

EDITORIAL

Beijing should be careful what it wishes for in the AIIB

Players in international affairs can count on two things to be true. First, nothing is ever truly unthinkable given time. A decade ago, anyone who would have suggested the possibility of a rapid warming of ties between long-time foes such as Taiwan and mainland China or the U.S. and Cuba would have been considered wildly imaginative.

The initial success of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank is a surprise to many, not the least Beijing when it started to float the idea of establishing the international institution in 2013. Born out of the frustration felt by mainland China (and other emerging economies) at the failure of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to reform to address their growing economic influence, the AIIB was considered more of a protest statement than a true rival to the World Bank and the IMF. The U.S. initially expressed its wariness on the founding of the AIIB, citing possible lack of clarity of the future institution's governance. Washington (and probably even Beijing) expected its Western allies to stay away from the organization, rendering it a small club for China and other like-minded nations.

Instead, the UK surprised the world in early March by agreeing to join the AIIB as a founding member on the grounds that it can better ensure the bank's transparency and robustness from the inside. Other Western nations — including Germany, France and Italy — soon followed the UK's lead. In perhaps the biggest surprise of all, Taiwan applied for AIIB founding membership on March 31, the last day of application. In the end, the U.S. was able to only keep Japan from applying as a founding AIIB member. Washington made a late about-face and expressed willingness to work with the AIIB (via organizations such as the IMF and World Bank). Non-incumbent U.S. diplomats, however, were more honest in their assessment of the situation. Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said frankly that "I think maybe the bottom line is we screwed it up" when talking about Washington's handling of the AIIB.

All of a sudden, the AIIB gained worldwide support and earned Beijing one of its biggest diplomatic victories, which brings us to the second truism: be careful what you wish for. For now Beijing seems to have gotten a seat at the grown-ups' table, but with that seat come the challenges of being a big player. While the UK may have used its high-minded "insider influence" rationale for joining the AIIB to cover for its other motive of hedging on the possible decline of the U.S. as the world's sole superpower, developed nations would indeed be angling for influence and oversight in the AIIB. Instead of being the big guy in a small club and using it to do as it sees fit, China is now tasked with the hard work of handling a truly international institution, something it has yet to get acquainted with. It had made some initial good decisions to gain creditability, including rejecting North Korea's application as a founding member due to its lack of financial transparency and hinting that it will give up veto power in the AIIB (The Wall Street Journal reported last month that Chinese negotiators persuaded key European countries to join the AIIB with a promise to do so, Beijing, however, denied such reports and said it is "premature" to discuss the matter).

Beijing, however, made a mistake yesterday by formally rejecting Taiwan's application as a founding member. Having Taiwan as a founding AIIB member would help bring legitimacy to the institution as a non-political development bank and help show Beijing as being able to work professionally with an AIIB member it has a complicated relationship with. At the same time, increasing cooperation with Taipei gives Beijing an advantage in its tug-of-war with the U.S. in gaining influence in Taiwan. China should have recognized a possible ground for mutual concessions in the R.O.C. government's agreement to join under the name Chinese Taipei (the name Taiwan uses in the international activities such as the Olympics, the FIFA World Cup and Miss Universe). Deciding to reject Taiwan's founding membership due to cross-strait political issues — which is the only reason since Taiwan is well-qualified in terms of financial and economic transparency and capability — shows China's lack of diplomatic imagination.

The true challenges for Beijing lie ahead. China is already facing strong diplomatic battles as prospective founding members are now engaging in negotiations in drafting the AIIB statutes. It has to prove itself a trustworthy and mature member of the international community or else the AIIB could serve as a window for the world to see China's incompetence first-hand.

The limits of Japan's military strength

By Dr. MARTIN WAGENER
Special to The China Post

Japanese security policy has hit a dead end. Tokyo criticizes that since 2010, illegal incursions into the territorial waters around the Senkaku Islands (known as Diaoyu in China and Diaoyutai in Taiwan) by Chinese government ships have increased. Further, it deplores that Chinese fighter aircraft have entered airspace surrounding Japan without permission. While Tokyo insists that it is in the right legally, Beijing is continuously expanding its capability to project military power in the region. How or whether Japan can avert China's extension of its sphere of influence in the East China Sea is unclear.

The disputed islands are only 170 kilometers northeast of Taiwan. They are part of Japan's sparsely populated south, the Ryukyu islands, a 1,200 kilometer-long island chain. Defending this area is difficult, especially because of logistical challenges. Moreover, the Japanese Self-Defense Forces' (SDF) presence in the region has traditionally been small, mainly for historical reasons: During the Cold War, the SDF were more focused on the north, fearing a Soviet attack against Hokkaido.

