

ASIA WITHOUT AMERICA: A VISION FOR PEACE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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One of the pleasant surprises of the 21st Century Forum was the debate, argument and disagreement this paper elicited. After my presentation, George P. Shultz, who served as Secretary of State to former US President Ronald Reagan and later George Bush, asked if he could have a few words with me. I said "Yes."

"Do you know what will happen if the US and Japan did not renew the Security Agreement?" Secretary Schultz asked.

"You have a way of putting me on the spot. I have no idea," I said.

"Well, let me tell you," Secretary Schultz said. "Do you know that the Japanese now have the capability to produce a nuclear bomb within 40 days? Without the treaty, do you know what the Japanese will do in a year's time? They will go nuclear." With my attitude and view, "the Asia-Pacific region will be ruled by Russia and Japan in the next millenium." Mr. Shultz went on and on for 15 minutes, outlining the dangers of an Asia without America, an Asia with a nuclearized Japan, and an Asia with Russia lording it over with its nuclear preeminence. He concluded that the renewal of the Japan-US Security Agreement was in Asia's welfare, but particularly in China's interest.

When we met for the open forum, Secretary Schultz had left for other engagements. But Nobuo Matsunaga, former Japanese Ambassador to the US and currently, President of the Japan Institute of International Studies, and Dr. Ezra Vogel, Director of the Fairbank Center for East Asian Research at Harvard University, pursued the argument of George Schultz. Ambassador Matsunaga and Dr. Vogel asserted that the Security Treaty was not intended "to contain China." In fact, Ambassador Matsunaga contended, "the agreement is meant to preserve peace in Asia. The treaty does not provide for the rearming of Japan."

I called Ambassador Matsunaga's attention to the Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement signed on April 17, 1996 by President Clinton and Prime Minister Hashimoto, wherein the US would supply ammunition, arms and arms production-related equipment and almost every conceivable logistical item Japanese military leaders deemed important. I then asked whether the "Joint Japan-US Declaration on Security-Alliance for the

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21st Century” could be interpreted in the spirit of Article 9 of Japan’s Constitution which declared: “Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order,” the Japanese people forever renounce war and the threat or use of force “as a means of settling international disputes.” Ambassador Matsunaga smiled but gave no comment while Dr. Vogel insisted that I “misinterpreted the treaty.”

When George P. Schultz delivered his closing remarks, he returned to the subject of the importance of America in Asia and warned that America could not be ignored in the 21st century, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region.

Asia is on the verge of a new historic passage - moving from a position of weakness for most of this century to a more positive leadership role in the near future. Once called by Western scholars as a “living fossil” or the stronghold of “arch-reaction and arch-conservatism,” Asia is now the center of “economic miracles” and most political and economic analysts predict that it will lead the rest of the world into the 21st century. No one had foreseen that the most modern of technologies and economic transformation could settle in the most antiquated and outmoded lands of “retrogressive” Asia. This revival and growth deserves to be compared to the historic instances of massive, incremental and peaceful change of political and economic institutions.

During the past 25 years, with the end of violent political conflicts in Indochina, economic growth of China, the end of the Cold War, the dialogue between Pyongyang and Seoul, and Vietnam’s entry into the ASEAN as a full-fledged member, Asia has become more peaceful, cohesive and prosperous. For more than a decade, the region’s economies have grown at an average of 6 percent, higher than the growth levels of most Western countries. China, Taiwan, Hongkong, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia have attained annual growth rates of 8 to 10 percent. Even less fortunate countries like the Philippines and Vietnam are achieving growth rates that impress the critical eyes of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). There is no doubt that compared to some 10 to 15 years ago, the living standards of Asians have risen remarkably; hence, their governments now confidently speak of meeting unappeased national aspirations long frozen by superpower rivalry.

