

How to Avoid the Next War in East Asia

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ABSTRACT

For a small country like the Philippines, watching the rise of Asia and the relative decline of the West bearkens its people to re-examine their past in the light of recent geo-political shifts. How is a nation to survive overt and subversive political violence from State enemies? The answer is to find strength from collective resolve against aggression and intimidation by the world's latest bullies, by taking refuge in the rule of law embodied by the United Nations, and in collective security arrangements with fellow democracies and like-minded allies. Like most global upheavals, this storm would pass over.

KEYWORDS

Huntington Revisited, Rule of law needed in an increasingly lawless environment, To prevent or mitigate political violence

INTRODUCTION

How many of us are comforted by the fact that what is happening in the world today reflects the time-honored spiral movement of history? Well, let us be reminded that history has a way of repeating itself, and we see that today. The

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The world has changed overnight. For example, in only 36 hours on September 15-16, 2008, wealth from three giant financial firms were obliterated: Lehman Brothers, Merrill-Lynch and American International Group. Since then, Wall Street as we know it is no more. There has been a perceptible loss of trust in the banking system because of the U.S. financial meltdown and the recent financial scams and scandals. If change can happen that fast in the financial world, what can 36 hours do to our cherished security architectures? These are not really strange times we are living in. It is only strange for those who fail to read history.

The United States as we know it is not the same United States you and I grew up with. Is it a leaner, meaner United States, or a kinder but fatter one? President Barack Obama's policies signal a dramatic change in America's priorities. From now on, America will be giving more importance to solving its own economic problems and those security issues of its allies. The message for the rest of the world: *prioritize*. This change is massive.

The war on terror is, and this is my own modest opinion, over, as far as calling it a Global War on Terrorism is concerned. With the death of Osama Bin Laden, the reasons for the continued stay of the United States in Afghanistan and Pakistan grow less and less each day, in the view of the American public. America and Europe have ceased to be the world's bank and the world's sole policemen. Is this the beginning of the end of history as we know it? We don't know. What I do know is that the law of unforeseen circumstances never changes. What changes is our worldviews, which adapt to the world around us. The only thing that is constant, like a rock, is that history always repeats itself. One empire rises, another one takes its place. If there are too many 'empires', there is a risk of global conflict as happened from 1914 to 1918. But can and should we be comforted by that foreknowledge?

The so-called 'Arab Spring', initially thought to have ushered in freedom across a wide swath of North Africa from Tunisia to Egypt, may in fact usher in Islamic fundamentalist rule in these countries. Turkey, which inherits the mantle of the last Islamic Caliphate, may be awakened to the fact that it now bears much influence in a region traditionally belonging to its orbit (until 1918 when the Ottoman Empire collapsed). There will therefore be a resurgence for Turkey.

The rise of Islamist regimes in these North African countries (and possibly Syria) also spell danger for Israel as it gets increasingly isolated, diplomatically and strategically, in its own neighborhood. With Europe being Islamized progressively (Christian populations have become largely 'nominal' and church attendance is down all throughout), there might be a revival of Jihadist ideals, i.e. to continue what the Caliphate left undone, the conquest of Islam's traditional territory from India in the East to Spain in the West. But as in the past (the Battle of Vienna in 1683 being the last), there will be a counter-reaction from the West, including the U.S.

A guarantee for ensuring long-term peace in the Middle East must ensue, with outside powers other than the U.S. enforcing it. In the meantime, the quest for energy, water and food commodities will lead to tensions around the world, and India and China's acute shortage of these might lead to global conflict.

At the seminar on 'Asia's Rise' at Jindal University, we discussed some interesting views with Prof. Manoj Pant, Mohan Guruswamy and Dr. Brahma Chellaney, three of the lecturers.

1. The strategic implications of the return of the East

According to Prof. Pant, since 1995, trade between the global South countries grew faster than trade between the North countries, which, in turn grew faster than trade between North and South. From 1995 to 2007, 50% of foreign direct investments flowed to the South. Of this figure, 80% went to Asia.¹

Incremental trade is being dominated by Asia (mainly China, which currently still has the U.S. as its main market). China has recognized that it is technology that primarily drives world trade, not resources. Starting in 2000, India started reaping its demographic dividend. Some predict that because India did not have a one-child policy, it will supplant China as the leading economy by 2040 (Guruswamy).

