



Friday, July 6, 2007

The patron-client relationship

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In late November, U.S. President George Bush announced that the United States would begin a searching consultation with its allies, including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization countries, Japan and South Korea, starting in early December in order to reorganize its military forces stationed abroad. Under Secretary of Defense Douglas Feith made an official announcement in December that the United States would reduce the approximately 100,000 troops in East Asia.

This was not the first time the United States called for a reduction of military forces in Asia. Immediately after the end of the Cold War, Congress began to demand a reduction of U.S. military forces. The first Bush administration responded with a 10-year plan (to run from 1990 to 2000) to reduce U.S. troops from 135,000 down to about 98,000 by the end of 1995.

In tandem with this approach, the U.S.-Japan alliance was also redefined. This was spelled out in February 1995 in the third East Asia strategy review (the so-called Nye report primarily drawn up by Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Joseph Nye).

The Nye report underscored the importance of security in the Asia-Pacific region and proclaimed that the United States intended to keep a military force of 100,000 in the region. It reconfirmed the Japan-U.S. relationship as the keystone for both U.S. security policy in the Asia-Pacific region and for overall U.S. global strategy. The report stated, "Security is like oxygen: you do not tend to notice it until you begin to lose it ... The American security presence has helped provide this 'oxygen' for East Asian development." In short, growth in East Asia was possible because of the security supplied by the U.S.

Nye firmly believed that the region would quickly plunge into chaos if the United States were to disengage. One of the objectives of the Nye report was to forestall demands from Congress for further reductions in U.S. military forces in Asia.

U.S. policymakers believe that maintaining the prestige of U.S. military forces in Asia is the key to winning Asians' confidence. The U.S. Security Strategy for the East Asia Pacific Region issued by the Defense Department in July 1997 stated, "a visible U.S. force presence in Asia demonstrates firm determination to defend U.S., allied and friendly interests in this critical region ... The U.S. military presence in Asia serves to shape the security environment to prevent challenges from developing at all. U.S. force presence mitigates the impact of historical regional tensions and allows the United States to anticipate problems, manage potential threats and encourage peaceful resolution of disputes."

While totally ignoring the ability of Asian countries to address their own security concerns, the United States flattered itself by insisting that the very presence of U.S. forces be the essential condition for avoiding chaos in Asia.

In order to bring about and maintain stability in Asia, the United States has demanded that Japan show

unfailing loyalty to Washington. Nevertheless, on Sept 17, 2002, Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi made the first visit to North Korea, without Washington's prior consent, in order to address the unstable conditions in Northeast Asia. The Koizumi trip was the first step by Japan toward changing the nature of its servile relation to the United States for the last 50 years.

Washington, however, reacted unfavorably to Koizumi's initiative or any other independent foreign policy moves by Japan. The United States soon wrested diplomatic initiatives toward dealing with North Korea away from Japan, and prevented Japan from taking any unilateral approach to this issue by incorporating Tokyo in the six-party talks.

Under Secretary of Defense Feith revealed that the Bush administration would be ready to engage in comprehensive consultation with Japan concerning U.S. global military transformation including strategic restructuring, military theories, new technologies, information, armaments, and operational systems.

Feith said that the United States and Japan would have to review the fundamental principle of their alliance. The Bush administration unveiled its 5 principal axes for its military reorganization: (1) Strengthen Allied roles, including dispatch of their military forces beyond their immediate regions; (2) Flexible responses to uncertain enemies including terrorists; (3) Focus on capabilities, not numbers; (4) Redeployment with consideration of both regional and global needs; and (5) Develop rapidly deployable capabilities.

After the suicide attacks in New York and on the Pentagon on Sept 11, 2001, the United States spread its terrorist paranoia around the world and led Japan to believe that terrorism could take place anywhere, even in Japan, at anytime. The Bush administration has been exaggerating North Korean threats. In the post-Cold War era, when the Soviet Union no longer served as an imminent enemy to induce Japan to depend on the Washington's military support, the United States has been using these threats from terrorism and North Korea to contain Japan's unilateral and unexpected movement in Asia.

Now, because of heavy financial burdens of peacekeeping and reconstruction operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, the United States put into practice its longtime desire to share military burdens with its allies. The principal axes (3) and (5) above indicate that the United States now emphasizes maneuverability of both its own and Japan's forces. Moreover, the principal axes (1) and (4) above indicate that the United States as a supreme commander and Japan as America's deputy will police not only East Asia but also the world at large.

The Bush administration is seeking to establish a true patron-client relationship on a global level between the United States and Japan. Strong and strenuous pressure from the United States finally forced the Japanese government to dispatch the advance troops of the Japan Air Self-Defense Force to Iraq on Dec 26. The government is still negotiating with the Komeito Party regarding the dispatch of the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force to Iraq.

Certainly, Washington is pleased in the knowledge that Japan follows the path set by the United States. This development clearly demonstrates that maintenance of the patron-client relationship, that is the U.S.-Japan alliance, certainly downplays the essence of Japan's sovereignty. To be, or not to be a self-reliant nation, that is the question that Japan has to confront head-on in the 21st century.

December 29, 2003

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