



EAST ASIA SECURITY IN FLUX

What Regional Order Ahead?

Masashi NISHIHARA and Céline PAJON (eds.)

May 2020

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This publication is the result of a collaborative project between the French Institute of International Relations (Ifri) and the Research Institute for Peace and Security (RIPS), Tokyo, Japan.



ISBN: 979-10-373-0173-4

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How to cite this publication:

Masashi Nishihara and Céline Pajon (*eds.*),
“East Asia Security in Flux: What Regional Order Ahead?”,
Études de l’Ifri, Ifri, April 2020.

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Forewords

Masashi Nishihara

On February 12, 2020 the French Institute of International Relations (Ifri) and the Research Institute for Peace and Security (RIPS) held a joint event in Paris on “East Asia Security in Flux: What Regional Order Ahead?”. The event had two parts: closed-door roundtables by experts and a public symposium. Celine Pajon, the French co-chair, and I were pleased that the event went so successfully. Many important subjects were covered, from different, perceptive viewpoints and with useful analyses.

For the roundtables, we had invited nine experts, who presented their papers in three sessions. For the public symposium, former Singapore ambassador Barry Desker agreed to join as a keynote speaker. He offered insightful perspectives on the present and future of East Asia, and three experts followed up with additional comments.

At our meetings, the US-China rivalry naturally occupied a dominant place. I have observed that Europe is less concerned than Asia and the US about the China threat, and more optimistic about the future of North Korea. Europe is also, I have perceived, more strongly interested in the Indo-Pacific concept than I had expected. To identify these differences among the three regions points to the value of inter-regional discussion such as ours.

The peaceful settlement of territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas constitutes an essential dimension of regional peace and security. Meetings like ours should continue to seek how they may be resolved on a rule of law basis rather than by force.

The covid-19, which developed into a pandemic since our conference was held in mid-February, is likely to bring about a new phase of tensions in the Sino-US rivalry and may even reorganize international power relations. Yet the strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific region will remain the same or may even be greater. It calls for continued inter-regional dialogues such as ours.

A Snapshot of the Past?

Céline Pajon

In February, the Ifri Center for Asian Studies and RIPS held a conference on the Asian security environment. Two months later, it feels as if it was another era. Back then, Covid-19 had already raged and then dwindled in China, and cases of infection started to be reported throughout Asia and Europe. But nobody could have foreseen that the virus would soon develop into a pandemic with profound implications for all of us and for international relations. It is still premature to predict the exact consequences of this terrible epidemic for the global order and the strategic setting in Asia.

At the time of writing, it already appears that the pandemic is not providing a moment of truce in Asian flashpoints. Pyongyang has resumed missile launches. Tensions in the South China Sea are flaring up. The information war is reaching new heights. While Beijing is upping its public-relations (PR) efforts to sell the Chinese way of managing virus, Taipei's successful alternative model to tame it in a democratic way has earned the respect of the international community. This development could lead to further tensions in cross-straits relations. Finally, the US-China strategic rivalry is worsening as Washington stands up fiercely against Beijing's narrative. At the same time, the US is badly hit by the virus and its global leadership has been fading to the point that it might mark the first year of a post-American world. The Covid-19 crisis is also deeply affecting European solidarity, identity and ability to act as one on the international scene.

The texts gathered in this report provide Asian, European and American perspectives about the power balance, competition and alliance system in Asia, maritime security and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, and the prospects for a resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue. These texts offer a snapshot of the past, but also provide glimpses of the future. Security tensions in Asia are here to stay. They may even be reinforced as the Covid-19 crisis accelerates the decline of US leadership in the face of a more assertive China. The extent to which the current crisis will offer the opportunity for China to extend its influence in the region remains to be seen, however. The deep recession and humanitarian impact created by the pandemic will have a lasting impact on many countries, and is likely to further shuffle the cards.

In these turbulent times, it will be more important than ever to continue to exchange views among experts from different continents and backgrounds. Think tanks will have an increasingly important role in deciphering the complex reality to help fight disinformation and provide solid analysis and foresight to decision-makers.

Keynote Address

Competing Strategic Visions in the Indo-Pacific

Barry Desker

The American-dominated regional order in East Asia since the end of the Second World War is facing a growing challenge. East Asian economic growth and the consolidation of post-independence states over the past seventy years occurred under the umbrella offered by the dominance of the US hegemon in the region. Today, the rise of China, the isolationist America First instincts of the Trump administration and rising domestic criticisms of the close affinity between the policies of regional governing elites and American strategic interests has led to a weakening of the 'hub and spoke' system that has characterized the American presence. A second important feature has been the emergence of alternative visions of strategic order as American domination in East Asia gives way to a growing willingness by China to challenge the status quo.

Chinese President Xi Jinping promotes China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as "open, green and clean". The BRI was included in the charter adopted at the 19th Communist Party of China National Congress in October 2017, ensuring its prominence among long-term Chinese development objectives. Although ASEAN members as well as many other states in Asia and Africa have responded positively to the BRI initiative, there are growing concerns about the dependence on China that would arise from a successful China-centered BRI. By contrast, the United States emphasizes its Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy. The American perspective focuses on its partners in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Australia, India and Japan) and excludes ASEAN and South Korea.

There are growing criticisms of the debt burden caused by Chinese loans, as seen in Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Laos. Nevertheless, China has demonstrated a commitment to supporting development projects around the region, even though the contracts may be going to Chinese state-owned

enterprises. By contrast, the new American strategic doctrine is not accompanied by a similar willingness to extend support to America's partners in the region. President Trump has called for a sharp increase in Korean and Japanese contributions to maintain the American military bases in these countries. He indicated a willingness to reduce the American military presence, despite the ongoing threat to South Korea and Japan posed by the North Korean nuclear arsenal. This creates the impression that the American military presence is not related to the larger issue of US strategic objectives in the Asia-Pacific

Three points regarding the Indo-Pacific concept deserve consideration. First, it looks like an American effort to pitch India as an ally of the United States. The American/Indian partnership has been promoted by President Trump and Prime Minister Modi. It occurs at a time when India's relationship with its South Asian neighbors is fraying as a result of the Modi administration's *Hindutva* policies emphasizing the role of Hindu nationalism in India's secular state.

Secondly, it highlights the importance of the sea-lanes of communication (SLOCs), especially unrestricted passage through the Straits of Malacca and Singapore. This is a critical interest for China, Japan and South Korea, which are dependent on safe passage for their supplies of oil and natural gas from the Middle East, as well as a key objective for major naval powers like the United States, which benefit from freedom of transit through such international straits.

Thirdly, Russia and China remain skeptical of references to the Indo-Pacific as this concept is perceived as providing a justification for a continued American presence in the Indian Ocean and East Asian waters. Although China did not object to references to the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), based on an inclusive approach, at the 35th ASEAN summit in Bangkok in November 2019, it is concerned with the Quad's Indo-Pacific concepts, worries that ASEAN may try to institutionalize the AOIP and is wary that this may provide an opening for India to play a critical role in regional affairs.

This draws attention to the changing relationships in the region. As states bordering China, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar have increasingly aligned with China and are perceived as a Chinese lobby within ASEAN. In July 2012, Cambodia established a precedent for ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meetings when it blocked a communique outlining an ASEAN consensus on references to Chinese claims in the South China Sea. Although a treaty ally of the United States, the Philippines under President Duterte has shifted from its earlier firm stance in opposition to Chinese claims in the South China Sea to acquiesce in the Chinese forward movement. Another

ostensible American ally, Thailand, has also moved much closer to China. One consequence is the increasing difficulty in developing agreed ASEAN positions on issues in which China has an interest, such as the South China Sea.

In the light of these developments, what role is there for the EU or European countries in maintaining regional security and regional order in East Asia? The EU has played a positive role in encouraging Trilateral Summits involving the leaders of China, Japan and South Korea. The former President of Finland Marti Ahtisaari played a critical role in facilitating the successful conclusion of the Aceh peace negotiations in 2005, assisted by the EU's Aceh Monitoring Process. This highlights the EU's role as a 'desecuritizer' in the region, which paves the way for creating an environment conducive to negotiated outcomes. By contrast, under the Trump Administration, the United States has 'securitized' issues such as 5G networks, trade deficits, intellectual property, technology transfer and the presence of Chinese students in American universities.

The Trump administration has labelled China a 'revisionist power'. It has increasingly stressed China's role as an emerging adversary that poses an existential threat to American global and regional interests. American policies designed to delay China's rise could spark fears of a catastrophic conflict. This is not inevitable. The EU, ASEAN and states like Japan and India can play a critical role as bridges aiming to reduce the potential for conflict and increasing the space for cooperation.

Over the next decade, as China becomes more influential globally, Europe and the EU will need to recognize that China will expect to shape the global outlook even on issues such as the rule of law, human rights, climate change and approaches to international economic policy. On these issues, China has a more collectivist perspective. Its focus is on the interests of the community, not the rights of the individual. This creates a fundamental clash of political cultures.

These cultural differences are reinforced by China's growing economic capabilities, which have revived Western fears. This has resulted in a Western shift away from open borders, the dismantling of trade barriers and the decline of open markets, best exemplified by American policies under the Trump administration.

While the Soviet Union posed a strategic and political challenge during the Cold War, it was an economic pygmy. By contrast, in the world that is emerging, China will be a major strategic, political and economic power. Global governance would require that Chinese perspectives, as well as those of Japan, India and Southeast Asian societies, play a stronger role in shaping

global decision-making in the future. Like the United States, Europe will need to adjust to this reality.

EAST ASIA SECURITY IN FLUX

Why the “Indo-Pacific” Concept is Not in Competition with China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

Elena Atanassova-Cornelis

The claim that there are no natural regions is well known. Regions are socially constructed and “dependent on the process of recognition, identification and membership”, which accounts for the fluidity of their borders and political contestation (Beeson 2018, p. 85). The definition of a region by policymakers largely depends on their particular foreign policy objectives and the specific international context in which they operate. The growing popularity of the Indo-Pacific as a regional concept is no exception. As observed by Gyngell (2018), the Indo-Pacific is a matter of framing, not geography, and thus different conceptualizations reflect different strategic interests. Furthermore, the very existence of divergent perspectives is indicative of countries’ evolving responses to the changing power balance in the region, as they struggle to deal with the implications of China’s rise in times of unpredictable US foreign policy. Indeed, many Asian states are confronted with the “dual dilemma” of economic overreliance on China and security dependence on the US. While regional states’ growing engagement with the Indo-Pacific is driven by their China-associated strategic anxieties, concerns about the willingness, but also ability, of America to sustain its security commitments and leadership in the region also play a role.

Over the past ten years, the term Indo-Pacific has been used more frequently by the major powers (the US, India, Australia and Japan) than the smaller ones, such as ASEAN, although it has increased in popularity since the Trump administration’s revival of the concept in the 2017 *US National Security Strategy* (He 2018). As this paper will argue, rather than competing with the PRC’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Indo-Pacific concept may be seen as representing a duality of an “exclusive-inclusive” perspective of responding to China’s rise. What this means is that regional attempts, such as coalition-building, to exclude Beijing from regional configurations are met with opposing forces that seek to prevent overt

balancing. Conversely, inclusive policies raise fears of acquiescence to the PRC and Chinese domination, which, in turn, stimulates “exclusive” behavior. This dynamic is a reflection of countries’ wariness of the PRC’s future strategic intentions, but recognition of China’s growing regional role; hence the necessity for some sort of regional framework that would be most conducive to realizing shared objectives, such as connectivity, economic development and stability.

Most analyses tend to emphasize the exclusive vision, rooted in the balance-of-power thinking and manifested in the perceived anti-China coalition formation. Admittedly, the rise of China has been a key driver in Australia and the US of their reconceptualization of the region from the Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific – with a more geographical and historical vision in the case of the former, and an explicit geopolitical perspective in the case of the latter (Beeson 2018; Gyngell 2018). While the China challenge to US interests and leadership in the region is nothing new in official US discourse, the definition of the Indo-Pacific as a strategic theatre for America’s response to the China challenge *is* new (Beeson 2018, p. 93).

The “China threat” discourse has become central in Japanese strategic thinking since the 2000s, manifested in perceptions of Beijing’s challenge to the rules-based international and, especially, maritime order (Atanassova-Cornelis 2018). It was Japan under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe that already in the 2000s sought a strategic redefinition of the region by means of connecting the Indian and Pacific oceans, and giving more prominence to India’s role in countering the PRC’s growing power (Lee-Brown 2018). Japan’s “selective mobilization” of countries with shared values and interests during Abe’s first term in office (2006-07) gave birth to the so-called “democratic security diamond” consisting of four maritime democracies (US-Australia-Japan-India), known as the Quad (Katagiri 2019, p. 16).

US and Japanese perspectives largely converge on their understanding of a “free and open” Indo-Pacific (FOIP) – a conceptualization rooted in open, democratic political systems, good governance and shared values (Gyngell 2018; Acharya 2019). In contrast, Indonesia avoids references to “free” (so as not to antagonize China) and calls for an “open and inclusive” Indo-Pacific instead (Acharya 2019). At the same time, an interesting difference may be observed between Washington’s emphasis on “power dynamics” and geopolitical competition, and Tokyo’s focus on promoting regional economic prosperity for all countries that adhere to established norms and standards of behavior (Hussain 2018). In this regard, Japanese interpretation of FOIP may be less exclusive and closer to that of the smaller Southeast Asian players than the US view. In Southeast Asia, Indonesia

played a key role for ASEAN to produce its *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific* in 2019. ASEAN's perspective builds on core ASEAN principles, such as regional inclusivity in terms of "ideas and proposals", dialogue, and cooperation, and promotes integration of the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions, multilateralism, interconnectivity and "prosperity for all" (ASEAN 2019).

For its part, New Delhi advocates a "free, open and inclusive" Indo-Pacific, which appears to merge the exclusive (US) and inclusive (ASEAN) perspectives. India shares Japan's security concerns about the PRC's maritime advances in the Indo-Pacific and the potential threat that China's behavior may pose to the future stability of the vital trade routes in the region, on which both Japan and India depend for their economic prosperity (Mukherjee 2018). However, unlike Japan, India is not a formal "spoke" in the US-led alliance system in the Asia-Pacific, which does not extend to the Indian Ocean. So New Delhi's conceptualization reflects, on the one hand, India's non-alignment policy and unwillingness to isolate the PRC, and, on the other, the democratic values shared with Japan, the US and Australia. Essentially, India seems to position itself at the center of the Indo-Pacific strategic conceptualization, acting as a potential "swing state" that could determine the dominance of the exclusive or the inclusive perspective.

The duality of the Indo-Pacific concept is reflected in the dynamics underlying the evolution of strategic alignments in the Indo-Pacific. These are informal and issue-specific (bilateral and minilateral) mechanisms for security collaboration, currently between the major players, i.e. the US, Japan, Australia and India, and some extra-regional, notably European, nations. While these configurations reflect "exclusive" behavior, as countries – driven by the shared "China threat" – seek to strengthen security ties with each other, as well as with the US, these informal mechanisms also provide opportunities for countries to potentially pursue policies of "inclusion" vis-à-vis Beijing through various cooperative agreements.

On the one hand, these new forms of security collaboration serve to reinforce the traditional US-led alliances and send a signal to China. This is the case of the more formalized US-Japan-Australia grouping, known as the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD), which has seen over the past 14 years enhanced war-fighting interoperability and joint power projection, as well as maritime security collaboration. In addition, the TSD countries have agreed to cooperate in developing infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific – a move largely seen as a response to the PRC's BRI. Some minilaterals include India, as in the US-Japan-India trilateral and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad). While the former has seen growing military-to-military engagements in recent years, especially since the trilateralization of the

Malabar exercise in 2015, and some discussions on possible infrastructure cooperation and maritime capacity-building in the Indo-Pacific, the latter largely remains at the level of declaratory politics. Some minilaterals even exclude the US, as in the Australia-Japan-India dialogue. At the same time, given New Delhi's reluctance to alienate Beijing, the presence of India in these groupings actually tends to dilute the perceived "anti-China" coalition-building in the region.

On the other hand, for close US allies, such as Japan and Australia, who remain wary of yet economically dependent on China, but also reliant in security terms on an increasingly "uncertain" US, the broad strategic-scope concept of the "Indo-Pacific" arguably provides an opportunity to redefine the region in more inclusive terms. In other words, this concept may be considered as opening up a cooperation channel with Beijing, without requiring countries to acquiesce in China's increasingly dominant geopolitical and geo-economic role in the region, or undermining the US regional presence. By contrast, the Asia-Pacific term remains exclusive due to its explicit link with the US-led "hub-and-spoke" security system, which does not include the Indian Ocean. The Indo-Pacific alignments are further important avenues for the regional involvement of European players, such as the UK and France, in trilateral or quadrilateral groupings with the US, Japan and Australia (Atanassova-Cornelis 2020). Although still nascent, inter-regional alignments may become vehicles for the European countries to promote regional connectivity and a maritime order in the Indo-Pacific inclusive of China (*ibid.*). This could mitigate the overt geopolitical and strategic conceptualization of the region, as seen in the US perspective, and thereby emphasize the more inclusive, cooperative vision in line with ASEAN's view. So far, India has been absent from the inter-regional groupings.

