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U.S. Primacy, Eurasia's New Strategic Landscape,
and the Emerging Asian Order

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ABSTRACT

The central objective of U.S. grand strategy after the Cold War is to preserve a unipolar world order in which America is the preponderant power. In order to achieve this goal, the United States has been carrying out a large-scale repositioning of its foreign policy, which includes a shift in geostrategic focus from Europe to the Middle East and Asia. Underlying this shift is the change from a confrontation with the USSR to a struggle against new challenges to U.S. position and the U.S.-led world order.

This and other struggles for global and regional primacies are redefining the strategic map of the Eurasian landmass and its vicinities. The mega-continent now can be divided into four strategic regions: "Europe" (West and Central), "Central Eurasia" (former USSR), the Middle East, and "Asia" (East and South). In Asia, the central strategic issue is the contest for regional primacy between China and the United States.

The paper argues that the current structure of international power in Asia is transitional. But neither hegemony nor multipolarity will likely be the next Asian order. The paper then assesses the prospects of the emerging regional order in Asia in terms of four options: bipolarity, the East Asian Community, U.S.-China condominium, and shared leadership. The paper concludes by discussing how Southeast Asian countries should prepare for the future strategic environment.

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U.S. Primacy, Eurasia's New Strategic Landscape, and the Emerging Asian Order

Introduction

With the end of the Cold War, the global bipolarity created by U.S.-Soviet confrontation ceased to exist. The post-Cold War world is living in an era of American primacy in which the United States maintains military and economic superiority.[1] Today, U.S. military spending accounts for almost half of the world total, more than those of all other major powers taken together.[2] U.S. economic output also outweighs that of the four next largest economies (Japan, Germany, China, and France) combined.[3] As the U.S.-led War on Terror demonstrates, American foreign policy represents a major parameter of contemporary international politics.

Since the end of the Cold War, U.S. foreign policy has undergone a profound transformation. From being fixed to a global conflict with the USSR, the United States has shifted its focus to a struggle against a variety of new challenges. How does this transformation affect, and indeed, remake the strategic landscape of the Eurasian landmass, and within it, the security environment in Asia? How should Southeast Asian countries position themselves in the emerging Asian order?

The paper begins by reviewing U.S. foreign policy after the Cold War. I argue that post-Cold War U.S. foreign policy is marked by a large-scale repositioning aimed at addressing new challenges to U.S. grand strategy. I then explore how the strategic map of the Eurasian continent is being redrawn as a consequence of the repositioning

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[1] Major works on America's global position and the coming international structure include Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs,* Vol. 70, No.1 (1990/91), pp. 23-33; Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Power Will Rise," *International Security*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Spring 1993), pp. 5-51; Charles A. Kupchan, "After Pax Americana: Benign Power, Regional Integration, and the Sources of a Stable Multipolarity," *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Fall 1998), pp. 40-79; and William C. Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Summer 1999), pp. 1-36.

[2] See *SIPRI Yearbook 2006*, ch. 8.

[3] See International Monetary Fund, *World Economic Outlook Database* (October 2007).

of, and the new challenges to, U.S. foreign policy. Next, I examine U.S. grand strategy toward Asia and discuss the emerging Asian order. Finally, I draw some implications for Southeast Asian countries of the shifting strategic landscape.

U.S. Foreign Policy after the Cold War

The end of the Cold War marked not only the end of the military-cum-ideological-cum-economic competition between the Soviet Union and the United States. It also indicated the decline of the USSR as a superpower. As the Soviet Union disappeared two years later, the United States found itself in an unprecedented situation: It remained the lone superpower in the world. Primacy, while complicating the making of U.S. foreign policy, brings greater benefits to its possessor. It increases the nation's security, foster its prosperity, and maximize its influence.[4] Given these benefits, it is hard to find an American president or presidential candidate who would not agree with the goal of maintaining U.S. primacy.[5] Preserving a unipolar world order in which the United States is the preponderant power is the central objective of U.S. grand strategy after the Cold War. This goal is shared by successive U.S. administrations under Presidents George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush, despite considerable differences in their foreign policy.[6]

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[4] Stephen M. Walt, "American Primacy: Its Prospects and Pitfalls," *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 55, No. 2 (Spring 2002), pp. 9-28. For a theoretical discussion of primacy, see Randall L. Schweller, "Realism and the Present Great Power System: Growth and Positional Conflict over Scarce Resources," in Ethan B. Kapstein and Michael Mastanduno, eds., *Unipolar Politics: Realism and State Strategies after the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

