

Geopolitics of the Asia-Pacific : the Fate of Regional Security Institutionalism

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アジア・太平洋の地政学：地域安全保障制度の行方

クレイグ・マーク

Abstract :

The major military powers of the Asia-Pacific have been increasing their military capacities in recent times, threatening a 21st-century arms race amid rising regional tensions and overall geostrategic rivalry. While numerous Regional Government Organizations (RGOs) have also become more prominent in the Asia-Pacific, it remains a major diplomatic challenge whether these will prove to be capable of addressing and solving the increasingly concerning security issues of the region.

要旨：昨今、地域間の緊張と戦略地政学上の対立関係が高まる中で、アジア・太平洋地域の主要国家による軍事力の増強が21世紀の軍備競争に拍車をかけている。アジア・太平洋地域で多く見られるようになったRGOが、増し加わる地域安全問題への懸念を明らかにし、解決に導くことができるかどうか重要な外交上の課題となっている。

Key words : Asia-Pacific security, Regional Government Organisations, foreign policy

Introduction

The increasing role of Regional Government Organisations (RGOs) in the Asia-Pacific region, such as Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and the East Asia Summit (EAS), are widely considered a positive development, confirmation of the importance of states in the region engaging in greater economic and diplomatic cooperation. A parallel development amid the relatively strong economic growth of many countries of the region has been the increase in defence expenditure enabled by developing economies, with the resulting desire by Asia-Pacific states to project greater geostrategic influence. This has led to the present situation where military spending in the region is now set to overtake that of Europe. A conventional arms race is therefore already potentially under way in the Asia-Pacific, and rivalry over nuclear weapons also exists among some states.¹⁾

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1) Richard Norton-Taylor, 'Asia's military spending likely to overtake Europe this year', *The Guardian*, 7 March 2012. Regional military spending was US\$294.04 billion in 2011, (not including US military spending in the Pacific), a real increase of 3.15% ; many European military budgets have fallen up to 10% in the wake of the Eurozone economic crisis.

This paper will examine the overall nature and geostrategic trends that have recently emerged in the region, comparing the relative military strengths of major states in the Asia-Pacific, and the main security issues that motivate and concern them. The diplomatic role of the major RGOs of the region will then be assessed, considering whether they are proving capable of settling some of the major diplomatic and security tensions of the Asia-Pacific, which are threatening to worsen.

In particular, territorial disputes between China and its neighbours, in the South and East China Seas, are potential flashpoints for deterioration of relations, and even for possible armed conflict, unless they are addressed successfully through the implementation of peaceful, effective diplomacy. This is occurring amid a wider geostrategic backdrop of rising regional and possibly global hegemonic rivalry between China and USA.²⁾ As one of the most important foreign policy concerns moving into the 21st century, this issue can therefore also be seen as a case study to compare the major competing schools of International Relations Theory : realism, versus its major rivals, liberal and constructivist theory, with their differing views on whether military deterrence or multinational institutions are the preferred means for delivering security and stability between countries.³⁾

Strategic Developments in the Asia Pacific

China

China is using its extraordinary economic growth to fund an increase in its strategic power, seen in its increasing assertiveness on territorial issues, particularly in the South China Sea. China will nevertheless remain well behind the US in its military capabilities far into the foreseeable future, particularly in maritime power projection capacity. This strategic fact has not prevented China from taking a more confrontational approach towards its South China Sea neighbours in ASEAN, claiming the entire maritime region, including the Spratly and Paracel Islands ; and with Japan, over the Senkaku Islands (claimed as the Diaoyu Islands by China).⁴⁾

China's official 2011 defence budget was US\$89.8 billion. Its 2.285 million-strong active People's Liberation Army (PLA) is organised in up to 12 armoured divisions, 38 infantry divisions, a marine division, 7,400 Main Battle Tanks (MBT), 1,700 combat aircraft, 78 principle surface combatant warships, and 71 submarines, including 3 strategic ballistic-missile submarines (SSBNs) ; China maintains a strategic arsenal of 470 nuclear-capable strategic missiles. While now far more militarily powerful than its Southeast Asian neighbours, China's military forces remain technologically behind those of South Korea, South Korea, and the USA.⁵⁾ In a signal of its military modernisation and expanding naval power projection capacity, China also launched its first aircraft carrier in 2012, with plans to acquire others in future, as the initial carrier is only suitable for training purposes.⁶⁾

2) James Dobbins, 'War with China', *Survival*, Vol.54, No.5, August-September 2012, pp.7-24.