Asian leaders are aware that this favorable environment is due to a combination of distinct geopolitical circumstances such as lack of conflict,

peace and stability in the region, as well as dynamic domestic economic programs. They also recognize that conflicts brought about by larger forces beyond their control could change conditions in the region abruptly. Even the spillover of a United States - Japan or United States - China trade war could plunge the rest of Asia once more into the backwaters of economic underdevelopment. Having been dragged into wars not of their own making, and now faced with a less than benign international economy, Asians know by heart that their peace and fortune have been inextricably linked to major power competitions, their political, economic and military dealings for the region and Asian countries' responses to these events and movements. Any struggle for regional leadership by the big powers, say between an insatiable America against a rising Japan or China, could once again swallow them up or divide them along new issues, interests and doctrines.

For these reasons, many Asian leaders want to bury old suspicions and rivalries and get on with the shaping of a new cradle of humanity based on mutually beneficial arrangements in the economic, political and security domains. They took the 1993 declaration of the new US President William Jefferson Clinton to heart when he announced that "the United States cannot solve every problem and must not become the world's policeman." They expect the era of *Pax Americana Pacificus* to come to a close and look forward to the start of new approaches and forging of a new world order.

Futurology, like commemoratives, often engender in people the wish to speak of where they are, how they got there and in what direction, if any, they should be going. All too often, however, the unveiling of such scenario is circumscribed by people who refuse to look beyond their national agenda and ideology. Their memories and analyses of world events are confined to what serves their national interests at the moment.

Thus, however much Asian leaders would like to believe President Clinton's declaration, subsequent developments showed that his policy of "engagement and enlargement" marked, not the end of the United States' active engagement in Asia, but the reformulation of a new Cold War policy against likely adversaries, such as the rising economic and military powers of Asia, particularly China. On the surface, American policy has concentrated almost exclusively on ensuring "peace" and, in the words of Samuel P. Huntington, the dramatic shift or movement of the world toward "political

democratization and economic liberalization.” But that is a question-begging proposition. The search for peace by going to war has been the battlecry of the West since World War I. What the US wants is not simply to remain as a rich and powerful country and to interact with other nations on a normal state-to-state basis for mutual benefit, but to be a world leader - one that seeks to create other nations in its own political image, and now uses the new dogma of economic liberalization to keep these nations subordinate to the American economy.

Of course, the most inhibiting constraint on American policy are countries that pursue their own brands of democracy and economic dogma. In spite of condescending talks about understanding different historical, political and economic circumstances and stages of development, it is clear that during the Clinton administration, the US, in many instances, has gone too far in considering competition from any other dominant center as undesirable. Accordingly, such competition does not only restrict America’s national objectives and freedom of action, but threatens American supremacy, as well.

It appears that current US policy makers do not welcome the new developments taking place in Asia. They are disturbed by Asian economies growing at a rate considerably higher than in other regions. China, for one, is expected to become the world’s second largest economy; its national capital is already equivalent to that of Japan, at least when measured in terms of international price parity. This means that world economic activities will no longer center solely on Japan and the US, but around the US, Japan, China and other Asian countries.

US trade will depend more on Asia. According to one estimate, by the year 2003, the US is expected to have twice as much trade with Asia as with Europe. Asia’s intraregional trade will continue to expand and thus reduce America’s share in the Asian economy. This means that US friction with Asian economies will grow, but America’s traditional strategy of threatening unilateral action to block access to its domestic market will become less effective. Moreover, despite being the only remaining superpower in the world, the US no longer possesses overwhelming economic and political clout to lead multilateral organizations, as it once did.

So that the US will not be overtaken by these developments, its policy of “engagement and enlargement” includes the use of all resources and existing agreements at its command, to protect, maintain, and expand US role in Asia. Policy makers at the White House, Department of State, and National Security Council, along with Republicans in the US Congress, favor a strategy of engagement, confrontation and destabilization in dealing with China. In the words of former Secretary of State Warren Christopher, American policy should be to “peacefully evolve China toward democracy.”

This explains why the US is keeping its old security agreements with Japan, South Korea, Australia and the Philippines, although today these agreements have different tactical objectives. For instance, the Japan-US Security Treaty is no longer purely for the defense of Japan against any third party attacks, as many conservative Japanese see it, but is designed to keep Japan under American control. It is not clear how the US will react if the attack emanates from South Korea, or how South Korea will react if a third party like Russia attacks Japan. What is clear, although unstated, is that all these security arrangements are important instruments not only for the protection of American commercial and security interests in Asia, but also for dividing and ruling the region in the 21st century.