[5] For the scholarly debate on the merit of pursuing U.S. primacy, see Robert Jervis, "International Primacy: Is the Game Worth the Candle?" *International Security*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Spring 1993), pp. 52-67 and Samuel P. Huntington, "Why International Primacy Matters," *ibid*., pp. 68-83; the article by Stephen M. Walt, critiques by Richard Falk, Joseph S. Nye, Naomi Chazan, Mahmood Mandani, John Tirman, Mary Kaldor, Anne-Marie Slaughter, and the response by Walt in the "New Democracy Forum," *Boston Review*, February/March 2005; Christopher Layne and Bradley Thayer, *American Empire: A Debate* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

[6] For similar and different views on the grand strategies pursued by these American administrations, see Michael Mastanduno, "Preserving the Unipolar Moment: Realist Theories and U.S. Grand Strategy after the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (Spring 1997), pp. 49-88; Melvin Gurtov,

What makes the grand strategies of the three post-Cold War U.S. presidents different from one another is the way pursued to achieve that shared goal. President George H.W. Bush tried to maintain U.S. primacy through a concert of powers, which included not only U.S. allies in NATO and Japan but also China and the USSR. This "new world order," as Bush called it, required Washington to seek the consent of the major powers when it came to decisions on important global issues, such as the war on Iraq in 1991. The United States was willing to complicate its world leadership by involving the major powers because it was in relative decline vis-à-vis such rising powers as Germany and Japan. This approach was successful due in part to the fact that China and the USSR—those major powers that were not U.S. allies—were pursuing U.S.-friendly foreign policies. Despite his successes in foreign policy, Bush lost the presidential election in 1992 to Bill Clinton, who vowed to refocus America on domestic issues and the economic front. Clinton's approach was succinctly packaged in his famous election slogan "It's the economy, stupid." Declaring that the United States should maintain world leadership, Clinton centered his government's policies on boosting up the economy, which had been in recession since the late 1980s. This explained why U.S. foreign policy under Clinton lacked clarity and coherence and was often characterized as "muddling through." It showed a tendency toward collective security and was tinkering with multilateralism during the first Clinton term. But in the second term, it was increasingly colored by a hub-and-spoke way of leadership, in which bilateral partnerships and *ad hoc* coalitions centered on the United States were given priority over multilateral institutions. When George W.

Superpower on Crusade: The Bush Doctrine in U.S. Foreign Policy (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006); P. Edward Haley, *Strategies of Dominance: The Misdirection of U.S. Foreign Policy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006). See also Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Michael H. Hunt, *The American Ascendancy: How the United States Gained and Wielded Global Dominance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

Bush succeeded Clinton as U.S. president in 2001, he inherited a strong U.S. economy that was also leading the advanced industrial countries in terms of growth rate. With a new self-confidence based on the economic recovery, coupled with the distrust in collective security and multilateralism resulted from experiences during the Clinton era, the Bush administration decisively changed the style of U.S. world leadership to the "hub and spokes" model. The "coalition of the willing" that led the war on Iraq in 2003 was a variant of this model.

The goals of U.S. grand strategy define what counts as threats to U.S. core interests. As the central objective of U.S. grand strategy is maintaining American primacy and the world order in which the United States plays the leadership role, major challenges to U.S. power are posed by three kinds of actors. The first is a peer competitor, which is a great power that threatens to replace the United States at the top of world order. The search for a potential rival began as soon as the USSR was in ultimate decline. In the immediate aftermath of the U.S.-Soviet rivalry, many in the United States believed Japan and Germany were the rising powers that could challenge America's position as the world's most powerful countries.[7] But it was soon clear that both Germany and Japan had neither the capacity to rival America nor the mood to disturb the U.S.-led international system. From the mid-1990s, China was increasingly identified as America's potential rival.[8] A number of reasons contribute

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[7] For example, George Friedman and Meredith LeBard, *The Coming War with Japan* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991); Lester C. Thurow, *Head to Head: The Coming Economic Battle among Japan, Europe, and America* (New York: Morrow, 1992); Jeffrey E. Garten, *A Cold Peace: America, Japan, Germany, and the Struggle for Supremacy* (New York: Times Books, 1992).

