

Understanding China: Myths and Realities

Report of an International Study Group

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Introduction

At a time of rising tensions in the world in general and in East Asia in particular, the Toda Peace Institute brought together an international study group to discuss the prospects for stable peace in Northeast Asia. The Study Group comprised Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Mongolian and international scholars and diplomats, and met in Tokyo from 16-19 November 2023.

The Study Group coincided with the San Francisco summit between President Xi Jinping and President Joe Biden, held on 15 November 2023. During their four-hour meeting, President Xi noted that the US and China face a choice. They could either 'join hands to meet global challenges', or 'cling to the zero-sum mentality, provoke rivalry and confrontation, and drive the world toward turmoil and division.'

This sense that the world is at an inflection point is widely shared. One path leads towards blocs, an arms race, and the risk of hot spots flaring up. The other leads towards mutual coexistence, restraint, improved understanding, and negotiated approaches to common challenges.

One choice is to resist China's rise, economically and militarily. The other is to renegotiate the international order to embrace China's role in global governance, alongside the US and other powers.

Northeast Asia is a site where these choices are particularly stark. There are large potential gains from cooperation and very large potential losses from conflict. The Toda Peace Institute convened this meeting with the aim of exploring ways to avoid violent conflict between China and the US and its allies and to advance cooperation in the region.

Participants considered the reasons for the recent deterioration of relations in the region and offered a range of proposals for positive steps forward. The Toda Peace Institute hopes to explore these topics in trilateral research groups, leading to policy briefs and a further conference. It is hoped that this can be the beginning of a process that can address Chinese and western security concerns in a calm and measured way, engendering trust.

The questions before the study group were:

(1) What explains the recent deterioration in relations, from 2017 up to the G7 in 2023? What are the major threats to peace in the region?

(2) How can China's perspectives on national and global security, development and inter-civilizational dialogue contribute to sustaining the East Asian peace, and how do they complement or contradict the perspectives of neighbouring states?

(3) What norms and institutions could promote cooperative security and collaborative relationships in Northeast Asia? Are the countries of the region willing to deal with painful history to create a peaceful present?

(4) How can trust in the region be built and how can a security architecture for North-East Asia prevent maritime clashes, territorial disputes, and nuclear risk?

(5) How can cooperation over superordinate global challenges (such as climate change) contribute to constructive engagement?

(6) What are the most important next steps to meet common goals of building stable peace in the region?

This report summarises the main lines of discussion and identifies policy proposals for future study.

1. What explains the recent deterioration in relations, from 2017 to 2023? What are the major threats to peace in the region?

A Chinese perspective

From a Chinese perspective, no region is as dangerous or as promising as Northeast Asia. The seven countries involved in the region (China, North Korea, South Korea, Japan, Mongolia, Russia and the United States) with much military, economic and ideological variety.

Throughout history, the regional order has changed several times. After World War II, the US was the dominant country shaping the regional order, having defeated and occupied Japan. As the Cold War developed, the US, Japan, South Korea and KMT-ruled Taiwan were pitted against the Soviet Union, Mongolia, North Korea and China, an antagonism which led to the Korean War. This period saw the split between North and South Korea and between

mainland communist China and Nationalist-controlled Taiwan. In the 1960s, the Sino-Soviet split changed the bipolar antagonism. From the 1970s, the rapprochement between China and the United States changed the dynamics of the region. China and Japan restored diplomatic relations and signed the Treaty of Peace and Friendship in 1978. In the 1980s, following the lead of Japan and the four Asian Tigers, China reformed and opened up its economy. The long peace in East Asia ensued. In 1989-91, the Cold War came to an end with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the normalisation of relations between China and Russia, China and Mongolia and China and South Korea. A new wave of regional integration and economic development followed in China, South Korea and Japan, despite their continuing political differences. The next turning point came in 2010, when China's GDP overtook Japan's.