For many years, Tokyo has been aware of this situation. Then-Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi called for a "defense force structure to respond effectively to the invasion of Japan's offshore islands" in the December 2004 National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG). Under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, security challenges have been addressed more directly. The December 2013 NDPG openly threaten China: "... should any remote islands be invaded, Japan will recapture them."

To this end, the Western Army Infantry Regiment (WAIR) was set up in 2002. It is based in Sasebo (Nagasaki Prefecture) and is approximately 700 soldiers strong. It is modeled on the U.S. Marine Corps, trains for amphibious warfare, and would be the spearhead of a counterattack in a crisis. Until fiscal year 2018, it is planned to augment these forces by establishing the Amphibious Rapid Deploy-

ment Brigade (tentative name) which is expected to consist of about 3,000 soldiers.

In addition, about 20 F-15J fighters are based at Naha, the capital of Okinawa. They scramble, sometimes almost daily, against Chinese aircraft in the airspace above the East China Sea. Supposedly, 20 more F-15Js will be added by 2016. P-3C Orion surveillance aircraft of the Fleet Air Wing Five also carry out daily patrols in the disputed area.

Japan wants to improve the defensive capabilities of the armed forces stationed on the southwestern flank by the procuring of V-22 Osprey tiltrotor aircraft, Global Hawk drones and amphibious assault vehicles. Also, 150 soldiers of the Ground Self-Defense Forces (GSDF) will be deployed to the southernmost island of the Ryukyus, Yonaguni. By the end of fiscal year 2016, they are to operate a surveillance station there. Yonaguni is only 110 kilometers from Taiwan and 150 kilometers from the Diaoyutais. In perspective, Japan's Ministry of Defense wants to station several hundred soldiers of the GSDF on Amami-Oshima, Miyako and Ishigaki islands. Under discussion is the deployment of surface-to-air and surface-to-ship missiles on at least one of these islands.

Nevertheless, this arms buildup will not suffice to balance Chinese forces in the East China Sea. According to Pentagon estimates, 330 operational combat aircraft of the People's Liberation Army Air Force are within range of Taiwan (as of 2014). Presumably half of them could also be used against Japan's southwestern flank. Furthermore, the Second Artillery Corps, the PLA's missile force, could launch attacks against targets anywhere in Japan. For example, DF-21 missiles could easily destroy Naha Air Base.

In addition, media reports indicate that China and Russia in 2014 signed an agreement for the delivery of S-400 surface-to-air missiles. This missile defense system could also be used against fighter aircraft. Reportedly, the S-400's reach is up to 400 kilo-

meters. Should the system ever be deployed, all of the Senkaku Islands would be covered from Fujian province, further limiting Abe's room for maneuver in the East China Sea.

Under these circumstances, the SDF face two problems. First, the WAIR's area of responsibility is too large to deter an enemy effectively or even to fight against him. Second, Japan will not be able to ensure air superiority in the East China Sea without U.S. help. China outnumbers Japan in combat-capable fighter aircraft in

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the disputed area. Also, the distance between Naha Air Base and the Diaoyutais is 420 kilometers — a minimum of 20 minutes' flight time for an F-15J. By the time SDF reinforcements arrive in the area, China will already have occupied individual islands and will be able to defend them.

Against Beijing's growing military might, Tokyo's future does not look bright. In 2014, China's defense budget amounted to US\$129 billion. Japan, in contrast, could only earmark US\$47.7 billion (official figures, The Military Balance 2015). This situation has been continuing since 2007, when Beijing first spent more money on its armed forces than Tokyo.

At first sight, it is astonishing that Japan does not do more to counter the Chinese military buildup. Randall L. Schweller, professor of political sciences at the Ohio

State University, describes this as "underbalancing," whereby a state would have to do more to respond to a clear threat by way of internal balancing, i.e. improving its armament, yet fails to do so.

The theory offers various explanations for underbalancing in the East China Sea. Japan does not arm itself more against China because it lacks the economic where-withal; it is highly indebted to the tune of 245 percent of its gross domestic product (as of 2014, International Monetary Fund). If the government does not want to lose domestic support, it has to balance austerity measures, welfare programs and economic reforms. This explains why the defense budget has only expanded very slowly since 2013.

According to the theory, underbalancing is more pronounced when there is no consensus between government and society on key security policy issues. That, too, is the case in Japan. According to a January 2015 survey, only 29.9 percent of Japanese support boosting the SDF's defensive capabilities. In an April 2014 poll, 62 percent of respondents spoke out against a revision of Article 9 of the constitution. Consequently, in an August 2014 poll, 60.2 percent of Japanese opposed exercising the right of collective self-defense, i.e. fighting together with U.S. forces.