[8] An earlier work that raised the possibility of a large-scale conflict between the United States and China is Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs,* Vol. 72, No. 3 (1993), pp. 22-49. The topic of U.S.-China rivalry is often coupled with that of China's rise and has produced a vast literature that a single paper cannot review. For major *pro* and *contra* arguments, see Richard Bernstein and Ross H. Munro, *The Coming Conflict with China* (New York: Knopf, 1997); Robert S. Ross, "China II: Beijing as a Conservative Power," *Foreign Affairs*, (March/April 1997), pp. 33-44; Gerald Segal, "Does China Matters?" *Foreign Affairs*, (September/October 1999), pp. 24-36; Aaron L. Friedberg, "The Struggle for Mastery in Asia," *Commentary,* Vol. 110, No. 4 (November 1, 2000), pp. 17-26, and the responses to Friedberg's article in "Facing China," *Commentary*, Vol. 111, No. 1

to this identification. First is China's vast demographic size and fast economic growth. Second, China's ideology and regime are the opposites of those of the United States. Third, China opposes "hegemonism," which is its codeword for U.S. hegemony, and advocates a "multipolar, equal, and democratic world order," also a codeword for its alternative to the U.S.-led international system. The fourth reason is the expanding Chinese presence and influence in not only Asia but also Africa and Latin America, plus China's occasional aggressiveness toward its neighbors, as during the Taiwan Straits crisis in 1995-1996 and in the South China Sea in 1995.

The second group of actors that pose a major threat to U.S. core interests is what Washington calls the "rogue states." These are small and medium-sized powers which categorically reject U.S. dominance and choose to stay on the margin of the U.S.-led international system. They are neither willing nor able to rival the United States but by refusing the U.S.-led international system, offering an alternative to it, and building their own deterrence capacities, they are sabotaging U.S. power. Not every rogue state catches America's large-scale attention, however. Only those who threaten to go nuclear, such as North Korea and Iran, are America's strategic enemies. Countries such as Cuba, Venezuela, Belarus, and Myanmar are on the list of the "rogue states" but not at the center of the radar screen as long as they remain non-nuclear.

(February 2001), pp. 16-25; Thomas J. Christensen, "Posing Problems without Catching Up: China's Rise and Challenges for American Security Policy," *International Security,* Vol. 25, No. 4 (Spring 2001), pp. 5-40; Alastair Iain Johnston, "Is China a Status Quo Power?" *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Spring 2003), pp. 5-56; Robert Sutter, "Why Does China Matter?" *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Spring 2003), pp. 75-89; Zbigniew Brzezinski and John J. Mearsheimer, "Clash of the Titans," *Foreign Policy,* No. 146 (January/February 2005), pp 46-50; Aaron L. Friedberg, "The Future of U.S.-China Relations: Is Conflict Inevitable?" *International Security,* Vol. 30, No. 2 (Fall 2005), pp. 7-45; United States Congress Committee on International Relations, *A Resurgent China: Responsible Stakeholder or Robust Rival?* Hearing before the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, 109th Congress, May 10, 2006 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2006); Dana R. Dillon, ed., *The China Challenge: Standing Strong against the Military, Economic, and Political Threats That Imperil America* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States has realized that its strategic adversaries need not necessarily be organized as states but can be some non-state actors, too. Though not in possession of state power, Jihadist networks are able to mobilize a powerful transnational movement toward the goal of establishing a global Islamic state. They consider America their main enemy and are conducting a global holy war against the incumbent world hegemon.

Striving for world leadership, the United States is faced with three strategic challenges. The peer competitor threatens to replace U.S. power. This challenge is still a potential, not a present one. The nuclear rogues threaten to sabotage U.S. power. This confrontation is, however, asymmetric. The Jihadi terrorists threaten to defeat U.S. power. These fighters are, due to their current nature and tactics, elusive.