3) Martin Griffiths, *Rethinking International Relations Theory*, (Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp.157-158.

4) Lindsay Murdoch, 'Claims over remote South China Sea rocks certain to be a flashpoint', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, December 24, 2012.

5) International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 2012*, (London : Routledge, 2012), pp.234-238. All figures cited on military capabilities are of course subject to change.

6) Jane Perlez, 'China Launches Carrier, but Experts Doubt Its Worth', *The New York Times*, September 25th, 2012.

Taiwan

The major outstanding potential strategic dispute concerning China since the Cold War has been Taiwan remaining outside of its direct control. While tensions between mainland China and Taiwan have receded in recent times, with increasing investment and personal contacts now being permitted, Taiwan maintains its determination to maintain its autonomy, if not independence from China by force if necessary, backed up by its military alliance with the USA. With a 2011 defence budget of \$9.9 billion, Taiwan maintains an active military force of 290,000 ; equivalents of up to 3 armoured divisions and 10 infantry divisions (and a marine division), 1,420 tanks, 477 combat aircraft, 26 principle surface warships, and four tactical submarines.⁷⁾ While these forces are well trained and equipped, they remain inexperienced and far smaller in size compared to the overwhelming numerical advantage of China's military.

North Korea

The other outstanding major strategic flashpoint of the region remaining from the Cold War is of course the division of the Korean peninsula. Despite the authoritarian regime under new leader Kim Jong Un providing some glimpses that it may be allowing more market forces to play a role in its impoverished economy, North Korea remains intransigent as ever, when it comes to its foreign relations. Continuing its strategic weapons programme, which has been outlawed internationally by the UN Security Council since it first tested nuclear weapons in 2006, North Korea was finally able to carry out a successful ballistic missile test in December 2012, increasing concerns throughout the region, but especially among its neighbours South Korea and Japan, that it now has a wider potential to aggressively deploy its small nuclear arsenal (of around possibly 10 to 12 warheads) in future.⁸⁾ Despite the country's desperate impoverishment, North Korea also continues to maintain the fourth-largest active military force in the world, of 1,190,000, comprising two armoured and nine infantry corps ; with 3,500 main battle tanks, 64 short-range missiles, 603 combat aircraft, 3 frigates, 383 patrol boats, and 72 submarines.⁹⁾

South Korea

To counter its heavily armed neighbour, South Korea maintains its own extensive military forces, although it is far more easily able to bear the cost, having developed one of the more successful industrialised and globalised developed economies. South Korea also has the advantage of its military alliance with the USA, which includes the continuing deployment of US forces within the country. South Korea's active armed forces of 655,000 include two armoured divisions, 23 infantry divisions, two marine divisions, and a Special Forces division ; 2,414 main battle tanks, 390 combat aircraft, 28 principle surface combatants and 23 submarines.¹⁰⁾ There are also tensions with Japan, over South Korea's possession of the tiny Dokdo Islands, claimed as Takeshima by Japan ; however, while this had led to a recent increase in diplomatic tensions, it is extremely unlikely this dispute would ever deteriorate into an armed conflict, particularly as the US is concerned that its two impor-

7) IISS, *The Military Balance*, pp.282–284.

8) Jack Kim and Megumi Negishi, 'North Korea rocket launch raises nuclear stakes', *Reuters*, December 12, 2012.

9) IISS, *The Military Balance*, pp.256–258.

10) IISS, pp.259–261.

tant Northeast Asian allies remain on stable strategic terms with each other.

