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SECURITY CHANGES AND TRENDS IN NORTHEAST ASIA

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ABSTRACT

The changes and future trends in the security environment of Northeast Asia, as one of the most complex geopolitical regions in the world, have a significant impact on the international security situation.

In recent years, the security situation in Northeast Asia has changed and become volatile due to the influence of internal and external factors.

This article analyzes the changes in the security environment of Northeast Asia, examines future trends, and puts forward proposals for necessary measures.

KEYWORDS

North East Asia, Security, Defense, Geopolitics, Region

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Introduction.

Northeast Asia, as one of the important geopolitical blocs in the world, has always been a key point where the strategic interests of major countries converge. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the international situation has been constantly changing, and the security situation in Northeast Asia has become increasingly complex.

Historically, the security problems in Northeast Asia were caused by the aggression of major powers within and outside the region. Although the military confrontation in the region has subsided after the end of the Cold War, the historical issues and current conflicts remain complex, so the security situation in Northeast Asia has not fundamentally improved. At present, the security situation in Northeast Asia is facing many challenges. On the one hand, the tension on the Korean Peninsula remains, and the military confrontation between North and South Korea, as well as the military intervention of the United States, Japan, South Korea and other countries, have further aggravated the security situation in the region. In particular, after the Yoon Seok-yeol government came to power in South Korea, it adopted a series of tough policies towards North Korea, further exacerbating tensions on the peninsula. At the same time, North Korea has also been steadily strengthening its military to counter external security threats.

In addition, there are many other security challenges in Northeast Asia. For example, the "institutionalization" of regional security cooperation between the United States, Japan, South Korea and other countries has increased the risk of "coalition" in the Northeast Asian security landscape and undermined regional stability. At the same time, Japan and South Korea have actively supported the "NATO pivot to the Asia-Pacific region" and the deployment of NATO military forces in the Asia-Pacific region, which has become a new factor in creating instability in Northeast Asia.

Historical security context in Northeast Asia

As a key link in the global political and economic situation, the stability and development of the security environment in Northeast Asia are undoubtedly related to world peace and prosperity. Northeast Asia has undergone a long-term evolution and comprehensive changes from its historical situation to the present, and its security environment has become more unstable and violent.

From a historical perspective, Northeast Asia is a land where many different civilizations have come together and clashed since ancient times. This historical continuity has led to the region displaying a rich diversity of cultural heritage and religious beliefs. However, historical issues such as territorial disputes and ethnic conflicts have become hidden threats affecting the security environment in Northeast Asia. These issues are often caused by the intervention of external forces, internal power struggles, and disputes over historical facts.

In the current situation, the security environment in Northeast Asia remains stable overall, but there are still tensions in some areas. This situation is not only caused by historical issues, but also closely related to factors such as great power games and geopolitical changes. With the development of globalization, security issues in Northeast Asia are also taking on new characteristics. Traditional security threats such as military aggression and armed conflict still exist, and non-traditional security threats such as terrorism and cybersecurity are increasingly emerging. These new security issues pose serious challenges to the stability and development of Northeast Asia.

Current security trends in Northeast Asia

1. Changes in the security environment caused by political factors

Political instability in Japan and South Korea

Recent political turmoil in Japan and South Korea has increased uncertainty in the regional security system, and the ruling party's significant loss in the general election in Japan in October 2024 has led to political instability. Experts believe that this may encourage neighboring countries such as China and North Korea to further incite tensions in East Asia.

Meanwhile, South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol abused his power to declare a state of martial law, and soon revoked his decision to declare a state of martial law, explaining that he was "struggling with a constitutional crisis and that there were 'anti-state forces' among his political opponents."

The unrest has raised concerns about the country's political stability and the impact on regional security dynamics. The incident could put South Korea's constitution in crisis and have long-term implications for U.S. strategic interests across Asia, even as Donald Trump returns to the White House.

Continuing geopolitical tensions

The Korean Peninsula conflict remains a key security concern in Northeast Asia. Tensions between North Korea and South Korea at the military and political levels have not abated significantly, and both sides are protecting their interests by strengthening their military and diplomatic means.

Meanwhile, relations between China and Japan remain tense due to historical issues and territorial disputes, and while the two sides are cooperating in the economic sphere, mutual trust in the security sphere has not been fully established.

