This chapter seeks to shed light on the foreign policies of several key states in the Western Pacific. It examines the foreign policies of the People’s Republic of China (PRC or China), the Republic of China (ROC or Taiwan), Japan, the Democratic Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Republic of Korea (ROK). Readers are provided with a brief historical overview of each state's foreign policy and an analysis of their current approaches to foreign relations. In conclusion, the authors outline some of the common trends and characteristics shared by the governments examined.

The People’s Republic of China

The People's Republic of China (PRC or China) matters, and it matters a lot. When one considers that China is now the world’s second-largest economy, third-largest military power and the single largest foreign holder of US government debt, it is clear that the country is important. At the same time, China’s cooperation is essential if the international community hopes to cope with a wide range of pressing global problems, including the worldwide economic tsunami, terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), environmental degradation, health issues, dwindling energy supplies and the continuing crises on the Korean Peninsula, to name just a few.

Given the country’s importance, it comes as little surprise that numerous studies provide detailed analyses of the foreign relations of the PRC (Swaine and Tellis 2001; Goldstein 2005; Zheng 2005; Foot 2006; Gill 2010; Hickey and Guo 2010; Wang 2005; Nathan and Scobell, 2012; Sutter 2016). The following discussion provides only an overview of Beijing’s fundamental foreign policy priorities and grand strategic postures.

Historical overview

To understand China’s present foreign policy orientation, one must begin with the nation’s “century of humiliation” (Hickey 2002). This began in the nineteenth century, when the Western powers and Japan forced China to open up and began to dismember it. Since that time, China has often viewed itself as a victim of external aggression. In fact, throughout
Foreign policies of East Asia

most of the twentieth century, Chinese schools taught history as a series of *guo chi* or national humiliations. This era of humiliation came to an end when Chairman Mao Zedong unified the mainland under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and established the PRC in 1949. As Mao declared on October 1, 1949, “China has stood up!”

The legacy of wounded national pride has left a deeply ingrained perception among the Chinese that in order to be secure and avoid potential infringements on China’s sovereignty and territorial unity, it must be strong, both at home and abroad. This sense of insecurity or vulnerability has also empowered the CCP and bolstered its ruling legitimacy. The party claims that it will protect China from foreign domination, subversion and Westernization (Medeiros 2009, 10; Nathan and Scobell 2012, 33).

During the first half of the Cold War era (1949–1969), Mao considered the US-led capitalist camp to be China’s most dangerous enemy. Initially, the country aligned itself with the Soviet Union, but this came to an end in the mid-1950s. During this stage in its foreign relations, Beijing also attempted to forge closer ties with the Non-Aligned states by espousing, in the 1954 Bandung Conference, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence: (1) mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, (2) mutual nonaggression, (3) non-interference in internal affairs, (4) equality and mutual benefit and (5) peaceful coexistence (Goldstein 2005, 21–22).

During the latter half of the Cold War (1969–1989), Beijing normalized relations with Washington, and Soviet “hegemony” was viewed as the principal threat to China’s national security interests. The United States and PRC teamed up to devise anti-Soviet strategies, and President Ronald Reagan even cleared the way for direct government-to-government arms sales to China in 1984, when he declared, as required by law, that such sales would “strengthen the security of the US and promote world peace” (Hickey 1997, 62).

In sum, China’s Cold War policy position was predicated upon the Maoist “united-front” strategy, which called for teaming up with all the possible coalitions of allies, irrespective of their ideological differences, in order to fight against a principal adversary. And if the nature of the primary foe changes, so should the cast of the alliance (Goldstein 2005, 20). This has been described as a “weak-state” approach, in which the

Chinese state relied for the most part upon a security strategy keyed to external balancing through shifting strategic relationships with the United States and Soviet Union, combined with the maintenance of a strong yet technologically unsophisticated defensive force designed to deter attacks on Chinese territory, not to project Chinese influence and presence beyond the heartland.

*(Swaine and Telleis 2001, 78)*

When Deng Xiaoping launched China’s economic reforms and internationalist foreign policy in the 1980s, he believed that “any country that closes its door to the outside world cannot achieve progress” (quoted in Harding 1987, 133). In addition to maintaining China’s internal political stability, preserving sovereignty and territorial integrity, and revitalizing international status and respect, economic development became a major foreign policy priority for Beijing. Indeed, Deng’s 1992 claim that “only development has real meaning” continues to serve as a major influence on China’s foreign policy (Medeiros 2009, 15). Economic growth and prosperity not only enhance domestic stability (thereby buttressing CCP’s popular support and monopoly on political power) but also provide the basis for strengthening China’s international prestige and influence.
During the immediate post-Cold War era, Chinese elites hoped to transform the US-dominated unipolar system into a multipolar world order in which China would be one of many great powers. Given the United States’ military, economic and technological power, however, Beijing came to the conclusion that it would be a long period of transition (perhaps several decades or longer) before this happened. By the mid-1990s, the Jiang Zemin administration, in the wake of the 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait crises and the South China Sea disputes, believed that China should embark upon a grand strategy that would embrace multilateralism. This move would reassure its Asian neighbors that its rising power would not jeopardize their interests while continuing China’s economic and military modernization in order to counter any possible constraining or containing acts by the United States and other great powers (Goldstein 2005). Consequently, post-Deng leaders have ramped up China’s multilateral diplomacy and engagement in a myriad of international and regional (economic and strategic) regimes and forums. Some examples include the Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Regional Forum (ARF), the East Asian Summit (EAS), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Six-Party Talks on North Korea’s nuclear ambitions (Medeiros 2009, 77–82; Gill 2010).

Given the fact that American hegemonic power is unlikely to decline soon and that the US-led liberal international order is conducive to China’s economic development, Beijing has toned down its drive to create a multipolar system and focused on stabilizing and improving its strategic partnership with the United States (Schweller and Yu 2011; Ikenberry 2013). The deepening of economic and strategic interdependence and competition between Beijing and Washington has led one analyst to characterize the US–PRC relationship as “an extremely complex and highly paradoxical unity of opposites” (Wang 2005, 46). Although they view the United States as a challenge to China’s national security and domestic stability, Chinese elites also view “America’s long-standing presence in the [Asia Pacific] region as a stabilizing factor” (Foot 2006, 89). In spite of Washington’s close alliance with Tokyo, it is believed that the United States will rein in Japan if it oversteps on China’s security interests. In a similar vein, during the early 2000s, the George W. Bush administration sought to restrain Chen Shui-bian, Taiwan’s leader, when he threatened to change the status quo in the Taiwan Strait. These American actions were welcomed by the PRC government. In short, from the Chinese perspective, American involvement in Asia is not always considered negative, and this is especially true when Beijing needs to place far greater attention on China’s numerous internal problems (Zheng 2005, 21).

