Between Deterrence and Cooperation: Eastern Asian Security after the 'Cold War'

Liselotte Odgaard

Introduction

The post-Cold War security environment of Eastern Asia[1] displays two contradictory tendencies: The power politics of the Cold War seem to continue, while at the same time regional security cooperation is gaining a foothold. These trends raise the question whether a stable order can be established on the basis of these dual patterns of state interaction.

This article argues that the security order in the making in Eastern Asia is at the junction between power political deterrence and comprehensive regional security cooperation. The preconditions of this order emerged in the last decades of the Cold War, but the germs of the new order did not begin to unfold until bipolarity had disappeared. Three elements of order captures this development. First, the governance structure contrived by great power balancing remains based on deterrence. Second, the organisational framework of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is extended to promote a region-wide security dialogue. Third, the security dialogue facilitates the long-term establishment of a code of conduct modelled on the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC). The article concludes that the prospects for the consolidation of a regional order which combines deterrence with security cooperation are good, provided that the PRC and Japan are positioned as political great powers with special rights and obligations towards the maintenance of regional order.

The Cold War Order in Eastern Asia

The Cold War order in Eastern Asia was dominated by a bipolar strategic balance between states belonging to the US-dominated liberal bloc and states aligning with the Soviet-dominated communist bloc (Harding, 1995: 328-331; Yahuda, 1996: 43-76). This strategic balance resulted in a power political pattern of state interaction where the great powers competed for adherents by military and economic means, communication between the blocs was sparse, and no rules of coexistence apart from those embodied by the global United Nations (UN) system were established.

During the second phase of the Cold War, from the beginning of the 1970s until the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s, three developments in the regional environment created the preconditions for the subsequent emergence of a challenge to the existing power political order. These developments were, first, the change in the balance of power from bipolarity to tripolarity, second, the formalisation of diplomatic multilateral dialogue amongst the member states of ASEAN in maritime Southeast Asia, and third, the establishment of the TAC within ASEAN in 1976.

The change in the Eastern Asian balance of power was a result of the PRC's successful positioning of itself as a power independent of the global giants, the US and the USSR (Yahuda, 1996: 77-104). From an ideological point of view, the PRC and the USSR were natural alliance partners. However, by 1956 their relationship had already begun to deteriorate. By the end of the 1960s, the USSR had arguably reached strategic parity with the US. As a consequence, a rapprochement between the US and the PRC took place, beginning with the visit of the US Secretary of State Kissinger to Beijing in 1971. Although the PRC could not match the power of the US and the USSR, its relative military strength complemented the economic power of Japan, the stable alliance partner of the US in Eastern Asia. The entrance of the PRC as a power to be reckoned with in the strategic equation between the global great powers suggested that in future, the policy of deterrence in Eastern Asia not only depended on the relationship between the US and the USSR, but also on the foreign policy choices of the PRC.

In maritime Southeast Asia, multilateral diplomatic dialogue became institutionalised with the consolidation of ASEAN in the 1970s (Frost, 1990; Armstrong, Lloyd and Redmond, 1996: 239-248). The organisation was established in 1967 by the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore. Against a background of repeated

outbreaks of hostility, especially between Indonesia and Malaysia, and communist threats towards regime stability, the aim of ASEAN was to prevent conflict. However, confidence-building had to be achieved before ASEAN could be anything but an organisation in name. After the first eight years, an organisational framework had emerged in maritime Southeast Asia, which institutionalised a practice of regular exchange of information, communication and negotiation.

The TAC was introduced in 1976 as a code of conduct for security relations, when ASEAN had become a permanent organisation. The treaty discloses the express commitment of the ASEAN member states to secure peace. It states that the signatory states shall display mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity and national identity of all nations. States are entitled to lead their national existence free from external interference, subversion or coercion, and they should not interfere in the internal affairs of one another. Differences or disputes are to be settled by peaceful means, and the states relinquish the right to use or the threat of using force. Finally, the states commit themselves to effective cooperation (TAC, 1976: ch. I, art. 2.a-f).

The establishment of a multilateral organisational framework and a code of conduct in maritime Southeast Asia suggested alternatives to the existing pillars of the Cold War order, but the old order was not fundamentally challenged. At times, foreign policy dilemmas occurred where the states had to navigate between opposing demands for deterrence and cooperation. One example is ASEAN's reaction to the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1978. On the one hand, ASEAN attempted to take into consideration the threat posed towards the security of Thailand as well as the breach of the rule of non-intervention, which the member states had committed themselves to. On the other hand, the states could not afford to antagonise the PRC. As a result, ASEAN did not condemn the Vietnamese acts of war, but nor was the new government in Phnom Penh recognised as legitimate.

