The major powers and Northeast Asia: Towards a security community, or a community of interests?

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Abstract
This paper seeks to address a key question regarding Northeast Asia’s future: Is a continuing American presence in the region a pre-requisite for ensuring long term regional security? In addressing this question, the authors challenge the structural realist argument that a US strategic presence in Northeast Asia is necessary to contain China’s “hegemonic” ambitions in the region. Structural realists assume that Beijing is intent on supplanting the United States as the dominant great power in Asia, but they overlook the severe internal challenges that Beijing confronts that will place constraints on how much it can achieve internationally in the years ahead. Even in the unlikely event that the Six Party Talks fail to evolve into a formal Northeast Asian security cooperation mechanism, the overlapping interests among the three regional major powers means that an informal community of security interests already exists. The challenge for Tokyo and Beijing will be to deepen further their mutual overlapping interests so that, in the event the United States decides to draw down its engagement at some future point, China and Japan will be able to maintain major power cooperation in the region with a view to promoting long term conflict avoidance among states.

Introduction
Opinions on the impact China will have on regional security in Asia are numerous and diverse. Two perspectives, however, have come to dominate contemporary discussion. The first is that Beijing will remain preoccupied with preserving internal domestic stability and be content with playing a constructive role in improving regional cooperation in Asia; Beijing’s primary concern and focus will be to defend its sovereign territorial integrity. From this perspective, China will not seek to dominate regional affairs and—in line with its historical approach to international relations—it will not have aggressive designs on other states.¹

The second dominant perspective is that China’s rise will pose acute challenges for regional countries in Asia. China will seek to dominate the Asian region and shape it in its own image. Countries will have little choice but to either accommodate or confront China in its quest for regional hegemony. In this scenario, China will behave just as all other great powers have behaved throughout history: It will aspire to

exercise control over its own “sphere of influence”. Viewed exclusively through the prism of balance of power thinking, the most likely outcome of China's rise is conflict between China and Japan, and therefore also the US, at some point as strategic competition intensifies under the logic of the security dilemma.

But China’s rise also can be seen as promoting opportunities for engagement and cooperation with the United States and Japan, which could over time lead to the formation of a Northeast Asian security community. If China and Japan’s economic relationship and domestic circumstances and priorities are also considered, in particular a clearly stated aversion to war and focus on economic growth common to both societies and governments, the foundations for establishing what Karl Deutsch described as a “pluralist security community”, in Northeast Asia may already exist.

For the purposes of this paper, what makes the distinction between these alternative futures interesting is the distinctive meanings they suggest about the significance of the US’s future role in Asia and the nature of its future relations with China and Northeast Asia’s other major power, Japan. The received wisdom among international relations specialists is that the future Northeast Asian security environment—China-Japan relations especially—will be more unstable in the absence of at least the present level of American strategic engagement that exists. Viewed from the perspective of Northeast Asia as a fluid regional security complex, the centrality of US power in providing a key balance in the region against increased major power competition and potential confrontation appears obvious. But if the prospects for increased competition were to be diluted by increased cooperation—inspired by recognition of mutually held or complementary interests—what does this mean for our understanding of the significance of the US role in Asia, and what does it tell us about the kinds of assumptions that mainstream depictions of Northeast Asia’s future security environment are based on?

This paper challenges the view that Northeast Asia’s major powers are on a collision course and that a continuing US presence in the region is a pre-requisite for long term security. Because judgments concerning the importance of future US military engagement and support in Asia are the product of assumed balance of power dynamics and systemic influences, the evidence informing this view needs to be tested rather than merely accepted as being intuitively correct. Moreover, the prospect that hard-edged balance of power competition in Northeast Asia could be mitigated by the formation of a security community of interests between the region’s major powers needs to be discussed to better understand the extent to which active balancing on Washington’s part against China is necessary to promote security in this part of the world.