Since then, there has been a spiral of mutual suspicion between the US, Japan and China. China perceives that the US is attempting to prevent China's rise in order to maintain US hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region. The foundations of the Sino-Japanese friendship treaty were shaken by the visits of Japanese leaders to the Yasukuni Shrine, the detention of Chinese fishermen in 2010, the Japanese nationalisation of the Diaoyu Islands in 2012 and Japan's 'close friend' diplomacy with Taiwan. In China's view, Japan's right-wing and militaristic tendencies are accelerating. In contrast, Japan feels squeezed by China's economic development, threatened by China's developing maritime capabilities and concerned that China is seeking to restore the hierarchical system of regional Chinese hegemony. Historical memories, conflicts of interest and concerns about the future are all coming together to create an intensifying power competition, enveloping nationalism and ideology.

The Chinese hope for the peaceful rise of China, but it is not predestined. It depends on other countries. Given its complexity and worsening relations, it is important to think innovatively about the region, while respecting historical realities. People's deep feelings and historical experiences need to be taken into account.

The US-China relationship has been a crucial determinant of the stability of the Northeast Asia region. From 1972 to 1989, when China and the US were in a tacit strategic cooperation against the Soviet Union, the region was stable. In 2000, the Republicans were critical of close economic relations between the US and China and George W. Bush called China a strategic competitor. Nevertheless US-China cooperation continued, no longer driven by the Soviet threat, but now based on working together on terrorism and climate change. However, it was undermined when the Trump Administration took office and launched the trade war. Soon after, the Covid pandemic restricted people-to-people exchanges. Trump used the rhetoric of 'strategic competition' to legitimise actions against China and the relationship drifted towards a new Cold War. The Biden Administration was expected to change this dynamic, but instead it continued to use the rhetoric of 'strategic competition' and pursued confrontational policies, attempting to expel China from the international system.

Four factors drove the deterioration in relations: tit-for-tat actions, military and strategic competition, the drift towards blocs (though China resisted alliance politics) and hotspot issues in East Asia. There has been no progress on these issues in recent years and their destructive momentum is still growing.

The countries in the region do not seek an armed conflict. China certainly does not. Its focus is on growth, improving living standards, and seeking a peaceful environment. But armed conflicts can break out even without the intention to instigate them, and commitments can be destroyed, if countries ignore one another's red lines.

A Western response

People-to-people exchanges are certainly important. Deep economic interdependence and interlinked production chains are vital for both sides. However, China's firewall has caused some decoupling. Few Chinese use Twitter or Facebook. Few westerners use Weibo. So digital communications are creating a wedge between them.

China has become so focussed on recovering Taiwan and small islands in the South China Sea that this is prompting resistance from the US and ASEAN countries. China undermines its own interests by playing up these issues. If Taiwan explodes, really strong decoupling will follow, and this would hurt China.

A Japanese response

There are lessons to be learnt from the successes and failures of Japanese modernisation. After its experience of militarism and jingoism, Japan learned not to impose its will on other states. Japan agrees with the UN principle that no conflict should be resolved by the use of force. A peaceful international society is one where all nations agree to deal with conflict by nonviolent, non-physical means.

The Japanese concern is that China is starting to use physical pressure and threats of force. The Chinese leaders say that China will never be a hegemonic state. If that is so, China should not seek to impose its will on others.

(2) How can China's perspectives on national and global security, development and intercivilizational dialogue contribute to sustaining the East Asian peace, and how do they complement or contradict the perspectives of neighbouring states?

A Chinese view

China's national security concept has evolved from a traditional security viewpoint which prevailed between 1949 and 2012, to a non-traditional security concept, expressed in the Global Security initiative. This commits China to a vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security, sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states, respect for the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and the legitimate security concerns of all countries, peaceful resolution of differences and disputes through dialogue and consultation, and maintenance of security in both traditional and non-traditional domains.

China seeks to implement these commitments by upholding the UN's authority and practising true multilateralism, consolidating the regional and subregional security architecture, and pursuing a foreign policy based on peaceful coexistence. It seeks to explore

political solutions to hot-spot issues through persuasion and dialogue. It wants to balance global development and security and lead the reform of the global governance system.

China's proposed security architecture for the region embraces the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, BRICS cooperation, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), and the China plus Central Asia Five mechanism, etc. It envisages a regional order based on friendships rather than alliances.

