

Introduction—East Asia in 2013

The year 2013 in East Asia was marked by the transformation and evolution of the security policies of the region's major powers under the direction of new leaders, and by the emergence of tensions and frictions among some of these players. Against this backdrop, especially the strategic environment in Northeast Asia has become acutely contested and severely strained, prompting concern that the regional security order will become destabilized over the longer run.

The second Shinzo Abe administration, which took over the political reins of Japan near the end of 2012, set a new course for national security guided by the policy of “proactive contribution to peace” based on the principle of international cooperation. To realize this vision, the Abe administration established in December 2013 the National Security Council (NSC), which formulated a National Security Strategy and a new set of National Defense Program Guidelines. In China, the Xi Jinping administration, while shoring up its domestic political base, is endeavoring to increase the country's presence and influence as a major power by modernizing and strengthening Chinese military might, especially through efforts to accelerate and regularize maritime activities in regional waters and airspace. South Korea, under the new Park Geun-hye administration, is pursuing a security policy that seeks to expand the country's partnership with China while remaining grounded in the US-ROK alliance, but appears to be taking an increasingly defiant stance toward Japan. The Kim Jong Un regime of North Korea, which came into power in 2012, has been working to turn the country's status as a “nuclear weapons state” into a fait accompli, while the purge of Vice-Chairman of the National Defense Commission Jang Song Thaek in December 2013 has made the country's future direction more indecipherable and uncertain. Russia, led by the Vladimir Putin administration, is placing greater emphasis on Asia, particularly Japan, but at the same time is taking an assertive approach in its foreign policy, emphasizing Russia's status as a great power. The United States' Barack Obama administration, which commenced its second term in January 2013, is pressed to deal with Middle Eastern affairs, including the situations in Syria and Iran, and is comprehensively implementing its rebalance to the Asia-Pacific—all while working under fiscal constraints. The Abbott administration of Australia, launched in September 2013, is strengthening its cooperative ties with the United States and Japan while expanding its strategic engagement across a broad region stretching from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean.

The direction of these new security policy shifts under new leaderships gradually became more clearly delineated during 2013. The security policies are determined by various factors, including the regional countries' perceptions of the security environment—particularly their mutual awareness of the power balance among them—domestic political and economic conditions, the degree of each country's technological innovation, and nontraditional security challenges such as international terrorism and natural disasters. In the following sections, we will provide an overview of three emerging trends in the East Asian security environment that merit close attention.

1. A More Contested, Strained Situation in Northeast Asia

Tensions have risen remarkably in Northeast Asia in recent years, sparking growing concern among the international community that some unforeseen contingency may erupt in the region. The rising tensions can be ascribed to at least four factors. The first is the situation in North Korea, where the Kim Jong Un regime has, since its inception in April 2012, endeavored to turn its status as a “nuclear weapons state” into a *fait accompli* through actions such as the launch of a missile purported to be a satellite in the following December, and the conducting of the nation's third nuclear test in February 2013. There is a worrisome yet unsubstantiated possibility that North Korea already possesses the ability to miniaturize its nuclear weapons technology and build nuclear warheads, and this prospect, along with the increasing range and accuracy of the country's ballistic missiles, is ramping up the threat to the security of Northeast Asia. At the same time, First Chairman of the National Defense Commission Kim Jong Un is cementing the foundation for his establishment of one-man rule over North Korea through forceful retirement and reshuffling of personnel in the Workers' Party of Korea, the armed forces, and the security agency. In December 2013, it was reported that Vice-Chairman of the National Defense Commission Jang Song Thaek and members of his inner circle had been executed, and that his supporters were being targeted by a large-scale purge. Given these and other developments, it remains difficult to predict the future course of North Korea's provocative attitude and internal order.

The second factor is the increasing scope of China's activity in the region. The country's rising defense spending, the rapid and extensive growth of its military