Deng warned that China should not create unnecessary antagonisms with foreign powers but should “taoguang yanghui” or hide its light and nurture its strength. As a result, in 1997, Jiang Zemin adopted a “new security concept” to urge countries to “rise above one-sided security and seek common security through mutually beneficial cooperation” (Nathan and Scobell 2012, 29). In 2004, Hu Jintao’s “peaceful development” sought to dispel worries about the “China threat” by telling the international community that China will not follow the path of Germany leading up to World War I or those of Germany and Japan leading up to World War II. Neither will China follow the path of the great powers vying for global domination during the Cold War. Instead, China will transcend ideological differences to strive for peace, development, and cooperation with all countries of the world. (Zheng 2005, 22)
Furthermore, Hu called for the building of a “harmonious world,” which was an extension of his domestic policy of constructing a “harmonious society.” A harmonious world, in essence, is one in which states act in ways that refrain from combative power politics, respect each other’s national sovereignty, tolerate diversity and promote national development by equitably spreading economic benefits.

China specialists have long debated whether its rise is peaceful or threatening and revisionist (Johnston 2003; Kang 2005). The answer lies somewhere between these extremes. The PRC’s peaceful development strategy is more likely to be “calculative” and “transitional” (Goldstein 2005, 39). It depends ultimately on the endurance of US global leadership and Washington’s commitment to remain engaged in Asia and shape China’s rise (Christensen 2015). While its power has grown, it still lags far behind the United States. Beijing’s rapid military modernization and technological advancements aim at fending off and deterring possible US intervention (and/or US-led encirclement) in China’s peripheral and regional contingencies, such as the Taiwan Strait and the South and East China Seas. Yet China, in the words of one China specialist, remains a “fragile superpower,” plagued by domestic corruption, rising economic inequality, social unrests, environmental degradation, growing rifts among the ruling CCP elites and the emerging influence of nationalistic and leftist political forces (Shirk 2008). Indeed, as a Chinese student explained during discussions with one of the authors, “China is a fat man with brittle bones.”

To be sure, Chinese leaders have, on occasion, resorted to assertive foreign policy behavior and/or nationalistic rhetoric to divert the population’s attention from domestic problems and to shore up support (Fewsmith 2008). But nationalism is a “double-edged sword.” Some contend that “contemporary Chinese history shows that the practice of trying to distract the public from domestic problems by playing up foreign problem has often ended with regime change. Xenophobic public sentiments can quickly transform into an anti-government uprising” (Li 2013, 46). The twentieth century provides numerous examples, including the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, the May 4th Movement in 1919 and the Communist Revolution in the anti-Japanese war of the 1930s and 1940s.

Today, CCP elites tread cautiously in an effort to avoid being forced to take a confrontational foreign policy stance by hawkish military officials, left-wing leaders or members of the public. Being risk averse and pragmatic, top decision-makers are unwilling, at least in the foreseeable future, to jeopardize decades of economic growth and modernization by waging a military conflict with the United States or other powers (Lampton 2014). As one scholar observed, in these respects, “China is instead more like Bismarck’s Germany: a nationalist rising power whose interests sometimes conflict with others’, but one that so far lacks a thirst for expansion, let alone domination, strategic purposes that would pose a serious threat to international peace” (Goldstein 2005, 210). Nuclear deterrence and continued US hegemonic power also serve as safeguards against Chinese revisionism.

Due to such consideration, it should come as little surprise that Xi Jinping, China’s current president, has called for “building a new type of relationship between major powers.” For example, with respect to US-PRC relations, Xi raised four major points: (1) increasing mutual understanding and strategic trust; (2) respecting each other’s core interests and major concerns; (3) deepening win-win cooperation in traditional areas, such as economic commerce, science and technology, and also in emerging fields, such as energy, environment and infrastructure construction; and (4) sharing international responsibilities to better meet global challenges and maintain a healthy interaction in the Asian Pacific region (Hu 2012; Xi 2012; Lampton 2013). Xi’s predecessor, Hu, also emphasized these points during his farewell report to the 18th Party Congress in November 2012 (Swaine 2013). These propositions...
could suggest a new thinking to replace the traditional realist power transition theory that has depicted a gloomy picture of an escalating security dilemma and the inevitable clash between the established dominant (status quo) powers and rising (revisionist) states (Chong and Hall 2014; Lam 2015).

At the same time, Xi’s taizidang or “princeling” background and his close ties with the military have presented a more hard-line image (Zheng 2010; Lam 2015). In February 2009, for instance, while visiting Mexico City, he told Hong Kong media that

> there are a few foreigners, with full bellies, who have nothing better to do than try to point fingers at our [China] country. China does not export revolution, hunger, poverty nor does China cause you any headaches. Just what else do you want?

*(Quoted in Yaita 2012, 205)*

Nonetheless, there seems to be a consensus among Chinese elites, irrespective of their factional affiliations, that peaceful development will prevail as China’s overarching foreign policy strategy. Indeed, some of Xi’s major policy initiatives focus on domestic affairs, especially the fight against rampant corruption and the pursuit of bolder economic reforms and restructuring. On January 29, 2013, in his first formal discussion of China’s foreign policy, Xi made it clear that the government “will ensure that the public benefits from China’s peaceful development as well as work to consolidate a material and social basis for furthering its development.” While insisting that the PRC will “never give up [its] legitimate rights and will never sacrifice our national core interests,” the CCP leader stressed that “China will pursue its development by seeking a peaceful international environment while safeguarding and promoting world peace.”

Despite the declared emphasis on global peace, it is clear that Xi has inaugurated a more audacious foreign policy agenda in recent years—particularly toward the disputed territories in the South and East China Seas (Economy 2014). A series of incidents have led the United States and China’s neighbors to voice concern. The United States has pushed for deeper strategic and economic ties with Japan, South Korea, Australia, India and ASEAN in its rebalancing or “pivot” to Asia-Pacific. Moreover, in seeking to promote the “Chinese Dream” and “rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” (terms with highly nationalistic significance), Beijing has launched the new Silk Road project to deepen continental infrastructural development and maritime trade with South Asia, Central Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe (Lam 2015). To help finance these initiatives, the Xi administration has established the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Some observers perceive the new banking organization as a rival to the US-dominated World Bank and IMF.

It is likely that the Xi government will continue to pursue the peaceful development strategy but behave more belligerently and assertively on various peripheral and international issues that pertain to its “core interests.” How China defines the notion “core interests” will certainly affect its relations with the neighboring countries as well as the United States. Whereas traditionally “core interests” have encompassed the Chinese mainland, Tibet and Taiwan, Beijing’s tougher stances on the South and East China Seas’ maritime and island territories seem to confirm that these contested regions will be included as well. This means that Sino-American relations may become more antagonistic (Sutter 2015), especially in the aftermath of the judgment rendered by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) on July 12, 2016. The court decision was highly favorable to the Philippines (and by extension, the United States and its other Southeast Asian allies, pertaining to the dispute) and essentially rebuffed the PRC’s so-called Nine-Dashed Line and its accompanied “historical rights.”
claims over the South China Sea’s maritime territories. The PCA also ruled that land features in the Spratlys, including the Taiwan-occupied Itu Aba or Taiping, are not islands under the UN Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS) and hence have no rights to the two hundred nautical miles of exclusive economic zones. Beijing has boycotted the proceedings, saying that the tribunal had no jurisdiction and that China would ignore its decision. Suggesting that the PCA was a “lackey of some outside forces” (implying the United States and Japan), the Chinese also staged a series of air-patrol and naval exercises in the region. Though China’s reactions have, for the most part, stayed restrained, it remains to be seen how it would charter its relations with Washington and other claimants.