In response to these challenges, the United States has carried out a large-scale repositioning of its foreign policy. This change includes a shift of its geostrategic focus from Western Europe to the Middle East and Asia. The shift is reflected in the structure of troop deployment and overseas bases. U.S. troops stationed in Europe decreased threefold, from the level of 310,000 in the 1980s to the level of 105,000 in the 2000s. The number of troops deployed to East Asia decreased slightly, from the 110,000 level to the 70,000 level during the same period. In the Middle East, the United States maintained between 8,000 and 9,500 troops in the 1980s, but this number increased to the area around 15,000 in the second half of the 1990s, and reached the 200,000 level after the 2003 Iraq invasion.[9] The "transformational diplomacy," which has recently been initiated, also demonstrates this geostrategic shift. Within this framework, the United States will reduce significantly the size of its diplomatic personnel in countries like Germany and at the same time strongly expand

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[9] See the U.S. Troop Deployment Dataset, compiled by Tim Kane, Center for Data Analysis, The Heritage Foundation, March 1, 2006 version, available at www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/troopsdb.cfm

its diplomatic corps in countries like China, India, Indonesia, and Egypt.[10] This geostrategic shift is also accompanied by a subtle change in America's alignment system. While differing threat perceptions emerged between the United States and some of its NATO allies, creating strains in transatlantic relations, converging strategic objectives have strengthened the U.S.-Japan alliance and elevated the Indo-U.S. relationship to a truly strategic partnership.

Eurasia's New Strategic Map

Three sets of factors are defining the international structure in the post-Cold War era. The first includes U.S. unipolarity as the distribution of international power and American primacy as the central objective of U.S. grand strategy. The second set of factors is the major challenges to U.S. power. These challenges include a peer competitor, the nuclear "rogues," and Jihadi terrorism. The third set of factors involves the major centers of world power. With the exception of the United States, all the major powers are presently located in the Eurasian continent and its vicinities. Europe, with its major national power centers in London, Paris, and Berlin, is a consolidating power. Russia was a declining power during the 1990s but is going to be a consolidating power in the 21st century. In Asia, China is clearly a rising power. Japan was stagnating during the 1990s but will be an expanding power in the future. Finally, India is an emerging power that, due to its location and demographic size, will play a very interesting role in the great power politics of the 21st century.

The struggles for and against U.S. primacy and the activities of the other centers of world power are redefining the strategic landscape of the Eurasian continent, which remains the center stage of world conflict and the principal external

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[10] Condolezza Rice, "Transformational Diplomacy," Speech at Georgetown University, January 18, 2006, http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/59306.htm

preoccupation of the United States. While U.S. power has a global reach, the geopolitical reach of the other major powers is rather regional (see Table 1 for a comparison of the national strengths and international influence of the major powers.) This explains why in the post-Cold War era great power confrontation with the United States has been so far largely muted. However, the major powers exhibit different postures toward the global hegemon—postures which range from strategic alliance to tacit balancing. Furthermore, there are also struggles for and against a number of regional primacies among the major powers. An analysis of the struggles for and against global and regional primacies and the geopolitical reach and geostrategic posture of the major powers gives rise to a new strategic map of the mega-continent.

Table 1. National Strength and International Influence of the Major Powers

Country	GDP (billion USD) (2006)	Population (million) (2006)	Nuclear weapons (2005)	Military expenditure (billion USD) (2004)	Foreign aid (billion USD) (2005)	Sphere of influence
USA	13,195	298.444	5,735	455.3	17.257	global
EU	14,610	456.953				European
UK	2,399	60.609	<200	47.4	7.069	limited
France	2,252	60.876	350	46.2	7.678	limited
Germany	2,916	82.422	0	33.9	7.895	limited
China	2,645	1,313.973	130	35.4	little	Asian
Russia	985	142.893	5,820	19.4	little	Central Asian
Japan	4,366	127.464	0	42.4	12.432	East Asian
India	874	1,095.352	50	15.1	little	South Asian

Sources: International Monetary Fund, *World Economic Outlook Database* (October 2007); CIA Factbook 2006; *SIPRI Yearbook 2005*; *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*; Federation of American Scientists; Center for Global Development.

Eurasia now can be divided into four strategic regions: Europe, Central Eurasia, the Middle East, and Asia. In the new strategic map Europe is essentially what is usually considered Europe minus Russia. This region is home to the European Union but also includes small and medium-sized countries in its neighborhood, from Norway and Iceland in the north to Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova in the east to the three former Soviet republics in the Caucasus. Europe is characterized by a "great experiment" that is the novel power configuration of the European Union and by the involvement of the United States and Russia.

Central Eurasia is essentially Russia plus Central Asia, which Russia regards as its "near abroad." Although Central Asia is traditionally a Russian sphere of influence, it is now where a "great game" between mainly Russia, China, and the United States is played out.