In general, the states successfully manoeuvred between the contradictory foreign policy demands they encountered. The possibility of changing fundamental elements in the old order did not arise until the end of bipolarity.

Governance structure

The end of bipolarity altered the strategic environment of Eastern Asia. The replacement of the USSR with the weaker and inward-looking Russia meant that the US was the only remaining global great power. However, in Eastern Asia the PRC remained in place as a local great power and Japan retained its position as an economic giant and a political dwarf. Consequently, a continuation of the policy of deterrence was on the horizon.

For the PRC, the disappearance of the Soviet threat made possible a reallocation of military capabilities. During most of the Cold War, the Chinese army held top priority ahead of the navy and airforce because the USSR was seen as the most likely aggressor towards the PRC. The disintegration of the USSR in 1989 left the PRC with the maritime powers the US and Japan as its principal opponents. Combined with the US demonstration of military superiority in the Gulf War and the movement to centre stage of local conflicts, the PRC was encouraged to speed up the change in its military strategy begun in the 1980s from a north-bound continental perspective to a south-bound maritime perspective. Indications of this development are new weapons acquisitions such as import of fighter aircraft, major progress in Research and Development programmes on for example destroyers and submarines, and the priority of the South China Sea as a central pillar in the establishment of forward defence (Arnett, 1995; You Ji, 1995; Lewis and Xue Litai, 1994: 209-230; Weixing Hu, 1993; Anthony, Hagmeyer-Gaverus, Wezeman and Wezeman, 1997: 302).

The PRC's bid to become a major maritime power is countered in her regional surroundings with military modernisation programmes and continued reliance on US power projection in the region. In general, the modernisation programmes reflect the Chinese trend of acquiring modern naval and air platforms and the associated missile systems in so far as economic growth rates allow for it. In the main, US power projection capabilities have been maintained in the region, as indicated by the establishment and renewal of military agreements with a number of the PRC's neighbours. For example, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore have granted the US access to air fields and ship berthing and repair facilities; the Philippines, Thailand and Brunei have offered the US increased military cooperation; and the US retains its bilateral defence alliances and agreements with the Philippines, Thailand, Japan and South Korea (Dibb, 1997; Freeman, 1997; Findlay, 1994: 131). All these states are drawing closer to the US to

ensure that her military presence in the region is maintained at a level sufficient to balance the PRC. The US accepts the role as military balancer in so far as global stability depends on a peaceful Eastern Asia.

Japan has a technologically advanced and mobile defence. However, at present Japan is not an independent military regional power, chiefly because of the prohibition against warfare in article nine of the Japanese constitution. The pacifist post-war tradition in Japan has not been challenged until recently, where support for a militarisation of Japanese foreign policy seems to gain ground amongst the younger generation (Kunihiro, 1997). Combined with the fact that Japan undoubtedly is capable of developing independent nuclear weapons, ballistic missile systems and satellite reconnaissance systems within a few months, fears of a future Japanese security threat towards regional stability are growing. Renewal of the defence treaty between the US and Japan, which assigns to the latter a modest military role in the region, does nothing to dampen these fears (Johnson, 1996).

Whether these policies of deterrence result in an outbreak of violent conflict depends on the PRC's response to her increased strategic isolation. Although the PRC is provoked by the tendency to adopt a containment strategy towards her, she does not at present have the military capabilities to match those of the US. Moreover, US military presence is not merely a threat: it also shields the PRC from Southeast Asian and Japanese power projection in view of the fact that the US prioritise regional stability ahead of ideological adherents in the post-Cold War regional environment. Consequently, the US presence is a necessary stabilising factor because it prevents the local powers from direct confrontation with each other.

Thus, the end of global bipolarity did not mean the end of deterrence. While deterrence may keep hegemonic ambitions in check, this structure does not provide for conflict resolution in the event of serious crises. The PRC and Japan came out of the Cold War without obligations towards this end, and in keeping with its Cold War practice, the US only provides it to a very limited extent. The need for the great powers to engage in practices of conflict resolution was illustrated by the Korean crisis of 1993.

The Korean crisis demonstrated that the US is willing to deliver crisis management if such efforts support stability at the global level. The Korean crisis was triggered by North Korea's withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1993. This radical step was not merely seen as a threat against regional security, but also against the credibility of the global scheme to prevent nuclear weapons proliferation. Because no Eastern Asian mechanisms for conflict resolution existed, the US had to take action. The US and North Korea signed an agreement in 1994, which did not satisfy all concerns regarding the North Korean nuclear programme, let alone the question of the partition of Korea. However, the *"Agreed Framework"* did solve the immediate crisis by promising North Korea delivery of oil supplies, pending the replacement of graphite-moderated reactors with light-water reactors, as well as guarantees against a US nuclear attack and removal of barriers to trade. In return, North Korea promised to honour the NPT provisions and resume negotiations with South Korea.

