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# East Asia in world politics

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Recommended minimum time required: 4 hours

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## Introduction

East Asia is today one of the most important regions in the world, both economically and politically. This vast and diverse region is home to the second (China) and third (Japan) largest economies in the world. In the last decades, it has become a **global hub** of finance, manufacturing and trade. However, contrasting with its economic dynamism, the region is also a hotspot of **geopolitical tension** and potentially destabilizing latent conflicts.

During the Cold War, East Asia was the scenario of superpower competition with myriad proxy wars fought in this theatre. Today, despite having become an engine of the global economy, the sequels of the Cold War remain palpable throughout the region, as several of its latent conflicts originated in that context remain unresolved: Taiwan, the Korean Peninsula,... At the same time, with the rise of China, the region has undergone a major shift in its **balance of power**, whose outcome remains uncertain. This module will examine the main dynamics of conflict and cooperation in these two periods to understand the full complexity of the region today.

This module is written as a **guide for students** embarking on their first approximation to the international politics of East Asia. The first part of the module provides an overview of the region. It discusses different delimitations and definitions, the main developments in its recent history and its degree of regional cohesiveness. The second part is dedicated to analyzing the role of the region's main powers: the US, China and Japan. Part three explores East Asian regionalism and the region's security architecture. Finally, part four presents and contrasts the main contending visions that exist in academia with regard to the region's future.



## 1. East Asia: an introduction to the region

As pointed out in the introduction, East Asia is one of the most relevant regions in today's world. Economically, this vast and diverse region is home to the second and third largest economies in the world: China and Japan; to other vibrant powerhouses, such as South Korea; and to top financial centres such as Hong Kong or Singapore. In recent decades, it has become a global hub of finance, manufacturing, and trade. On the other hand, contrasting with its economic dynamism, the region is also a hotspot of geopolitical tension and potentially destabilizing conflicts. It is the theatre of strategic competition between an established power, the US, and a rising one, China; and a region ridden with territorial disputes and unsettled historical grievances.

East Asia is a highly complex region. To begin with, even defining it as a **region** can be a challenging endeavour! The very concept of Asia is a European creation, not an Asian one. The first to use this term were the Ancient Greeks, about Persia. Thus, both in terms of geographical delimitation, as well as in terms of political cohesiveness, East Asia is a **contested entity**.

The objective of this first part of the module is to give the reader a brief but complete overview of the region and to raise awareness about its complexity. In this first part we will attempt to answer questions such as: How do we define East Asia? What changes has the region experienced in recent years? How does the legacy of the past impact upon its present? To what extent is East Asia a cohesive **region**?

### 1.1. Contending geopolitical delimitations – the variable geography of Asia

The notion of Asia and its geopolitical delimitation has historically caused confusion. It is not infrequent to come across terms such as Asia, the Asia-Pacific, East Asia, and Northeast Asia; they are often used interchangeably, even though each of them has different implications.

#### 1.1.1. Asia

If we take the most common definition of Asia, the one that is generally taught in schools, we come up with a landmass which is described as the largest and most populated continent on Earth, separated from Europe by the Ural Mountains and the Caspian and Black Seas; and from Africa by the Suez Canal.

Figure 1. Asia, according to its most common geographical definition



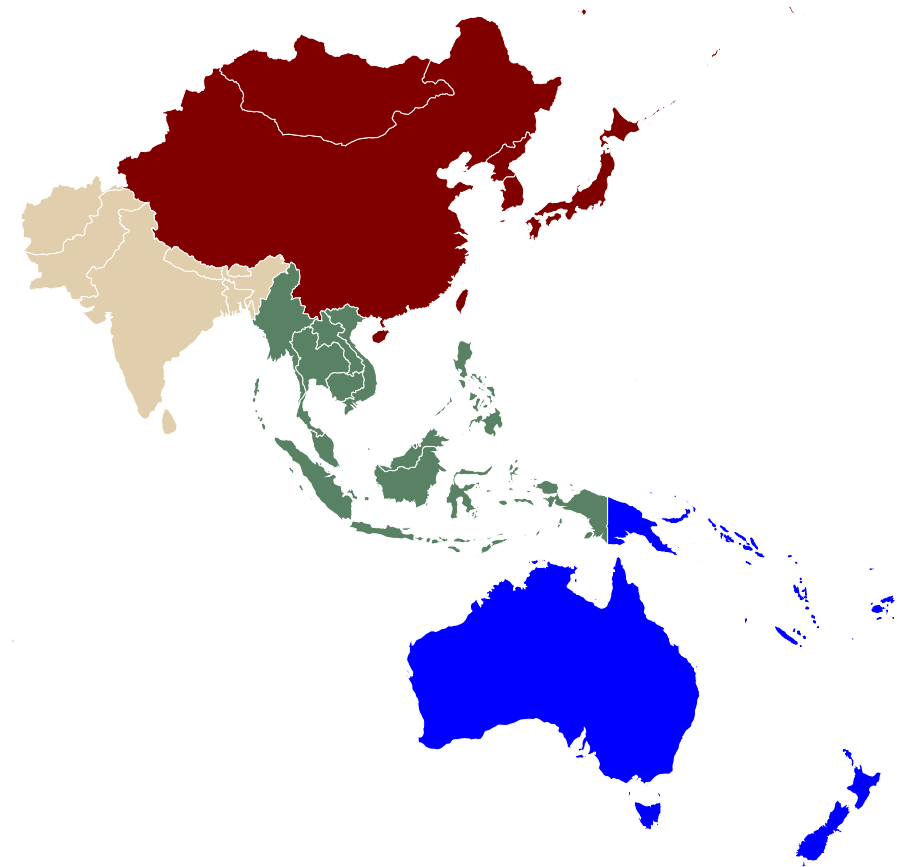
There is nothing natural in these divisions that would suggest that one continent ends there and another one begins. As mentioned above, the concept of Asia is, in its origin, a European cultural construct. In geopolitical terms, which is our main field of interest, this notion of Asia does not provide us with an analytically useful framework. Because of this, both scholars and practitioners –for example, the UN– generally work with more concrete sub-regional divisions of this vast geographical space.

### **1.1.2. The Asia-Pacific**

Most often, the Asia-Pacific is geographically defined as the areas that involve Asia and the Pacific Ocean; that is, the Western Pacific. Academic literature often defines it as comprising the subregions of Northeast and Southeast Asia, Oceania, and South Asia.



Figure 2



The most common definition of the Asia-Pacific includes those areas that involve Asia and the Pacific, as depicted in the figure. Differentiated by colour, the map features the most common sub-regional divisions of this geographical space. Yellow: South Asia. Red: Northeast Asia –often East Asia–. Green: Southeast Asia. Blue: Oceania. Source: self-elaboration by the author.

The notion of **Asia-Pacific** has broad **political and security implications**. Consequently, it appears frequently in geopolitical analyses, most generally in studies that deal with security in this part of the world. Because of this, its exact scope can be subject to various interpretations. Besides, depending on the questions being addressed, some authors may choose to adopt more or less restrictive definitions, including or excluding from consideration some subregions, such as South Asia, or areas of the Russian Far East that border the Pacific.

References to the notion of Asia-Pacific are also most commonly found in relation to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC<sup>1</sup>), a forum established in 1989 to promote free trade between its 21 member economies across the Pacific Rim in Asia, Oceania and the Americas.

<sup>(1)</sup>The current members of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) are: Australia, Brunei, Canada, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, the USA, Taiwan, Hong Kong, China, Mexico, Papua New Guinea, Chile, Peru, Russia and Vietnam.

In summary, the notion of Asia-Pacific, is used to refer to a vast and dynamic region, which is very diverse politically, culturally, ethnically, religiously, and in terms of economic development.

Depending on the definition adopted, this region is home to eight of the ten largest militaries in the world and it includes several states with nuclear capabilities. Thus, notwithstanding such disparities, we should bear in mind that this wider area is one of the main economic hubs and one of the key geopolitical scenarios of today's world.

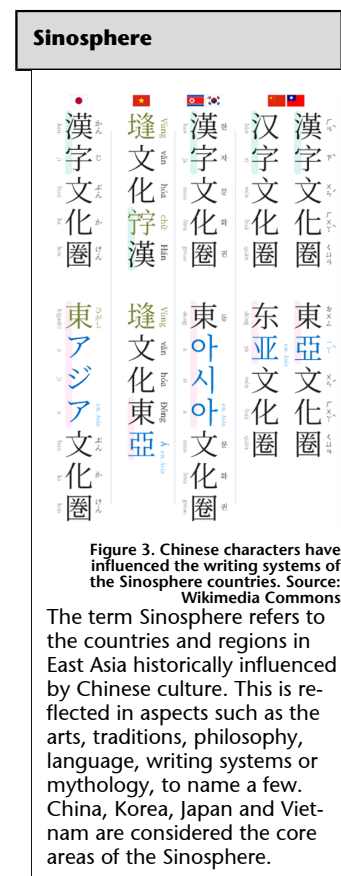
### 1.1.3. East Asia

Another highly contested concept, the term East Asia is frequently used as a synonym of **Northeast Asia**, albeit doing so entails a loss of terminological precision which is important when discussing or analyzing the politics of the region. According to this definition, East Asia encompasses China, Japan, the two Korean States, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, Mongolia and Vietnam. From a cultural perspective, these countries form what is known as the East Asian Cultural Space or *Sinosphere*, that is, the area that has been most culturally influenced by China through history (see Figure 3).

In more precise terms, however, an accurate definition of **East Asia** would have to include both **Northeast Asia** –the countries mentioned above except Vietnam– and **Southeast Asia** –those countries located south of China and Japan, east of the Indian subcontinent, west of Papua New Guinea and north of Australia. According to figure 2, this definition of East Asia would comprise the red and green coloured areas. In any discussion about the geopolitics and security of this region, the differentiation between Northeast and Southeast Asia becomes very important since, as we will see in section 3, the two subregions have very distinct security dynamics that, at the same time, are highly interdependent.

Besides, even though there is a wide consensus about understanding East Asia as the geographical area comprising Northeast and Southeast Asia, the concept is sometimes extended to include countries such as Australia and New Zealand. The reader should be aware of the fact that this is generally done with political purposes in the context of discussions regarding security. In other words, the inclusion of these two Oceanian states in the definition of East Asia, is usually done to convey a notion of the region that includes traditional US allies. In other instances, the accuracy of this inclusion is controversial. We can find other examples of different delimitations of the region based on the security or geopolitical interests of the actor (the state) that formulates them.

For example, Japan tends to favour inclusive conceptualizations of East Asia that generally include India. Tokyo does this with geopolitical purposes, as it regards India as an important actor in counterbalancing China. Conversely, China tends to favour more restrictive definitions of the region that exclude India.



### 1.1.4. Northeast Asia

Northeast Asia is a term commonly used in the contexts of security and geopolitical analyses. This subregion is not only home to the two main East Asian powers –China and Japan– but also to some of the most potentially **destabilizing hotspots of tension** in the world, such as the Korean Peninsula or the Taiwan Strait, discussed throughout this module.

Northeast Asia comprises **Greater China**, that is, the People’s Republic of China –Mainland China–, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau; **Japan**; the two states in the **Korean Peninsula**; and **Mongolia** (see figure 2). In the cultural sense, Northeast Asia largely corresponds with the concept of the *Sinosphere* introduced above, except for Vietnam, which belongs to Southeast Asia.

### 1.1.5. Other criteria

The geographical and cultural aspects presented above are not the only ways to define the region. Other criteria may include membership in regional organizations, or even the adherence to the so-called Asian values.

