

United States SAVI Interests in East Asia

Stability, Access, Values, Influence, and Averting Sino-Japanese Rivalry

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For a region as diverse and dynamic as East Asia, where United States involvement is longstanding and significant, U.S. interests must be clearly defined to provide a sound basis for strategy and policy implementation. This task is particularly pressing given China's increasing multidimensional power and Japan's evolving international security role. For the first time ever, Japan and China are simultaneously strong nations, raising the possibility that tensions over history, resources and regional leadership may develop into strategic rivalry. Contrary to speculation in the region, such a rivalry is not in the interest of the United States, just as it is not in the interests of populations across East Asia. A concise statement of U.S. interests in the region – SAVI: *stability, access, values and influence* – makes clear U.S. concerns for Sino-Japanese strategic rivalry, and suggests ways such a rivalry can be averted.

Stability

United States interest in stability means more than avoiding an extremely costly war in terms of lives and treasure. Stability also means preventing contingencies that, through misperception or miscalculation, could escalate to military conflict, or create a crisis of confidence adversely affecting trade and investment. One such contingency is a possible naval clash between Japan and China over the disputed areas of the Senkaku/Diaoyutai islands. To minimize the chance of such an occurrence, the U.S. should devote greater diplomatic efforts toward realizing Sino-Japanese confidence building measures such as a code of conduct, incident at sea agreement and mil-mil lines of communication.

U.S. interest in stability significantly includes preventing the development of weapons systems that could prompt a regional arms race or directly threaten the United States or its friends. A prime example is North Korean nuclear proliferation for which Six Party Talks have made measured progress. The present U.S. strategy of dealing with North Korea via multilateral diplomacy, offering security guarantees and economic engagement contingent on North Korean reciprocity, is likely the best course. But to be effective, a greater level of coordination among the U.S., South Korea, Japan and China is needed. A Sino-Japanese rivalry would preclude such coordination, and could push South Korea toward strategic reliance on China and away from cooperative relations with the U.S. and Japan.

U.S. interest in stability also suggests disapproval of unilateral changes to the status quo on sensitive security issues. The most relevant example is the international status of Taiwan. The balance of perceptions across the Taiwan Strait is drastically tipping in Beijing's favor with the increasing military and diplomatic influence associated with China's economic rise. But as Taiwan is denied international space commensurate with its political system and

economic standing, Taipei's frustrations can result in destabilizing action. This situation is complicated by the fact that Japan has very close ties to Taiwan, which would aggravate and provoke Beijing in the context of a Sino-Japanese rivalry. Japan should be a U.S. partner for stability across the Taiwan Strait, helping to ensure a peaceful development of cross-Strait ties with adequate representation for the people of Taiwan. But if Japan and China are locked in rivalry, Washington and Tokyo may do more to motivate than dissuade Beijing's military modernizations.

To deter military aggression, avoid escalation scenarios, dissuade destabilizing military deployments and prevent political provocations, U.S. strategy should continue its time-tested policies of forward military deployment and strong bilateral alliances. But the United States and its friends must take a broad perspective on how certain actions may prompt undesired reactions. U.S. interest in stability requires avoiding self-fulfilling prophecies of regional rivalry. So while alliances are transformed and updated to address post-Cold War circumstances, it must be clear that military cooperation is not directed at any state, but instead geared toward regional stability. This means calibrating the Armitage-Nye vision for U.S.-Japan relations with the Zoellick vision of U.S.-China relations on the basis of a mutually understood and desired concept of stability. This calibration will be further guided by U.S. access, values and influence outlined below.

Access

Ever since the United States articulated its "Open Door Policy" concerning China and sent Commodore Perry to open relations with Japan over 150 years ago, the U.S. has consistently pursued and secured access to East Asia. Access concerns guide U.S. orientation on Asian regionalism, trade infrastructure and forward military deployment.