Evolving alliances and defense strategy

The United States, Japan, and South Korea have continuously deepened their military security cooperation, signed a framework agreement on security cooperation, and held joint military exercises, raising the level of security cooperation in the region. North Korea has responded by taking firm countermeasures against the military and security cooperation between the United States, Japan, and South Korea, and has been building up its military, further increasing the risk of military confrontation in the region.

In response to potential threats and threats, countries in the region are reassessing their defense postures and alliances. Japan has significantly increased its defense spending and strengthened its alliances with the United States and other regional partners, including Australia, the Philippines, and South Korea. This strategic shift is intended to provide a balance against China's growing military power.

The quadrilateral security dialogue involving Australia, India, Japan, and the United States is also gaining prominence. The discussions within the quadrilateral are seeking to transform it into a more formal defense alliance, reminiscent of NATO, to address shared security concerns about China's rising influence.

Impact of US political situation

The re-election of President Donald Trump has created uncertainty in the region, and how his administration will approach Asia remains unpredictable, potentially impacting trade policy, defense

commitments, and diplomatic relations. Regional allies continue to watch these developments closely for strategic adjustments.

Technological Advances in Military Capabilities and Rising Unconventional Threats

Northeast Asian countries are increasingly focusing on emerging military technologies to improve their defense capabilities, which increases the risk of new types of threats: information and cyberspace threats.

2. Analysis of regional countries

China

China continues to assert its influence through military reforms and regional initiatives. It is deepening military cooperation with Russia, including joint exercises and patrols such as the Vostok-2022 exercise and the Pacific Naval Patrol. These activities are intended to balance the growing power of the US alliance in the region. While China's firm stance on territorial disputes, particularly in the East and South China Seas, remains a key point of regional tension, China has consistently stated its readiness to uphold the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, resolve disputes through dialogue and consultation, and advance regional economic and security cooperation.

United States

The United States' Northeast Asia security strategy is focused on protecting regional interests and global dominance. By strengthening military and security cooperation with Japan and South Korea, the United States is trying to contain China's rise and maintain a military balance in the region, and the re-election of US President Donald Trump has created uncertainty about US foreign policy in the region. Potential changes in trade policy, defense commitments, and diplomatic relations are forcing regional allies to reassess their security strategies and alliances.

Russia

Russia plays a key role in the security of Northeast Asia through its military presence, strategic partnerships, and diplomatic relations. It maintains a strong military presence in the Russian Far East, conducts joint military exercises with China, and modernizes its military forces in the region. Russia has deepened its relationship with China, increasing its strategic influence through military cooperation and energy trade. It has also engaged with North Korea, resisted its tough economic sanctions, and prioritized regional stability over regime change and supported dialogue. Although it may not be as dominant as Russia or China, Russia has used its position as a balancing power to influence the security dynamics of Northeast Asia. Moscow has been strengthening its influence and countering Western allies through joint military exercises and engagement in the Arctic and Pacific regions. These measures have had a significant impact on stabilizing the security dynamics of Northeast Asia.

Japan

Japan's Northeast Asia Security Strategy aims to enhance the combat capabilities and international status of its Self-Defense Forces. Japan is seeking to play a greater role in the region by strengthening military and security cooperation with the United States and establishing a small multilateral security cooperation mechanism.

Japan plays a key role in Northeast Asia as a leading economic power, a key ally of the United States, and an influential diplomatic representative. As the world's third-largest economy, Japan contributes significantly to regional trade, investment, and technological progress, and is pursuing economic integration with China and South Korea.

Politically, Japan is a strategic ally of the United States, ensuring regional security and countering China's growing influence. It also maintains diplomatic relations with North Korea on security issues, particularly nuclear threats, threats, and abductions. Japan actively participates in multilateral organizations such as the East Asia Summit (EAS) and ASEAN+3, and promotes regional stability and cooperation. While its historical disputes, particularly its approach to relations with China and South Korea, remain a challenge, Japan continues to seek diplomatic engagement to maintain regional stability. Japan remains a key player in shaping the future of Northeast Asia through its economic strength, security alliances, and diplomatic efforts.

South Korea

South Korea is strengthening its military capabilities and expanding its international partnerships to counter emerging threats. The country is increasing its defense budget and investing in advanced technologies, including cyber defense. Faced with the military threat from North Korea and the strategic needs of the United States, South Korea is preparing to respond to challenges by strengthening military and security cooperation with the United States and increasing its own military strength.

Seoul has also intensified security cooperation with the United States and Japan, despite historical tensions, and has stood up to North Korea's nuclear advancements and China's regional dominance.

