

# Peace in Northeast Asia: the U.S.-China relationship

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East Asia is a region having been enjoyed durable peace since the end of the war in Cambodia in 1991. From then on, most of those who have been warning the danger of war in East Asia have seemed to overlook this fact, unfortunately. The East Asia peace survived North Korea's nuclear program for more than a decade, and the peace looks quite stable rather than vulnerable. I would like to make three points to explain why peace is durable and how to maintain it in the future.

First, the general peace in East Asia rests on the mutual nuclear deterrence between China and the US. As long as these two nuclear powers do not dare to fight a direct war between them, there will be no total war in this region. The narrowed military gap between China and the US is reducing the danger of proxy war in this region. Because no country, except the US, will initiate a war in this region, the regional peace will be maintained as long as the US can be deterred from launching war in this region. Regarding the issue of denuclearization in the Korean Peninsula, it will be difficult to achieve the final goal in the short term, but there is also no danger of war as long as Trump keeps its current policy toward North Korea. Being America's ally, South Korea places a crucial role in keeping the US from initiating a war in the Korean Peninsula, because it cannot start a war against North Korea without South Korea's support.

The bipolarization between China and the US will strengthen peace in this region. First, the competition between China and the US focuses on economy, especially the technological superiority, which differs from the military rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union. It is so obvious that neither China nor

the US can attain an economic or technological superiority over the other side through proxy war. Therefore, they will exploit all methods to improve the capability of technological inventions like the space race between the US and the Soviet Union in the late 1950s. The NASA, which was established in 1958, suggests a competition model for the present China-US rivalry. This type of strategic competition is very expensive and this will help constrain competitors from fighting wars.

Second, competition in the wireless world is different from traditional geopolitical rivalry. In 2016, the digital economy accounted for 58.2% of America's GDP, 46.3% of Japan's GDP, 43.4% of South Korea's GDP and 30.3% of China's GDP. These percentages would have increased to over 60% of America's GDP, near 50% of Japan's GDP, over 45% of Korea's GDP and over 40% of China's GDP by the first quarter of 2019. When a major part of their national wealth generates from the digital economy, Washington, Beijing, Tokyo, and Seoul will concentrate their resources on the competition in the wireless world rather than traditional geopolitical or ideological rivalry. North Korea's nuclear program is a problem, but it is far less important than the security of the digital economy for these capitals as well as for the rest of the world. So, these four capitals will give priority to prevent North Korea's nuclear program from disturbing their digital economy growth, rather than quick denuclearization itself.

The superiority of the digital economy greatly rests on durable inventions of electric communication technology. America's diplomatic tour requiring allies to bloc Huawei 5G indicates that Trump's administration has already focused its containment strategy against China on undermining China's capability of technological invention. It implies that North Korea's nuclear program can no longer get Trump's priority in visible future. Unlike geopolitical rivalry, competition in the wireless world does not require competitors to control the governments of other countries but to attract foreign markets by superior technology and low price. For instance, the Australian federal government is a firm supporter of the US in blocking Huawei, but West Australia insists on purchasing Huawei equipment for their local metro system. In early May, the Japanese government also abandoned the early decision to join the US in blocking Huawei. Simultaneously, Abe's administration suggested an unconditional summit with North Korea.

Third, the world center is moving on the path towards East Asia, which is favorable to maintaining peace in this region. The GDP of China, Japan, South Korea, and ASEAN is equal to that of the EU and the military budget of East Asia is already larger than that of European members in NATO. In visible future, East Asia will have a stronger influence on international politics than Europe. To be the new world center, East Asian countries will value the regional peace more than before because the durable peace will be an important condition for economic growth, social advantage, sense of political pride and regional identity. Being a center of the world will automatically improve the regional identity

of East Asian countries just like what happened to European states in the last few decades. Most countries still dislike North Korea's nuclear arsenal, but they also have increasing confidence in preventing that problem from escalating into war. The calm response to the break-up of the US-DPRK Hanoi summit in February 2019 showed how unperturbed the East Asia countries are at this result. People in this region feel far less afraid of the danger of nuclear issues.

The regional economic identity of East Asia countries is growing along with China's rise. East Asia countries are still divided by both the history of World War II and the Cold War. It is difficult for them to establish the same political identity, but economically it is possible. China-ASEAN (10+1) free trade agreement (FTA) has created a semi-common market. AIIB has created a common financial identity for East Asia countries to expect Japan. China and Korea signed FTA in 2015. After Abe's state visit to China last year, China has suggested resuming the negotiation on China-Japan-Korea FTA. Even though the trilateral FTA cannot be reached in the short term, the 10+1, AIIB, and China-Korea FTA can help East Asian countries to improve their regional identity. The common economic identity will drive most East Asian countries to side with China on most economic issues in China-US rivalry. The popular hedging strategy between China and the US adopted by East Asia countries, including Japan, will help maintain the balance between these two giants. Therefore, it also favors consolidating regional peace in this region.

In general, the trends of bipolarization, digital economy, and regional economic identity are reducing the danger of nuclear threat in Northeast Asia. Countries in this region should further improve regional economic cooperation for the sake of a more solid peace.