

BOOK REVIEWS

***Asian Flashpoint: Security and the Korean Peninsula.* Edited by Andrew Mack.** Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993. 175 pp.

Several reasons make reviewing an edited book dealing with contemporary affairs difficult. Chapters in the book do not usually share the same style, methodology, and approach. The situation and context in which the book was written are changeable, and sometimes a once critical issue loses its relative significance over time. Andrew Mack's book may have some of these weaknesses. For instance, North Korea's nuclear problem was temporarily settled through the Geneva accord, but what came to the fore were issues of multilateral co-operation through the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), food aid to flood-stricken North Korea, and a peace treaty between North Korea and the United States. Furthermore, the Taiwan Strait had recently commanded more attention as a flashpoint in East Asia than the Korean peninsula.

Nevertheless, surviving three years since its publication testifies to the book's durability, reminding us that the Korean problem is still one of the critical issues left to be solved in the post-Cold War world. Compared to other books of this category, authors here prefer realistic appraisals to diplomatic rhetoric, and most articles take the proper levels of analysis for understanding security (and insecurity) dilemmas in the Korean peninsula. This review examines the various authors' arguments on the position of each country concerned with the Korean problem by covering three key issues: strategic intentions of the actors, their domestic politics, and the possibility and limit of a multilateral approach to the problem.

We should start with North Korea's position. As both Bracken (Chapter 7) and Moon (Chapter 9) correctly indicate, North Korea's strategy boils down to matters of "state survival" or "regime interests". Confronted with dual problems of internal/economic and external/military security simultaneously, North Korea's "tactical" use of nuclear "strategy" was a viable decision. With the nuclear option open and a willingness to compromise, North Korea's *quid pro quo* meant reduced military tensions, at least with the United States, a better position in normalizing relations with the United States and Japan, and economic benefits, including light water reactors.

Unfortunately, a reduction of tension hardly suffices as a true solution to the Korean problem. North Korea's defensive shift and its desire to join the multilateral club in East Asia coincide with the status-quo orientation of the United States and Japan, which will enhance short-term stability in the region. Bracken's fear of North Korea's isolation and Mack's suggestion of unilateral assent (Chapter 1) both have their limits. In order to understand this knotty subject, we should recognize the ongoing zero-sum game between the two Koreas and the ways in which North Korea perceives its security threat.

One aim of South Korea's Nordpolitik, which has led to normalization of relations with China and the Soviet Union, was to take the initiative in inter-Korean relations by isolating North Korea. North Korea's recent policies are similar to this miscalculated zero-sum strategy. Its regime security is still based on the existence of an enemy, and South Korea is the remaining target of threat mobilization. North Korea's relative opening does not necessarily imply that it will accept the rules and norms of the market and democracy. Therefore, if the North Korean state thinks that the continuing involvement might jeopardize its own political or policy-making autonomy, other options would be considered. As Moon argues, the North Korean conception of security is "relative and context-bound".

Compared to North Korea, South Korea's reaction to the nuclear problem and its position on the reunification issue have been inconsistent. As Hayes (Chapter 6) suggests, this is partly due to the domestic politics of South Korea. The complex pattern of political coalitions, the lack of bureaucratic consensus in dealing with North Korea, and the uncertain mix of security and economic interests are obvious factors of turbulence. Consequences of the congressional election in 1996 and the presidential election in 1997 will be significant in this regard. However, South Korean policies in the post-Cold War era also show some continuity in their emphasis on a gradual and long-term

approach under the assumption of South Korea's ideological and economic ascendancy.

Hayes' argument that both the reunification and nuclear issues are of great symbolic potency in South Korean politics is well taken, but his analysis of the potential nuclear proliferation propensity of South Korea, or a reunified Korea is somewhat misleading. While classical balance of power relations in East Asia may reappear in the post-Cold War period, South Korea's security discourse remains focused on the calculation of "relative gains" in inter-Korean relations. Its embeddedness within the triangular relationship with the United States and Japan, and its growing economic interdependence with China and Russia make South Korea's search for a nationalistic security alternative problematic.

What South Korea wants is relative autonomy in the peninsula and great power co-operation in inducing internal changes in North Korea. This explains South Korea's sensitivity to American unilateral actions towards North Korea. Consequently, the KEDO model, in which South Korea plays an important role in a multilateral setting, should be seriously pursued. However, the dilemma will continue because the North Korean state is likely to perceive an enhanced South Korean role as a major threat. As Cotton (Chapter 10) suggests, there is also no guarantee that a relatively open North Korea will be favourably disposed towards its southern neighbour.