The United States and China will also continue to quarrel over other issues, including trade, foreign exchange rates, human rights, cybersecurity and the protection of intellectual property rights, to name just a few. Yet both Beijing and Washington have affirmed repeatedly that these contentions (while inevitable) must not derail their bilateral cooperation, which is required to address a series of major global challenges. The firm shared commitment of President Barrack Obama and President Xi to set stringent measures in their respective countries to reduce global warming gases and curb carbon dioxide emissions is a case in point. This intermix of cooperation and competition, known as “coopetition,” is likely to characterize US-PRC relations in the years to come (Shambaugh 2013). It will also characterize China’s relations with many regional powers.

Summary

It is often claimed that China’s post-Mao leadership is based on collective leadership and decision-making. The nation’s foreign policy has become more bureaucratic, pragmatic and consensus-oriented. Therefore, greater institutionalization of the policymaking process may ensure a certain degree of continuity and moderation. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that President Xi differs from his predecessors. His more assertive foreign policy positions and more consolidated approach to setting China’s national security agenda (such as establishing an all-powerful National Security Commission in November 2013) have modified some of these policy norms. Despite being more powerful than any time since the mid-nineteenth century, the Chinese mainland is now at crossroads. While striving to become more open and deeply integrated into the global economic system, Beijing also understands that greater economic liberalization carries some risks. Pressures for domestic political reform and change might accelerate and threaten the CCP’s continued monopoly on power. The growing anti-PRC sentiments in Hong Kong and Taiwan illustrate the limits of Beijing’s political, economic and ideological appeal, especially to the younger generation. The maintenance of social stability and, with it, the CCP’s continued political hegemony remain the Chinese leadership’s top priorities. Thus, Xi’s vocal advocacy of the nationally stoked “Chinese Dream,” more aggressive foreign policy stances and concentration of political power may be necessary to keep the CCP in control. Xi’s hard-line policies, however, may not work well in the long haul, and this represents a dilemma for the PRC to seriously contemplate.

Taiwan

In 1949, the Republic of China (ROC or Taiwan) retreated from mainland China to Taiwan along with the country’s foreign exchange reserves, gold reserves, art treasures and official seal. Since that time, the ROC has transformed itself from a staid, authoritarian regime into what the US government describes officially as “a multi-party democracy.”
On January 16, 2016, the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) won a double victory over the ruling Kuomintang (KMT). Tsai Ing-wen, a career politician promoting a populist agenda, was elected president, and for the first time, the DPP won a majority in Taiwan’s parliament. The landmark election could impact the island’s external relations (both its foreign relations and relations with the Chinese mainland).7

**Historical background**

Following its defeat in 1949, almost all of the ROC’s diplomacy was geared initially toward the goal of “rescuing” the mainland and reunifying the country under Chiang Kai-shek’s leadership (Hickey 2007, 80–83). Like Chairman Mao Zedong, the Generalissimo adhered to the “one China principle” and the “one China policy.”8 Taipei severed relations with any government that recognized Beijing and withdrew from any international governmental organization (IGO) that admitted the rival regime. Due to Cold War calculations, most Western governments stood with Taipei throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

During the early 1970s, seismic shifts in international politics undermined Taiwan’s position in the global community. In 1971, Taipei was compelled to yield its seat on the United Nations (UN) Security Council to Beijing.9 This set the stage for the ROC’s expulsion from other IGOs and most governments switched diplomatic recognition to Beijing.

Shortly after Chiang Kai-shek’s death in 1975, President Chiang Ching-kuo adopted a pragmatic approach toward international affairs. Perhaps most significant, he sought to boost Taipei’s “unofficial” relations with foreign governments—particularly the United States—after Washington recognized Beijing in 1979. He also agreed to use names other than his government’s formal title in order to participate in global forums. And on July 15, 1987, Chiang lifted the ban on travel to the PRC (Hickey 2007, 86).10

In 1988, Lee Teng-hui became the president of the ROC. Like Chiang, Lee sought to bolster Taipei’s “unofficial” relations with foreign governments. But he also tried to “advance” formal diplomatic ties and engineer Taiwan’s return to international organizations—including the UN.

President Lee’s diplomatic victories came with a high cost. The number of Taiwan’s diplomatic allies rose to 30, but all of its remaining important diplomatic partners defected to Beijing. Moreover, the UN campaign went nowhere. Lee enjoyed some successes upgrading substantive ties with foreign governments. But these efforts—along with his other moves to increase Taiwan’s international space—put Taipei on a collision course with Beijing. Such considerations led President Bill Clinton to journey to China in 1998 and proclaim America’s adherence to the “three no’s” policy (no support for “two Chinas” or “one China, one Taiwan,” no support for Taiwan independence and no support for Taiwan’s formal membership in IGOs).11

Chen Shui-bian was elected president in 2000. His approach to foreign affairs mirrored the strategy embraced by Lee. During Chen’s eight years as ROC president, his administration gained three new diplomatic allies. But it lost nine. And Taipei’s drive to secure international recognition by bribing impoverished countries in the global south contributed to the island’s growing reputation as an international troublemaker. Chen strained relations with both the United States and the PRC.

Following his election in 2008, Ma Ying-jeou embraced a policy described as “flexible diplomacy.”12 Perhaps most important, Ma endorsed the “1992 Consensus.”13 Negotiations between Taiwan’s and the mainland reopened for the first time in over a decade. Cross-strait relations moved forward.
By 2016, a total of 23 cross-strait agreements had been signed. Moreover, the number of direct cross-strait flights had soared from 0 to 120 per day. Perhaps most surprising, however, was the historic summit meeting between President Ma and President Xi in 2015.

The Ma administration improved relations with the United States, the EU and other foreign governments in parallel with the breakthroughs in cross-strait relations (Hickey 2015). Moreover, his administration managed to raise the number of countries and regions offering Taiwan visa-free preferential treatment from 54 to 158 (including the United States). Taiwan also put a stop to what Ma described as the “pointless competition” with the PRC for diplomatic allies (Hickey 2015). Rather, his administration sought to play the role of peacemaker in a variety of complicated international disputes.

Taiwan’s foreign relations

In 2008, Ma Ying-jeou had campaigned for president promising to improve Taipei’s relations with Washington and Beijing. He also pledged to turn around a stagnant economy that had been “misligned” by the DPP. Ma fulfilled the first two promises. But President Chen’s economy eventually became President Ma’s economy. This was a critical factor leading to the unprecedented KMT defeat in the 2016 elections.