However, polls from April/May 2014 illustrate that the public's position on security policy is inconsistent. Ninety-one percent said they have a somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of China. Eighty-five percent are concerned that the territorial dispute in the East China Sea could lead to military conflict. Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority is unwilling to spend more money on defensive capabilities in order to better protect Nippon's southwestern islands.

Following Schweller, states that are too weak for internal balancing have to rely on alliances (i.e. external balancing) for their survival. Therefore, Japan employs a strategy of bandwagoning with the United States. And it does so successfully: Washington has confirmed

many times that the U.S.-Japan security treaty of 1960 applies to the Senkaku Islands (Diaoyutais). In April 2014, even President Barack Obama reiterated this position in Tokyo. No doubt, the U.S. security guarantee is Japan's best option of deterring China in the East China Sea. To this end, U.S. and Japanese soldiers are engaged in regular exercises like Dawn Blitz or Iron Fist, in which they train recapturing lost offshore islands.

Against this backdrop, Abe will not be able to better protect Japan's southwestern flank solely with SDF units in the near future. Only a military incident and the ensuing rallying around the flag could change this situation. Until then, war will remain an abstract category for the Japanese population, despite all the conflicts of today. The same phenomenon is evident in other democracies, e.g. in Germany. It appears to be a consequence of long times of peace and being accustomed to U.S. security guarantees. Underbalancing is the logical consequence of this.

For Tokyo, the dependency on Washington in even the smallest crisis could very well pose problems. This is indicated in the interim report on the revision of the guidelines for U.S.-Japan defense cooperation from 1997. Published in October 2014, it states: "In case of an armed attack against Japan, Japan will have primary responsibility to repel the attack. The United States will provide support, including strike operations as appropriate." Accordingly, the SDF will at first probably be on their own in small-scale military incidents around the Diaoyutais. The question is: are the Japanese armed forces ready for this?

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Malaysia revives indefinite jail, opposition labels it repression

By EILEEN NG
KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia, AP

Opposition leader Lim Kit Siang had just been elected an opposition lawmaker in Malaysia's Parliament three days earlier when racial riots between ethnic Chinese and Malays broke out on May 13, 1969. The government named Lim a suspected instigator and arrested him a few days later.

No charges were filed. There was no trial, and no guarantee he would ever be freed. The law under which he was arrested — the Internal Security Act — ensured that he could be held indefinitely. For life, if the government so wished.

So it was with great relief and euphoria that Malaysia welcomed the abolition of the law by Prime Minister Najib Razak in 2012. The joy was short-lived. Last week, after hours of debate in Parliament, where Najib's ruling coalition has a majority, the government passed a new law that critics say is the ISA in another garb.

"Malaysia is regressing into a period of dark ages. This is very, very disturbing," Lim, 74, said in a recent interview with the Associated Press.

The government says the new Prevention of Terrorism Act, which also allows detention without trial, is aimed at curbing Islamic militancy amid fears that the Islamic State (IS) group in the Middle East could be spreading its tentacles to Asian countries with Muslim populations like Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, India and Pakistan to find recruits.

Some 92 people have been detained over the past two years for allegedly supporting IS, including 17 arrested on April 5 for planning attacks in Kuala Lumpur, under another law that does not allow indefinite detention.

About 60 percent of Malaysia's 24 million people are Muslims, most of whom have little sympathy for Islamic extremism in the Middle East.

But critics such as Lim fear that the new law is a sign that authoritarian politics is returning to Malaysia to crush dissent as public support for the government erodes rapidly. It fared poorly in the 2008 general elections when for the first time the ruling National Front coalition

could not win a two-thirds majority in Parliament, coming to power with only a simple majority. In the 2013 election, it won a majority of seats but lost the popular vote.

Najib's own position in the ruling party is threatened. He is also saddled with allegations of mismanagement at a debt-laden state investment company and efforts to link him to the death of a Mongolian woman nine years ago. He also implemented an unpopular new goods and services tax this month to boost government revenue amid a weaker economy.

"If history is an indicator, then these new laws could potentially be very important tools for the regime to hang on to power before the next elections due in 2018. The new laws can ensure opponents are crippled before they can contest," political analyst Ibrahim Suffian told the AP.

Trade Unionists, Student Leaders, Political Activists Target

Najib, who came to power in 2009, says the new law is dedicated to fighting "violent extremism" and has promised it won't be used against political opponents. During the session to pass the anti-terrorism law, lawmakers also approved amendments to strengthen the Sedition Act including mandatory jail sentences and longer jail term of up to 20 years.

The Sedition Act has been used extensively in recent months, with more than 100 activists, politicians, academicians, journalists and a cartoonist being investigated or charged in court since last year.

Najib went on national television on Thursday to defend the new act.

