

BOOK REVIEWS

Pacific Asia? Prospects for Security and Cooperation in East Asia.
By Mel Gurtov. New York: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002.
259pp.

The main title of this packed and densely footnoted but still very readable book ends with a question mark, which intrigues the reader to ponder the extent to which post-Cold War Pacific Asia is really “pacific”. Indisputably, the Cold War’s ending has been a critical defining moment in major power relations but the effects of that transformation in the political and security domains have yet to be fully realized in East Asia where a divided Korean peninsula (the most heavily militarized area of Pacific Asia) and the 100,000 American “forward” troops deployed there and in Japanese bases are constant reminders of the un-ended business of a previous strategic era. Add to that the U.S.–China–Taiwan imbroglio, the unresolved issue of sovereignty over the South China Sea, questions over a future Japanese security role and disturbing trends in weapons acquisitions by regional states and the East Asian strategic environment begins to look less sanguine.

Nevertheless, the Cold War’s demise has opened the way for multilateral confidence- building and conflict management processes that are uniquely “Asian” and distinguishable by its “emphasis on informal arrangements rather than institution-building to solve inter-governmental problems and gain co-operation ... by the belief that where security cooperation may not be directly attainable, economic development through interdependence is ... and by reliance on reassurances through dialogue rather than rule making in regimes and agreements to resolve or mitigate disputes” (p. 62). Coupled with the

general improvement in major power relations, they make for a strategic landscape that is more stable than it was during the Cold War. However, it has also become more complex and uncertain. These uncertainties were most starkly re-emphasized by the onset in 1997 of the East Asian economic crisis, the consequences of which on the economy and development, the environment, regime instability (and attendant effects on the foreign policy environment), and the flow of displaced peoples across borders, constitute a major security concern of the book. Such threats to human security, which could not be addressed adequately by either the Realist or Globalist paradigms — given what Gurtov sees as the pessimism of power politics associated with the former and the quest for profit associated with the latter — led him to prescribe in the critical perspective of what he calls “global humanism”, which redefines security needs in terms of advancing human values and policies, namely, those fostering “peace, social justice, environmental protection and economic balance, political liberties and accountable institutions” (p. ix).

This is not to suggest, however, that the author eschews the Realist or the Globalist framework in his analysis of China’s ambitions, Japan’s quest for “normalcy” in its international role, and mutual security between a divided Korea — the themes that constitute the core of the book (chps. 4–6). On the contrary, Gurtov views each of these issues through both prisms but concludes that the best way of coping with a rising China, encouraging Japan to play its role as “a global civilian power”, or underpinning stability in the Korean peninsula is through a “global humanism” approach that emphasizes a common rather than a unilateral search for security. In what is by far the longest chapter in the book (chp. 4), Gurtov rightly identifies the Sino-American security relationship as the most important element in the wider security of East Asia. But how should a rising China be handled by the sole superpower of today? Not on the presumption that a strong China will be aggressive, “nor by seeking to weaken China through balance-of-power tactics, but rather by helping provide China with the means of securing people’s livelihoods and protecting its resource base — in short, helping to refocus its security agenda by ways that also promote regional security”(p. 124). What is lacking in the treatment of this “rising China” is a deeper analysis of the security challenges for others in the region as China acquires more “soft” power elements and capabilities. An economically strong China is not only an opportunity to others but also a possible threat in terms of its trade and investment diversion potentials. In this respect, perhaps the “ASEAN+3” dialogues as well as the proposed ASEAN–China free trade pact are arrangements and

mechanisms for economic confidence-building as much as they serve to advance mutual economic interests.

Gurtov's analysis of the interactive dimension of major power politics does not lose sight of the domestic and cultural environments that both shape and circumscribe foreign policy behaviour. This is underlined in his reflections on Japan's role as a global civilian power. Indeed, he echoes the view attributed to Michael J. Green that such a power that rejects militarization "defies international relations theory, and particularly the neo-realist perspective". Whether this seeming anomaly can be sustained would depend on the extent of Japanese societal changes — the extent to which public participation is registered upon policy-making, the pervasiveness of democratic norms on the bureaucratic process, domestic economic restructuring, and whether Japanese society itself can become less homogeneous (p. 154). The author makes the admittedly contentious point that "what really stands in Japan's way is Japan itself" (p. 155). It is in the Korean peninsula that the neo-realist paradigm remains most pertinent. Here, all four major external powers (namely, China, Japan, the United States, and Russia), whose strategic interests converge, seem to find commonalities in the avoidance of another war, keeping the area nuclear-free and according low priority to Korean unification, although they probably regard such a prospect as inevitable (p. 167). This, together with the general acceptance (including, interestingly, by Kim Jong Il) of a residual American role in providing strategic stability on the peninsula now and after unification (p. 166), gives hopeful optimism for multilateral efforts at security management.

While the Korean peninsula may, up to a point, be more amenable to security management among the major external powers, the question remains whether the United States itself, the sole superpower — indeed, the post-Cold War hegemonic (yet others would call "exceptional") power, with its unique web of historical bilateral security alliances and less formal, but nevertheless special, security partnerships in East Asia — is paying only lip-service to multilateralism. To Gurtov, however, despite the many sources of friction in the region, regional governments remain attracted to the idea of resolving disputes and promoting collaboration through regional dialogues. What the United States itself needs "most of all (is) to be a partner with Asia-Pacific states, not a balancer or military ally" (p. 203). This would seem to give hope for those inspired by the multilateral approach to security. One policy implication is that the U.S. strategic predominance is neither to be taken for granted nor necessarily desirable. However, for a hegemonic power, the challenge would lie in striking a balance between the impulse

to lead and going with company. Nowhere is this more challenging than in America's efforts at coalition-building in the war against global terrorism following the 11 September terrorist attacks on the United States — the significance of which, for East Asian security, was just beginning to sink in at the time the book went to press. There are brief references to the impact on and implications for U.S. security policy towards the region. Indeed, the index contains only three entries under "war on terrorism". Today, one would expect the spectre of global terrorism to hang heavily over the regional security discourse. More importantly, the current war on terrorism also raises serious questions over the heavy American emphasis on military response as well as Washington's management of its relations with the moderate Islamic constituencies, particularly in Southeast Asia. This is not to suggest, however, that another "defining moment" in history has overtaken the book, although the author himself recognizes the hazard of writing about foreign and security policy in East Asia. As he says in the Preface, "changes come with such frequency and, often, unpredictability that one week's writing is next week's garbage" (p. ix). The main underlying injunction of the book, to think "comprehensively" about the human dimensions of security, is as relevant as ever in the war on terrorism. Above all, the collaborative effort at meeting this new threat (as well as responding to the previous challenge of the East Asian economic and financial crises) also puts into perspective the so-called softer "Asian way" to managing security. The question for security planners who would prefer a more robust co-operative response must be: if the Asian way is necessary, is it quite enough?

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***The Politics of Multiculturalism: Pluralism and Citizenship in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia.* Edited by Robert W. Hefner. Honolulu, Hawaii, USA: University of Hawaii Press, 2002. 319pp.**

Southeast Asia has long been noted for its ethnic and religious pluralism. While studies since the colonial era have commonly focused on state policies to build coherent, stable nations out of this diversity, the contributors to this volume consider pluralism from the perspective of non-state or sub-state actors. In considering how actors from four social