U.S. interest for access motivates a strategy of supporting open regionalism in East Asia. Regional institution building is desirable, when institutions efficiently apply diplomatic resources, do not ignore serious challenges (such as poor governance in Myanmar), do not devalue U.S. alliances in the region, and do not seek to establish an Asian block oriented against the U.S. or insulated from the global economy. The latest test case is the East Asia Summit, which held its first meeting in 2005. It is too early to tell what good may come of the East Asia Summit, but it is already apparent that Japan-China competition can hold back the summit's progress and could even render it counterproductive. The extent to which China attempts to drive the summit, and the extent to which Japan is seen to offer roadblocks (e.g. historical issues such as Yasukuni Shrine), the more concerned the U.S. must be about the effect of Asian regionalism on U.S. regional access.

Crucial for U.S. access is the region's openness to the global trading system. The U.S. strategy is to push for increased trade liberalization through the World Trade Organization, as WTO agreements are more efficient than negotiating bilateral Free Trade Agreements. However, the United States may pursue FTAs to deepen trading relationships with important regional security partners such as South Korea, Japan and Taiwan. The greatest political economic challenge at present is the unsustainable massive U.S. trade deficits with East Asia.

Thus, the United States must focus on achieving market access toward a balance of payments in its regional trading relationships.

While a Sino-Japanese rivalry would not bode well for progress of the current WTO round, it could be even more problematic regarding energy competition. The U.S. strongly favors a market-based allocation of global energy, as opposed to mercantilist special rights to various countries' oil production. China's demand for energy is growing at an impressive rate, and in pursuit of its own economic security, China is making special agreements with energy suppliers around the world. This may spur politically divisive energy competition with Japan, still the world's second largest economy, which is heavily dependent on energy imports. The issue is already materializing over planned pipelines from Russia and posturing over disputed Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) that may contain resources. In the interest of access and stability, the U.S. must convince the region of market solutions.

The United States maintains a robust forward deployment of military forces, which represents its engagement in the region. While pursuing a strategy of more flexible basing and operational integration with allies, the U.S. should also promote greater cooperation on energy exploration, transportation security (including sea lanes), and countering cross-border crime, to continue its secure and stable access to the region.

Values

International relations theorists make much of the difference between interests and values. Explanations based on the former have recently focused on the need to deal with disaffected populations and territories that can become breeding grounds for international terrorism. Explanations based on the latter have recently highlighted the concept of democratic peace and the building of international community based on shared values. U.S. national identity is that of an inclusive and free society with a leadership role in the world. This means U.S. values more than inform U.S. interests, on issues of democracy and human rights, American values *are* U.S. interests. Plainly stated, the American people have genuine interest in the freedom and welfare of peoples everywhere, and the lack of democracy and human rights in large parts of East Asia are of great concern to the United States.

Difficulty arises in how to pursue a values promotion strategy. By no means should the U.S. turn a blind eye to the lack of freedoms of speech, religion and civil organization in East Asia. Indeed, the U.S. looks to gradually transform the sovereignty norm toward a post-Westphalian order where governments are held accountable for the welfare of their people. But direct intervention could prove counterproductive for the very people the United States wants to help, and aggressive imposition of values could damage U.S. interests for stability and access.

This is why U.S. strategy needs to be more sophisticated and nuanced, comprising three initiatives: (1) support international non-governmental organizations in their efforts to assist East Asians attain sustainable development and vibrant civil societies; (2) provide international incentives (membership in organizations such as the OECD being an example) for good governance, political economic reform and responsible stakeholder foreign policy;

and most importantly, (3) pursue a process of two-way socialization where the U.S. not only looks to shape other countries but also seeks feedback and works to improve its own system by applying the lessons of others. This third initiative is particularly important for U.S. influence because it is essential for maintaining U.S. soft power and discrediting perceptions of American arrogance and unilateralism.