Japan

The return of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to office following elections in December 2012 have raised the prospects of Japan altering Article 9 of its Constitution, reconstituting its Self Defence Forces (SDF) into 'National Defence Forces', which would have greater authorisation for wider use of force, in order to participate in acts of 'collective self-defence' with its allies, principally the US. The new LDP government under PM Shinzo Abe is unlikely to attempt any such constitutional changes until after Upper House elections due in July 2013, but there are already indications that defence spending will be increased, following on from the 2010 National Defence Programme Guidelines instigated by the previous Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) government.¹¹⁾

The main security challenge for Japan has turned out to be asserting its control of the Senkaku Islands, also claimed by China and Taiwan.¹²⁾ While nationalist politicians and activist groups have been greatly responsible for escalating tensions with China over the islands, China has taken the opportunity to make near-continuous incursions by paramilitary maritime security vessels, and now aircraft, into Japanese-claimed territory around the Senkakus. Anti-Japanese riots and attacks on Japanese-linked businesses were also tolerated by Chinese authorities in September 2012, resulting in a significant loss of trade between Japan and China.¹³⁾ While it would be in neither countries' interests (as well as that of regional and global stability) to allow this dispute to escalate into armed conflict, it remains a highly dangerous source of potential diplomatic tension, as both sides have invested both international prestige and appealed to domestic nationalistic support in this ongoing crisis.¹⁴⁾

To buttress support for its territorial claims, Japan maintains one of the most technologically advanced, highly trained and well-equipped conventional armed forces in the region, despite being limited to a shorter-range 'self-defence' doctrine. However, this has the scope to expand into a wider range of military operations, if the SDF reforms are carried out as planned by the LDP government. The wider use of the SDF has already been implemented to some extent in recent times, with deployments in UN peacekeeping operations, and largely logistical support for US forces in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Maritime forces have also been deployed as part of the multinational anti-piracy task force in the Indian Ocean, with an SDF support base established in Djibouti, the first such base established by Japan since the postwar period.¹⁵⁾ The SDF's military assets include almost 248,000 personnel, including : 1 armoured division, 10 infantry divisions, one airborne division, 806 main battle tanks, 371 combat aircraft, 48 principle surface warships (including 2 helicopter carriers), 18 submarines, and 386 Coast Guard patrol craft.¹⁶⁾

11) Ayako Mie, 'Onodera to review defense plans, up spending', *The Japan Times*, December 31, 2012, p.2.

12) Fumio Ota, 'The Japanese Way of War', in Julian Lindley-French and Yves Boyer (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of War*, (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.309–314.

13) 'History of the Senkaku Islands dispute', *The Asahi Shimbun*, December 26, 2012.

14) Christian Wirth, 'Ocean governance, maritime security and the consequences of modernity in Northeast Asia', *The Pacific Review*, Vol.25, No.2, 2012, 228–237.

15) Wilhelm M.Vosse, 'Comparing Japanese, Australian and European Responses to 'Out of Area' Security Challenges, in William T. Tow and Rikki Kersten (eds), *Bilateral Perspectives of Regional Security : Australia, Japan and the Asia-Pacific Region*, (Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp.163–165.

16) IISS, *The Military Balance*, pp.251–254.

Russia

Following the dissolution of the USSR after the Cold War, Russia went into a period of strategic decline. However, it has recently recovered some degree of economic and military strength, largely based on development of energy resource commodities, particularly oil and LPG, as well as other valuable mineral resources. Under the increasingly autocratic leadership of President Vladimir Putin, Russia has been engaged in its own 'pivot' towards its Far East Region facing the Pacific, seen in its hosting of the last 2012 APEC meeting in Vladivostok.¹⁷⁾ The major power projection capacity for Russia in the Far East is its Pacific Fleet and Eastern Military District, which includes : 17 principle surface warships, 21 submarines (including 3 ballistic missile submarines), 23 patrol vessels ; the equivalent of : a tank brigade, 4 infantry divisions, an airborne/special forces division, a naval infantry brigade and regiment ; and 334 strike/fighter aircraft.¹⁸⁾

India

With a high rate of economic growth second only to China among the emerging powers, India is also aiming to develop its geostrategic power. This is partially to counter China, with whom India has territorial disputes, over which a brief border war was fought in 1962. India is also concerned about any potential increase in China's naval capabilities, which may challenge India's maritime capabilities in the Indian Ocean, particularly if China is able to further develop port visitation and logistics access and intelligence gathering capabilities in neighbouring Pakistan, Myanmar and Sri Lanka. India is also more directly confronted by its ongoing main security rivalry with Pakistan, with both countries developing their nuclear capabilities since 1998, aimed at deterring each other. India also has to cope with long-running violence and low-intensity conflicts in Kashmir, Assam, and the extensive 'Naxalite' Maoist-based insurgency in central and eastern India.¹⁹⁾