**China’s rise and the United States**

A major consequence of the end of the Cold War in Northeast Asia was growing uncertainty about the future of America’s strategic presence in the region. While the United States had endured its fair share of public criticism across Asia, privately most governments regarded an American strategic presence as an important stabilising

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factor in the region.\textsuperscript{3} Even China, against which many saw the American presence as a necessary strategic hedge, occasionally indicated that it considered US forces stationed in Japan as a necessary evil to keep Tokyo’s strategic ambitions in check. Yet, the commencement in 1990 of a major drawdown of Soviet/Russian naval and air forces in the North Pacific theatre provoked concerns among US allies in particular that Washington would have little strategic rationale to maintain its military presence in Northeast Asia in a climate where calls from US taxpayers for a substantial post-Cold War “peace dividend” were gaining momentum. Moreover, the US East Asia Strategy Initiative (EASI) reports released in 1990 and 1992 conspicuously failed to provide a convincing set of reasons why American forces should remain in the region.\textsuperscript{4}

It was not until the 1995 EASI (often referred to as the “Nye Report”)—deliberately framed to reassure states in the region by ruling out further reductions in US force levels and reaffirming America’s commitment to its bilateral alliances—that many of these concerns were properly addressed. From the perspective of the Clinton administration, the need to maintain a stable regional environment in Northeast Asia to buttress American trade and investment interests, as well as a highly visible level of military engagement in a key region for America’s broader global strategy, outweighed any economic or political benefits that may have been gained by withdrawing US forces from Northeast Asia. More specifically, American policy makers realised that endeavours to counter North Korea’s nuclear ambitions and contain China’s emerging regional aspirations would be made considerably more difficult without a tangible US strategic footprint in the region. However, despite the clear strategic rationale for a continuing US presence, throughout the 1990s many believed that a further significant drawdown of America’s Northeast Asian commitment was only a matter of time.

The end of the Cold War sounded the death knell for close strategic cooperation between Washington and Beijing. For much of the latter Cold War period, the shared commitment to containing Soviet power regionally and globally helped justify an increasingly close relationship between the United States and China throughout the 1970s and 1980s. This served to paper over many of the underlying fissures in the relationship, especially those relating to human rights, governance, and sovereignty. For many Americans, the brutal suppression of student protests in Tiananmen Square in 1989 underscored the gulf between the Chinese authoritarian system and the liberal democratic system of the United States. Equally, for many Chinese, Washington’s harsh condemnatory response confirmed existing suspicions about the propensity of the United States to meddle in the internal affairs of other states.

Notwithstanding the best efforts of some in the US policy community during the 1990s to talk up the bilateral relationship and characterise China as a “strategic partner” of the United States in the region, few were convinced by claims regarding the supposed strategic like-mindedness of the two countries. China was a regional power rapidly on the rise seeking to challenge the status quo, while the United States


was the established regional hegemon seeking to preserve it. Moreover, continuing fallout over the Tiananmen Square suppression, tensions over Taiwan in 1995-96, and alleged Chinese espionage in the United States itself placed serious strains on the bilateral relationship and served to mask the periodically constructive dialogue between Washington and Beijing on the North Korean nuclear issue. In a period where many in the United States, especially those in conservative quarters, appeared to be casting around for adversaries to supplant the Soviet threat to inject focus into America’s post-Cold War foreign and defence policy, China seemed to be a convenient candidate to fill the role. By the end of the 1990s, it had become clear to most observers that China and the United States, although not engaged in “a new Cold War” were nevertheless “vying for strategic pre-eminence and leadership in East Asia”.