As for China, Beijing has evidently approached the FOIP concept and related strategic alignments with a certain degree of suspicion, seeing them as anti-China coalition-building. No doubt, Beijing is well aware of the existence of a shared "China threat" and its role as a driver of the various strategic relationships in the Indo-Pacific. However, the PRC also realizes that the Indo-Pacific alignments face obstacles in evolving into an "Asian version" of NATO in the foreseeable future (Atanassova-Cornelis 2020). In fact, the fluid security environment may not necessarily be a bad thing for the PRC's strategic interests and, in fact, may provide opportunities for Beijing to enhance its geopolitical influence in the area.

From China's perspective, these opportunities lie, first, in the geographical and policy priorities overlap between the BRI, especially the Maritime Silk Roads, and some of the FOIP's (notably, Japan's) strategic

objectives. Prime Minister Abe's FOIP strategy promotes regional prosperity, connectivity, infrastructure development, and flow of goods and people, among others. For Beijing, Abe's diplomatic overtures towards the PRC over the past three years are indicative of the above opportunities. Japan in 2017 alluded to a possible inclusion of the PRC in the FOIP, and also expressed interest in cooperating with China on the BRI on a case-by-case basis and if certain conditions were met, especially concerning international investment, social and legal standards. In 2019, Tokyo and Beijing agreed to initiate talks on joint infrastructure development projects in third countries, including those along the Maritime Silk Roads. ASEAN's recent call for integration of the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions, too, is seen from Beijing's perspective as compatible with the BRI's objectives. Yet, it is Japan's endorsement of the BRI that, for China, is increasingly seen as legitimizing the PRC's growing regional influence.

The second opportunity for Beijing is the division of Asian countries regarding the extent to which they perceive China as a threat, as exemplified by the duality of the Indo-Pacific concept. The PRC seems to have successfully exploited this division and pursued a "divide and rule" strategy in recent years towards ASEAN, as well as the EU, through the BRI and other economic projects. In some instances, such as the Philippines and Thailand, Beijing has sought to exploit cracks in their bilateral relations with the US to pull them into its (economic) orbit and away from Washington (Atanassova-Cornelis 2017). The recent Sino-Japanese rapprochement, not least due to the US turnaway from multilateralism and unpredictability under Trump, may be seen as a success from Beijing's perspective. Indeed, China has sought to position itself, together with Japan, as a defender of the rule-based multilateral trade system, thereby seeking to drive a wedge in the US-Japan alliance. A key objective for the PRC is to prevent anti-China coalition-building in the region. As the PRC wants to ensure that Asian countries refrain from pursuing (collective) actions detrimental to Chinese interests, it has stepped up its reliance on the economic leverage it has over its Asian neighbors, including core US allies, and focused on strengthening and enlarging its so-called "network of friends".

Admittedly, China's "divide and rule" approach towards ASEAN, as well as pursuit of economic coercion towards its neighbors, rewarding those that submit to its interests and punishing those that go against them, has alienated many regional states. The BRI is now increasingly perceived as a China-led, economic version of the hub-and-spoke system that emphasizes selective, bilateral, and reflects a sinocentric perspective on regionalism (Acharya 2017). The Indo-Pacific alignments examined earlier illustrate one of the responses by regional states to China's behavior. At the same time, as

the scale and impact of the BRI is becoming more global, the dichotomy between “China-friendly” countries (usually authoritarian) and “China-wary” nations (mostly liberal democracies) is increasingly blurred. The Digital Silk Road is a case in point. China has started to export digital technologies in the framework of smart-city projects and for surveillance purposes, such as facial recognition, to both “friendly” nations, such as the Philippines under Duterte, and liberal democracies in Europe. Indeed, the BRI has become much more than just transportation infrastructure, while also transcending the Eurasian space. The project has acquired an increasingly prominent “non-material” dimension, which is manifested in China-driven cooperation in various sectors, such as norms and standards, information and communication technologies, digital data, education and culture; the BRI has become a symbol of China’s increased power status as a whole (Ekman ed. 2019).

The duality of the Indo-Pacific concept examined in this paper reflects to a large extent the complex challenges that regional states face in responding to China’s rise – as an economic, military, and, increasingly, normative power. As noted by He (2018), it is China and its foreign policy behavior that ultimately hold a key to the future conceptualization, and eventual institutionalization, of the Indo-Pacific framework. The Indo-Pacific concept, as articulated by the key players, appears to leave sufficient space for a “China in” interpretation. On the surface, however, it seems that the “China out” vision appears dominant at the moment, especially in so far as official discourse in some of the countries is concerned. At the same time, the divergence between the Indo-Pacific framing and the actual policies that Asian players pursue towards the PRC (including on the BRI) suggests a quite pragmatic, and, possibly, deliberately ambiguous approach of dealing with strategic uncertainties – an approach that is not so new, after all.

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Shift of US-China Relations and its Impact on the Regional Order

Yoichi Kato

The US-China relationship has deteriorated in recent years due to dual management failure of their bilateral relations. The nature of US-China competition has fundamentally changed. Geo-economic and geo-technological elements are increasingly playing larger roles alongside geopolitics, so their bilateral relations are becoming more complicated and harder to manage.

This continuing deterioration of US-China relations has had substantially negative impacts on regional states by exacerbating their dilemma of dual dependence (D3), where states rely on the United States for security guarantees and on China for trade and economic interests. This series of changes has transformed the regional leadership structure and pushed regional states to pursue alternative strategic options to safeguard their national interests and to survive this era of major strategic shift.

US-China Relations: Dual Management Failure

What has recently become clear is that the United States and China have failed to manage their relationship with the other in a fundamental way.

In the United States, the widely shared argument in recent months is what they call “engagement failure.” Vice-President Mike Pence said as follows in a recent policy speech on China:

“No longer will America and its leaders hope that economic engagement alone will transform Communist China’s authoritarian state into a free and open society that respects private property, the rule of law, and international rules of commerce.”¹

1. M. Pence, “Remarks by Vice President Pence at the Frederic V. Malek Memorial Lecture”, speech, Washington DC, October 24, 2019, The White House, www.whitehouse.gov.

This argument is not partisan. Former Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell, the primary architect of the Obama administration's main Asia policy called "Pivot to Asia" (later called "Rebalance") wrote the following in an article published last fall: "The basic mistake of engagement was to assume that it could bring about fundamental changes to China's political system, economy, and foreign policy."²

The National Security Strategy of 2017 elaborated on this "mistake" by stating, "For decades, US policy was rooted in the belief that support for China's rise and for its integration into the post-war international order would liberalize China. Contrary to our hopes, China expanded its power at the expense of the sovereignty of others."³

In short, the basic assumption was that, if China achieved economic prosperity, China would eventually become a liberal democracy like the United States. However, to this day, reality has shown otherwise. China has succeeded in achieving substantial economic growth but has not moved to political reform. It still maintains a one-party authoritarian regime under the total control of the Chinese Communist Party.

Furthermore, in the United States, as Campbell pointed out, "there is a growing consensus that the era of engagement with China has come to an unceremonious close. The debate now is over what comes next."⁴ Echoing Campbell, Vice-President Pence said, "America will continue to seek a fundamental restructuring of our relationship with China." He indicates the intention of the Trump administration to move beyond "engagement."

However, this "engagement failure" is not a new argument. In his groundbreaking 2007 book, *The China Fantasy*, James Mann, former Beijing bureau chief of the *Los Angeles Times*, wrote that we should not assume that China was headed for democracy. Instead, China would probably retain a repressive one-party political system for a long time.⁵ Apparently, he was right, but his argument was not accepted in the mainstream policy circle in Washington DC at that time.

One can also argue that the Chinese Communist Party had already made a clear decision that it would not accept any political reform that would topple its one-party dominance when Deng Xiaoping ousted Zhao Ziyang, who advocated the introduction of political pluralism, and put down the

2. K. M. Campbell and J. Sullivan, "Competition Without Catastrophe: How America Can Both Challenge and Coexist with China," *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 5 (September/October 2019).

3. *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Office of the President, Washington DC, December 18, 2017, available at www.whitehouse.gov.

4. Campbell and Sullivan, op. cit.

5. J. Mann, *The China Fantasy*, New York: Viking, 2007.

student demonstration in Tiananmen Square in 1989. This decision has never been overturned. If this view is correct, then the engagement approach never had a chance. Over the past three decades, views like the one put forward by James Mann have been expressed, but the United States never changed its basic assumption and approach to China. Why this shift took so long is a legitimate question.

What this “engagement failure” argument means is that the United States as a state did not understand the fundamental, long-term strategic thinking of China.

China also made a failed attempt to set up a framework to dictate the bilateral relationship. This initiative was called the “New Model of Major Power Relations (新型大国关系).” It was first proposed to the United States in 2012 by then Vice-President Xi Jinping when he visited Washington DC prior to his inauguration as President.

According to Xi’s explanation, the major elements of this initiative were:

- “mutual understanding and strategic trust”
- “respecting each other’s ‘core interests’”
- “mutually beneficial cooperation” (win-win)
- “enhancing cooperation and coordination in international affairs and on global issues”⁶

The Obama administration at first demonstrated a positive attitude toward this idea. But within a few months it changed its position. Evan Medeiros, Senior Director for Asian Affairs at the White House National Security Council, said in a speech in 2014:

“Some in China say that, in order to build this new model, the United States must accept and accommodate China’s core interests. That’s their definition. We simply have a different view.”

The primary point of contention was China’s requirement of “respecting each other’s ‘core interests.’” It was apparent that China’s definition of “core interests” included its claim of sovereignty and exclusive control over Taiwan, Xinjiang, and Tibet, among other claims. Even the Senkaku islands of Japan were once mentioned by China’s Foreign Ministry as part of its core interests.

6. Xi Jinping, “Vice President Xi Jinping Policy Speech,” speech, Washington DC, February 15, 2012.

Because of this gap in the perception of “core interests,” the United States “got off the train” of the “New Model of Major Power Relations” by the fall of 2014. Similarly, China stopped using this term without openly admitting that the initiative had failed due to the rejection by the United States.

If China seriously thought that it could make the United States accept these conditions, then it had a fundamentally wrong understanding of US strategic thinking. The United States enacted the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) in 1979, which stipulates the US political will to help Taiwan defend itself from aggression from China by providing Taiwan with “defense articles and services for its defense against armed attack.” Considering the spirit of this legal framework, there is no way that the United States would abandon Taiwan by agreeing to the Chinese proposition to respect “each other’s ‘core interests’”.

This failed attempt to establish a “New Model of Major Power Relations” with the United States clearly shows the lack of fundamental understanding of US regional strategy on the part of China.

These two failures, the US failure to politically transform China into democracy through engagement and China’s failure to establish a “New Model of Major Power Relations” with the United States, together illustrate a serious problem in US-China relations. This perception gap is exactly what the US-China joint study on “strategic distrust” by Kenneth Lieberthal of the Brookings Institution and Wang Jisi of Peking University concluded in their report published in March 2012.⁷

These developments in both countries, as described above, demonstrated that neither of them could avoid such a negative trajectory even though it was laid out with alarming analysis by their top scholars.

It is, therefore, only natural that there is a view among practitioners that the strategic distrust is a “structural issue” and “cannot be solved anytime soon.” The only way to deal with this issue is through “mutual hedging.”⁸ Wang Jisi demonstrated this pessimistic view by saying, “Strategic distrust is still growing. We have to go back to management of risks.”⁹

7. J. Wang and K. Lieberthal, “Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust,” *The Brookings Institution*, March 30, 2012, www.brookings.edu.

8. E. Medeiros, “Remarks at the 7th Xiangshan Forum,” speech, Beijing, October 12, 2016.

9. Wang Jisi, “Remarks at the 7th Xiangshan Forum,” speech, Beijing, October 12, 2016.

Impact on the Regional Strategic Balance

This dual failure of managing bilateral relations between the United States and China has had a substantial impact on the geostrategic environment in the Indo-Pacific region.

With the realization that engagement has failed, the United States has toughened its approach to China from “engagement” to “balancing.” The ongoing trade war, with mutual imposition of sanctions, demonstrates this escalation. The US is further hardening its approach to China by employing “decoupling.” There have been a number of examples, but the recent decision to exclude Huawei from the US 5G wireless network stands out. The US decision to disinvite China from the Rim of the Pacific Naval Exercise 2018 can be explained as another example of “decoupling” China in the area of defense cooperation.

China has also been pursuing a new approach to the United States after it failed to establish the “New Model of Major Power Relations.” One possible path was to go back to the non-confrontational approach of “hide our capabilities and bide our time” (韬光养晦) that Deng Xiaoping allegedly launched in the 1990s after the Tiananmen incident. Even if China has not totally returned to this approach, top policy experts in China have argued that China should remain “modest” while its national power is still on the rise.¹⁰ The other path is more aggressive and independent, based on the idea of “Self-Reliance” (自力更生) that Xi Jinping advocates.

It is well-known that Xi Jinping told US President Donald Trump in their face-to-face talks on November 9, 2017: “The Pacific Ocean is big enough to accommodate both China and the United States.” He went on to say, “The two sides need to jointly maintain and promote peace and stability and prosperity in the region.”¹¹

Even though his “New Model of Major Power Relations” initiative was rejected by the United States and failed, Xi Jinping still pursues a way to co-exist with the US as a peer competitor in the region. It is not a coincidence



10. Yang Jiemin (杨洁勉), Senior Fellow of the Shanghai Institute for International Studies and Chairman of SIIS Academic Affairs Council, said in his keynote speech at the “Connecting the World and the Future” International Symposium held by Shanghai International Studies University on November 11, 2018: “China is enjoying uninterrupted 5000 years (of history). And we have witnessed the history with the ups and the downs. When we are down, we are working for the ups. When we are up, we must keep vigilant and remain modest. China now is on the rise. So, we must be very modest and know very well what our weakness and shortcomings are.”

11. Xi Jinping and Donald Trump, “Remarks by President Trump and President Xi of China in Joint Press Statement,” speech, Beijing, November 9, 2017, US Embassy and Consulates in China, www.china.usembassy-china.org.cn.

that the concept of “One Belt One Road” (later rebranded as “Belt and Road Initiative”) was launched in 2013 when the “New Model of Major Power Relations” started to fade out. One can argue that Xi Jinping decided to proceed with a new approach of “Self-Reliance” with OBOR as the main tool.

The United States has moved from “engagement” to “balancing” and even to “decoupling” while China has chosen “Self-Reliance” over a new version of “Hide and Bide,” or “Hide and Bide 2.0.” What implications do these decisions collectively have on the future of the US-China bilateral relationship?

The following matrix is one way to analyze the possible changes.

	 	Hide/Bide 2.0 韬光养晦2.0	Self-Reliant 自力更生 (Chinese Decouple)
Engage/Hedge		Mutually amicable relations	U.S. unilateral concession
Balance		Lower-level of tension	U.S. containment of Chinese advancement Higher
Decouple/Disengage		Chinese unilateral concession	Mutual decouple ↓ Parallel World Order →New Cold War? ⁴⁸

The two countries would end up decoupling each other, especially in the technological sector. As a result, a “parallel world/regional order” could emerge; that is, coexistence of a US-led order and a China-led order, even if only in limited sectors. Some scholars argue that such developments could lead to a new cold war.

An editorial of the *Financial Times* in December 2019 represents this kind of view as follows: “The decoupling of the technology sectors between the two countries (the United States and China) is becoming a reality.” “The danger is that this decoupling turns into a giant rift—one that splits the internet between dominant US and Chinese spheres.”¹² The regional leadership structure since the end of the Cold War has shifted from one under “uncontested US primacy” to another under “contested US primacy.” The question is “what is next?”

12. “The world should beware a technology cold war,” *Financial Times*, December 12, 2019.

There are four possibilities:

1. Continued “Contested US Primacy”
2. “Power-sharing” between the United States and China
3. Parallel World
4. China Primacy

Alternative Strategic Choices for Regional States

As one of the closest allies of the United States, Japan’s basic strategy is to aim for and support the continued state of “contested US primacy.” The Japan-US alliance is structured based on such a premise and assumption. It is natural and safe to assume that Japan as a state will make every effort to make US primacy sustainable.

But at the same time Japan must prepare for the other three possibilities listed above as a strategic insurance. Japan’s strategic options consist of the following four:

1. Default position: maintenance of the alliance with the United States
⇒ Update and enhance it as necessary
2. Alternative (1): internal balancing
⇒ Build up its capabilities to be independent of the US, mainly in the military domain
3. Alternative (2): external balancing
⇒ Look for alternative alliances and/or coalitions
4. Alternative (3): bandwagoning
⇒ Accommodation with China

An important point is that these four options are not mutually exclusive. All of them can coexist, as they do now.

The best example of “internal balancing” is the spy satellites that Japan launched after the flight of the North Korean Taepodong missile over the Japanese archipelago in 1998. The US government strongly opposed this plan of the Japanese government by saying that such surveillance capabilities from space would be rendered redundant by similar US capabilities, and waste alliance resources. As for “external balancing,” the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) or TPP11 and the Japan-EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) are clear examples. Neither includes the United States. Even “bandwagoning” is happening. Japan agreed with China to cooperate on joint infrastructure projects in third countries when Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited China in October 2018. China publicized this agreement as

Japan's decision to join "One Belt One Road" even though the government of Japan did not describe it that way.

