
Defense Report

AUSA



Asia And The Pacific—Who Will Dominate?

Like most nations of the world, the countries located around the Pacific rim are still reeling from the changes that occurred in the world in the past few months. The demise of communism in Eastern Europe, the collapse of the former Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War have rendered moot some long-enduring political alliances. Other once intractable relationships have shifted rapidly as nation after nation finds its leverage in international affairs significantly altered by the ending of the Cold War.

The Vietnamese and the Chinese have patched up a relationship seriously sundered by decades of hostility. Prime Minister Li Peng became the first high-ranking Chinese official to visit India in more than 30 years. The United States is tilting, however slightly, toward India as relations with long-term ally Pakistan have cooled.

These shifting alliances and revised interests presented the opportunity for several stunning diplomatic events in Asia during the year just ended. The fighting ceased in Cambodia; the U.S. and the ex-USSR agreed to stop supplying arms to their respective clients in Afghanistan; the American government began talks with the communist regime in Vietnam; and the Philippine senate told Uncle Sam to close his air and naval bases and go home.

Despite claims to the contrary, and against the wishes of many countries in the area, the United States is reducing its presence along the Pacific rim. Financial problems at home, the failure of the Philippine base negotiations and trade frictions with key alliances all portend a reduced U.S. presence in this vital area of the world.

The outcome of the 1992 presidential election in the United States could be pivotal in terms of the role to be played by America in Asia and the Pacific. All the candidates need to be reminded that in the Pacific region lies America's largest trading block; that the United States must protect its vital national interests in this part of the world; and we had better not let it slip from our area of priority influence. Our economic future may well be at stake here.