nuclear weapons, Clinton followed hard-line threats with the Agreed Framework of 1994, which kept the North’s plutonium facilities locked down and inert under IAEA supervision for the next six years. Toward the end of his regime, Clinton even began moves toward normalization of relations with the DPRK.

The Bush administration, with a completely different socio-economic coalition as its support base, rejected large swaths of the Clinton administration’s policies by explicitly pursuing U.S. primacy in security, deepening bilateral military ties with Japan, and pivoting on the presumption that China needed to be prevented from becoming America’s next major “strategic competitor.” Reflecting its belief that the United States enjoyed a “unipolar moment” of unchallenged primacy, as well as the ideological predisposition of the neo-conservatives at the core of its foreign policy team, it took measures to stymie the emergence of any “peer competitor.” The Bush administration also embarked on an approach to the DPRK that broke sharply from that of Clinton: it renounced engagement, refused to reiterate Clinton’s pledge of “no hostile intent,” de-

² Etel Solingen, “Pax Asiatica Versus Bella Levantina: The Foundations of War and Peace in East Asia and the Middle East,” *American Political Science Review* 101 (2007): 757–80.

manded that the North adopt a host of domestic changes, declared North Korea to be part of the infamous “axis of evil,” and hinted that the North could be the object of its new doctrine of “preventive war.”

Relations with the DPRK spiraled sharply downward following Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly October 2002 accusation in Pyongyang that the DPRK had begun a covert HEU program, separate from the shuttered plutonium program under IAEA inspections. These charges served as the basis for America’s final break with the Agreed Framework, which in turn precipitated the DPRK’s withdrawal from the NPT and IAEA inspections and the restart of its Yongbyon plutonium facility.

Only with the introduction of the Six-Party Talks did the United States return to multilateralism as a strategy for dealing with the DPRK. The first four years of the talks saw little substantive negotiation as the United States continued to demand that the DPRK surrender all fissile material prior to any discussion addressing DPRK security concerns. Only after the DPRK had carried out a series of missile tests in July 2006 and an actual nuclear test in October, and only in the wake of Democratic Party victories in both houses of Congress in November, did the Bush administration move toward a new flexibility that began to move the talks forward.

U.S. relations with South Korea also cratered under Bush from the time of his first telephone call to President Kim Dae-jung. Bilateral relations then oscillated between tepid and ice-cold for the next seven years, leading Kim’s successor Roh Moo-hyun to suggest shifting the ROK from its historically close ties to Japan and the United States in favor of becoming a ‘balancer’ in Asia; by the waning years of the Bush administration many Koreans had come to see the United States as a greater threat to peace than the DPRK.

Reflecting the importance of domestic politics and the socio-economic coalitions behind them, the Obama administration again shifted U.S. policies toward East Asia, this time to reestablish a warmer climate across the region through a series of high-level visits to the region, a downplaying of U.S. military might in favor of dialogue with all parties, direct engagement with regional bodies, signing of the ASEAN-created Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, and exercising an overall “pivot” toward Asia. As a result, Asian public opinion toward the United States has improved quickly. In addition, the United States led Russia, China, Japan, and the ROK, among others, to introduce a series of UN-sponsored sanctions against the DPRK following its second nuclear test right after Obama took office.

In short, it is clear that U.S. policies toward East Asia have been heavily driven by the competing do-

mestic electoral coalitions and the consequent strategic orientations of three U.S. administrations that differed radically from one another, largely for domestic political considerations.

The Republic of Korea

The election of Kim Dae-jung as president in December 1997 triggered a radical reorientation of the country’s grand strategy from the previous conservative regime’s policies that had prevailed since the end of the Korean War. Kim’s “Sunshine Policy” toward the DPRK (but also toward other neighbors) marked a sharp break with the well-established defense doctrine that treated the DPRK as the South’s major military threat, embraced the U.S.-ROK alliance as the core of the country’s strategy, and was highly skeptical of improving relations with Japan. Kim’s policy put his administration into direct confrontation with the Bush administration’s East Asian policies, most notably its confrontational attitude toward North Korea and its emphasis on hard security tools in its Asian policies. Kim’s policy was designed to engage the DPRK economically, replacing the previously clenched ROK security fist with a more open hand—frequently offering unqualified (and critics would argue “naïve”) economic assistance. In 2000, Kim made a breakthrough visit to Pyongyang and met with Kim Jung-il, the first visit between the top leaders of the two Koreas since the end of the Korean War.

