At 11:36 a.m. on Monday, October 9, 2006 (Korean Time), North Korea conducted what appeared to be its first nuclear test detonation. Five days later the United Nations Security Council passed a unanimous resolution—Resolution 1718—condemning the test and levying sanctions against North Korea, but leaving the crisis far from resolved. As the implications of the apparent test continue to unfold, American policy makers and security analysts would be well advised to take a broad look at the history of significant changes to East Asia’s security environment. For linked to the Korean dilemma is the other lingering conflict in East Asia: the dispute over the status of Taiwan in relation to mainland China. While both conflicts receive ample attention in academic journals, security analyses and op-ed pages, they tend to be analyzed separately, as if each exists in isolation of the other. The geographic proximity, parallel histories, and links connecting the two conflicts in the strategic thinking of the regional powers suggest however, that the two conflicts are inextricably intertwined.

This article examines the historical correlation of significant geopolitical change on the Korean Peninsula and in the Taiwan Strait since 1950, and what this history reveals about the present and future dynamics of the two conflicts. Significant geopolitical change is defined here simply as an event or series of events, the effects of which fundamentally and directly alter the strategic dynamics of either conflict. Whether North Korea’s nuclear test qualifies as a significant geopolitical change under this definition remains to be seen. Certainly, the test is significant. However, does it fundamentally alter the dynamics of the Korean Peninsula? For some time now, the United States and its allies have operated under the assumption that North Korea possessed several nuclear devices. While the test may confirm this, it will likely be some time before North Korea possesses a weaponized nuclear device—i.e., one small enough to be launched in a missile or dropped from an aircraft in its inventory. Furthermore, though China and Russia supported Resolution 1718, both powers’ longstanding opposition to the threat or use of force was reflected in the resolution’s prohibition on “military enforcement.”

The positions of the major powers—primarily the United States and China, but also Russia and Japan—will be the ultimate factor determining the long-term significance of the test. In fact, the tendency for significant geopolitical change to be instigated by, or with the consent of, the major
regional powers, is an enduring trend throughout the last half century in East Asia, and a basic premise of this article. This not meant to suggest that the smaller regional players—North Korea, South Korean and Taiwan—are incapable of unilaterally initiating significant geopolitical change. Particularly since the end of the Cold War, each has become more independent and increasingly likely to initiate, or attempt to initiate, significant change without the consent of their larger partners. This is not only apparent in North Korea, but in South Korea and Taiwan, where relatively new electorates have exerted their newfound influence on foreign policy. Despite these developments however, the size, influence and interest of major regional powers indicate that they will remain the primary instigators of significant geopolitical change well into the region’s future.

The second enduring trend during the last half-century in East Asia, and the central principal assertion of this article, is that significant geopolitical change tends to affect both conflicts concurrently or sequentially. In other words, when the strategic dynamics are significantly altered in one conflict, they tend to be altered in the other. The logic behind this is simple: the geographic proximity, parallel histories, and links connecting the two conflicts in the strategic thinking of the regional powers has made concurrent, or sequential, significant geopolitical change a consistent feature of the region’s past and, in all probability, its future.

There has long been a fear that a bona fide North Korean nuclear weapons capability might set off a regional nuclear arms race that could include South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. Each would be volatile; however, a renewed nuclear weapons development effort by Taiwan—such an effort was terminated in the 1970s thanks to concerted United States diplomatic pressure—would be an unacceptable affront to China. We are not there yet. With the ultimate significance of North Korea’s test—even on the Peninsula—still to be determined, it is too early to ascertain what secondary effects will spread to the Taiwan Strait. It is not, however, too early for United States policy makers and security analysts to appreciate that when events significantly alter the dynamics of one conflict, they tend to alter the dynamics of the other as well. Failing to appreciate this will leave strategic planning efforts at best incomplete and at worse vulnerable to failure.

To illustrate these points, this article examines four phases of significant geopolitical change in the region since 1950: 1) the Korean War, 2) the normalization of United States-China relations, 3) the end of the Cold War, and 4) the rise of China. Finally, the article’s conclusion will offer some important lessons for how United States policy makers, diplomats and military planners can prepare for an uncertain future in East Asia.

**Phase I: War and Alliance**

The Korean War is the defining event in the modern history of the Korean Peninsula. It is also a crucial starting point for the conditions that persist today in the Taiwan Strait. The period beginning just prior to the Korean War and ending with the completion of United States-Taiwan and United States-South Korea mutual defense treaties in 1954 clearly illustrates the two enduring trends that also emerge in subsequent phases of both conflicts. Though the war itself was initiated by North Korea, its leader at the time, Kim il Sung, first obtained consent from both the Soviet and Chinese leadership and would not have initiated it without their support. The North Korean attack was followed by the United States decisions not only to come to the defense of South Korea, but also to intervene in the Chinese Civil War by sending the Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan Strait. It was therefore decisions made primarily by the major powers that instigated significant geopolitical change. This, and the sequential timing of the significant events that followed, are characteristic of the dynamics connecting both conflicts over the next fifty-plus years.

**Links in the Chain**

By the end of 1949, Mao Tse-tung’s Chinese Communist Party controlled all of mainland China and had established the People’s Republic of China. The Kuomintang (KMT or Chinese Nationalists), led by Chiang Kai-shek, fled to Taiwan in December with the remains of the defeated government. Though President Truman grieved the loss of China, at no time before the beginning of the Korean War did he commit to defending Taiwan.
Truman’s Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, explicitly affirmed this in his memoirs, stating, “From October 1948 to the outbreak of the Korean War on June 25, 1950, this policy—that the United States forces would not be used to defend Formosa—never wavered.” Despite numerous public assertions, ranging from members of Congress to General Douglas MacArthur, that the United States should protect Taiwan, Truman refused. On the day following his January 5, 1950 State of the Union address, the administration released a statement indicating clearly that the United States would not send any military aid or even advice to Taiwan.

A week after Truman’s statement, Acheson made his infamous speech at the National Press Club, during which he did not include Korea (or Taiwan) in what he called the United States “defense perimeter” in Asia. Acheson’s omission allegedly gave the Soviet Union and China reason to believe the United States would not defend South Korea in the event of a communist attack. The next day, another significant event occurred: the Soviet Union, in protest of the United Nations Security Council’s continued recognition of Chiang’s Nationalists as the legitimate government of China and thus entitled to its seat on the council, walked out of the UN. Six months later, when North Korea attacked the South, the Soviet’s absence allowed the United States to act in the name of the UNSC, which passed resolutions condemning the attack and authorizing the use of force to oppose it.

In the weeks and months before the commencement of the Korean War, the situation on Taiwan looked bleak for the Nationalists. For months, United States, British and Russian officials predicted the invasion and subsequent fall of Taiwan sometime during the summer of 1950. In May, Hainan Island fell to the Communists and on May 17, the American consul in Taipei reported: “Fate of Taiwan sealed, Communist attack can occur between June 15 and end of July.” Chiang, perhaps sensing that his salvation lay with events on the Korean Peninsula, reportedly offered South Korea both troops and air support for a South Korean attack against North Korea. Even after the invasion, Truman refused to allow the use of the Taiwanese troops on the peninsula. However, one of the first moves he approved following the attack was the movement of the United States 7th Fleet into the Strait of Formosa. The administration considered the move necessary not only to prevent a Communist attack against the island but also to prevent Nationalist provocations against the mainland. Truman did not want war with the Chinese in June any more than he wanted it when it was forced upon him four months later.