Seen in this light, the forward deployment of US forces becomes a condition for maintaining American power and for containing China, specially now that Asia has become the global center of economic dynamism. The US Congress, for instance, has allowed single-issue lobbyists to dominate Congressional positions on China. China’s policies on “birth control, imprisonment of dissidents, prison system, restricted speech, religious restrictions and constraints on Tibetan monks,” were viewed as “inimical to American national interests” and became the bases for the 1995 China Policy Act. In the executive branch, President Clinton acted with new ferocity in dealing with China’s military exercise over the Taiwan straits in March 1996. President Clinton interfered in China’s internal affairs when he ordered the Seventh Fleet and other nuclear vessels to move closer to the Taiwan straits, despite US recognition, along with Britain, France, Japan, Australia, the ASEAN countries, India, and Russia, that Taiwan is an integral part of one China and should be governed by Beijing. Such actions demonstrate how little America regards bilateral commitments in pursuit of domestic politics.

It will go to the extent of containing China and frustrating its emergence as a world economic and military power.

Of course, many western political analysts justify American action by claiming that uncertainties remain about the precise form Asia will take in the next century. Asia at the end of the 20th century is an animated area in which a number of powers, not only China and Japan but ASEAN, Russia, India and soon a united Korea, are jostling with one another. American presence is thus said to be needed to hold a fragile peace in the region. These critics conveniently ignore Chalmers Johnson's observation that the closing of the United States' two largest military bases outside the US, namely Clark and Subic in the Philippines, "produced not even a shiver of instability" in Asia.

In order to justify the deployment of US forces in Asia, America's new engagement and enlargement policy includes the construction of a scenario whereby all rising economic and military powers, unless they have security agreements with the US, are deemed dangerous to peace and prosperity in the region. In this scenario, other Asian countries should be outwardly friendly but inwardly wary of China's economic growth, as it spells competition for their growing economies. China's military modernization should also be a cause for alarm for it means that China will one day use it to strike at rival Asian powers.

The US-Japan Security Treaty as well as the new Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement which allows the US to supply Japan ammunition, arms and arms production-related equipment and nearly all logistical items, is clearly a treaty for the containment of China. Thus, despite Article 9 of Japan's Constitution, the "Joint Japan-US Declaration on Security - Alliance for the 21st Century," signed between Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto and President William Clinton on April 17, 1996, made Japan literally an Asian-NATO ally.

President Clinton has signed the treaty again for domestic political reasons. He can silence domestic detractors who criticize the US-Japan Treaty as onerous as it provides a security umbrella to the Japanese but takes away American jobs with cheap exports. President Clinton can report that Japan, which will pay for the realignment cost of \$10 billion, will add to the nearly \$6 billion Japan defrays on the 47,000 US forces in its soil. Americans tend

to explain their double standards by adverting to their democratic processes. Political decisions, other nations are told, are made in particular political contexts and many elements must be factored into the equation of policy.

There is no doubt that the new treaty will pave the way for Japan's plan to revise Article 9 of its Constitution which stipulates: "Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order," the Japanese people forever denounce war and the threat or use of force "as means of settling international disputes." In order to accomplish this, "land, sea and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized." Yet Japan has an army, a navy, and an air force, called the Ground Self-Defense Forces (SDF), Maritime SDF and Air SDF. Its defense budget adds up to \$47 billion a year, the second largest in the world. There is no doubt that the Americans have commenced the remilitarization of Japan with the new treaty. They have paved the way for the eventual revision of the Japanese Constitution for this purpose.

In view of the new treaty, there is a feeling among the two signatories that a wall against China has finally been established. It gave confidence to Japanese thinkers to talk of Japan's leadership role in Asia. Mineo Nakashima, a noted Japanese expert on China, believes that Asian security could advance if China breaks into pieces and Japan "assumes leadership of the Asian nations."