Kim shifted bilateral relations between Japan and the ROK as well. A long-standing testiness gave way to a substantial reconciliation during the 1998 summit between Japanese Prime Minister Obuchi and President Kim. Kim promised to engage Japan less on past history, and more on future behavior. Obuchi in turn offered a profound apology to Kim on behalf of the Japanese people for the misdeeds of the Japanese government and military during the prewar period. This temporarily salved past wounds and pointed toward a more cooperative future, reaching its culmination in the joint hosting by Seoul and Tokyo of the 2002 World Cup. Though less effusive in his efforts to engage Japan, Kim’s successor Roh Moo-hyun continued the basic outlines of Kim’s policies regarding the DPRK.

Yet when conservative Lee Myung-bak was elected president in December 2007 he quickly distanced himself from the policies of his two predecessors, opting for a swing to the right on both domestic politics and regional relations. He refused to be bound by a series of previously-negotiated ROK-DPRK agreements, backed away from economic engagement, demanded the DPRK move toward nuclear disarmament

as a precondition for engagement, and took numerous steps to re-strengthen the bilateral alliance with the United States. In late 2011 as his term was winding down, he took the unprecedented, and provocative, step of visiting Dokto/Takeshima in a blatant genuflection to domestic nationalism, despite the negative consequences for ROK-Japan relations. Among the most visible results were a series of direct confrontations with the DPRK with the sinking of the *Choenian* and the shelling of Yeonpyeong, as well as a noteworthy deterioration in bilateral Japan-ROK ties.

Taiwan

Democratization in Taiwan, like that in the ROK, ushered in sharp internal political differences over the country's broad policy directions. That division took on the colorful clash between the Green and Blue coalitions, with the Greens pressing policies that would break from long-term KMT rule and the old regime's policies toward both the PRC and the United States, while emphasizing the centrality of Taiwanese identity and pursuing policies designed to move toward a separate "state" identity for Taiwan that would break with the "one China" policy and give Taiwan greater international independence.

Taiwan's divisions have their socio-economic roots: the pan-Greens are deeply in the less economically sophisticated Taiwanese south while the pan-Blues (and the KMT) are rooted in the more economically sophisticated and globally competitive sectors surrounding Taipei in the north. But the most powerful division has been over foreign policy. Taiwan's pan-Greens are far more nationalistic and independence-oriented while the pan-Blue and KMT forces have advocated closer, and their critics would say, more dependent links with mainland China.

Eight years of pan-Green rule under Chen Shui-bian saw a number of moves to enhance close military ties to the United States (most notably a 2004 effort to secure \$18 billion worth of arms from the United States, which was continually blocked by pan-Blue politicians in the legislature), a renaming of various NGOs that had "China" in their titles to "Taiwan," the issuance of separate Taiwanese passports, regular discussion of Taiwan as a "state," seeking state dinners with a few pro-Taiwan countries abroad, and so forth. Most of these were met by corresponding and hostile reactions from Beijing.

The retaking by the KMT of the presidency with the election of Ma Ying-jeou in 2008 saw another major break in foreign policy, with Ma seeking to improve bilateral ties with the PRC by loosening the rules governing outgoing FDI from Taiwan to the mainland,

opening up air and other communication routes, and expanding tourism on both sides of the Straits. All marked sharp deviations from the pan-Green reluctance to improve economic ties with the mainland.

Nothing more cemented the economic links across the Straits than the signing in January 2010 of the bilateral Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement designed to reduce mutual tariff barriers and to foster closer economic integration between Taiwan and the mainland.

Japan

For most of the postwar period, Japan's foreign policy relied centrally on its bilateral alliances with the United States for hard security and a concentration on economic growth and economic diplomacy as Japan's signpost course of regional and global strategy. This changed with the end of the Cold War, the collapse of Japan's asset bubble in 1990, and the 9/11 crisis in the United States. In the wake of these events, Japanese domestic politics went through considerable turmoil as the long-ruling Liberal Democratic Party struggled both to retain electoral power and to return Japan to some measure of positive economic performance. The party became highly divided internally over how best to mix economic reform and national security, largely failing in its efforts to shape a coherent course of action until Koizumi Junichiro ascended to the LDP's leadership and to the prime ministership in 2001. Koizumi sought to advance a major revamping of Japan's highly protected domestic economy that conflicted sharply with the long-standing protectionist policies pursued by the LDP "old guard" as well as to engineer a substantial shift in Japan's defense and security policies aimed at enhancing its military links with the United States in the wake of 9/11. Among the changes were new military guidelines in 2004 that broke precedent by explicitly identifying China as a worrisome regional challenge and the DPRK as a potential security threat to Japan.