Over the last two decades, China’s steady economic growth and development has been accompanied by a growing body of literature warning of the security consequences of a wealthier and more powerful China. Numerous realist scholars and observers have warned of the emerging “China threat”. Informing this view are assumptions about the imperatives the anarchical international system imposes on the behaviour of emerging great powers like China. Chief among these is the view that China is intent on pursuing hegemony in Northeast Asia and in Asia more generally, that emerging powers are never “status quo” powers, and that they inevitably cause shifts in regional balances of power that must be countered by other powers in the region. In a 2005 exchange with Zbigniew Brzezinski in Foreign Policy, Mearsheimer asked:

> Why should we expect China to act differently than the United States? U.S. policymakers, after all, react harshly when other great powers send military forces into the Western Hemisphere[…] Are the Chinese more principled, more ethical, less nationalistic, or less concerned about their survival than Westerners? They are none of these things, which is why China is likely to imitate the United States and attempt to become a regional hegemon. China’s leadership and peoples remember what happened in the last century, when Japan was powerful and China was weak. In the anarchic world of international politics, it is better to be Godzilla than Bambi.

The balance of power dynamics shaping the behaviour of emerging and existing powers alike are regarded by advocates of the China threat thesis as objective forces and constraints produced by the international system that states ignore at their peril. All rational states, therefore, strive to maximise their individual power through military capability and alliances in order to remain secure. Great powers, including

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7 Zbigniew Brzezinski and John Mearsheimer “Clash of the Titans (Make money, not war)”, Foreign Policy, January-February, 2005, p. 49.
the US, strive to achieve and maintain hegemony in their own regions, while attempting to deny it to other great powers in their own backyards. The potential for conflict as regional powers compete, and the limited incentives for cooperation are, then, hardwired into state behaviour by the characteristics of the international system. Statements about peaceful intentions and defensive military spending by governments count for little in such structural accounts of the international system and how it works.

As a consequence, “unit level” factors such as economic interdependence are given short shrift in structural accounts of state behaviour, as is any meaningful role for the individual agency of policy makers and the domestic circumstances they operate in. The fundamentally structural-determinist approach underlying the China threat thesis and the subsequent need for a large US military presence in Northeast Asia prioritises theoretical simplicity over theoretical sophistication and, in particular, the need to acknowledge more intangible but no less significant influences on policy making like perception, world views, and values. In so far as structural realism does consider non-structural factors, it is only to explain instances of “non-rational” behaviour by states, a task most recently taken up by neo-classical realist scholars.

US power and the China-Japan relationship

Since its inception in 1960, the US-Japan security alliance has remained at the core of Northeast Asia’s security complex. China views the alliance with concern, and has repeatedly stated that it regards itself, and the threat of a PRC attack on an errant Taiwan, as the rationale for the alliance’s continued existence and expansion in the post-Cold War period. China’s status as a threat to American interests continues to be reinforced by conservative policy advisors and commentators in the US, while for Japan, the alliance remains the major pillar of its national security and political relationship with Washington. It is also, in its current form, an obstacle to Japan’s aspirations for a more independent regional and global identity.

The enlargement of Japan’s military activities and responsibilities (e.g., peacekeeping in Cambodia and a support role in Afghanistan and Iraq)—beyond the hitherto strictly adhered to limit of only defending Japanese territory as per Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution and the original alliance provisions—has to date prompted sustained criticism from Beijing. Other governments in the region, reassured by the fact that Japan’s expanding military role in and beyond the region is occurring with the approval and encouragement of the US, are yet to voice any real concern over these developments. And while there remains some disquiet in Japan over how far its military responsibilities and capabilities are likely to be expanded, support for plans

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8 As Jennifer Sterling-Folker puts it, “Actors are free to act as they wish, pursue any goals they desire, and to allow their interests and behaviors to be determined by the processes in which they are engaged. They are also free to die, but it is the choices they have made vis-à-vis themselves and others that determine that outcome, not anarchy itself.” Jennifer Sterling-Folker, “Realist Environment, Liberal Process, and Domestic-Level Variables,” International Studies Quarterly, vol. 41, 1997, p. 19. See also Gideon Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy”, World Politics, vol. 51, no. 1, 1998, pp.144-72.

to amend the Constitution, in particular Article 9, in order to “normalise” Japan’s military has grown significantly in recent years.