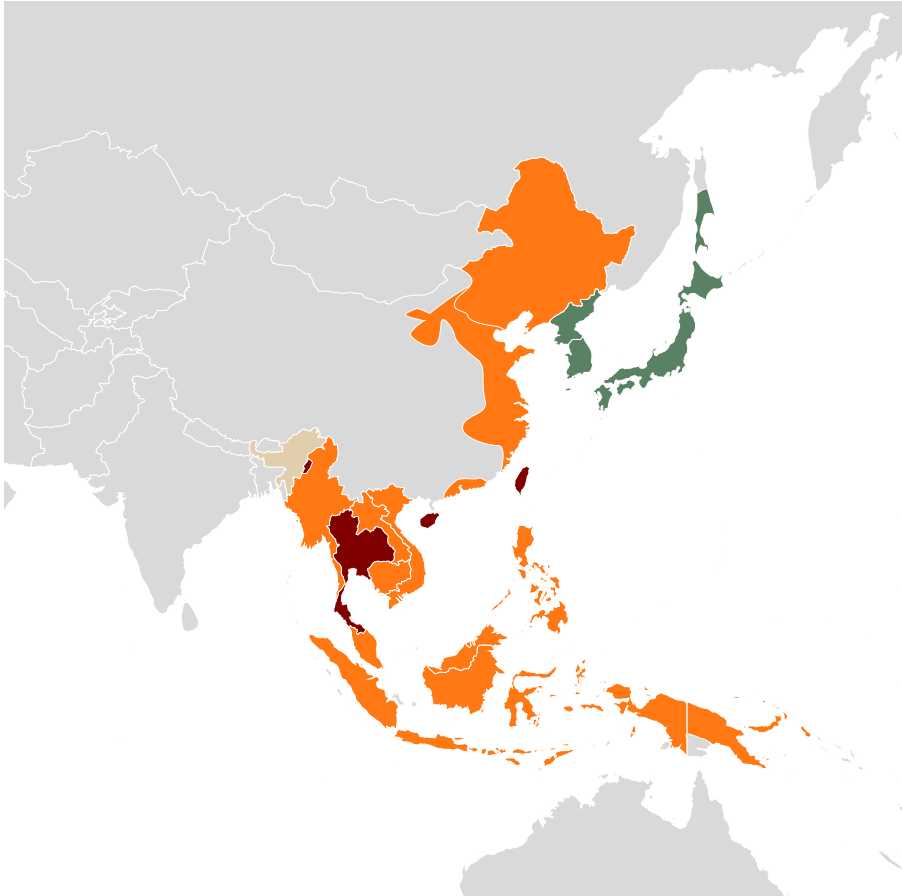
Since East Asia is a contested space, the reader should be aware of the different criteria that can be used to define it, and of the possibility of coming across different conceptualizations of the region depending on the source and its purpose. In this module dedicated to *East Asia in world politics*, we will be working mostly with the definition of East Asia understood as the area that comprises Northeast and Southeast Asia.

## 1.2. History bits – From World War II to the post-Cold War

### 1.2.1. The end of the Japanese empire and of World War II

In no other place in the world the legacies of World War II and of the Cold War continue to be as relevant as in East Asia. Understanding how these two major episodes of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century unfolded in that region remains an essential task for the analysis of its contemporary international politics.

Figure 4. Territories controlled by Japan at the point of maximum height (ca. 1945)



In the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Japan began expanding territorially throughout Northeast and Southeast Asia. The Japanese had envisioned uniting this vast geographical area under a so-called «Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere» ruled by Tokyo, a concept that enshrined Japanese colonial aspirations (see figure 4). These ambitions brought Japan to annex neighbouring territories, such as Taiwan and the Korean Peninsula that were incorporated as integral parts of Japan. In other cases, such as in China and Manchuria, the Japanese gained control through the establishment of puppet or client states.

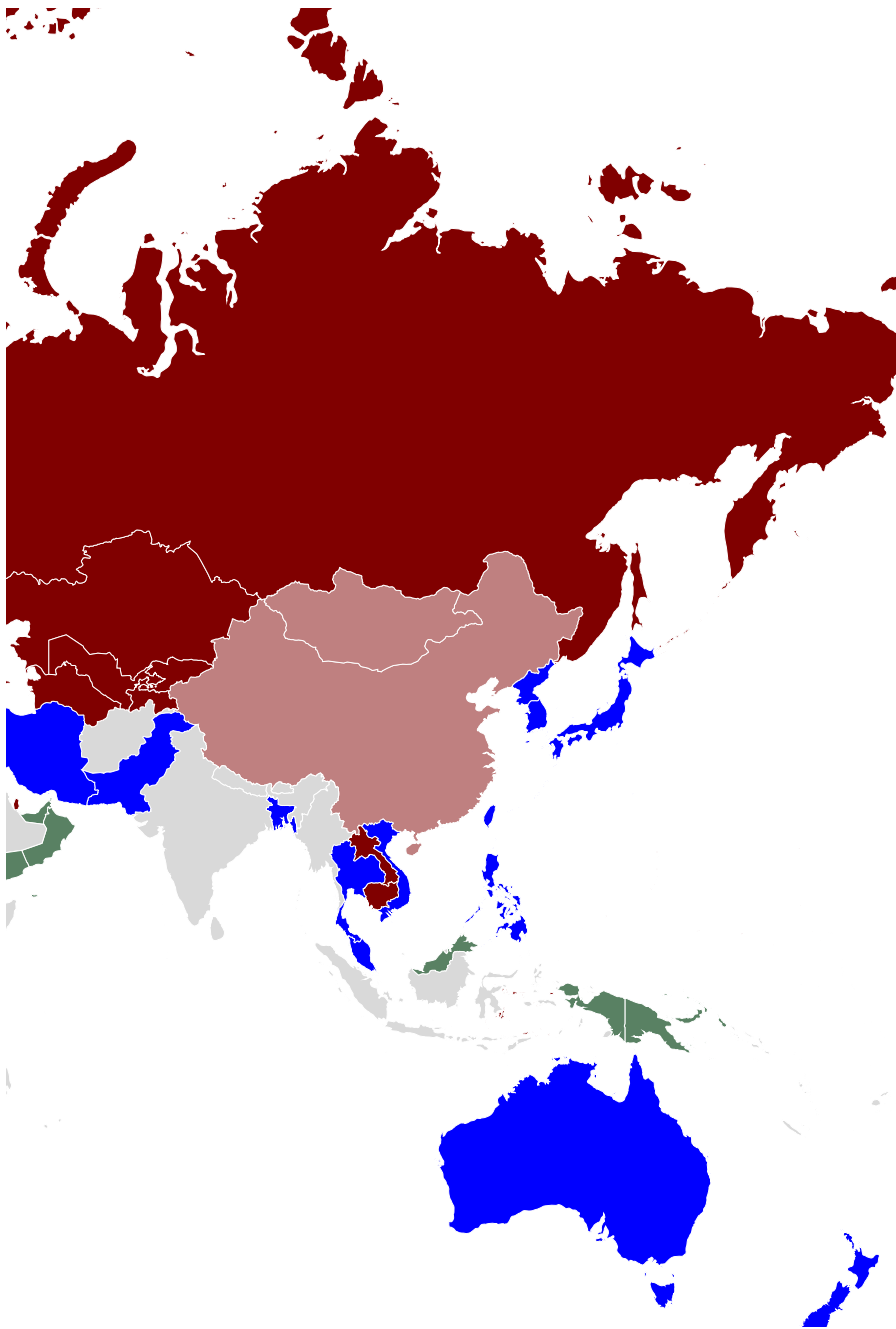
The **end of World War II** in the Pacific came with Japan's unconditional surrender on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1945, after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The surrender implied acceptance by **Japan** of the terms previously outlined in the Potsdam Declaration, an ultimatum issued by the Allied powers on the 26<sup>th</sup> of July of the same year, demanding its surrender. Japan's territory was relegated back to the Japanese archipelago. After the war, Japan remained under US tutelage between 1945 and 1952. During the occupation period Japan's new constitution was passed (see section 2.4) and the country embarked on its economic modernization. Regarding the territories previously occupied by the Japanese Empire, Taiwan and the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea, were placed under the authority of China (the **Republic of China** – ROC). As World War II ended, the ongoing civil war in China entered its second phase –often known as the Chinese Communist Revolution–, which

culminated with a Communist victory and takeover of mainland China, and with the establishment of the **People's Republic of China** (see section 2.3). Meanwhile, the Korean Peninsula had been divided along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. At the time, the division was intended to be temporary, but after talks to explore avenues for unification stalled, the partition became more permanent. The territory south of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel was placed under US authority, and the northern part under Soviet control. Separate governments were formed in those territories in 1948. In the south, the **Republic of Korea** was established with Syngman Rhee as its first president. In the north, the **Democratic People's Republic of Korea** was founded under the figure of Kim Il Sung. Some of the former Japanese territories in China were initially claimed and occupied by the USSR, following the Soviet commitment to annex as much land from Japan as possible. However, these were eventually turned over to Chinese control after the victory of the Communists in the Civil War.

### **1.2.2. The making of the Cold War in East Asia**

The end of World War II marked the start of the Cold War, the period between 1945 and 1989 characterized by the continued geopolitical tension between the US and the USSR and their respective allies, which led to the bipolar division of the world into two differentiated blocks.

Figure 5. Bipolar division of the Asia-Pacific during the Cold War (1959). Blue: US allies; green: colonies of European powers; dark red: Warsaw Pact members; light red: other USSR allies; grey: non-aligned countries



The **Cold War order** in East Asia took shape rapidly after the end of World War II (see figure 5). The Communist victory in the Chinese Civil War had led to the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 1949, and relegated the Nationalist troops of the Republic of China –one of the Allied powers– to exile in the island of Taiwan. Across the Yellow Sea, after three years of bloody conflict (1950-1953), the Korean War reached a ceasefire with the Peninsula divided along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, practically where it had begun three years earlier. The remaining members of the Communist block were North Vietnam (1945-76) and the Mongolian People's Republic (1924-1992). Japan, South Korea, and initially Taiwan, continued as US allies and formed the core of the capitalist block along with other states in South-east Asia, such as the Philippines, Thailand and South Vietnam (1955-1975). By contrast, many countries in Southeast Asia, such as Indonesia, followed a policy of non-alignment. This led to the establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1955 with the impulse of the Indonesian president Sukarno.

During the Cold War, East Asia became the scenario of numerous **proxy wars** that indirectly confronted the two superpowers. The first of such conflicts in the region was the **Korean War** (1950-1953), a war between the communist forces in North Korea, supported by the USSR and China; and South Korea, supported by the US. The other paramount example of a proxy confrontation is the **Vietnam War** (1955-1975).

### 1.2.3. The legacy of the Cold War

Nowhere in the world has the **legacy of the Cold War** remained as relevant and palpable as in East Asia. Its consequences are **still tangible** in the region as some of the **flashpoints of geopolitical tension** that exist there today, such as the proliferation of WMDs by the North Korean regime and the question of Taiwan, are direct consequences of the Cold War.

The following section reviews the main patterns of continuity and change observable in the region since the end of the Cold War.

## 1.3. Continuity and change

### 1.3.1. Economics and trade

It is often said that East Asia is a region in rapid **transformation**. Many people would immediately associate this transformation with the changes that have made this region the **most economically dynamic** in the world. They would be right. A profound economic transformation of East Asia<sup>2</sup> has been ongoing since the end of World War II.

#### The division of the Korean Peninsula



The division of the Korean Peninsula is a legacy of the Cold War in Northeast Asia. Despite the Cold War order that had led to the division being over, the anomalous situation remains one of the key security challenges of the region. North of the demarcation line is the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, a single-party Communist state. After the collapse of the Communist bloc, it has become one of the most isolated countries in the world.

In the south, the Republic of Korea has a democratic political system and a high-income capitalist market economy.

<sup>(2)</sup>Research indicates that the world's economic centre of gravity is gradually moving towards Asia.

After its defeat in World War II the **Japanese economy** was devastated. Soon after, the country embarked on a process of rapid industrialization and modernization that allowed it to become the second economy in the world in a little more than two decades (1968). The so-called **Japanese economic miracle** was achieved by a strategy later known as the **Yoshida Doctrine**, in honour of Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida. Accordingly, all national efforts would concentrate on rebuilding the economy, while the country's security was to be guaranteed by the US through the bilateral security alliance. In the early 1990s, the Japanese asset price bubble brought the country's economy to a decade-long stagnation period. Japan is today a highly developed economy that ranks third in the world in terms of GDP per capita and has one of the highest standards of living in the world.