Unlike the other three strategic regions, the Middle East has no intraregional great powers. In this region, the United States is the central power, which is faced with no other major powers but a "great mess." Included in this turbulence is the civil war/resistance war/holy war in Iraq, the Jihadi terror, the Arab-Israel conflict, Iran's nuclear ambitions, and the involvement of the United States, to mention the most visible.

In the new strategic map Asia combines what is usually referred to as East Asia and South Asia. The region is home to three rising powers—China, Japan, and India. Although the United States is based outside the region, it is the preponderant power in Asia. However, U.S. dominance in the region is being challenged by the rise of China. China's rise has sparked a struggle over regional leadership that involves not only the United States and China but also Japan and India. East and South Asia combined, as opposed to Central Asia, is the region where a "great rivalry" over

Asia's leadership takes place. This rivalry is blurring the divide between Northeast, Southeast, and South Asia, uniting these three former regions into a single strategic theater while distinguishing them from the rest of conventional Asia, namely Central Asia and the Asian part of the Middle East.

U.S. Asia Strategy

Strategic Asia is home to two major challenges to U.S. power. While North Korea's nuclear ambitions pose an asymmetric threat to the United States, the rise of China has the potential to create a peer competitor that can rival America as the region's and even the world's predominant power. While the North Korean threat will possibly not endure in the long run, the challenge that China's rise poses will continue to exist for decades. The rise of China is arguably the central challenge to and primary focus of U.S. interests in the region. The question that most concerns the United States about the future of China's rise is whether China will integrate into the U.S.-led international system or it will resume regional leadership and then threaten to rival the United States on a global scale.

As Washington is still unable to give a definite answer to this question, it is pursuing a hedging strategy toward China. The hedge consists of two components. On the one hand, the United States tries to engage China with the hope that cooperation, socialization, and interdependence will raise enough incentive for China to seek a place within the U.S.-led international system. America is engaging China through diverse channels ranging from expanding bilateral ties, strategic dialogues, trade and investment to multilateral mechanisms. The United States participates alongside with China in several multilateral forums, the most important of which are the United Nations, the G-8 Summit, the World Trade Organization (WTO), Asia-Pacific

Economic Cooperation (APEC), the Asean Regional Forum (ARF), and the Six-Party Talk.

On the other hand, America is balancing China's growing power by strengthening strategic ties with old allies and new partners in Asia. The logic of balancing suggests the United States secure the strategic alignment of Japan and India, the two powers with the largest capacities and determination to resist Chinese hegemony. Since the mid-1990s Washington has indeed reinforced its strategic ties with these two Asian powers, intensifying the security alliance with Japan and advancing the relationship with India into a strategic partnership.

The U.S.-Japan alliance, which was codified by the 1996 U.S.-Japan Joint Declaration on Security Alliance for the 21st Century, stipulates not merely mutual security but mutual defense. It throws the weight of America behind Japan and adds the capacities of Japan to those of the United States in the face of security challenges. More than any other countries in the world, the United States has encouraged Japan to expand its international role, especially in security and strategic issues.

U.S. India policy underwent a sharp change during the turn of the century. Barely three years after India's nuclear tests in May 1998, to which Washington reacted with condemnation and sanctions, U.S. Vice President Al Gore agreed with India's Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee that their countries were "natural allies."[11] The warming of Indo-U.S. relations accelerated during the tenure of President George W. Bush. The United States pledged to assist India's rise to great power status and signed a nuclear deal with India that laid the grounds for both U.S.-India collaboration in nuclear energy and a *de facto* recognition of India's status as a nuclear power.

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[11] C. Raja Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon: The Shaping of India's New Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2003), pp. 49-51.

Alternative Asian Orders

The rise of China is arguably the central political issue in contemporary Asian affairs. It is the main focus of China's domestic and foreign policies, of course, but it is also a major focus of U.S. policy toward Asia. The interplay, then, of U.S. and Chinese foreign policies creates the principal context for the foreign policies of the other regional states. The rise of China is revitalizing the contest for regional leadership, which has been muted since the demise of the previous competition between the United States and the former Soviet Union.

The central question that defines the emerging Asian order is the question of regional leadership. The scholarship on international and regional orders usually revolves around the question "How to achieve order."[12] But from the states' perspective, the most relevant question is rather "Who is in" and "Who controls the order." Scholars and statesmen alike are concerned about both the "how" and the "who" of international order. But most scholars who study international orders tend to study the pathways to order and the instruments of order rather than the orders themselves. For statesmen, however, the place of their state in an international order is the primary issue. They apply, tinker, and innovate on various pathways to and instruments of international order with the purpose of securing their state's place in the international order, not the other way around. What is a primary subject of study for most academics is in fact a secondary issue for policymakers.