Considering the estimates of a successful Chinese invasion of Taiwan during the summer of 1950, it is widely understood that the Korean War directly resulted in the protection of the Nationalists on Taiwan. After the Chinese intervention in the Korean War, United States support for Taiwan increased dramatically. Shortly after the signing of a mutual defense treaty between the United States and South Korea in October 1953, the United States signed a formal defense treaty with Taiwan (both entered into force in 1954). It is also widely accepted that, though North Korea initiated the war, Kim would not have done so without the consent of Mao and Joseph Stalin, which he received in April 1949 and March 1950 respectively. Thus, instigation of significant geopolitical change — the North Korean attack — was done with the consent of the two larger regional powers — China and the Soviet Union — and would likely not have occurred absent that consent. Similarly, it was the change in American policy at the beginning of the war that saved both South Korea and Taiwan from defeat by the communists, in effect establishing the basic dynamics of both conflicts that persist to this day.

**Phase II: United States - China Normalization**

The early 1970s ushered in the second era of significant geopolitical change on the Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan Strait. These changes were the result, primarily, of the eight-year process of normalization of relations between the United States and China, beginning with the July 1971 announcement that President Richard Nixon would visit Beijing, and culminating with the establishment of official diplomatic relations between the two countries on January 1, 1979. The extended time span was largely a result of the Watergate scandal, which prevented Nixon from making good on his promise to China’s leaders to recognize Beijing during his second
term. Nonetheless, the warming of relations between the two countries resulted in significant alterations of the strategic dynamics in both conflicts. Made to feel increasingly insecure by the thaw between their larger benefactors, the smaller players responded with changes of their own. Taiwan began a slow drive towards democratization and Taiwanization, while South Korea slid back into martial law, temporarily accelerated its pursuit of nuclear weapons, and began an ambitious drive towards industrial development. North Korea, after initiating the first series of unification talks with the South, began a significant expansion of its military. Unlike the Korean War, neither conflict became a primary battleground during this phase. However, once again, as the major powers repositioned themselves in relation to each other, the changes they instigated significantly, and concurrently, altered the dynamics of both conflicts.

Taiwan Loses Face

Nixon’s February 1972 state visit to China was the culmination of two strategic shifts in America’s Cold War policy in Asia: the Nixon Doctrine and Détente. The Nixon Doctrine, proclaimed during the first year of his presidency, declared that United States allies in Asia would be expected to use their own manpower for their own defense. The new doctrine was most apparent in the policy of Vietnamization — a gradual United States troop withdrawal from that war, combined with a strengthening and transfer of responsibility to the Army of South Vietnam. Nixon hoped to complement Vietnamization by gaining Beijing’s assistance in pressuring the North Vietnamese to return to peace negotiations. In addition, Nixon hoped rapprochement with the Chinese would widen the existing rift between China and the Soviet Union. This in turn would complement his other major foreign policy strategy of détente, which sought to reduce tensions between the United States and the communist block.

In July 1971, National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger made a secret trip to Beijing in advance of the president’s visit. During the trip, Kissinger was unable to secure Beijing’s help with the Vietnamese, but he did gain assurances that China would not intervene after an intensified American bombing campaign. In exchange, Kissinger privately assured Chinese Prime Minister Chou En-lai that the United States would not support Taiwanese independence. Nixon’s trip was announced immediately after Kissinger returned. The announcement proved an unexpected trigger for the eventual expulsion of Taiwan from the United Nations. In October 1971, a majority of the UN General Assembly voted to transfer China’s seat from the Nationalists on Taiwan to the PRC, effectively expelling Taiwan from the UN. In September 1972, Japan switched diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to the PRC. Others followed. By October 1974, only 32 countries recognized the Nationalists as the legitimate government of China, down from 65 in 1965. Today the number is 24.

Nixon’s visit the following February produced the Shanghai Communiqué, in which both countries pledged that they would work towards normalization of relations, expand trade relations, and implied that the United States and China would cooperate to contain the Soviet Union. Nixon agreed to remove the 9,000 United States troops stationed on Taiwan and promised that the United States would recognize China during his second term. The Watergate scandal made recognition impossible, but after the short presidential administration of Gerald Ford, the Carter Administration formally recognized the PRC and ended the mutual defense treaty with Taiwan. The island’s supporters in Congress were able to preserve some official United States support for Taiwan by passing the Taiwan Relations Act, which provided for continued military assistance despite the change in diplomatic relations.

The loss of its UN seat and the growing diplomatic isolation that followed shook the island’s leadership. Significantly, it convinced Chiang Kai-shek’s son, Chiang Ching-kuo, of the need to transform Taiwan’s political system. In 1969, Chiang Ching-kuo had been promoted to deputy premier and by 1972 was head of the Kuomintang’s Executive Council. Chiang realized that with United States and other international support waning, the prospect of retaking the mainland — the stated goal of the party — was becoming more remote. In order to survive, the government would have to become more democratic and bring more native Taiwanese
into the party, called localization or Taiwanization. These steps, he believed, would be essential for the party to maintain its position on the island, and help Taiwan maintain some sympathy and support in a world that seemed increasingly apathetic. Though martial law remained in effect on Taiwan for almost 15 years after Nixon’s visit to China, and the island would not have its first truly free and fair presidential election until 1996, changes initiated during this period planted the seeds of democracy that would bloom during the next phase of significant geopolitical change.

Shockwaves in Korea
When Kissinger made his secret trip to Beijing, Kim Il Sung also happened to be in the Chinese capital city. Clearly, Kissinger’s visit and the thawing of United States-Chinese relations that it represented was an unsettling notion for Kim. Three weeks later, he made a dramatic announcement that North Korea was ready to establish relations with South Korea “at any time.” South Korean President Park Chung Hee was no less disturbed by the United States-Chinese rapprochement. He had already endured a dose of the Nixon Doctrine in the spring of 1971, when Nixon ordered the number of United States troops in South Korea reduced by almost a third. Nixon’s shift of support away from Taiwan, and his Vietnamization strategy made Park worry that South Korea might be abandoned. He quickly responded to Kim’s offer with a proposal that the two countries’ Red Cross Societies meet at Panmunjom. The North accepted; and thus began a series of meetings that eventually led to the July 4, 1972 joint North/South Korean statement on unification. The statement was notable not only as the first joint commitment to unification, but for explicitly stating that it should be achieved “without being subject to external imposition or interference.” Little concrete action followed the statement, but it marked a significant prelude to the openings between the two Koreas in the 1990s (discussed below).