"If we wait for an incident to occur ... the implications would be bad. So before anything happens, we can take action under this new act," he said.

The ISA and Sedition Act are handovers from the British colonial days designed to fight communists. But after independence in 1957, the laws have been largely used against thousands of trade unionists, student leaders, political activists, religious groups and academicians who opposed the government. Many

opposition politicians were among some 10,000 people detained so far under the ISA.

Among them was Lim, who was only 28 when he was arrested after the 1969 race riots. On being told he faced imminent arrest, he fled to Singapore but returned a few days later.

On the flight back, Lim said he wrote on postcards asking his wife to take care of their four children, aged 3 to 8 years, and left them in the seat pocket.

He was detained at the airport and held in solitary confinement for two months, with no access to lawyers or family for the first month.

Police interrogated Lim intensively, up to 24 hours in the first week with no breaks, to try to make him confess to being one of the master-mind of the riots that had killed nearly 200 people.

"Those were the most excruciating moments. I had many moments of despair. They tried to break me down mentally and psychologically. My family didn't know where I was and I didn't know whether they were safe," he said.

Lim was freed Oct. 1, 1970, after about 17 months in detention.

The nightmare recurred in 1987 when then Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, facing severe political challenges, locked up many political opponents.

Also arrested with Lim was his eldest son, Lim Guan Eng, who was then 27.

"For the first few weeks, we were isolated and not given any information. They gave us a mix of truth and fake news to try and destabilize us," Lim said.

Just like before, each detainee was kept in a bare cell comprising a single bed with a thin mattress, a table and chair.

He said most detainees became resigned to their fate but a feeling of outrage and anger often surfaced at being held without any recourse in court.

Lim and his son were freed 18 months later. Both are now lawmakers and the younger Lim is the top elected official, the chief minister, of northern Penang state.

"No one should be locked up for their political beliefs. People will be locked up not because they are terrorists but because they are not in the good books of the authority," Lim said.

Virtual reality may soon become, well, a reality in daily life

The Nation/Asia News Network

In the movie Surrogates, human beings live in isolation and interact by remote-controlling surrogate robots, who are perfectly good looking, young, healthy and athletic. In Gamer, people have personalities in simulation worlds that are different from their real lives.

It sounds like fun, doesn't it? Well, that futuristic outlook may not be too far away, after all. Virtual reality is, they say, a technology fast approaching a tipping point. Funny-looking headsets have come out, albeit largely in prototypes or with "primitive" functions, allowing wearers to enjoy digitally created surroundings or even some simple experiences.

Predictably, the gaming industry is leading the innovations. You might feel like being on a battlefield or in a sporting arena, but that will be just a baby step. If virtual reality is set to be used in training rooms, for pilot or astronaut training, or by the public in general, we would be seeing just the tip of the iceberg in the coming years. As for where it may lead, we have no idea.

Some have said new pilots coming out of virtual reality training will immediately fly a plane full of passengers, that soon you will be able to join a party without having to leave your home. You will be able to "tour" Venice while still in your Bangkok residence and you won't be able to tell the difference. And how about a tennis session with Roger Federer? Better still, how about being an athlete yourself and playing in a stadium full of your "fans"?

There are many reasons why big changes should come sooner rather than later, not least because Facebook is among those who have realized the potential of virtual reality. It's simply a business and a social game-changer. Of course, it will start with the gaming world, with a lot of new computer games already

providing glimpses into how far the technology can go. But soon virtual reality should affect everyone, like the touch-screen smartphones that we so naively assumed only well-to-do people could afford.

Moral questions will definitely be raised. If virtual reality is blended with something controversial, like access to other people's memory like in an even older movie, "Strange Days," alarmists are expected to be out in full force. But technological development has taught us that what we envisage can often happen.

Virtual reality may start relatively humbly outside the gaming industry. Facebook, for example, plans to add videos that give viewers a 360-degree view of a scene and enable them to pan left or right. Then Facebook users would be able to share special moments that would make viewers feel as if they were there.

The "positives" don't end there. There are countless possibilities in education. People can "participate" in historical moments. Will virtual reality be able to help remote surgery? Technology will, of course, reach that stage. And that raises the question: Will immersion replace books? When you can "visit" historical places in Italy instead of just reading about them, what will you choose? Executives from Silicon Valley to Hollywood could soon join hands to provide a new 3D medium that could edge out television, movies and books.

What's driving the virtual reality technology to a tipping point, where something exclusive becomes available for all, which further hastens its improvement and widens its use? According to a recent article in the Washington Post, the driving force is human nature — never settling for the same old experiences. This facet of human nature will ensure that virtual reality will keep evolving — even to the point where it wows or scares us.

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