Today, 'world trade' is mainly composed of transactions between global affiliates of transnational corporations like Apple, General Motors, Airbus, Huawei, Tata Corporation and Toyota.

1. Prof. Manoj Pant, lecture at workshop on 'Asia's Rise in World Affairs: Diplomacy, Law and Economics', *Jindal School of International Affairs*, 4 March 2012.

China and India are in a race to dominate Africa – the former through construction and aid, the latter through trade and food purchases. Brazil, on the other hand, is increasingly being heralded as a future superpower because of its natural resources and trade links to Europe. All this amounts to what is being described as a 'global rebalancing' between East and West.

The important forums of the immediate future will be the Group of 20, not the G7 or G8. With the moribund Doha Round, WTO negotiations will be increasingly relegated to the back seat, with regional trade arrangements taking the fore and bilateral trade negotiations increasing. I made a simple diagram to what we were discussing:

$$\begin{array}{ccccc} \text{WEST} & = & \text{EAST} & = & \text{WAR (?)} \\ \text{(rebalancing)} & & \text{(rematch?)} & & \end{array}$$

On the other hand, Dr. Brahma Chellaney says the next global conflicts will be over water, oil and gas.

Illustrative of the disconnect between empirical evidence and subsequent reality, for Chellaney, was Gunnar Myrdal's book *Asian Drama*, for which he won a Nobel. But Asia today does not mirror the way it was described back then. In his view, Asia was the biggest beneficiary of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the defeat of the Communist ideology – because 1989 saw the shift from military to economic power as the chief indicator of global leadership. In this regard, the West did not punish China for Tiananmen in 1989 because it was already experiencing triumph in Europe. Before 1989, India was engaged in barter trade with the East Bloc countries. The victors of the Cold War were therefore not able to dictate a new international order. The current power shift is different from previous power shifts (for example, from U.K. leadership to that of the U.S.). Unfortunately (for Asia, that is), increasing power in China and India has not resulted in a coming together of Asia, but of growing apart. The reasons for these, in Dr. Chellaney's view, are the following:

- 1) The demons of nationalism are still loose in Asia. In China, jingoistic nationalism is the result of the decline of the appeal of the Communist Party.
- 2) Asian nations have not come to terms with their history. There are many harmful historical legacies, such as between China and Japan, Japan and Korea, India and Pakistan, India and China, not to mention within Southeast Asia. This tension exists because several middle powers are in a dynamic equilibrium in Asia.

- 3) The 'shadow of hegemony' in Asia is very strong. Therefore, a 'rules based' arrangement in Asia is not forthcoming.
- 4) The absence of a common Asian identity and common Asian norms. Historically, there has been no lasting hegemony in a given region without common norms and rules. Asia has adopted the economic values of the West, but not its political values. This situation is not conducive to peace and development.
- 5) The widening gap between economics and politics. The theory and practice of economics is not being constrained by politics. Economics alone will not help solve political disputes. It is politics that drive the economics. Booming trade between two countries in Asia will not guarantee a moderation of their political tensions.

Some warnings were highlighted by Chellaney. Europe, in 1914, was more economically and politically integrated (the Kaiser in Germany was related to the Windsors of Great Britain, for example) than Asia is today – but that did not stop the First World War. To avoid Europe's fate, Asia must see a *'hegemonic service trade which can be promoted by the establishment of a rules-based order paired with durable, dynamic, multilateral institutions.'* But this is not happening because of the following:

- The rise and return of authoritarian big powers in Asia
- Cold War-era territorial and maritime disputes have returned to Asia (unlike in Europe, where wars resulted in generally accepted redrawing of boundaries, wars in Asia have not resolved anything but in festering unresolved territorial questions).

Obvious questions need answering : why is there no 'NATO' for Asia? Why is the ADB not adequately used for regional peace and security?

2. Asia's Future, Despite Its Much-heralded 'Rise', Is Therefore Far From Guaranteed.

In Guruswamy's view, Asian countries must accelerate broad-based development and social welfare systems, such as pre-crisis Europe, in order to avoid the corruption, inequality, discontent and unrest in the Middle East. While the **EAS** is largely ceremonial, its direction is *'welcome'*. An EAS that is *'neither here nor there'* is better than nothing. From the

Indian perspective, invasions always came from the West, but never from the East (Japan stopped in Burma in '42). India therefore seems to pay more attention to the West but always looks favorably to the East. The long-term **military presence of the U.S. in Asia**, however, is a factor that needs to be further studied.