During Taiwan’s 2015–2016 election cycle, Tsai Ing-wen campaigned on a populist platform. She promised to reduce income inequalities, revitalize Taiwan’s economy, boost social welfare spending, create meaningful and well-paying jobs for young people, diversify Taiwan’s trade partners and clean up the environment. At the same time, she pledged to balance the government’s budget.

With respect to relations with the PRC, Tsai refused to endorse the “1992 Consensus.” Rather, she sought to sidestep the issue by claiming to support the “status quo” and promised to handle relations with Beijing in accordance with “the will of the Taiwan people” and Taiwan’s Constitution. When asked to elaborate on the vague approach to cross-Strait relations and/or state plainly her position toward the 1992 Consensus, Tsai preferred to duck the question.

With respect to foreign relations, Tsai left many questions unanswered during the campaign. For example, she promised to boost arms purchases from the United States but never explained how this could be accomplished while simultaneously boosting social welfare spending and balancing the budget. Tsai also promised to reduce Taiwan’s economic dependence on the PRC by shifting investment and trade to Southeast Asia but failed to provide specifics as to how this policy—a failed initiative that had been pursued by the Lee administration—might be accomplished. But perhaps most puzzling was the candidate’s attitude toward Taipei’s diplomatic truce with Beijing.

When asked about the diplomatic truce with Beijing during Taiwan’s first presidential debate on December 27, 2015, Tsai charged that “Taiwan’s diplomats have lost their direction in the past eight years of diplomatic truce and have lost their efficiency and competitiveness—as a result Taiwan has become beholden to China in maintaining diplomatic ties.” Tsai threatened to transform the government’s inefficient foreign affairs personnel into “combat-ready” diplomats. Several days after the debate, Tsai elaborated on her earlier comments when she complained that ROC diplomats wasted their time waiting for “someone to throw them a bone” and charged that “this is not how a country should handle diplomacy.” It appeared that Tsai was preparing Taiwan’s people for an end to the diplomatic truce and a return to Chen’s “scorched earth diplomacy.”
At the time of writing, Tsai has only been president for several months. But it is still possible to identify some elements of continuity and change in Taiwan’s foreign relations.

Like each of her predecessors, President Tsai claims to support the maintenance of a strong relationship with the United States. When running for president, she went to great lengths to show Washington that she was not a troublemaker. Moreover, in her inaugural address, Tsai promised to “safeguard” the territory of the ROC—including the government’s claims in the East and South China Seas. Tsai appears to support President Ma’s peace proposals for both disputes.19

Like President Ma, Tsai hopes to somehow engineer Taiwan’s admission to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a high-standard free trade pact led by the United States.20 She also will continue the Ma administration’s drive to participate in UN-affiliated organizations, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Interestingly, she acquiesced to Taiwan’s continued participation in the 2016 World Health Assembly (WHA) as “Chinese Taipei”—a moniker despised by many in Taiwan. Like Ma, boosting Taiwan’s participation in NGOs is also one of Tsai’s objectives.

Unlike the Ma administration, Tsai’s government plans to diversify trade ties as much as possible, a move designed to reduce the island’s dependence on the PRC. The cornerstone of this initiative is a “new southbound policy” aimed at promoting economic ties with Southeast Asia (and to a lesser extent with India). The plan failed miserably when pursued in the past, and serious analyses give it even less of a chance for success today (Copper 2016). Yet Tsai’s administration appears determined to give the initiative another try.

The most striking difference between the Ma and Tsai administrations is their respective approaches to the PRC. The new president wants to move closer to Washington and Tokyo, while distancing Taipei from Beijing. Given the fact that the Chinese mainland is now Taiwan’s largest trading partner (no other country is even close), many in the business community view this objective as unattainable.

Summary

Since retreating to Taiwan in 1949, the ROC’s foreign policy has experienced a variety of “ups and downs.” At the end of the day, however, it is clear that the government’s foreign policy options are shaped largely by actors and events outside Taiwan (Hickey 2007). This will not change. Taiwan’s leadership realizes that it’s one thing to proclaim a shift in foreign policy but another thing to actually achieve declared goals. In short, two states—the United States and the PRC—will continue to wield an enormous influence over Taiwan’s foreign relations in coming years.

Japan

For much of the post-World War II (WWII) era, Japan has been described as an economic superpower but “a military midget and political lightweight on the world stage” (Auslin 2011). Following his election as Japan’s prime minister in December 2012, Shinzo Abe (who briefly held that position in 2006–2007) vowed to change this. Abe has expanded Japan’s linkages with international organizations based outside East Asia ranging from NATO to the EU. And the Japanese media has described the number and scope of Abe’s summit meetings with foreign leaders as unprecedented. But it is Abe’s campaign to change Japan’s defense posture that has attracted the most attention and is the primary focus of this discussion.
Abe is seeking to revise Tokyo’s self-imposed restrictions on the use of his nation’s military—the so-called Self-Defense Forces (SDF)—overseas and “normalize” Japan’s foreign security policy in an era of China’s rising power and increasing assertiveness (Bendini 2015). His strategic vision squares with the Barack Obama administration’s drive to upgrade the US-Japan security and economic cooperation as a key pillar of America’s rebalancing or “pivot” policy to the Asia-Pacific region (Chanlett-Avery and Rinehart 2016, 2). However, Tokyo’s attempt to revamp its grand strategy confronts challenges. The nation’s imperialist past continues to haunt its relations with many Asian countries, especially China and South Korea. Both view Japan’s rearmament and more ambitious security posture with some suspicion and concern (Hickey and Lu 2007, 95). Furthermore, there are constitutional, normative and political barriers within Japan that undermine the prime minister’s drive to expand Japan’s military and security role in regional and global affairs.

**Historical overview**

Japan’s foreign policy since the mid-nineteenth century onward has been driven predominantly by a realist impulse—namely, to ensure the nation’s survival, security and economic interests in an anarchic world dominated by competitive great power states (Bendini 2015, 4). Compelled by the imperialistic threats of foreign powers, Japan abandoned its long-standing isolationist orientation and embraced Western modernization. The Japanese realized that their nation needed to become industrialized and militarily strong to avoid being conquered, partitioned or colonized by the Western imperialists. Seeking to advance its own strategic, economic and territorial ambitions, Tokyo rushed to compete with other foreign powers for concessions in China, Korea and the Western Pacific. For example, in 1895, it defeated China in the first Sino-Japanese War and annexed China’s Taiwan province and other territories. Japanese rule was often harsh and cruel. Indeed, no other foreign power brutalized China as much as Japan during that country’s so-called “century of humiliation” (Hickey and Lu 2007, 95–96).

Japan’s expansionism ultimately ignited WWII in the Pacific Theater (described by China as “the Second Sino-Japanese War”). The bloody conflict ended only after the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 and coerced Tokyo into accepting an unconditional surrender. In accordance with its postwar constitution (drafted by American occupation officials in 1947), Japan appeared to renounce war as an instrument of national policy. Article 9 of the document reads,

> 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. 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.