Starting from the 1960s during the dictatorship of Park Chung-hee, **South Korea** also experienced a Japanese-style development. Between 1962 and 1994, South Korea's economy grew at an annual average of 10%.

Between the 1960s and 1990s, the so-called **Four Asian Tigers** (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan) experienced sustained high-growth rates and rapid industrialization. Despite the setback of the late 1990s Asian Financial Crisis, today, these four countries have high-income economies and advanced standards of living.

In **China**, Deng Xiaoping began implementing a package of economic reforms in the late 1970s that introduced the concept of a **socialist market economy** and led to the opening up of the Chinese economy. As a result, China has experienced decades of continued economic growth and improving living standards. Gaining WTO membership in 2001 has contributed to the consolidation of China's role as a key player in international trade. Today, it is the largest manufacturing economy and the largest exporter of goods. In 2011, China surpassed Japan as the second largest economy in the world in terms of GDP.

In sum, as a result of these transformations, East Asia has become a pole of economic growth and a global trading and financial hub. The region has embraced globalization, and its economies have reached unprecedented levels of interdependence. It is not surprising that many consider it a region of boundless opportunities. However, economic aspects give us only a partial view of the region's reality.

In many ways, East Asia has a dual reality that scholars and observers alike have described with the catchphrase «hot economics, cold politics». Therefore, in order to get a complete understanding of the region, it is crucial to look at both sides of the coin. The following paragraphs bring the focus to political and security aspects.



### 1.3.2. Politics and security

Contrasting with the economic dynamism of the region and its profound transformation in recent decades, with regard to political and security issues, we cannot talk only about **change**. We also must consider some patterns of **continuity** with the past that shape the region as we know it today.

The major **change** in the region since the end of the Cold War has been the rapid **rise of China** as a regional and increasingly global power. The rapid shift in the distribution of power –regionally and globally– that has occurred as a result has contributed to shaping the dynamics of strategic confrontation that characterize its relations with the US and its allies. This aspect is further addressed in section 2.3.

As introduced earlier, one of the key patterns of **continuity** in East Asia's international politics is the continued relevance of the of the **Cold War legacy** in the region. In Europe, the collapse of the bipolar world profoundly reshaped the structure of the continent. With the successive eastward expansions of the EU, which today reaches the borders of the Russian Federation, Europe has very little resemblance with the divided continent that existed until the late 1980s. By contrast, in East Asia, the withdrawal of superpower competition did not lead to a total fading of the bipolar structure of the region but, rather, to its gradual transformation. In the current East Asian regional system, China's relations with the US and its allies display elements of strategic rivalry and antagonism that, although less intensive than those prevailing during the Cold War, are reminiscent of that period.

Figure 6. The inter-Korean summits of 2018 may suggest a rapprochement between the two Korean States and the advance of negotiations towards a peace treaty to end the Korean War. The outcome remains to be seen



Second, **divisions** that took place in East Asia as a result of Cold War dynamics, remain in place today. The **Korean Peninsula**, which remains divided into two states –North and South Korea– presents the best-known case. In 1953, a

ceasefire put a halt to the open conflict, but the Korean War never formally concluded with a Peace Treaty. Because of this, tension remains high between the two Korean states, which do not maintain any kind of diplomatic or formal relations. Officially, the two states do not recognize each other. Both claim the entire Korean Peninsula as their homeland and –at least in rhetoric– both profess a commitment to an eventual reunification.

However, after seven decades of division with only very limited contact, the two countries have grown apart in many regards. Today, no other two countries that share a land border have levels of economic development as dissimilar as North and South Korea. But that is not all. With cross-border contacts being impossible, the two societies have advanced in very different ways. Because of the different economic and ideological systems, the predominant values in the two countries are substantially different. Research has even detected that the Korean language north and south of the border has evolved in different ways, mainly due to the influence of English in South Korea, in a way that communication between younger people could become difficult.

The other major unsolved division in East Asia is the case of **China and Taiwan** (PRC-ROC, see section 2.3). This case is both a legacy of the Chinese Civil War (1945-49) and of Cold War dynamics. Because of its anti-communist stands, at the end of the Chinese civil war the Republic of China (ROC) continued to be recognized as the legitimate government of China by the UN and Western Nations, including the US. During the 1970s, most members of the international community started to switch their recognitions from the ROC to the PRC. The UN did so in 1971, and the ROC ceased to exist *de jure* as a subject of International Law. This, with the generalized acceptance of the One-China Principle, has capped Taiwan's ability to maintain formal diplomatic relations with other states. However, the island continues to be a *de facto* independent state with whom the US maintains unofficial relations under the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979. The Taiwan Relations Act is an ambiguously worded document that aims both at dissuading Taiwan from seeking any unilateral alteration of the *status quo*, and also dissuading the PRC from seeking the forceful integration of Taiwan into its territory. This makes the island a key piece in the geopolitical puzzle of today's East Asia, and a major potential source of tension and confrontation between the US and China.

Third, the security structure of East Asia has not changed substantially. Despite the rise of China, the US continues to be the primary actor in East Asian security. The **system of alliances** forged during the early Cold War has continued to exist and to articulate East Asia's security structure. The **US-Japan Security Alliance** forms the core of this alliance system (see sections 2.2. and 2.4).

#### Chinese Taipei



Figure 7. «Chinese Taipei» Olympic Flag

Taiwan participates in numerous international events, particularly those hosted by the International Olympic Committee, under the name of «Chinese Taipei». The ambiguous formulation, in contrast with the Republic of China or Taiwan, allows the PRC to not consider it in violation of the One-China Principle.

Finally, another key aspect of the element of continuity with the Cold War era is that East Asia has not advanced in terms of cohesion or regional integration. At the time of writing in mid-2019, there is no East Asian regional political or security organization, and no regionwide economic institution.

#### **1.4. East Asia: a cohesive region?**

This module began with the discussion about the possible geographical delimitations of Asia and its sub-regions. In that discussion, we defined East Asia as the wider region that comprises Northeast and Southeast Asia (see Figure 8). In our discussion, we have introduced some notions of the factors that contribute to defining what is a region, such as geography, cultural or political aspects, among others. The following lines present working definitions of the concepts of region, regionalization, and regionalism, which will be useful to continue our analysis.

**Regions** are often defined as groups of countries that are located in the same geographical space although the exact limits of these spaces are frequently unclear. Most authors will go beyond geography to define a region and will consider other indicators of cohesion, such as social and cultural homogeneity, shared political attitudes and political institutions, or economic interdependence. Other authors even conclude that high levels of interdependence and shared political values are key to determine whether countries compose a region or not. According to this view, states that form a region would be expected to have similar perceptions of a given phenomenon.

Figure 8. East Asia and its two differentiated subregions



Similarly, **regionalism** is usually defined as the political process marked by cooperation and policy coordination. Most authors distinguish it from **regionalization** in the sense that the former implies a deliberate, top-down, political process to cooperate and coordinate policy, whereas the second term is usually used to define a bottom-up, societally- and economically-driven and more spontaneous process. Some authors define regionalization as the growth of societal integration within a region and the often-undirected process of social and economic interaction. Thus, they interpret regionalism as institutionalized practices and regionalization as a process that engages actors.

Another useful concept is *regionness*. **Regionness** is a constructivist concept that aims to capture the «**why**» and «**how**» of regionalism. It looks at how regionalization is socially constructed, and it allows a way to investigate the state of regionalization in different settings or contexts. Regionalization implies increasing regionness. Despite its abstraction, the concept is useful because it captures well the degree of multidimensional cohesiveness that it is required for the countries in the vicinity to identify common goals or a common identity that can eventually lead to a higher degree of political cooperation, or even integration.

With these concepts in hand, we can go back to our initial question about whether East Asia is a cohesive region.

First, let us consider the diversity that exists between the different countries in the region. Leaving aside the physical, natural and human diversity expected in such a geographically extensive area, in East Asia we can find a vast range of political and economic systems, religions, and cultures, to name only a few aspects. First, the region displays a variety of political systems, ranging from liberal democracies (Japan, South Korea or Taiwan), to hybrid regimes (Thailand), and single-party authoritarian regimes (China, Vietnam, North Korea). There are monarchies (Japan, Brunei, Thailand), republics (South Korea, Singapore, The Philippines, Taiwan), people's republics of Communist tradition (Laos, China, Vietnam, North Korea) and even non-constitutional regimes (Brunei). In addition, significant differences exist with regard to economic development.

The region is home to some of the most developed economies in the world, with high standards of living (Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan), as well as some countries classified as least developed (LDC) (Myanmar, Laos, East Timor or, until 2017, Cambodia).

In terms of religion and beliefs, there are countries in the region with deeply rooted Buddhist traditions (Cambodia, Thailand, Taiwan); Muslim-majority countries (Indonesia, Malaysia); and also countries where Christianity is either the dominant religion (as in the Philippines) or a minority but rapidly growing one (South Korea). This list is not comprehensive; a thorough analysis of this diversity would go far beyond the scope of this module. With it, we only intend to raise the reader's awareness of the diversity and the complexity of the region from multiple perspectives.

Second, having considered the differences between the countries in the region, let us focus on political cohesiveness: the presence of **regionalism**.

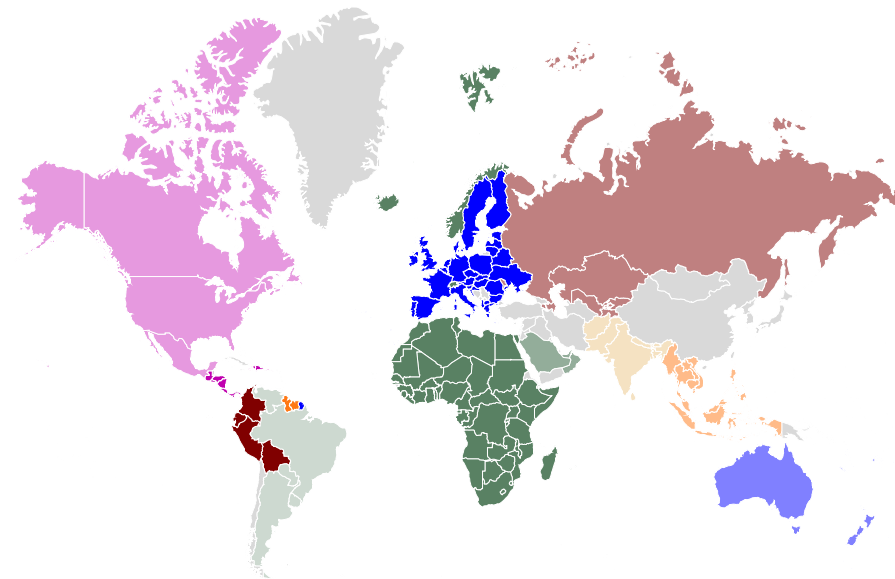
In the previous section, when discussing the patterns of continuity and change observable in the region, we already introduced the continued **absence of pan-regional cooperation** and/or security arrangements in East Asia. As the reader may have anticipated, this is a good indicator of a low degree of regional cohesiveness.

#### Recommended reading

Huang, X. 2009. *Politics in Pacific Asia: An Introduction*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

The book offers a comprehensive view of the region's political, economic and religious diversity, among others.

Figure 9. Regional organizations with non-overlapping membership. The figure shows the presence of ASEAN in Southeast Asia, as well as the absence of a regional organization / arrangement in Northeast Asia



Source: self-elaboration by the author.

Examples can be found throughout the world where the identification of shared interests –or even identities and values– and the consequent emergence of a notion of region among the countries in a given geographical area have motivated initiatives of **regionalism**. The paramount example of this is Europe, context in which regionalism has led to political integration and to the establishment of regional institutions, both intergovernmental and supranational (the EU). Latin America is another context where there has been a continued interest in advancing towards regional cooperation and integration, leading to a myriad of initiatives and to the establishment of institutions of a different nature, such as the Southern Common Market (Mercosur).