However, China believes that South Korea's strategic choices have increased the risk of tension and confrontation in the region, and have undermined regional peace and stability.

North Korea

The DPRK's development of nuclear weapons and missile technology has had a profound impact on regional security, and it is also trying to strengthen its strategic position in the region by strengthening its military power. However, this strategy has exacerbated regional tensions and made the security situation in Northeast Asia more complex and unstable.

However, despite its economic backwardness, its geographical location and resources offer great potential for developing regional economic cooperation. However, the DPRK's isolated position in the international community and the impact of sanctions have placed certain restrictions on its economic cooperation. If relations between regional countries improve in the future and international sanctions are eased, it is expected that the DPRK's potential for regional economic cooperation will increase even more.

The DPRK continues to occupy an important position in Northeast Asia, and its foreign policy, regional influence, and challenges are directly related to the peace and security of Northeast Asia. In the future, the DPRK needs to intensify dialogue and cooperation with neighboring countries, advance the peace process on the peninsula, accelerate the pace of economic structural adjustment and innovative development, enhance its economic strength and competitiveness, and at the same time actively participate in international affairs and regional cooperation to enhance the DPRK's reputation and position in the international community.

Mongolia's contribution to ensuring regional security and stability

Mongolia is located between two large countries, China and Russia, and enjoys a unique geographical location. In the complex and changing security environment of Northeast Asia, Mongolia believes that countries should strengthen security cooperation and jointly respond to various security threats and dangers. It is committed to balancing the relationship between its two neighbors, China and Russia, and avoiding becoming a "front line" of confrontation with either side. At the same time, Mongolia is actively cooperating with the United States, Japan, South Korea and other countries to expand its diplomatic space and increase its influence in international affairs.

Mongolia actively develops friendly relations with the United States, Japan, South Korea and other countries in Northeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific region, and pursues a "multi-point" integrated, equidistant and comprehensive foreign policy aimed at balancing the influence of its two large neighbors, China and Russia. This policy not only helps Mongolia maintain its independence and security, but also contributes to the overall security and stability of Northeast Asia.

In terms of balancing China-Russia relations, Mongolia maintains China-Russia relations on an equal footing, does not ally with any country, does not become an enemy of any country, thereby maintaining the balance of regional power and preventing any country from gaining overwhelming advantages in the region.

In terms of developing friendly relations with third countries, Mongolia actively develops friendly relations with the United States, Japan and other countries, and uses the power of these countries to increase the balance of power between China and Russia, and contributes to the stability and balance of Northeast Asia.

As a key part of Mongolia's contribution to regional peace efforts, the "Ulaanbaatar Dialogue" on Northeast Asian Security launched in 2014 brings together government officials, scholars, and experts to discuss key regional challenges, including the North Korean nuclear issue, economic integration, energy security, and climate change, and adopts Track 1.5 and Track 2 diplomatic approaches.¹ The dialogue aims to build trust, reduce tensions, and promote multilateral cooperation in a region that is often subject to geopolitical competition.

Mongolia also actively participates in regional security dialogues, including: the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) on security cooperation and conflict prevention, the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative (NAPCI) on security, economic integration, and environmental challenges, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), where Mongolia participates as an observer member to address regional security and economic issues.

¹ The term Track 1.5 is used to describe a situation where formal and informal parties work together to resolve a conflict. Essentially, Track 2 diplomacy aims to bridge or complement the formal negotiations of Track 1.

How can Mongolia use its neutral position in the dynamics of a developing region?

Mongolia's neutrality policy is manifested in many ways. First, it does not form any military alliances or participate in any military blocs, thereby maintaining its military neutrality. Second, in political terms, Mongolia pursues an independent foreign policy, has friendly relations with China and Russia, and actively develops friendly cooperation with third countries. In addition, Mongolia has strengthened its neutral status through legal means, such as joining international treaties such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and demonstrating its position not to develop, produce, or stockpile nuclear weapons.

Regarding challenges, the increasing influence of China and Russia in Mongolia's foreign relations has created a need for Mongolia, as a neutral country between China and Russia, to carefully manage its relations with the two countries so as not to be involved in disputes and conflicts between the major powers. In addition, in a time when the international situation is constantly changing, Mongolia needs a flexible foreign policy to adapt to new circumstances, which largely depends on its diplomatic wisdom and adaptability.