*(Quoted in Hickey 2001, 35–36)*

In short, Article 9 constitutes a “no-war clause,” setting forth the renunciation of war, non-possession of war potential and a denial of the right to collective self-defense and belligerency by the state (Pyle 2014).

The outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 and the ensuing Cold War power struggle led the United States to encourage Japan to establish the SDF, with three different service branches—the Ground Self-Defense Forces (GSDF), Maritime Self-Defense Forces (MSDF)
and Air Self-Defense Forces (ASDF). In addition, Tokyo created the Japan Defense Agency (JDA), a civilian-staffed bureaucracy under the prime minister’s office, to oversee and administer SDF operations (Hickey 2001, 37). Meanwhile, Washington ramped up defense cooperation with Tokyo as a balance against the Soviet Union. On January 19, 1960, the two sides signed a mutual defense treaty. According to the security pact, America would retain basing privileges on Japanese soil, and Tokyo would cooperate with Washington if “the security of the Far East is threatened” (Hickey 2001, 38). Creating greater equality between Japan and the United States in their security partnership, the treaty also assured Tokyo that America would not intervene in Japanese politics and that Washington would consult Tokyo before using bases in Japan for military operations elsewhere in Asia. Furthermore, the United States promised to protect Japan against foreign attack. It is noteworthy that this pledge covers all the territories under Japanese administration (including the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and other islands that were returned to Japan in 1971) (Bendini 2015, 6).

Throughout the Cold War era, Japan slowly increased its military capabilities. However, Japanese leaders adhered steadfastly to the Yoshida Doctrine, a policy that emphasized the country’s economic development while leaving its security and defense largely to the United States (Bendini 2015, 5). This doctrine and other self-binding policies interpreted Article 9 to mean that

there would be no overseas deployment of the Japan Self Defense Forces, no collective defense, no power-projection capability, no nuclear arms, no arms exports, no sharing of defense-related technology, no more than 1% of GNP for defense expenditure, and no military use of force.

(Pyle 2014)

Japan’s foreign policy

The end of the Cold War did not signal an end to US-Japan defense cooperation. Rather, Washington began to call on Tokyo to reassess its role in global affairs and make pragmatic and necessary adjustments in its defense policy due to the turbulence that characterized the immediate post–Cold War era—particularly the Gulf War of 1990–1991 and the 1994 nuclear crisis on the Korean peninsula. In other words, Washington believed that Tokyo should assume greater responsibility for its own security and also contribute meaningfully to the international community.

On November 28, 1995, Tokyo adopted a new National Defense Program Outline (NDPO) that, in essence, moved the SDF away from its traditionally defensive posture and inched it toward an emphasis on the ability to contribute to the creation of a stable security environment in East Asia (Hickey 2001, 43). Japan was expected to enhance its participation in the UN peacekeeping operations and disaster relief activities. Japanese defense planner also pledged to take into account the “changes in the military posture of some of Japan’s neighboring countries,” such as North Korea and China (Hickey 1998).

On September 24, 1997, the United States and Japan updated their Military Defense Guidelines (MDG). Under the terms of the agreement, the Japanese military forces would play a larger role assisting US military forces during a conflict. Specifically, Japanese naval forces could engage in blockades and minesweeping activities in international waters, rescue American pilots downed at sea and supply US naval vessels with food and fuel. Moreover, the two countries pledged that they would cooperate in these and other ways when confronted with “situations that may emerge in areas surrounding Japan.” Most observers and analysts
agreed that this phrase referred to the Korean peninsula as well as a conflict in the Taiwan Strait (Hickey 2001, 43).

During the administration of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi (2001–2006), the SDF’s defense doctrine became more forward-leaning, as the 2004 NDPO sought to streamline the SDF in order to handle the new threats of missile strikes and terrorist attacks and the development of “multi-function, flexible defense capabilities.” The GSDF, MSDF and ASDF were also given more latitude to be deployed in far-flung overseas noncombat and humanitarian missions. For example, the SDF helped support the US-led coalition operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Its military contributions to global counter-piracy missions helped to relieve some of the burden on the US military to manage every security challenge (Chanlett-Avery and Rinehart 2016, 3). In 2006, the naval, air and ground forces were placed under a single command for the first time since WWII, and the JDA was elevated to the rank of Defense Ministry (Hickey and Lu 2007, 98).

Five years of unstable leadership and political paralysis in Tokyo between 2007 and 2012 contributed to a slowdown in Japan’s security policy reform and put to a halt to some US-Japan defense initiatives. After the LDP’s decisive victory in the 2012 election, however, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe proposed the removal of important constitutional constraints on Japan’s military and a revision of the educational system to encourage a stronger sense of patriotism among the country’s young people (Bendini 2015, 12). Abe defended his policies by claiming that the country needed to respond to a series of missile provocations by Pyongyang and increasingly aggressive maritime advances and operations by Beijing in the East and South China Seas. He claimed that Japan must strengthen its military power in order to meet these new security challenges in the Asia-Pacific (Chanlett-Avery and Rinehart 2016, 6). With respect to China, the prime minister stressed,

> We have an immediate neighbor [the PRC] whose military expenditure is at least twice as large as Japan’s and second only to the U.S. defense budget. The country has increased its military expenditures, hardly transparent by more than 10 percent annually for more than 20 years since 1989. And then my government has increased its defense budget only by zero point eight percent. So call me, if you want, a right-wing militarist.

*(Quoted in Smith 2016, 6)*

In short, Abe now seeks to turn Japan into a more “normal” country by increasing the flexibility and capabilities of the SDF.

In order to realize the goal of becoming a more “normal” country, the Abe administration made some meaningful modifications in Tokyo’s security policy during 2014 and 2015. These changes include (1) reinterpreting Article 9 of the constitution to allow for the exercise of the right of collective self-defense, (2) passing a package of security legislation that provides a new legal framework for the new interpretation, (3) modestly increasing Japan’s military budget, (4) relaxing Japan’s previous bans on arms exports, (5) establishing a National Security Council to facilitate decision-making on foreign policy, (6) passing a “state secrets” bill permitting more intelligence-sharing with the United States and (7) committing political capital and resources to advance the US-Japan agreement to relocate a controversial marine airbase in Okinawa (Chanlett-Avery and Rinehart 2016, 14–15).

In April 2015, the Obama and Abe governments both agreed to yet another revision of the US-Japan MDG. The new pact deepens alliance cooperation in a way that “more intricately intertwines US and Japanese security, making it difficult to avoid involvement in each other’s military engagements” (Chanlett-Avery and Rinehart, 14–15). Advances in
SDF capabilities gave Japan a potent deterrent power that complements the US forces, and both sides have deepened their bilateral cooperation in areas like ballistic missile defense, cybersecurity and military use of space. With a more liberal interpretation of the Japanese constitution, Tokyo will now more easily exercise the right of collective self-defense and come to the defense of the United States if its military and/or territories are under attack (Chanlett-Avery and Rinehart, 4). It is likely that the PRC’s rising global/regional influence and more assertive behavior in the East and South China Seas served as major impetus behind this closer security union (Chanlett-Avery and Rinehart, 9–10). For example, during his April 2014 visit to Japan, President Obama affirmed that the United States regards the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands as falling under the purview of Article 5 in the US-Japan Security Treaty and promised that Washington would oppose any attempt to undermine Japan’s control of the islands. It is also noteworthy that Japan is one of the 12 active members of the American-proposed TPP free trade pact that, if enacted, will further solidify US economic connections with the Asia-Pacific.