Relations with Asia shifted as well under Koizumi, though largely downward, as his concentrated efforts to pursue economic reform policies and close security links to the Bush administration meant far less attention to maintaining positive relations with the rest of the region. A series of coordinated military shifts designed to make Japan's defense policies more compatible with those of the United States led to a move of the U.S. Army's I Corps headquarters to Japan; to more sophisticated weapons for Japan, including space satellites, a helicopter carrier, and ballistic missile defense; to the dispatch of Japan Self-Defense forces to both Afghanistan and Iraq; and the elevation of the Japan

Defense Agency to full ministerial status, among other things. Meanwhile, Koizumi did nothing to challenge the Japanese Ministry of Education when it approved textbooks that continued to whitewash Japan's aggression during World War II, downplayed the significance of forced prostitution to serve the Japanese military, and pushed the claim that Japan enjoyed sovereignty over Dokto/Takeshima (long under ROK control).

With his regular and quite public visits to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine, a focal point of nationalist and militarist fervor, Koizumi also tapped into a lodestone of nationalist frustration fueled in part by Japan's cascading decline in relative economic power and China's corresponding rise in stature. Unlike Prime Minister Nakasone's decision to forestall such shrine visits in the face of Asian opposition nearly two decades earlier, Koizumi disdained the consequent protests by both China and the ROK as attempts to interfere with Japanese domestic politics.

Koizumi's successor, Abe Shinzo, made quick visits to both Seoul and Beijing in an effort to repair two important bilateral relationships that had been frayed by Koizumi's Yasukuni visits. Abe also avoided making such visits himself. Yet in August 2007, picking up on a theme first articulated by Foreign Minister Aso in November 2006, Abe reaffirmed the goal of forging an "arc of freedom and prosperity" that would create tighter links among four big democracies, India, Japan, the United States, and Australia. "This partnership," he said, "is an association in which we share fundamental values such as freedom, democracy, and respect for basic human rights as well as strategic interests." Conspicuously missing from the list was China, whose analysts interpreted the Japanese arc as an effort to forge a new containment doctrine.

Nowhere did the emboldened right exert more influence than on policy toward the DPRK, where Abe took an exceptionally tough line both with regard to the abductee issue and to DPRK missile testing, nuclear development, and human rights. Abe played the DPRK and the abductee issue as one of his major political cards, insisting that Japan should demand the return of all abductees before any focus on denuclearization on the assumption that all who had not yet been returned to Japan were still alive. Abe continued to contend that the abductee issue took a higher priority for Japan than denuclearization. And until the issue was resolved to Japan's satisfaction, Abe insisted that Japan would not supply the heavy fuel oil that it had promised, in the 2007 joint statement at the Six-Party Talks, to provide to the North in exchange for the dismantlement of Yongbyon.

A final twist in Japan's wide swings in foreign policy as a consequence of domestic politics came

with the ascendance of the Democratic Party of Japan to government control in the 2009 election. The DPJ took a series of moves designed to mark it as breaking with its LDP predecessor, whether positively, by explicitly improving relations with East Asia, or negatively, by a fumbling of military ties with the United States. The latter was heavily driven by the DPJ's electoral reliance on strong voter support from citizens on Okinawa, the vast majority of whom were hostile to the mainland expectation that the prefecture would host the bulk of U.S. bases in Japan despite their many negative repercussions. Most recently, as the DPJ has seemed to founder in its electoral appeal, the LDP has elevated Abe once again to its leadership. Within weeks of his taking that role, he made a highly public and controversial trip to Yasukuni and spoke vigorously of the need for an LDP government to break with what he claimed were the misguided foreign policies of the DPJ.

CONCLUSION

The treatment of the domestic politics of these four democracies has shown how deeply divided each has been on a number of critical issues, leading to rather sharp swings in policy depending on the orientations of the administration in power. None of these moves can be explained by a simple reliance on international relations arguments about balance of power, band-wagoning, or military force structures. Rather, domestic actors in each of the four confronted essentially the same exogenous security environment as their predecessors, but each came to radically different conclusions about the desirable course that they should pursue. As noted throughout, these choices normally reflected the competing domestic political support bases and ideological predispositions of the administration in office.

What then can be said of the region's non-democracies, most notably China and the DPRK? In neither is it possible to identify any systematic and organized opposition group or coalition seeking to topple the dominant regime and pursue a radically different course of action. Within authoritarian regimes, the kinds of organized oppositions that are so readily found in democracies enjoy none of the same freedoms to articulate dramatic policy alternatives to the regime in power. At the same time, many of the foreign policy actions by both the PRC and the DPRK have been about regime protection as much as they have been about advancing an abstract national interest. The ebbs and flows of nationalism, military saber rattling, jousting with neighbors, on the one hand versus warming to closer ties will obviously reflect a mix of external and internal politics, although in the case of these two regimes, it is an internal politics without an organized opposition.