
Interview: Chalmers Johnson

We need 'creative chaos' in East Asia

A founder of the revisionist school of economists, Chalmers Johnson is currently at the University of California in San Diego. He was interviewed on May 10.

EIR: What is your prognosis for Japan?

Johnson: This is "karaoke democracy": The bureaucracy rules. Any damn fool off the streets can be prime minister, so long as he's got the bureaucracy behind him. The LPD-Socialist coalition is meaningless. Our Defense Department has published a report saying, "We're going to keep 100,000 troops in Asia for 20 years." This is irresponsible; it smells of France in 1939.

EIR: And Japan is like Germany?

Johnson: It's conceivable. This is inertia left over from the Cold War. The problem is, Japan has no history of real parliamentary democracy. When they have a consensus, Japan's bureaucracy is brilliant. But what's being revealed today: A range of issues has arisen on which the bureaucracy is incompetent. Therefore you are likely to see more crises, such as the inability to call out the military after the Kobe earthquake, or the inability to find out who put sarin gas in the subway system, and a half-dozen other such crises. Then, finally, reform will get on the agenda in Japan. But "reform" will mean the return of the Naimusho, the prewar Ministry of the Interior.

EIR: You've said for years we should not pay Japan's defense bill. But if you think the old police state is coming back, why would you want Japan to rearm?

Johnson: The only conceivable solution is the development of responsible democracy in Japan. This means you must give the government responsibilities. . . . That requires we do everything that we can to smash the LDP-Socialist coalition right now. That means: Stop negotiating with them. Put the pressure on them very hard. Pull the rug out from under them! No one in Washington understands this.

EIR: What about your protégé Laura Tyson?

Johnson: Now that she does have direct access to the President, we may actually get the sanctions against Japan. If we don't apply sanctions, we lose. It will be the 30th year of

Americans once again being conned by smart officials at MITI. . . .

The thing to do is to immediately renegotiate the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty; it's a Cold War instrument written in 1951, to put pressure on Japan to deliver. To make it clear that we're not going to deal with unelected bureaucrats on this. . . . There is no justification for that many troops in Japan. Nobody knows what 37,000 first-line U.S. troops are doing in South Korea, either.

EIR: We should pull the troops out of Korea, also?

Johnson: The Defense Department wrote in 1989 that South Korea can defend itself [under Bush].

EIR: Won't governments in Tokyo and Seoul collapse?

Johnson: Sure. It's going to be creative chaos. But I don't see any reason why we should expect and applaud creative chaos in the U.S.S.R., and believe Japan is forever exempt. I do believe that we know the end-result. Ten to 15 years from now, Japan will be a fully independent nation-state, defending itself, and there will not be a U.S. Japan Security Treaty. The issue is: How do we get there? U.S. strategy on this requires the kind of care and attention which George Kennan's whole postwar containment of the U.S.S.R. strategy required. . . .

The problem is that we are drifting and waiting for an incident, which will make the intrinsic situation, extrinsic, i.e., obvious. The intrinsic situation is the shift in the balance of power from the U.S. to Japan and Asia. The American public will then be alarmed to discover that the problem of "Who lost Japan?" is worse than the old problem "Who lost China?" . . . From an Asian point of view, the Sino-Japanese relationship is more important than anything the Americans do. The issue now is the empowerment of East Asia. Is it led by Japan allied with the U.S.? Or does it occur by Japan and China allied together? In that case it is all over for us. . . .

For now, Japan's policy is to buy time to further consolidate ascendancy in East Asia, before their real problems develop: How do we live with China? And what [about] when the Americans wake up to find they're irrelevant?

EIR: The Yomiuri Research Institute has a study out on the need to strengthen police controls in Japan—

Johnson: Yes, the director is a very good friend of mine.

EIR: Is it just a sociological phenomenon, the Japanese joining their Aum groups? Or are you saying there is a faction using terrorism to accelerate its power?