The recent changes in US-Japan security and economic ties are transforming the strategic environment of the entire Asia-Pacific region, particularly in the face of a more powerful and influential China. However, the Abe administration confronts numerous difficulties in its quest to “come out” and become a “normal country.” Japan’s imperialist past (and its efforts to whitewash or glorify atrocities committed during the imperialist era) continues to drive a wedge between Tokyo and its neighbors. Both China and South Korea view Abe’s defense agenda with suspicion. Beijing and Seoul both contend that Japanese political elites have not learned and accepted the lessons of Japan’s troubled past and that their apologies lack sincerity. Since America’s “pivot” policy to Asia depends, to a great extent, on more coordination between Tokyo and Seoul, such a gulf of mistrust will not be conducive to their strategic interests. Moreover, domestic political considerations in Japan pose another obstacle. While the Japanese people have felt the increasing sense of uncertainty and vulnerability in response to China’s rising military and economic clout, it has also voiced strong opposition against Abe’s plan to pursue a more muscular foreign policy (Smith 2016, 18–19). For example, Japan was rocked by protests and turmoil in 2015 when the Japanese Diet passed the Security Bills that helped to undergird the reinterpretation of Japan’s pacifist constitution.

To mollify these sentiments, Abe now claims that Japan’s exercise of its collective self-defense will be constitutional only when meeting three conditions: (1) when an armed attack against a foreign country that is in a close relationship with Japan occurs and as a result threatens Japan’s survival and poses a clear danger to fundamentally overturn people’s right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness; (2) when there is no other appropriate means available to repel the attack and ensure Japan’s survival and protect its people; and (3) if Japan limits the use of force to the minimum extent necessary (Chanlett-Avery and Rinehart 2016, 4). Although the language of these conditions appears ambiguous and seems to be crafted to allow flexibility when different security contingencies arise, it appears that institutional and domestic roadblocks could inhibit full implementation at least in the foreseeable future. In January 2016, Abe further reassured that Japan would not take part in America’s campaign against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the Middle East.

Summary

In sum, Japan is now at a difficult and even contradictory position in world affairs. Despite Tokyo’s declared intent to move forward with stronger defense capabilities and closer ties with the United States, the baggage of history continues to prevent it from making greater
strides. Perhaps, this was best illustrated by President Obama’s visit to Hiroshima in May 2016. On the one hand, it was unprecedented for an incumbent American president to pay tribute to the site where US warplanes dropped atomic bombs to end the Pacific War 71 years ago. Obama’s gesture may have symbolized a new chapter in US-Japan relations and his commitment to eliminate nuclear weapons. On the other hand, the memories of the war cannot be so easily dispelled as the president, knowing full well the feelings of other Asian countries, reiterated that he “was not going to apologize” but merely to “pay respect to the Japanese people” and to bolster a very important alliance in the Asia-Pacific.25

North Korea

The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) or North Korea is a small, xenophobic and isolated nation. Often described by the international media as “the world’s last Stalinist state,” foreign policy analysts warn that the DPRK is “the most dangerous country in the world” (Stavridis 2016). It also holds the dubious distinction of being the world’s first and only hereditary communist dynasty.

Historical overview

In 1910, Korea was occupied by Imperial Japan. It was liberated following Tokyo’s surrender and the end of WWII in 1945. In keeping with wartime agreements, the Korean peninsula was divided temporarily at the 38th parallel. International efforts to unify the country failed, and two rival regimes were established.

In 1948, the DPRK was founded. The new state was led by Kim Il-Sung, a hard-line Communist with close ties to Moscow. In the south, a pro-Western regime headed by Syngman Rhee, a nationalist leader, was established with US support.

On June 25, 1950, the DPRK launched a massive invasion of the South. After a meeting with Joseph Stalin and Chairman Mao Zedong, Kim Il-sung evidently reasoned that “a weak-kneed United Nations would act either too late or not at all” (Bailey 1974, 819). But he was wrong. A US-led UN coalition eventually halted the DPRK military advance and pushed Kim’s troops back to his country’s border with China—a move that contributed to Beijing’s decision to intervene in the conflict. Some feared that the battles raging in Korea would lead to World War III.

The Korean War has never officially ended. However, after slow and difficult negotiations, representations of the UN command, DPRK and China signed an armistice agreement at Panmunjom on July 27, 1953. According to the terms of the pact, an international conference would find a political solution to Korea’s division. But this has not occurred. To date, no comprehensive peace treaty has replaced the 1953 armistice.

DPRK foreign policy

The world has changed a lot since 1953. Despite dramatic changes on the Korean peninsula and astounding transformations in the international system, the overarching foreign policy goals of the DPRK have remained remarkably consistent.

Like all other states, the first goal of the DPRK is regime survival. Ever since its founding in 1948, Pyongyang has promoted a national ideology of self-reliance (*juche*). But Kim Il-Sung, the founding leader of the Kim dynasty, relied heavily upon handouts from the Soviet bloc (the Soviet Union, China and Eastern Europe) to bolster his country’s economy during
the Cold War. The assistance accelerated after the Sino-Soviet split in the late 1950s as Kim
skillfully played the two rivals off each other to obtain more economic support. Each of the
communist giants also signed a defense pact with the DPRK and provided it with military
assistance. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that “North Korea owes its survival as a sepa-
rate political entity to China and the Soviet Union.”

The end of the Cold War clouded the DPRK’s security outlook and complicated its for-
eign policy. Russia terminated its security treaty and stopped propping the country up with
economic aid. China also scaled back its economic assistance. Both countries established
relations with the rival regime in Seoul during the early 1990s.

During the mid-1990s, a conjunction of several factors—including centralized planning,
excessive military spending, natural disasters and reduced foreign aid—brought the DPRK
to the brink of total starvation. The regime confronted an unprecedented threat to its sta-
bility and survival. In order to cope with the crisis, Pyongyang sought to turn one of these
“negatives” into a “positive.” Namely, excessive military spending is employed to prop up
the regime in several ways.