strength, increased activities in regional waters and airspace, use of its burgeoning power to engage in coercive behavior and attempts to change the status quo, and lack of transparency with regard to its military affairs are sources of concern for not only other countries in Northeast Asia, but also the many members of the broad region spanning from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean. In particular, incursions by Chinese government ships into the waters surrounding the Senkaku Islands have skyrocketed since the Japanese government purchased three of the islands in September 2012, generating international concern over the increased potential for collisions and accidents. In December 2012, a Y-12 aircraft belonging to China's State Oceanic Administration (SOA) violated Japanese airspace over the Senkakus, while another Chinese aircraft approached the islands in 2013. Also, in separate incidents in January 2013, Chinese warships locked their fire-control radar on a destroyer and a destroyer-based helicopter operated by the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF). In the following November, China announced the establishment of an "East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone" that included the Senkaku Islands area within its borders—as if the region were part of Chinese territory—and in so doing attracted international censure as undue infringement of the principle of freedom of flight over the high seas. Such actions have fueled concern about the possible increase and protraction of "gray-zone situations" (situations that cannot be defined as either purely peacetime events or military contingencies) surrounding territory, sovereignty, and maritime economic interests, and thus Japan and other neighbors are being pushed to take effective responses.

The third factor is the tension and antagonism existing between major powers in the region, which can be seen as the product of the unique domestic political situation of each country and the rising tide of nationalism. For example, despite the many serious domestic issues faced by China, the Xi Jinping administration is apparently seeking to strengthen its political base by utilizing nationalism under the banner of realizing "the great renewal of the Chinese nation" as "the greatest dream for the Chinese nation." Consequently, the administration has put itself in the position of having to take an uncompromising attitude toward other nations so as to avoid public backlash. As China stands now, the Xi Jinping administration's footing could become tenuous if there were a sudden surge of public outcry or opposition regarding domestic problems such as decelerating economic growth, chronic political corruption, deteriorating public order, and environmental

degradation such as air pollution. If this were to happen, any compromises or concessions made to other countries by the administration could fatally undermine its rule.

The fourth factor is the emergence of the “security dilemma” among the principal actors of the region. The idea behind this dilemma is that action by a given nation to enhance its security by increasing defensive capabilities and strengthening security relationships with other countries could spawn concern among neighbors or be perceived as threat, prompting those neighbors to take countermeasures, which in turn would lead to higher military tensions and thus degrade the security environment as a whole. In order to break free of this dilemma, it is necessary for the major countries involved to comprehensively and steadily pursue endeavors such as strategic dialogue at the highest political level, international exchange in multifaceted fields, the construction of a crisis management mechanism, and programs for defense exchange and security cooperation.

2. US-China Relations as a Defining Factor for the Regional Security Order

During the nearly 70 years since the end of World War II, the United States’ forward deployed military forces in the Asia-Pacific and strategy of forming alliances in that region have played a decisively important role in maintaining regional security. In other words, the United States’ strategic primacy can be said to have bolstered the foundation for peace and stability in the region. However, China, whose rapid economic growth in recent years has propelled it into the world’s second largest economy, is now expanding its presence and influence in the international community politically, militarily, and culturally. Moreover, India, too, has been experiencing booming economic growth while increasing its presence on the diplomatic and security fronts. The rise of these two players is ushering in a dramatic shift in the balance of power in the Asia-Pacific, compelling the United States and other regional countries to strategically respond to this transformation. In particular, the Obama administration is realigning its security strategy to pivot the US military’s global posture and presence toward the Asia-Pacific.

The United States, while expressing its concern over China’s military modernization efforts and murky strategic intentions, is also working to develop cooperative, stable ties with that country. Underlying those overtures, however, is

Washington's deeply rooted apprehension and distrust that China could become a hegemon that threatens the global commons of the high seas, outer space, and cyberspace. In the Defense Strategic Guidance issued in January 2012, the Obama administration made clear its emphasis on the Asia-Pacific, and defined the area as a strategic region extending from East Asia and the Western Pacific and into South Asia and the Indian Ocean. This attracted global attention as a manifestation of the United States' strategic response to the expansion of China's power in the region.

Chinese President Xi Jinping visited the United States in June 2013, where he and President Obama joined together for an eight-hour summit. During their meeting, the two leaders discussed a broad range of concerns, including new cooperative relationships between both countries, the North Korean nuclear issue, and cyber security. Xi expressed his view that "the vast Pacific Ocean has enough space for two large countries like the United States and China," and called on his counterpart to work with him in constructing a "new type of major power relationship." According to media reports, Xi's promotion of this concept was informed by the desire to avoid the sort of clashes that have historically occurred when emerging states stood up to established powers, to foster mutual respect for one another's core interests and major concerns, and to build mutually beneficial ties through cooperation. Subsequently, in a speech delivered at Georgetown University on November 20, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs Susan Rice brought up the US-China relationship, declaring, "When it comes to China, we seek to operationalize a new model of major power relations. That means managing inevitable competition while forging deeper cooperation on issues where our interests converge—in Asia and beyond." With regard to the US rebalance to the Asia-Pacific, Rice stated that it was the cornerstone of the Obama administration's foreign policy, emphasizing, "No matter how many hotspots emerge elsewhere, we will continue to deepen our enduring commitment to this critical region." Statements such as these and the ones made by President Xi suggest that both countries have come to an agreement on the general framework for pursuing a new form of major power relations between themselves, but the definition and specific content of that relationship have not yet been articulated. For instance, the development of this relationship will not likely lead Washington to make concessions toward Beijing's positions on issues such as the United States' arms sales to Taiwan, embargoes on high-tech exports to China, military reconnaissance near China, or the various questions surrounding