Now for my take. For ASEAN, which includes the Philippines, the key response should be ensuring food and energy security in the 21st century and avoidance of risk from volatile capital flight. Greater political, economic and strategic integration would ensure that ASEAN would be able to create a zone of peace, freedom and neutrality, similar to Switzerland's success at avoiding destruction while its immediate neighbors fought World War II.

We in the Philippines are used to massive change. It happened to us in 1899, when the United States reneged on its promise to support General Emilio Aguinaldo in establishing the first democratic republic in Asia. Manifest destiny gave the United States the *raison d'etre* to turn us into their sole colony in Asia. Our understanding of *realpolitik* because of our lost war with America from 1899 to 1913, when the last patriots surrendered, received an education then. It happened to us again in 1942, when a temporarily defeated U.S. Pacific Fleet and United States Forces in the Pacific led by General Douglas MacArthur had to make a strategic retreat from Asia and from the onslaught of its only rival Asian power then, Japan, only to come back with overwhelming strength and power two years later.

Today, our understanding of the world has to change again. Our understanding of the role of the superpowers has to change as well. But the need for comity among nations, the good news that if rule of law prevails in the international community, weak nations should not be at the mercy of powerful nations – will never change. It is our anchor. We may feel that beyond our current trials there is no line on the horizon. There is a storm brewing in the world today, and more storms are coming. But let us take comfort that we should know the end of the story.

Here is what we may prepare for: **1)** new ways of doing Hans Morgenthau, **2)** new ways of spreading democracy, **3)** new ways of encouraging and promoting the rule of law in international politics. Let me expound on these.

3. New Ways of Doing Hans Morgenthau

It is actually not a new way, just looking back to how national power plays a role. Before the Second World War, we found that the League of Nations was ineffective in enforcing the rule of law. Germany was arming. Japan benefitted greatly from its naval exchanges with England. The United States had not yet emerged from its isolationist cocoon. In the absence of a strong League of Nations therefore, and in the absence of a global policeman, war became inevitable. Nothing could have prevented it. We should always remember that and be wiser for it. Have we given our international instruments of law and order, the United Nations, the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court, the UN organs – the respect and authority that are essential for these creations of ours to function well? I believe we have not. And we still wonder why the neighborhood is dangerous? The international community after World War II was based on a weak United Nations buffeted by two rival camps of the Cold War. The Philippines was in one camp, and India was in the other. Today, more than 20 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it seems the Philippines and India have yet to embrace each other. It allows the enemies of democracy in Asia to triumph. I believe our part of the world will be safer if we really knew who our real friends are, and who are not. But the 21st century will not allow us that luxury. As Foreign Minister Lwin of Myanmar said here in Delhi recently, we can choose our friends, but we cannot choose our neighbors. India is not our neighbor, but we would like it to be our friend. China has been our neighbor but we would like to believe there are enough friends in Beijing that will override the desire to teach a weaker neighbor a lesson.

4. New Ways of Spreading Democracy

We must be smart enough to use the new web tools in Track 1, Track 1.25 or Track 1.5. and Track 2 undertakings. The Internet has no boundaries and does not respect national spheres of influence. Yet, we still think the same way we have thought in the 20th century. For a rabid democracy like the Philippines, whose People Power Revolution (PPR) in 1986 antedated both the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe and the fall of the Arab dictators in the Arab Spring and Arab Winter by several years, removing a

dictator is a well-trodden ground. But having experienced PPR II and PPR III, we realize that nothing comes close to beating fair and honest elections. This is why we are very excited about the path Myanmar is taking. Myanmar will be the anti-Arab Spring. No violence, no tank battles, no explosions, no NATO aircraft violating their UN mandate, no massacres, and no summary executions of both the good and the bad. These tools I mentioned were not available to us just a few years ago. Today they are. The second wave of democracy should be sustained, but through peaceful means and through the rule of law. ASEAN, when it was founded in 1967, has evolved into something the forefathers (including Narciso Ramos, our first Ambassador to India and later Foreign Minister) probably knew beforehand.² It was the greatest strategic accomplishment of Bangkok, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Manila and Singapore at the height of the Cold War, to foresee a world that was both Post-Cold War and post-Millennium at the same time. Today the hub that is ASEAN, ARF, ASEAN+6, and the East Asia Summit, has created spokes of security that is benefitting all and is undermining none. ASEAN is probably the cheapest, most cost-efficient and non-threatening security tool that is available to all powers today. As our former President Corazon Aquino said in her 1986 speech before the Joint Session of the U.S. Congress, and if I may paraphrase her, ASEAN has 'value for money', and there is no need to spend billions of dollars and thousands of lives to sustain it.

