

**Leif-Eric Easley, "Toward Win-win-win U.S.-Japan-China Relations: Deeper cooperation possible with strategic coordination, high standards for state behavior," *International Herald Tribune-Asahi Shimbun*, July 5, 2007, page 25; *OMNI*, July 26, 2007, page 1; *China Post*, August 25, 2007, page 4.**

Reciprocal visits by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao have lifted Sino-Japan relations out of a difficult period. U.S.-China relations are of growing international importance and now better managed with high-level dialogues on economic and security issues. The U.S.-Japan alliance is increasingly operative and forward-looking. The demonstrated political will for improving these international ties suggests that Tokyo, Beijing and Washington all want to see "win-win-win" trilateral relations. It is yet unclear, however, what exactly win-win-win relations would look like or how to achieve them. This article articulates the characteristics of win-win-win relations, suggests discarding old thinking about international relations, and recommends steps for strategic coordination with high standards for state behavior.

### **What would win-win-win relations look like?**

Win-win-win relations would be *broader* than U.S.-Japan-China relations today, to include formal interaction on a full range of global – not just bilateral – issues. Win-win-win relations would also be *deeper*: all three countries would reach further into each other's societies. Moreover, win-win-win relations would be notably *more stable*. The alleviation of uncertainty and mistrust would decrease hedging behavior and associated opportunity costs, and better insulate relations from crises.

Most important in terms of policy, win-win-win relations would exhibit *greater international cooperation*. Japan, China and the U.S. would bring combined capabilities to bear on myriad international challenges including nuclear proliferation, terrorism and environmental degradation. In addition to responding to crises and disasters, the three countries would together engage in preventive diplomacy, address demographic change, and deal with chronic transnational problems.

### **Discarding old thinking about international relations**

To realize win-win-win relations, China, Japan and the U.S. can gradually do away with outmoded concepts of Westphalian and postwar international relations. First, *the international socialization of states is not one-way*. The U.S. is not the sole rule-maker or promulgator of international norms. While offering particular political and economic models, the U.S. also takes lessons from others. The international marketplace of ideas and practices is interactive and competitive, and should be a race to the top.

Second, *institutions should be open and purposeful* rather than closed and used for posturing. Transforming bilateral alliances should attract third parties and become nested in multilateral cooperation. Bilateral FTAs and regional blocks are less efficient than global trade liberalization under the World Trade Organization (WTO). And while focused diplomatic mechanisms such as the Six-Party Talks can yield results, excluding stakeholders from regional fora can be counterproductive.

Third, states should *move away from zero-sum assumptions*. Improved U.S.-China relations need not involve trade offs for U.S.-Japan relations. Increasing Chinese influence in Southeast Asia and elsewhere need not push out Japan. Improving China-South Korea relations need not come at the expense of the U.S.-South Korea alliance.

Fourth, governments need to *update old concepts of sovereignty*. Increasing global interdependence means certain domestic problems are international problems. States, particularly at the United Nations, need to begin to discuss new rules and means of intervention to address transnational problems such as terrorism, trafficking and the environment. More flexible concepts of sovereignty would also allow joint development of resources in disputed waters and territories, transforming security threats into economic opportunities.

In addition to new thinking on these points, all sides should *beware popular theories that may not hold*. The ideas that interdependence begets cooperation, economic development leads to democracy, democracy produces peace, power transition invites conflict, and multi-polarity yields effective international compromise, can help inform policy, but should not be assumptions on which leaders base decisions.

### **Strategic coordination with high standards for state behavior**

Tokyo, Beijing and Washington need to calibrate strategic roles so trilateral interaction pursues greater cooperation rather than suffering from misperception, nationalist miscalculation, or self-fulfilling prophesies of conflict. There is plenty of work to go around on transnational issues. The key for reaching productive win-win-win relations is navigating primary strategic interests while demanding high standards for state behavior.

China, Japan and the U.S. have yet to recognize fully each other's primary interests. China's primary interest is strategic space for its overall development. Beijing seeks to be not contained, not territorially divided, and not discriminated against by the international system. Japan's primary interest is its continued international relevance. Tokyo seeks to be not "passed," not isolated, and not silenced. The United States' primary interest is U.S.-led stability. Stability is of course a shared interest, but Washington wants to retain leadership because the U.S. and other countries do not yet see another willing, able and trusted stabilizer.

Successfully navigating primary interests will allow the three countries to avoid conflict, but win-win-win cooperation also requires high standards for state behavior. These standards include "three R's": respect, restraint and responsibility. Each principle applies to the U.S., China and Japan, but it is useful to emphasize the most relevant policy adjustments for each country.

The United States needs to *respect* other governments and effective multilateralism. The U.S. stabilizing role must clearly account for the interests of other countries. Washington should avoid acting as a lone superpower and demonstrate it is a trustworthy partner. China meanwhile should exercise military *restraint* in terms of coercive diplomacy, defense spending transparency, and power projection capabilities. Beijing can also show restraint domestically by allowing the continued growth of Chinese civil society. For its part, Japan can deal with historical issues *responsibly* as it takes a more active role in international politics and security. The region can better recognize Tokyo's international contributions and avoid security dilemmas if diplomatic efforts to build trust accompany Japanese normalization.

Japan's expanding security role and Japan-U.S. alliance transformation focus on increasingly global cooperation. Tokyo and Washington can show these efforts are not directed at China by doing more outside the region in terms of disaster relief and post-conflict stabilization, while inviting China's participation. Within the region, the three countries can coordinate search-and-rescue exercises, humanitarian assistance, and efforts to combat piracy.

Complex processes of globalization are transforming international relations. Multi-directional socialization is underway among states, international institutions and increasingly intertwined societies. In this dynamic context, it is essential to specify what win-win-win trilateral relations would look like. Those relations would be broader, deeper and more stable than today, and better able to address pressing international problems.

The goal is distant but far from impossible. Realizing win-win-win relations requires new strategic thinking, questioning old assumptions and adjusting to new realities. Japan, China and the United States would navigate each other's primary interests and adhere to high standards for state behavior involving mutual respect, restraint and responsibility. On this basis, multi-directional socialization would gradually produce shared strategic visions and even a sense of common identity. Only then will U.S.-Japan-China relations truly be win-win-win.

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