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At the end of the first decade of the 21st century, the majority of Northeast Asian countries remain on reasonably good terms with the United States, maintaining for the most part peaceful, productive, and cooperative relations. The United States has managed to keep relations with China on an even keel. It is also reshaping and streamlining the alliances with Japan and South Korea in a way that strives to meet the needs of the emerging geopolitical realities of Northeast Asia and the demands of the U.S.'s own military structure and capabilities. Even with regard to North Korea, the United States is hopeful about resolving the nuclear weapons issues within the context of the Six-Party Talks. This is despite the fact that North Korea has previously been a thorn in U.S. foreign policy toward Northeast Asia. However, Northeast Asia is undergoing significant changes in its international relations. The next U.S. administration will be dealing with a regional situation that is quite different from what it has been over the years. Several developments characterize the changing geopolitical landscape in Northeast Asia.

First, there are leadership changes occurring in many countries of Northeast Asia. In China, a fifth generation of leaders is emerging in the aftermath of the 17th Party Congress, which took place in the fall of 2007. Even though President Hu Jintao continues to lead the country, he is now joined by younger leaders with professional backgrounds who subscribe to both a nationalistic and pragmatic outlook on policy. In Japan, a succession of leaders from Junichiro Koizumi to Shinjo Abe to Yasuo Fukuda and now to Taro Aso has left the country still searching for an effective government that can undertake needed domestic reforms and conduct robust foreign relations. The recent elections in South Korea and Taiwan produced more pragmatic and conservative presidents. Russia also elected a new president, after 10 years with Vladimir Putin in office — though many predict that Putin will likely continue to exercise power as the prime minister. Finally, the United States will elect a new president after eight years of George W. Bush's administration. Leadership change in most of the regional countries in Northeast Asia will have a significant effect on U.S. relations within the region.

Second, even as the traditional security and economic issues remain important, new sets of issues — including resource competition, environment and climate change, pandemic diseases and other natural disasters, humanitarian problems, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and domestic governance — are increasingly gaining salience in regional and international relations, as they will in America's relations with the region.

Third, with the strong growth of key countries such as China, Russia, and India in the last few years, we are witnessing the return of big power politics in the region. Their rise means the need for more consultation, closer cooperation and better coordination among them in order to achieve mutual benefits in political, security, and economic areas. The newly emerging big powers increasingly demand recognition of their regional and international presence, status, and weight — a fact which requires the development of a more multi-polar framework as well as multilateral processes and institutions.

Fourth, the return of big power politics is also likely to provoke a change in the pattern of regional politics. Even though bilateral alliances will remain an important element in Northeast Asian international relations, the region is also witnessing the emergence of a regional system of cooperation, which will supplement the competitive nature of alliances.

Fifth, changes are taking place in the way international affairs are conducted. Even as military power remains salient, soft power is gaining importance as more countries are becoming adept at cultivating and utilizing it. Although unilateral and bilateral arrangements remain important, multilateral consultations, arrangements, and institutions are becoming more salient and indispensable. International relations are increasingly becoming less of a zero sum game.

Sixth, the security paradigm in the region is shifting. In the past, the United States created alliances with Japan and South Korea in order to contain Soviet expansion, prevent another outbreak of war in the Korean Peninsula, defend Japan, and maintain a leadership position in the Asian Continent. Today, these alliances are deemed necessary to



maintain balance vis-à-vis emerging powers such as China and Russia; for peace and security in the Asian region; to keep sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) open; to prevent proliferation and transport of weapons of mass destruction and the means of their delivery; to fight a global war on terrorism; and to maintain U.S. military presence in the region for the above purposes.

Seventh, we are witnessing the globalization of regional affairs and the strengthening of links between the East Asia region and the rest of the world. What happens in the Middle East, for example, has relevance and impact on East Asia. Middle East security issues not only affect security and terrorism in Asia, but also the amount of attention the United States can and will devote to Asia. It will also have a direct bearing on Asia's energy security and supply.

Finally, East Asian countries are experiencing a phenomenon that can be called a "democratization of foreign policy," as citizens and the civil society become more interested and engaged in foreign affairs. As the economies of East Asian countries become more globalized, people feel the effects of foreign relations more directly and keenly on their daily lives. At the same time, as different means of communication become more readily available and extensive, public consciousness spreads in conjunction with the expanding horizon of information. The effect is greater involvement of the non-governmental sector in foreign affairs and the imposition of greater constraints on the government in conducting foreign policy.

Recommendations for the Next U.S. Administration

1. The United States should maintain its China relations on an even keel. It should not repeat the pattern of previous administrations that frequently started out China relations in a rocky way only to improve them in later years. The United States should take advantage of China's declared intention not to upset the status quo and maintain good relations with the United States.
2. Even as the United States maintains and strengthens its bilateral alliance with its Asian allies, it should engage in multilateral security dialogue and building of institutional arrangements that will discuss, coordinate, and plan security cooperation and coordination.
3. The United States should engage in strategic dialogue, both bilateral and multilateral, with key Asian countries — especially China — not only on trade and security, but also on other matters such as North Korea, proliferation, the environment, and energy resources, particularly natural gas.
4. Once the TAC is signed, the United States should take a more engaging and open-minded attitude toward regional arrangements in Asia such as the East Asian Summit and ASEAN Plus Three. It can do so by actively participating in those exercises and at the same time encouraging and supporting its allies and friends in Asia to participate in such arrangements and groupings.
5. Non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) should be the diplomatic goal of the United States. Regarding the North Korean nuclear program, the next administration would be well advised to continue with the North Korea policy espoused by the Bush administration since the spring of 2007. The United States should also revive and invigorate the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) system, which has apparently been weakened by several developments including the increased number of de facto nuclear weapons states.
6. The United States should be actively involved in building regional architecture in Asia — economic, security, and political. Even as the United States maintains bilateral relations with key countries, it would be well advised to place greater emphasis on multilateral diplomacy and arrangements in economic, security, and political areas.
7. Successive U.S. administrations, including the incumbent Bush administration, have espoused spreading democratic values and enhancing human rights. Even in the circumstances of conducting a difficult and dangerous war on terrorism, the United States would be well advised to set a good example by upholding the very values that it espouses.
8. In view of the current financial crisis that is engulfing the world with its serious consequences for the Asian economies, the United States, together with other economically advanced countries should put its own economic



house in order. That will not only shape up its financial institutions and situation, but also restore trade and investment activities that are being adversely affected.