Depending on the degree of dependability of the United States, Japan would modify the weight that it puts on each four options and try to find the right mix among them. There is no simple, straightforward "Plan B" to the alliance with the United States. This approach is not just for Japan, but applicable to all the other regional states that share the dilemma of dual dependence (D3). And each state uses its own judgment to find the right choices and the right mix of them.

Concluding Observations

The nature of competition with China has changed from a simple "geopolitical" struggle to one that encompasses "geo-economical" and even "geo-technological" elements. Continued technological innovation, such as artificial intelligence (AI), is rapidly increasing the significance of the technology sector in determining the framework and nature of US-China competition. The technological superiority of Huawei in 5G wireless networks is a clear example of this change. There is a view within the government of Japan that China's technological superiority in 5G may even continue to the next phases of critical technological innovation such as environmental protection, in which China is believed to be making enormous investments. The concern is that the rest of the world may depend more heavily on China in the future for emerging technologies such as environmental protection, even more than it does now for 5G.

On the other hand, the recent outbreak of coronavirus in China and the Chinese government's stunning display of incompetence in effectively dealing with the situation demonstrates the vulnerability of the Chinese style of governance and even China's political system itself. This series of unfortunate events may bring about a new perspective for considering the future of competition with China and US-China bilateral relations.

Whither the US Alliance System?

Emma Chanlett-Avery

Donald Trump's presidency has stoked fears that the prevailing post-World War II system of alliances in Asia could deteriorate. For a number of years, US allies and partners have been anxious about the possibility that China's economic might and military modernization coupled with America's relative decline would shift the balance of power in the region. The Trump administration's "America First" approach and the president's open skepticism about the value of US alliances has exacerbated such concerns.

While many elements of the US foreign policy system—civil servants, Congress, and the broader policy establishment—resisted this recasting of the US presence in the Pacific, the shift in approach has prompted an examination of the strength of alliances. The question remains as to whether the impact of this moment under President Trump's leadership is temporary and if another president would return to the traditional "hub and spoke" system, or if it will usher in a new era of uncertain partnerships and an entirely different power structure in East Asia.

The Free and Open Indo-Pacific Vision

The Free and Open Indo-Pacific (or FOIP) approach adopted by the Trump administration offered the promise of US reassurances but has also introduced new questions about where America stands in the region. The FOIP vision centers on the maritime democracies—the United States, Japan, India, and Australia—but leaves other states, particularly South Korea and Southeast Asian countries, less certain of their position.

Trump's embrace of the FOIP language during his first trip to Asia delighted Japan, as Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had earlier championed this concept. Abe has also been an ardent supporter of more robust ties with India, particularly under Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

While the FOIP concept may be welcomed in Tokyo, its ambiguous structure leaves some US allies (South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand) and friends in an awkward position. Further, the FOIP has not been well

resourced and the operational concept of the quad has yet to be more fully developed. To many critics, the US withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) undermines both the concept of the FOIP and the traditional alliance system.

Meanwhile, China's suspicion of encirclement shades Seoul's response to the FOIP, while ASEAN countries may similarly wish to avoid offending Beijing.

The North Korea Impact

Although many strategists frame China's rise as the underlying challenge to US interests in Asia, dealing with North Korea has provided a more immediate crisis that has tested US alliances. As the threat of "fire and fury" subsided and the Trump administration pursued a diplomatic opening with Pyongyang, Seoul and Tokyo breathed a sigh of relief that the region had avoided a direct military confrontation. South Korean President Moon Jae-in successfully employed Olympic diplomacy to broker a direct meeting between Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, leading to Trump and Kim's historic meeting in Singapore, and later in Hanoi and Panmunjom. However, leadership summitry over the past two years has not achieved a breakthrough, and the alliances may have been adversely affected.

The US-Republic of Korea (RoK) alliance—which has always been primarily focused on deterring and defeating the North—has navigated a shifting agenda, including Trump's unilateral cancelation of all large-scale bilateral exercises. In addition, in 2018 South Korea and North Korea signed a tension-reduction agreement known as the Comprehensive Military Agreement (CMA). The CMA establishes land, sea and air buffer zones in the heavily armed demilitarized zone (DMZ) that separates the two Koreas and around the maritime border, called the Northern Limit Line. Implementation of the CMA required US military officials to modify practices in the DMZ, including removing land mines and guard posts. While observers point to a marked reduction of tension in the DMZ, some critics maintain that the CMA-mandated changes reduced alliance readiness with little sacrifice in return from North Korea.

The abruptness of Trump's decision to engage diplomatically with North Korea may have taken Japan by surprise. Abe strongly supported Trump's hostile rhetoric and consideration of a military option, and nurtured his personal rapport with Trump through frequent phone calls about North Korea's provocations. During the three meetings between Trump and Kim, Japan's concern about the fate of the Japanese citizens

abducted by North Korean agents in past decades appeared to be only fleetingly broached. As North Korea has continued to test missiles, the Trump administration's dismissal of these tests appears to have marginalized Japan's vulnerability to missile attacks. Many in Tokyo and Seoul fear that the US emphasis on long-range missiles that could potentially strike the United States indicates a lack of concern about its allies' security. South Korea has long been threatened by DPRK artillery situated along the border, and Japan is within range of North Korea's well-tested medium-range missile capabilities. This anxiety points to a concern that the United States will accept a deal that addresses Pyongyang's long-range missile program while leaving allies vulnerable.

Burden-sharing Tension Spikes

Perhaps no area has been more difficult for US alliances than the issue of cost-sharing for hosting US troops. As a candidate, Trump was harshly critical of existing arrangements, suggesting that some countries should go it alone, up to and including developing their own nuclear arsenal. In office, while maintaining the bilateral alliances, Trump has continued to criticize Seoul's and Tokyo's respective contributions to offset the cost of hosting US bases, and demanded steep increases in funds. Burden-sharing negotiations are invariably contentious, with Washington always demanding that allies increase their contributions and the host countries pointing to their own growing contributions to security. But the Trump administration approach has been more aggressively transactional and appears to suggest that host governments now cover personnel costs. Defenders of the alliances decry the US demands that do not appear to acknowledge the value of alliances and focus exclusively on dollar figures.

Negotiations in late 2019 revealed sharp differences between Washington and Seoul on how much South Korea should contribute to offset US costs to station troops on the peninsula. These negotiations on cost-sharing arrangements—known as the “Special Measures Agreement” (SMA)—generally occur every five years. Press outlets reported that the Trump administration asked South Korea to increase its contribution by roughly 400%; with this demand untenable for Seoul, the SMA expired without agreement. The ongoing negotiations aim to renew the accord signed in February 2019, which raised South Korea's previous annual contribution by approximately 8%. South Korean officials point to Seoul's contributions to the alliance beyond the SMA agreement. Military expenditures account for 2.6% of its GDP, the largest percentage among all US allies. The RoK government is paying \$9.7 billion, or about 90% of the

total cost of constructing Camp Humphries, the largest overseas US base in the world, and is a top buyer of US defense systems.

The South Korean press has aggressively covered the SMA negotiations, and the RoK public is aware of the US position. Although opinion polls have indicated enduring support for the US alliance among South Koreans, recent surveys have revealed limitations: in a November 2019 poll, nearly 70% of South Koreans opposed paying more to the United States even if it resulted in a reduction in US troops. A drop in public support for the US troop presence could undercut the political viability of the alliance.

Japan is carefully watching how the South Korea negotiations play out, with an eye to its own SMA expiration in April 2021. In a normal cycle, SMA negotiations would commence this year, but Tokyo may wish to stretch out the talks to extend beyond the 2020 US elections. Rumors have circulated that the Trump administration will demand approximately four times as much as Tokyo has usually provided. Tokyo is quick to point out that more than 90% of Japan's defense acquisitions are from US companies. Japan's annual purchases via the US Foreign Military Sales program are valued at about \$11 billion. Recent major acquisitions include Lockheed Martin F-35 Joint Strike Fighters, Boeing KC-46 Tankers, Northrup Grumman E2D Hawkeye airborne early-warning aircraft, General Dynamics Advanced Amphibious Assault Vehicles, and Boeing/Bell MV-22 Ospreys.

South Korea is also a major purchaser of US weapon systems and is regularly among the top customers for Foreign Military Sales (FMS). From 2008 to 2016, RoK FMS contracts with the US totaled \$15.7 billion, and commercial acquisitions totaled \$6.9 billion for a total of \$22.5 billion in acquisitions during that period. From 2008 to 2016, approx. 75% of South Korea's total foreign defense purchases came in the form of FMS and commercial sales from US companies. Seoul has also contributed about \$700 million in kind to US efforts overseas, including Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. During the second Gulf War, South Korea sent 3,000 troops to Iraq, making it the third largest contingent after the United States and the UK. During the Vietnam War, South Korea sent 300,000 troops to fight on the US side.

Personnel Choices and Congressional Response

Many observers have expressed distress at the lack of Asia policy veterans in the current Trump administration, citing a belief that careful stewardship of alliances requires regional expertise. The delay in appointing ambassadors and other senior officials in the State Department was seen by many as

hampering bilateral relationships. Initially reassured by the presence of some senior officials in the Trump administration, Japanese officials were alarmed by the departures of National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster and Defense Secretary James Mattis. Foreign officials had viewed Mattis' presence as tempering more skeptical US views of overseas alliances. In Mattis' resignation letter, he dwelled on the value of alliances, writing, in part:

“My views on treating allies with respect and also being clear-eyed about both malign actors and strategic competitors are strongly held and informed by over four decades of immersion in these issues. We must do everything possible to advance an international order that is most conducive to our security, prosperity and values, and we are strengthened in this effort by the solidarity of our alliances... Because you have the right to have a Secretary of Defense whose views are better aligned with yours on these and other subjects, I believe it is right for me to step down from my position.”¹

While Congress—particularly the Senate, with responsibility for confirmation of senior US officials—has acknowledged the president's prerogative in setting foreign policy, support for the alliances has been widely bipartisan. The FY2020 National Defense Authorization Act requires a report on South Korea's and Japan's contributions to US alliances, and a sense of Congress resolution on the continued US commitment to its alliances with South Korea and Japan, as well as trilateral cooperation between the three countries. Many in Congress appear keen to restrain the president's ability to make major changes to force structure in the region. Section 1254 of the FY2020 NDAA Conference Report prohibits the use of funds to reduce US forces deployed to South Korea below 28,500 until 90 days after the Secretary of Defense certifies to Congress that (1) such a reduction is in the US national interest and will not significantly undermine the security of US allies in the region and (2) US allies have been “appropriately consulted” on the proposed reduction.

The Future of US Military Presence in the Pacific

All of these challenges to US alliances in Asia have prompted debate about whether and how the US military presence in the region will endure. The Japan and South Korea alliances made up part of the post-World War II “hub and spoke” system of US security relationships in the Asia-Pacific. US

1. “READ: James Mattis' Resignation Letter,” *CNN Politics*, December 21, 2018.

bases in Japan provide the platform for US forward operations, including the only US aircraft carrier forward-deployed outside of the United States. Although the US-RoK alliance has focused most heavily on deterring and defeating North Korea, US troops based on the Peninsula also expand US options to respond to a contingency.

Traditionally, the United States has urged greater coordination among US partners in confronting DPRK threats and countering China's military rise. Trilateral cooperation has been challenging because of poor relations between Tokyo and Seoul. Although South Korea reversed its plan to withdraw from a military information-sharing agreement with Japan in November 2019, tensions in the relationship remain severe. The "America First" approach has eschewed multilateral arrangements in trade and security alike, providing less pressure and less incentive for US allies and friends to form productive partnerships. Strains on the bilateral alliances exacerbate these challenges.

Cracks in the relationships with Japan and South Korea benefit China and, to a lesser degree, Russia. Beijing and Moscow have long criticized US alliances as outdated and counterproductive, and are deepening their own defense cooperation. In a Russia-China joint air-patrol exercise in July 2019, Russian aircraft violated airspace over the Dokdo/Takeshima islands—territory claimed by both Japan and South Korea—prompting both countries to scramble jets in response. Incidents such as these appear to be testing the fragility of the security landscape, providing reason for China and Russia to cooperate in generating instability, and rattling nerves in Japan and South Korea. If alliances weaken and security commitments waver, many may call into question whether Pax Americana is fading in Asia.

MARITIME SECURITY – COMPETITION AND COOPERATION

The Naval Balance of Power in the Pacific

Patrick Cronin

The United States Navy remains the most formidable maritime presence in the Pacific Ocean. But a confluence of trends raises considerable uncertainty about the ability of the United States to project military power forward into the Western Pacific in the decade ahead. First, the People's Republic of China (PRC), under an assertive Chinese Communist Party (CCP) led by Xi Jinping, is striving to build a military and naval force to rival that of the United States.¹ Second, if China is waxing, America is waning, at least in the perception of critical regional audiences. Finally, an unfolding fourth industrial revolution is changing the character of war, rendering previous notions of the naval balance of power less relevant in an era when the strategic advantage resides with those actors who can achieve information dominance and wage political warfare in both peacetime and wartime.

The Rise of the PLA Navy

China is determined to challenge America's ability to project military power forward into the Western Pacific. Its emerging blue-water navy, backed by comprehensive national and maritime power, is "tipping the balance in the Pacific."² In the span of 35 years, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has been transformed from a coastal defense force into a serious peer competitor for the US Navy and its regional allies. The balance of naval power is particularly favorable to China in its near seas where shore-based missiles and aircraft can support the PLAN fleet. Together, China's land-based weapon systems and its fleet of small combatants are likely now sufficient to defend China's adjacent seas, which frees up the PLA Navy's growing inventory of large vessels for power projection.

1. *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2019*, Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, DoD, 2019, www.media.defense.gov.

2. D. Lague and B. Kang Lim, "China's Vast Fleet Is Tipping the Balance in the Pacific", *Reuters*, April 30, 2019, www.reuters.com.

While the US still fields more large combatants than the PLAN, the pace of China's large-combatant shipbuilding is accelerating. China is continuing to expand and modernize its shipyards so that it can build more large combatants simultaneously.³ Meanwhile, China is converting existing facilities for making small combatants into facilities to produce large warships.⁴ Retired Rear Admiral Michael McDevitt predicts that by 2035 China's major surface fleet could add as many as 140 new large combatants and approach numerical parity with the US Navy.⁵ If that occurs, China would not only pose a threat within a radius of its assets ashore but anywhere its fleet sails.

Without an effective counterweight, China may well come to militarily dominate most of the maritime Indo-Pacific in the near future. While Beijing already enjoys global maritime reach, the sharpest impact of its ascending naval power affects potential contingencies involving democratic Taiwan, the Japanese-administered Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea, and disputed waters and territories in the South China Sea. The PLAN and its auxiliary forces intend to keep this trend going in the decade ahead, which is why some point to the 2020s as the "Decade of Concern."⁶

The PLAN's surface-ship prowess is improving in both quantity and quality. During the decade beginning in December 2008, the PLAN deployed 100 ships in 31 naval task forces to the Gulf of Aden, thereby using a nominally counterpiracy mission to build a truly blue-water navy capability.⁷ In December 2019, the PLAN commissioned its first indigenously produced aircraft carrier, the Type 001A *Shandong*, with a 70,000-ton displacement and a short take-off but arrested recovery (STOVAR) system similar to that of its first aircraft carrier, the *Liaoning*, a 1985 Soviet platform later purchased, overhauled, and eventually commissioned by the PLAN in 2012.⁸ Another four aircraft carriers are planned, and these may include nuclear-powered engines and a catapult-assisted take-off but arrested recovery (CATOVAR) system.

3. L. Zhen, "Satellite Images Show China Is Expanding Shipyard 'To Build More Aircraft Carriers,'" *South China Morning Post*, October 17, 2019, www.scmp.com.

4. L. Zhen, "China To Stop Building Type 056 Corvettes As Navy Shifts Focus To Larger Vessels," *South China Morning Post*, January 14, 2020, www.scmp.com.

5. M. McDevitt, "China's Navy Will Be the World's Largest in 2035," *Proceedings*, 146/2/1 (2020), www.usni.org.

6. G. G. Chang, "Top General Fears War With China and Russia at the Same Time," *The Daily Beast*, October 31, 2018, www.thedailybeast.com.

7. A. S. Erickson, "The China Counter-Piracy Bookshelf: Statistics & Implications from Ten Years' Deployment Counting," January 2, 2019, www.andrewerickson.com.

8. "What Do We Know (So Far) About China's Second Aircraft Carrier?" *ChinaPower*, CSIS, December 2019, www.chinapower.csis.org.

