

INTRODUCTION

It is commonplace to describe the current era as one of uncertainty. Indeed, we seem to have lost sight of the fact that the Cold War was a period of great uncertainty. Be that as it may, the outlines of a new order have begun to emerge in the Asia-Pacific region. The central feature of that new order is the prominence of China. Reviled and underestimated after Tiananmen in 1989, China has risen, phoenix-like, to capture journalistic and analytic attention.¹ New statistical measures suggest that it is now the world's third largest economy and that it will surpass Japan and the United States early in the twenty-first century. By way of comparison, Russia has become invisible. Paralysed by economic and political instability, it has lost sight of Gorbachev's Vladivostok vision. Temporarily at least, Japan and the United States appear to be in a condition of stasis, feeling their way forward slowly as they try to cope with the recession and articulate appropriate foreign policies. The Koreas continue to constitute the most volatile corner of northeast Asia. Peninsular instability is not new, of course, but Pyongyang's threatened withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in March 1993 has given rise to a lethal totentanz; an inconclusive round of negotiations linking Washington, Pyongyang and Seoul in which the solutions appear to be as deadly as the problem they are meant to solve. Thus, the number one question on the North Pacific security agenda is how to escape from the nuclear labyrinth.

Generally speaking the outlook is bleak. As a rough rule, challenges to the state system appear to be growing in inverse proportion to their ability to deal with them. The Bosnian, Iraqi and North Korean cases underscore the limits to power. Furthermore, they raise very disturbing