

An Era of Multilateralism: A Conceptual Approach to Post-9.11 International Security

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Multilateral Approaches to New Threats

Terrorism per se is not necessarily a new threat. The North Atlantic countries, most notably the United States, have long regarded it as one of the most eminent threats after the demise of the Soviet Union. However, the extent to which the United States and its allies considered and approached the threat of terrorism as a common threat to the international community is less clear. Or, even if the United States attempted to solicit cooperation of its allies in dealing with terrorism, the threat perception on the part of allies was not necessarily as acute as that of the United States. This was the case, at least, in the U.S.-Japan security relationship.

This has changed after the 9.11 terrorism. Despite the initial American emotional call for “revenge” or “retaliation” against those who attacked the United States, the logic of dominant international support was not necessarily to assist an American war. In a nutshell, many members of the international community took the threat of terrorism as common to the international society. As such, the nature of the threat of terrorism transcends national borders, and endangers the foundations of civil societies and universal values including democracy and liberal market economy.

Therefore, the ongoing American war and fight against terrorism are not in defense of the United States alone, nor an exclusive matter of its homeland defense. The same is true with the counter proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their vehicles. Coping with these newly-defined threats should require new multilateral approaches, which belong to the domain of international security rather than national security.

Very broadly and conceptually speaking, this new security situation after the 9.11 terrorism provides a golden opportunity for Japan and Canada to think creatively and act bravely along the line of multilateral security cooperation, while maintaining a solid security relationship with the United States.

The most critical starting point for bilateral dialogue, needless to say, has to do with the assessment of the US diplomacy under the George W. Bush (Jr.) administration.

Bush Diplomacy and Multilateralism

Security policy under the Bush administration is aggressively unilateralist, but is still characterized by internationalism of a kind. The Bush foreign policy team has not hidden its intention to defend and promote US national interests, but to the extent the team sees the spread of democracy, market economy and the associated universal values as compatible with its own national interests, preoccupation with national interests does not imply an inward-looking inclination. Here, from a perspective of the Bush administration, unilateralism and internationalism are not mutually incompatible.

We need to recognize, however, that multilateralism is not in the vocabulary of the central members of the Bush team in charge of defense and security policies. What is central for them is to achieve desired goals by whatever means that yield results. Here, multilateralism is not regarded effective nor, therefore, essential, and fundamentally the belief in unilateralism sustains their approach.

From the point of view of the US allies, such as Japan and Canada, however, this does not mean that multilateralism has lost its effectiveness. To the contrary, the Bush diplomacy has increased the potentials of multilateral diplomacy, precisely because of its unilateralist propensity; namely, multilateralism backed by US unilateralism.

Indeed, records of the Bush diplomacy and related international issues do not necessarily match its flamboyant rhetoric apparent in many speeches and statements by the President himself and his close aides. The most recent case in point is the compliance by the Bush administration to the demand of the international community, most explicitly voiced by Europe and Russia, to work through the Security Council of the United Nations, concerning the U.S. policy to coerce Iraq into the abandonment of its programs on weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The UN Security Council resolution calling for Iraq to accept the UN full inspection within a week was passed by a unanimous 15-0 vote. It is clearly the power of the US unilateralism that forced Iraq to accept the resolution without condition.

Also, after the US has worked through multilateral processes, responses from the allies in the event of American actions would be different, which after all share the judgment about the dangerous nature of the Iraqi WMD programs as well as its regional ambitions.

Even prior to this recent development over the Iraqi issue, there was an important precedent indicating a similar blend of US unilateralism and multilateralism; Bush diplomacy on Missile Defense.

A New Strategic Framework: Missile Defense and Anti-Terrorism

Initially, perceived threats of missile attacks from a handful of rogue states constituted the primary motivation convincing Washington of the necessity of Theater Missile Defense (TMD) and National Missile Defense (NMD) programs. Naturally, strategic competitors of the US such as Russia and China voiced strong concerns about the negative implications of the US missile defense programs for their national security. But the Bush administration, in its typical unilateralist style, appeared it did not care much about the opposition from strategic competitors.

It, however, responded to concerns from its friends and allies, most explicitly to the European concern about "de-coupling." In order to alleviate these concerns, Washington stopped making the distinction between TMD and NMD, and began to insist that it was now pursuing a global missile defense that would benefit the allies as well as the United States, therefore a generic term of Missile Defense (MD).

Thus, the logical implications of the missile defense initiatives have become systemic; even if the completion of the system is a remote possibility, as the initiatives gain momentum the world will continue to move away from the Cold War deterrence to something new. And, indeed, the Bush administration embarked on such global initiatives as it approached Russia for the construction of a new strategic framework in which to reduce offensive capabilities in exchange for the installation of a new defense system, i.e., MD. The Russian acceptance of this new approach paved a way for a rather unilateral decision by Bush to abrogate the ABM Treaty.