In the case of East Asia, we can find these kinds of arrangements in Southeast Asia (ASEAN). However, there is not a single arrangement or organization that articulates the whole of East Asia in the same fashion as the EU does in the European context or the African Union (AU) in Africa (see figure 9).

Northeast and **Southeast Asia** have had significantly different experiences with regionalism. ASEAN has been the leading intergovernmental organization in Southeast Asia. Currently it groups the ten member states across the whole region, and its objectives are to promote the cooperation in a range of fields: economic, political, security, military, educational and social, to name a few. We will further discuss Southeast Asian regionalism in section 3.1.

In the case of **Northeast Asia**, by contrast, no regional arrangement has ever been established (see figure 9). Several factors prevent regionalism from emerging there. The primary impediment is the difficulty in relations between the Northeast Asian states, especially between China and Japan. Despite the two countries, the main regional powers, being more interdependent today than

#### A Regional Security Complex

Some authors (Buzan 2003) have proposed that Northeast Asia's *regionness* cannot be explained on the basis of objectives or identities that these countries identify as having in common, as it would be in a deliberate process of regionalism. Instead, they propose looking at the region as a Regional Security Complex; that is, through patterns of security dependence that exist in the region as a result of the distribution of power among those states and their historical relations of amity and enmity. In other words, what gives Northeast Asia a sense of region is that security problems and strategies of its different countries are so intricate that they cannot be understood in absence of one another.

they have ever been before, their bilateral relations are very often defined in terms of rivalry and antagonism. Apart from the divergent strategic priorities that the two countries have, and which have been amplified by the rise of China, frequent elements in Sino-Japanese disputes are the legacy of history, especially Japan's colonial past; and territorial issues, in particular the dispute about the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in the East China Sea.

The legacy of Japan's colonial past has also been an issue in the relations between South Korea and Japan, in particular with regard to highly sensitive issues such as forced labour and prostitution of Koreans by the Japanese imperial administration before and during World War II. The reader must bear in mind that an effort of reconciliation at all levels, such as between France and Germany after World War II, has never been undertaken in East Asia. As a result, factors such as the absence of a shared interpretation of history, and nationalism –highly prevalent among countries in the region– intensifies the rivalry and antagonism between these countries.

The second main impediment is due to the growing strategic competition between the US and its allies, and China. The US-China strategic competition can be seen as an additional layer that overlaps the already complex relations between the Northeast Asian states themselves, as exposed above. Thus, for example, there is a component in Japan-China relations that is indissociable from US-China relations. Similarly, the most poignant security questions in the region, such as North Korea or the unsettled status of Taiwan, have a dimension that is linked with the strategic competition between the US and China (see section 2.3).

In summary, Northeast and Southeast Asia have taken different paths regarding regional cooperation. In Southeast Asia, ASEAN has become a relevant driving force for the cooperation between these countries. In Northeast Asia, by contrast, no such regional arrangements exist, and the evidence suggests that the region is far from advancing in that direction anytime soon, as dynamics of great power politics are prevalent in the region.



Figure 10. China-Japan relations are highly complex, despite the economic mutual interdependence between the two. The picture shows protests in both countries regarding the territorial dispute over the so-called Senkaku (in Japanese) / Diaoyu (in Chinese) islets

Source: 1. Global Times (Huanqiu). 2. Agence France Press / Getty Images.

## 2. Power politics in EA: conflict and cooperation

### 2.1. The «Great Power Game» of East Asia

«Presently, Asian geopolitics represents a complex blending of power and paradox, both stable and fluid, with change occurring against an unresolved tension between the direction of economic growth and that of strategic development. Military modernization is occurring but, so far, no arms race; China's geopolitical influence is rising in the region but maritime Asia's security remains, and is likely to remain, dependent on the Pax Americana's system of alliances and offshore power projection. Yet, no formal anti-Beijing counter alliance is rising among Asian nations whose pursuit of security includes a pragmatic and nuanced strategy of hedging» (Evan 2011).

East Asia's international politics are described as **great power politics**. In contrast with its economic fluidity, the political and security landscapes of the region are shaped by the geopolitical competition between the US and its allies – most notably Japan– and China, the most likely challenger to US preeminence in the decades to come. The following sections review the role played by these three powers in shaping the political and security reality of the region.

Figure 11. Political cartoon illustrating the confrontation between China and Japan, the closest ally of the US in the region and worldwide



### 2.2. The US

Since the end of World War II, the US has maintained a preeminent position in the Asia-Pacific and has been an essential actor in its current regional order. The demise of the Japanese colonial empire led to the emergence of a *Pax Americana* in the region that, despite being increasingly contested, has prevailed since. Some authors describe the US's preeminence in the Asia-Pacific as *hegemony*, and thus characterize the US as the **regional hegemon**.



The concept of hegemony indicates the preponderant influence or control of one state over another or over a region.

US regarded the Pacific Ocean as its natural area of influence before World War II. Today, the US has a strong presence in the Asia-Pacific across a broad range of domains: economic, political, security, cultural, to name a few. Because of this, it is not surprising that political developments in the US, in particular the election of a new president, are closely watched across the region. The policy priorities, commitment, or the political project of the incumbent president are assumed to have an impact on the degree and the direction of the American engagement with the region.

Despite the challenges that the post-Cold War order has brought about, observers point out that American policy towards the Asia-Pacific has remained consistent throughout this whole period. Dosch (2012) defines the **American strategy** towards the Asia-Pacific as consisting of five points: preventing the emergence of a competing power that could challenge US preeminence, that is, maintaining a balance of power favourable to Washington and its regional allies; maintaining and protecting sea lines of communication throughout the region; strengthening commercial access to the region's economies and maintaining the peace and stability that trade and investment demands; maintaining and extending security ties with allies and friends in the region; and finally, if other priorities allow, promoting democracy and human rights.

### 2.2.1. US involvement during the Cold War

The US involvement in East Asia (or in the Asia-Pacific, for that matter) during the Cold War was significantly different from the one in Europe. In the European context, the US exercised security leadership through the establishment of a multilateral security structure, NATO. In the Asia-Pacific, however, the US built a security architecture consisting of a series of bilateral relations with key **allies** in the region, primarily Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, but also other states such as the Philippines or Australia. This architecture is known as the San Francisco System.

In contrast to the multilateral structure of NATO, US allies in the Asia-Pacific maintained strong **bilateral ties** with Washington, but the relations among themselves were not cultivated. In this regard, the architecture established by the US in the Asia-Pacific was a highly asymmetric alliance system that allowed Washington to exert the maximum control over the allies' actions. Because of its radial structure, this system of alliances is known as a **hub-and-spokes** architecture (see figure 12, section 3.2).

#### The Cold War in Europe vs in Asia

Even though the continent was divided, the balance of power between the US and the USSR kept Europe relatively stable and secure throughout the Cold War.

By contrast, the antagonism between the two superpowers resulted in armed conflicts in Asia. The two superpowers confronted each other through so-called «proxy wars», most notably the Korean War (1950-53) and the Vietnam War (1955-1975).

Figure 12. Scheme of the US-led alliance system in the Asia-Pacific, the hub-and-spokes system



Source: self-elaboration by the author.

### 2.2.2. US involvement during the post-Cold War period

The post-Cold War period has brought about new uncertainties in the region. The rise of China has caused rapid **shifts in the distribution of power**, regionally and globally, from the US towards Beijing.

Immediately after the end of the bipolar world, US allies throughout the region feared that Washington would progressively disengage from its security commitments with the region and eventually withdraw. Such fears were most prevalent in the early 2000s, when the US administration of President George W. Bush was perceived to shift the focus towards conflicts in the Middle East and Western Asia, thereby relegating the Asia-Pacific to a secondary position.

The arrival of President Obama at the Whitehouse renewed the US commitment with its regional allies through the so-called «Pivot to East Asia» strategy. The strategy aimed to set a solid foundation for US relations with the regional states through diplomatic, economic and military / defensive instruments. In the words of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the «pivot to Asia» strategy aimed to strengthen bilateral security alliances; deepen working relations with emerging powers, including China; engage with multilateral institutions; expand trade and investment; forge a broad-based military presence; and advance democracy and human rights.

Most recently, the arrival of President Trump at the Whitehouse revived some of the old fears among US allies, particularly regarding whether the new administration would stay committed to the system of alliances, security and trade institutions that American administrations had built since World War II. Despite the doubts that his election initially supposed for many, experts coincide that the US foreign policy vis-à-vis the Asia-Pacific has returned to

#### Recommended reading

Hillary Clinton, «America's Pacific Century,» *Foreign Policy*, October 11, 2011. [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/americas\\_pacific\\_century](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/americas_pacific_century).

its habitual course. Taking into consideration the challenges that the region presents today, it is not expected that the US will make drastic changes in its approach toward the region anytime soon.

In fact, many observers coincide that the rise of China, as the emerging power that is most likely to contest the US's preeminent position in the region and seek regional hegemony, has ended up strengthening US alliances with regional states, rather than weaken them.

### 2.2.3. US-China relations

Throughout the module, we have already introduced several features of the contemporary relations between the US and China. We have mentioned those aspects that are most likely to raise frictions in the future, such as Taiwan. We have also mentioned the increasing strategic competition between the two.

However, even though it appears as if we have highlighted the conflictive aspects, US-China relations are profoundly mixed. There are elements of **competition** –the ones we have seen so far– and elements of **engagement**, especially through trade and diplomacy, but encompassing a wide array of policy areas. Cooperative relations are particularly relevant in issues of common interest that are not directly linked with regional geopolitics, such as terrorism, clean energy or climate change.

## 2.3. China

The **People's Republic of China** (PRC) came into existence on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 1949 after the Communist victory –led by Mao Zedong– in the Chinese Civil War. Since then, the PRC has undergone unprecedented fast-paced transformations. By 1978, it was still one of the poorest countries on earth. Today, it is the second largest economy in the world and a great power. In recent years, China's military has also undergone an ambitious programme of modernization. Most observers agree that today China's ambition is to consolidate its power and to project it beyond its borders, both regionally and globally.

Figure 13. Proclamation of the PRC. 1st October 1949



### 2.3.1. PRC-ROC

After Japan was defeated at end of World War II, the administration of its colonial possessions in China reverted to the Republic of China (ROC), ruled by the Chinese National Party –or *Kuomintang* (KMT)–, which at the time was recognized internationally as the legitimate government of China. Nationalists and Communists contended in the Chinese Civil War, which culminated in the proclamation of the PRC in October 1949 after the Communists had secured control over the Mainland.

Despite the outcome of the Chinese Civil War, the ROC, led by the KMT, retained *de jure* recognition as the legitimate representative government of China. Accordingly, the ROC was the representative of China in the United Nations until 1971, when the **General Assembly Resolution 2758** (see figure 14) recognized the PRC as the representative of China in the organization and expelled ROC representatives. Since then, most members of the international community have switched their recognition from the ROC to the PRC, leading to the diplomatic isolation of the former. Since then, the PRC demands that all countries with whom it maintains diplomatic relations abide by the so-called **One China Principle**, which states that there is only one China and that Taiwan is part of it.

At the time of writing in 2019, the ROC is only recognized by 16 out of the 193 UN member states as well as by the Vatican. Nevertheless, the fact that the ROC ceased to exist officially in 1971 has not prevented Taiwan from retaining a certain capacity to function as a *de facto* sovereign state or to engage with other states. Many countries in the world, including the US and Japan, continue to maintain unofficial relations with Taiwan.

#### The PRC and the ROC

Today, both the PRC and the ROC still claim to be the legitimate representatives of China and claim sovereignty over the entire Chinese territory, but the ROC in Taiwan has moderated such claims in recent years. The ROC holds *de facto* control over the island of Taiwan and some minor island groups, while the PRC administers the Mainland and is recognized internationally as the representative government of China.