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[12] See G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); David A. Lake and Patrick M. Morgan, eds., *Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997). For scholarly discussion focused on the Asia-Pacific, see G. John Ikenberry and Michael Mastanduno, eds., *International Relations Theory and the Asia-Pacific* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Muthiah Alagappa, ed., *Asian Security Order: Instrumental and Normative Features* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2003).

A typology of international order that features the real objects of states' search for order must reflect the perspectives and preferences of the participants rather than those of the observers. It must make the "who" aspects the primary issues and the "how" aspects the secondary issues. This paper constructs its typology according to the number of actors and their relative share in the international leadership as well as the nature of international leadership (exclusive, divided, or shared). There are in general four major types of international order: hegemony, bipolarity, multipolarity, and shared leadership of different layouts. In hegemony, a single state assumes exclusive international leadership. Bipolarity refers to the situation when two great powers compete for international leadership. Multipolarity exists when international leadership is contested among three or more great powers with independent foreign policy and roughly equal military capabilities. One can imagine two or more great powers cease to compete for world leadership and divide the world into distinct spheres of influence. This is the case of parallel hegemonies. The category of shared leadership includes various configurations of two or more powers sharing, equally or not, the international leadership.

In contemporary Asia, seven alternative scenarios of the emerging Asian order are worth discussing: Chinese hegemony, American hegemony, Sino-U.S. bipolarity, U.S.-China condominium, Chinese primacy via the East Asian Community, U.S. primacy via inclusive shared leadership, and multipolarity. Both Chinese and American hegemonies are unlikely to emerge in the foreseeable future. Although the United States is currently the predominant power in the region, the presence of an independent, powerful and rising China has made American primacy short of hegemony. China provides an alternative center of gravity for the regional states. Even traditional allies of the United States such as South Korea, Thailand, and the

Philippines have found in Beijing a second big brother to whom they would draw as close as to the United States. While a number of regional states are jumping on China's bandwagon, major powers such as the United States, Japan, and India are opposed to possible Chinese hegemony. Even a pullout of the United States from the region, which is highly unlikely, would leave China faced with Japan and India in a competition for regional leadership. Given the strong opposition by the three major powers, which will be joined by some lesser regional states, attempts to establish an exclusive regional leadership by China would lead to anything but Chinese hegemony.

Multipolarity is widely viewed as characterizing the contemporary configuration of power in Asia. The major powers that are counted as the poles of this structure are the United States, China, Japan, Russia, and India. It is no doubt that the United States is qualified to be a pole. China's qualification as a polar power is controversial. To be a pole, a state must be able to provide for its own security without cooperation with any other foreign powers. According to Beijing's own assessment, it is not yet a polar power; it is rising to that status. Japan and India are far from being poles because Japan, an economic superpower without nuclear weapons, is dependent on the United States for its own security and India, despite its nuclear weapons arsenal, still cannot contend in a war with the polar powers. Russia has the qualification to be a regional pole, but Russian power and interests are concentrated outside East and South Asia. It is a pole in Central Eurasia but not in Asia. Multipolarity can only emerge in Asia when Japan has acquired an independent nuclear weapons arsenal and severed its security alliance with the United States, India has reached rough military parity with other polar powers in the region, or Russia has

again become a global hegemonic contender with allies in East and South Asia. This scenario has, however, little chance to be realized in the foreseeable future.

Is contemporary Asia bipolar? Many indications suggest that it is. China's influence overwhelmingly outweighs that of the United States in North Korea and Myanmar. Beijing may be more influential than Washington in several states in Southeast Asia and South Asia from Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh to Cambodia, Laos, and East Timor. Robert Ross has argued that contemporary East Asia is bipolar despite the prevailing global unipolarity. As he stated, "East Asia is bipolar because China is not a rising power but an established regional power. The United States is not a regional hegemon, but shares with China great power status in the balance of power." This bipolar structure is characterized by "Chinese dominance in mainland East Asia and U.S. dominance in maritime East Asia." The two dominant powers are "destined to be great power competitors" but "U.S.-China bipolarity is likely to be stable and relatively peaceful."[13]

However, the bipolar structure as described by Ross rests on fragile and shifting grounds. First, China's capabilities and aspirations will likely go beyond the level of East Asian regional parity with the United States. China's capabilities are rapidly expanding. Debates among China's foreign policy elites indicate that China is determined to reach a position somewhere between global primacy and regional, East Asian or Asia-Pacific, parity with the United States.[14] Thus, although it is still an open question whether China's long-term objective is more or less or exactly global parity with America, it is likely that China will increasingly not be satisfied with East

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[13] Robert S. Ross, "The Geography of the Peace: East Asia in the Twenty-first Century," *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Spring 1999), pp. 81-118, quotations in pp. 82-84.