And yet, the 9.11 terrorism has added a new dimension to the evolution of a new strategic framework. As declared by the State of Union Address by Bush on January 29, 2002, on top of war against terrorism, Bush has expressed his strong determination "to prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction." Here, North Korea, Iran and Iraq, formerly labeled as rogue states, were upgraded to "an axis of evil," and the vigilance against WMD has come to be closely linked with the fight against the 9.11 terrorism.

As argued, in carrying out its plan to dismantle Iraqi WMD programs, the Bush administration has worked through the United Nations with its firm resolve on US unilateral actions. We can discern similar developments in Northeast Asia, particularly over the question of the North Korean nuclear weapons development program.

North Korean Problem

Pyongyang has recently admitted to have in fact been conducting the nuclear weapons development program, despite the Korean Energy Development Organization agreement signed in 1994, agreeing to freeze its nuclear weapons program in exchange for the international community's commitment to build light-water nuclear reactors for North Korea. The Bush administration, despite its earlier definition of North Korea, together with Iraq and Iran, as one of the three countries constituting the "axis of evil," chose not to confront North Korea directly but to leave the matter to multilateral

consultations.

For instance, APEC Leaders' Statement on North Korea, issued at the occasion of the 10th annual APEC Economic Leaders Meeting held in late October 2002 in Los Cabos, Mexico, said that "We call upon the DPRK to visibly honor its commitment to give up nuclear weapons programs and reaffirm our commitment to ensure a peaceful resolution of this issue." The statement by the Chairman of the 8th ASEAN Summit and the 6th ASEAN+3 Summit, issued on November 4 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, also reiterated the same position by saying that "In calling upon the DPRK to visibly honour its commitment to give up nuclear weapons programmes, we reaffirmed our commitment to ensure a peaceful resolution of this issue."

On top of these general commitments to a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula, more effective form of multilateral pressures toward the North Korean nuclear program have to do with the so-called "mini-lateralism," the most notable of which has been U.S.-Japan-South Korea cooperation. When the APEC leaders met in Los Cabos, US President George Bush, Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, and South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung met and issued the Joint US-Japan-ROK Trilateral Statement. The words of warning toward North Korea are most explicit:

The three leaders agreed that North Korea's program to enrich uranium for nuclear weapons is a violation of the Agreed Framework, the Non-Proliferation Treaty, North Korea's IAEA safeguards agreement, and the South-North Joint Declaration on Denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. The three leaders called upon North Korea to dismantle this program in a prompt and verifiable manner and to come into full compliance with all its international obligations in conformity with North Korea's recent commitment in the Japan-North Korea Pyongyang Declaration. In this context, the three leaders agreed to continue close coordination on next steps.

As a mode of operation, the three leaders in effect preempted US unilateralism by stressing "their commitment to seek to resolve this matter peacefully in close consultation trilaterally and with other concerned nations around the globe."

This opened the way for China to join multilateral coalitions against the North Korean nuclear weapons program. Of particular significance is an agreement among Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi, South Korean Prime Minister Kim Suk-Soo and Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji at the occasion of the ASEAN+3 meeting in November in Phnom Penh, to the effect that they will cooperate in pressing North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons program.

At the forefront of these multilateral coalitions is none other than Japan which re-opened diplomatic normalization talks with North Korea in late October. Japan is now backed by the unprecedented unanimous international support in dealing with the North Korean nuclear weapons program as one of the most important issues (in parallel with the abduction issues) in the normalization talks. In essence, this is a real test case for Japan's multilateral diplomacy, which will have deep ramifications for potential unilateral diplomacy by the United States in the event multilateral approaches fail.

The China Dimension

By definition, the Bush administration regards China as a strategic competitor, and the same is true from a Chinese long-term perspective. This, however, does not mean that a clash between strategic competitors is always inevitable. To the contrary, the innate instinct of strategic competitors is to grope for ways of strategic co-existence. This is exactly what Beijing has been doing vis-à-vis Bush, and the Bush administration also shifted its basic tune in this direction soon after its inauguration (stopping using the term “strategic competitor” toward China, for instance). This in turn proved a useful background against which to acquire Chinese acquiescence with the U.S. fight against the 9.11 terrorism.

Before the Bush administration, Chinese immediate and primary concerns over the U.S. missile defense had to do with its TMD programs in relation to the security of Taiwan, while the NMD was a much longer-term question with implications for an overall strategic balance.