The Sino-American thaw led to other lasting changes on the peninsula. In contrast to Chiang Ching-kuo’s moves to increase political freedoms in Taiwan, Park responded to the changing international environment by restricting political freedoms in Korea. In October 1972, he inaugurated the yushin system. Literally meaning “revitalizing reform,” yushin actually ushered in an extended period of martial law in the South. Park simultaneously focused on accelerating development of South Korean industrial development. In late 1971, against the advice of American economic advisors, he initiated a heavy industrial development plan, which he believed was essential to ensuring South Korean security in the new international environment. He also backed an effort to accelerate South Korea’s nuclear weapons program. The country began its pursuit of nuclear weapons technology in the 1960s, but Nixon’s visit to China convinced Park of the need to accelerate the program. Korean scientists began working on the means to reprocess spent plutonium rods used in its existing nuclear power plants (as North Korea’s current effort seeks to do). Park’s goal was not to develop actual nuclear weapons but to be able to develop them quickly “if the United States nuclear umbrella were to be removed.” Once the program was discovered by the United States in 1974, a concerted effort was made to force Park to end the program. He did so in 1975, and shortly thereafter South Korea joined the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

Meanwhile North Korea began a significant expansion of its military. Though not fully appreciated until several years later, sometime during 1971 or 1972, Pyongyang began a gradual build-up of armored and mechanized forces in the southern half of the country, which would continue over at least the next two decades. When a United States military analyst discovered the build-up in 1975, North Korean armored forces appeared to be approximately 80 percent larger than previously estimated. Pyongyang also pursued upgrades in the quality of its ground forces and began constructing the first of a series of tunnels under the DMZ into South Korea. This effort continued through the 1980s and early 1990s. By 1993, the North maintained twice as many tanks and artillery, and 50 percent more soldiers, than the United States and South Korea had on the southern half of the Peninsula.

Phase III: The End of the Cold War
The next phase of significant geopolitical change — this one sparked by the end of the Cold War — produced two interrelated sets
of developments on the Korean Peninsula and Taiwan Strait. The first began with a series of structural and diplomatic shifts prompted by the decline and fall of the Soviet Union. Structurally, the end of the Cold War brought to an end the basic capitalist-versus-communist relations among the major powers. Diplomatically, significant developments included Russian and Chinese recognition of South Korea. This shift eventually resulted in a more insecure, deprived, and dangerous North Korea, leading to a series of crises that again transformed the dynamics of the Korean Peninsula. The diplomatic shifts affected Taiwan as well. Recognition by Beijing required Seoul to break ties with Taipei, which in turn helped stem Taiwan’s struggle to regain a seat at the United Nations. Around this time, Taiwan’s leadership also began a public shift away from the traditional goal of reunification towards the more volatile position of Taiwan as an independent state.

The second set of developments was the democratization of South Korea and Taiwan. While democratization affected the countries differently, its emergence, combined with the end of the Cold War structure of geopolitics, has resulted in the conduct of more independent foreign policies. Taiwan’s first fully democratic presidential election in 1996, along with increasingly public moves towards independence, helped provoke a dangerous crisis with China. That crisis, combined with the Korean crises, helped convince Japan to reassess its role in the region, resulting in substantial implications during the next phase of significant geopolitical change.

**The Cold War’s End and Aftermath**

Though it was not apparent to most at the time, by the mid-1980s, the Soviet Union was in terminal decline. The combination of the draining war in Afghanistan, the decline of the price of oil, and pressure to match increasing American military expenditures was too much for the inefficient and inflexible Soviet system to bear. When Mikhail Gorbachev became general secretary of the Communist Party in 1985, he inherited a system that he realized was unsustainable. *Perestroika*, or restructuring, was Gorbachev’s attempt to reform the Soviet economic system. Among the *perestroika* reforms were the policies allowing foreign investment into the Soviet Union. South Korea was one of the first countries from which Gorbachev sought investment.

His timing could not have been better. At least since the early 1980s South Korea sought better relations with the Soviet Union and China. Unofficial and third-country trade between South Korea and both communist states grew throughout the 1980s. In November 1988, the Soviet Politburo agreed to begin to explore closer relations with South Korea. Shortly afterward, Moscow lifted restrictions on South Koreans traveling to the Soviet Union. In June 1990, Gorbachev met with South Korean President Roh Tae Woo in the United States and three months later, the two countries established official diplomatic relations.

The move was not a complete surprise for North Korean officials but it was unquestionably a severe disappointment. The USSR was the first country to officially recognize North Korea in 1948 and had been its primary economic sponsor ever since. For Pyongyang, Soviet recognition of South Korea was more ominous than the establishment of United States-China relations because it gave legitimacy to the permanent division of Korea. To make matters worse, the USSR also informed Pyongyang that it would have to begin making payments on its debt and that trade between the two countries would henceforth be in hard currency (instead of on credit). In last minute attempts to sway the Soviets against the move, North Korean officials reportedly threatened to recognize parts of the USSR that were seeking independence at the time; and, in an important portent of things to come, implied that Pyongyang would no longer consider itself bound by pledges not to pursue nuclear weapons. In 1993, Russian President Boris Yeltsin proclaimed that Russia was no longer bound to the defense assistance clause in the 1961 Soviet-North Korean Friendship Treaty.

Just as jarring for North Korea was the continued transformation of Communist China. After initiating market reforms in the late 1970s, China’s relations with the West improved throughout the 1980s until the Tiananmen Square massacre in June 1989. Following that event, though, foreign investment in the
mainland declined only temporarily and economic reforms continued. Significantly, trade between China and South Korea grew from only $19 million in 1979 to $3.1 billion in 1988 and $6.4 billion in 1992. During the same period, trade between China and North Korea was stagnant, with most of it subsidized by the Chinese.

In April 1992, China informed South Korea that it was ready to begin discussions relating to the establishment of diplomatic relations. The news shook both North Korea and Taiwan. For each it meant again, a long-time enemy would soon establish official relations with a historically dependable ally. North Korea and Taiwan did what they could to prevent the deal from being reached — including threatening to establish diplomatic relations with each other. However, in the end the world had changed. Foreign Direct Investment was now a crucial priority for China, and South Korea was a leading provider. Taiwan offered South Korea special trade and investment benefits but could not sweeten the deal enough to overcome the strategic and economic benefits for South Korea of relations with China. On August 24, 1992, China and South Korea signed a joint communiqué agreeing to recognize one another and establish full diplomatic relations. Seoul promptly severed diplomatic ties with Taipei and handed over Taiwan’s $1.7 billion embassy complex in Seoul to China.

The shift from a “One-Korea” to a “Two-Koreas” policy was a significant shift for Beijing. Its motivation was not simply financial. Chinese leaders have consistently connected Korea policy with Taiwan policy — both in real and symbolic terms. Historically Beijing linked recognition of “One-Korea” to its demand that there was only “One-China,” including Taiwan. China’s recognition of “Two-Koreas” broke that link. In return, Beijing received Seoul’s acceptance of “One China” including Taiwan. This would in turn have implications for the possible use of American forces in South Korea to defend Taiwan. It also came at a time when Taiwan was attempting to use its significant currency surplus in an effort at “dollar diplomacy” to gain support for its reentry into the United Nations. South Korea’s switch was a significant blow to that effort. For Beijing, upsetting Pyongyang was well worth the gain — the North Koreans after all, had few other friends to turn to.

The loss of the Soviet Union and China as reliable partners (the “socialist betrayal”) had dramatic effects on the welfare and outlook of North Korea. According to the best available figures, North Korea’s GDP declined approximately 25 percent between 1990 and 2002. The period of its most dramatic decline occurred between 1990 and 1998, when GDP declined by a third. In March 1993, less than a year after China and South Korea established diplomatic relations, North Korea threatened to pull out of the NPT. Over the next year, a clash between North Korea, the International Atomic Weapons Agency and the United States led to the 1994 North Korean Nuclear Crisis. The crisis involved a demand by the IAEA and the United States that safeguards against the diversion of spent plutonium fuel rods from North Korea’s 5-megawatt nuclear reactor remain in place. When North Korea officially withdrew from the NPT on June 13, 1994, the United States considered pursuing UNSC sanctions. The implementation of such sanctions, North Korean officials said, would mean war. The crisis was defused and the resolution led to the signing of the Agreed Framework in October 1994. The Agreed Framework provided fuel aid and the promise of light-water (proliferation resistant) nuclear reactors to North Korea in exchange for its pledge to refrain from reprocessing the spend fuel rods and remain in the NPT.