For now, however, the aircraft carriers convey greater prestige than combat power, and the PLAN surface fleet remains focused on a growing number of modern destroyers, frigates, and corvettes. These surface ships include the new Type 055 large destroyer armed with 112 vertical launch system (VLS) cells.⁹ China's destroyers have fewer VLS cells than their US counterparts. Still, when operating within range of shore-based missile defense systems, they can dedicate a larger percentage of their missile inventory to attack rather than self-defense. As experts like Bryan Clark have noted, the missiles on China's combatants can also out-range US missiles, meaning PLAN vessels can target US Navy ships before they can return fire.¹⁰ So far, China has launched six Type 055 destroyers and 24 Type 052D destroyers, dubbed the "Chinese Aegis."¹¹ The pace of shipbuilding surpasses that of any other navy today. For instance, in December 2019 alone, China launched two Type 056A missile corvettes, two Type 052D guided-missile destroyers, and one Type 055 guided-missile destroyer, as well as having commissioned into service the *Shandong* aircraft carrier.¹²

More worrisome for a potential Taiwan or East or South China Sea scenario, however, is the expansion of China's amphibious force. Last year, the PLAN began construction on its first big-deck amphibious assault ship, the Type 075 landing helicopter dock (LHD).¹³ Adding the rough equivalent of the *USS Wasp* to other Chinese capabilities, including some 37 large amphibious landing ships and 22 medium landing ships, it appears that the PLAN is replicating the combined US Marine and Navy amphibious task forces—Marine Expedition Unit/Amphibious Ready Group (MEU/ARG)—that currently deploy throughout the Indo-Pacific and elsewhere.¹⁴ The combined air-sea-ground capability represented by the 31st MEU based in Japan, for instance, conducts joint training with partners, delivers timely

9. K. Mizokami, "What Will America Do About China's New Advanced New Type 055 Destroyer?" *The National Interest*, January 22, 2020, www.nationalinterest.org.

10. R. Pickrell, "China has an Advantage Over the US Navy that Could Mean A 'Decisive' Defeat for US Warships in a Fight at Sea," *Business Insider*, April 27, 2019, www.businessinsider.com.

11. X. Vasseur, "China Launched the 24th Type 052D, 6th Type 055 & 71st Type 056 Vessels for PLAN," *Naval News*, December 30, 2019, www.navalnews.com; and A. Tate, "First 'Stretched' Type 052D Destroyer Enters Service with PLA Navy," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, January 14, 2020, www.janes.com; and F.-S. Gady, "China Launches 19th and 20th Type 052D Guided Missile Destroyer," *The Diplomat*, May 13, 2019, www.thediplomat.com.

12. "China Has Launched Five Warships in December 2019 including Type 056A Type 052D Type 055 Missile Destroyers and Frigates," *Navy Recognition*, December 31, 2019, www.navyrecognition.com.

13. See M. Chan, "China Building Navy's Biggest Amphibious Assault Vessel, Sources Say," *South China Morning Post*, March 29, 2017, www.scmp.com; and D. Axe, "What Does China Plan to Do with its New Assault Ship?," *The National Interest*, January 15, 2020, www.nationalinterest.org.

14. R. O'Rourke, "China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities—Background and Issues for Congress," *Congressional Research Service*, January 22, 2020, www.fas.org.

humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR), and otherwise signals US interests and influence. China appears to be on the cusp of replicating this capability and with it an ability to conduct the same range of influence operations, exercises and training, noncombatant evacuation operations (NEOs), and HA/DR missions.¹⁵ Moreover, China's quantitative advantage in ships, backed by a massive shipbuilding industry and paranaul forces, conveys a message throughout the Indo-Pacific that Beijing is becoming more capable of coercing regional neighbors into abiding by China's rules and claims.

Meanwhile, undersea capabilities remain a vital part of the PLA's naval capabilities. The PLA is steadily modernizing its mostly non-nuclear-powered submarines and investing in unmanned undersea vehicles (UUVs) and seabed research and survey vessels. One notable development has been the creation of "a deep sea base for unmanned submarine science and defence operations in the South China Sea, a centre that might become the first artificial intelligence colony on Earth."¹⁶

The PLAN remains focused on its near seas, a fact attested to by its relatively small inventory of replenishment ships. However, China is developing a replenishment system designed to be used on existing civilian ships.¹⁷ Moreover, given China's shipbuilding capabilities, along with building a base in Djibouti and constructing various ports that could in future accommodate naval vessels, Beijing is not as hamstrung by logistics shortfalls as some might think.

China can backstop its naval presence with not only advanced land-based airpower but especially with its array of anti-ship and land-attack cruise and ballistic missiles. Two land-based, road-mobile anti-ship ballistic missiles pose a direct threat to US Navy combatants. The DF-21D has a range of more than 1,000 miles and is the first ASBM designed to hit ships at sea. The DF-26 intermediate-range ballistic missile boasts a range of about 2,500 miles, and it can carry either a conventional or nuclear warhead. Both missiles can achieve much greater range if delivered by air on the PLA's new H-6N bomber, which is also designed to carry supersonic cruise missiles and

15. G. Newsham, "China's Amphibious Force Emerges," *Asia Times*, November 5, 2019, www.asiatimes.com.

16. D. R. Strachan, "China Enters the UUV Fray," *The Diplomat*, November 22, 2019, www.thediplomat.com; L. Lew, "Chinese Survey Ships Cause Ripples in Vietnam and Across the South China Sea," *South China Morning Post*, August 10, 2019, www.scmp.com; J. Trevithick, "Four of the Biggest Revelations from China's Massive 70th Anniversary Military Parade," *The Drive*, October 1, 2019; and S. Chen, "Beijing Plans an AI Atlantis for the South China Sea—Without a Human in Sight," *South China Morning Post*, November 26, 2018, www.scmp.com.

17. "Civilian Ship Debuts Underway Replenishment to PLA Navy Ships," *China Military Online*, November 21, 2019, www.eng.mod.gov.cn.

UAVs, among other weapons.¹⁸ As if to emphasize the psychological warfare element of Beijing's total competition, these missiles are often referred to as the "carrier-killer" and "Guam express" weapons designed to push the US military out beyond the second island chain.¹⁹ Meanwhile, China is reportedly developing hypersonic glide vehicles (HGVs) that would be much harder to intercept.²⁰

Beyond all of these capabilities, China augments its naval power in the Pacific by exploiting information across all dimensions of policy, including its advances into the new domains of cyberspace, outer space, and the electromagnetic spectrum. The PLA's quest to master the new domains is being realized through massive investment and reorganization to include a Strategic Support Force that integrates "PLA space, cyber, electronic, and psychological warfare capabilities."²¹

Also worth noting is that China essentially has two additional navies, each of which is the largest of its kind in the world.²² The China Coast Guard (CCG) inventory includes at least 142 lightly armed oceangoing vessels.²³ If added to the PLA Navy's force of over 335 commissioned combat submarines and surface combatants, China's maritime force numbers 477 combat vessels—more than twice the number of comparable US Navy combat vessels and nearly four times the number of US Navy combat vessels assigned to the Pacific Fleet.²⁴ A vast People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia (PAFMM) and an organized civilian fishing fleet also give the PLAN

18. A. Panda, "Revealed: China's Nuclear-Capable Air-Launched Ballistic Missile," *The Diplomat*, April 10, 2018, www.thediplomat.com; and M. Chan and L. Zhen, "China's New Supersonic Arsenal Could Give Its H-6N Bomber Force Greater Reach," *Business Insider*, November 11, 2019, www.businessinsider.com.

19. J.-H. Lee, "China Releases Footage of 'Guam Killer' DF-26 Ballistic Missile in 'Clear Message to the US'," *South China Morning Post*, January 28, 2019, www.scmp.com.

20. A. Cummings, "Hypersonic Weapons: Tactical Uses and Strategic Goals," *War on the Rocks*, November 12, 2019, www.warontherocks.com.

21. J. Costello and J. McReynolds, *China's Strategic Support Force: A Force for a New Era*, Washington DC: NDU Press, October 2018, www.ndupress.ndu.edu.

22. A. S. Erickson, "Numbers Matter: China's Three 'Navies' Each Have the World's Most Ships," *The National Interest*, February 26, 2018, www.nationalinterest.org.

23. A. Erickson, J. Hickey and H. Holst, "Surging Second Sea Force: China's Maritime Law-Enforcement Forces, Capabilities, and Future in the Gray Zone and Beyond," *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 72, No. 2, Article 4, Spring 2019, www.digital-commons.usnwc.edu.

24. Note: As of January 23, 2020, the total US Navy battle force consisted of 293 vessels. However, one vessel is not yet commissioned (SSN-791 USS Delaware), and 73 were non-combat ships (minesweepers, surveillance ships, logistics ships, etc). When omitting those vessels, the US Navy fields a total combat force of 219 commissioned vessels. R. O'Rourke, "China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities—Background and Issues for Congress," *Congressional Research Service*, January 22, 2020, www.fas.org; "Ship Battle Forces," US Navy Naval Vessel Register (NVR), updated January 23, 2020, www.nvr.navy.mil; and "Active In Commission," US Navy Naval Vessel Register (NVR), updated January 23, 2020, www.nvr.navy.mil.

and CCG vessels a major paranaval auxiliary force. Together, these so-called “three navies” constitute a gray-, white- and blue-hulled force, with nothing comparable in the US alliance network.²⁵ China recently demonstrated how its increasing maritime capabilities are impinging on the sovereign interests of its neighbors. In late 2019, with the help of new outposts built on artificial island reefs in the Spratly Islands, China was able to sustain a prolonged CCG presence in the waters of Indonesia’s Natuna Islands.²⁶

Perceptions of US Decline

A more powerful China flexing its muscle at sea and in new domains is casting longstanding US regional leadership and commitment in a harsher light in East Asia and the Pacific. Despite formidable headwinds,²⁷ the Chinese economy is still seen as the dominant driver of the regional economy. Nearly four of five Southeast Asians polled view China as the dominant economic power, and twice as many (52 versus 26 percent) see China rather than the United States as the dominant political and strategic power in the region.²⁸ Perhaps a protracted economic downturn, exacerbated by the coronavirus crisis, may begin to alter these views. Certainly, China’s economy faces major structural problems and suffers from a misallocation of resources to bloated state-owned enterprises, while banks hold a mountain of bad debt.²⁹

Meanwhile, the United States has shown signs of retrenchment from Asia. The 2003 US intervention in Iraq, the 2008 global financial crisis, the 2012 incident in which China coercively displaced America’s ally the Philippines at Scarborough Reef, the failure to follow the rhetorical flourishes of a “pivot” to Asia with sufficient resources, and the Trump administration’s decision to withdraw from the Trans-Pacific Partnership without a workable alternative as part of a less predictable and more nationalistic policy: all of these instances and more reinforce a perceived pattern of retrenching behavior, especially in contrast to Beijing’s Belt and

25. A. S. Erickson, “Numbers Matter: China’s Three ‘Navies’ Each Have the World’s Most Ships,” *The National Interest*, February 26, 2018.

26. N. Mandhana, “In South China Sea Confrontation, Indonesia Resists China—Cautiously,” *The Wall Street Journal*, January 17, 2020, www.wsj.com.

27. For instance, see J. Lee, *China’s Economic Slowdown: Root Causes, Beijing’s Response and Strategic Implications for the US and Allies*, Washington DC: Hudson Institute, December 2019, www.s3.amazonaws.com.

28. *Ibid.*, p 3.

29. See a roundtable discussion with P. M. Cronin, J. Lee, N. Lardy and T. J. Duesterberg, “Transcript: Understanding China’s Economic Slowdown: Countering Belt and Road and Beijing’s Plans to Dominate Global Innovation,” Hudson Institute, February 18, 2020, www.hudson.org.

Road Initiative and active diplomacy.³⁰ Questioning of US staying power and reliability is not new, but the combination of China's growing economic weight and an "America First" strategy that raises doubts about Washington's commitment to preserving the post-World War II order is undermining the Trump administration's ability to mobilize allies and partners around a shared set of principles and goals. For instance, a recent survey of elite opinion in Southeast Asia found that 7 of 10 ASEAN member states would choose China over the United States if forced to do so.³¹ At a minimum, the United States is conveying mixed signals at a time when heightened major-power competition requires far more vigilant and productive engagement.³²

The Trump administration's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy could well serve as a basis for rallying like-minded countries to stand up to unilateral changes to the status quo and threatening to settle disputes through military force.³³ However, as with the efforts of the Obama administration before it, and the George W. Bush administration before that, a real pivot to Asia requires a sustained focus on the region, backed by an ability to find sufficient resources to preserve a favorable balance of power. As elites in Asia increasingly see China as supplanting US power, the US Navy faces a welter of challenges to maintain the current readiness for increasingly contested environments, while simultaneously investing in future capabilities.³⁴

Over the past 25 years, China and the United States have been engaged in what Michael Fabey calls a "warm war."³⁵ However, they have arguably approached naval competition with very different degrees of urgency. Fabey

30. Yet there is a positive counter-narrative to be made, such as the one I argue regarding the South China Sea. See P. M. Cronin, "The United States and the South China Sea," in L. Buszynski and D. T. Hai, editors, *The South China Sea: From a Regional Maritime Dispute to Geo-Strategic Competition Book*, London: Routledge, 2020, www.routledge.com.

31. While a slight majority (53.6 versus 46.4 percent) of those polled preferred the United States, the US was the choice of the majority among only Vietnam, the Philippines, and Singapore. See the *State of Southeast Asia: 2020 Survey Report*, Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, January 2020, www.iseas.edu.sg

32. See P. M. Cronin, "Southeast Asia and U.S.-China Rivalry: A Washington Perspective," *ASEAN Focus*, December 2019, www.iseas.edu.sg.

33. P. M. Cronin, "America's Indo-Pacific Strategy," in S. Nagao, ed., *Strategies for the Indo-Pacific: Perceptions of the U.S. and Like-Minded Countries*, Washington DC: Hudson Institute, December 2019, www.s3.amazonaws.com.

34. For instance, see, S. Cropsey, *Seabindness: How Political Neglect is Choking American Seapower and What to Do About It*, New York: Encounter Books, 2017; and the Government Accountability Office's J. H. Pendleton, "Rebuilding Ship, Submarine, and Aviation Readiness Will Require Time and Sustained Management Attention," Testimony Before the Subcommittees on Seapower and Readiness and Management Support, Committee on Armed Services, US Senate, December 12, 2018, www.gao.gov

35. M. Fabey, *Crashback: The Power Clash Between the U.S. and China in the Pacific*, New York: Scribner, 2017, p.1.

states that, on the US side, “The truth is that in the lean years since the end of the Cold War, as the navy has shrunk from almost six hundred ships to fewer than three hundred, it has had to fight for every ship and every dollar—and the navy has consistently lost.”³⁶

As the United States struggles to maintain and adapt a legacy naval force, China is closing the qualitative gap in its major combat ships and aircraft. It is gaining sea denial and sea control through an array of missiles that threaten America’s aircraft carrier strike groups and critical bases throughout the region. China is also leveraging the world’s best-armed coast guard and largest paramilitary force to achieve its expansive goals through gray-zone operations.³⁷

Importantly, the erosion of US military and naval supremacy is also being accelerated by China’s successful political warfare strategy and America’s sluggish response. Beijing is waging a whole-of-society “total competition.”³⁸ The techno-nationalist approach seeks to achieve economic preeminence on the back of emerging information-centric technologies such as 5G, Artificial Intelligence, robotics, 3D manufacturing, and quantum computing.³⁹ All of these are technologies that have both civilian and military value.

Competition Below the Threshold of War

While naval competition is vital, there is another competition worth considering. Political and irregular warfare is making a resurgence. Major and regional powers bent on revising the post-World War II global order, in whole or in part, are seeking to achieve their aims without triggering major conflict. Through shadow and covert warfare, as well as a variety of means designed to achieve success with little or no use of kinetic force, revisionist powers are eroding rules, coercing states, and weaponizing information.⁴⁰

The most recent US National Security Strategy highlights four state challengers at the forefront of revising the post-World War II rules-based order: major powers China and Russia, and regional powers Iran and North Korea.⁴¹ However, as a global economic and military power, China poses a

36. *Ibid.*, p. 248.

37. See A. S. Erickson and R. D. Martinson, eds., *China’s Maritime Gray Zone Operations*, Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2019.

38. P. M. Cronin and Ryan Neuhard, *Total Competition: China’s Challenge in the South China Sea*, Washington DC: CNAS, January 2020, www.cnas.org.

39. *Ibid.*

40. See S. McFate, *The New Rules of War: Victory in the Age of Durable Disorder*, New York: William Morrow, 2020.

41. *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington DC: The White House, December 2017, www.whitehouse.gov.

far more complex and dangerous challenge than the other revisionist powers. While there is a bipartisan consensus on the China challenge, we remain divided over what to do about it.⁴² How much should we decouple our supply chains and technology links? When should we confront Beijing, and when should we engage? How much risk can we afford to take in responding to the world's second-largest economy? While we seek answers, if not a consensus, to these and other questions, Xi wields dominant power across all of China, and the PRC appears to have a clear strategy, with nothing like the political checks and balances and transparency of a moderate democratic state.