Just as the scenario feeds other Asians with the fear of rising Asian powers, it also creates higher rationales for America's continued presence in the region. America must remain in Asia not to pursue, maintain and guarantee its commercial interests but to ensure peace. The US is not only a fair and just mediator; it also champions the cause of the weak.

There are many reasons why, for the moment, American leaders are training their targets on China. First, the fear that China may become a superpower in every sense of the word. China does not only have a fast growing economy but has 1.2 billion people with a proud 5,000 year history. China is currently already more than a nation; it is a civilization with ethnic links to all the countries of Asia and a cultural force that has influenced its neighbors throughout history. Second, China's new status suggests that it can shape regional politics. This means that in the 21st century, a different style of cultural, political and economic leadership will likely emerge in Asia.

Third, China is a nuclear power, exports high-tech equipment and arms, and is therefore a direct competitor in this market. Above all, China is a member of the United Nations Security Council with a veto vote. This means it can frustrate America's goal of pursuing its narrow national agenda in the UN.

The US wants to portray itself as the most reliable buffer between China and the other Asian states. The most obvious move in this direction is America's attempt to label China's military modernization as a sign of its ambition to become the new superpower in Asia. Though aware that China is militarily a poor third in its air and naval power, Washington nonetheless portrays China's modernization of its armed forces as a military threat. Through crafty propaganda and subterfuge, the US makes it appear that China's military modernization is aimed at other Asian countries, therefore, they must lobby against it and press for American presence in Asia in order to neutralize China.

Because other Asians have been bombarded with propaganda pointing to China as the new, rising evil empire of the 21st century, American Cold War allies passionately argue for continued American dominance in Asia. In most Asian media that rely on Western wires and satellite feeds for international news, every sort of information about China is robbed of its sense of reality. Indeed, not since the Cold War years has the resurrected China bogey waxed over more pervasively.

No doubt, the American scenario requires accomplices who are willing to enter into a pact. The individual accomplice who joins the pact agrees to regard the American scenario as the conditions of Asian reality. Such is the case of Japan who, in extending its Security Agreement with the US, has agreed that China, Russia and North Korea could be the likely future enemy.

I make these quite obvious points to underline the kinds of challenges we face in pursuit of our respective national policies as we move into the 21st century.

The American-created mentality in the last days of the current century should be replaced with the new realities of Asia. For instance, in the economic sphere, the US is already facing off Japan, China and South Korea, and has begun to reveal itself not as a fair or just mediator, but a fierce partisan competitor and a biased intercessor.

Until America accepts Asian realities, particularly the rise of China as an equal and the likely new peacemaker of Asia, the conflicts of the 20th century will be dragged into the next century. In most of Asia, the character of the post-World War II period has been defined by policies instituted by the US during the Cold War. America's policy, strategy and negotiating style of using threats, pressure and destabilization clearly are not part of the solution but part of the problem in Asia.

When I point to the US as a part of the security problem in Asia, I do not mean to imply that if the Americans were to vanish tomorrow in Asia, or in an Asia without US dominance, there would be no more security problems in the region. Of course, America will be very much around Asia in the 21st century.

While Japan, China, Russia, India and the Southeast Asian countries are all encountering a difficult phase in their relations with the West, particularly with the US, on issues of trade or security, they are also experiencing many difficulties with one another. Bilateral relations among these countries have not been close and have seen extreme fluctuations. Although they want to redefine their respective relations with the US on a more just and equal basis, they scrupulously avoid the onus of being branded as anti-American and anti-Western. While they recognize that cooperating more extensively and forging a common front in dealing with the US could improve their bargaining chips, none of them, except a small nation like Malaysia, has proposed the building of a strategic Asian partnership.

Even in purely tactical terms, the mere idea of gathering together to strengthen their respective positions is unthinkable to some Asians. The Japanese, for instance, prefer to be under the protection of the American nuclear umbrella while getting richer, planning and plotting to become the eventual leader of Asia. Meantime their scholars insist that the US and its Western allies will not accept a new center of power, nor will it be possible, for now, for Asian nations to abandon the American market and sustain a new arrangement of their own.

