The US stake in greater Asian integration
By Samuel R. Berger

There are three giants may lead to a certain balance against destabilizing tendencies on a global scale.

To some extent, this idea is embodied in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), with member states Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and observer states India, Pakistan and Iran. Ethereal by each year, the organization gains weight. Its major significance lies, on the one hand, in the gigantic territorial and human resources potential of the participating countries, and, on the other, in the membership of two nuclear powers – Russia and China, united in strategic partnership. Russian-Chinese and Russian-Indian military exercises have not gone unnoticed. Though the SCO is not a military bloc, it enables its members to defend their geopolitical interests. It is not by chance that the communiqué adopted at the SCO summit meeting in 2005 encouraged the U.S., in light of the completion of the active phase of its antiterrorist operations, to set exact dates for ending the use of facilities and the American military presence in SCO countries. Those who hoped to use the antiterrorist operations in Afghanistan to install non-regional military bases on a permanent basis in strategic points of Central Asia will not be able to turn a deaf ear to such requests.

The SCO also plays a big role in developing trade and setting the right climate for investment, technological cooperation and professional training in this important part of Asia. The gigantic project to construct oil pipelines from Eastern Siberia to the Pacific coast, with branches into China, will definitely serve to strengthen economic ties between these countries. There are also other projects to transport oil and gas through the territories of SCO countries. There are also other projects to transport oil and gas through the territories of SCO countries.

Some political scientists suggest that the U.S. and China will be the main superpowers of the 21st Century and that the century will pass under the shadow of their stand-off. Personally, I do not agree that the global architecture will return to the model that existed during the Cold War, where the two superpowers were the U.S. and the USSR. To my mind, this kind of structure is no longer feasible. We are already seeing the formation of a multi-polar, rather than a bi-polar, world. Its evolution is not easy, sometimes going in zigzags, overcoming the aspirations of one power for global dominance. But still, we see the emergence of a world structure with several centers. It goes without saying that in the list of major players, there are countries from the Asia-Pacific region – Russia, China, and India. Regional and sub-regional integration has an important role to play in the formation of a multi-polar world. This is confirmed by the successes of APEC, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and now the SCO. The Asia-Pacific region will also be influenced by Latin American countries, where we see tendencies toward national self-assertion being matched at the same time by economic integration within the region.

What about Russia? Russia may become a sort of connecting bridge between Asia-Pacific and Europe. And this bridge is not simply a transport or transit model – though, of course, Russia is the shortest land and air corridor between the two regions. No less important is the notion of bridging the gap between civilizations, especially nowadays. Not long ago, the world was split by ideologies. Today there is a threat of a different divide – religious and cultural. Unchecked, this split will lead humanity to an abyss of no return. Russia, situated on two continents, provides a good example of a united commonwealth of people with different religious beliefs and mutually penetrating cultures.

Evgenii Primakov is the former Prime Minister of Russia

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regional attitudes toward free trade and investment flows
• Provide a mechanism for less prominent states in the region to express their views
• Create a spirit of cooperation and confidence-building

Consistent with these policy objectives, President Bill Clinton invited the heads of state of all APEC countries to Seattle in 1993, when I served as Deputy National Security Advisor, and this gathering has evolved into an annual “Leaders Meeting” which facilitates diplomatic progress on pressing regional issues.

Despite the long history of U.S. support for regional cooperation in Asia, it is important to identify major American concerns for a future that will see creation of new regional institutions at the initiative of other countries. No doubt the U.S. is committed in principle to being a prime mover for the continued evolution of Asia-Pacific regional institutions. But whether it continues to do so in practice depends on as yet unknown answers to certain critical questions:
• Will the new East Asian Community (EAC), as announced at the December 2005 East Asia Summit, interact in a positive way with other institutions in the Asia-Pacific that the U.S. actively supports?
• Will the EAC take actions aimed at weakening U.S. bilateral alliances or the overall U.S. role in the region?
• Will the EAC become a means for China, in particular, to dominate the regional security agenda?
• Will the EAC reinforce the programs and policies of other regional organizations, especially the ARF and APEC?

There are concerns that China will use its growing involvement in the East Asian Community and other regional organizations to diminish the U.S. role in Asia. During the 1990s, China strongly favored bilateral diplomacy and was reluctant to involve itself in regional organizations that it believed were controlled by the United States. Beijing suspected that the U.S. wanted to enmesh China in multilateral activities to constrain China’s freedom of action in the political and military spheres.

China’s attitude toward regional cooperation in Asia has evolved considerably in recent years. It realized that it could gain political influence through regional arrangements, particularly those that excluded the United States. As a result, China began investing greater efforts in three forums: 1) “ASEAN Plus Three” meetings where China participated in talks on both security and economic issues; 2) the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) where China and Russia have sought to limit U.S. influence in Central Asia; and 3) the East Asia Summit in 2005, which included the “ASEAN Plus Three” as well as India, Australia and New Zealand.

Despite U.S. anxiety that China may use regional organizations to reduce U.S. influence, the bottom-line U.S. assessment is that this situation is not likely to occur in the foreseeable future. The regional organizations in which China actively participates are essentially “talk shops” and China feels comfortable with this approach. ASEAN and the ARF work through consultations, dialogue and consensus. They take only incremental policy steps and they resist more muscular efforts to impose normative codes of conduct or punitive sanctions.

Work in the ARF is voluntary and because its pronouncements have no binding character, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) where China and Russia have sought to limit U.S. influence in Central Asia; and 3) the East Asia Summit in 2005, which included the “ASEAN Plus Three” as well as India, Australia and New Zealand.

Despite these U.S. concerns, regional organizations in Asia also provide a mechanism for China to demonstrate that it is a good neighbor and not a threat to other countries. Enmeshing China in the broader framework of international organizations and thereby encouraging it to pay attention to the interests of other countries is likely to outweigh the risk of China dominating such groupings and giving them an anti-U.S. agenda.

East Asia certainly has a legitimate right to demonstrate the relevance of regional organizations, both new and old, the U.S. and other participants can best contribute to advancing their common interests.

In the end, of course, the success of all these regional organizations will not be based just on fostering dialogue and consultation. It will depend on the energetic policies of Asia-Pacific governments to utilize these organizations to solve problems and build consensus. By demonstrating the relevance of regional organizations, both new and old, the U.S. and other participants can best contribute to advancing their common goal of achieving greater peace, stability and prosperity in East Asia.

Samuel R. Berger was Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs in the administration of U.S. President Bill Clinton. He is the current Chairman of Stonebridge International.
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Work in the ARF is voluntary and because its pronouncements have no binding character, the SCo is more of a political and military sphere. This effort can help ensure that all multilateral organizations within the region work in greater harmony. It can also establish the most efficient process for adjusting the competing interests of states and for strengthening their common interests.

In the end, of course, the success of all these regional organizations will not be based just on fostering dialogue and consultation. It will depend on the energetic policies of Asia-Pacific governments to utilize these organizations to solve problems and build consensus. By demonstrating the relevance of regional organizations, both new and old, the U.S. and other participants can best contribute to advancing their common goal of achieving greater peace, stability and prosperity in East Asia.

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