2758 (XXVI). Restoration of the lawful rights of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations

The General Assembly,  
Recalling the principles of the Charter of the United Nations,

Considering that the restoration of the lawful rights of the People's Republic of China is essential both for the protection of the Charter of the United Nations and for the cause that the United Nations must serve under the Charter,

Recognizing that the representatives of the Government of the People's Republic of China are the only lawful representatives of China to the United Nations and that the People's Republic of China is one of the five permanent members of the Security Council,

Decides to restore all its rights to the People's Republic of China and to recognize the representatives of its Government as the only legitimate representatives of China to the United Nations, and to expel forthwith the representatives of Chiang Kai-shek from the place which they unlawfully occupy at the United Nations and in all the organizations related to it.

1976th plenary meeting,  
25 October 1971.

Figure 14. UN General Assembly Resolution 2758 shifted recognition of the ROC as the legitimate representative of China to the PRC

The US officially recognized the PRC and established diplomatic relations with it in 1979, seven years after Nixon's landmark visit to China. The same year, it passed the Taiwan Relations Act in order to regulate its unofficial relations with Taipei in the new context. According to the Act, the US is obliged to provide for the security of Taiwan and to assist it in case of threat. The continued validity of this compromise has been reaffirmed on several occasions through the so-called **Six Assurances** to Taiwan. The implications of this are not minor, particularly if considered against the backdrop of the intensifying US-China competition that we see today. Taiwan continues to be a potential source of conflict between the US and China.

In 2005 the PRC passed the so-called **Anti-Secession Law**. With it, Beijing made it clear that it would not tolerate any movement by Taiwan that puts the One-China Policy in jeopardy, and that it would retaliate militarily if Taipei should attempt any movement towards independence. If this occurred, the PRC would be involved in a military confrontation with the US, an undesired scenario for all involved parties. Conversely, some observers cast doubts on whether the US would confront China over Taiwan. Nevertheless, the American legal obligation to do so remains there. In sum, despite the evidence suggesting that, for the time being, the preservation of the *status quo* seems in the interest of all parties involved, the equilibrium in Cross-Strait relations is delicate and it continues to be a major focus of geopolitical tension in East Asia.

### 2.3.2. The Sino-Soviet split and the US-China rapprochement

During the first years of the Cold War, the West had assumed the Communist block to be a monolithic actor. However, by the mid-1950s, discrepancies between its two major powers, the PRC and the USSR, began to emerge and escalate until the point that, by the early 1960s, Sino-Soviet political relations broke.

The causes of the Sino-Soviet split were multiple and complex, although primarily ideological. Against the backdrop of the destalinization policies that followed Stalin's death in 1953, Soviet leaders encouraged seeking peaceful coexistence with the West, rather than deliberate confrontation. However, despite both the PRC and the USSR being founded upon Marxist-Leninist ideologies, Mao advocated for a more orthodox compliance with its principles. This, according to his interpretation, demanded a more belligerent attitude towards the West. By the late 1950s, discrepancies had convinced Mao that the USSR was not trustworthy, leading to the split. The relations between the two Communist powers did not begin to improve until the late-1970s, well after Mao's death.

#### The Six Assurances to Taiwan

- 1) The United States would not set a date for termination of arms sales to Taiwan.
- 2) The United States would not alter the terms of the Taiwan Relations Act.
- 3) The United States would not consult with China in advance before making decisions about U.S. arms sales to Taiwan.
- 4) The United States would not mediate between Taiwan and China.
- 5) The United States would not alter its position about the sovereignty of Taiwan, and that the question was one to be decided peacefully by the Chinese themselves, and would not pressure Taiwan to enter into negotiations with China.
- 6) The United States would not formally recognize Chinese sovereignty over Taiwan.

The consequences of the split had both a regional and a global impact. In the West, the US initiated a policy of Triangular Diplomacy aimed at exploiting the Sino-Soviet rivalry to its advantage. Its most relevant result was the **rapprochement** between the **US and China** of the early 1970s, symbolized by Nixon's visit to China in 1972. The Sino-American rapprochement culminated with the establishment of full **diplomatic relations** in 1979, seven years later.

In turn, the Sino-American rapprochement implied that the nationalist government of China, exiled in Taiwan since the end of the Chinese Civil War, would cease to be recognized internationally as the legitimate government of China.

### 2.3.3. China-Japan Relations

China and Japan are historical rivals, great powers in East Asia, and mutually dependent countries. However, their relations have been strained by mistrust and suspicion since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The legacy of history, in particular of Japan's **wartime past**, remains a major aspect of contention between the two that adds to the **territorial disputes** an overall sense of competition and antagonism.

After its surrender in World War II, Japan recognized the ROC government, led by the Kuomintang (KMT) of Chiang Kai-shek. The Japanese territorial possessions of Taiwan and the Penghu Islands were transferred to the ROC.

Against the backdrop of the US-China rapprochement, Japan also switched its recognition to the PRC and established **diplomatic relations** with Beijing (1972), accepting with it the One-China Principle. In exchange, the PRC renounced claiming war reparations from Japan for World War II.

Nevertheless, from 1979 to 2007 Japan provided a total of 32.4 billion USD to China in official Development Assistance. The reforms undertaken in China since 1978 enabled the strengthening of economic and commercial ties between the two countries, which have reached unprecedented levels of exchange and interdependence.

Despite the official normalization of relations and the strengthening of economic and commercial ties, Sino-Japanese relations continue to face numerous difficulties, particularly regarding security aspects. In this regard, there are several major points of **contention** between the two countries:

- **Japan's constitutional revision.** Debates on the «**normalization**» of Japanese foreign policy have been in the agenda since the 2000s. Under the premiership of Shinzo Abe in Japan, there is a renewed interest in reviewing –amending or reinterpreting– article 9 of the Japanese constitution, the «Peace clause» (see section 2.4). These debates have been inter-

#### The Sino-Soviet Split

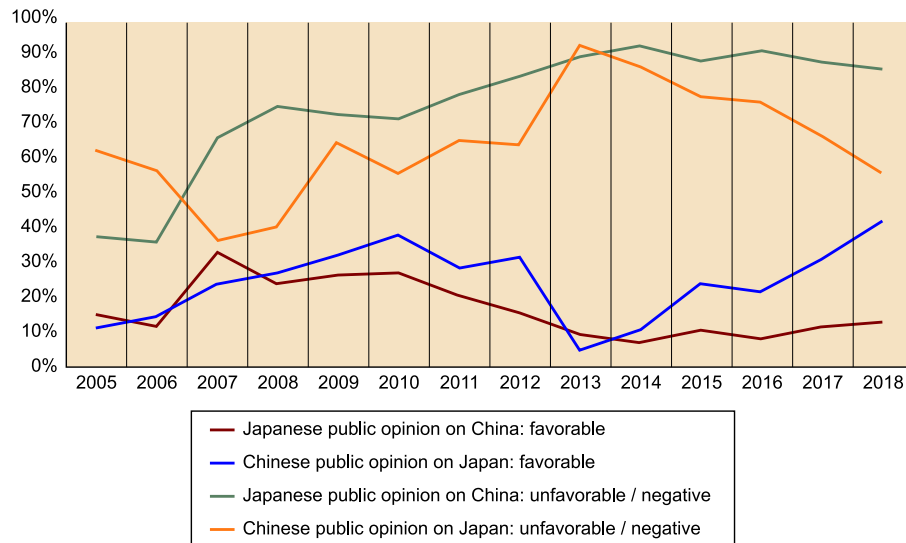
The Sino-Soviet Split also had consequences within the Communist bloc. In Cambodia, Mao backed Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia (1975-1979). In consequence, Pol Pot's regime was also recognized by Western countries. One of the first symbolic measures adopted by the Khmer was to bomb and loot the Soviet embassy, forcing diplomats out. Meanwhile, Vietnam was backed by the USSR. In 1979, angered by Khmer threats to Vietnam and by the massacre of Vietnamese civilians by the Cambodian regime, Vietnamese and Soviet forces occupied Cambodia forcing the Khmer regime out. Despite the genocide perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge, their deposed regime continued to be recognized by the West and the UN as the legitimate Cambodian government.

preted in China as a possible abandonment of Japan's primarily defensive security strategy towards more aggressive stands.

- **Territorial disputes** in the East China Sea. The islands known as *Senkaku* (in Japanese) and *Diaoyu* (in Mandarin) have been another key point of contention in recent Sino-Japanese relations. The uninhabited rocks, administered by Japan, are located approximately 170km northeast of Taipei (Taiwan), 170km northwest from the closest islands of the Japanese prefecture of Okinawa (410km from the prefectural capital), and some 330km southeast of the Chinese mainland. China maintains territorial claims over these islets. In 2012 the Tokyo Metropolitan Government purchased the islands from a private owner, leading to an escalation of the conflict with China, who saw in the operation a provocation against its sovereign territory. From 2012 to 2014 a series of incidents involving fishing vessels maintained this territorial conflict high in the regional agenda. It remains a major point of contention between the two countries.
- **North Korea** remains a point of tension in Sino-Japanese relations, particularly due to the threat of nuclear proliferation by Pyongyang. China has significant leverage over the North Korean regime. However, its top priority is to maintain the *status quo* in the Peninsula. Beijing is concerned that the collapse of the North Korean regime could lead to an uncontrolled influx of refugees, and to the American sphere of influence moving closer to its borders.
- **US-Japan** military cooperation; which is often regarded by Beijing as an instrument to contain its power ambitions.
- Japan's close relationship with **Taiwan**.

Today, these two Asian powers are more powerful and interdependent than they have ever been before. This bilateral relationship has become a paramount example of «hot economics, cold politics». Apart from the security aspects mentioned above, historical contentions such as the legacy of history continues to strain the relations. In the absence of a true reconciliation between the two countries, unfavourable opinions and negative feelings vis-à-vis the counterpart are prevalent among public opinions in both China and Japan (see figure 15).

Figure 15. Perceptions of the counterpart country in China and Japan



Source: Self-elaboration based on Genron NPO 14th Joint Opinion Poll Japan-China.

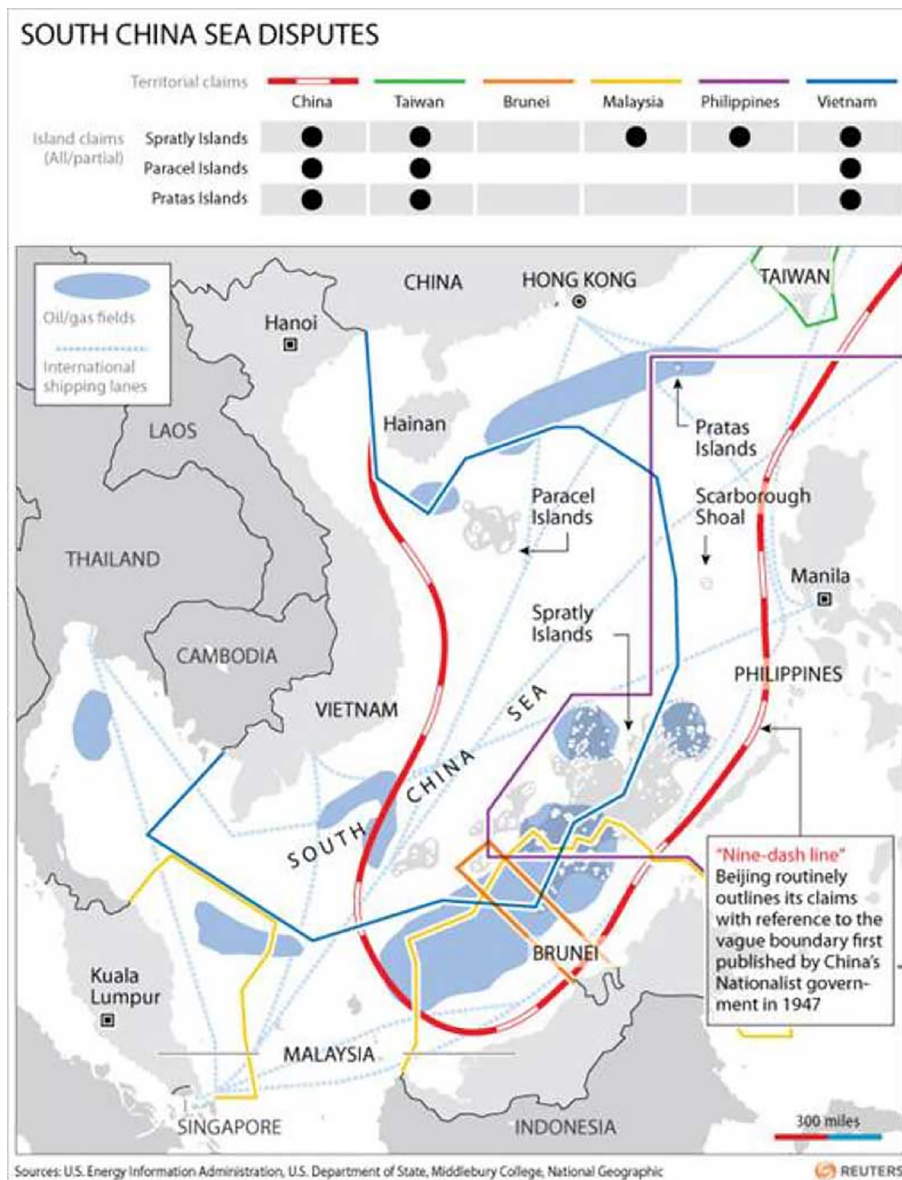
### 2.3.4. The South China Sea

The South China Sea (SCS) is, without doubt, one of the most **contentious** geopolitical flashpoints in the region and in the world. The **strategic importance** of the SCS is unquestionable. It is a critical area of navigation for the energy security of China, Taiwan, Japan and South Korea, as it is the main passage from the Persian Gulf to East Asia. Its fisheries are also of high strategic importance for Indonesia, Malaysia, China and the Philippines.

China, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei currently maintain overlapping territorial claims over islets –mostly uninhabited– in this body of water, which today is considered to be international waters (see figure 16).



Figure 16. Territorial Disputes in the SCS. In red, China's nine-dotted line



Source: Reuters.

Beijing claims that 80% of the SCS belongs to the PRC. It sustains this claim by referring to a demarcation line –known as the nine-dash line– drawn by the KMT government in 1947, which none of the other claimants accept.

In 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague ruled in favour of the Philippines on a maritime claim that Manila had made. The Court determined that there was no legal basis for the claims expressed by China over the South China Sea and thus, that China was acting in violation of the fishing rights of the Philippines. China refused to recognize the jurisdiction of the Court, arguing that it did not consider historical elements.

In more recent years, China appears to be constructing artificial reefs and islets to build military installations, such as aircraft runways, on them. These constructions have motivated condemnation from neighbouring countries as well

as from the US, as they are seen as a way for China to attain *de facto* military control over the waters. As an area with such geopolitical relevance, the SCS remains one of the most potentially destabilizing spots of tension in the world.

### 2.3.5. China and North Korea

As we have seen, the 1953 ceasefire did not officially put an end to the Korean War. During the Cold War, **North Korea** enjoyed normalized relations with socialized countries. However, with the collapse of the bipolar world, it became increasingly isolated. In the post-Cold War era, North Korea has persisted in the pursuit of a nuclear arms programme as a means to ensure the survival of the regime. This has led to numerous condemnations and sanctions by the international community.

Today, North Korea is heavily dependent on its northern neighbour. China supplies over 70% of its oil needs and it is estimated that roughly 90% of North Korea's trade is with China. Among the goods traded, experts claim, there are military and dual-use assets that Pyongyang could use for the development of its nuclear arms programme.

A number of analysts coincide that North Korea is an uncomfortable issue for Beijing. The argument goes that, on the one hand, the best scenario for China would be that the Pyongyang regime were not developing nuclear weapons. However, China appears to fear the possibility of an uncontrolled regime collapse at its borders more than the threat of proliferation. Accordingly, China has often opposed tough international sanctions on the regime and, when it has supported them, has usually applied them lightly.

Because of this **ambivalent** position, North Korea remains a major source of potential conflict between the US and China in Northeast Asia.

## 2.4. Japan

### 2.4.1. The end of Pacifism?

Since its defeat in World War II, Japan has been regarded as an **anomalous case** when it comes to **security** matters. The post-war Constitution, drafted under the tutelage of the US Occupation Forces and enacted in 1947, aimed to break with the militaristic and imperialistic practices of the past. To do so, it contained two clauses –enshrined in the well-known **Article 9**– by which Japan renounced to its sovereign right to wage war:

### Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution

(1) Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.

(2) In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.

Despite meeting the criteria to be a great power: a large economy –the third largest in the world in nominal terms–, trading power, a large population, its presence and contribution to multilateral institutions, Japan’s capacity to act as one in the realm of security is very limited. According to the current interpretation of the Constitution’s Article 9, Japan may only resort to the use force to exercise its right to self-defense. This involves some limited instances of collective self-defense since 2015, after some legislative measures were passed by the Shinzo Abe administration in that regard.

For the most part, however, Japan’s security is guaranteed by the US in accordance with the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security signed between the two countries in 1951, and amended in 1960.

The peace clauses of the Constitution have historically enjoyed the support of the vast majority of the Japanese people. **Opinion polls** suggest that this continues to be so. However, many observers consider that Japan is currently at a crossroads with regard to its National Security. The growing uncertainty in its regional environment has put stress on some of the foundations that have characterized Japan’s relation with security and military affairs since the end of World War II. The unusual –restricted– capabilities of Japan regarding the use of military force and the appearance of new threats to the country, particularly due to the rise of China and the development of nuclear capabilities by North Korea, have motivated vivid political debates about the necessity to ‘**normalize**’ the country’s defense **capabilities**, in particular during most recent times under the premiership of **Shinzo Abe**.

At the centre of Japan’s security are some of the most poignant questions the country will need to deal with in the near future. To name a few: how to deal with an increasingly assertive China? What is Japan’s position vis-à-vis the brewing rivalry between China and the US? How can Japan respond to the nuclear proliferation threats by North Korea?

Within Japan’s political debate there is a plurality of views with regard to these questions. However, the mainstream position is that of the so-called *neoconservatives*, of which Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi are prominent figures. Simply said, neoconservatives believe that Japan needs to overcome the restrictions imposed by the pacifist Constitution. In terms of foreign policy, they propose deepening US-Japan cooperation against perceived threats from North Korea and China. Domestically,



Figure 17. The acting capabilities of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (SDF) are constitutionally restricted. Nevertheless, they are ranked as the fourth most-powerful military in the world in conventional capabilities

they demand a critical reconsideration of Japan's pacifist identity and tradition, which they regard as weakening, as they prevent the country from addressing some of its most poignant problems. In that regard, since the early 1990s different Japanese administrations have passed legislative packages and have **reinterpreted** the pacifist clauses of the Constitution in order to allow the Japan **Self-Defense Forces** (SDF) to play a greater role within US-Japan security cooperation. For example, in the early 2000s, it became possible for the SDF to be deployed overseas in support of the US actions, as long as it did not involve entering into combat.

In 2015, as mentioned above, a reinterpretation of the pacifist clauses has been made in order to allow Japan to take part in some –limited– instances of collective defense. Nevertheless, Prime Minister Abe is a proponent of Constitutional revision and reform, not merely reinterpretation. **Constitutional reform** has never been formally attempted. There appears to be a difficult process ahead, as the Japanese people remain ambivalent and divided with regard to this sensitive topic.

On the far right of the spectrum, the ultranationalist minority believe that the reinterpretations carried out to date have gone in the right direction for restoring Japan's pride and capabilities, although they did not go far enough. They demand deep reforms and the embracement of militarism «without complexes». Conversely, pacifists believe that reinterpretation movements have already gone too far, and that reinterpretation is just the last step before abandoning the pacifist clause of the Constitution altogether. Most recently, in an attempt to bring these irreconcilable positions together, Prime Minister Abe has coined an approach that he described as «pro-active pacifism». In any case, if Constitutional reform is attempted, the result thereof is bound to have an impact on the Japan-US Security Alliance in the years to come.

#### 2.4.2. The great debates in Japanese foreign policy

Given the drastic changes that have taken place both in East Asia and internationally, many observers –domestic and international– identify a series of debates in Japan with regard to its foreign and security policy, many of which have been ongoing, with more or less intensity, during the last two and a half decades.

At the end of the Cold War, the disappearance of the Soviet Union as an immediate threat to Japanese borders and to international stability raised fears in Japan that the conditions that justified the close US-Japan security alliance were fading. A certain anxiety of abandonment by the US, together with the rapidly changing environment –especially due to the rise of China– called for a profound reevaluation of the country's foreign and security policy. As discussed in section 2.2, precisely the challenges posed by the rise of China contributed to dissipating some of the fears about the possibility of US abandon-



Figure 18. Protesters against the reinterpretation / reform of the Constitution's article 9 gather in front of the Japanese Diet

Source: EPA, via The Independent.

ment. However, many of the questions raised in that context, and which go beyond the issue of Constitutional revision or reform discussed above, remain relevant in Japan today.

- First, many in Japan see the need to find a middle point between the need to strengthen the **US-Japan** vis-à-vis the new challenges and the possibility of becoming too vulnerable to uncertainties or pressures coming from the United States. Today, the US-Japan Security Alliance continues to be the backbone of the Japanese foreign and security policies. The relationship is asymmetric, both in power and in responsibilities, and has thus remained a key issue in Japan's political discussion. In recent times this debate regained relevance after the election of President Donald Trump generated uncertainties with regard to his commitments with allies.
- The second debate revolves around the need for a higher sensitivity towards **traditional or hard security aspects**. Since the end of World War II, as a result of the constitutional limitations, Japan's foreign policy has focused overwhelmingly on non-traditional or soft security, also relying strongly on economic instruments. During the 1950s and 1960s, this strategy allowed Japan to maintain a low profile in international affairs while focusing on its economic recovery. However, many consider it obsolete today in sight of the new challenges, and call for a reconsideration. Recently passed legislation, as well as the reinterpretation of the Constitution's peace clauses, suggest that there is already a trend towards a more balanced strategy.
- The third debate is about the **diversification of Japan's Foreign Policy**. Many in the country see Japan's foreign policy as excessively focused on Washington and call for a more independent and diversified foreign policy without renouncing the bilateral alliance with the US.
- Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, Japan must develop a strategy to properly respond and adapt to the **rise of China**. Many observers see the development of a «Cold War mentality» in Sino-Japanese relations, considering the intensification of the dilemmas that antagonize the two countries, in particular territorial disputes and history-related issues.

### 3. Regionalism and security

Earlier in this module (section 1.4), when we briefly discussed the cohesiveness of East Asia, we advanced that this part of the world has neither seen the development of a regional security organization nor of a region-wide economic institution. We also advanced, however, that Northeast- and Southeast Asia have had significantly different experiences with regionalism. While in the Northeast, no such initiative has ever been undertaken, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has become a key actor in Southeast Asia's international politics since its establishment in 1967.

This section starts with an overview of regionalism in Southeast Asia, placing the focus on ASEAN, its development, and its successes and failures. In this discussion we will also review the several arrangements (mainly forums) that have outgrown from the centrality of ASEAN, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Finally, it reviews the regional security architecture of East Asia in order to assess to what extent multilateral / regional solutions to its security challenges are possible in this region.

#### 3.1. East Asian Regionalism

States in a geographical vicinity may decide to establish regional groupings, projects or initiatives in order to cooperate if they identify the existence of a common interest, goal or threat that they expect to address in cooperation (see section 1.4 for a discussion about the terms region, regionalism, regionalization, and *regionness*).

The EU is often seen as the most successful case of regionalism and the one that has gone the furthest in the **process of integration**. A key feature of the EU model of integration is the establishment of complex institutional settings. The EU combines elements of supranationalism –institutions established above the state level through the pooling of sovereignty by member states– and elements of intergovernmentalism. Many observers consider the EU to be a *sui generis* regional organization (a kind of its own) that is not necessarily replicable or exportable to other parts of the world. Nevertheless, theorists have contraposed this institutionalized model of regionalism to another kind, which is the one found in East Asia, known as «**new regionalism**». New Regionalism accepts a broader definition of regional integration/regionalism through paths that neither aspire nor see the construction of supranational institutions as inevitable.