There are feelers like the first ever Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) in Bangkok in March 1996 where leaders from 15 countries of the European Union (EU), seven member states of ASEAN and the three East Asian nations,

China, Korea and Japan, met to explore and eventually evolve a new partnership. The leaders agreed to discuss what they considered important, "in full awareness of the differences." In the words of Lamberto Dini, Italian Prime Minister and President of the EU: "If our aim is to bring about a partnership between Europe and Asia, this meeting must first and foremost prepare the ground for a deeper understanding of the problems of the two areas. Only through a shared view of our problems shall we be able to carry our collaboration forward." Evidently, the Italian Prime Minister wants to put behind the era of European colonial exploitation of Asia.

Notwithstanding such diffidence, most Asian countries are trying to improve their bilateral relations "to develop a strategic partnership of equality, mutual confidence and mutual coordination" by the 21st century, as in the case of Sino-Russian relations. "I can't name a single question on which we would have different opinions," President Boris Yeltsin told the Chinese in a toast to seal their new partnership. Of course not all Asian leaders talk of their relations with one another in the manner of President Yeltsin.

Among some Asian countries, there are very real differences involving conflicting territorial claims over areas like the Sakhalin islands, the Spratlys and Paracel, Diaoyu islands, East Timor, Sabah and Kashmir. However, the leaders of most of these countries now appear to prefer to go to dialogue rather than engage in aggressive posturing, having realized that the persistence of territorial conflicts seriously constrains their ability to pursue mutually beneficial arrangements. Indeed, many seem to be ready to make appropriate adjustments over delicate and difficult issues in order to build a new and progressive framework of interdependence among themselves. Thus, after two years of mutual denunciations in the much publicized conflict over the Paracel and Spratly islands of the South China Sea, all sides have become more conciliatory, having realized the futility of holding on to a static position which turned out to be unproductive over time. They also know that prolonged controversy could make them once more the battleground of rival powers, or fall prey, at the very least, to superpower and big power intrigues.

Today, China has taken a big step in assuring its smaller neighbors of its desire for a cooperative and consensual framework of relations. It has agreed to discuss contentious issues with the ASEAN members and to respect freedom of navigation in the South China Sea. It has also ratified the 1982 UN

Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which incorporates a mechanism of settling water disputes through international arbitration, and has published a white paper on its defense policy.

No doubt mutual ambivalence is still apparent among some Asian leaders in the way they avoid talking about new interlinkages for the region. Clearly, there are still many sensitive issues and differences that need to be resolved. However, the end of the Cold War as well as the objective conditions within the region, have made clear to these leaders that time is of the essence as perceptions are changing, and that new policy frameworks and diplomatic initiatives are required to resolve these issues.

Yet, however much we would like to believe that America is part of the problem in Asia, many ASEAN members still consider the United States as a close ally. Nonetheless, the failure of the US lobby against Myanmar's application for ASEAN membership revealed that Americans could no longer take the ASEAN leaders for granted. Only a decade ago, the US and most European countries could still exercise a major influence over ASEAN affairs through their various security and commercial interlinkages. But now their ASEAN allies not only talk back but make independent decisions.

The situation is not any different on the other side of the coin. China and Japan, the likely early contenders as leaders of Asia in the 21st century, are still looked upon with suspicion. For Japan, the suspicion is rooted in its aggressive militarism and savage cruelty against its Asian neighbors at the turn of the century up to the end of WW II. In the case of China, it is the short and unhappy alliance with the Soviet Union during the early years of the Cold War. But Japan appears more than willing to cede temporary leadership to the US while stalling to make the best arrangement for its own ascendancy. Most Japanese leaders and academics argue that an American military presence is an absolute condition for the security of Japan since the Self-Defense Forces, which are conditionally barred from engaging in offensive action, cannot defend Japan by themselves. Some Japanese even claim that the 150,000 SDF ground troops combined with 45,000 American troops garrisoned in Japan are still not enough.