In a recent report, *Total Competition: China's Challenge in the South China Sea*, Ryan Neuhard and I attempted to outline Beijing's variant of political warfare, especially as it applies to a critical regional flashpoint: the South China Sea.⁴³ Understanding China's total competition approach is essential to thinking about the naval balance in the Pacific. We call it "total competition," in contrast to "total warfare" and instead of political warfare because all wars are political, and the main idea is an indirect approach of winning without fighting. The CCP is interested more in what H. R. McMaster calls "cooption, coercion, and concealment" than it is in "lethality" (to pick a term central to DoD strategy). Total competition comprises five dimensions: economic, legal, psychological, military (especially maritime), and informational. But information cuts across all the aspects of the strategy and all activities. The growing importance of Big Data, narrative, cyber warfare, artificial intelligence (AI), quantum, and other issues explains why Beijing's total competition is at its core a desire for information dominance.

Concluding Thoughts

Denying Beijing's quest to become the region's dominant land and sea power will require more than traditional naval strength. A comprehensive strategy that understands the unfolding fourth industrial revolution and the Chinese government's problematic activities will be necessary to deny China's bid for maritime supremacy. In short, the United States does not merely face a rising competitor for primacy in the Pacific; it does so at a time when it is

42. Indeed, a recent Council on Foreign Relations monograph offers 22 prescriptions, and a report issued by the Center for a New American Security puts forth 100 recommendations. See R. D. Blackwill, *Implementing Grand Strategy Toward China: Twenty-Two U.S. Policy Prescriptions*, New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2020, www.cdn.cfr.org; and E. Ratner et al. *Rising to the China Challenge: Renewing American Competitive in the Indo-Pacific*, Washington DC: CNAS, December 2019, www.s3.amazonaws.com.

43. P. M. Cronin and R. Neuhard, *Total Competition: China's Challenge in the South China Sea*, Washington DC: CNAS, January 2020, www.cnas.org.

having difficulty finding strategic coherence and adequate resources. It also does so at a time when it is crucial to place conventional military power in a broader context of political warfare in the digital age of total competition.

With that in mind, the United States should consider making the following strategic adjustments:

First, the United States and its allies and partners must prepare for a range of contingencies. Beyond a possible North Korean missile attack, the principal concerns are a possible Taiwan invasion, and maritime coercion or naval conflict in the East or the South China Sea. In short, more must be done to shore up deterrence by denial, counter maritime coercion and prepare for possible short, sharp “informationized” warfare?

Second, the United States needs to strengthen rather than weaken its alliance network, building out a broader and more capable constellation of security partners.

Third, the US needs to reinforce and defend the rules-based order, rather than calling into question the basic multilateral framework of regional cooperation.

Fourth, the United States needs to push back on China’s total competition, adding military means that help to preserve deterrence by denial, but at a sustainable cost.⁴⁴

Fifth, in the context of the Pacific naval balance, the United States needs to garner more resources and spend it far more wisely to protect the desired balance of current and future capabilities. The administration’s recent proposed budget would cut shipbuilding but invest more in the competition over future information-based technologies.⁴⁵ A balance is needed.

Finally, some crucial questions require further deliberation and research.

First, how can the United States and allies maintain deterrence, prevent it from slipping, or restore it? Presumably, conventional deterrence by denial capabilities and networked security with partners are essential, but policymakers should consider the full toolkit.

Next, how can the United States reassure allies and partners while bolstering deterrence against major power adversaries? For instance, the US Navy has begun its first submarine patrol with low-yield nuclear weapons designed to preserve deterrence. Similarly, the interest in deploying mobile,

44. See P. Parameswaran, “Interview: Understanding Total Competition and China’s Challenge in the South China Sea,” *The Diplomat*, February 19, 2020, www.thediplomat.com.

45. L. Seligman, “Navy Prepares to Slash Funding for New Warships,” *Foreign Policy*, February 10, 2020, www.foreignpolicy.com.

long-range anti-ship ballistic missiles is also sincere, even though the process of trying to deploy them will create an inevitable political backlash from some quarters.

Finally, how can the United States and its allies and partners win the total competition with China, given that winning means avoiding major war while denying China or any single power exclusive control over the Western Pacific and maritime Asia? A winning approach requires the adoption of a similar total competition strategy, albeit one suited to democracies. It also requires a positive slate of activities to bolster the prevailing rule set, institutions, and allies and partners.

By finding adequate answers to these questions and making necessary policy adjustments, it remains possible to prevent allowing the Western Pacific and Indo-Pacific to fall into the exclusive control of a single predatory power.

Maritime Security and Territorial Issues: the Impact of Territorial Conflicts on Regional Security

Masashi Nishihara

Most nations facing the Western Pacific are engaged in varying degrees of maritime territorial disputes with their neighbors. Half of the Southeast Asian nations have territorial disagreements with China over the South China Sea, and in Northeast Asia Japan has territorial problems with Russia, both South and North Korea, and China. China and South Korea have overlapping air identification zones. All these disagreements affect the region's security and stability.

Territorial issues usually begin with rather simple disagreements over demarcation. But in time these become complicated by nationalistic emotions and national security, which then lead to such strategic factors as China emerging as a hegemonic power, the growing rivalry between China and the United States, and Russia's anxiety about Japan's deployment of US-made ballistic missiles. All this makes resolving territorial disagreements difficult. China, Russia, and South Korea have forcibly occupied what Japan claims as its own territories. The use of force in territorial disputes is rather common. For example, Russia forcibly annexed Crimea in 2004.

The South China Sea

Most of the territorial issues pertaining to Southeast Asia have been between China and its Southeast Asian neighbors. In 1949 the People's Republic of China affirmed its "historical" claim of sovereignty over 80 percent of the South China Sea, imposed a nine-dash line outside the disputed area in 1953, and reaffirmed it in 1958 with a 12-mile nautical territorial sea. In 1992 Beijing once again reaffirmed its claims through the Law of the Sea and, in 1996, through the ratification of the United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Vietnam and the Philippines, however, which had conflicting claims, naturally disagreed with China's unilateral decisions.

Today China argues that its sovereignty over the South China Sea constitutes its “core national interest.” That is, it wants to achieve a hegemonic position in the South China Sea by driving out the US presence and protecting its own military complex on Hainan Island. Accordingly, in July 2016 China ignored the ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague to support the Philippines’ case against China’s claims in the South China Sea. The Obama administration’s restrained support of this ruling encouraged China to turn the sea’s islets and reefs into manmade islands complete with airfields and other facilities.

China’s actions have only intensified its rivalry with the United States. As a result, the United States and its allies have begun conducting “freedom of navigation operations” to enforce their right of passage and to underscore that the South China Sea is international waters, not a Chinese lake.

The US-China rivalry has recently intensified. Chinese harassment of US warships has become commonplace, an example being a deliberate near-miss of a Chinese and an American destroyer near the Spratly Islands in late September 2018.

The ASEAN nations and China today are continuing their negotiations on a legally binding code of conduct. After the two sides spent ten years just to agree on a nonbinding Code of Declaration in 2002, they then spent another 17 years futilely discussing a binding code of conduct. Although they decided in 2019 that they would reach an agreement in three years, the prospects are not good.

The Northern Pacific, the Sea of Japan, and the East China Sea

One of Japan’s diplomatic challenges after World War II has been its inability to resolve three territorial problems with its neighbors: the Northern Territories (or South Kuril Islands) with Russia in the Northern Pacific, the Takeshima Islands (Korean: Dokdo) with South Korea in the Sea of Japan, and the Senkaku Islands (Chinese: Daiyotai) with China in the East China Sea.

Conflicts over the Northern Territories and the Takeshima Islands grew out of Japan’s defeat in World War II, when Japan was unable to make strong counterclaims against its neighbors, which then captured these islands by force.

The Northern Territories

Signed in 1854 and ratified in 1855, the Northern Territories became part of Hokkaido, one of the main islands of Japan, when Japan and Russia signed the Treaty of Amity (i.e. trade), initiating their official relationship. But then on August 18, 1945, three days after Japan announced its surrender with the Potsdam Declaration, Soviet troops moved in from the Kurile Islands into the Northern Territories. Thus Moscow not only broke the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact of 1941, expelling all of 17,385 residents before Japan signed the official instrument of surrender on September 2 of that year, but also it ignored the principle of “no territorial aggrandizement” specified in the Atlantic Charter of August 1941. Then in September 1951 when the US-led San Francisco peace treaty was signed, restoring Japan’s sovereignty, the Soviet Union refused to be a party to it. Hard negotiations between Tokyo and Moscow followed, and in October 1956 they agreed a joint declaration stipulating that the Soviet Union would “transfer” to Japan the Habomai and the Shikotan islets when a peace treaty was signed.

Although World War II ended 75 years ago, the two countries have not signed a peace treaty and Russia has not returned the Northern Territories, now renamed as the South Kuril Islands. Russia has slowly improved the islands’ economy; its current Russian population is about 17,000 people. Premier Dmitri Medvedev visited Etorofu (Iturup) in August 2019, and Russia has gradually increased its military buildup on the islands.

In addition, Russia has a new argument for not returning the islands to Japan: the Japanese plans to build bases for Aegis Ashore, US land-based ballistic missile defense systems, which Russia regards as a threat to its security on the captured islands.

The Takeshima Islands (Korean: Dokdo)

Although the Koreans have claimed that the Takeshima Islands, or what the Koreans call Dokdo, have been a part of Korea since the 12th century, their argument has been considered by Japan as questionable. Actually, they were no man’s land for many years. Japanese fishermen used the islands for hunting sea lions. The Japanese government officially administered the islands from 1905. In 1906 it taxed fishermen for catching sea lions in order to control overhunting. In addition, after World War II, the US forces stationed in Japan used the islands for bombing practice.

In May 1951, before the San Francisco peace treaty was signed between Japan and the Allied powers in September 1951, the South Korean government asked that the draft treaty be revised to exclude the Takeshima

Islands from Japan's sovereignty. Even though the United States refused, Seoul did not back down. Then, in January 1952, President Syngman Rhee of South Korea unilaterally drew a north-south line (the Rhee Line) in the middle of the Sea of Japan, covering the Takeshima Islands.

The Japanese government's position was that Japan's sovereignty over the Takeshima Islands was clear and that there was no territorial problem between the two countries. In July 1953, however, after a patrol vessel of the Japanese Maritime Safety Agency (now the Japan Coast Guard) demanded that Korean fishing boats leave "Japan's territorial waters," the Korean coast guard fired on it.

Since South Korea thus forcibly took over the Takeshima Islands, they have been under Seoul's control to this date. This marked another factor of diplomatic tensions between the two governments. South Korea has since built a military base, housing about 40 soldiers. South Korea also disseminates the term "East Sea" to replace "Sea of Japan." Indeed, the Koreans retain the islands, with both government and private sources propagating the islands' Korean identity. Today they are open to Korean tourists, and nationwide campaigns for their retention are held in many public places, including public buses, television commercials, sports stadiums as well as school textbooks. In August 2012 President Lee Myung-bak visited the islands, souring relations between Tokyo and Seoul.

In July 2019 the dispute between Japan and South Korea over the Takeshima Islands' sovereignty spread to Russia, when Russian and Chinese bombers flew close to the islands. A South Korean F-15 jet fighter intercepted them with 40 warning shots for violating "South Korea's territorial airspace and defense identification zone." The Japanese government also warned Russia about flying its aircraft "over Japan's territory" and admonished South Korea for "having scrambled a third party's aircraft over Japan's territory." Although it was a minor incident, it foreshadowed the binational disputes developing into multinational disputes.

The Socotra Rock

Even though the Socotra Rock (Korean: Ieodo and Chinese: Suyan Rock) is 4.6 meters underwater, South Korea claims that it is covered by its EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone) and China claims that it is part of its continental shelf. In 2006 the Korean government constructed the Korean Ieodo Research Station (KIORS) to monitor weather conditions and maritime features in the area. The station is a 76-meter tall building, of which 40 meters is underwater. China is continuing to protest the construction. In

2012, the Chinese government stated that China would step up its patrols and enforce its domestic law over Ieodo.

The Socotra Rock is also covered by both South Korea's and China's air identification zones, thereby creating an invitation to conflict.

The Senkaku Islands

China insists that its own historical maps of the sea from the 16th through the 19th centuries showing the Senkaku Islands (Chinese: Daiyotai) justify its claim to them, despite having no legal basis for ownership. In fact, after investigating whether they might belong to China, Japan took possession of the Senkaku Islands in 1895, and, between 1895 and 1946, Japan managed the islands. At one time, as many as 200 Japanese fishermen lived there, overseeing a factory preparing dried bonito. But by 1940 all of them had left the islands.

When the US military government in Okinawa controlled the islands, they were used for target practice. In 1953, when the Chinese newspaper the *People's Daily* described the growing anti-US feelings in Okinawa, it referred to the Senkaku Islands as part of Okinawa. Moreover, in June 1971 when the United States signed an agreement with Japan to return Okinawa, the agreement specifically referred to the Senkaku Islands as part of Okinawa. This fact supports the Japanese government's position that there is no territorial problem between Japan and China that needs to be resolved.

However, by the time the Senkaku Islands were returned to Japan in 1972, both Taiwan and China were claiming ownership of the islands, based on a report by the UN referring to the high potential of oil deposits in the East China Sea. Some Chinese sources insist that the Daiyotai have belonged to China since the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). In 1970 Taiwan hoisted Kuomintang's official flag over the islands.

In September 1972, when Japan's Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka visited Beijing with the goal of restoring diplomatic relations, Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping proposed to put off negotiations on sovereignty of the islands "until the next generation." Even so, China started applying pressure to Japan both politically and militarily to give up its control of the islands.

In 2010 and 2012, relations between Tokyo and Beijing deteriorated. In September 2010, a Chinese fishing boat intentionally collided with a Japanese Coast Guard vessel patrolling near the Senkaku Islands. The coast guard's arresting of the fishing boat's captain led to wide anti-Japanese demonstrations in Beijing and other cities. Then in September 2012, anti-Japanese demonstrations resumed, when three privately owned islands

among the Senkaku Islands were sold to the government. In 2013 China's Foreign Ministry enhanced the level of its claims by stating that the Senkaku Islands belonged to China's "core national interest."

Both the Obama and the Trump administrations made it clear that, based on Article 5 of the Japan-US Security Treaty, the United States would take military action to protect the Senkaku Islands if China took military action. Accordingly, China held back.

Today tensions are high over the East China Sea, as Chinese Coast Guard vessels and military aircraft regularly approach the islands and often enter their contiguous zones and territorial waters. China has deployed large patrol vessels, supported by the PLA Navy, with even a submarine entering the contiguous zone. Between April and December 2019, Japan's Air Self-Defense Force scrambled 523 times, the second highest number, against Chinese aircraft approaching the Senkaku Islands. With its now greater military presence, China obviously is trying to shift the balance of forces in the East China Sea.

Future Territorial Issues

Territorial conflicts in the Western Pacific, extending from the Northern Territories down to the South China Sea, are no longer merely territorial issues, but essentially regional security problems. Big countries become involved for strategic reasons. The United States has a presence in the South China Sea and the Senkaku Islands, and Russia is getting concerned about Japan's US-made ballistic missiles, which could affect the security of the Northern Territories (South Kurils). Russian and Chinese military aircraft have jointly flown over the Takeshima Islands, apparently testing Japan's and South Korea's reactions. Clearly, Russia and China have been aware of the political friction between the two countries.

Countries involved in territorial disputes obviously try to settle them to their advantage, and to do this, China, Russia, and South Korea have used force: China for the South China Sea, Russia for the Northern Territories, and South Korea for the Takeshima Islands.

Unfortunately, resorting to force is often more effective than achieving a legal solution. Although Japan has sought legal solutions rather than using force, this has allowed China, Russia, and South Korea to rely on quicker solutions, namely, force. Peaceful resolutions of territorial problems work only when the parties involved trust one another. China, Russia, and South Korea, however, have refused to access an international arbitration process.

Many laws and organizations have been established to resolve regional and international disputes. In East Asia, regional institutions such as ASEAN, the ASEAN Regional Forum, summit and ministerial meetings of Japan, China, and South Korea, and the East Asia Summit are expected to help resolve regional security issues. However, even though the ASEAN Regional Forum foreign ministers meet annually, they avoid discussing territorial issues, because they know they cannot agree.

Many countries tend to ignore international laws and institutions, unless they are useful to their national interests. As mentioned earlier, China, while stressing the importance of the UNCLOS reference to its continental shelf, ignored the 2016 ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration.

For 27 years since 1992, ASEAN has been negotiating with China to establish a legally binding code of conduct regarding the South China Sea. In 2019 the two sides agreed to complete their work by 2022. But because China benefits from prolonging negotiations, this latest pledge probably will prove to be a useless exercise for ASEAN. Moreover, even if ASEAN and China do produce a binding code of conduct, China will probably disregard it, just as it disregards Vietnamese and Philippine territorial claims. For example, Chinese Coast Guard vessels often use water cannons to drive off Vietnamese and Philippine ships and intentionally collide with them to warn them away from disputed areas.

Japan is finding it almost impossible to retake the Northern Territories and the Takeshima Islands peacefully. If any country wants to prevent another party from seizing a disputed territory by force, it should defend its claim with armed forces rather than just making legal arguments. In fact, a balance-of-power approach does work here. The Senkaku Islands are a good example. Japan's alliance with the United States, maintaining a balanced force vis-à-vis China, has been successful in preventing China from seizing the Senkaku Islands by force.