China's new security concepts were introduced in successive speeches and documents. In 2014, Xi Jinping proposed the 'overall national security concept'. In May 2014, Xi Jinping elaborated on the new Asian security concept. In 2017, the State Council Information Office published a White Paper on China's Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation. 2021 saw the publication of the Global Development Initiative. In 2023, China published the Global Civilization Dialogue and the Global Security Initiative Concept Paper.

An opinion poll conducted by Tsinghua University in 2022-2023 showed that the Chinese people have a relatively optimistic view of their current security situation. They expect China's international influence will increase and hope that the government will pursue a relatively stable course in foreign policy. They have some deep concerns about key security issues but tend to favour peaceful solutions. They have a positive attitude to globalisation and expect to resolve security issues through strengthening the opening-up policy and international cooperation.

China values independence, development and security. It seeks close cooperation with the international community to achieve common security. Chinese people want to avoid resistance, self-isolation, and a perception gap between China and other countries. China seeks to promote multilateralism and a stable, open order.

The Chinese have painful memories of the war, and of the century after 1840, when colonial powers invaded China and infringed its sovereignty. This is why China lays so much emphasis on sovereignty now. Although the Chinese harbour some grievances, they seek reconciliation.

A Korean response

The Chinese initiatives are important and the US should not demean or dismiss them. The Belt and Road Initiative is animated by the same spirit as the Marshall Plan.

There are beautiful promises in the Global Security Initiative, but is President Xi Jinping sincere about them? Are they rhetoric, or will they be implemented?

The century of humiliation consumes China and shapes its policy on territorial issues. When can China overcome this burden of the past? As long as it remains, China is bound to be in conflict with its neighbours.

A Japanese response

There is a gap between the CCP's words and its practices. Its rhetoric may be important for internal governance, but people know there's a difference between China's principles and its practice.

(3) What norms and institutions could promote cooperative security and collaborative relationships in Northeast Asia? Are the countries of the region willing to deal with painful history to create a peaceful present?

A Chinese view

The post-1945 order was dominated by the West, with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and Bretton Woods. This system has institutional design flaws. Western countries have prioritised ideology and the WTO dispute settlement system is not working well.

The value of the East Asian community idea is that it highlights the interest in the international order of global southern communities, especially small and developing countries, which differ from the interests of major powers. The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) initiated the idea of an East Asian community. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) builds on it. As a result, the East Asia region is more peaceful than Europe and the Middle East.

The idea of an East Asian community is to emphasise inclusiveness, cooperation and reconciliation based on mutual understanding.

As outlined in the Chinese vision of a 'Global Community of Shared Future', "countries of different systems and different types and at various development stages are in a state of mutual dependence, with their interests intertwined. This has turned the world into a community of common destiny in which the members are closely interconnected. Another world war would be disastrous for the whole of mankind, and no one would emerge victorious in an all-out conflict between big powers."¹

The more unstable the international situation is, the more the core concern of the region should be the stable development of East Asia. Countries in the region should seek common ground, while reserving differences, not forgetting their peaceful intentions and pursuing a balanced foreign policy.

China did not oppose the international liberal order, but believed it should be based on the UN, not the US. As a responsible emerging country, China should take up its responsibilities

¹ China State Council Information Office 'A Global Community of Shared Future: China's proposals and actions. White Paper, 2011.

in the global governance system. Modern diplomacy should be based on public support, so people-to-people diplomacy is important. People-to-people exchanges are important too.

China's economic contribution to the Northeast Asia region has been organised through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with agreements with Russia (on the Eurasian Economic Union), Mongolia (the 'Steppe Road' Program), North Korea (BRI and the New North Policy), Japan (Memorandum on Third Party Market Cooperation between China and Japan), and South Korea (the RCEP agreement on a China-Japan-Korea FTA).

The trade volume between China and other Northeast Asian countries has increased by 3.8 per cent year on year, and China is the biggest trading partner for Russia, Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea and Japan.