Accordingly, American marines in Okinawa are trained and equipped primarily for offensive missions, with the capability to make rapid amphibious landings and establish a beachhead anywhere in the Far East. Similarly the air wings based in Japan not only watch over Japanese airspace but patrol the skies over the northern Pacific. The Seventh Fleet in Sasebo, which has 60 warships and 50,000 sailors, covers the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean — Washington's key linkages for defending US interests in the Asia-Pacific region.

Most Asians view Japan's lobby for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council, its recent moves to amend the Constitution to make a Japan a "normal nation again" and its renewal of the security treaty with the US as selfish and self-serving. Clearly these moves are not intended to build a mutually beneficial partnership with its Asian neighbors nor to defend these countries' national sovereignty against the onslaught of America's New World Order, but to promote Japanese interests. Many believe that Japan is actually preparing itself for a collision course with China, which explains its unwillingness to write off the US-Japan Security Treaty despite bilateral tensions over trade and other commercial arrangements.

Although there has been greater warmth in China's relations with its neighbors in recent years, many Asians still fear that any cooperative arrangement with China beyond commercial issues may be seen as anti-Western. Indeed China's rise as a military power, which comes at a time when the US is the sole remaining superpower, is seen as a "dangerous development" in the sense that, historically, it has always been a problem for a rising power to come to terms with a bigger one - specially if the goal is balance of power. The mutual perception that the other country challenges core national interests will remain indefinitely. Even in purely tactical terms, Chinese manipulation of military power for its own survival is not acceptable to the United States. Indeed, it reinforces American apprehensions that China is deliberately threatening its commercial and national security interests in the Asian region - a perception that has been bolstered by the distinctly anti-hegemonic, anti-big power politics and anti-bullying posture that China has taken vis-a-vis the US in recent years. This is unfortunate since Chinese responses have been mainly reactive - derived mainly out of modern Chinese history, the "century of shame and humiliation," and the recent hustle and tussle with the US over issues of trade, intellectual property and human rights.

China will not feel safe until it has achieved some degree of parity with the US and the US ceases to act as an imperial superpower.

It is fashionable among Westerners to deny that China has any special lead role in the Asian region. We may hear from Western analysts that any Chinese aspiration to play the part of one of the leaders betrays a presumption that Chinese record does not justify. As far they are concerned, it is brazen, at best a foolish ambition. For the Westerners, there is no room for accommodation with a Chinese leadership in the region. But historical passage is a political opportunity that cannot be put off by the dark wishes of the prophets of doom. Therefore the relevant question for the Chinese is not whether China should try to lead but rather how and under what circumstances should China seek to exercise its leadership. There is little doubt that China will have to lead Asia sometime in the next millenium. Can China do it and will it succeed?

Here we may do well to consult history. When the Chinese communists seized political power in 1949, they were confronted with more daunting problems. The nation faced massive starvation and famine characteristic of China's worst times. The new government took over the most ruinous inflation and monetary breakdown in world history. Its agricultural sector was disintegrating under a backward technology and the persistence of traditional feudal socio-economic relations, while its inadequate system of transportation was in shambles. Large areas of China had yet to come under the control of the new government. Though Chiang Kai-shek had already fled to Taiwan and the military power of the Kuomintang had been broken, it still terrorized much of South and Southwest China. Remnants of the KMT army and various warlord armies occupied many parts of West and Northwest China. Worse, the key instrument for preventing the development of China was economic isolation by the West led by the US. Moreover, on June 27, 1950, US President Truman ordered the United States Seventh Fleet to neutralize the Taiwan straits.

In 1960, the forces of nature inflicted even crueller blows. More than 60 percent of China's cultivated area suffered from flood or drought and agricultural production plunged below the plummet line. Yet with all the problems and difficulties that confronted China - the menace of two hostile

superpowers, economic underdevelopment, and periodic political upheavals, China has survived to become one of the fastest growing economies and powers of Asia near the end of the 20th century.

If China is to negotiate the historic passage mandated by national survival, pursue new priorities as it grows in power, wield global influence, as well as ensure peace and stability in the region, it has to overcome serious constraints internally and externally, and provide a strategic doctrine that will link its interest with Asia and the rest of the world.