### 3.1.1. Early Cold War in Southeast Asia: SEATO

In Southeast Asia, the first experiment with regionalism was a result of the Truman Doctrine, which stated that a key foreign policy objective of the US was to prevent Soviet geopolitical expansion. In the early years of the Cold War, the US saw parallels between the Asia-Pacific and Europe, estimating that the USSR would become a strong rival in both theatres. The proposed instrument of contention was SEATO, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, which was established in 1954. Apart from the US, its members were other western powers: France, that until recently had been a colonial power in Indochina; the UK; Australia, which administered Papua New Guinea; and New Zealand; as well as three regional states, Pakistan, the Philippines and Thailand. Laos, South Vietnam and Cambodia were given observer status and were included under the protection of the organization. SEATO was an international organization for collective defense which, in many regards, could be described as a Southeast Asian NATO, although without joint commands. SEATO was a failure. Disagreements were frequent amongst its members, who started to pull away from the organization in the early 1970s. With the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, the conflict that justified its continued existence no longer existed, and SEATO was formally terminated in 1977.

### 3.1.2. ASEAN

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations –ASEAN– was founded in 1967 in Bangkok. After the failure of SEATO, ASEAN was conceptualized as a way to strengthen the relations between Southeast Asian countries, to reinforce the role of the region, and to prevent it from becoming a scenario of superpower confrontation.

Unlike SEATO, ASEAN was a native Southeast Asian idea, not a foreign one. Its five founding members were Indonesia, whose president Suharto played a major role in the process; Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. The organization has later enlarged to ten members with the addition of Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia.

ASEAN's **regionalism** differs substantially from that in the EU as its aims are to be a political and economic organization, without any ambition of becoming a supranational institution. According to the Bangkok Declaration, the objectives of the organization are to accelerate economic growth, promote social progress, protect regional peace and stability, and provide its members with the opportunity to solve their differences peacefully.

In the wake of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, some observers claimed that ASEAN could collapse. It had not renewed its principles or objectives, such as adherence to non-interference, since its foundation thirty years earlier. By

#### Integration theory

In integration theory, **supranationalism** is a concept that implies the establishment of a common institution that has interdependent decision-making authority. Member states of the organization pool part of their sovereignty to the supranational institution, which acquires the capacity to take sovereign decisions on their behalf.

**Intergovernmentalism**, by contrast, focuses on the importance of member states as the main actors in the integration processes.

#### The ASEAN Way

A working process or style that is informal and personal. Policymakers constantly use compromise, consensus, and consultation in the informal decision-making process...it above all prioritizes a consensus-based, non-conflictual [sic] way of addressing problems. Quiet diplomacy allows ASEAN leaders to communicate without bringing the discussions into the public view. (Masilamani and Peterson 2014).

the late 1990s, these had become less relevant. In addition, the need to find consensus before adopting any decision could sometimes lead to an inoperative organization.

As a response, in 2005 ASEAN leaders compromised on an **ASEAN Charter**, which would lay out the organization's institutional and legal frameworks. The Charter was adopted later in 2007 and highlighted the commitment to liberal values, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. This, together with the posterior establishment of an ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights and the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration, both of 2012, was interpreted as a significant step forward in that regard; as something that would not have been possible in ASEAN decades earlier. The Charter also rejected EU-style integration, that is, a rejection of supranationalism, and an affirmation of its commitment with national sovereignty and the **ASEAN Way** approach.

Contrasting with the EU's institutionalism, ASEAN's model of regionalism is based on a soft approach to intergovernmental cooperation that emphasizes Southeast Asian cultural norms. This approach is known as the *ASEAN Way* and it emphasizes the sovereign equality of members; conflict resolution by peaceful means without resorting to force.

- 1) Non-interference and non-intervention.
- 2) Non-involvement of ASEAN to address unsolved bilateral conflicts between members.
- 3) Quiet diplomacy.
- 4) Mutual respect and tolerance.

The **informal** style and **low institutionalization** of ASEAN is cherished by its leaders. However, its critics say that the emphasis on consultation, consensus and non-interference often entail that cooperation is only achieved through the lowest common denominator among members. Besides, the consensus needed in the ASEAN decision-making process demand intense negotiations which are often conducted informally.

Other common criticisms point out the fact that members of the organization have different understandings about its priorities. For instance, while Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos put more emphasis on the aspect of non-interference, the founding members tend to highlight cooperation. Such different understandings of priorities often make it difficult to determine when and which collective actions are appropriate given a certain situation.



In 2015, ASEAN rebranded itself as the **ASEAN Community**, a vision to be achieved by 2020. The ASEAN Community is a three-pillar structure based on the so-called Three Community Blueprints roadmap (2009-2015): an economic community, a political and security community, and a sociocultural community. The Community remains a work in progress, although its critics point out the lack of a clear goal and the focus on its economic dimension.

Nevertheless, it is fair to say that, in its more than five decades of existence, ASEAN members have achieved a certain degree of harmonization of their foreign policies, which has often led to them speaking with one voice in international affairs. In addition, ASEAN has developed a network of institutional meetings in dialogues with major players in the world such as the US, China, the EU and Japan; and it has made contributions to conflict resolution in the region. During the Cold War, it managed to stay neutral and to negotiate from a position of strength. Analysts often present the achievements of the organization –and the roles it plays in the region– along four points.

- First, ASEAN has served as a **regional conflict mediator**. ASEAN contributed to the resolution of the Vietnam-Cambodia conflict (Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia) between 1978 and 1991. In 1992, it promoted a Declaration on the South China Sea as a step towards the resolution of the Spratly islands dispute, in which several of its members plus China are claimants. In 2002, it promoted the signature of a non-binding Declaration of Conduct with China; and, in 2009, a Treaty of Amity and Cooperation with the US, which enshrines a multilateral approach to security.
- Second, ASEAN has acted as a **regional security community**; a key actor to keep the conflicts between its members in low profile. This has been achieved through a comprehensive approach to security that encompasses not only military aspects, but also socio-economic development.
- Third, due to its informal character, ASEAN has become a large **interpersonal network**. In this regard, the organization is a unique trust- and confidence-building mechanism.
- Fourth, ASEAN can be seen as a **framework for development**, trying to increase the economic benefits of regionalism for its members. ASEAN has implemented an FTA among its members, although its implementation took 18 years (from 1992 to 2010). Many challenges remain in that regard, particularly due to the large diversity between these economies.

On the other hand, critics of ASEAN often point out the numerous challenges the organization faces. Regarding the safeguard of its interests, one of the most urgent challenges for ASEAN is to find the best way to balance the prevailing influence of the two major powers in the region, China and the US. Past episodes have shown **divisions among ASEAN members** –most notably between those that have a territorial dispute with China and those who do not– with regard to the organization's policy vis-à-vis Beijing.

Another common criticism has to do with the proposed **ASEAN Economic Community**. In 2015 it was seen as a key step towards the economic integration of ASEAN. It is important to take into consideration that, taken as a single entity, ASEAN would count among the ten largest economies in the world. However, key steps towards the development of the Economic Community, such as the development of a common regulatory framework, have not yet been undertaken.

Furthermore, critics point out that despite the enactment in 2012 of the **ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights**, and the **ASEAN Human Rights Declaration** suggested a renewed commitment with Human Rights, the organization's strong commitment to non-interference has prevented it from having a role in cases such as the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar.

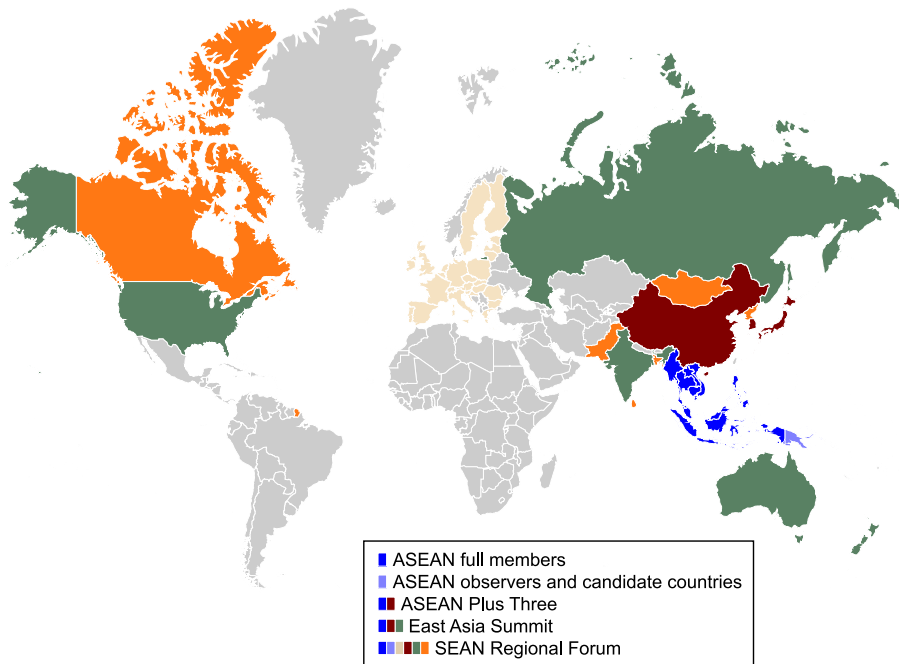
### **3.1.3. The Centrality of ASEAN: Derived frameworks**

A relevant feature of ASEAN is the central role it has acquired as the fulcrum of East Asian regional cooperation. Several East Asian cooperation frameworks and initiatives have grown out from the core of ASEAN (see figure 19). The following paragraphs review the main characteristics of these ASEAN-derived frameworks.

The **ASEAN Plus Three** (or APT, sometimes as ASEAN+3) groups the 10 ASEAN Members plus China, Japan, and South Korea. It was started in 1997, in great part motivated by the East Asian financial crisis and with the coordination of the Asia-Europe Meeting (see below), although it was formally established in 1999 with the signature in Manila of the Joint Statement on East Asia Cooperation. The APT is a forum, not an organization. It does not have a legal, international personality of its own, neither is it an organ of ASEAN. It consists of a series of institutionalized meetings that take place regularly, with the main aim of coordinating cooperation between the participants, ASEAN, China, Japan and South Korea.

The APT foresees an ample cooperation agenda in the economic, social, and political and security fields. For many observers, the APT can be seen as an interesting mechanism to foster interstate cooperation in East Asia, given the lack of alternative working institutional systems of cooperation in Northeast Asia. Its main achievement, however, is to provide a platform for the exchange of views between states' leaders, officials and experts. APT meetings have resulted in numerous declarations, plans of action and agreements in areas such as trade and investment, energy, agriculture, technological transfers and development, intellectual property, transport, or the environment, to name a few.

Figure 19. Regional frameworks derived from the centrality of ASEAN



The **East Asia Summit (EAS)** is another forum derived from the centrality of ASEAN. It has a wider membership than the APT. At its establishment in 2005 it grouped a total of 16 members: the 10 ASEAN states plus China, Korea, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and India. Its membership was expanded to 18 in 2011 with the addition of Russia and the US. Its declared objectives are regional peace, security and prosperity. Similar to the APT, the EAS is a forum, not an institution. It is intended to serve as a platform for high-level dialogue among the main players in the Asia-Pacific Region. There are six priority areas of cooperation within the framework of the EAS: environment and energy; education; finance; global health issues; natural disaster management; and ASEAN connectivity. East Asia Summits take place once a year.

The **ASEAN Regional Forum (or ARF)** is a security-orientated forum established in 1994 to foster constructive dialogue and consultation on political and security issues of common concern. It deals with a range of issues in the security field: preventive diplomacy, maritime security, disaster response, counterterrorism and transnational crime, nonproliferation and disarmament. It currently has 27 participants: 26 states plus the EU.

