

THE MAKING OF AN EAST ASIAN COMMUNITY: STRATEGIC CHALLENGES, STRATEGIC RESPONSES

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STRATEGIC CHALLENGES: A WARM PEACE, A DYNAMIC PROSPERITY

The central strategic challenge facing the nations of East Asia in the 21st century is the building of an East Asian community of cooperative peace and prosperity. This central challenge—of achieving remarkable peace and friendship and remarkable prosperity and dynamic growth—is by far the most critical, structural, long-term mission of the states of our region.

If we succeed handsomely in achieving such a community of cooperative peace and prosperity, East Asia will emerge as the third centre of human civilisation in the world. If we fail badly, we will see the end of history and a return to history—the dawn of a future substantially more bleak, perhaps as dark as the last generation has been bright.

Let me begin by saying a few words about “East Asia”, about “Community”, about “cooperative peace,” and about “cooperative prosperity”.

East Asia

By “East Asia” we should mean that region of the world made up of Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia. Why East Asia?

Why confine the community we should seek to build to East Asia? Why not something smaller, like ASEAN Southeast Asia? Why not the APEC membership, which would also include not only the United States and Canada but also Australia, New Zealand, Russia, Mexico, Colombia and several other Latin American countries? Why not the PECC (Pacific Economic Cooperation Council) fraternity, which would have an even larger geographical footprint? Why not the Pacific states, which would be a yet bigger congregation, bringing in a large number of mini states and island nations?

Why not South and East Asia, which would stretch from Pakistan to Siberia, including India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and others? Why not “Asia”, which would span that geographical area from the Mediterranean to the Sea of Okhotsk. After all, as the crow flies Dubai is as close to Singapore as Sydney.

The basic reasons are clear:

- First, because ASEAN is in several senses too small. (In any case, an ASEAN Community is already well on its way. Building an ASEAN Community will not be compromised and will be aided by the process of building the East Asian Community; the two should prosper together; acting together and advancing together.)
- Second, because we must not re-invent or torpedo APEC, whose time and high tide came—and went, because of our failures in diplomacy and statesmanship. APEC remains an important and potentially powerful process which should not be destroyed.
- Third, because we must avoid a central strategic flaw in the APEC architecture: its excessively ambitious membership. A community must obviously be **wide enough** to ensure the value-added but not so wide that **deep** cooperation is nigh impossible and deep community building is out of the question—so that in the net you get a huge minus rather than a significant plus.
- Fourth, we should concentrate on an East Asian community because what we must build in East Asia is not just a strategic partnership of temporary convenience and value or a short-term strategic alliance, a “*gesellschaft?*”, an association which only requires a coincidence of interests. Instead, we must build a “*gemeinschaft*”, a long-term community of nations, which requires what Foreign Minister Downer has called “a cultural community”, an underpinning of shared consciousness, orientations, values and ways and a sustained and sustainable sense of community in addition to a sizeable body of contemporary shared interests.
- Fifth, we should concentrate on an East Asian community because although highly imperfect and still in its infancy, there already exists an East Asian consciousness, an East Asian orientation on many issues, an East Asian corpus of values and ways.
- Sixth, there already is a *large* and *stable* East Asian cooperative agenda, a body of shared East Asian vital interests—political empowerment and having a larger voice, ensuring good relations between China and Japan, generating greater and deeper ASEAN+3 economic interdependence and integration, protecting common and threatened so-called “Asian” values (so characteristic of the era of Queen Victoria in the West)—around which a strong, sustained strategic friendship, system of cooperation, and condition of community can and should be built in coming decades.

(We should, of course, continue to establish alliances, join other congregations and participate actively in other processes. But the last three conditions do not exist in the case of the north Pacific, in the case

of the PECC fraternity, and the case of the even wider Pacific Basin. To reiterate, APEC is important and should continue to be nourished; but it is more a “gesellschaft” than a “gemeinschaft”, more intent on negotiating and on crowbar diplomacy and opening markets than on community building. The APEC venture also lacks a sense of community, and has far fewer commonly shared interests necessary for sustained community building. It is simply too big and too diverse in too many ways. These factors apply even more to the broader configurations.)