Among other things, China may have to move away from its defensive and reactive policies and develop “a strategic partnership of equality, mutual confidence and mutual coordination towards the 21st century.” Another is to project the positive side of China’s political and economic development. Forms of government, whether democratic or socialistic, are not necessarily good or bad in themselves. It is the leadership and the men and women in the bureaucracy that make or unmake governments. History has shown that not all elected officials are good and non-elected officials bad people. Moreover, very few Asians are aware of China’s technological advances since 1949 and the kind of technical and scientific skills China can offer to some of its developing neighbors and global friends. China must also seek common ground in solving problems shared by all developing countries such as unfair trade practices and pressures imposed by the advanced industrialized countries.

With regard to contested territories and waters, China must take the lead in promoting commonly acceptable solutions, including development programs for the areas, instead of just shelving sovereignty claims. In the Spratlys and Paracel islands, for instance, if China can come up with a joint development program that will prove more beneficial to all claimants than their individual aggressive posturing, there is little reason why these parties will not give such program a chance. All claimants understand that there is no realistic alternative to a mutually beneficial settlement. Certainly this is not only a conciliatory gesture but a more pragmatic approach to beneficially share contested resources. Avenues for confidence-building include joint undertaking of research into areas of common interest, exploration of underwater resources and ecological preservation of the South China Sea.

By and large, most Asians admire China's economic development and growth in the face of so many obstacles and problems. At the same time many of them feel that China will become their economic rival in the global market. Since most Asian countries are trying to attract foreign investments into their economies, they generally look at China as a formidable competition. China must make clear that it has no clash of interest — whether economic, political or strategic — with the developing countries of Asia. Rather it has to develop a comprehensive engagement program of its own to transform these developing countries into dynamic trading partners and progressively build an interdependent market which will work to their common advantage.

Since the United States will still be very much around by the 21st century, at least during the first decade, China must find a way to deal with the reality of the US as a fading superpower. While improvement of relations does not mean cordiality on all fronts, there is a need to change Washington's negotiating style which combines threats and sanctions. One school of thought in Washington believes that unless the Chinese are badgered, pressured, threatened and harassed, they will not yield an inch. Supporters of such thinking include a large segment of Americans who want to induce change in China. These Americans somehow nurture the belief that Christian precepts and democratic ethos are superior to China's over 2,000 years of civilization. Unlike other nations who seem satisfied to deal with China on a normal state-to-state basis for mutual benefit and profit, they want to change China socially, politically, and economically. The Chinese have correctly refused to be imposed upon, but the future cannot be defined by a combination of some cooperation where interests coincide and a lot of threats where differences cannot be resolved.

A basic policy China must eventually pursue is to hasten the end of American hegemony in Asia, initiate a new dialogue and eventually build a mutually beneficial doctrine of economic, political and security relations among Asian nations. The task amounts to restoring to Asians a sense of the reality and an understanding of their own role and destiny as a region. Chinese and other Asian leaders should clear Asia of the American dogma that has dominated the region for almost a century, if only to bring a politically and psychologically cleansed Asia into the 21st century.

What we should remind ourselves during this conference is that Asians have a unique history. Asia is the cradle of several great civilizations. We are one region whose civilizations can be traced back to thousands of years before the birth of Christ and whose inventions have been offered as the heritage of humanity. The Chinese invented, among other things, gun powder, the printing press, silk culture, porcelain ware technology and the compass, but they never badgered nor pressured any country for compensation or violation of intellectual property rights. We are resilient peoples who survived, during the late 19th and throughout the 20th centuries, aberrant periods of wars, Western colonization, imperialism, and superpower rivalry, which stifled our independent development and doomed our peoples to second class status.

What we need is to regain our human rights from the West, particularly the United States of America, reassert our Asian heritage and go on with our business of pursuing Asian traditions and ideals of a peaceful and stable world of equals and virtuous friends. Otherwise, we may suffer the fate of the American Indians - isolated and quartered in reservations in their own homeland. It is a simple agenda that cannot be met without strong Chinese leadership. To get through the challenging century ahead will not test merely the wisdom, but the will and vigor of all Asians. It will not be easy but we have done it long before, we can do it again.