To meet this range of security challenges, India maintains the third-largest active military in the world, of 1,325,000, which includes the equivalent of : six armoured divisions, 24 infantry divisions, 13 mountain divisions, one airborne/special forces/marine division, 3,233 main battle tanks, 798 combat aircraft, 21 principle surface warships, including an aircraft carrier, 15 submarines, and 54 nuclear-capable strategic missiles.²⁰⁾

Major ASEAN States

ASEAN was founded in 1967 to counter the rise of Communism in the region, at the height of the Cold War, and to secure peaceful relations within the region, which it has largely accomplished. With the increase in the strategic influence of China, particularly in its claims over the South China Sea, several ASEAN states have been engaging in the own modernisation of their military forces, particularly in naval and air capacity, with recent average economic growth rates of 7% allowing av-

17) Robert D. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts and the Battle Against Fate*, (New York : Random House, 2012), pp.178–179.

18) The total active strength of the Russian military is 956,000, including 292 ICBMs. IISS, *The Military Balance*, pp.192, 200–201.

19) Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography*, pp.249–251.

20) Pakistan's active military is 642,000, including 64 strategic nuclear missiles ; as well as confronting India, Pakistan has had to deal with an increasingly violent insurgency and terrorist campaign by the Pakistani Taliban. IISS, *The Military Balance*, pp.243–245, 272.

erage defence spending increases of around 4%.²¹⁾ While this is principally aimed to deter the growing power of China, this increase in defence spending also has domestic security purposes for a number of countries as well.

Indonesia's military remains dominated by the army, which continues to fight an insurgency in West Papua, amid accusations of human rights abuses ; Indonesia has active armed forces of 302,000, which include the equivalents of 7 infantry divisions ; an airborne/Special Forces division, a marine division, 69 combat aircraft, 11 principle surface warships, and 69 patrol vessels.²²⁾ Malaysia's active armed forces of 109,000 are relatively well modernised and equipped, with the equivalent of two armoured divisions, three infantry divisions, a special forces/airborne division, 48 main battle tanks, 67 combat aircraft, 10 principle surface warships, 2 submarines, and 258 patrol craft.²³⁾ Singapore has the best equipped armed forces in ASEAN, with an active strength of 72,500, including the equivalent of 5 combined-arms divisions, with 96 main battle tanks, 148 combat aircraft, 6 principle surface warships, 5 submarines, and 35 patrol craft.²⁴⁾

The Philippines' active armed forces of 125,000 have traditionally had to cope with various insurgencies, of the Communist New Peoples' Army (NPA), and the Islamist Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), with whom a ceasefire has just been secured, and the Islamist Abu Sayyaf terrorist group. The Philippines is also seeking to increase its maritime capacity, after the shock of China sending military forces to secure the Scarborough Shoals island group in the South China Sea in 2011, which is claimed by the Philippines. The Philippines armed forces include 11 light infantry divisions, a Special Forces division, a marine division, 24 combat aircraft, one frigate, and 63 patrol craft.²⁵⁾

Having fought a border war with China in 1979, and naval clashes over the Spratly Islands in 1988, Vietnam sees China as its greatest threat, and has similarly sought to recently improve its maritime capacity. Vietnam's experienced active armed forces of 482,000 include the equivalent of 3 armoured divisions, 66 infantry divisions, 15 combat engineer divisions, 2 marine divisions, 1,315 main battle tanks, 235 combat aircraft, 2 frigates, 2 submarines (with plans to procure 6 more from Russia), and 62 patrol vessels.²⁶⁾

Thailand has no major dispute with China, but is still aligned with the USA, particularly to gain support for its southern counterinsurgency campaign against Islamic militants, which has been criticised for human rights abuses ; the long-running role of the military in Thai politics has also remained controversial in recent times, seen in its coup of 2006, and suppression of 'Red-shirt' protesters in the 2010 political crisis. The active strength of the Thai military is 305,860, comprising two armoured divisions, seven infantry divisions, two Special Forces divisions, a marine division ; 283 main battle tanks ; 202 combat aircraft, 10 principle surface warships, including an aircraft carrier, and 83 patrol vessels.²⁷⁾

Burma's military has also long been accused of extensive human rights abuses, having waged

21) IISS, pp.208-209.

