

Crump, Thomas. 2007. *Asia-Pacific: A history of empire and conflict*. New York: Hambledon Continuum. xv+383 pages. ISBN 978 1 85285 518 5.

Hara, Kimie. 2007. *Cold War Frontiers in the Asia Pacific: Divided territories in the San Francisco System*. Nissan Institute/Routledge Japanese Studies Series. London and New York: Routledge. xiv+247 pages. ISBN 978 0 415 41208 7

Gill, Bates. 2007. *Rising Star: China's New Security Diplomacy*. Washington DC: The Brookings Institution. xii+267 pages. ISBN 978 0 8157 3146 7

# The search for security in East Asia

FRANS PAUL VAN DER PUTTEN

East Asia does not have a multilateral security organisation capable of addressing the main security issues in the region. The 'rise of China' is widely regarded as a development that simultaneously complicates security relations in East Asia and makes them more relevant to the rest of the world. Three recent books explore these issues and their wider Asia-Pacific context. The historical background to security issues in this part of the world is provided by Thomas Crump's *Asia-Pacific*. By dedicating chapters to specific countries, this book chronicles the modern history of the various countries in East and Southeast Asia, most of the chapters covering a specific country each. Additional chapters focus on Russia, the US and Australia, with two thematic chapters dealing with migration and crime in the region.

The time frame and geographic scope of Crump's work are wide-ranging. By combining the histories of many countries into a single volume, the book is a welcome addition to existing literature. However, a consequence of the country-based approach is that the narrative largely avoids taking a regional viewpoint. Apart from the two thematic chapters on migra-

tion and crime, only the conclusion gives a brief analysis of how security affects stability in the Asia Pacific as a single geographic entity. While the book has much to offer, it does little to highlight the common characteristics of the Asia Pacific area during the twentieth century, in terms of security or otherwise.

## A less than perfect plan for peace?

The San Francisco Peace Treaty was a predominantly American plan for a new order in East Asia and the northern half of the Pacific Ocean. While the UK government was involved in the drafting of the treaty, the main decisions were made on the American side of the Atlantic. Other countries involved in the Pacific War were

Republic of Korea (North Korea), and the Republic of Korea (South Korea) were not even invited to sign the treaty. Thus, the treaty was fundamentally flawed from the outset. Many of the key players were not involved, and yet the treaty laid the security groundwork for East Asia for many decades to come.

The treaty was originally intended to embody the ideals of the 'Yalta system'. Yalta was the location for the February 1945 conference during which the US, the UK and the USSR mapped out the post-war world international order. Following the war, Japan would no longer be able to play the role of the predominant power in eastern Asia. Instead, the victors would jointly manage peace and stability in the region. Apart from establishing the United Nations Organisation, the allied powers would take responsibility for specific geographic areas: the US in maritime East Asia and the northern Pacific Ocean, the USSR in Northeast Asia, and the UK in Southeast Asia. China, formally the fourth of the new Big Four, would be a strong and independent buffer between these areas.

The central element in Hara's analysis is that the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 caused a radical change in the drafting of

invasion caused the US to overtly abandon the Yalta system. Japan was not to be punished severely, because this might strengthen anti-Western nationalism among its population. Territorial issues that existed because of the collapse of the Japanese overseas empire were now to be approached in ways that provided direct strategic benefits to the US. Initially the US policymakers had been inclined to solve territorial issues according to historical and legal guidelines, in principle providing a solid basis for long-term regional stability. The final treaty no longer had this aim.

Hara contends that Washington intentionally maintained, or even created, territorial disputes in order to insert 'wedges' between the US area of control and the communist world. The purpose of these wedges was two-fold: firstly, to keep regional allies firmly on the side of the West, and secondly, to fortify the US military position in the region. One example is the Kuriles dispute between the USSR and Japan. Hara posits that this dispute could probably have been resolved, but that the US ensured that this would not happen, in a bid to block closer ties between Tokyo and Moscow. Moreover, an end to the Kuriles dispute could threaten the American position on Okinawa, the main US military stronghold in East Asia. Hara also argues that the way in which the San Francisco Peace Treaty was drafted intentionally exacerbated tensions over Diaoyu/Senkaku, South China Sea and Takeshima/Tokdo island. Furthermore, the author suggests that American policy towards these issues has not fundamentally changed since 1950.