Significantly, the crisis marked the beginning of a consistent trend in North Korean behavior after the disastrous diplomatic shifts of the early 1990s. In short, pursuit of nuclear weapons became the only means North Korean leaders were — and still are — able to comprehend as a means to secure economic assistance and maintain regime security in the absence of guarantees provided by China and the Soviet Union. This policy became more pronounced after the collapse of the Agreed Framework in 2002 following the revelation of North Korea’s continued pursuit of nuclear weapons related material (via uranium enrichment). The 1994 crisis was also significant because it helped prompt Japan’s reconsideration of its role in the region. As the regional players contemplated the possibility of an
all out war on the peninsula, the United States and Japan realized that they were not prepared for cooperation in the event of war on the Korean Peninsula. The crucial question was to what extent did Japan’s constitutional prohibition on the use of force to settle international disputes permit Japanese cooperation with the United States in the event of armed conflict on the Korean Peninsula. The two countries initiated a review of the guidelines on defense cooperation (previously revised in 1978), thus beginning the process of redefining the alliance for the Post-Cold War world. The process expanded following the 1996 Missile Crisis in the Taiwan Strait.

While there was a general improvement in China-Taiwan relations between 1991 and 1994, including increasing Taiwanese investment in the mainland and the first unofficial talks between representatives of both governments in 1993, relations quickly soured. In June 1995, the Clinton Administration allowed Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui to visit his alma mater, Cornell University, where Lee declared, “the people of the Republic of China on Taiwan are determined to play a peaceful and constructive role among the family of nations… we are here to stay.” The speech was symbolic of the shift in Taiwanese thinking that began in the 1970s and strengthened following the emergence of democracy on the island and the end of the Cold War. While the Kuomintang traditionally considered themselves as the legitimate rulers of the mainland and eventually hoped to regain power there, Lee and others increasingly began to acknowledge this was unrealistic. The traditional goal of reunification (under KMT leadership) shifted towards independence, and deeply antagonized Beijing. Lee’s Cornell speech thus triggered a crisis, during which Beijing began a series of military exercises and missile launches into the waters north of Taiwan. The launches intensified as Taiwan’s March 1996 presidential elections approached. Just prior to the election, President Clinton ordered the aircraft carriers Independence and Nimitz into the area to deter further escalation.

The crisis passed and Lee won the election despite China’s attempts to intimidate the island’s population. Beijing would take a more restrained position in the future, realizing such aggressive actions would provoke Taiwan’s electorate to vote for the more anti-Chinese/anti-unification candidates. An additional annoyance for Beijing was the role the crisis played in further reviving United States-Japanese discussions on defense cooperation. While the 1994 crisis in Korea prompted the United States and Japan to reaffirm their alliance by undertaking “efforts to advance cooperation” in maintaining stability on the Korean Peninsula, they did not address the Taiwan Strait. Following the 1996 crisis, the United States and Japan revised alliance guidelines to include “cooperation in situations in areas surrounding Japan.” Though the revised guidelines did not specifically mention Taiwan, Beijing accused the United States and Japan of “indirectly” including Taiwan in United States-Japan defense cooperation. The revision served as the basis for deeper, and to China’s consternation even less ambiguous, United States-Japanese cooperation over the next decade. (Covered in the article’s final section)

The Democracy Exception? During the 1980s, newly emergent domestic pressures combined with the changing international environment to produce nearly concurrent transitions to democracy in both Taiwan and South Korea. Though the process of democratization was different in each case, the timing of their democratic transitions is clearly consistent with the second enduring trend (concurrent or sequential change). Whether the major regional powers were the primary instigators of democratic change, consistent with the first enduring trend, is debatable. Clearly, domestic factors (i.e. popular and determined opposition movements and budding, educated middle classes) were essential elements in both cases. However, the role played by the major powers — primarily the United States — should not be underappreciated. As discussed above, the normalization of United States-China relations during the 1970s prompted Taiwan’s leadership to initiate moves towards greater democratization. While South Korean leaders instead clamped down on opposition and renewed marital law, the United States influence on the roots of that country’s eventual democracy is also significant. As Thomas W. Robinson wrote 15 years ago,
“land reform, foreign aid, security guarantees, transmission of cultural and political values, and American toleration of unequal terms of economic competition” during the last half of the twentieth century set the conditions for the economic and political evolution that made democracy possible in both cases. attempted to instigate such change, the major powers will remain the dominant instigators of, and influences on, significant geopolitical change in both conflicts. Since becoming democracies, South Korean and Taiwanese behavior has at times tended to conflict with United States preferences (as has North Korea behavior via China). This is partially due to the expiration of the communist-versus-capitalist dynamics of the Cold War. It is also a result of the evolving preferences of their newly empowered electorates. As C.P. Chung states, “[Democracy] exacerbates social division within a country, as a result of which relations with foreign countries get ameliorated or aggravated, depending on the revealed preference of the median voter.” The effect, according to Chung, has been that “relations between the two Koreas have improved, while relations between Taiwan and China worsened.” 2 A look at the last decade-and-a-half substantiates Chung’s thesis, but also illustrates the limited extent to which either country can pursue its medium voter’s foreign policy preference without consent of a major power. Relations between North and South Korea improved slightly during the early 1990s, then following the 1994 Nuclear Crisis gained substantial momentum following the election of Kim Dae Jung in 1997. Kim’s “Sunshine Policy,” which sought to decrease tensions with the North by increasing economic interaction and political exchanges, led to the historic meeting in 2000 between Kim and North Korean leader Kim Jung II in Pyongyang and commercial deals like the construction of the Kaesong Industrial Complex just north of the DMZ. The election of Roh Moo Hyun in South Korea’s 2002 presidential election ensured the continuation of the Sunshine Policy through the present.

However, while Kim and Roh’s policies have somewhat altered the dynamics on the Peninsula, they have yet to produce significant geopolitical changes on the order of Nixon’s visit to China or the end of the Cold War. While the Kaesong Industrial Complex and other Sunshine Policy initiatives continue to make incremental advances, the policy has been largely ineffective at achieving its goal of changing North Korea’s behavior. Such change will require action from the larger regional powers. In the June 2006 issue of the Far Eastern Economic Review, John S. Park writes that the way for Seoul to “enable its Sunshine Policy to flourish,” is to enlist Chinese assistance in building similar industrial complexes along North Korea’s border with China. 3 Park’s suggestion that China’s participation is a crucial element in producing change in North Korea is indicative of the continuing decisive influence of the larger regional powers on significant strategic change in the region. Kim Jung II’s week-long visit to China in January 2006, during which Chinese leaders showcased the results of a quarter century of economic reform, may indicate Kim’s interest in Chinese-style economic reforms. However, Chinese leaders have made it clear that Pyongyang should consult with them before commencing any significant economic ventures near the northern border. China’s
October 2002 arrest of Yang Bin, who Pyongyang appointed to head a new Special Administrative Region (a type of Free Trade Zone) in the northern city of Sinuiju, sent just such a message.24