The U.S. strategy related to democratic values must carefully consider relations with China and Japan. Chinese democracy must come out of Chinese needs and desires, with the encouragement and support of NGOs, international incentives and two-way socialization. U.S. democracy promotion, in which Japan is an important ally, should not fuel a Sino-Japanese rivalry. Democratic values and international efforts to improve human rights and welfare should attract rather than isolate China. This is essential for avoiding self-fulfilling prophecies of enmity. A new bipolar order in East Asia, with the U.S. and Japan on one side and China on the other, is in no one's interest. Neighboring countries want desperately to avoid choosing sides. Moreover, any such ideological conflict would threaten stability and U.S. access to the region. To promote democracy and human rights, it is necessary for the U.S. to maintain and enhance its influence to counter perceptions of rivalry.

Influence

United States interest in regional influence is not just for the sake of influence; the U.S. has no designs on controlling or dominating East Asia. The maintenance and enhancement of influence is geared toward protecting U.S. interests in stability, access and values and working toward a positive shared future with the peoples of East Asia. While the foundation of U.S. influence is provided by international political, economic and military power, U.S. influence in the region is largely determined by perceptions of commitment, credibility and evenhandedness.

Attention to regional perceptions yields several important implications for U.S. strategy in East Asia. The U.S. must show that (1) it is not absorbed or bogged down in the Middle East and remains capably engaged in East Asia; (2) the U.S. is not attempting to contain China but will confront Beijing if and when it challenges U.S. interests; (3) the U.S. does not stand against Asian-based solutions for preventing economic crisis and contagion; and (4) the U.S. objects to divisive nationalist and face-saving politics. Given these implications, the United States must focus on better public diplomacy in conjunction with its forward presence and alliance transformation efforts. In addition, the United States must be concerned about a Sino-Japanese rivalry isolating Japan in the region, reducing Tokyo's capacity as a diplomatic ally in Asia. The U.S. should thus encourage leaders of all nations to promote more balanced and informed public opinions about regional neighbors.

If the U.S. does not exercise any of its influence to counter a Sino-Japanese rivalry, it is easy to perceive that Washington sees such a rivalry as in its interest. The United States can do more to encourage regional mil-mil exchanges to increase transparency and build trust. To the extent that China and Japan perceive a competition between them for "leadership in Asia," the United States can help to enlarge the leadership pie. There is plenty to be done in this region, and the U.S. can convene further regional efforts on various issues of human and

comprehensive security on which China and Japan have different comparative advantages and can take different leadership roles. Such initiatives may be just a start, but the U.S. must devote attention to preventing zero-sum perceptions by Japan and China concerning their roles in Asia and in regards to their bilateral relationships with the United States.

Conclusion

SAVI offers a straightforward formulation of U.S. interests in stability, access, values, and influence in East Asia and helps explain U.S. policy approaches to a rapidly changing regional environment. The United States shaped the postwar order by building new international institutions in its interest, with careful consideration of the interests of other peoples. In the post-Cold War, post-September 11 environment, the United States faces a similar but perhaps even more difficult task. The challenge now is to shape post-Westphalian norms of good governance and principled effective multilateralism, again in line with U.S. interests, but now with greater input and cooperation from other nations.

United States interests clearly favor U.S.-Japan-China cooperation over a Sino-Japanese rivalry. Trilateral cooperation among the major powers in East Asia would provide shock absorbers to the region, allow frank discussion of long-term demographic and political change, help manage economic imbalances (trade deficits, exchange rates, significant and growing gaps between global rich and poor), facilitate disaster relief, improve responses to health and environmental crises, and expand effective counter-terrorism efforts.

The young generation in East Asia envisions a region no longer divided by Cold War lines and old historical animosities, a region where states transcend rivalry and compete for greater prosperity, not dominance. This may be achieved, not so much through the building of international institutions as was the case after World War II, but through the diffusion and mutual shaping of global norms of interaction, governance and security, facilitated by a revolution in communication and human exchange. The United States can advance this vision in the pursuit of its SAVI interests and enduring role in East Asia.