22) IISS, pp.248-250.

23) IISS, pp.264-266.

24) IISS, pp.278-279.

25) IISS, pp.276-277.

26) IISS, pp.292-293.

27) IISS, pp.286-288.

counterinsurgency campaigns against ethnic-based rebel groups since independence in 1948, making these the longest-running wars in the world. The military-dominated government has recently moved towards greater political openness over the past couple of years though, freeing political prisoners, including Noble Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, allowing greater press freedoms and participation of opposition groups in elections. These developments have been rewarded with greater diplomatic recognition, and much-desired foreign investment, enabling Burma (officially called Myanmar) to become less dependent on Chinese investment, with a related reduction in Chinese geostrategic influence. However, concerns over human rights abuses against minority groups remain, with the ongoing military campaign against the Kachin rebel group recently including airstrikes.²⁸⁾ The armed forces of Burma will no doubt seek to exploit the desired increase in foreign investment to promote its own business interests, as well as its military strength, which currently comprises active numbers of 406,000, including equivalents of 3 armoured divisions, 58 infantry divisions, 160 main battle tanks, 136 combat aircraft, one frigate, and 99 patrol vessels.²⁹⁾

Australia

As one of the USA's longest military allies in the region, Australia has continued to support US military operations beyond the Cold War, contributing forces to the US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Australian Defence Forces (ADF) have also sought to have their capabilities upgraded in the 2009 Defence White Paper issued by the Rudd Labor Government, which aimed for an ambitious expansion of air and naval capabilities in particular; however, recent budget constraints have seen this plan for expansion downgraded somewhat, with plans to acquire the troubled F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, and up to 12 conventional submarines likely to be delayed in a follow-up White Paper due in 2013.³⁰⁾ The ADF still nevertheless maintains a highly professional, well-trained and capable active strength of around 56,550, including the equivalent of an armoured brigade, an infantry division, and a Special Forces brigade, with 59 main battle tanks, 142 combat aircraft, 12 principle surface warships, six submarines, and 24 patrol vessels.³¹⁾

In one of the most significant regional defence policy decisions in recent times, it was announced during President Barack Obama's first visit to Australia in December 2011 that US military forces would be hosted in northern Australia, based around Darwin, in a series of escalating rotations and military exercises, which commenced in 2012.³²⁾ While aimed at reinforcing the traditional ANZUS alliance with the USA, this move has generated significant anxiety within China, and highlights the core diplomatic dilemma for Australia into the 21st century, of maintaining good relations with its most important trading partner China, while simultaneously supporting its core security partnership with the USA.³³⁾

28) Thomas Fuller, 'Myanmar Military Admits to Airstrikes on Kachin Rebels', *The New York Times*, January 2, 2013.

29) Other rebel armies fighting the Burmese military include those of the Karen, Mon, and Shan ethnic groups. IISS, *The Military Balance*, pp.268–269.

30) Tomohiko Satake and Yusuke Ishihara, 'America's Rebalance to Asia and its Implications for Japan-US-Australia Security Cooperation', *Asia-Pacific Review*, Vol.19, No.2, 2012, p.20.

31) IISS, *The Military Balance*, pp.226–228.

32) Up to 2,500 US Marines are planned to be based in Darwin by 2017. Tan Seng Chye, 'Changing Global Landscape and Enhanced US Engagement with Asia-Challenges and Emerging Trends', *Asia-Pacific Review*, Vol.19, No.1, 2012, pp.118–119.