maritime interests and territory. In addition, variables such as the strategic mutual distrust between both sides, their respective military strategies, postures, and exercises, and the lack of an effective crisis management mechanism could develop into destabilizing factors that negatively impact US-China relations.

As the perception grows that US-China relations are a defining factor for the security order in East Asia, China will likely seek to avoid potential confrontations and clashes with the United States as it explores opportunities for putting itself on an equal standing with that country. Meanwhile, in its relations with neighbors, China will likely ratchet up its unique assertions and actions regarding maritime interests and territorial issues.

As a result of the rise in power of emerging states such as China and India, the United States is seeing a relative decline in its military and economic might, as well as its international influence. Moreover, US defense spending is expected to shrink drastically due to the federal government's tight financial situation. Nevertheless, the United States will likely continue to play its role as a major global power guided by a long-range vision, while maintaining its strategic primacy in East Asia and strengthening its strategic partnerships with regional allies such as Japan, South Korea, and Australia, and with other key players, including India, Vietnam, and Indonesia.

3. Advances in Multilateral Security Dialogue and Cooperation

As multilateral frameworks in Europe, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) have played a vital role in the resolution of security-related challenges, prevention of conflict, and crisis management. In East Asia, however, similar comprehensive multilateral frameworks for security have yet to be fully institutionalized. Nevertheless, there are a number of major multilateral frameworks for security dialogue and cooperation in Asia, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum (ARF), the East Asia Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus), the IISS Asia Security Summit (Shangri-La Dialogue), the Six-Party Talks, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). The Six-Party Talks, which have addressed the North Korean nuclear issue through discussions aimed at denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula, have been suspended since December 2008.

In contrast with Europe, most of Asia's multilateral security frameworks have not progressed beyond the level of confidence-building, and do not yet serve the functions of conflict resolution, preventive diplomacy, and crisis management.

In recent years, the expansion of ASEAN-led multilateral security cooperation has been drawing international attention. In addition to hosting meetings such as the ARF and the ADMM-Plus, ASEAN has been promoting multilateral security cooperation in other ways as well, including by holding its first-ever military exercise, ASEAN Militaries' Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Table-Top Exercise (AHR) in July 2011. Notably, the ADMM-Plus, established in 2010, is steadily becoming institutionalized. At its first gathering in October of that year, the delegates discussed topics mainly related to five areas for cooperation—humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR), maritime security, counterterrorism, military medicine, and peacekeeping operations (PKO)—and agreed to form experts' working groups (EWG) for further discussion of those areas. The ADMM-Plus staged its first field training exercise in June 2013 in Brunei, with a focus on HA/DR and military medicine, and followed up with a counterterrorism exercise in Indonesia in September and a maritime security exercise in Australia in November. In addition, the participants in the second session of ADMM-Plus, convened in Brunei in August, discussed challenges such as maritime conflict prevention and collision avoidance, peaceful resolution of disputes in the South China Sea, denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, and the deteriorating situation in Syria. They also established a new EWG to focus on landmine removal, and appointed new joint chairs for each of the six EWGs. As another sign of the progress in institutionalizing the ADMM-Plus, the members decided to increase the frequency of their meetings from once every three years to once every two years.

As these examples illustrate, multilateral security cooperation in East Asia is making salient advances in terms of functional cooperation and dealing with nontraditional security issues and specific problem areas. The key challenges that lie ahead are to further expand and deepen this concrete, practical multilateral cooperation and raise it to the level of conflict resolution, preventive diplomacy, and crisis management, in a way that strengthens the international order in East Asia based on universal values and rules. In order to accomplish this task, the members of this region will need to exercise strong political leadership and share a common long-range vision.