The dynamics and potential outcomes of the US-Japan alliance are at least as vexing for China’s own security concerns and aspirations. The alliance itself is, as already noted, China’s clearest and most serious security concern, particularly in the context of Beijing’s ongoing plans to one day reunify Taiwan with the mainland. Therefore, on one level, Chinese strategists would prefer either a weaker alliance or no alliance, as US power in Asia would be less formidable without it. On another level, however, China—like South Korea and to a lesser degree the ASEAN nations—also sees Japan’s dependence on the US for its security as protection against a military resurgent Japan, which would pose a much more immediate and direct threat to China’s interests. As Brzezinski has argued, responding to Mearsheimer’s predictions of an inevitable future conflict between the US and China: “Frankly, I doubt that China could push the United States out of Asia. But even if it could, I don’t think it would want to live with the consequences: a powerful, nationalistic, and nuclear-armed Japan.”

On yet another, more regional-focused, level, a more independent Japan could also be seen as an opportunity for China to undermine US power and influence in the region and forge closer ties with Japan, but preferably with Japan as a junior partner in a China-led regional economic community. This view, however, is somewhat optimistic and lacks any clear basis for why Japan would not just be as likely to remain a competitor stymieing Beijing’s plans, or, alternatively, develop a joint leadership role with China based on areas of mutual benefit such as reducing tensions on the Korean peninsula, energy cooperation, and managing transnational issues (pollution, piracy, fisheries).

Indeed, there is something of a “catch-22” quality to China’s position and options in regard to the alliance. While the view among some Chinese analysts that the alliance is “keeping the genie in the bottle” appears to reflect China’s current position and attitudes towards Japan and the alliance in general, even this seemingly straightforward perspective is more complicated than it first appears. Jiang points out that in the current alliance, China is the “imagined enemy”, which, like North Korea, gives Japan seemingly good reason to build up its military. Hence:

Chinese analysts…seem to be in a dilemma. On the one hand, they would like to see U.S. protection of Japan continue so that the latter will not feel compelled to rapidly build up its own military. On the other hand, they believe

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11 Brzezinski and Mearsheimer, “Clash of the Titans”, Foreign Policy, p. 49.

China is now being targeted and Japan’s military role is expanding anyway.\textsuperscript{13}

Japanese and Chinese perceptions of the US-Japan alliance, then, are focused on many of the same issues but raise quite different problems. The US, for its part, needs to be mindful of these concerns if it is to maintain its regional influence in a way that neither threatens China, or its neighbours, with the prospect of a military resurgent Japan with Beijing in its cross hairs, nor gives support to the increasingly popular view in Japan that the alliance ties Japan too closely to the US, constraining Japanese autonomy, and making it vulnerable to consequences and costs that are not of Japan’s own making. Stable relations between these three countries are crucial for regional stability. And, at the moment, in spite of its flaws and complications, the current status quo is one that allows Japan and China the stability each requires for domestic economic reform and development. Whether the US needs to, or can, continue to act as a balancer in Northeast Asia through its large military presence in the region is less clear.

With China continuing to increase its military spending and Japan talking up its plans to bolster an already significant military capability, the specter of an arms race developing in North East Asia has become a common feature of media and other reporting on the region. Looking at Japan and China’s current and future military capabilities through the lens of the economic challenges facing both countries, however, provides an alternative indicator to just how big a role “hard power” is likely to play in Sino-Japanese relations.

Despite occasional tensions that emerge between the two governments over China’s military build up and Japan’s potential remilitarisation, there is little evidence to support the view that a military confrontation between the two countries is inevitable, or even likely, at any time in the near future. As argued earlier, economic growth is the overriding priority for both countries and neither government can afford, either politically or economically, the seriously adverse impact any military action would have on their respective economies, particularly given the significant level of economic interdependence that now exists between the two countries. And while provocation by Taiwan or possibly an energy-related territorial dispute are both plausible causes for open conflict occurring between Japan and China, the possibility of either scenario being played out remains very low, given the huge consequences it would have for not only China and Japan, but also the entire region and beyond.