Future trend predictions and strategic proposals

The evolution of the political and economic structure of Northeast Asia, an important part of the world economy, has a profound impact on the political and economic situation of the world. With the development of globalization, the political situation in Northeast Asia is becoming increasingly complex, and the security situation remains complex and uncertain. As geopolitical competition intensifies, the interests of major powers in the region, such as the United States, China, Russia, Japan, and South Korea, are divergent, making the security environment fragile. The confrontation between China and the United States over the issue of China's Huangyan Island in 2025 indicated that the US military was losing its initiative in the South China Sea, which may affect the security trend of Northeast Asia. In addition, the geostrategic value of the Korean Peninsula is becoming increasingly apparent, and North Korea's domestic and foreign policies and relations with neighboring countries will continue to be key factors affecting regional security.

With the return of Donald Trump, China-US relations may face increasing uncertainty and multiple risks, which may have a profound impact on the security of Northeast Asia. The Middle East policy implemented by Trump during his new term may have a profound impact on the Middle East and the world, and may indirectly affect the security and stability of Northeast Asia. At the same time, non-traditional security issues such as drugs and piracy are important challenges facing Northeast Asia.

The political situation in Northeast Asia is undergoing profound changes. On the one hand, China's rise has challenged US dominance in the region, and the strategic competition between China and the US is intensifying. The US has tried to contain China's rise by strengthening its alliances with countries such as Japan and South Korea, but China's growing military power and improving international status are gradually squeezing the strategic space of the US and its allies in Northeast Asia.

On the other hand, the continuous deepening of China-Russia cooperation in politics, economy, security and other fields is seen as an effort to establish a new hegemony in the region, while Japan and South Korea are also working hard to find a balance between China and the United States to avoid overdependence on the one hand. In addition, the process of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and North Korea's efforts to integrate into the international community, if successfully implemented, will bring positive factors to the political stability of Northeast Asia.

The region has abundant natural resources, human resources, and market potential, which creates important advantages and broad development prospects for economic cooperation. In recent years, major countries in Northeast Asia have adjusted their regional policies and promoted the development of economic cooperation. The advancement of projects such as the Golden Triangle Development Zone of the Tumen River, the Yellow Sea and Bohai Sea Economic Zone, and the China-Russia-Mongolia Border Economic Cooperation Zone have created a new trend for economic cooperation in Northeast Asia.

However, Northeast Asia's economic development also faces some challenges. First, differences in social and economic systems have negatively affected economic cooperation. Second, differences in economic development levels and historical issues have also brought challenges to economic cooperation. In addition, geopolitical conflicts may negatively affect economic development.

With the acceleration of globalization and the advancement of regional economic integration, Northeast Asian economic cooperation still has broad development prospects. Countries should further strengthen policy coordination, liberalize and facilitate trade and investment, increase infrastructure connectivity, and promote economic integration and common development, which will bring about major positive changes in regional development.

Conclusions

As an important part of the international political process, the changes and trends in security in Northeast Asia not only affect regional peace and stability, but also have a profound impact on the global picture. The following conclusions are drawn from the analysis of the current security situation in Northeast Asia.

First, the security situation in Northeast Asia is characterized by complexity and uncertainty. The intensification of geopolitical competition, the strategic games of major powers, and the intertwining of historical issues make the regional security environment particularly vulnerable. In particular, the process of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, the DPRK's relations with neighboring countries, and the strategic interests of the United States have become key factors affecting regional security. The changes and uncertainties of these factors make Northeast Asia's security uncertain.

Second, the security trend in Northeast Asia has been characterized by multipolarity and factionalism. On the one hand, with the rise of China and the re-emergence of Russia, the security situation in Northeast Asia has undergone profound changes, and the trend of multipolarity has become more and more obvious. On the other hand, the United States has tried to contain China's rise by strengthening its alliances with Japan, South Korea and other countries, which has led to the intensification of the trend of factionalism in the region. This factionalism has not only undermined regional stability but also created global instability.

In the future, Northeast Asia's security will continue to face various positive and negative factors. In order to maintain regional peace and stability, countries need to strengthen dialogue and cooperation and jointly respond to challenges. In particular, major countries should seek mutually beneficial and win-win solutions. At the same time, countries in the region need to strengthen their independent security capabilities and improve their ability to cope with external threats.

In short, the security situation in Northeast Asia is a complex and sensitive issue that requires the joint efforts of all countries. Only by strengthening dialogue and cooperation and building independent security capabilities can we achieve peace, stability, and prosperity in the region.

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