Resolving territorial problems peacefully would widen the scope of Japan's foreign policy options and diplomatic activities. But because it cannot expect a peaceful resolution in the near future, Japan must continue to make clear and persistent arguments regarding territorial claims and at the same time prevent territorial disputes from destabilizing regional stability and security in the Western Pacific.

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Europeans and Maritime Security in the Indo-Pacific: Demonstrating a More Proactive Commitment

Céline Pajon

The maritime area connecting Europe and Asia-Pacific – now labelled as the Indo-Pacific area – is an essential zone: it not only hosts vital maritime trade routes for the two regions, but is also the central stage of Sino-American geostrategic competition. In this area, tensions at sea are increasing, due to more assertive territory and resources appropriation strategies, persistent crimes at sea (piracy, illegal fishing, etc), increased environmental risks (climate-change impact on the oceans and sea level) and challenges to the freedom of navigation.

European countries have obvious economic interests in keeping these sea-lanes open, secure and stable. They also care about maintaining the Law of the Sea and fostering a multipolar region to mitigate the negative effects of great-power competition. As the Sino-US rivalry is souring, expectations for an enhanced European security commitment in the Indo-Pacific have been growing.

In fact, the Europeans are interested, legitimate and experienced players to contribute to the maritime security of this area. They already have extensive experience in the Western Indian Ocean of tackling transnational crimes at sea and building the maritime capacities of developing countries. The EU has also started to adopt a more consistent Asian policy, with maritime security at the core. As discussions over strengthening its strategic autonomy are developing, stepping up European engagement in the region is important to increase Brussels' leverage in dealing with Washington and Beijing. The Europeans are thus developing a multifaceted, multilayered approach to maritime security in the Indo-Pacific. This more strategic stance increasingly relies on the EU member states' naval capacities and particular approaches to the Indo-Pacific.

The EU as an active, multifaceted maritime player in the Western Indian Ocean

The EU has been a proactive actor in tackling piracy off the Horn of Africa and in the Western Indian Ocean, with Operation Atalanta, set up in 2008. The EU EUNAVFOR was the first multinational responder to tackle the Somali piracy and monitor illegal fishing activities. It was soon joined by the US-led Combined Task Force 151 (CTF151) and NATO's Ocean Shield operation (2009). However, the Atalanta Operation alone arranged legal and procedural measures to properly handle the prosecution of arrested pirates.¹ Transfer agreements were set up with Kenya, Seychelles, Mauritius and Tanzania between 2009 and 2014.

In addition, several programs on fostering maritime security through capacity-building activities, information-sharing and operational coordination in the Western Indian Ocean have been launched through the European Development Fund, such as EUCAP Nestor (2012-2016, then EUCAP Somalia), MASE (Program to Promote Regional Maritime Security, 2012-2018) and CRIMARIO (Critical Maritime Routes, Indian Ocean, 2015-19). This has led to the build-up of law-enforcement agencies in the region, and the creation of several information-sharing and coordination centers to promote better maritime domain awareness (MDA).²

MDA is an enabling tool for maritime cooperation as it allows better monitoring of the seas and analysis of what is happening in order to respond in a timely and efficient manner.³ It requires data-gathering from a diversity of actors (civilian and military, public and private), monitoring assets, and analysis. Information-sharing is key, and should allow for more transparency and trust. In this perspective, an information-sharing and incident-management tool, IORIS (Indian Ocean Regional Information Sharing platform), was launched with the support of the EU in 2018. And the CRIMARIO II Program was launched (2020-2023) in order to expand the use of the IORIS platform in the Eastern Indian Ocean and South-East Asia.

A legitimate actor, the EU has demonstrated its ability to coordinate an international maritime presence – through the Maritime Security Center of

1. J. Larsen, "The European Union as a Security Actor. Perspectives from the Maritime Domain", *DIIS Report*, 2019:06, 2019, p.16-17.

2. C. Bueger, "Effective Maritime Domain Awareness in the Western Indian Ocean", *Policy Brief*, ISS, 104, June 2017, p. 2.

3. R. D. Thiele, "Fostering Cooperation in East Asia via Maritime Domain Awareness", *ISPSW Strategy Series*, n°346, May 2015, p. 5.

the Horn of Africa (MSCHOA) for example⁴, to handle the various aspects of maritime issues through a unique civilo-military approach, and engage with the East-Asian navies joining the operations (in particular from China, South Korea, Japan). This strong European experience tackling maritime security is not widely recognized and assessed. However, it demonstrates the kind of role the EU can play in the broader Indo-Pacific.

Maritime security at the core of EU policy on Asia

The updated EU Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS) adopted in 2018 states that the EU has a role as a global maritime security provider, in particular in maritime zones of great strategic interest including the Horn of Africa and the South China Sea (others being the Gulf of Guinea and the Caribbean Sea)⁵. In a similar way, and building on the 2016 EU Global Strategy, the 2018 Conclusions on Enhanced EU Security Cooperation in and with Asia⁶ call for a deepening of security cooperation with key partners (China, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea, ASEAN), and identify maritime security as the first priority area. Capacity-building activities to help strengthen the ability of Asian countries to better address traditional and non-traditional maritime security issues are encouraged, as well as deepening cooperation on upholding key international normative frameworks, including UNCLOS.

This agenda is drawing on the EU-ASEAN High-Level Dialogue on Maritime Security Co-operation that has been going on since 2013. The EU has started to build up the ASEAN capabilities and resiliency through various programs and trainings on maritime law enforcement, sharing of best practices, and a comprehensive approach to maritime crisis management. In addition, the EU is active in the Asian Regional Forum (ARF) as it has been co-chairing the ARF Inter-sessional meetings on Maritime Security since 2018. And the EU is a candidate to join multilateral security organizations such as the ASEAN Defense Minister Plus process and the East Asia Summit.

Finally, the maritime agenda is also central in EU's strategic partnerships with Japan, India and Vietnam.⁷ The maritime dimension is

4. E. Pejsova, "The EU as a Maritime Security Provider", *EUISS Brief 13*, December 2019, p. 5.

5. "Revised European Union Maritime Security Strategy Action Plan", Brussels, 26 June 2018, p. 3.

6. "Deepening EU Security Cooperation with Asian Partners: Council Adopts Conclusions", European Council, 28 May 2018. www.consilium.europa.eu

7. For example, see G. Mohan, "Prospects for the New EU Strategy on India. Game Changer or Business as Usual?", *Asie.Visions 108*, Ifri, September 2019.

less obvious in the EU 2018 Connectivity strategy, but this could change with the Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure between the EU and Japan⁸ signed last September, as Tokyo has an interest in maritime connectivity.

The EU is ready to contribute to maritime security in the Indo-Pacific area. Brussels will focus as a priority on low-end types of activities, such as crisis prevention, training and capacity-building. The EU low-key security profile can actually be an asset in promoting a multilateral solution, functional cooperation and fostering trust at a time of Sino-American rivalry.⁹ That said, the return of geopolitics is also pushing the Europeans to adopt a more realistic and consistent policy to defend their interests and play a role in Asia.

The Europeans becoming more “geopolitical” players in maritime Asia

A more realistic approach

While the EU is championing the Rule of Law, Brussels failed to issue a strong statement to support the South China Sea Award of 12 July 2016. At that time, Hungary and Greece opposed the move, in consideration of their relations with Beijing. This episode showcased the differing views among the member states and has weakened the EU’s position as a normative superpower. This failure was also a wake-up call to better address the divisions among member states, define their common interests and assert them vis à vis China.

In particular, a more realistic assessment of China has been made, symbolized by the European Commission and EEAS Strategic Outlook¹⁰ of March 2019 stating that China is a “systemic rival” and that its geopolitical endeavors “present security issues for the EU, already in a short- to mid-term perspective”. It goes on to specifically state: “China’s maritime claims in the South China Sea and the refusal to accept the binding arbitration rulings issued under the UNCLOS affect the international legal order and make it harder to resolve tensions affecting sea lanes of communication vital

8. “The Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure between the European Union and Japan”, Brussels, 27 September 2019.

9. E. Pejsova, “The EU as a Maritime Security Provider”, *op. cit.* p. 9.

10. “European Commission and HR/VP Contribution to the European Council EU-China – A Strategic Outlook”, 12 March 2019. [www//ec.europa.eu](http://ec.europa.eu)

to the EU's economic interests". Also, efforts to present a more European united front in relation to China were made in 2019.¹¹

That said, it is still difficult to achieve any consensus on the South China Sea issue for example, considering the dependence of some EU states on China. For this reason, we are likely to see the emergence of clusters of European countries with special interests and capacities to stand up together and act in Asia and vis à vis China.¹² For example, the UK, France and Germany issued a statement last August to share their concerns about the situation in the South China Sea.¹³ The E3 also called for an early conclusion of a rules-based, co-operative and effective code of conduct consistent with UNCLOS.

The EU, with no naval force of its own, is often seen as a weak military player, thus unable to really enforce the principles it defends. This could gradually change.

Showing the flag: Relying on the member states' naval capacities

The 2014 Maritime Security Strategy encourages EU members' navies to "play a strategic role at sea and from the sea", including for supporting freedom of navigation in international waters. Accordingly, France, which holds territories, troops and a large EEZ across the Indo-Pacific, supports the strict application of UNCLOS, contributes to actions against crime at sea, and is keen on actively demonstrating its commitment to the freedom of navigation. While not taking sides on sovereignty matters, Paris has consistently sent ships to sail in the East and South China Sea since 2014.¹⁴ Last June, the aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle* was dispatched to Singapore during the Shangri-La Dialogue. The French Minister of the Armed Forces Florence Parly then promised that French vessels would sail at least twice a year in the South China Sea and continue upholding international law in a "steady, non-confrontational but obstinate way." France's enduring commitment to the region is underpinned by its Indo-Pacific strategy, designed in 2018 and promoted at the highest political level.

11. In March 2019, President Macron invited Angela Merkel and Jean-Claude Juncker to join him for a meeting with Xi Jinping in Paris.

12. M. Reiterer, "Asia as Part of the EU's Global Security Strategy: Reflections on a More Strategic Approach", in *Changing Waters: Towards a new EU Asia Strategy*, LSE Ideas Special Report, April 2016, p. 68.

13. "E3 joint Statement on the Situation in the South China Sea", 29 August 2019.

14. "France and Security in the Indo-Pacific", French Ministry of the Armed Forces, May 2019.

The UK has also projection capabilities to Asia and has sent three ships since 2018 to exercise freedom of navigation in the South China Sea. In 2017, London announced that its future new aircraft carriers would be deployed in priority to this area. While the UK has important interests in the Indo-Pacific area, Brexit also triggered a more proactive multifaceted engagement in the region. In the post-Brexit era, the UK could still associate with EU countries to jointly promote common principles.

The next step is to coordinate the European presence in the area. Back in 2016, then French Defense Minister Jean-Yves le Drian emphasized the need to discourage unilateral coups de force in the China seas, for fear that such actions might expand in other strategic areas like the Mediterranean Sea, and called for a regular, coordinated and visible European presence in the South China Sea. Accordingly, 52 British troops and their helicopters, as well as 12 officers from European countries and one EU official joined the French naval mission *Jeanne d'Arc* in 2017, and UK ships sailed alongside the French naval group in 2018.

In August 2019, the concept of an EU “Coordinated Maritime Presence” was agreed by EU Defense Ministers at an informal meeting in Helsinki. The aim is to ensure a coordinated presence at sea, based on a voluntary forces contribution by EU member states, under national control. The first test is set up in the Strait of Hormuz, with the EMASOH (European Maritime Awareness mission in the Strait of Hormuz) mission kickstarted by France in January 2020. This provides new flexibility for the EU to show the flag and set up a multinational naval presence outside of the PSDC framework – thus evading the necessity to reach consensus to act among all member states.¹⁵ It also helps to affirm European strategic autonomy vis à vis the United States.

In the future, such a “European Task Group” could sail the South China Sea for political signaling, naval diplomacy and information-gathering.

Conclusion

The EU already has solid experience in promoting maritime security in the Western Indian Ocean and is willing to act as a security provider in the Indo-Pacific region. Faced with growing geopolitical tensions, Brussels has recently consolidated its Asian and China policy to make it more strategic and relevant, and is expanding its toolbox so as to be considered a relevant security player. While it is likely to stay away from hard security matters, the EU can still play a valuable role in the maritime security of the region,

15. J. Larsen, *The European Union as a Security Actor. Perspectives from the Maritime Domain*, *op. cit.*, p. 40-41.

especially in the Indian Ocean, where it maintains the most important interests.

First, Europeans are pursuing a balanced and inclusive approach in the region that helps to mitigate the negative effects of great-power competition by providing an alternative to the regional countries and favoring multilateral solutions and a multipolar Indo-Pacific. Second, Europeans are building up maritime domain awareness, a key tool to develop cooperation on all maritime issues. Third, the EU is an important normative power, which is all the more important when Rule of Law and other principles are being constantly tested. Brussels is also likely to act as a norm-setter for new governance issues touching the ocean (protection of biodiversity, deep-sea mining, marine energy, etc). For example, on 22-24 April 2020, the European Commission in association with the European External Action service launched the International Ocean Governance Forum.

Further issues should be discussed to really step up European commitment to Indo-Pacific maritime security, such as more strategic use of the European Development Fund in the area (prioritization of projects, proper communication and narrative). It will be also important for Europeans to concretize their coordination, if not cooperation, with their partners in the region.

THE FUTURE OF THE KOREAN PENINSULA

Koreas at the Center? South Korea, North Korea, and their Quest for Autonomy

Ramon Pacheco Pardo

The year 2020 has started with stalemate in inter-Korean relations and US-North Korea relations, along with friction between South Korea and the United States but signs of de-escalating tensions between South Korea and Japan. In other words, from a diplomatic point of view, North Korea is in a worse position than it was in early 2019; South Korea and the United States are in the same position they have been in almost since President Donald Trump took office, and South Korea and Japan are seeking to leave behind the low point in relations of mid-2019. Both change and continuity are therefore part of the geopolitics of the Korean Peninsula.

This is a reminder of one of the truisms of Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asian affairs: relations among key players tend to be in constant flux. Indeed, under President Trump even the US-South Korea and US-Japan alliances are on shaky ground. With the rise of China and the concomitant shift in structural power between Washington and Beijing, this state of fluidity is set to continue. The Koreas, thus, have no option but to adapt their behavior to the changing structure, and anticipate and take a proactive approach towards their international relations. Otherwise, they will be caught in the flow of events – rather than being able to shape them.

Indeed, an underexplored aspect of Korean Peninsula geopolitics is that both Koreas are clearly seeking to be masters of their own destiny. Certainly, the centuries-old ‘shrimp among whales’ fatalism cutting across much of Korean history remains a powerful force across the Korean Peninsula. However, President Moon Jae-in, taking a cue from previous South Korean presidents, is seeking to continue to develop an independent foreign policy – including towards North Korea, relations with the United States, and other Northeast Asian partners. This position is shared among both liberals and younger conservatives. Chairman Kim Jong-un, meanwhile, wants to decrease North Korea’s economic and diplomatic reliance on China (and Russia). His grandfather and father might have harbored the same wish

under the banner of *Juche*, but were not able to steer North Korea in this direction.

Whether the Koreans are successful in their quest for autonomy and to drive Korean Peninsula affairs remains to be seen. However, their push to be in the driver's seat seems to be structural rather than rhetorical – as it was during most of the Cold War and, for North Korea, early 1990s. Therefore, it is a force to be reckoned with.

Summit Diplomacy between North Korea and the US

Trump and Kim have held two summits, met in Panmunjom, and signed a joint statement indicating their wish for better relations, peace, and denuclearization. Trump and his administration have repeatedly indicated that they are willing to support North Korea's economic development in exchange for denuclearization. Kim is on record saying that he is willing to have North Korea denuclearize. In theory, the scene is set to launch a process involving North Korea taking steps towards denuclearization in exchange for economic support and a peace regime.

As of early 2020, however, US-North Korea relations have reached an impasse. Bilateral working-level talks were last held in October. Pyongyang has threatened to resume ICBM and nuclear tests. Trump, distracted by an impeachment trial and other foreign policy matters ranging from trade negotiations with China to tensions with Iran, seems not to be as keen on a deal with North Korea as many analysts assumed he was. Indeed, some have suggested that Trump's erratic approach towards the North Korean nuclear issue is at least partly to blame for the lack of progress in US-North Korea relations.¹

North Korea, however, is equally to blame for the diplomatic stalemate – if not the main culprit. Essentially, Kim wants removal of the last five rounds of UN sanctions imposed in 2016-17 in exchange for the dismantlement of the Yongbyon nuclear complex. This is a non-starter for the Trump administration, which believes that sanctions are the reason why North Korea is willing to discuss denuclearization. It might be that Kim can take a wait-and-see approach until Trump's impeachment trial is over, or even until this year's US presidential election. Absent an ICBM or nuclear test, diplomacy will continue.

