

that the Himalayan region will remain one of significant rivalry involving itself, India and the USSR.

Japan's role in the region and the world will also accelerate with the decline of US credibility. Thus far, the US defence umbrella has allowed Tokyo to maintain a minimum defence force. This convenience has been maintained under the US-Japan Security Treaty, and has enabled the Japanese to live up to the requirements of the 1947 constitution. Even the Japan Socialist Party has learned to live with the US forces and the Self Defence Forces of Japan. Slowly, the Japanese have started to play a greater role in their own defence. In December, a Soviet fighter overflew Okinawa, and shots were fired. Japan was rudely reminded that it remains in the frontline of any possible East Asian conflict.

Dynamic threesome

The third major trend in the region will be the continued dynamism of Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. Japan has become one of the economic superpowers of the world, and shows no signs of decline. The "endaka," or rising yen, has had relatively little effect on its trade balance, to the exasperation of its trading partners. Japanese companies have been cutting costs and restructuring to maintain their competitiveness, while US companies may not have responded adequately to trade opportunities. The economic summit in Toronto in June will seek solutions to these questions, and the diplomatic mettle of Takeshita will be compared to that of his predecessor, Nakasone.

Korea has been a historic buffer between Japan and the Asian continent. Events there are closely watched in Tokyo. The South Korean elections of December 16 were a mandate for continuity and stability. The unified candidacy of either Kim Dae Jung or Kim Young Sam would have posed a formidable electoral threat to the government party of Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae Woo. Opposition inability to cooperate clearly cost them the election, and cries of "foul!" were greatly exaggerated. In retrospect, the supporters of the two Kims may have been excessively loyal and largely local, so that an agreement between the two candidates would not have consolidated the two regional and personal bases into a single bloc of support.

The election represented a step towards democracy, in that an open contest under liberalized laws produced a president who will not likely be toppled by the military. Equally important, the recent season of strikes and violent demonstrations appears to be over, and the stability required for continued economic growth seems back on track. Roh Tae Woo's legitimacy was tarnished somewhat by the split vote, and will come under fire from hard-line dissidents, but external rather than internal threats will take priority.

South Korea's flaws diminish considerably when comparisons are made with North Korea. There, Kim Il Song continues to exercise a Stalinist-type totalitarian dictatorship, while grooming his son, Kim Jong Il, for the succession. Economic stagnation has not dimmed Pyongyang's hopes to subvert South Korea. Kim Jong Il seems to have been the likely origin of sabotage in the crash of a Korean civilian flight over the Andaman Sea in December, as confirmed in the confession by the surviving suspect. Apprehension over the North's intentions makes the US military presence more palatable in South Korea and reinforces acceptance of the military role in society.

Progress in Taiwan

Taiwan has also been moving towards democracy. Martial law has been lifted, and the formation of opposition parties has been legalized. As with South Korea, Taiwan still takes a fundamentally anti-communist stance. Nevertheless, Taipei is allowing citizens to visit the mainland if they have relatives there. Trade between the PRC and Taiwan continues to grow, and some degree of reconciliation appears likely if Beijing continues on its moderate course. The death of Jiang Jingguo in January reopens the question of Taiwan's future. The native Taiwanese proportion in the ruling Guomindang, and the more Taiwan-oriented new opposition party, the Democratic Progressive Party, reduces the likelihood of early negotiation of reunification between the old mainlander elite and their counterparts on the mainland.

In addition, the liberalization of martial law, family visits by Chinese of Taiwan, political parties, and other forthcoming reforms, will also make reunification more difficult because it again widens the gap between the PRC (People's Republic of China) and ROC (Republic of China). Taiwan residents will be even less willing to give up their economic and political rights under the more liberal regime (relatively speaking) on Taiwan. Much also depends on the process of reunification between Hong Kong and the PRC during the next nine years. Taiwan sees the fate of Hong Kong as a portent of its own future if reunification is ever agreed upon. Each restriction on the colony's freedom will only harden Taipei's resistance to rejoining the mainland.

What will happen if the US reduces its presence and commitments to the Northeast Asian region? When US forces withdrew from Taiwan, the defence system there adapted and a strong military force remained in place. Japan and South Korea continue to host US military bases, and have been modernizing and expanding their own defence establishments.

For Japan, the Korean peninsula has been both a buffer and a bridge facing the Asian continent. If war breaks out again, and if the US is unable or unwilling to save the South, Japan would face the agonizing dilemma of its longstanding minimal defence posture.

The three non-communist countries of Northeast Asia are bound together by more than past US military presence and treaties with the US. They represent dynamic adaptation of capitalist industrialization, and a rough synthesis of liberal democracy and Confucian cultural values. Taiwan and Korea also shared the common experiences of Japanese colonialism until 1945.

"Pull" of mainland China

Taiwan and South Korea represent two flourishing societies being pulled by two "gravitational fields" which are bound to become stronger in the years ahead. The increasing moderation and declining ideology of the PRC represents the first "field." Trade between Beijing and Seoul/Taipei has been increasing. Moving from "hijack diplomacy" to "sports diplomacy," South Korea has rapidly increased contacts with the mainland, despite the protests of North Korea. Pyongyang has lost credibility and perhaps support from its allies. The government of Kim Il Song was unable to prevent its allies from participating in the 1988 summer Olympics — a major blow to its prestige.

Taiwan has modified its earlier uncompromising stand on relations with the mainland. Trade between Taiwan and the mainland is public knowledge. On the death of Jiang, the Beijing government sent condolences and praised him as a patriot. With