Similarly, while democracy has also altered the nature of United States-South Korean relations, significant changes in the relationship remain primarily Washington’s prerogative. Over the last decade in South Korea, favorable opinion of the United States has slowly eroded, particularly among young, college-educated South Koreans.25 Though the decline in pro-American sentiment coincides with United States troop reductions and redeployments south of the Han River and out of Seoul, these moves were actually instigated by Washington for strategic reasons having little to do with South Korean public opinion. In fact, support among South Koreans for continued United States troop presence on the Peninsula remains over 70 percent.26 The redeployment of United States forces south of the Han is actually intended to leverage the longer reach of United States armaments by moving out of North Korean artillery range. The troop reduction on the peninsula furthermore is part of a broader Pentagon initiative, which includes the repositioning of forces from Cold War bases in Europe, intended to posture forces to respond quicker to crises in the Middle East and Central Asia. The war in Iraq is also a factor: in 2004, 3,600 United States troops were permanently shifted from South Korea to Iraq.27

In Taiwan, democracy has also resulted in the island’s leadership attempting to play a more independent role (literally) in the region. Again though, the influence and interests of the larger regional powers outweigh the degree to which Taiwan’s leaders can instigate change. For example, despite the two-term presidency of long time independence advocate, Chen Shui-bien, attempts to move the island closer towards independence have been constrained, primarily by the United States interest in maintaining the status quo in the conflict. This was most apparent during Chen’s 2003 attempt to improve his electoral prospects by pushing for a referendum demanding China remove medium range missiles opposite Taiwan and renounce the use of force against the island. Chen hoped the referendum would increase turnout of his supporters in the March 2004 presidential election. Not surprisingly, the referendum was harshly condemned by China as a dangerous provocation. During a December 2003 visit by Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao to the White House, President Bush publicly rebuked Chen’s referendum, stating, “comments and actions made by the leader of Taiwan indicate that he may be willing to make decisions unilaterally to change the status quo, which we oppose.”28 Bush’s rebuke brought his administration in alignment with the longtime United States policy of strategic ambiguity, and established a limit on how much the United States would tolerate Taiwanese provocation of China.29

The referendum episode also illustrates the restraining influence of Taiwan’s electorate in limiting the president’s ability to instigate strategic geopolitical change. Following Bush’s rebuke, Chen succeeded in putting watered-down versions of the original referendum questions on the ballot — these asked voters whether Taiwan should arm itself with additional defensive weapons against China if Beijing did not withdraw short and medium range missiles directed at the island and whether Taiwan should have open negotiations with China. Chen won a very narrow victory in the election, but the referendum questions failed to get the fifty percent voter participation needed to be valid.30 The vote was indicative of the Taiwanese electorate’s preference for the status quo in cross-strait relations. A preference reinforced during legislative elections in December 2004 and local and municipal elections in December 2005, as Chen’s DPP sustained significant losses in both. The setbacks prompted some to declare the demise of Taiwan’s independence movement.31 While this seems premature, the likelihood of any dramatic moves by Taiwan towards independence in the near future seems remote.

Phase IV: China’s Rise and an Uncertain Future

The final phase of significant geopolitical change involves China’s rise as a potential global superpower. This phase overlaps with the Phase III, and both are ongoing. It is difficult to mark an actual date for the beginning of this phase (as with the prior phase). However, suffice it to say that
towards the end of the twentieth and beginning of this century, China’s unprecedented economic growth has led to a dramatic increase in its relevance and influence in Asia and throughout the globe. This increased relevance is likely to extend well into, if not throughout, the twenty-first century. The three most salient factors of China’s rise relating to the Korean and Taiwan conflicts are: 1) The deepening economic interdependence between China and all regional players; 2) a shared interest among all the regional players in maintaining stability and, at least in the near-term, the status quo in Northeast Asia; and 3) Japan’s evolving response to China’s rise. This final section will explore how each of these factors reinforces the continuity of the two enduring trends in the present and future.

**Economic Interdependence**

China’s dramatic growth since the initiation of economic reforms in 1978 is well documented and widely appreciated. Since 1978, China’s GDP has increased more than tenfold, giving it the fourth largest GDP in the world (recently surpassing the United Kingdom) or, when measured by Purchasing Price Parity, the second largest behind only the United States. Concurrent with China’s economic growth has been its economic integration into the global economy. China’s accession into the World Trade Organization in 2001 has accelerated this integration and helped make it the world’s third largest trading nation. China has replaced the United States as the number one trading partner of South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. A decade ago, South Korean exports to the United States were twice as large as exports to China. Today, South Korea exports more to, and imports more from, China than the United States. While Japan still exports more goods to the United States than to China, its exports to China are growing at a much faster rate than exports to the United States, and Japan’s imports from China exceed United States imports by over $40 billion. In 1995, Taiwan’s exports to the United States were almost double those to China ($29 billion vs. $15 billion). By 2004, Taiwan’s exports to China almost equaled exports to the United States (United States - $35 billion vs. China - $34 billion).

A driving force for integration as well as China’s explosive economic growth has been the massive amounts of Foreign Direct Investment poured into the mainland from each of these countries. In 2003, FDI into China was for the first time higher than FDI into the United States ($54 billion vs. $30 billion). While the United States regained its traditional lead in 2004, FDI into China continues to soar. In 2005, it received $60.6 billion, including a combined 29 percent from Japan ($6.5 billion), South Korea ($5.2 billion), the United States ($3.6 billion) and Taiwan ($2.2 billion). This does not count $9 billion in FDI from the Virgin Islands, much of which comes from Taiwanese businesses attempting to avoid government limitations on FDI into the mainland.

Integration with China entails significant benefits and risks for each of these countries. For Taiwan, integration with the mainland has helped the island remain competitive through periods of currency escalation, wage inflation and competition from other regional low-wage countries. The island, however, has struggled to deal with a series of potential risks associated with closer integration. These include the “hollowing out” of Taiwan’s domestic manufacturing base, Chinese attempts to influence Taiwan’s domestic politics, and transference of strategic technologies to the mainland. While South Korea has also benefited from China’s cheap labor and growing consumer market, it also faces risks, including depressed manufacturing, job loss, and competition from emerging Chinese industries. Japan has benefited from investments in the Chinese market to such a degree that some attribute Japan’s recent recovery to integration with China. However, while fewer Japanese see China as an economic threat, political tensions between the two countries raise the possibility of future hostilities (see below). For the United States, investment in China has helped American firms remain competitive in the global economy, and China’s massive holdings of United States Treasury Securities have helped dampen interest rates and inflation. However, the ever-increasing United States trade deficit with China, and Beijing’s associated refusal to let its currency float, are a constant source of disagreement between the two nations.

Despite the inherent risks of closer
economic ties with China, continued economic integration is a stabilizing force if not an outright deterrent to conflict. Though not a guarantee of peace, integration raises the costs of armed conflict for all sides. For example, while there is ample evidence that China hopes to use economic integration with Taiwan to influence the political process on the island and eventually force unification, the economic benefits the mainland continues to receive from Taiwanese investments have helped convince Beijing that belligerent actions — such as those opted for during the 1996 Missile Crisis — are counterproductive and not in its interests.\(^\text{47}\)

The notable exception to the integration calculation is of course Pyongyang. North Korea is highly dependent on China and South Korea for aid and investment, but its stake in the existing regional economic structure, because it exports so little, is considerably less than the other players. North Korea’s dependence on China may make Pyongyang more malleable to Chinese influence. Though Pyongyang’s decision to test a Taepodong II ICBM in July 2006 and conduct the nuclear test three months later—both apparently against China’s wishes—suggests Beijing’s influence is not absolute.\(^\text{48}\) Either way, China will continue to be a restraining influence on North Korea—though not as much as many would hope—as long as stability remains one of China’s primary regional objectives (see below).