1. H. P. Jung, "Trump Is More Vulnerable Than Ever to Kim Jong Un's Nuclear Extortion", *Foreign Policy*, 8 November 2019.

Pyongyang, however, needs a deal leading to sanctions relief and normalization of relations with Washington more than Washington needs Pyongyang to move towards denuclearization. Kim might think that he has the upper hand over Trump, and indeed there are analysts who believe that the North Korean leader is masterfully manipulating the US president.² In reality, Pyongyang will have to sign a workable deal with Washington at some point – whether with Trump or whoever replaces him later this year or in five years' time. For Kim can only fully realize the economic development half of his *Byungjin* vision with sanctions relief and, eventually, a normalization process with the United States leading to private investment as well as grants and loans from international institutions.

Even in the closely related area of inter-Korean diplomacy and relations, North Korea gives the impression of being the driver, but the reality is more nuanced. It is true that the Moon government clearly wants more inter-Korean economic exchanges and diplomacy, even if it will not breach the sanctions regime. But it is Pyongyang that needs good relations with South Korea to, eventually, reduce economic dependence on China and Russia and, at any time, get support to steer the United States towards diplomacy. Post-Cold War history shows that lower US-North Korea tensions are facilitated by good inter-Korean relations.³

The Two Koreas and Relations with China and the United States

The positioning of South and North Korea in an era of growing Sino-American rivalry matters. A new conflict in the Korean Peninsula is unthinkable. But South Korea's support for the initiatives of one or the other, North Korea's wish to reduce reliance on China, and the influence that both superpowers try to project over Korean Peninsula affairs matter both in the Korean Peninsula itself and Northeast Asia at large. The end of the Cold War and subsequent normalization of diplomatic relations between South Korea and China upended certainties dating back to the Korean War. The rise of China, Kim's leadership style, and underlying South Korea-US tensions since Trump took office have made relations between both Koreas on the one hand and China and the United States on the other unpredictable.

In the case of South Korea, Moon has been building on the push by all South Korean presidents since the transition to democracy in the late 1980s

2. C. Lee, "In Kim's Threats and Appeasement, Experts See Move to Manipulate Trump", *VOA*, 18 August 2019.

3. R. Pacheco Pardo, *North Korea-US Relations from Kim Jong Il to Kim Jong Un*, London: Routledge, 2019.

to forge a middle-power identity, including a more independent foreign policy. In practical terms, the Moon government has thus refrained from unnecessarily antagonizing China. The experience of the Park Geun-hye government following the announcement of the deployment of THAAD, when China imposed sanctions and Seoul felt that the US government did not provide the support it could have in return, has shown the Moon government the potential pitfalls of supporting US-led initiatives that China rejects. The obvious example is the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy, which Seoul is unlikely to endorse even if Trump himself has pressed Moon to do.⁴ Instead, Seoul will stick to the message that its own New Southern Policy is complementary to FOIP.⁵ The days when South Korea would simply follow any US initiative seemingly are over.

Concurrently, the Moon government has not shied away from open confrontation with the Trump administration. Disagreements include US demands for inter-Korean cooperation to essentially follow US-North Korea relations, the Trump government's reaction to the Japan-South Korea trade dispute, the US raising "competition-related concerns" following the revision of KORUS, and US demands for a fivefold increase in SMA payments from South Korea. The latter is particularly symptomatic of the extent to which Seoul is willing to openly defend its position. The Moon government has openly stated that negotiations are not going well.⁶ This shows that South Korea will not just quietly accept demands from its ally and will fight its corner.

The above does not suggest that South Korea is about to leave the United States and embrace China. It should be remembered that the alliance with the United States has the support of over 90 percent of South Koreans.⁷ Seoul will support Chinese projects like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) when it suits its interests. BRI, for example, fits very well with the Moon government's New Northern Policy.⁸ But the case of THAAD under the Park government or the forcefulness with which the Moon government reacted to the Sino-Russian violation of South Korean air space⁹ show that relations

4. The White House, "President Donald J. Trump's Visit to the Republic of Korea", *The White House*, 8 November 2017.

5. For a detailed explanation of the New Southern Policy, see Presidential Committee on New Southern Policy, *Policy*, available at www.nsp.go.kr

6. J. Lee, S. Cha and H. Shin, "U.S. Breaks Off Defense Cost Talks, as South Korea Balks at \$5 Billion Demand", *Reuters*, 19 November 2019.

7. K. Friedhoff, "While Positive towards US Alliance, South Koreans Want to Counter Trump's Demands on Host-Nation Support", *The Chicago Council on Global Affairs*, 16 December 2019.

8. For a detailed explanation of the New Northern Policy, see the Presidential Committee on Northern Economic Cooperation, *Vision and Objective*, available at www.bukbang.go.kr

9. S.-H. Choe, "South Korean Jets Fire Warning Shots toward Russian Military Plane", *New York Times*, 23 July 2019.

with China are not unidimensional. Considering Korean history, this could not be any other way.

The case of North Korea under Kim is of interest insofar as his personal relationship with President Xi Jinping is not good. Kim and Xi only met for the first time in March 2018, after the first Trump-Kim summit was announced and more than six years after Kim took office.¹⁰ Indeed, poor Sino-North Korean relations under Kim led Beijing to support the five rounds of ever-more stringent sanctions imposed by the UN in 2016-17. Certainly, relations improved in 2018-19. Also, China's interest in a stable North Korea has not disappeared. However, relations between Beijing and Pyongyang have been clearly weakening since the end of the Cold War. North Korea's loathing of its economic dependence on China does not help. "Lips and teeth" they are no more.

Indeed, one of the reasons why North Korea would like to improve relations with the United States is to show its independence from China. Diplomatic relations with Washington would put Pyongyang on a similar (diplomatic) footing to Seoul, which matters to the Kim regime. But it would also suggest that North Korea is not part of any 'China camp' and that it has its own foreign policy and set of international relations. This matters for Kim as he seeks to position North Korea as a more "normal" country, one that can drive its own foreign policy without the help of China.

Prospects for a Multilateral Approach to the Korean Peninsula

The Korean quest to be at the center of Korean Peninsula affairs raises questions regarding the multilateralization of the resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue. The precedents of the Four-Party Talks in the late 1990s and the Six-Party Talks in the mid-2000s suggest that a multilateral approach can serve to support diplomacy in the Korean Peninsula.¹¹ However, it seems that the time for a multilateral negotiation process has passed, at least in the short-term. In the case of denuclearization talks, the Trump government prefers a bilateral approach. As for inter-Korean relations, both Koreas want them to be a bilateral matter, even though the United States and China would need to be part of peace agreement negotiations since they signed the armistice agreement putting an end to the Korean War.

10. S. Lee Myers, and J. Perlez, "Kim Jong-un Met with Xi Jinping in Secret Beijing Visit", *New York Times*, 27 March 2018.

11. R. Pacheco Pardo, *North Korea-US Relations from Kim Jong Il to Kim Jong Un*, *op. cit.*

Implementation of any agreement reached and long-term engagement with North Korea, however, are different and would benefit from a multilateral approach. In the case of the dismantlement, transportation, storage, and destruction of North Korea's nuclear materials, the United States would like to take the lead. But involving the International Atomic Energy Agency and third-country experts in monitoring North Korea's keeping to its commitments, or in the transportation, storage and destruction of nuclear materials, would reduce the burden on the United States, support trust-building between Washington and Pyongyang, and decrease the possibility that any party would defect from the process. It would thus make sense to multilateralize it.

In the case of the international support that North Korea will need to rebuild and develop its economy, a multilateral consortium would make sense. At the very least, China, Japan, Russia and South Korea, along with the United States, should be part of discussions about this matter. In addition, it would make sense to involve the UN, economic powers such as the EU and perhaps ASEAN and Australia, and multilateral organizations such as the World Bank or the AIIB. Eventually, a reformed North Korea should attract private capital. After all, Northeast Asia hosts the second, third and twelfth biggest economies in the world in China, Japan and South Korea. North Korea's geographical location is unmatched from a development perspective.

Final Reflection: a Stable Korean Peninsula and Regional Order in Northeast Asia

The Korean Peninsula seems to be on the path towards quasi-permanent stability. North Korea knows that significantly raising tensions will bring more sanctions. Kim wants economic development for his country. There is no appetite to go back to the days of "fire and fury" that rocked the Korean Peninsula in 2017. The Koreas have shown that they want to move towards reconciliation. In other words, structural forces are leading towards lower tensions in the Korean Peninsula.

This is welcome news for Northeast Asia. Sino-US tensions, China's looming threat over Taiwan, still unsolved Japan-China and Japan-South Korea differences over history, and territorial and maritime disputes create enough problems in the region. A more stable Korean Peninsula, with a North Korea taking steps towards denuclearization while opening its economy would be a positive development in the opposite direction. The promise of lower tensions and eventual reconciliation is pushing Moon's

and, probably, Kim's push to be at the center of Korean Peninsula affairs. It is also part of Seoul's vision of a more stable regional order in Northeast Asia.

High Time to Reconsider Approach to North Korea

Hiroyuki Akita

The negotiations between the United States and North Korea to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula have come to a dead end. Rejecting many calls from the United States, North Korea is unwilling to come to the table of working-level talks. How can we break this deadlock and have North Korea give up its nuclear weapons?

This paper examines new prescriptions for the country's denuclearization.

This paper argues that three unrealistic premises, on which the United States and other major states have tried to deal with this issue, are hindering the correct approach. The first erroneous premise is that, if the current negotiations continue as they are, at some point they will be able to pave the way for North Korea's denuclearization. But this perception is no longer relevant in the current deadlock situation. It is extremely unlikely that the current negotiations will lead to denuclearization.

Secondly, it is doubtful that China and Russia are urgently hoping to denuclearize North Korea, to the same extent as the US, Japan and South Korea. It may be true that the two powers prefer North Korea without nuclear weapons. But we should assume that China and Russia are not as keen to denuclearize North Korea as the United States, Japan and South Korea.

The third doubtful premise is the perception that the United States, Japan and South Korea are close partners on this issue. Policy gaps are gradually widening between South Korea, which seeks a reconciliatory approach to North Korea, and the United States and Japan, which are trying to maintain strong pressure on Pyongyang.

After analyzing these underlying problems, this paper argues that the US, Japan, and South Korea and other stakeholders should reconsider their current approach and adopt alternative prescriptions.

1st incorrect premise: NK can be denuclearized through current negotiations

The United States and other major partners should recognize that the current negotiations with North Korea are already at an extremely serious deadlock. President Trump often emphasizes that his relationship with Kim Jong Un remains very good and that the two leaders can work together to solve the problem. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has also stated that he fully supports Trump's approach to North Korea.

Trump's over-optimism is not only wrong, but harmful. There is a risk that his attitude will delay an effective response by Washington and Tokyo to the problem.

If we assess the current situation in detail, the premise that we can denuclearize North Korea through dialogue raises great questions.

First, North Korea already possesses nuclear bombs and has become a *de facto* nuclear power. North Korea has between 20 and 30 nuclear warheads, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), and it is likely that it will continue to produce more nuclear warheads.

Second, it seems that North Korea has not only increased its nuclear warheads, but also has succeeded in miniaturizing them. The Japanese government's annual Defense of Japan report released in late September 2019 acknowledged for the first time that Pyongyang has "already successfully miniaturized nuclear weapons." This means that it could possibly complete nuclear missiles. According to Japanese government officials, such conclusions were made based on intelligence exchanges with the United States and other partner countries.

If this analysis is correct, Japan and South Korea are now within range of North Korean nuclear missiles for the first time in history. Katsutoshi Kawano, who until the end of March was chief of the Japan Self-Defense Forces joint staff, the top uniformed officer of Japan's armed forces, said: "If North Korea has succeeded in miniaturizing nuclear warheads, there is a great likelihood that the country has already deployed nuclear missiles. The SDF, for its part, must think of how to respond to it based on that premise."

In other words, it appears that North Korea is not in the process of developing nuclear weapons, but has become a nuclear-weapon state armed with nuclear missiles. If so, very regrettably, the possibility of disarming North Korea through negotiations has become much smaller than before.

The international community cannot, of course, endorse North Korea as a “nuclear state” and must continuously urge it to abandon nuclear weapons. However, one must consider a new approach based on this painful reality.

2nd incorrect premise: China and Russia aim for denuclearization as top priority

The second premise to be reconsidered is that China and Russia also place denuclearization as top priority in their approach towards North Korea. China and Russia have never tolerated the possession of nuclear weapons by North Korea. However, the two countries have increasingly shown a more North Korean-friendly position.

For example, China and Russia submitted a resolution to the UN Security Council on December 16, 2019, calling for partial suspension of sanctions on North Korea. Since the beginning of US-North Korea negotiations, Beijing and Moscow have insisted on a so-called “step by step approach”, which means UN sanctions being eased gradually in accordance with each North Korean action toward denuclearization. This is a very different position from that of the US and Japan, advocating no relaxation of sanctions until North Korea adopts visible and drastic steps to abandon nuclear weapons and its program.

The logic of China and Russia is that North Korea deserves to be rewarded for its decision to accept negotiations with the United States and to suspend nuclear and intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) tests. While this argument sounds reasonable, it is negative for the early realization of denuclearization. As sanction pressure weakens, North Korea is likely to become more bullish and set various conditions on denuclearization.

Still, Beijing and Moscow argue for relaxation of UN sanctions, because, unlike the United States, Japan and South Korea, they are in no hurry to proceed with the denuclearization process. China and Russia are prioritizing the preservation of the North Korea regime over the early realization of denuclearization.

For China in particular, North Korea is an embankment that prevents the Korean Peninsula from becoming a sphere of American influence. As China and the United States deepen their strategic confrontation, North Korea’s importance as such an embankment has grown more than ever. Also for Russia, the worst scenario is the collapse of North Korea for the same reason. To avoid this “nightmare,” Russia prefers to ease sanctions on North Korea, even if it means delaying progress towards denuclearization.

These geopolitical calculations of China and Russia will continue to be a major roadblock for the United States and Japan, which regard the disarmament of North Korea as top priority. Washington and Tokyo should formulate North Korean policies on the premise that China and Russia will take an uncooperative attitude.

3rd incorrect premise: the US and Japan, South Korea are in the same boat

In the challenging circumstances explained above, close cooperation between the United States, Japan and South Korea is more essential than ever before. Both Japan and South Korea are allies of the United States, and on January 14, 2020, foreign ministers of the three countries met in a suburb of San Francisco, CA, and confirmed unity and closer policy coordination.

Yet, in recent years, more question marks are being attached to the unity of these three partners. While President Moon Jae-in shares a common goal with the United States and Japan to ultimately denuclearize North Korea, his increasingly reconciliatory approach shows a sharp difference from that of Washington and Tokyo. Moon consciously tries to proceed with dialogue with Pyongyang, hoping to persuade it to abandon its nuclear weapons program.

When US-North Korea talks were somehow making progress, the gap between the US-Japan and South Korea didn't show as much. But, after US-North Korean talks in October last year in Stockholm broke down without any agreement, the gap has become more apparent.

At a press conference on January 14, 2020, Moon indicated that he would cooperate with North Korea as much as possible without violating UN sanctions. As specific areas of cooperation, he cited tourism and the formation of a single team at the Tokyo Olympics. Moon seems to believe that, if South Korea could improve its ties with North Korea, Seoul will be able to bridge the United States and North Korea. At the same press conference, he emphasized that there was increasing need to expand North-South exchange, in which Seoul could encourage US-North Korea dialogue.

The United States and Japan are raising concerns about Moon's approach. In an interview with a South Korean television station, US ambassador to South Korea Harry Harris suggested that it would not be desirable for North-South dialogue to proceed without North Korea's denuclearization. He also pointed out that Kim Jong-un's visit to South Korea, which Moon tried very hard to realize, should be prepared in close

consultation with the United States. Concerns over Moon's approach have also been active within Japan's government.

However, it is unlikely that Moon will cease to adopt a soft approach to North Korea. Now that North Korea's nuclear possession has become a reality, preventing a nuclear war on the Korean Peninsula has become absolute top priority for South Korea, rather than its immediate denuclearization. In case of a nuclear war, the most serious damage would be inflicted on South Korea, which would be the direct battlefield. For this reason, preventing such scenarios is of paramount importance for Moon.

South Korea is not the only factor that could weaken US-Japan-RoK cooperation. In fact, cracks are starting to emerge between the United States and Japan. The biggest reason is the widening gap of threat perception about North Korea's growing missile capabilities.

Japan is already within a range of hundreds of medium-range ballistic missiles deployed by North Korea. It is taking these threats very seriously. To address them, it has invested enormous resources in missile defense. However, North Korea is building a new missile that will neutralize it.

From May to November in 2019, North Korea tested missiles in the Sea of Japan 13 times. These include a new type of ballistic missile similar to the Russian Iskander type. According to reports, these new missiles flew at an altitude of about 50km in the atmosphere, soared at the end of orbit and fell at an angle of 80 to 90 degrees. According to Japanese defense officials, these new missiles would be very difficult to shoot down with Japan's current missile defense systems.

