

**Leif-Eric Easley, "Korea and Japan in Washington's Taiwan Calculus," *JoongAng Daily* (with *International Herald Tribune*), August 24, 2007, page 11; *IHT-Asahi Shimbun*, August 27, 2007, page 19; *China Post*, September 9, 2007; *OMNI*, September 12, 2007.**

Security concerns in East Asia do not exist in a vacuum, but it is difficult to know how closely issues interact. United States reliance on China in dealing with North Korea has allegedly caused Washington to take a more pro-Beijing stance in its relations with Taipei. Recent Japanese elections, leading to an opposition Democratic Party takeover of the Upper House, will allegedly decrease Tokyo's commitment to the U.S.-Japan alliance, and hence diminish the alliance's capacity to promote stability across the Taiwan Strait. Both these theories deserve further investigation.

The United States needs Chinese cooperation to effectively deal with the North Korean nuclear issue. Beijing's ability to pressure Pyongyang and mediate the Six-party Talks is key in the U.S. regional approach to North Korea. China may want to leverage its cooperation, but Washington knows that regardless of U.S. support of Taiwan, Beijing will pursue its own interests in its relations with Pyongyang. A "North Korea for Taiwan" quid pro quo is thus wishful thinking on the part of Chinese strategists. The U.S. is not so desperate for China's help, nor so bogged down in the Middle East to accept Beijing's attempts to link North Korea and Taiwan.

The U.S. would need Japan's logistical, if not active, support if it became necessary to defend Taiwan. After years of only whispering about such contingencies, the U.S.-Japan alliance explicitly recognized Taiwan security as a common strategic objective in 2005. However, the Japanese Upper House elections in July dealt a blow to the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and particularly to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who favors a greater international role for Japan's military. Observers thus predict an end to increasing U.S.-Japan coordination on Taiwan. Yet irrespective of the elections, the main limitations on Japan's involvement in cross-Strait security - the importance of Tokyo's relations with Beijing and constitutional restrictions on the Japanese military - are not expected to change soon.

Japan's alliance commitment and China's productive role in dealing with North Korea are indispensable for East Asian security. Moreover, Washington does not want Taipei to take provocative actions while the U.S. foreign policy agenda is overbooked. Connections among these issues notwithstanding, U.S. policy toward Taiwan is primarily shaped by the situation across the Taiwan Strait.

Legally, the United States' Taiwan policy is a balancing act between the U.S.-China Communiqués on the one hand, and the Taiwan Relations Act on the other. The U.S. has long balanced the two in the interest of avoiding violent or unilateral changes to the status

quo. Of course, the "status quo" is a convenient fiction to maintain relative stability, as cross-Strait relations continue to witness significant economic, military and political change.

Practically, there are three major factors in Washington's current Taiwan policy: (1) the importance of the "One-China" concept for positive Sino-U.S. relations; (2) the closeness of American and Taiwan democracies; and (3) the military balance across the Strait. The first factor is more or less a given constant. The second and third are variables that Taiwan actually has notable control over.

Taiwan can constructively improve ties with the U.S. (as well as with Japan and South Korea) by further strengthening its democracy. Taiwan's political development is impressive and demonstrates commonalities with other free societies, but Taiwan still lacks consolidated democratic institutions. Taipei can also make greater investments toward a credible national defense. Allies are less willing to defend friends who do not show serious efforts to defend themselves.

U.S. cooperation with Taiwan has stalled because the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP)-controlled executive has played the "democracy card" for political purposes rather than strengthening Taiwan's democratic institutions. In addition, the Kuomintang (KMT)-controlled legislature has obstructed adequate funding for Taiwan's self-defense. Circumstances may improve after Taiwan's 2008 presidential election, as both candidates - Frank Hsieh of the DPP and Ma Ying-jeou of the KMT - appear committed to address these matters.

In the meantime, Washington should communicate convincingly that the recent downturn in coordination with Taiwan is not because of a quid pro quo with China over North Korea or because of a reticent U.S.-Japan alliance. Otherwise, misperceptions about the role of Korea and Japan in U.S. Taiwan policy may grow, leading to feelings of betrayal in Taipei, an exaggerated sense of advantage in Beijing, and fears of entrapment in Tokyo. Such developments would not serve Taiwan's security or U.S. interests.

Korean and Japanese historical developments have had significant effect on Taiwan. But Washington does not link current security issues in ways that force trade offs for U.S. Taiwan policy. There is however, a lack of positive linkages. North Korea dominates the schedule of the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and U.S. diplomacy is not doing enough to link friends in North and Southeast Asia. The U.S. can encourage more consultation among South Korea, Japan, Taiwan and ASEAN to ease Taipei's concerns about being adversely affected by security mechanisms that exclude Taiwan.

Japan-South Korea-Taiwan coordination should focus on economic issues. Both Tokyo and Seoul could explore free trade agreements with Taiwan, perhaps using a different acronym than FTA for political reasons. In addition, Tokyo, Seoul and Taipei could benefit from greater information sharing on China's World Trade Organization (WTO) compliance. The three also share similar concerns for increased economic

interdependence with China and a lack of transparency in Beijing's military modernizations. On these matters, more Track II or unofficial dialogues among Japan, South Korea and Taiwan would prove useful.

China's contribution in dealing with North Korea is significant, and the U.S. would prefer to avoid developments that would disrupt Beijing's positive role. Tokyo's commitment to the U.S.-Japan alliance, inclusive of Taiwan contingencies, is vital to East Asian security. However, China-North Korea and U.S.-Japan interactions only indirectly affect Washington's relations with Taipei.

Recent strain in U.S.-Taiwan relations can be traced to Taiwan's domestic politics. When Taiwan achieves democratic reforms and builds an internal consensus on national security, cooperation with the United States will improve. Meanwhile, Washington, Tokyo and Seoul should not allow productive relations with Beijing to obscure shared values and interests with a democratic Taiwan.

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