Economic integration with China, though a stabilizing force, also increases the likelihood that significant geopolitical change will be instigated by China and will affect both conflicts concurrently or sequentially. This is not to suggest that China will be successful using economic leverage to coerce its neighbors. Successful economic coercion is unlikely even in the most obvious case—Taiwan.\(^\text{49}\) Instead, events outside of Beijing’s control—but still emerging from within China—are the most likely sparks for such significant geopolitical change in the region. A significant recession and/or widespread internal instability leading to insurrection, for example, could spark chain reactions, which would alter the dynamics of the Korean and Taiwan conflicts. On the other hand, if China’s leaders maintain internal stability, its influence will continue to grow, not only in Northeast Asia but among the Southeast Asian nations as well. Though China currently accepts the American military presence as a stabilizing force throughout the region, eventually it will prefer to see the traditional United States-centered hub-and-spoke alliance structure in Asia dismantled. Any prospect of achieving this objective is some way off. However, as China has carefully nurtured numerous regional and bilateral trade agreements and an image of moderate and mature diplomacy, some in the region already note a shift in the “balance of influence” in China’s favor.\(^\text{50}\) Whether Beijing can continue this trend remains to be seen. What is certain is that if it is successful in upsetting or even supplanting United States influence in the long term, it will transform the dynamics of the conflicts in the Taiwan Strait, the Korean Peninsula, and beyond.

Hail the Status Quo

Regardless of China’s long term ambitious, in the short term, it clearly seeks to maintain regional stability and the status quo. According to Avery Goldstein, China’s grand strategy “is designed to sustain the conditions necessary for continuing China’s program of economic and military modernization as well as to minimize the risk that others, most importantly the peerless United States, will view the ongoing increase in China’s capabilities as an unacceptably dangerous threat that must be parried or perhaps even forestalled. China’s grand strategy, in short, aims to increase the country’s international clout without triggering a counterbalancing reaction.\(^\text{51}\)

In relation to the Korean Peninsula, this strategy manifests itself in efforts to prevent two worst-case scenarios for China: an internal collapse of North Korea or armed conflict on the Peninsula involving the United States. The former could
bring tens or even hundreds of thousands of refugees into northern China with potentially destabilizing consequences. The latter could produce the refugee problem as well, but in addition, raise the disturbing possibility of American troops positioned at or near the Chinese border. North Korea’s pursuit of nuclear weapons is also of concern to the Chinese. As noted above, related crises have already helped push Japan into a more assertive role in the region. If North Korea is able to demonstrate the capacity to mate a nuclear warhead with a long-range missile, it could trigger further military expansions by Japan, more forcible action by the United States, and reigniting of South Korean and Taiwanese nuclear programs. China has attempted to help resolve the nuclear issue by playing a leading role in the Six Party Talks between China, Russia, Japan, North Korea, South Korea and the United States. The talks, which have been stalled since November 2005, serve China’s interest by facilitating dialogue and thereby minimizing the prospects for armed conflict, as well as enhancing Beijing’s prestige as the primary moderator between Washington and Pyongyang.

For the most part, the region’s primary players share China’s interest in preserving the status quo in Korea. The United States, though antagonized by North Korea’s development of nuclear weapons and missile technology, has settled on diplomacy and containment for the near term. This policy is an acknowledgement that there are few good military options for compelling North Korea, particularly while the United States military is heavily engaged in Iraq and Afghanistan. South Korea, like China, fears the destabilizing consequences of a North Korean collapse, to say nothing of the devastation that would result from armed conflict. As noted above, the new generation of leaders in Seoul prefer economic engagement with the North in order to foster steady improvement of the North Korean economy, in the hope not only that it will moderate the regime’s behavior but also make unification less painful when and if it comes. Finally, North Korea, while seemingly doing its best to disturb the status quo, may actually be the most fearful of change. Pyongyang understands that the regime will not survive another significant armed conflict on the Peninsula. As mentioned above, its pursuit of nuclear weapons is intended as a “deterrent” to armed conflict, as well as a bargaining chip to be used to induce aid from the international community. At the other end of the spectrum, economic liberalization may also be a threat to the regime. The inevitable exposure it will bring to the outside world, particularly to more affluent South Korea, risks a loss of legitimacy for the regime that has preached the utopian ideal of junche—self-reliance—for over half a century. Thus, North Korea’s risky policies of periodic provocations, long-range missile and nuclear tests, and resistance to outside influences, are ultimately aimed at shoring up the regime and thereby support maintenance of the status quo.

Similarly, the primary players in the Taiwan Strait also seek to maintain the status quo for the time being. Chinese officials have previously indicated that an indefinite delay of negotiations on unification is not acceptable. However, it is interesting to note that while China’s 2000 White Paper on Taiwan stressed that the issue could not be “postponed indefinitely,” the much-maligned Anti-Secession Law passed in March 2005 had no similar proscription. Clearly, the current cross-strait dynamic—which blends steady flows of investment from Taiwan, an apparent increase in China’s influence on the island, and ever-increasing military and diplomatic advantages for Beijing—only benefits China in the long run and broadens its future options for reunification. This is reinforced by the Bush Administration’s embrace of strategic ambiguity. Though Taiwan’s current leadership has attempted to move towards formal independence and thus shift the status quo, opposition from the Bush Administration, in addition to resistance from Taiwan’s own population (each discussed above) have proved a tight restraint. Potential moves by any future Taiwanese leader in the opposite direction, towards formal unification, are likely to be similarly restrained.

Japan in the Mix

Japan also shares an interest in maintaining the status quo on the Korean Peninsula and Taiwan Strait. However, not unlike how Beijing’s grand strategy guides its approach to both conflicts, Tokyo views both conflicts in close context with its primary strategic concern—the rising power of China. Much
of Japan’s response to China’s rise over the past decade has been in cooperation with the United States. While this cooperation will continue into the foreseeable future, Japan remains an independent actor with its own interests, image, and tendencies. Its actions, and the region’s response to those actions, will have distinct effects on the regional dynamics. Never before have China and Japan been major powers at the same point in history. Historical animosities, maritime disputes, or even episodes of inadvertent military altercations have the potential to produce conflict between the two nations. Proximity alone suggests that such conflict would involve the Strait and the Peninsula. Short of an outright clash between China and Japan, their evolving relationship will still directly affect both conflicts.

Much to China’s annoyance, Japan has become increasingly involved in the Taiwan Strait — a trend not disconnected from the evolving situation on the Korean Peninsula. Tokyo also maintains a vital interest in Korea and will seek to influence any significant changes to the status quo on the Peninsula. However, the memory of Japanese militarism — kept fresh by former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi’s periodic visits to the Yasukuni shrine — has made its relations with both Koreas, as well as China, increasingly difficult. This in turn, has prompted fears in Tokyo that the closer relations between South Korea and China could come at the expense of Japanese security. While Japan desires cooperation with South Korea, or an eventual unified Korea, if Chinese influence on the Peninsula continues to grow, Tokyo will look to balance that influence elsewhere. One direction it could turn towards is the Taiwan Strait.