- Seventh, it is better to begin small (with ASEAN+3) and then to expand than to begin big and then to contract. The final geographical footprint of the East Asian community we should build will of course change over time. We must seek its expansion beyond the original 13 in due course. But in the days immediately ahead, there are rational grounds for us to begin the process of regional integration and community-building with the ten states of South East Asia and the three big states of Northeast Asia: China, Japan, and South Korea.

Community

By “Community” we cannot imply a model such as the European Union or its many antecedents. Even though we must obviously learn from the efforts of western Europe, eastern Europe, north America, south America, Australasia, Africa and other parts of Asia, including the ASEAN community, because of our own specific conditions in East Asia, we must copy no specific scheme, mimic no specific model, or seek to replicate the experience of any particular region.

Cooperative Peace

Our conception of “a cooperative peace” should have at least two dimensions, the first connected with regard to the end, the second with regard to the means:

- The end we seek must be true peace, a warm peace awash in a sea of friendship, as opposed to the mere absence of war or hostility; for others, the mere absence of war and hostility in East Asia may be enough; for us in East Asia it is not;
- The means must revolve around the idea of striving, acting, working, and cooperating together for this true and warm peace.

In the decades ahead, we must aspire to build true and stable peace and tranquillity, a warm and cordial peace, not temporary respites from tension and hostility, a cold war or a cold peace.

The ancient Romans coined the famous saying: *Si vis pacem para bellum* (If you want peace, prepare for war.) Hegemonic powers, realpolitik superhawks, and unilateralist superpowers throughout history have preferred the unilateralist, might-is-right approach, for somewhat obvious

reasons. So-called “Realist” Great Powers and the militarily powerful who are not in a position to create hegemonistic systems are generally great advocates of the “Balance of Power” system, especially those Balance of Power systems (more accurately called “Preponderance of Power systems”) in which they militarily outbalance their enemies and opponents—again, for somewhat obvious reasons. History tells us that true peace and tranquillity can never be achieved directly through hegemonism and domination or through competitive Balance of Power and Preponderance of Power systems.

To be cooperative is to be non-impositionist and non-dictatorial. The states of East Asia can and must cooperate multilaterally; but they can and must do so **unilaterally, by taking** steps to “stand down”, to “tone down”, by unilaterally reducing offensive weapons, by fighting the unnecessary hostilities that poison the well of peace, the deep prejudices that do no-one any good, by communicating positive intentions, by unilaterally adopting policies that generate goodwill and friendship.

Cooperation can also come through **bilateral** steps, through mini-lateral ventures, regional endeavours, internationalist and global efforts.

Cooperative peace can be generated by direct efforts at peace-making. It can also be contributed to indirectly through other means, including “cooperative prosperity”.

Cooperative Prosperity

Just as it is possible to have a barren absence of war, without an iota of friendship, and to call it “peace”, it is possible to have a comfortable standard of life, cradled in the embrace of a comfortable stagnation, and to call it “prosperity”. Our objectives must go beyond this—to a warm peace nourished by friendship and goodwill and to a dynamic prosperity accompanied by rapid growth.

The “*cooperative prosperity*” we must build should refer to a system whereby we care for each other’s economic prosperity and deliberately work together for ourselves and for each other within our already economically highly integrated region. For most of the 1990s before the great East Asian Crisis of 1997 and 1998, East Asia was the fastest integrating region in the world, surpassing the rate of integration in Western Europe, which was stepped up in the 1990s and which culminated in the

establishment of the European Union. This incredible economic integration in East Asia occurred in the absence of any inter-governmental attempt at regional integration or cooperation and was driven almost entirely by the private sector.

STRATEGIC RESPONSES: IMPERATIVES AND PRINCIPLES

To the governmental and non-governmental builders of our East Asian community in the years to come I would like to commend two strategic imperatives and at least twelve strategic principles.

The Primacy of Ends, Not Means

We will obviously have to do many things. For just a mere outline on the massive explosion in regional cooperation and integration efforts over the last three years, which will accelerate in the years to come, please see the article I recently wrote for Nikkei.¹

A hundred flowers will bloom. A thousand ideas will contend. We should always be clear about means (trade, monetary, health, tourism, environmental and other cooperation and integration schemes) and ends. Primacy should always be accorded to the ends.