Like other mechanisms derived from ASEAN, it adopts an approach of minimal institutionalization and consensual decision-making. Its relevance lies in that it is the only forum of this kind that can gather together countries as diverse as the US and North Korea. ARF meetings are held at Foreign Minister Level, and supported by a Senior Official's Meeting, both held once a year. Besides that, there are four inter-sessional meetings a year working on counterterrorism and transnational crime, disaster relief, maritime security, and non-

proliferation and disarmament. Every two years, a civil-military disaster relief training session is held and, finally, there are track-two diplomacy activities (non-governmental diplomacy).

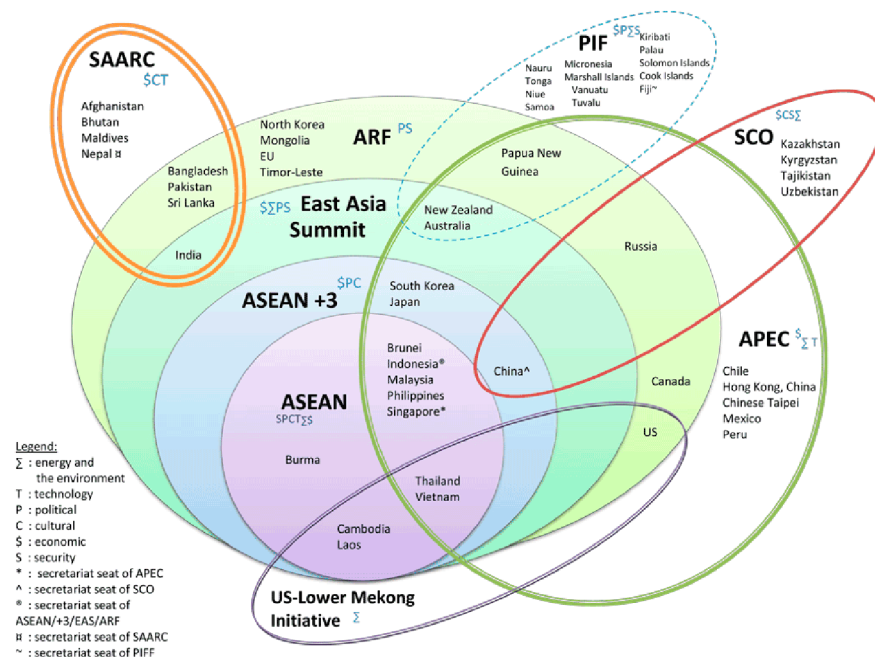
The ARF has not been exempt from criticism either. Critics normally point out that, when it was established in 1994, it had the aim of becoming the flagship security forum in East Asia (understood as the entire region) -- the closest East Asia would have to a security arrangement. The ARF was intended to be deployed in three stages. The first stage focusing on confidence building, the second, on preventive diplomacy, and the third, on conflict-resolution mechanisms. However, despite its potential, it has never passed its first stage as a confidence building platform. Harsher criticisms have labeled it a 'talk shop' and a 'highly-imperfect mechanism', "ineffective to bring about any meaningful coordination to addressing regional problems" (Dent, 2008, p. 24).

### 3.2. East Asian Security architecture

In the previous sections, we reviewed the different aspects that contribute to shaping the East Asia as we know it today. In section 2 we studied how the region's politics and security are largely dominated by their geopolitical competition, and examined some of their patterns of conflict and cooperation. In the previous section, we explored the characteristics of East Asian regionalism. In order to complete our understanding of the region, this section considers its security architecture.

It is generally considered that there are three pillars forming the core of today's East Asian security architecture:

Figure 20. East Asian Security Architecture.



Source: Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

- First, the **US-led security alliance** system known as the *hub-and-spokes* system. As introduced earlier, this system consists of a network of bilateral security relationships in which the US acts as the security guarantor (see section 2.2). The most relevant links –the closest partnerships– in this *hub-and-spokes* system are the US-Japan alliance, which is the closest US alliance in the region and a key pillar of its presence in the region; the US-South Korea alliance; and the US-Taiwan relationship that, albeit unofficial and ambiguous, remains highly relevant. In addition to these close relations with its traditional allies, the *hub-and-spokes* architecture is complemented by a series of treaties, agreements and partnerships with other regional states, such as the Philippines, Indonesia or Taiwan.
- Second, the **bilateral networks** of cooperation between states. This is most common in the context of Southeast Asia. For example, Vietnam and the Philippines have strengthened relations as a way to address China's increased assertiveness in the South China Sea. Bilateral contracts and other types of security cooperation, such as joint exercises, are maintained within the framework of ASEAN.
- Third, the notion that ASEAN can be the centre, the hub, of East Asia's regional order. In this regard, **ASEAN centrality** is the third pillar of East Asia's security architecture.

**China**, as the reader may have observed, is not embedded in the region's security architecture and remains largely a self-sufficient actor outside of this layout. This aspect is a consequence of the geopolitical confrontation between China and the US and its allies. The US's strategy vis-à-vis the region articulates the main pillar of its security architecture, the *hub-and-spokes* system. China, whose strategic aspirations are antagonistic to those of the US, cannot intricately itself in the current architecture and therefore, it chooses to remain largely at its margin. This does not mean that China may not have ambitions to reshape this security architecture in order to make it more advantageous to its strategy and interests.

So far, the security architecture reviewed here has remained relatively stable. However, the reader should remember that East Asia is a volatile region. A majority of scholars concur that any major destabilization in the current East Asian system in the coming years will most likely originate in: China-Taiwan relations, or in the Korean Peninsula, or in the South China Sea.

Thus, the final and pertinent reflection is whether multilateral solutions to the region's security are possible. The ARF emerged from the centrality of ASEAN in 1994 with the aspiration of establishing a stable order under a native regional leadership. Its critics, however, consider that its shortcomings suggest it will not be able to play such central role in the near future. The existence of two antagonistic geopolitical strategies in the region, China's and the US's, further complicates the matter.

## 4. The future of Asia? Contending visions

The rise of China is one of the top issues of debate in contemporary International Relations scholarship. There are many interpretations about China's future and about the implications of its rise for the rest of the world. How will it be? Can China rise peacefully? Is war between China and the US unavoidable? Will China try to overthrow the current liberal order, or it will simply aim at increasing its power and influence within it?

In that regard, two main camps can be identified. On the one hand, scholars within a **realist tradition** generally have a pessimistic outlook on the dynamics of power competition between the US and China. These realist scholars see the rise of China as a motive for concern and as looming for conflict. On the other hand, scholars from a **liberal tradition** tend to have a more optimistic outlook. International Relations scholars do not have a crystal ball to see the future, so neither of these traditions can talk with more authority than the other. However, they can certainly make assumptions, each based on their respective ontology –vision– of the world.

Theorists on the realist camp address this problem from the perspective of **rising powers**. In their view, the emergence of new powers that contest consolidated ones has always brought about instability and conflict. This is because realists –particularly neorealists– focus on the effects of the anarchic international system, the **self-help system** which leads to a competition for power.

One of the most prominent neorealist thinkers, John J. Mearsheimer argues that China's rise will not be peaceful (2006; 2010). He considers that as China's growth and rise continues, its competition with the US will intensify and lead to higher conflictivity with the possibility of war. Mearsheimer's argument is that China, as a rising power, will have the ambition to have hegemonic status in its 'home region'. At the same time, the US is determined to avoid the emergence of another power that challenges its permanent position, and it will attempt to contain China if its interests require it to do so -- the perfect recipe for increased tensions, rivalry and conflict. Mearsheimer's vision of Asia's future is not very optimistic either.

In his view, China will first attempt to attain **regional hegemony**. When it does so, its neighbours will strengthen ties with the US to counterbalance China's ambitions. This, Mearsheimer argues, is likely to drive the region towards conflict and instability. Other realists, such as Christensen (2006) argue that East Asia is an unstable region due to its diversity and the major shifts in power balance that have characterized it.

Another prominent realist, Aaron Friedberg (2011; 2010) argues that the future of Asia will very much depend on two aspects. First, domestic developments in China: will China evolve towards a more democratic system? Will it continue to be a one-party regime? Friedberg believes that what happens in that regard will shape both the region and the rest of the world. Secondly, he focuses on the character of US-China relations and how they may evolve: will they derive into a new Cold War, or towards a deeper *entente* –understanding– between the two? Friedberg is pessimistic in this regard, since he believes that the competitive aspects of **US-China** relations are not conjectural but deeply rooted. He argues that traditionally, the US has understood the world by making simple categories: friends or foes, competitors or partners. However, Friedberg argues that China is neither of these and both at the same time, a new situation that leads to increasing mistrust.

Similarly, regarding China and the future of the liberal order, Pu & Schweller (2011) argue that as China continues to rise, it will develop a more robust ideology that will bring it to challenge the current liberal order. They argue that the growth in interest in traditional culture and philosophy within China is an indicator that a more powerful China will not be content with an international order based on Western liberal ideas; a system that they see as created to perpetrate and propagate American views and interests.

Conversely, theorists on the liberal camp have a more optimistic view about the future of East Asia. In general terms, these scholars do not deny that China will develop ambitions for power, but they argue that the current liberal international order is robust and flexible, and can accommodate the rise of new powers without this leading to conflict. These authors tend to envision a **multipolar, interconnected** and more **cooperative international** system. If we said that realists focus on the anarchical structure of the international system and on the balances of power, liberals focus on international institutions, rules and norms, economic interdependence and globalization. Despite anarchy, cooperation can be achieved. Besides, they argue that power is not only transitioning from some states to others (US to China, in this case), but also that power is diffusing as non-state actors gain increased relevance in the globalized and interconnected world (Nye 2012).

Ikenberry (2011) argues that China cannot simply overthrow the current international order, which is strongly developed, institutionalized, expansive, and deeply rooted in the societies and economies in the developed and developing world. Ikenberry (2014) envisions several possible scenarios for East Asia. On the one hand, China could gradually dominate regional institutions, reducing the role and influence of the US. To do this, Ikenberry suggests that China would need that those regional arrangements that exclude the US, such as the Asean Plus Three (see section 3.1) or the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, emerged as robust entities. He estimates this unlikely, as US allies

in the region would not accept such evolution of the regional order. Instead, he suggests East Asia is likely to see the further development of overlapping regional groupings and arrangements (see figure 20).

Ikenberry argues that the US and China certainly will compete for regional leadership although this will neither reverse hegemony nor become a traditional balance of power system. The result, he claims, will be a mix of the two in which China and the US will aim to reach an agreement by which the US would accommodate China into the regional order by offering it status and position, while seeking the establishment of regional multilateral arrangements.

Finally, an interesting contribution from this camp is made by scholar David Kang (2007). Kang argues that, contrary to what neorealists claim –a theoretical approach that he considers inadequate to analyze the East Asian reality–, the rise of China may in fact be taken as a stabilizing force in the region. Kang's study is based on observing that China's neighbours have taken an active role in intensifying their links with China. According to this view, the rise of China is bound to be peaceful because it shares an identity –a Sinocentric identity– with its neighbours.

To sum up, the future of this complex region remains unclear. Developments with regard to the main spots of tension identified in this module will tell the direction in which the region moves.



## Summary

As exposed in the introduction, the purpose of this module is to be a companion for students in their first approximation to the international politics of East Asia.

The first part offered an introduction to the region. It reviewed its different geopolitical delimitations and definitions, presented a brief overview of its recent history, and examined the main patterns of continuity and change in post-Cold War East Asia. The first part concluded with a discussion of the degree of cohesiveness of this contested region. The second part focused on analyzing the role that the three main powers of the region play in shaping it: the US, China, and Japan. Next, the third part examined regionalism in East Asia and the region's security architecture. Finally, the fourth part has presented the main contending visions that prevail in academia regarding the future of the region.

We have attempted to offer the most comprehensive view of the region possible within its limited scope. Unavoidably, we have not been able to go into full depth in the analysis and discussion of each of these aspects. Here below there is a list of resources that students may find useful to continue deepening their knowledge of this relevant and complex region.



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