The RCEP creates opportunities for trilateral cooperation. BRI creates important economic links, and connectivity at the local level. BRI advocates open and inclusive regional cooperation based on the principles of planning together, building together and benefiting together. It is important to build economic corridors to promote interconnectivity in the region. This requires smooth transport and trade networks among the economic centres of Northeast Asia, and cooperation on environment, health, digitalisation among local governments.

A Japanese response

The 'East Asian Community' is a very positive idea. Network communications tend to be more resilient in nearby geographical areas. This leads to sharing of interests and a shared sense of identity.

How can the politics of exclusive nationalism be overcome? The slogan of Meiji Japan was: 'Strengthen the armed forces, enrich the nation'. There is a risk of it becoming the slogan of the People's Republic of China today. It would be better to resist this mentality and take a wider view of regional development.

Avoiding war is crucial. It would be helpful to reach an agreement on the norm of peaceful settlement of disputes. A mechanism to implement this norm in the region is needed.

The joint Chinese-Japanese historical research panel did good work. Unfortunately, the part of the study which dealt with post-World War Two developments was not published, due to Chinese government objections. Nevertheless, scholars on the panel had good conversations.

Everyone agrees that youth exchanges are important. The idea of student exchanges should certainly be revived. Perhaps Japanese parliamentarians could host Chinese students, and members of the CCP Central Committee could host Japanese students.

Regional cooperation is important in relation to North Korea. The Six Party talks were a promising framework.

Prime Minister Kishida and President Xi have had promising meetings and agreed to deal with the Fukushima issue through expert talks. Japan has been willing to cooperate with the BRI.

A Korean response

South Korea floated a proposal for a trilateral summit between China, South Korea, and Japan, but China has not responded.

A Northeast Asia Security Summit could be a way to address North Korean issues. The idea of a nuclear weapons free zone on the Korean peninsula is still on the table. China has been urged to play an active role in restraining North Korea.

South Korea is interested in possible BRI developments in Siberia, in which Japan might also become involved.

Discussion

With regard to norms, principles, and institutions for this region, how can flesh be put on the bones of the Global Security Initiative concept? Is it possible to find agreement on what the principle of cooperative security means and on how to operationalise its principles? These should include transparency, predictability, the role of arms control, crisis prevention and crisis management.

Could there be a regional mechanism on notification of major military exercises, drawing lessons from the European precedent?

Could there be a political commitment to nonviolent resolution of international disputes? Chinese leaders exhort others to accept that. China should adopt the same principle, to demonstrate restraint and contain threat perception, especially over the Taiwan Strait.

Could there be a commitment to No First Use of nuclear weapons? In the past China has promoted the idea of No First Use . It is a valuable principle as it would reduce the risk of nuclear escalation.

North Korea should be encouraged to consider a No First Use commitment, as a near term step. China could support this as it has an interest in restraining military use of nuclear weapons and development of tactical nuclear weapons by North Korea. China and other regional countries have complementary interests here.

Crisis management is important. Countries in the region could build common understandings of what constitutes an escalatory or a de-escalatory measure. The US-China bilateral arrangement on military-to-military talks could be broadened to the regional level. The Vienna document on confidence and security-building and experience with the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) agreement might be relevant.

A Code of Conduct for the South China Sea would be helpful.

Historical reconciliation is important but difficult to achieve while security issues are pressing. Overcoming the lack of trust and the lack of transparency is crucial. Scholars could contribute to discussions of how to contain differences over current and historical differences and prevent future incidents.

They could also consider how the clash between the US paradigm of collective defence and the Chinese paradigm of common security for a community of common destiny could be overcome.

(4) How can trust in the region be built and how can a security architecture for North-East Asia prevent maritime clashes, territorial disputes, and nuclear risk?

A Japanese perspective

For the Japanese, key concerns are the expansion of China's nuclear weapons and North Korea's nuclear weapons, together with the risks of conflict in the Taiwan Strait and the Korean peninsula. North Korea's ICBM and M(I)RV capability is seen to strengthen its deterrence against the United States and its 'new tactical guided weapons' suggest nuclear weapons designed for war-fighting on the Korean peninsula.