Bush’s new emphasis on MD as an integral program has not changed Chinese position and policies in principle, but China has begun to cast a weary eye over the development of a new strategic framework with the U.S. and Russia as the principal actors. Unlike Russia, China does not have substantial stockpiles of weapons with which to engage in strategic deals with the United States in the domains of missile defense and nuclear balance, which would in effect motivate Beijing toward further build-up of their nuclear and missile capabilities.

This in turn would create a typical situation of security dilemma over the Taiwan Strait, with Taiwan being tempted to upgrade its security ties with the United States. Bush appears ready to move along this spiral of security dilemma, the creation of his own, perhaps with unilateral confidence that the U.S. would not lose if challenged.

There is a dominant perception in Washington today that this “base-line” diplomacy toward China has been bearing fruits, soliciting less threatening and more cooperative behaviors from Beijing over regional issues including the question of Taiwan security. The picture, however, is mixed at best.

True, the Bush strategy is an important basis for encouraging conciliatory approaches from Beijing, but equally important is that China has been employing its own version of “base-line” strategy and its origin dates back well before the inauguration of the Bush administration.

China has stopped challenging the American primacy in the short run, and by extension the US-Japan alliance, and is now concentrating on strategically using their economic weight in their regional policies. Beijing maintains a low-key posture toward Taiwan’s political moves to upgrade relations with the United States and the Asia-Pacific, and gives priority to deepening Taiwan’s economic dependence on China. Partly due to the lack of American strategic interest in the CLMV countries (Indochina), Chinese economic overtures toward Southeast Asia in various routes, not least the China-ASEAN FTA and the Greater Mekong River Development Project, have been generating rapid China-tilt among these countries. The same strategic orientation accounts for its recent low-

key policies toward Japan as well, particularly over the questions of security and history.

Needless to say, this economy-centered strategy of China is an important background for the Chinese active participation in multilateral fora and processes including the United Nations, APEC, ARF, and ASEAN+3.

Implications for Japan and Japan-Canada Cooperation

In discussing implications of these security developments for Japan, one can make a conceptual distinction between Japan's commitment to the US-Japan alliance, on the one hand, and its multilateral diplomacy, on the other. The fundamental basis and rationale for Japan-Canada Cooperation derives from this particular structural position where Japan and Canada find themselves, i.e., between the alliance with the unilateralist US and international multilateralism.

For Japan, today's security environment should provide ample opportunities to renovate Japan's overall security policy premised on the US-Japan alliance. True, Japan holds constitutional, legal, political, societal and other constraints prohibiting it from becoming a truly "normal" security actor. Here, Japan falls far behind Canada as far as participation in international security is concerned. However, while debates over these Japanese constraints are important in themselves, today's security environment should offer ample opportunities to re-design the alliance into a more "equal" relationship by multilateralizing its role and function.

In fact, there are already important seeds for the U.S.-Japan alliance to evolve in this direction. Among others, the "U.S.-Japan Joint Declaration on Security: Alliance for the Twenty-first Century," signed on April 17, 1996 by Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto and President Bill Clinton, did already identify the primary role of the U.S.-Japan alliance as public goods for the larger cause of regional peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region. In the aftermath of the 9.11 terrorist attacks, the role of the U.S.-Japan alliance to fight against the common security threat not only for the two nations but for the global community has become explicit.

There is a critical side-effect of this alternative approach for Japan's security policy and Japan-Canada cooperation. Namely, this new multilateral logic should shed a new light on, or provide a new framework for, the on-going domestic debate on security policy including the revision of the Article Nine of the Constitution. The debate on the Article Nine so far has been preoccupied with the revision-or-not arguments. Those who argue for the revision have been regarded as dangerous nationalists, not only by Asian neighbors but by many Japanese. But, clearly, the Article Nine has now become a liability, particularly in the context of multilateral diplomacy premised on the U.S.-Japan alliance.

Previously, there were cases where Japan's legitimate interest and initiatives in promoting multilateral diplomacy were shut down by the U.S. opposition. Typically, the U.S. regarded these initiatives as a sign of Japan drifting away from the United States. The natural initial step for Japan

to take is to pile up records of success in multilateral diplomacy and prove that they are not threatening to the United States nor the U.S.-Japan alliance. Only after this would Japan be able to give effective advise to the U.S. on the negative side of its unilateralism and to provide an alternative diplomatic approach through multilateral cooperation.

In an important way, the European Union has been conducting such diplomacy vis-à-vis the U.S. They do have their own records and means of effective multilateral diplomacy, and yet share common values and interests with the U.S. Canada has an important mission to guide Japan into this innovation of Japan's security policy.