As discussed above, the 1994 Nuclear Crisis in Korea and the 1996 Missile Crisis in the Taiwan Strait prompted the United States and Japan to reaffirm their alliance and revise guidelines to solidify cooperation “in areas surrounding Japan.” North Korea’s launch of a Taepodong I long-range missile over Japan in August 1998 encouraged even deeper cooperation, helping convince Tokyo to join the United States-led Theater Missile Defense (TMD) program. North Korea’s July 2006 Taepodong II launch has already prompted acceleration of this program. There can be little doubt that the nuclear test will encourage further United States-Japanese defense cooperation. Increasingly though, the driving force behind Japan’s more assertive role in the region is the perception that China presents a long-term threat to its interests. In addition to its growing military budget, China’s continued buildup of medium range missiles across the Taiwan Strait (some capable of hitting Japan), disputes over ownership of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and gas deposits in the East China Sea, and the incursion of a Chinese submarine into Japanese waters in November 2004 have helped mobilize Japanese suspicion of China.

In December 2004, Japan’s Security Council and Cabinet approved National Defense Program guidelines that for the first time listed both North Korea and China as potential military threats. The guidelines noted China’s continued modernization of air, naval and nuclear forces and stated that Japan “will have to remain attentive to [China’s] future actions.” On February 19, 2005 the United States-Japan Security Consultative Committee (the so-called “2 plus 2” discussions between the United States secretaries of state and defense and Japan’s foreign minister and minister of state) released a statement that listed “common strategic objectives” of encouraging “the peaceful resolution of issues concerning the Taiwan Strait” and encouraging “China to improve transparency of its military affairs.” Beijing condemned the “unprecedented” mention of the Strait in the joint statement as meddling in “the internal affairs of China.” The statement was nonetheless reaffirmed in May 2006 at the next “2 plus 2” meeting in Washington.

Tokyo’s actions are indicative of its increasing interest in the Taiwan Strait and symbolic of a strategic tilt towards Taipei as a means to balance against a potential Chinese threat. It should be noted that while Japanese policy towards Taiwan remained more or less aligned with the United States throughout the Cold War, it tended to lean towards China — at least as far its alliance with the United States would allow — due in part to the perceived importance of China’s traditional market for Japanese goods. Tokyo’s quick switch from recognition of Taipei to Beijing following Nixon’s visit in 1972
resentment remains among Koreans and island from 1895 until 1945 — bitter legacy with fondness — Japan ruled the Taiwanese look upon Japan’s colonial relating to Japan’s past. While some older Koreans have shown no such inclination Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi’s visits bashing over its colonial past and former disinclination to participate in Japan-Tokyo have also benefited from Taiwan’s Warmer relations between Tokyo and joins the United States led program.

Beijing, may be an indication of things to come. Finally, Japan’s participation in TMD also raises the possibility of indirect integration with Taiwan defenses if Taipei joins the United States led program. Moreover, a Japan’s disparagement of China’s cultural heritage and an obligation to come to the defense of Taiwan.” While Japanese policy is not likely to become as unambiguous as Chen hopes, Japan’s recent actions suggest it will assume a greater future role in deterring a Chinese assault on the island. Though Japan has no formal defense ties to Taiwan, the recent attendance of the commander-in-chief of Taiwan’s army at a major live-fire exercise in Japan, also condemned by Beijing, may be an indication of things to come. Finally, Japan’s participation in TMD also raises the possibility of indirect integration with Taiwan defenses if Taipei joins the United States led program.\textsuperscript{a}

Warm relations between Tokyo and Taipei have also benefited from Taiwan’s disinclination to participate in Japan-bashing over its colonial past and former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi’s visits to the Yasukuni shrine.\textsuperscript{a} China and both Koreas have shown no such inclination towards restraint on sensitive issues relating to Japan’s past. While some older Taiwanese look upon Japan’s colonial legacy with fondness — Japan ruled the island from 1895 until 1945 — bitter resentment remains among Koreans and Chinese. Significantly, Koizumi’s visits to Yasukuni, most recently in August, have strained already shaky Japanese relations with South Korea. Japan’s new Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, has pledged to improve relations with China and South Korea but has not ruled out visiting the shrine.

Seoul has also taken exception to Japan’s more assertive posture in the region and the ongoing dispute between the two countries over ownership of the Dokdo/Takeshima islets might have led to a clash in May 2006 when South Korea dispatched 20 patrol ships toward the islets in response to an official Japanese Coast Guard survey of surrounding waters. Though the situation did not escalate further, the dispute remains unresolved. Tensions between Tokyo and Seoul have made cooperation in negotiations with Pyongyang difficult — even when it seems to be in both of their interests to do so. Japanese officials, for example, hoped that the revelation in April 2006 that one of its citizens abducted by North Korea was likely the daughter of a South Korean abductee would lead to a common front in talks with Pyongyang over the issue. Seoul however — despite claims that over 480 abducted or detained South Koreans remain in North Korea — prefers to downplay the issue, placing a higher priority on détente with the North.\textsuperscript{a} In fact, beyond modest cooperation in response to North Korea’s missile tests in July, Seoul’s approach to the North is much closer to Beijing’s approach than to Tokyo or Washington’s, which tend to mirror each other.

Beyond North Korea’s abduction of its citizens and development of nuclear weapons, Tokyo’s long-term concern on the peninsula is that animosity towards Japan, combined with enhanced Sinosouth Korean relations, is resulting in a South Korean tilt towards Beijing. Although South Korea and Japan, through their mutual alliances with the United States, have implicitly cooperated in maintaining stability in East Asia over the past 50 years, significant cooperation between Seoul and Tokyo in the current environment seems unlikely. As Victor Cha has put it, sentiment in Korea is such that, “[r]emaining even mildly neutral about Japan is, in essence, to deny a critical part of one’s identity as Korean. Advocating security cooperation with Japan becomes synonymous with treason and once again subjugates Korea to Japanese domination.”

Cha has also pointed out that many analysts in Asia, particularly in South Korea, argue that Tokyo’s fear of a unified Korea allied with China motivates Japanese opposition to reunification and will cause Japan to “recreate military capabilities commensurate with its economic and political influence.” Cha dismisses this offensive-realist argument in favor of the defensive-realist variant. Offensive-realists assert that states seek to maximize their relative power in order to ensure survival. Defensive-realists also believe states pursue relative power to balance against perceived threats, but consciously
avoid seeking a preponderance of relative power that would provoke counterbalancing from others. Thus, Cha contends that the reorientation of Japan’s military is defensive in nature and Tokyo will not oppose reunification because doing so would risk alienating a united Korea. This would be antithetical to its long-term strategy of “assuring non-adversarial relations” on the Peninsula in order to balance against China. Furthermore, he argues that Japan realizes “a united Korea would be more preoccupied with securing its new northern border and gaining domestic stability than with entertaining any designs on Japan.”