33) James Manicom and Andrew O'Neil, 'China's rise and middle power democracies : Canada and Australia compared', ↗

The USA

Despite the recent economic difficulties the US economy has faced since the Global Financial Crisis of 2008, which has led to cuts to its defence budget, and the strains endured by the US military from its long wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the US retains the most powerful military in the world, a situation which is unlikely to change for the foreseeable future. In the Pacific, the US certainly maintains a position of unrivalled relative dominance, despite the increase in capabilities of China and other states. The recent policy of the 'pivot' of US forces towards the Pacific, announced by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in November 2011, will only seek to preserve this dominance, where around 60% of US maritime capability will be allocated to the Pacific, altering the overall general policy of having a '50-50' deployment shared between the Atlantic and Pacific Commands.³⁴⁾

This is recognition by the Obama administration of the increasing importance of the Asia-Pacific region to the global economy and international strategic stability in the post-Cold War era. In response, the US has been effectively expanding its regional network of alliances, including developing closer relations with India, and also with its former bitter Cold War enemy Vietnam. This level of defence cooperation by the US has also been increasing with other states in the Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines, ranging from joint training exercises, to logistics cooperation and counterterrorism/security operations. The core of US foreign policy in the Pacific remains its key military alliances, with Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Australia. The US has insisted that the Pivot is not a Cold-War style containment of China; however, there is still a potential danger that tensions between the two regional hegemonies could still yet escalate in future.³⁵⁾

The USA's Pacific Command maintains the strongest military forces in the region, which includes: the 3rd Fleet, with 4 aircraft carriers, 42 other principle surface warships, 38 submarines (including 8 ballistic nuclear missile submarines), and the 7th Fleet, based in Japan, with an aircraft carrier and 9 principle surface warships; 8 air force wings, including 54 strike fighters based in Japan, and 64 in South Korea; a marine division based in Japan, an armoured brigade and infantry division based in South Korea, and a marine division, an infantry division, and two Special Forces groups, based in the US.³⁶⁾

RGOs and Prospects for Asia-Pacific Security

The overall geostrategic situation just highlighted therefore demonstrates the imperative need for constructing an effective multilateral institutional mechanism for addressing security issues in the Asia-Pacific region. However, the current diplomatic structures are not proving to be very effective so far. The most prominent of the regional government organisations (RGOs) which have emerged, include: APEC, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and the East Asia Summit (EAS).

↘ *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol.12, No.2, 2012, pp.211-218.

34) Hillary Clinton, 'America's Pacific Century', *Foreign Policy*, November 2011.

35) Christian Le Mièrre, 'America's Pivot to East Asia: The Naval Dimension', *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, Vol.54, No.3, 2012, pp.88-90.

36) The active strength of the US military is 1,569,000, including 292 ICBMs. IISS, *The Military Balance*, pp.62, 67.

APEC

APEC was established as a largely Australian diplomatic initiative in 1989, first at the ministerial level, then as an annual leaders' meeting from 1993, with overall aims of facilitating trade and investment in the region. While trade and economic issues remain the priority for APEC, 'non-traditional' security issues, such as terrorism, piracy, organised crime, emergency relief for natural disasters, and environmental degradation have also become part of its agenda. However, resolving territorial disputes, and arms control, have so far effectively remained outside its remit.³⁷⁾

The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)

The ARF, made up of the ASEAN states, plus most others from the Asia-Pacific, to a present total of 27 members, is highly significant in that it encompasses such an extensive number of countries throughout the region, ranging from the major powers to the smaller states, including traditionally isolated diplomatic players such as North Korea.³⁸⁾ As the largest multilateral diplomatic forum of the region, since its founding in 1994, it regularly raises issues of preventative diplomacy, consultation and confidence building measures. However, the limits of the ARF were demonstrated at its most recent summit in Cambodia in July 2012, where for the first time, a final communique could not be issued, as China refused to even discuss disputes over territorial issues in the South China Sea. The US, Japan and ASEAN states had attempted to raise the prospect of a Code of Conduct (COC) for the peaceful handling of territorial disputes in the region, but this was firmly blocked by China's intransigence over the matter.³⁹⁾

The East Asia Summit (EAS)

The EAS was formed in 2005, as an extension of the ASEAN Plus Three (ASEAN + 3) dialogue process, with 16 regional members, significantly expanding with the inclusion of the USA and Russia in 2011.⁴⁰⁾ While similar to APEC, in that trade and economic issues such as energy are its main focus, security issues, both within ASEAN and in the wider region have also become prominent areas for discussion. The last East Asia Summit of leaders (also held in Cambodia, in November 2012) again attempted to raise a Code of Conduct to prevent escalation of maritime disputes in the region, but this was again stymied by China pressuring EAS host Cambodia not to have the South China Sea issue 'internationalised'.⁴¹⁾

Conclusions

Ideally, international law and multilateral institutions, both international and regional, provide the best potential mechanisms for resolving conflict, according to the liberal and constructivist schools of International Relations Theory. Other regions do provide potential models of varying effective-

37) Ryo Sahashi, 'Security Arrangements in the Asia-Pacific: A Three-Tier Approach', in Tow and Kersten, *Bilateral Perspectives of Regional Security*, pp.213–234.