Beginning in the early 1960s, the DPRK openly declared its intention to “turn the entire
nation into a fortress” (Hickey 2001, 198). The lion’s share of the national budget is ear-
marked for military spending (roughly 30 percent of the GDP), and the country now boasts
one of the largest militaries in the world. The DPRK possesses nuclear weapons, over 1,000
missiles and 1.25 million active-duty troops. It has also stockpiled tons of chemical and bio-
logical weapons. It uses this military prowess—particularly its development of nuclear weap-
ons and ballistic missile systems—to blackmail other states into providing it with support:

The North Korean regime has survived for sixty years by relentlessly pursuing the de-
velopment of nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles and other forms of military power that
hold South Korea—and its other neighbors—hostage. North Korea continues to employ
its nuclear blackmail and brinksmanship strategies, including test firing of weapons and
carefully controlled attacks on South Korea, to wrest concessions from the US, South
Korea, China, and other states that are far more powerful.

(Terry 2013, 64)

The DPRK has no intention of abandoning its WMD. Pyongyang believes that the arms
provide the regime with the only credible deterrent against a US-led attack. After all, the
alliance with Moscow was terminated long ago, and Beijing’s commitment is questionable.
Indeed, in 2014, a spokesman for China’s Foreign Ministry declared that “there is no mil-
itary alliance between China and North Korea.” Moreover, experience shows that the
development of WMD and other provocative behavior may be used to obtain assistance—
ranging from food and energy aid to hard currency—from foreign countries. It is estimated
that South Korea’s “sunshine policy” pumped roughly US$8 billion into DPRK before the
policy was judged a failure. Furthermore, the WMD serve as a source of pride for the regime
and its people. Finally, the arms are inexorably linked to the realization of the regime’s sec-
ond foreign policy goal—the annihilation of the rival regime in South Korea.

North Korea’s second foreign policy goal is the unification of the Korean peninsula under
DPRK control. Tactics and strategies employed to achieve this objective have changed since
1948. But the general goal remains the same.

In the past, the DPRK resorted to terrorism on numerous occasions in an effort to over-
throw the ROK government. It also sought to whip up popular discontent among elements
in the South Korean population and foment a popular uprising. Viewing the United States
as a major obstacle, it has long worked to achieve a withdrawal of American military forces from the South. In the past, North Korean agents sought to instigate anti-American riots in the ROK. At the present time, Pyongyang is seeking a peace treaty with Washington that would require the withdrawal of US troops. This would enable the DPRK to achieve its long-standing goal—reunification on its terms.

Summary

To be sure, the foreign policy behavior of the Kim dynasty—Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un—has come with some cost. Although China remains the DPRK’s chief trading partner (and source of aid), many analysts contend that there is now a “serious estrangement and distance between China and North Korea despite their common ideological origins and fraternal and geographic bonds” (Snyder 2016). Relations with the ROK, Japan, the United States and numerous other states are effectively in a state of paralysis. At the time of writing, the UN Security Council has imposed four sets of sanctions on Pyongyang.

Despite these problems, however, it would be a mistake to brand the DPRK’s approach to foreign relations a failure. As one study concluded, “if foreign policy is designed to aid a regime’s security, then North Korean foreign policy may be judged a success” (Terry 2013, 83). Predictions of North Korea’s demise have proved exaggerated. The DPRK is still standing.

Republic of Korea

Over the past quarter century, the Republic of Korea (ROK or South Korea) has experienced a dramatic political transformation. On the domestic front, it has made the transition from authoritarianism to democracy. On the international front, the ROK has been embraced by many of its former adversaries. For example, the PRC is now the nation’s largest trading partner. Perhaps equally significant, Seoul has pursued several new approaches toward relations with its archrival—the DPRK.

These developments truly are remarkable. But they cannot alter the fact that the touchstone for the ROK’s foreign policy—relations with the DPRK—remains. The Korean War has never ended, and the Korean peninsula remains one of the most dangerous places on earth.

Historical background

For much of its history, the ROK was ruled by a series of “strongmen.” During the first decades of the authoritarian era, primary emphasis was placed upon boosting the ROK’s relations with the “free world.” Bolstering America’s defense commitment to the ROK was deemed especially important, and the two sides negotiated a bilateral defense treaty in 1953.

During the administration of General Park Cheng-Hee (1960–1979), the ROK’s foreign policy priorities grew to include the expansion of economic opportunities. As a result, South Korea’s economy began to take off. However, security issues continued to dominate ROK foreign policy, and the nation’s military was largely responsible for crafting the country’s defense and foreign policies.

South Korea’s authoritarian era came to an end during the late 1980s. Under the 1987 ROK Constitution, executive power is vested in a popularly elected president who is commander in chief of the armed forces and the nation’s chief foreign policy decision-maker. When crafting policy, the president is often assisted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the
National Security Council, relevant economic agencies and the intelligence community. Some important foreign policy initiatives—including a declaration of war, deployment of troops overseas and treaty making—are subject to legislative approval.

The ROK’s foreign relations changed markedly following the nation’s democratization and the end of the Cold War. For example, both Seoul and Pyongyang joined the UN in 1991, and the ROK and PRC established formal diplomatic relations in 1992. Perhaps most important, the ROK began to make meaningful adjustments in its relationship with the DPRK.

**ROK foreign policy**

Despite the end of the Cold War and the accompanying transformation of the international system, the DPRK remains central to ROK foreign policy. In 1998, the government of the ROK launched an innovative approach to relations with the DPRK—the sunshine policy. The initiative called for Seoul to employ both “carrots” and “sticks” in its relationship with Pyongyang.

Not everyone in South Korea approved of the change in policy. Critics described the new approach as “appeasement” and claimed that the “provision of food, fertilizer and dollars has led the North to expedite the development of artillery and missiles, threatening our security.” North Korea’s continued development of its nuclear and missile programs supported this view, and the policy was abandoned following Lee Myung-bak’s inauguration in February 2008.

Lee and his successor, President Park Geun-hye (daughter of the late General Park), have pursued an approach toward North Korea that has been described as “trustpolitik.” The policy emphasizes elements of pressure (military exercises, sanctions, etc.) while keeping the door open to inter-Korean dialogue and peaceful negotiation. Pyongyang has learned that there are consequences to its misbehavior. For example, following the DPRK’s January 2016 missile launch, the ROK closed the Kaesong Industrial complex, an industrial park in the north that employed over 50,000 North Koreans.

Since its establishment in 1948, relations with the United States—Seoul’s main ally—have served as the cornerstone of South Korea’s foreign and security policy. In recent years, both sides have claimed that relations are at their closest in decades. Indeed, the 2015 ROK Diplomatic White Paper boasts that ROK-US relations are in “the best shape ever.” Several considerations help explain this development. First, the ROK-US alliance remains strong. The ROK is included under the US “nuclear umbrella,” and the United States stations roughly 28,500 troops in South Korea. Second, Washington and Seoul coordinate policies when addressing the threat posed by the DPRK. Third, the two nation’s economies are closer than ever—in part due to the ROK-US free trade agreement (FTA). In fact, the ROK has repeatedly emphasized its intention to join the US-led TPP.

Despite the long-standing ties between Washington and Seoul, the relationship has been subject to strains. Over the years, the two sides have quarreled over trade policy, host nation support (ROK contributions to US defense costs), US troop levels, crimes committed by American servicemen and the appropriate approach toward the DPRK.