5. New Ways of Encouraging and Promoting the Rule of Law in International Politics

I believe that there is only one rule of law interpretation, and that is determined by the United Nations, various conventions like the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNLCOS), the opinions of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), and, where applicable, the rulings of the International Criminal Court (ICC). The quality of our international system is determined by our adherence to and faithful observance of the rule of law. Without the rule of law, there would be anarchy. Is there a nation in our part of the world today that would like to espouse anarchy? I

2. *New Directions for ASEAN – Fourth Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Manila, 12-13 March 1971* (Office of Press and Public Affairs, Department of Foreign Affairs, Manila, 1971).

don't believe so. A nation that promotes anarchy outside its borders, yet demands the rule of law within its own borders is, I think being disingenuous. Bilateral relationships have deteriorated these past few years because policy-makers and practitioners are simply tired, too busy and too distracted to really think about the consequences of their actions. Therefore, we should fight for quality bilateral and regional relationships so these can improve. So, my prescription would be to stop doing things that are not consistent with the rule of law, and instead to concentrate on those areas where the rule of law can be applied, such as in the South China Sea/Western Philippine Sea, or in Kashmir and the India-Pakistan Shimla Agreement, or the Agreement between India and China on the Establishment of a Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs. The rule of law is possible when we allow it to work. If there are no mechanisms, such as that involving the Sakhalin Islands dispute between Russia and Japan, the situation can only fester. If addressed in a timely manner, it could serve as a template for other similar disputes. If it is easy for bilateral relationships to deteriorate, then we have to build quality in our bilateral relationships.

In Southeast Asia, we believe, as do the rest of ASEAN and China, that the ASEAN-China Declaration of Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) should be made to work, because there are no other mechanisms available. A legally binding Code of Conduct in the South China Sea/West Philippine Sea between ASEAN and China would contribute to peace and stability in the region.

There is hope. At the 4th ASEAN-China Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) and the 7th Joint Working Group (JWG) Meeting on the Implementation of the DOC held on 13-14 January 2012 in Beijing, the SOM 'agreed to consider' activities proposed by China in consideration of the Philippines' expressed concern for prior consultation with stakeholders: a) a workshop on Marine Hazard Prevention and Mitigation in the South China Sea; b) a Symposium on Marine Ecological Environment Monitoring Technique in the SCS and c) a Seminar on Search and Rescue at Sea. Throughout the rest of 2012, ASEAN leaders reaffirmed the importance of the DOC, Guidelines for the Implementation of the DOC, and committed to move for the eventual realization of a regional Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea.

6. If the UN Doesn't Work, Are We Headed for War (Again?)

Samuel Huntington can be truncated to any other scholar's fit, but I hazard to propose that a clash is indeed coming, not between civilizations but between hemispheres. West versus East. By 'West' I do not include just the physical West, but the doctrinal, civilizational West that includes Australia, New Zealand, perhaps Japan, Rep. of Korea and Singapore. By East, I mean the whole of Eurasia starting from the Russian Federation until China and India and all that these countries encompass in between, including Turkey and West Asia (Near East, Middle East and Far East in Western jargon).

Why do I say this? The seeds of conflict are already evident, I suppose. Westerners envy the rise of China and India, and they rue the day they exported their manufacturing prowess to the 'emerging economies' because of unionization at home. They rue the day when their people, lulled by the deceptive wealth bubble that credit created, soon overextended themselves and when the tide went out, it was found that many in the West had no real money at all. In the East, there is enough evidence that the elites in this hemisphere are beginning to realize that 'the great equalization', nay, the return to history, has begun. Fukuyama can be forgiven for thinking all would be well in the West after 1989. But the story isn't finished. India and China between them had 50% of world GDP in the 1500s, with India (under the great Mughals) being the richest country in the world back then. For China and India then, it is just a return to (ancient) form.

For Turkey, it is neo-Ottoman, a term that has gained currency in its former realms including Egypt, Syria and Arabia. For Russia, its energy reserves are enough to power it into troublemaker status versus the West in the far future. Need I say more? For the rest of non-aligned Asia, what would be the options?