Thus, in broad terms, economic growth is an overarching priority for both countries that will, barring acts of gross provocation, most likely contain any existing potential for military conflict between them. Moreover, in terms of China and Japan’s military spending, at least in the short to medium term, existing and emerging challenges in both economies are very likely to impede the emergence of a North East Asian arms race capable of destabilising the region. Japan, for example, still continues to struggle with a deflationary economy climate that has lasted for over a decade. For China to further expand, or even maintain, its current level of military spending to the point where it could exert some measure of military dominance in the region, Beijing needs to maintain a very high level of sustainable economic growth while at the same time

\textsuperscript{13} Yang, “Sino-Japanese Relations: Implications for South East Asia”, p. 309.
reigning in some of the country’s emerging social ills. To date, China’s average levels of annual growth have been steady at between 8-10 percent, but some observers see a number of looming domestic problems that could derail continued high rates of growth in China. Among these problems are China’s lop-sided male-female birth ratio; its burgeoning demand for external energy supplies, growing income disparities, and high unemployment combined with decreasing levels of state benefits; an unstable and poorly regulated financial system; and a host of emerging environmental problems stemming from the PRC’s rapid modernisation and expanding energy consumption.14

Adding further to the list of problems facing the Chinese economy is the manufacturing sector’s reliance on low wage costs for its competitiveness and low levels of investment in research and development among many Chinese companies. This approach has made China extremely attractive as a manufacturer for foreign companies, and has led to it becoming Japan’s biggest export destination. But it does little for the development of Chinese owned products able to compete both domestically and internationally against foreign brands. And although China’s levels of research and development investment have been increasing, domestic value added exports remain a small proportion of China’s overall export earnings.15 China’s ongoing need for foreign investment for its foreign trade growth also makes clear the compelling need for the CCP to avoid any kind of confrontation that could disrupt its foreign trade16 or cause existing flows of investment capital to suddenly dry up. In 2005, Liew and Wu observed that,

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), especially since 2000, played a significant role in the growth of China’s foreign trade. China’s large domestic market and attractiveness as a location for production for export, as a result of its large cheap labour force and WTO membership, have been the magnets for FDI flows into China. Between 1995 and 2000 China received 40 percent of the FDI flows into Asia. In 2002 China received more FDI than even the US and became the largest recipient of FDI in the world that year.17

In spite of its impressive growth, which actually has been slower than that experienced by Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan measured at comparable stages of development, the Chinese economy remains extremely inefficient. More than 40 percent of China’s GDP is generated by fixed investment, but Chinese business has so far been unable to fully exploit the full growth potential of the unprecedented levels of capital it has at its disposal. Japan in 1961, South Korea 1982, and Taiwan in


16 China’s gross import and export volume, as a proportion of GDP, rose from 43.8 percent in 2000 to 70 percent in 2004.

1976 each achieved a similar level of per capita GDP as China had achieved in 2005, calculated at purchasing power parity, but with much lower rates of investment as a percentage of GDP.\footnote{Martin Wolf, “Why is China Growing So Slowly?”, \textit{Foreign Policy}, January-February, 2005, pp. 50-51.} This inefficient use of investment within the Chinese economy, caused in large part by the huge amount of bad loans issued by China’s banks (almost US$73 billion in 2009),\footnote{“Chinese banks' bad loans down in 2009: CBRC”, \textit{Reuters}, January 15, 2010. Available at \url{http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE60E3192010010115}. According to Reuters, ‘Ratings agency Fitch, affirming its "A+" long-term currency rating on China, said on Thursday that it was concerned about "an eventual deterioration in banks' asset quality" after the surge in lending. "In the agency's view, falling non-performing loans do not indicate that banks' asset quality is improving, as some new loans have been used to roll over delinquent obligations, and the predominance of bullet-oriented repayment structures means that any problems associated with recent lending are unlikely to be evident until the loans mature," Fitch said.’ See also Wolf, pp. 50-51.} is likely to limit the sustainability of further growth in the economy over the longer term, while any solution undoubtedly will create further pressure on already existing problems such as employment and wealth distribution.