The Primacy of Peace and Friendship

We should also avoid one clear mistake of the admirable APEC enterprise. Even more important than cooperative prosperity is peace and friendship. In our enthusiasm to cooperate and integrate, we must bow to the primacy of community-building, peace, goodwill, and friendship.

The Principle of Rationality

We must always be cool, calm, and calculating. We should eschew the affectative; we should be obsessive about the instrumental. We must always calculate, calculate, calculate, in order to minimise the costs and to maximise the benefits, in the fullest understanding that in any venture there are risks and opportunities, the downside and the upside. We must forego the satisfying but counter-productive option of emotion and outburst.

The Sinatra Principle

It is also necessary to stress that there are many pathways to the building of cooperation and

¹ "Lots of good reasons for optimism on East Asia economic integration", *The Nikkei Weekly*, 8 December 2003.

community—because so powerful has been the European experience that the accumulated weight of intellectual momentum forces us (all too often) to be prisoners of the European way. According to the European way, for example, trade cooperation preceded monetary and financial cooperation. This somewhat dramatically does not look like the sequencing paradigm appropriate for East Asia. The Sinatra principle which advocates that we do it our way suggests very strongly that we can and should move aggressively on both fronts at the same time. It also argues that we also move in directions (for example, health cooperation) that were not at all relevant in the European experience.

The Principle of the Colourless Cat

We should be non-ideological, non-doctrinaire, non-theological. Our only doctrinal addiction should be to pragmatism. We must do what is needed; we must do whatever works, whatever will yield the productive political and economic (and social) results, results that are dynamically productive in the medium and longer run (as well as in the short run). It should not matter if the cat is black or white, so long as it catches the mice.

The Principle of Prosper-Thy-Neighbour

So much of the misery in the world arises out of beggar-thy-neighbour policies arising out of narrow, bloody-minded definitions of the national interest. This is the propensity within dog-eat-dog systems un-informed and untouched by a sense of community. This is not the system that we want for East Asia.

In the longer term, our prosperity, especially but not only our economic prosperity, will hinge a great deal, in the future as in the past, on how well our neighbours do. In the great East Asian financial crisis of 1997 and 1998, East Asia helped East Asia. Our friends outside East Asia gave us a great deal of advice but very little substantive help. China played a pivotal role. Japan extended a big helping hand. Even crisis-hit Malaysia pledged US\$1 billion to Thailand and Indonesia.

East Asia cooperation must be securely built upon a smart partnership founded on the precept of win-win, driven by the ethos of mutual benefit.

The Principle of Self Determination

This is a critical basic principle. Even if we are not so smart as others, it is the countries of East Asia

that must decide what is good and bad for us, not external powers. We must ensure national self determination. And we must ensure regional self determination.

The Principle of Focussing on Real Results on the Ground

The world is littered with examples of inter-governmental negotiations which produce incredible results on paper and none on the ground in the real world. The legalistic Cartesian impulse to negotiate, negotiate, negotiate, to wring concessions and to impose legalistic commitments, especially on weaker negotiating partners is most often counter-productive. Sustainable cooperation can not be built on intimidation, pressure, and dragging reluctant diplomats and politicians to the dotted line. This is even more so with regard to community building.

A signature is no substitute for sincere agreement. Consent based on the persuasion of power is no substitute for commitment on the basis of the power of persuasion.

Five additional strategic principles that should guide our community-building efforts deserve mention without perhaps necessitating elaboration:

- The Principle of Open Regionalism, historically developed by the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council,
- The Principle of Democratic—not Hegemonic—Regionalism,
- The Principle of Consensual Decision-making,
- The Principle of Mutual Consideration and Respect, and
- The Principle of Mutual Benefit, of ensuring that in whatever we do our eye should be on not only what benefits we will derive but also what benefits our community partners will be able to reap.

The Principle of Realism

Finally, let me stress the importance of the principle of realism. Ours must always be an idealism that is without illusion. Let us have no doubt that the East Asian process of community-building and deep and substantive cooperation and collaboration amongst us will constantly test the patience of Job, the wisdom of Abraham, and the creative genius of Steven Spielberg. It is always going to be laborious and difficult.

In the years ahead, will we be able to somehow find the patience of Job, the wisdom of Abraham, and the creative genius of Steven Spielberg? Certainly not in full measure. But there are grounds for some cautious optimism.