In Japan and South Korea, there is increased attention to the role of nuclear weapons in security policy. Three days after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, former Prime Minister Abe mentioned 'nuclear sharing' with the USA, and conservative politicians threw their support behind this idea. The Japanese security community is more sceptical and thinks it would not help the credibility of extended deterrence. But they do want to get involved in nuclear planning and threat assessment.

In South Korea, according to a survey, 70% of the public support acquisition of nuclear weapons. But the South Korean security community, which has similar views to their Japanese counterparts, does not. Both South Korea and Japan consider it important to increase the dependability of US deterrence. This might involve, in the Japanese case, reinforcing extended deterrence, and in the South Korean case, visits to South Korean ports by US nuclear submarines or B-52 flyovers.

The US needs to face Russia in Europe and China in Asia simultaneously. China-US arms control would be the primary pillar of arms control in Northeast Asia, but China remains reluctant to participate. It is difficult to get all the players to participate in arms control talks, especially considering the asymmetry between the nuclear-armed states and the non-nuclear states. Globally, people are losing faith in arms control.

Arms control involves fixing power relations, but the changes in the distribution of power in the region are dynamic. How will the US and China agree? They have divergent interests and strategic objectives. The asymmetry of their force structures and assets will make arms control very difficult.

There could be a division of labour between the US and its allies, with the US supplying the nuclear element of the force structure and Japan and South Korea supplying the sub-

strategic assets. But China would have to plan to deal with both of these. So how can stability be established?

An arms control forum could be convened at Track 1.5 or 2 level, preceded by a candid dialogue, isolating concerns and interests and credible red lines. Both crisis stability and arms race stability are needed. Some mechanisms for crisis management exist, but they will only work if the relevant players make and take phone calls. A regional missile launch notification system would be useful. And there should be agreement in principle on arms control transparency. The 'trust but verify' principle is important. Another priority is how to make declaratory policies (such as No First Use) effective, to reduce risks and threats, and hence induce arms reduction.

A US perspective

US-China relations are in their worst state since the 1960s. Matters are at an inflection point and where they go from here will define Northeast Asian and global security for decades.

Coalitions have quickly developed around the US and China. Besides NATO and the US-South Korea alliance, the new elements are the Quad, India and AUKUS and the improvement in Japanese relations with South Korea in the last two years. Things that were unthinkable, such as trilateral training and military exercises, are now underway. It is too early to say that these two camps are blocs, because that suggests they are getting ready for a war, but they could be called like-minded coalitions which have identified the other coalition as the rival.

A significant impact of this process is that North Korea is no longer isolated. China, Russia, and North Korea face off against the US, South Korea and Japan. North Korea's trade is increasing and it is no longer under pressure from China or Russia to give up its nuclear weapons. The US, Japan and South Korea no longer see denuclearisation as possible.

It used to be imagined that it was possible to create a security framework in Northeast Asia, but that is no longer regarded as a serious possibility in Washington. So, the question remains, what to do about North Korea?

Further militarisation is on the cards. It is hard to imagine things getting better soon. In Washington, there is talk of a trilateral military alliance between the US, Japan, and South Korea, with mutual defence obligations along the lines of NATO's Article 5. Washington is the most enthusiastic about this idea, South Korea the least, with Japan in between. People in all three countries are thinking about what this would mean for relations with China and what it would mean in the event of hostilities over Taiwan.

This raises the question of whether existing extended deterrence is sufficient. The public is concerned about this question in South Korea and Japan. With North Korea's capabilities in WMD advancing, there will be pressure for more powerful extended deterrence, and failing that, for indigenous nuclear weapons. That would be anathema to the US, and it would be a difficult path to take. There are also intermediate options, such as returning small US nuclear weapons to South Korean territory.

The US is looking for improved US–China relations. The Xi–Biden summit set a helpful tone, but whether it will bring substantial change remains to be seen. Its main outcome was the agreement on new lines of communications.

The leaders have yet to start fundamental discussions on key issues that divide them, including technology sharing, Artificial Intelligence, semiconductors, and quantum computing. The US will want to include a discussion of human rights in any future dialogue. Cessation of hostilities in Ukraine would help move US–China relations in a positive direction, and Washington might be more willing to give ground on divisive issues if the Chinese position on Ukraine becomes clearer.