By non-aligned Asia I do not mean the Non-Aligned Movement of Nehru and Tito. We refer to countries like the Philippines, which straddles East and West, where 'East ends and West begins' or vice versa. What would be the national policy and doctrinal response of the Filipino people? Should we be neutral in the coming War of the Hemispheres? A little history lesson would suffice to help explain the Philippine response to these extraneous developments.

Because of an edict in Rome, we fell into the sphere that was allotted for Spain's conquistadors during the 16th century. Christian West met East in the Philippines, starting in Butuan, then Cebu (1521) then Manila (1565). Eventually, the West prevailed and Manila, then under Muslim rule, was conquered, and became the Spanish capital in the East in 1571. The Spaniards prevailed against British and Dutch intrusions throughout the rest of the 17th and 18th centuries. Inspired by Dr. Rizal, Filipinos were at the gates of Manila (Intramuros) in 1898, about to retake it, with the Spaniards cornered. But Gen. Aguinaldo hesitated, and was later duped by the Americans when they conspired with the Spaniards to buy the Filipinos for US\$ 20 million, in a treaty they signed in Paris. The Americans beat the Germans to the Philippines in the process.

The Filipinos fought a losing war against the American troops for more than ten years, with the last patriots surrendering in 1913. Seeking to become a benevolent Occupier, while at the same time profiting from, and extracting the country's natural resources, the Americans introduced English, Protestantism and the public education system to the Philippines, among others. It essentially became an appendage of the U.S. An American soldier, Douglas MacArthur, fell in love with the Philippines and defended her honor on behalf of the United States by fulfilling his promise to free the Filipinos from the Japanese Occupation (1941-1944).

The Japanese were ahead of their time, and they used the wrong means to instill a pan-Asianism in their image. The Japanese attempt was defeated by the West. In 1991, the Philippines ended its dependency on the U.S. when it did not renew the U.S. lease on its military bases.

China became ascendant in the 21st century. Fearing a confrontation between China and its Treaty ally, the United States, the Philippines seeks to strengthen its ties with fellow ASEAN neighbors in order to create a zone of peace, freedom and neutrality while strengthening their mutual defense capabilities. This is coupled with continuing military cooperation with the U.S. and commencing strategic dialogues with fellow members of the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone (SEANWFZ). This neutral zone should hold, and the Philippines and its immediate ASEAN

neighbors should be spared from the ravages of another global war. The Philippines and other small countries can benefit from not being embroiled in this gigantic closed causal loop (systems thinking), where relative prosperity in the East led to prosperity being transferred to the West, and then back again.

7. Storm warning

In conclusion, we should try to remain calm in the midst of a coming storm. Like the apostles inside the boat with Jesus, we should just hang on! Storms always pass, in time.

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Asia's rise AD 476 to AD 1500

Fall of Rome to rise of Islam, Mongol Empires, Chinese dynasties

(Holland, 'The Forge of Christendom - the End of Days and the Epic Rise of the West')

- Ummayyad Caliphate (7th to 8th centuries)
- Abbasid Caliphate (8th to 13th centuries)
- Mongol Empire (1206 to 1279)
- Ming Dynasty (1368 to 1644)
- Ottoman Empire (1453 to 1683)
- Mughal Empire (1526 to 1757)

West's rise AD 1500 to AD 2000

15th to 19th centuries: Age of Western Empires in the East (Diamond, 'Guns, Germs and Steel')

- West conquers East
- Qing Dynasty (1644 to 1912)
- Africa carved up (19th century)

1918 - End of "Western civil war" (Ferguson, 'Civilization')

- Quest for settling the 'German question' (from Rise of Prussia to the fall of the Kaiser)
- Demise of Russian, German, Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman empires

1945 - End of West's dominance over the East

- 'German question' remains unsettled (Rise of Nazism to its demise)
- Demise of British Empire
- Rise of the U.S., rise of Soviet Union

The Great Equalization Begins

1989 - The rise of China, India, Turkey

- German reunification (German question settled)
- Fall of Soviet Union
- Rise of China (next century will be determined by quest for settling the 'China question')

Temporary decline of U.S.? Western Europe in stasis?

** The diagram illustrates the ebb and flow of relative dominant power between East and West over the past half millennium. Some years are approximate and the list of major events is not exhaustive. What appears is only for the purpose of illustrating broad trends.*