[14] For summaries of these debates, see Michael Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future International Security Environment* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2000); Alastair Iain Johnston, "Is China a Status Quo Power?" *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Spring 2003), pp. 28-34; Yuan-Kang Wang, *China's Grand Strategy and U.S. Primacy: Is China Balancing American Power?* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2006), pp. 5-6.

Asian regional parity with the United States. Second, the fault lines between the U.S. and the Chinese spheres of influence are often cutting in the middle of a third nation and shifting. In several nations, from Pakistan in South Asia to Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines in Southeast Asia and South Korea in Northeast Asia, the U.S. and Chinese spheres of influence overlap. Vietnam, for example, is torn between two grand strategies—one prefers a strategic alliance with China, the other favors closer ties with the United States; and the balance of power between the two grand strategies has been shifting several times since the late Cold War.[15] Although both the United States and China want peace, their different, sometimes conflicting, visions of what "peace" means and the friction between their spheres of influence are vigorous sources of instability.

The above analysis suggests that the current structure of international power in Asia is transitional. It is a patchwork of overlapping spheres of influence where the major centers of gravity are to different extents the United States, China, India and Japan. It is bipolar in some sense, but not in other. It is unlikely to lead to hegemony; nor is multipolarity the coming Asian order. Most of the region is marked by U.S. primacy but this is increasingly contested by Chinese growing power. Japan, India, and a number of medium-sized powers are redefining their places and roles in the international system. China itself is determined to restore its high place in the international system but at the same time avoids confrontation with the United States. There is indeed a widespread view that the region is lacking leadership. Unless bipolarity will be hardened, the emerging Asian order will fall in the broad category of shared regional leadership. There are three options for such a shared leadership.

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[15] Alexander L. Vuving, "Strategy and Evolution of Vietnam's China Policy: A Changing Mixture of Pathways," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 46, No. 6 (November/December 2006), pp. 805-824.

The first is an East Asian Community, the structure of which may include various mechanisms ranging from the East Asian Summit to a future common regional currency. An ASEAN-led attempt at shared regional leadership, the East Asian Community was initially based on the vision of regional stability without American involvement. Reflecting this idea, the East Asian Summit has excluded the United States while including India, Australia, and New Zealand, states that do not traditionally belong in East Asia. The inclusion of India, Japan, and Australia in the group may help to prevent Chinese hegemony but the exclusion of the United States will guarantee Chinese primacy. The net effect will be a regional order in which China is first among equals.[16] It is not impossible in the future that the United States will participate in the Summit and become a formal member of the Community. This would be the first step for the East Asian Community to evolve into the third option of shared leadership that will be discussed below. But U.S. participation in the East Asian Summit may also be part of the U.S. hedge against Chinese hegemony and thus will serve as the brake rather than the gas pedal in the system.

The second option is U.S.-China condominium. This is in effect a regional order in which both China's pan-Asian parity with the United States and Japan's and India's inferiority to China are guaranteed by U.S. power. Such a shared rule will meet with region-wide opposition from virtually all the other regional countries, which are excluded from the regional leadership.

The third option is an inclusive but qualified shared leadership (thereafter referred to as "shared leadership"), sustained by a complex of multilateral mechanisms. The idea is to involve all major players in a regional order that is

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[16] This scenario is predicated on the conditions that Japan will not acquire nuclear weapons and India will not reach military and economic parity with China. Under these conditions a Sino-Indian or Sino-Japanese condominium is not worth discussing. The time frame of the options presented in this section is arguably from now to mid-century.

commensurate with the actual distribution of power. In the present period, shared leadership must provide ways for the United States to be first among equals. The various existing multilateral templates in the region such as APEC, the ARF, the Six-Party Talk, and even the East Asian Summit may be the first stepping stones toward shared leadership. But these forums must be reformed before they can serve as mechanisms that are to sustain this option. In their current forms, some are based on a notion of multipolarity (APEC and ARF), while others reflect U.S.-China condominium (the Six-Party Talk) or Chinese primacy (the East Asian Summit). As they are at odds with the current balance of power, their role in stabilizing the region remains limited. The mechanisms of shared leadership must be responsive to the prevailing balance of power. As such, they facilitate peaceful competition as opposed to war-prone confrontation between the major powers. However, this presents a big challenge because establishing institutions that are responsive to shifts in the balance of power is not an easy task.