In 2015, the ROK and Japan observed the 50th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations. Although both states are firm allies of the United States and enjoy robust economic links, the relationship is often strained by historical and territorial disputes. Japan accuses the Koreans of illegally occupying Japanese territory—the Dokdo/Takeshima islands. For its part, the ROK accuses Japan of whitewashing atrocities committed in WWII.
and during its occupation of Korea (which began in 1905). Although a breakthrough was realized when Tokyo and Seoul concluded a deal to settle the issue of Korean “comfort women” in 2015, it remains likely that the relationship will continue to be plagued by periodic quarrels. Some attribute this to domestic politics in both countries.

As described, the ROK established diplomatic relations with China in 1992. Since that time, economic ties have exploded. The ROK’s chief export destination is the PRC (US $180 billion or roughly twice the value of exports to the United States), and its chief import origin is the PRC (roughly US$88 billion or double its imports from the United States). China is also the number one location for South Korean foreign direct investment, and the two nations signed a bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in 2015. Moreover, despite US opposition, Seoul opted to join the China-led Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB) in March 2015.

Despite the remarkable progress in ROK-PRC relations, tensions remain. Although Beijing claims to support the “denuclearization” of the Korean peninsula, many South Koreans suspect that Beijing places greater emphasis on peninsular stability and opposes regime change in the DPRK. Such calculations might help explain why Beijing appeared to back Pyongyang after the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island in 2010 or why it continues to forcibly repatriate North Korean refugees. In addition to these concerns about PRC support for the DPRK, China looms large as an economic competitor. In fact, recent years have witnessed an increasing rivalry between ROK and PRC firms.

Summary

This discussion focuses primarily on the ROK’s foreign relations with the United States and other regional powers. A more complete discussion would include numerous other features of the ROK’s foreign policy as well. The ROK maintains diplomatic relations with roughly 170 countries and plays an active role in dozens of international organizations ranging from the UN to ASEAN. It has hosted numerous multilateral forums and played an increasingly active role in the efforts to eradicate poverty and promote inclusive growth in the global community. In short, the ROK is well on its way to achieving its declared goal to be a “responsible middle power that contributes to achieving global power and development.”

Conclusion

This discussion provides an overview of the foreign policies of five East Asian states—China, Taiwan, Japan, North Korea and South Korea. It examines the background of each country’s foreign policy and discusses their present foreign policy strategies.

At first blush, these countries appear to be a diverse lot. For example, some are rich, and others are poor. Three are democracies, and two are ruled by authoritarian regimes. Four are economic giants, and one is an economic basket case (North Korea). And some are allied with the United States, while others are not.

To be sure, each state examined in this chapter is unique. But it is also clear that these nations share two major characteristics that play a large role in their respective approaches to foreign policy.

First, China is the major trading partner of every other country examined in this chapter. Like Washington’s traditional approach to security partners in East Asia, Beijing is now the center of a regional “hub and spoke” economic system. This development holds important foreign policy implications for all of East Asia—irrespective of a country’s domestic politics.
or internal characteristics. And this development will likely become more significant in future years—not less so.

A second important characteristic is that each state examined in this study confronts significant foreign policy challenges. All of them are involved in a variety of long-standing territorial disputes that hold the potential to generate conflict and undermine peace and stability in the Western Pacific. Realizing a peaceful resolution of these quarrels represents a continuing problem for each government.

Some contend that increased economic interdependence will pave the way for friendly relations among states and a more peaceful region. Other analysts and policymakers disagree with this argument. They caution that promoting peace and stability will represent a significant challenge in coming years. But if the governments in the region can cooperate and act effectively, the future could unfold in a way that will benefit the entire world.

Notes


2 The United States has not agreed to join the AIIB despite the fact that some of Washington’s key allies have already entered, such as Great Britain, Australia, France, Germany, Israel and South Korea, to name just a few. Some have argued that to ensure the bank’s proper functioning in accordance to international law, human rights, environmental protection and liberal internationalism, the United States should join AIIB too rather than sitting out. See Stephen Olson, “Time for the U.S. to Join the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank,” The Diplomat, November 9, 2015, on the world wide web at http://thediplomat.com/2015/11/time-for-the-us-to-join-the-asian-infrastructure-investment-bank/.


7 Relations with the PRC are not foreign relations, but they are not domestic relations. As President Lee Teng-hui once explained in the 1990s, “they are something else.”

8 According to the “one China principle,” there is only one China, and Taiwan is a part of China. According to the “one China policy,” there is only one China—not two China’s or one China, one Taiwan—and governments and IGOs must choose between the PRC and ROC.

9 Rather than suffer the humiliation of expulsion from the UN, Chiang ordered his delegation to walk out of the global body.

10 As President Chiang explained, “in order to become more anti-communist, we will have to become less anti-communist.”

11 Moreover, rather than remaining silent when the Taiwan representation issue was raised in the UN, the American delegation began to support the PRC’s position and vote against Taipei in 1999. For a complete analysis of Taipei’s bid to rejoin the UN and the US response to this initiative, see Hickey (2008).

12 Flexible diplomacy was designed to improve Taipei’s relations with Beijing while simultaneously strengthening ties with foreign governments. An important part of it is the “diplomatic truce.”
whereby Beijing and Taipei agree to stop poaching each other’s diplomatic allies. For more information, see “President Ma Defines ‘Flexible Diplomacy,’” China Post, November 11, 2008, on the world wide web at www.chinapost.com.tw/print/182601.htm.

13 Under the “1992 Consensus,” both Taipei and Beijing appear to accept the principle of “one China,” but each side holds its own interpretation of what that means.

14 During a Congressional hearing, Daniel Russel, US Assistant Secretary of State, testified that “US-Taiwan unofficial relations have never been better.”

15 Not surprisingly, Ma Ying-jeou criticized Tsai’s position as little more than “slogans,” while Eric Chu, KMT chairman, described it as “gobbledygook to take people in.” For more information, see Dennis V. Hickey, “Tsai Must Clarify Cross-Straits Position,” China Daily, May 28, 2015, on the world wide web at http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2015-05/28/content_20840896.htm.


17 Ibid.


19 In her inaugural address, Tsai proclaimed support for “setting aside disputes so as to enable joint development.”

20 Given the fact that many of her supporters oppose free trade and fear imports from abroad, Tsai’s support for the TPP puzzles some observers.

21 The term “disaster” is defined by the NDPO to encompass “acts of terrorism and other situations.”

22 Ankit Panda, “Obama: Senkakus Covered under U.S.-Japan Security Treaty,” The Diplomat, April 24, 2014, on the world wide web at http://thediplomat.com/2014/04/obama-senkakus-covered-under-us-japan-security-treaty/. While backing Tokyo’s effective administration over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands since 1971, the United States has refrained from taking a stance on the sovereignty issue, hence leaving China, Japan as well as Taiwan asserting their respective sovereignty claims over these island territories.


Bibliography


Foreign policies of East Asia