38) ASEAN Secretariat, 'About the ASEAN Regional Forum', ASEAN, 2011.

39) Luke Hunt, 'ASEAN Summit Fallout Continues', *The Diplomat*, July 20, 2012.

40) Kazuhiko Togo, 'Regional Security Cooperation in East Asia: What Can Japan and Australia Usefully Do Together', in Tow and Kersten, *Bilateral Perspectives of Regional Security*, pp.86–88.

41) Ernest Z Bower, 'The ASEAN and East Asia Summits: US Walks Softly While China Wields a Big Stick', *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, November 21, 2012.

ness, such as NATO, the EU, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the African Union (AU), and the Organization of American States (OAS). Regarding arms control, Europe at least has diplomatic constraints on the possession and deployment of nuclear weapons, through the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, and of conventional armed forces, with the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty.⁴²⁾ Such an arms control regime is sorely required for the Asia-Pacific; however, there has been little diplomatic effort or momentum towards similar treaties being established in the region, certainly not through the various current RGO networks.

Further multilateral diplomatic initiatives do remain under way, principally to encourage greater economic interdependence amongst the region; principally the TPP and RCEP, which supporters claim will assist in fostering greater interest towards peaceful conflict resolution overall, in order to avoid endangering the mutual benefits of regional trade and investment.⁴³⁾ The recent leadership transitions in Northeast Asia may also provide an opportunity to ‘reset’ foreign policy in the region; with Xi Jinping in China, Shinzo Abe in Japan, and Park Guen-hye in South Korea coming to power, there is a chance for fresh diplomatic initiatives, which are already being potentially driven by proposals for renewed trade negotiations between the three countries.⁴⁴⁾ However, there remains little prospect for a similar level of cooperation on security issues. The current RGOs of the Asia-Pacific have so far been unable to resolve the increasing territorial tensions in the South China and East China Seas, nor the other potential flashpoints in the region, such as North Korea.

The challenge therefore remains whether the existing regional organisations can adapt to successfully address the security challenges of the region, or whether new institutions and diplomatic practices need to evolve. Another relatively new grouping is the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM+), an annual meeting since 2010 of the defence Ministers from the EAS states.⁴⁵⁾ If it gains further support and genuine participation from its contributors, with its direct focus on security issues, it has the potential to possibly become *the* prime RGO for the diplomatic maintenance of regional security for the Asia-Pacific.

If the dominance of power politics as recently seen in the ARF and other RGOs is replicated though, the ADMM+ could face the same fate of being another largely symbolic annual ritual on the regional diplomatic calendar. The danger remains that the ‘realist’ paradigm of a ‘great power’ struggle for regional hegemony, driving a nuclear and conventional arms race, threatens to dominate the diplomacy of the Asia-Pacific into the 21st century.⁴⁶⁾ Given the numerous potential flashpoints which could possibly escalate into open armed conflict, the challenge for policymakers, political leaders, diplomats, and interested commentators and scholars is starkly urgent; to avert the foreign policies of the region’s member states from descending into such a dire future.

42) Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, ‘Start of CSBM and CFE negotiations’, OSCE, 18 July 2005.

43) Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), ‘Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement negotiations’, ‘Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership negotiations’, DFAT, 2013.

44) ‘Northeast Asia in turbulence: Incoming 3 leaders share responsibility for peace’, *The Korea Times*, December 25, 2012.

45) Eiichi Katahara, ‘Japan-Australia Joint Security Statements and the Trilateral Security Dialogue: A Japanese Perspective’, in Tow and Kersten, *Bilateral Perspectives of Regional Security*, p.143.

46) Michael Heazle & Michael Clarke, ‘Old problems in a new century?’, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.66, No.5, 2012, p.497.

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