Preparing for the Future

The prospects for a regional order in Asia depend on the preferences of the actors involved, their relative power, and unintended consequences of their action such as the security dilemma. The following assessments are based on three assumptions about the preferences of the international actors. First, the larger the relative share in the regional leadership that an actor can obtain in a regional order, the more the actor prefers the corresponding regional order. Second, actors prefer peace and stability to war and instability. Third, the preference for leadership share is primary while the preference for stability is secondary. The possible options are U.S.-China bipolarity,

U.S.-China condominium, Chinese primacy via the East Asian Community, and U.S. primacy via inclusive shared leadership. Table 2 shows the preferences of the players.

Table 2. Preferences for a Regional Order in Asia

United States	shared leadership > bipolarity > condominium > EAC
Japan/India	bipolarity > shared leadership > EAC > condominium
China	EAC > condominium > shared leadership ≈ bipolarity
Rest of Asia	shared leadership ≈ EAC > bipolarity > condominium

The United States prefers bipolarity and shared leadership to both condominium and the EAC because the former promise larger relative shares in regional leadership. Washington may try to obstruct the EAC as this model excludes the United States from the regional leadership in Asia.

For major powers such as Japan and India, bipolarity opens the prospect of gaining even more in leadership share than can they under shared leadership, but at the same time, bipolarity is accompanied by a chance of war that shared leadership has ruled out. Japan and India would fiercely combat U.S.-China condominium as this option keeps them out of the regional leadership, but the two would accommodate the East Asian Community as they still can get some leadership share within this framework. Both Japan and India would prefer shared leadership to the EAC because they would rather accept U.S. primacy than Chinese primacy.

China prefers the EAC to condominium because the former gives it a larger relative share in regional leadership than does the latter. Also, it prefers condominium to shared leadership and bipolarity. Although in theory bipolarity opens the way for China to gain exclusive regional leadership, but in practice, China is aware that it is still too weak and vulnerable to engage in a confrontation with the United States.

Rather than giving China a chance to restore its high position in the world, bipolarity in the present period would certainly lead to China's defeat. China would have a hard time to compare the options of shared leadership and bipolarity as it would suspect the former is a vehicle to perpetuate U.S. primacy and China's lower status.

Like Japan and India, the rest of Asia will also be opposed to U.S.-China condominium. Some Asian states favor shared leadership, other the EAC, but most prefer shared leadership and the EAC to bipolarity because bipolarity brings in the possibility of intra-national conflict, regional division, and war.

Given that two of the three major players and some in the rest of Asia prefer either shared leadership or bipolarity, the real alternatives of regional order in Asia are bipolarity and shared leadership. An inclusive shared leadership that reflects the real distribution of power would be most likely to emerge as the next Asian order if mutual understanding prevails over the security dilemma. But if the business of the security dilemma works as usual, a bipolar regional order will be the most likely scenario.

For the small and medium-sized countries in Southeast Asia, this means that they must seriously prepare for bipolarity while at the same time strongly push for shared leadership. Regional mechanisms that sustain such a shared leadership must fulfill three criteria. First, they must be inclusive. None of the major players—the United States, China, Japan, India, and ASEAN—can be excluded from the club. Second, they must be responsive. There must be rules to adjust the leadership shares to the actual balance of power. The mechanisms must provide ways for renegotiating the leadership shares when there is a significant shift in the balance of power. Third, the regional leadership must be qualified. On the one hand, no single state can dominate the agenda and decision making. But on the other, the major players are not

equal because the leadership shares must reflect the relative power of the major players. ASEAN is right when it tries to promote the diverse regional forums that provide a venue for exercising shared regional leadership. But it would be wise if it takes advantage of its role as the "driver" to set up a "seat order" that reflects not the ideals of multipolarity but the real balance of power among the "passengers."

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