There are so many structural impediments to better relations that they will be difficult to obtain.

The coalition partners are not taking a lead in improving relations between the two coalitions. Tokyo and Seoul are supporting Washington's positions. ASEAN countries could play a role, but they have a weak hand and are happy to ensure that South East Asia remains relatively peaceful.

A Chinese response

China wants a stable, cooperative relationship based on partnership. But the US rejects China as a partner and defines China as a competitor.

At the recent summit, President Xi agreed to crack down on Chinese companies supplying precursor chemicals to fentanyl. However, China's cooperative actions only tend to produce fresh accusations from the US.

(5) How can cooperation over superordinate global challenges (such as climate change) contribute to constructive engagement? What role can common needs and aspirations play in building regional collaboration?

A Korean perspective

Although Northeast Asia does not meet all Karl Deutsch's conditions for a pluralistic security community, it has had the characteristic of a no-war community since the 1980s, which may be a precursor of a security community. The possibility of creating a security community should not be ruled out. It is needed to consolidate the strong development of economic interdependence in the region. Previous cooperation of the regional powers in the Six Party talks suggests that security cooperation is possible.

A European perspective

The global community needs the cooperation of the USA and China in preventing wars and resolving acute problems in the world.

US–China rivalry is certainly not inevitable. Although there is a power shift going on between them, power shifts do not necessarily lead to rivalries. It is not the changing

capabilities of the powers, but their actions and perceptions that determine whether a rivalry develops.

Ideology is not a sufficient condition for rivalry, since there has been rapprochement before at times of more extreme ideological difference, as in 1972.

The US and China are economically interdependent. This creates sensitive issues, as the world's economy becomes digitalized. Taiwan produces a large share of the world's semiconductors, China of rare earths. But these issues could be dealt with cooperatively through negotiations.

The real explanation for the developing rivalry lies in domestic politics. China's emphasis on the century of humiliation drives its need for unification and irredentism in the South China Sea and its 'wolf warrior' diplomacy. The US has problems with its political polarization and the Democrat and Republican parties are competing to demonize China.

Conflict prevention is one important response. The return to military-to-military talks was a good development. New and innovative conflict prevention mechanisms should be developed. Planners should identify scenarios of crisis escalation and develop mutually acceptable rules to prevent them.

The world should welcome Chinese investments, applaud the Belt and Road initiative and the financial support offered by the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank, and support greater Chinese influence in global financial institutions. In turn, China should re-emphasize its good neighbour policy and downplay its quest for sovereignty over tiny islands and its military provocations against Taiwan.

Cooperation in areas of mutual concern is the best way to create a positive political climate.

The most urgent area for cooperation, to deal with a shared nontraditional security threat, is climate change, which is an existential threat to mankind. John Kerry and Xie Zhenhua forged a good working relationship, which was crucial for the Paris agreement of 2015, but much more needs to be done. Xi Jinping and Joe Biden should jointly declare a climate emergency and cooperate on an emergency plan. Controlling methane emissions would offer immediate benefits. An end to the Ukraine war would facilitate this.

Another crucial area for US-China cooperation is over the unbalanced relationship between their economies. China has a large trade surplus with the US and Chinese investment in US bonds sustains the US's large budget deficit. The US Treasury and the Chinese Finance Ministry need to balance their relationship over the medium term.

There is also important scope for cooperation on health policy.

Together, a strong US and a strong China could effectively address global challenges. What is needed is the political commitment in both countries necessary to improve relations. US-China rapprochement is also crucial for establishing a better security environment in Northeast Asia.

A Japanese perspective

A better US-China relationship would also serve Japanese interests. Both politically and economically, Japan has much to gain from improved US–China relations.

A Chinese response

China has always worried about threats to its unity and its national integrity. A more peaceful environment would make China feel more relaxed. China does not want to see history repeat itself in the region.

(6) What are the most important next steps to meet common goals of building stable peace in the region?