While Cha’s assessment seems reasonable, reunification is probably years if not decades away. More important than Japan’s support for reunification in the future is how it deals with the closer Sino-South Korean relationship in the present. Scott Snyder, in the same publication as Cha, writes of the potential for China to use its increasing influence in South Korea as a lever to weaken the United States-South Korea alliance or to seek the eventual reduction or removal of United States troops from the Peninsula. Snyder focuses primarily on the implications for United States policy; however, China’s increasing influence in South Korea creates a serious concern for Tokyo. Korea’s geographic position—the Peninsula has been called “the dagger pointed at the heart of Japan”—makes its future posture a potentially decisive factor in any conflict involving Japan and China. Thus, closer Sino-South Korean relations will force Tokyo to respond.

Taiwan provides a convenient though imperfect balancing opportunity for Japan to leverage against increased Chinese influence in South Korea. Taiwan is convenient due to its geostrategic importance and inclination towards closer relations with Japan. It is imperfect, however, primarily because closer relations with the island present risks of provoking unwanted conflict or counterbalancing reactions from China or others. Tokyo will continue to take an increasing interest in Taiwan’s security while stopping short of explicit support for, or cooperation with, the island, unless dramatic circumstances force it to. Meanwhile, it will maintain primary emphasis on continued cooperation with the United States while seeking opportunities to improve relations with South Korea.

**Conclusion: Preparing for an Uncertain Future**

North Korea’s October 9 nuclear test refocused the world’s attention on that desperate and dangerous state. Despite the unanimous passage of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1718, North Korea’s nuclear program will continue to present a difficult dilemma for the United States and its allies. Unfortunately, this article reveals no clear policy recommendation to solve this dilemma other than continued diplomacy and taking comfort in the fact that, though provocative, the North Korean regime realizes any use or export of nuclear weapons will result in consequences, which it is not likely to survive. The enduring trends illustrated in this article do, however, suggest some important lessons for how United States policy makers, diplomats and military planners can prepare for an uncertain future in East Asia.

Primarily, it is crucial for those involved in creating and implementing United States policy in the region to appreciate not only the dynamics linking both conflicts but also the importance of the major powers in influencing significant geopolitical change. Clearly, the Bush Administration’s insistence on the Six Party format is based upon the correct assumption that China’s involvement is crucial to changing North Korean behavior. Unfortunately, China’s unwillingness to risk destabilizing North Korea has frustrated Washington’s efforts to convince Beijing to exert adequate pressure on Pyongyang. One means of altering Beijing’s calculations might be to exploit linkages in the minds of China’s leadership between the Peninsula and the Taiwan Strait. Such a strategy would not be without risk and thus should be considered carefully before implementation. Now may not be the time to introduce the Taiwan issue into the negotiations related to North Korea. However, exploiting Taiwan as a source of leverage could become a viable strategy if a stalemate in negotiations continue or if a more dangerous crisis emerges in the future.

The enduring trends illustrated in this article also strongly suggest that United States planning efforts in the region should address the full...
spectrum of potential concurrent or sequential significant geopolitical changes in both conflicts. This includes preparing for possible positive developments — such as opportunities for peaceful reconciliations — as well as the most dreadful ones — like a simultaneous occurrence of hostilities in both conflicts. Of course, some combination of the two should also not be ruled out. The future direction of change in both conflicts is unknowable.

However, significant geopolitical change will reemerge. When it does, it is essential that those involved understand the regional dynamics and are well prepared to manage change and protect United States interests in both conflicts.

ENDNOTES

1. Such a device could be considered weaponized if, for example, it was smuggled or simply driven to its target. For a preliminary, yet well informed, assessment of the test see, Anthony H. Cordesman, “The Meaning of the North Korean Nuclear Weapons Test,” Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), October 9, 2006, http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/061009_cordesman_commentary.pdf.


5. Ibid., p. 350.

6. This long held assumption may be overly simplistic. There is some evidence that Stalin and Mao not only believed the United States would intervene, but actually hoped it would, so that China could use its virtually unlimited supply of manpower to chew up American forces and distract them while the Soviet Union made aggressive moves in Europe. See Jung Chang, Mao: The Unknown Story (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), p. 359.


9. Chang, Mao, pp. 358 - 361. For an alternate and insightful description of the start of the Korean War, see Cumings, Korea’s Place in the Sun, Chapter 5.


11. There were two decisive votes on the night of October 25, 1971 that sealed Taiwan’s fate. The first was on a resolution that would have declared Taiwan’s expulsion an “important matter” requiring two-thirds of the General Assembly. That resolution failed by a vote of 59 to 55 with 15 abstentions. That vote made the actual resolution to replace Taiwan with the PRC almost a formality. Seventy-six members voted for that resolution, UN Resolution 2758; 35 voted against it, and 17 abstained. See “UN Roll Calls on China” The New York Times, October 27, 1971.

12. At the time ruling Kuomintang as made up primarily of ethnic Chinese who emigrated to Taiwan at the end of the civil war.


19. Though United States FDI into China did decrease between 1989 and 1990 from $641 million to $357 million, FDI from both Taiwan and Japan continued to increase - though at slower rates than the period preceding the massacre. By 1992, all three countries had resumed investing much higher levels then before the massacre. See Chin Chung, “Division of Labor across the Taiwan Strait,” in Barry Naughton, ed., The China Circle: Economics and Technology in the PRC, Taiwan, and Hong Kong (Washington DC: Brookings, 1997), Table 6-1, pp. 166-7.

22. Ibid., p. 385.
27. Mann, About Face, p. 327.
36. For an extensive review of South Korean attitudes towards America, both positive and negative, see Eric V. Larson, Norman D. Levin, Seonhae Baik, Bogdan Savych, Ambivalent Allies? A Study of South Korean Attitudes Toward the United States (Santa Monica: RAND, 2004).
37. Ibid., p. 53.
40. The United States policy of Strategic Ambiguity seeks to maintain the status quo in the Taiwan Strait by deterring both unilateral moves towards independence by Taiwan and aggression moves from China by being purposely vague about which circumstances the United States would intervene in a conflict. For a current and comprehensive discussion of strategic ambiguity see Nancy Bernkofk Tucker “Strategic Ambiguity or Strategic Clarity,” Chapter 8 in Nancy Bermkopf Tucker, ed., Dangerous Strait: The United States - Taiwan - China, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).
45. For a current and comprehensive look at Taiwan’s challenges related to economic integration with China, see T. J. Cheng “China-Taiwan Economic Linkage: Between Insulation and Superconductivity,” in, Dangerous Strait, 60.
46. For a detailed look at the challenges Korea faces due to economic integration and competition with China see, Somi Seong, Steven W. Popper, Kungang Zheng, Strategic Choices in Science and Technology: Korea in the Era of a Rising China (Santa Monica: RAND, 2005).
48. For an alternate view of the situation, that Beijing may have encouraged or at least benefited from these acts, see “North Korea: Kim’s Strategic Disappearing Act,” Strategic Forecasting, August 15, 2006; and “Geopolitical Diary: The Non-reactions to the North Korean Nuclear Test” Strategic Forecasting, October 13, 2006, www.stratfor.com.
49. See Chen-yuan Tung “China’s Economic Leverage and Taiwan’s Security Concerns with Respect to Cross-Strait Economic Relations,” paper presented at the Taiwan Studies Workshop, Fairbank Center, Harvard University, May 1, 2003; and Cheng “China-Taiwan Economic Linkage.”
50. See for example Hugh De Santis, “The Dragon and the Tigers” World Policy Journal, Vol. XXII, No. 2