The possibility of a meaningful transition on the Korean peninsula is still strongly affected by the intentions of surrounding powers. Instead of the strategic environment dominated by U.S.-Soviet rivalry, a multipolar structure or a latent bipolarity between the United States and China is emerging in East Asia. The logic of power balance in this region, however, is much more complicated than in the Cold War era.

According to Levin (Chapter 2), the United States is interested in reducing tensions on the Korean peninsula and reinforcing stability in East Asia, and also in supporting peaceful reunification of the two Koreas. Tentative settlement of the nuclear issue and the improvement of U.S.-North Korean relations via America's policies of engagement and enlargement can contribute to the first goal of stability. The issue of reunification, however, may appear contradictory to United States interests because Washington could perceive the transition as a destabilizing factor in the region. Therefore, for the United States, strategic advantages that a unified Korea can offer should be considered, and the shape of both domestic and international orientations of the new polity will be important.

China shows greater flexibility for peaceful change in the Korean peninsula than the United States. As Ye Ru'an (Chapter 4) says, Beijing emphasizes the usefulness of a bilateral approach in dealing with the Korean problem. To a certain degree, this is due to the analogy with its own problems with Taiwan, but a close comparison between China and Korea easily suggests more differences than similarities. While South Korea's possible strategy of a delicate balance between China and the United States looks still premature, future U.S.–China relations will have a significant influence on Seoul's policy options. China's domestic situation — political leadership, economic reform and decentralization — will be a critical variable affecting East Asian security.

Japan does not have any intention to play an active and independent role in the Korean problem for the time being. As Morimoto (Chapter 5) shows, Japan is focused on regional stability and economic co-operation. This conservative position accommodates with American interests in East Asia. Negotiations with Korea around normalization are also part of Japan's regional strategy based on its two-Korea policy. Russia's influence on the Korean peninsula will also be limited. As Chufirin (Chapter 3) points out, economic interests are still predominant over security considerations. Moscow's orientation towards the reunification issue is ambiguous, and like China, domestic changes will likely affect its position on the peninsula.

The chapters in Mack's edited volume have different views on the relevance of multilateralism in East Asia. According to some authors, East Asia has fundamental limits in applying the European concept to its regional international relations. While the region has had hierarchical and bilateral relations traditionally, the experiences of colonialism and the Cold War have distorted the processes of modernization both domestically and internationally. Presently, these historical legacies make East Asian states wary of accepting ideas such as "indivisibility" and "diffused reciprocity", the core of multilateral consensus. The settlement of the security dilemma around the Korean peninsula will serve as a kind of melting point of these barriers.

The inevitability of a multilateral approach, however, seems to be evident in the discussion of co-operation in the post-Cold War era. Consequently, we have to consider how the preconditions of multilateralism can be attained in East Asia. The pursuit of multilateral security should be accompanied by realignments of bilateral relationships established during the Cold War and the expansion of non-political interdependence and dialogues. For the Korean problem, therefore, bilateral confidence (and hopefully consensus) building between the two Korean states is

the first goal to be achieved. Mack's book provides many useful observations on security issues on the Korean peninsula, but solutions are still somewhat nebulous. The "pipe dream" may not come true unless the peninsula is relatively "Koreanized" and depoliticized.

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***The Gulf War: Critical Perspectives.* Edited by Michael McKinley. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1994. 201pp.**

The meaning and significance of the Persian Gulf War of 1990–91 for world politics is still unclear. At the time, critics and supporters heralded a "new world order" (whether George Bush's or not), but despite the vast number of books, articles and commentaries published on the causes, conduct and consequences of the war, there is still no scholarly consensus. And perhaps there will never be, nor should there be, one.

Michael McKinley's edited volume, *The Gulf War: Critical Perspectives*, might be accurately termed "second wave" scholarship on the Gulf War. Published and completed in 1994, it benefits from a couple of years of critical distance and perspective, and hence one of its goals is to contribute to a "critical" scholarly analysis of the war that goes beyond the instant analysis that characterizes much of the "first wave" literature of the early post-war period. Whether or not the book (or all its contributions) succeed equally at this is another question. The book's seven somewhat eclectic contributions can be divided into three general categories: those that are concerned with the Australian dimensions of the war, those that raise regional or comparative issues, and those of a more general or conceptual nature.

The first category includes contributions by James Richardson and Graeme Cheeseman. Richardson's thoughtful essay looks at Australia's reaction to and participation in the war through the prism of "political culture", notwithstanding the divergent interpretations ("both individualism and conformism, both forthrightness and inarticulateness") that can be given to so slippery a concept. The chapter raises troubling questions (albeit none unique to Australia) concerning the degree of "democratic" consultation in the Hawke government's decision to send warships to