A Mongolian perspective

Mongolia seeks to enhance peace in the region. Mongolia has a nuclear weapon free status and advocates a Korean peninsula free of nuclear weapons. It has diplomatic relations with North Korea and ‘eternal partnerships’ with its neighbours, China and Russia, on which it is economically dependent, and with the democracies, with which it shares values. The Ulanbaatar Dialogue is a suitable venue for discussing regional security issues, including with North Korea. Mongolia is committed to this track, focusing on confidence-building and peace building in Northeast Asia. These dialogues have attracted not only government officials but also mayors, female parliamentarians and youth. Mongolia welcomes regional participation in its forthcoming meetings.

A Japanese perspective

The recent militarisation of Japanese policy and the strengthened alliance with the US are matters of concern. There is a gap between the professed values of the liberal order and what people in developing countries see as the exclusionary, white-supremacist approach of the West. This enables President Putin, a former westerniser, to present himself as anti-Western, and China to present itself as upholding international law. China opposes the alliance system and the development of blocs. The ‘rules based order’ does not represent international law, but rather rules favoured by the US.

Ways forward and next steps for the Study Group

The Study Group was a valuable exchange of views, which helped to clarify areas of agreement and disagreement. To build on this, it would be useful to form trilateral research clusters to engage in more depth with the topics identified in the workshop, with reports published as Policy Briefs in the Toda Institute’s series. These might be reviewed at a further conference later in 2024.

Participants suggested a number of possible topics for the research clusters to take forward:

(1) Operationalizing the Global Security Initiative in Northeast Asia.

- (2) Scope for an East Asian Community
- (3) Agenda for a Northeast Asian Security Summit, focusing on a security architecture to prevent maritime clashes, territorial disputes and nuclear risks.
- (4) A track 1.5/track 2 forum on regional arms control.
- (5) Scope for No First Use policies in the Northeast Asia region.
- (6) Regional mechanisms for dispute settlement and the commitment to use of nonviolent means of conflict management
- (7) Confidence building and crisis management in Northeast Asia: lessons from the Vienna experience.
- (8) Means of developing regional economic integration and its implications for regional security in Northeast Asia
- (9) Conflict management options in the Spratly Islands
- (10) A Code of Conduct for the South China Sea.
- (11) Modalities for conflict prevention in the Taiwan Straits.
- (12) Building on the joint historical commission: painful memories and the next steps towards reconciliation in Northeast Asia.

We are considering which of these topics to take forward for detailed work with our Chinese, Korean and Japanese partners.

Conclusion

Northeast Asia stands at a turning point in history, with the next steps taken by the states in the region likely to have a decisive bearing on the prospects for peace and war. The Toda Peace Institute Study Group, made up of senior scholars and diplomats from China, South Korea, Japan, the US, the UK, Norway and New Zealand, found considerable common ground in exploring ways forward, while acknowledging significant areas of difference.

It was agreed that the US–China relationship is likely to be a crucial determinant of peace and stability in the region. Economic integration will be vital for consolidating the region’s development and harnessing its potential. In order to consolidate economic integration, security cooperation is crucial. The drift towards blocs is a dangerous prospect, that should be checked. One possible step would be the creation of regional community, built on existing frameworks such as RCEP and the BRI, which have the prospect of developing into an East Asian Community. Elements of a regional security architecture could encompass declaratory commitments, such as No First Use commitments and a commitment to peaceful means of resolving disputes, crisis management and confidence-building measures such as a system for notifying missile launches, and a transparent and verifiable arms control framework.

Painful memories and diverging perspectives on history still divide the region. Scholars can contribute to limiting the risk of these differences fuelling hostility by working together to agree points of fact and narrow areas of difference. It is important to separate disputed interpretations of history from current security issues and to find ways towards reconciliation and trust. There are clear divergences between, on the one hand, the US and western collective security paradigm and their understanding of a rules-based order, and on the other the Chinese vision of an order based on a community of common destiny. There are also differences between both sets of principles and the realities of states' practices in Northeast Asia.

It is important to continue to explore these divergences and areas of common ground at the Track 1.5 or Track 2 level. Exchanges between scholars and policy-makers from the region are vital. They can contribute to a better understanding of the means of avoiding violent conflict and consolidating peaceful development in Northeast Asia and the world.

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