

PERSPECTIVES ON ASIAN PEACE AND SECURITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

David B. Dewitt, Director
Centre for International and Security Studies
Professor of Political Science
York University
Toronto, Canada

I. Introduction

International relations scholars have been beset by dichotomous understandings. For instance, some scholars assume that the norm is conflict; while for others it is cooperation; both believe that military capability is necessary, one to prepare for war, the other to avoid it; and both sides in this debate often imbue the exact same factor — the military — as the cause of the consequent but different outcome. The realist tradition, dominant though no longer unchallenged in the western literature, argues that in the absence of some supra-national body which can enforce authority and thereby manage relations between autonomous states, inter-state politics reduces itself to Hobbesian self-help. Peace and stability are the exception and, in any case, are transitory; insecurity and conflict, struggle and violence will be the norm as states challenge based on their material conditions and derivative interests. These scholars view the late 20th Century emergence of a more coherent and distinct regional interstate system within Asia as merely another phase in the journey, one which is as fraught with conflict and with the potential for major war as in the past, only now with the added destructive potential of modern weapons.

On the other hand, liberal theorists are more optimistic, seeing that in the face of these material and structural conditions there are also forces which temper the tendency towards competition and conflict. As the American scholar Aaron Friedberg recently commented, “following Immanuel Kant, most contemporary liberals base their optimism about Asia (and about the world as a whole) on the pacifying effects of increased economic interdependence, the spread of democracy and the growth of international institutions. Liberal theorists have always believed that capitalism and trade would be potent forces for peace.”¹ Combining this with the evolution of the contemporary multilateral system and the slow but, as some would hope, inexorable spread of democracy, and one has a recipe for the belief that peace and security will be the legacy of this new century. For liberals, interaction brings cooperation and a perceived realization of the mutual benefits which accrue from avoiding conflict, what Karl Deutsch many years ago, when exploring the future options for post-war Europe, thought of as a security community. Globalization, essentially a market phenomenon, adds new dimensions to the meaning of borders and boundaries, of institutions and agencies, and of cooperation and conflict. Globalization is thus an important variable in the quest for peace and security.

The mandate I have been given is to explore “perspectives on Asian peace and security in the 21st Century” and thus set the stage for the papers which are to follow, themes which will move us to consider a broad range of issues which concern the larger international community. The task I face is daunting. It is somewhat presumptuous if not foolhardy for

¹ Aaron L. Friedberg, “Will Europe’s Past Be Asia’s Future,” *Survival* 42:3 (Autumn 2000): 147-59.