Johnson: That's possible, we don't know; it's certainly possible that much of Aum is infiltrated by the police. . . . The Aum are a bit like Japan's gangsters; they've existed with the toleration of the police, the police have known about this for a very long time. It's very hard to imagine that the Japanese

police, given their surveillance of this society, haven't known about what was going on. That is to say that Aum, rather than being a new religion, represents an ultra-nationalist organization, the type of organization which existed in the 1930s. . . .

From a Japanese point of view, so long as the Americans wish to continue to play a rat's-ass Cold War role, there is a huge vested interest in Japan in it.

EIR: All the terrorism in the world won't change that?

Johnson: Well, you would think it would, that's why I said the pressures are very intense! That's why I said Washington is deluding itself with the DOD report. Who could believe the status quo could possibly last till the year 2015? We're lucky if it lasts another year. . . .

Revolutionary situations are hard things to predict. It does begin to lead to the utter de-legitimization of the system. The Asian answer is authoritarian capitalism. I'm afraid that if pushed that hard, it will lead to more authoritarian government, and that the people who'd profit from that are precisely the current police system.

This is what I meant earlier in saying 10-15 years from now Japan will be defending itself as an independent state. It's going to happen, one way or the other. We can either bring it about in a controlled way, or we can ignore the issue until it explodes in our faces. . . .

You either get change in a processional, policymaking way, in which the U.S. tries to control these events, or you drift until some big incident, maybe Aum or terrorism would be it, some people thought the earthquake—brings home to the Japanese, that they finally need a government! This will set the Yomiuri off and all these new proposals to amend the Constitution and come up with a new crisis-management government. *All of which are good.* Our strategy is to encourage these things, because we can't continue to provide the defense of Japan.

Our job is to frame a world with a balance of power, a world which is very complex for them, not simple. . . .

EIR: This idea of creating a new framework to control the global system reminds me of the 1940s debate in the British Foreign Office between the "Keep the Empire" group, and those who realized you have to coopt the naive Americans, to control the future.

Johnson: It is very similar to that; this is precisely the type of dilemma posed by current circumstances.

EIR: So we need to get away from the old imperial attempt to simply keep the old Cold War system?

Johnson: Whatever you may think of [Henry] Kissinger and [Zbigniew] Brzezinski, they were at least grand strategists. There isn't anyone even slightly comparable to either of them in the government now. We need a kind of containment policy for the next 40 years.

Interview: Peter Ferdinand

Regional nuclear wars are possible in Asia

Peter Ferdinand, former Asia director of the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London, was interviewed May 16.

EIR: There's a severe crisis in Japan, yet the U.S. is pressuring Japan, and I'm wondering if the Cold War security relations in Asia might not unravel?

Ferdinand: You're right, that's a possibility. . . . The U.S. seems to be treating Japan in an aggressive way as far as trade relations, and I find it difficult to believe that won't have impact on security relations. America's old cowboy image entering the saloon has certainly come to the fore, and it certainly is having a counterproductive effect in South Korea, as well as Japan.

Taiwan's another thing. There are people in Taiwan and South Korea who feel that the U.S. is not a reliable partner, that the U.S. is prepared to sacrifice the interests of Taiwan and South Korea. . . . There is no U.S. commitment to force on behalf of Taiwan, because there is no longer any treaty between the two. So there are two countries which have been very pro-American, which now can see gaps opening up between themselves and the U.S.

I do think we have reached a turning point in U.S.-East Asian relations, especially Japan relations, over the past year, when leaders of various parties are going to say "enough is enough, we've had enough of being kicked around and it's time that Japan was treated as an equal by the U.S." That's an attractive message for Japanese politicians when the party system is in such chaos. . . .

EIR: If the U.S. keeps on the cowboy routine, will this kick down the Murayama government?

Ferdinand: There's no long-term future for the Murayama government, anyway. . . . If you think the terrorism is going to continue, then clearly you're going to have a population more occupied with security than it was before, and that means domestic as well as international security. Then you have a kind of mood which is more sympathetic to a stronger line internationally, one which says Japan should be allowed to play the place in the world to which their economic might entitles them. . . . There have been a lot of articles in the Japanese press recently about the need for Japan to weigh carefully the extent to which it is an Asiatic state, the extent to which its interests conform to those of other Asian powers, rather than to those of the U.S.