Both China and Japan face serious economic hurdles and challenges, and a large part of the solution to overcoming them rests with their ability to further nurture their existing economic relationship. As argued here, while the clear economic value of the relationship should itself provide ample reason for avoiding any serious political confrontation, the prospect of conflict, either over Taiwan or energy rights, cannot be dismissed entirely. However, the ability of either country, given Japan and China’s current economic situations, to significantly increase, or possibly even maintain, their current levels of military spending over the next five to ten years is far from clear. Subsequently, any major change in the regional balance of military power will probably remain a remote possibility until Japan and/or China are able to overcome their existing economic and social problems and settle into a phase of stable, long term growth.

**Northeast Asia as a security community, or a community of interests?**

A security community refers to a situation—typically in a regional context—where states successfully develop formal and informal practices that serve to promote a sense of shared interests in the security realm and therefore help to ensure that change is managed peacefully among states in the community.\footnote{Karl Deutsch, “Security Communities”, in James Rosenau (ed.), \textit{International Politics and Foreign Policy}, Free Press, New York, 1961.} As Acharya notes, “the main characteristics of security communities include mutual interdependence, mutual responsiveness, and the pacification or the abandonment of the use of force”.\footnote{Amitav Acharya, “Security Community”, in Martin Griffiths (ed.), \textit{The Routledge Encyclopedia of International Relations and Global Politics}, Routledge, London and New York, 2005, pp. 751-753.} The role of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations is often identified as fulfilling many of the attributes of a security community in Asia. Yet, as Emmerson has argued, it is important not to exaggerate the degree of security interdependence...
among ASEAN members; from this perspective, ASEAN is best described as a “thin” security community.\(^\text{22}\)

In contrast to almost all other regions and sub-regions in the international system, Northeast Asia has never had a multilateral institution that reflects a unity of purpose or a common identity among its constituent states. As Gilbert Rozman has observed, despite a high degree of complementarity between Northeast Asia’s economies, deeply nationalistic rivalries and structural geopolitical impediments (particularly the division on the Korean peninsula) have inhibited the growth of regionalism in this area of the international system.\(^\text{23}\) Despite this, however, Northeast Asia is, to employ Buzan’s terminology, a distinctive sub-regional security complex within the broader East Asian security complex, which has “its own patterns of interaction and dynamics”.\(^\text{24}\) The influence of the United States, China, and Japan in shaping the security dynamics of Northeast Asia is much stronger than is the case in Southeast Asia, largely because of the absence of any analogous institution to ASEAN. Paradoxically, this is both a cause and a consequence of a highly fluid sub-regional security environment: the absence of an established institutional mechanism in Northeast Asia means that patterns of strategic behaviour are largely unregulated, and the more unregulated nature of the security landscape tends to reinforce the presumption against institutional security frameworks among key actors.

Of all the contemporary developments in Northeast Asia, it is the shifting role of the major powers that will determine future security dynamics in the sub-region. Strategic rivalry between major powers has a long tradition in Northeast Asia. As Chung Min Lee observes, “in no other region is the prospect for long-term regional stability and prosperity so dependent on the level, or lack, of major power cooperation”.\(^\text{25}\) It is important not to confuse rivalry with confrontation. The latter implies a short term readiness on the part of major powers to use force to achieve policy objectives (e.g. the Cuban missile crisis), while the former refers to a situation where major powers share a relationship characterised by underlying adversarial tensions (i.e. the superpower relationship for most of the cold war period).