However, in response to the series of missile tests in late 2019, Trump repeatedly stated that he did not consider them to be a problem. North Korea fired both short-range and medium-range missiles, but it didn't launch an ICBM. Trump doesn't care as long as Pyongyang doesn't resume testing ICBMs that can reach the mainland of the United States.

The gap between Trump and Abe became explicit when they met in France in August 2019. Asked by reporters about the series of North Korean missile launches, Trump said that, although he was not happy about it, he didn't believe Pyongyang had violated the US-North Korean agreement. On the contrary, Abe emphasized, "It is a violation of the UN resolution."

If these policy gaps among the US, Japan and RoK deepen, it will provide an increasingly favorable environment for North Korea. Kim Jong-un would think that, as long as he maintains good relations with Trump, he could drive a wedge between Washington and Tokyo.

What should be done to improve current situation?

The situations above could be summarized as follows. North Korea may have deployed nuclear missiles, and hopes that efforts to force its denuclearization are weakening even if US-NK negotiations resume. China and Russia have prioritized the stability of the current North Korean regime over its denuclearization and are unlikely to cooperate in strengthening sanctions. And there are policy gaps also between the United States, Japan and South Korea, and the gaps seem to be widening.

A prescription for denuclearization must address these challenges and make it possible to impose greater pressure on North Korea. Unfortunately, there is no immediate solution that can solve this problem at once. But, as second-best options, there are at least two prescriptions:

- **Prescription 1: Stronger enforcement of UN sanctions by “coalition of the willing”**

The international community needs to impose more severe sanctions on North Korea to force them to change their calculations. But, it is unlikely that additional UN sanctions will be adopted, as China and Russia are opposed. The next best thing to do, then, is to strengthen the cooperation through “a coalition of the willing”, to increase the effectiveness of already imposed UN sanctions. More specifically, the United States, Japan, Australia, and other partners including France and the United Kingdom, should further enhance maritime surveillance of North Korea and strictly seize smuggling that violates UN sanctions. Hopefully, South Korea will also join this effort.

Since 2018, eight countries, including the countries noted above, have dispatched ships and aircraft to Asian waters to monitor North Korean activities. To escape UN sanctions, North Korea continues to transship embargoed goods offshore onto its ships and smuggle them in.

Recently, North Korea has allegedly smuggled by using smaller boats that are difficult to find, and has been expanding its area of activity. According to an expert panel of the UN Security Council’s North Korea Sanctions Committee, between January and the end of April in 2019 North Korea committed at least 70 smuggling cases of refined petroleum products. According to the analysis, North Korea procured refined petroleum products that exceeded the annual import limit of 500,000 barrels set by UN sanctions.

Preventing these breaches by North Korea could have the same effect as strengthening sanctions. It is necessary to increase surveillance activities by

willing “coalition” members, and also to increase the number of states that participate in surveillance operations.

- **Prescription 2: Change strategic calculations of China and Russia**

To advance the denuclearization process, it is also essential to change China’s and Russia’s stances of resisting additional pressure on North Korea. To this end, it is important to make clear to Beijing and Moscow that, if they continue to provide diplomatic and economic “support” to North Korea, their strategic environment will deteriorate.

If North Korea continues to pursue its nuclear and missile developments, the United States, Japan, and South Korea should further accelerate their security cooperation to address North Korea’s military threat. Specifically, the three countries ought to draft new concrete plans to enhance missile-defense cooperation. This would not suit Chinese and Russian national interests. Beijing and Moscow are extremely concerned that the US-Japan and US-RoK missile-defense networks will be further strengthened. They believe that, if the United States builds a strong missile-defense network in Northeast Asia in cooperation with its allies, it will largely weaken their deterrent capabilities against the United States.

Washington, Tokyo and Seoul should clearly inform China and Russia about the likelihood of this scenario, unless Beijing and Moscow cooperate to push forward the denuclearization process. In this way, the United States and its allies may be able to urge China and Russia to understand the strategic cost of supporting North Korea.

Conclusion

Rethinking our approach to North Korea has been long overdue. As its nuclear threat increases constantly, we cannot afford to cling to sweet illusions. It is critical to carefully review the current situation surrounding the North Korean crisis, and come up with more effective prescriptions.

Having said that, increasing pressure unilaterally on North Korea could raise tensions in Northeast Asia and lead to a military crisis like that of 2017. If the Trump administration chooses to push towards such a path once again, South Korea and other countries will fall out of sync, and the US-led coalition will be frayed.

To prevent such a scenario, it is important for the United States to maintain a communication channel with North Korea to avoid unintended conflicts. Washington should patiently continue to urge North Korea to come back to the negotiation table, and US allies and partners should support such US efforts.

Northeast Asian Regional Cooperation: An Elusive Necessity

Niklas Swanström

Despite the decreased tensions on the Korean Peninsula since the end of 2017, there has been a failure to manage, and more so to resolve, the North Korean nuclear issue. Since the Singapore Summit in June 2018, the denuclearization process could be compared to a train crash in slow motion. That negotiations would reach an impasse has been increasingly evident as North Korea has been very explicit in its demands and refusals to compromise on its core interests; likewise, the United States has pursued a maximalist approach focused on complete denuclearization before the lifting of sanctions or the signing of a peace treaty. Furthermore, even if there is international consensus on a peaceful and denuclearized Korean Peninsula, the major stakeholders are greatly divided in practice on how to resolve the nuclear quandary, something that has greatly benefitted North Korea's position. This lack of consensus and failure to maintain sanctions at the level needed to convince the regime to change its current policy has weakened leverage over North Korea, with Chairman Kim Jung-Un arguably masterfully exploiting the divisions. Today there is little, if any, possibility to force North Korea to denuclearize unless a major internal crisis erupts.

The continuous failure on the Korean Peninsula is not only due to the lack of consistency of approach among the international community, or that bilateral dialogue between the US and North Korea has failed to achieve any sustainable breakthrough; any dialogue process is bound to experience ups and downs. Arguably, much more important is that the breakdown of bilateral negotiations on the Korean Peninsula leaves the whole process in limbo, without being embedded in a regional multilateral structure that could build on the progress made and reestablish dialogues in a more sustainable format less prone to breaking down.¹ The stalled

1. N. Swanström, *The Korean Peninsula in a Regional Context*, in A. Forss, "Dimensions of Peacebuilding on the Korean Peninsula," *ISDP Asia Paper*, forthcoming 2020.

denuclearization process on the Korean Peninsula, its implications, and the need for multilateral negotiations and structures is increasingly evident.

Seeking Stability and Managing a Top-down Process

Northeast Asia, in which I also include the US due to its strong position in the region (with military bases in South Korea and Japan and major geopolitical interests), has a long history of broken promises, nationalism, historical animosity, tension, and aggression, even if there have also been times of temporarily improved relations and *détente*. Contacts between states and political entities as well as improvements in relations have been initiated both by bilateral and multilateral means, but there is major concern in Northeast Asia about leadership of a regional structure and how to establish such a structure. China would prefer to have a regional structure for Asia by Asians, excluding the US, but the rest of the states, arguably also including North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea: DPRK), would prefer to have a more balanced regional structure, i.e. balancing China, but not necessarily having the US dominating the future. There are today no agreements on how such a regional structure should be structured, and in the short to mid-term there seem to be limited opportunities for such a development.

However, it is often generally assumed, not least among the more powerful actors in a regional setting, that bilateral relations are the primary driving engine in creating security. This is not too far from the reality in Northeast Asia. I would even argue that bilateral dialogues are more often than not the engine for change in a Northeast Asian security setting. This is partly because there is no alternative to bilateralism, for historical and geopolitical reasons, and partly due to the fact that change is often driven by individual leaders with relatively strong power positions in Northeast Asia. There is no doubt that bilateral relations will continue to be predominant, and that multilateralism can only be successful when all actors define it as in their national interest to engage multilaterally. The European Union (EU), the African Union (AU), but also of course ASEAN, are cases where this has been the situation. None of these cases is without its weaknesses, however, and it is fair to say that the international space is dominated by *realpolitik* and imperfect multilateral security solutions.

With the exception of the Six-Party Talks, which ultimately failed, however, the lack of success in establishing a sustainable multilateral regional structure or system in Northeast Asia is worrisome. It is evident that bilateral interactions between states are often more flexible, but this

does not mean that they are more stable: on the contrary, they tend to be dependent on personal relations and domestic political realities. Bilateral frameworks can be, and often are, more fragile than their multilateral counterparts, and are better used for short-term political momentum rather than sustainable long-term security dialogue. It is apparent that multilateralism has not worked, but neither have bilateral talks, power politics, sanctions, etc. The proposal here is to create multilateral structures, albeit weak, that reinforce the current fragmented dialogues through a process of official and semi-official channels.

While not disregarding the importance of bilateral efforts for achieving diplomatic momentum, these are vulnerable to setbacks. Breakthroughs have often failed to survive political transitions and geopolitical change, while being subject to the vicissitudes of individual leaders' personalities and decisions.² Despite the positive effects a top-down approach could have, the reliance on personal relationships can compound the insecurity and fragility of long-term relations as these relationships inevitably change over time. The personification of diplomacy through summit meetings between President Trump and Chairman Kim, as well as between President Moon and Chairman Kim, has ultimately failed to transcend the political realities faced and the domestic constraints in each country.³ Unfortunately, this is not unique for this time period or for the Korean Peninsula. Accordingly, there are still substantial gaps in how to secure long-term engagement at both the bilateral and multilateral level.

While the *realpolitik* aspects of international relations will continue to dominate world politics, and possibly especially so in Asia, the question is how to decrease their negative impact and secure positive development for the broader region. While all political processes are driven by political interests and unilateral agendas, these become more diluted (or stable) in a multilateral setting. This is not to say that the two approaches are mutually exclusive: multilateral meetings need to work in parallel with bilateral meetings to support and reinforce bilateral processes, and *vice versa*. This is why it is essential to strengthen bilateral dialogues between the different actors within a multilateral framework that could push any process beyond short-term bilateral interests. Weak multilateral structures, such as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), were extremely sensitive to unilateral interest, i.e. the US leaving the agreement, while stronger multilateral structures such as the EU are less concerned about unilateral measures such as Brexit. The reality in Northeast Asia in the short to

2. North Korean Nuclear Negotiations: A Brief History, CFR: www.cfr.org

3. J. Jervis, "South Korean President Moon's Mid-Term Review", *The Diplomat*, 16 June 2019: www.thediplomat.com.

medium term is that, even within a multilateral structure, unilateral interests will still affect the region to a very high degree. This said, there is always a higher degree of reluctance to break a multilateral agreement as this would damage that actor's reputation, and it is unlikely that they would be trusted in forthcoming negotiations.

Obstacles and Challenges

Establishing multilateral security frameworks, of course, faces major obstacles, not least prevailing national interests and individual political leaders' egos. National (or personal) interests drive much of the agenda even within multilateral frameworks (but arguably even more so in bilateral settings), but immediate results from more flexible dialogue between two leaders, such as in Singapore, could be reinforced by a more complex and stable multilateral structure that builds on formal or informal gains in the bilateral setting. The challenge will be to manage the linkage between bilateral and multiparty structures in an effective way.

A broad inclusiveness in a proposed regional framework in the Northeast Asian context would be essential to create more stable negotiations as it would be difficult to move forward without having a broad coalition agreeing on the future path. Without a multilateral framework, it would be impossible to sustain sanctions if negotiations break down; and on the other hand, it is impossible to lift the international sanctions without a multilateral agreement. It is even difficult for humanitarian organizations to operate in North Korea in areas such as food shortages, children's vaccinations, etc, without a broad international agreement. It would also be difficult to promote a sustainable approach to economic development and political normalization without wider agreement.

In an unsuccessful or incomplete scenario, which is likely considering the failure in Hanoi or during working-level negotiations in Stockholm, there will be a need to mitigate tensions and try to reestablish security-building and denuclearization in a situation of no or limited trust between actors. Failure is a real option, as the main parties are not on the same page at this juncture in time, and the value of different actions is perceived very differently among the states involved as well as the organizations that have a stake in the process. This necessitates a compromise on all sides, and that the interests of all actors be taken into consideration, without necessarily surrendering the core values of each individual state. This is not an argument to unconditionally lift the current sanctions or to unilaterally dismantle the nuclear program, as national and international interests still remain, and it is important to remember that sanctions were put in place

due to North Korea breaking international law, and nothing so far has changed that fact.

Spoiler problems could be endemic in the Korean Peninsula if strictly bilateral negotiations continue to be the primary route of action. China, South Korea, Russia, and Japan all have interests in the process, and will not sit idly by waiting for decisions that directly concern their future. Incorporating the interests of a broader group of actors will be essential if a peace treaty or economic deal is to be successful, but also to prevent competing bilateral agendas undermining long-term security. Furthermore, there are limits to negotiations if the positions and interest of other powers are not included, in particular those of great powers in the region. A regional mechanism would be able to address some of the issues of contention between different actors, not least Washington and Beijing, which so far have prevented a long-term solution of the situation in several contentious issues. A multilateral framework, therefore, would give each actor a voice and stake in shaping the outcome of the peace/denuclearization process, confidence building, and economic development, among other issues.

What is Needed in the Future?

Accordingly, multilateral negotiations between the key regional parties are also needed in the future to discuss more relevant regional security issues, such as peace treaties, international sanctions, pandemics, economic and humanitarian aid on the Korean Peninsula, but also maritime and cyber security as well as environmental and economic security. In fact, the latter will become increasingly necessary for reasons of inclusivity and coordination, and to address issues that cannot be resolved bilaterally. It is also clear that multilateral security instruments need to be integrated into a longer-term process of denuclearization and normalization in the region. Long-term measures to solve nuclear issues in Northeast Asia should look beyond the details of the current crisis on the Korean Peninsula. Cooperation should be gradually built on collaboration, such as to promote the safe use of nuclear energy and non-proliferation, which would potentially lead to more ambitious denuclearization issues such as safeguards and verification systems. Such measures would better answer whether a regional approach can be applied to Northeast Asia to resolve the common problems that countries are facing in the region. It is necessary for all sides to reaffirm that the end goal remains full denuclearization of the Peninsula and to complement bilateral negotiations when possible.

It is not feasible to go into depth in this paper what such a multilateral framework would actually look like, how it would operate in the context of

Northeast Asia and in relations to the structures that presently exist, even if they are weak and underdeveloped. It would be useful to use the existing frameworks and build a regional consensus on how to operate the existing frameworks in a more effective way and to raise the question of sovereignty, potentially the most crucial obstacle to any regional structure in the region. However, the initial structure will be limited and built on both official and semi-official channels due to the low level of trust and the political considerations. The aim would be to reinforce the bilateral dialogues before any truly multilateral structures can be established.

Established and regularized structures will be required, as often there is a small window of opportunity to meet and discuss relevant issues. As one example, the current window of opportunity in the Korean Peninsula is limited, and there is a need to establish a multilateral framework not only to lock in the progress that has been made so far, through multilateral discussion and operational implementation, but also to create a format to oversee implementation and to create a more sustainable process involving economic and political normalization in the region. Personal contacts between Chairman Kim and President Trump are reportedly good, but they will both need some gains in order to consolidate support at home. Similarly, and potentially more troublingly, President Moon shares some of these needs, and he has so far been instrumental in the peace process. His support domestically has been declining and if he loses his momentum to act in this process, it could potentially jeopardize the positive climate that has been in place since January 2018. This in the light of the recent failure to get North Korea on the denuclearization bandwagon, which threatens the formal and high-level process, and it will be difficult to maintain the positive momentum that Trump has tended to boast about in his tweets. Similarly, there are always opportunities to seek out compromises and long-term solutions in most conflicts, but the window of opportunity is very limited due to changing political circumstances. When such opportunities arrive as a result of other processes or incidents, the region needs to be ready to act on them quickly, and there is no time to prepare a structure to seek out what could be accomplished.

Due to the limitations to the impact or even possibility of multilateralism and the stability of bilateralism and unilateralism, more space can be given, in tandem with the formal track one process, to support informal or semi-formal track 1.5 or 2 processes until a more coherent formal track is established. Despite the obvious need for such multilateral dialogue mechanisms to complement and support official processes, there is a lack of broader sustainable funding to support long-term initiatives, as short-term thinking and interests often prevail. The Korean Peninsula is one

of the most obvious cases where informal tracks would be useful. The challenge is that low-key initiatives struggle to find political traction, space and support, with the focus primarily on a direct crisis situation and not on how to prevent situations from developing into crisis in the first place. This could very well be an issue for a multilateral dialogue in the Northeast Asian region as well: when there is not a direct crisis, there is less interest in sustaining dialogues, and starting a fresh dialogue is difficult when a crisis is already occurring, and trust is lacking. The challenge is that track 1.5 and 2 processes need to develop in times of relative stability, to be used in more problematic times.

Would a multilateral security structure resolve all the issues? No, but neither will strictly bilateral security arrangements. A regional framework can only succeed if each party is willing to invest political will, resources and, to a minimal extent, surrender some form of sovereignty in favor of regional security. It is imperative, therefore, that reinforcing structures be established to build trust and a process of interaction in the security field. The very lack of trust in the extended region is one of the most serious challenges – and the rapid growth of China as a dominant regional security actor has not increased trust but rather insecurity and distrust.



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