The author explores the effects of the peace treaty rather than the root causes of current territorial disputes. It would, therefore, be premature to conclude that the treaty and US foreign policy are the primary cause of these problems. Still Hara's conclusions question how committed the US really is to stabilising international relations in East Asia. Would Washington allow a peaceful resolution of these issues at the cost of a weakened strategic position? Costs that could ultimately include military withdrawal from South Korea and Japan, the end of Taiwan's role as a barrier to China's naval expansion, and a shift of Washington's regional allies towards closer cooperation with Beijing.

## Closer through cooperation?

The question should also be asked, how does China view regional security and the role of the US? Highly relevant in this regard is *Rising Star* by Bates Gill, a leading specialist on China's foreign policy. His book has two main purposes: First, it answers the question, what is Beijing aiming to achieve with its foreign security diplomacy? Gill concludes that Beijing seeks three things: overall external stability in order to focus its attention on economic growth; to allay the fears of neighbouring countries that China's rise

poses a threat; and to cautiously limit US influence in international relations without entering into a conflict or overt rivalry. While this view is in accordance with what other experts in this field have written, the importance of Gill's book lies in the clarity and consistency of this message. He achieves this through analysis of Chinese foreign policy in relation to regional security mechanisms, non-proliferation and arms control, and sovereignty and intervention.

The second purpose of this book is to identify which approach would be useful for the US to adopt to deal with China's growing security role. The author argues that although China and the US are unlikely to become friends, there are sufficient motives and opportunities for both countries to move towards building a good working relationship as two world powers. Gill observes that China's security diplomacy is moving in a direction that in many ways supports US foreign policy aims. Mutual benefits could be broadened, while more could be done to reduce conflicts of interest. As Gill states, a better understanding of Beijing's security diplomacy would help Washington achieve its long-term aims without entering into a conflict with China.

With regard to security in East Asia, Gill's work emphasises that Beijing gives top priority to regional stability and that it is very active in several initiatives towards multilateral security mechanisms. China promotes a multilateral approach towards the dispute over the South China Sea islands and to US-North Korea nuclear tensions. The Chinese government also plays an active role in the ASEAN Regional Forum and the East Asia Summit. While US influence in the region is a major concern to Beijing, the Chinese government prefers to leave American interests largely untouched rather than entering into intensive military competition. Still, two factors seem to stand in the way of a Chinese endorsement of a comprehensive multilateral security organisation for the whole region. One is Beijing's insistence that its relationship with Taiwan is a domestic issue in which other countries should not interfere. This means that the single most direct threat to peace in the region cannot be addressed at the multilateral level. The other factor is the military alliance between Japan and the US. This prevents Tokyo from operating as an independent party, while at the same time providing the Japanese government with powerful backing. An East Asian security organisation that is jointly dominated by the US and Japan is unacceptable to China.

Frans Paul van der Putten

Asia Studies/Security and Conflict Programme

Clingendael, Netherlands Institute of International Relations

fputten@clingendael.nl



The American forward-deployed aircraft carrier USS Kitty Hawk arrives at her homeport, Yokosuka Naval Base in Japan. (Courtesy of United States Department of Defense).

limited to the role of signatories; Japan as the defeated nation was obliged to sign. The USSR, denied any influence during the drafting process, refused to be a party to the treaty. The People's Republic of China (on the mainland), the Republic of China (on Taiwan), the Democratic People's

the peace treaty. While the Americans had cautiously begun to adjust their drafting to the realities of the Cold War - that old allies USSR and China were becoming the new enemy, while the old enemy Japan was to become a key ally - the North Korean

## Conclusion

To conclude, Crump provides us with a useful historical overview of modern history in the Asia Pacific, while Hara offers a thorough analysis of the origins of the main security issues in East Asia. Finally, Gill's work spearheads English-language writing on China's role in international security. The most provocative of the three books is Hara's. His conclusion that 'present US strategy may [...] not necessarily favor clear resolutions' of the various unresolved territorial disputes (p.193) is noteworthy. It suggests that ultimately, United States foreign policy - often credited with keeping the peace in East Asia since 1953 - might be less committed to regional stability than many in the West acknowledge.

## Cold War frontiers

A regional perspective on international security is provided by *Cold War Frontiers in the Asia Pacific* by Kimie Hara. This book analyses how current territorial issues have their origins in the Peace Treaty of San Francisco that ended the 1941-1945 war between Japan and the Western Allies. The author focuses on how the