Contrary to the view of structural realists, the prospects for cooperation among the major powers in Northeast Asia are quite good. US-China rivalry is more multilayered than many observers acknowledge, and its strong economic dimension distinguishes it from the rather narrow ideological-military rivalry between the US and the USSR. As Denny Roy points out, the United States and China are both partners \textit{and} competitors in Northeast Asia.\(^\text{26}\) The partnership aspect is evident on


\(^\text{26}\) Denny Roy, “China’s Reaction to America’s Predominance”, \textit{Survival}, 45(3), 2003, p. 72
Korean peninsula issues, with Washington and Beijing working closely to maintain
the coherence of the Six Party Talks process, despite consistent intransigence on the
part of Pyongyang. In this sense, the tendency among neo-realist\textquotesingle s to draw parallels
between US-China relations and US-Soviet rivalry is misleading, and attendant
prescriptions in favour of containment are based on a simplistic analogy. Relations
between Washington and Beijing are more complex and underpinned by less
structural confrontational than is often assumed.

In the case of the China-Japan relationship, often identified as having the potential to
evolve into great power confrontation in East Asia, there are perhaps fewer reasons to
be optimistic. But it would be incorrect to assume that bilateral confrontation and
serious tensions are necessarily inevitable. In addition to shared concerns over the
need to safeguard valuable energy resources in the broader Asian region, China and
Japan share one of the most interdependent relationships of any two states in the
international system, with both countries acutely dependent on high levels of bilateral
trade and investment for their continued economic well-being. Yet, unresolved
historical issues, coupled with deep mutual mistrust at the popular level, pose
considerable challenges for Beijing and Tokyo in managing their relationship.
China\textquotesingle s burgeoning influence in Asia, coupled with its increasingly assertive posture
on political and security issues, worries Japanese policy makers. For its part, Beijing
remains vigilant about Japan\textquotesingle s growing strategic role and capabilities, particularly in
the naval realm. An ongoing territorial dispute over the East China Sea and concerns
about Japan\textquotesingle s threshold nuclear weapons capability have the potential to escalate
tensions in the bilateral relationship, despite close economic ties.\textsuperscript{27}

Supporters of enhanced institutionalism in Asia have argued in favour of the need to
transform the Six-Party Talks process—instituted in 2003 as a response to North
Korea\textquotesingle s withdrawal from the NPT—into a sub-regional forum to address broader
security issues. Most recently, Stephen Haggard and Marcus Noland have outlined
the concept of a Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism, which would aim to
formally integrate sub-regional states.\textsuperscript{28} Nick Bisley has argued that the Six Party
Talks “have garnered sufficient political interest to make possible an ongoing
multilateral mechanism to deal with security challenges in this relatively combustible
region”.\textsuperscript{29} According to Bisley, one of the key contributions such a mechanism could
make would be “to establish a set of procedures to deal with any future sub-regional
crises”.\textsuperscript{30}

However, it is important to note that the Six Party Talks process has failed to achieve
its core mission since 2003: preventing North Korea from acquiring nuclear weapons.
It is no coincidence therefore that the Six Party Talks have failed to produce any
agreement of significance about the future of the Korean peninsula. Yet, even in the

\textsuperscript{27} For discussion, see James Manicom and Andrew O\textquoteleft Neill, “Sino-Japanese Strategic Relations: Will

\textsuperscript{28} Stephen Haggard and Marcus Noland, “A Security and Peace Mechanism for Northeast Asia: The
Economic Dimension”, \textit{The Pacific Review}, 22(2), 2009, pp. 119-137. The authors concede that “a
more permanent multilateral structure is unlikely until the [North Korean] nuclear issue is resolved”.


\textsuperscript{30} Bisley, \textit{Building Asia\textquotesingle s Security}, p. 106.
likely event that the Six Party Talks fail to evolve into a formal Northeast Asian security cooperation mechanism, the overlapping interests among the three regional major powers means that an informal community of security interests already exists. The challenge will be for Tokyo and Beijing to further cultivate and deepen their mutual overlapping interests so that, in the event the United States decides to draw down its Northeast Asian engagement at some future point, China and Japan will be able to maintain major power cooperation in the region with a view to promoting long term conflict avoidance among states.