The PRC and Japan did not enter the scene as central actors in the conflict resolution process until implementation of the agreement started. For example, Japan participated in the establishment of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), which is to finance the construction of light-water reactors in North Korea. Through Japanese mediation, the PRC also became involved in the conflict resolution process. Significantly, the PRC has participated in the preliminary negotiations on the Four-Party Peace Conference together with the US and the two Koreas. Provided the negotiations proceed, the conference is to discuss how stability on the Korean peninsula is secured (Cotton, 1997; Gurtov, 1996; Xuewu Gu, 1996; Hughes, 1996; *the Economist*, 13.12.97, 18.4.98).

During the Korean crisis, the US put the fire under control, but did not extinguish it. The local great powers did not enter the conflict resolution process until a preliminary agreement had been negotiated. In conclusion, the Eastern Asian great powers are only able to provide the region with very limited security governance. This leadership vacuum has left the small and medium powers of ASEAN with the option of providing the organisational framework which may form the basis for the development of institutionalised mechanisms for the provision and maintenance of security in the region.

Organisational framework

The Cambodian conflict resolution process paved the way for the ASEAN member states to facilitate engagement of the Eastern Asian great powers in conflict resolution by means of their experience with multilateral dialogue. The Cambodian conflict lasted from 1979 until 1991. In 1988 and 1989, Indonesia arranged informal consultations between the contending Cambodian fractions. Following the Vietnamese troop withdrawal, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, the US, the USSR, the PRC, the UK and France, produced a conflict resolution proposal. After subsequent amendments, the proposal was accepted by the conflicting parties at a conference in October 1991, led by France and Indonesia. Until democratic elections could be held, the Paris Agreement placed administrative authority and demobilisation responsibility with the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), which included Chinese as well as Japanese participation (Ratner, 1993; Schear, 1995). Although the Cambodian conflict flared up in 1997 with Hun Sen's coup, the conflict has been localised so that it no longer threatens regional stability.

The Cambodia process demonstrated that multilateral governance with the participation of the local great powers is possible when lesser powers act as midwifes. Moreover, the localisation of the Cambodian conflict removed a serious threat from the Eastern Asian security agenda. This encouraged the ASEAN states to proceed with the development of regional security mechanisms. The touchstone for the attempt at utilising the experience with ASEAN cooperation out of its immediate area became the South China Sea disputes.

There are numerous disputes in the South China Sea. Because these disputes could pose major difficulties for regional stability, they were an obvious testing ground for multilateral dialogue. Beginning in 1990, Indonesia convened the annual workshops on Managing Potential Conflicts in the South China Sea. The workshops are informal gatherings which bring together researchers and government officials in their private capacities. The achievements of the workshops have been to initiate dialogue, enhance confidence and understanding, and establish cooperation on non-controversial issues such as biodiversity and safety of navigation between the contending states (Gao, 1994; Djalal, 1996; Townsend-Gault, 1997).

The proposals and limited cooperative ventures produced by the workshops on the South China Sea disputes have provided the states with a concrete basis for conflict resolution. This experience has been applied to the wider region of Eastern Asia, for example through the creation of the Council for Security Cooperation in Asia Pacific (CSCAP), which is to pave the way for regional confidence building and cooperation by the same means as the informal workshops on the South China Sea (the CSCAP Charter, 1993, 1995).

The informal workshops on the South China Sea also revealed a more fundamental problem: Eastern Asia lacked formal mechanisms for conflict resolution on security issues. Ultimately, only formal representatives of states can enter sustainable concessions. Expansion of dialogue to the formal level is necessary if conflict resolution measures is to be constructed. This realisation resulted in the establishment of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).

The ARF developed out of the decision of the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference (ASEAN-PMC) to admit security issues onto the agenda and invite Western and Asian dialogue partners outside of the ASEAN to participate.[2] The ARF was established in 1993 as an annual meeting which forms an umbrella for the web of regional security fora in Eastern Asia. The purpose of the ARF is to bring about regular dialogue with the long-term goal of establishing a framework for preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution (the ASEAN Regional Forum, 1995).

The ARF has not yet produced any major results. The intermediate goal was the more modest one of promoting confidence-building. The results so far have been the establishment of dialogue on security and defence perceptions, and some states have issued defence white papers, undertaken transparency measures, and instituted defence cooperation. While the process of confidence-building proceeds, ASEAN anticipates future possibilities of establishing concrete security mechanisms by researching techniques of preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution.

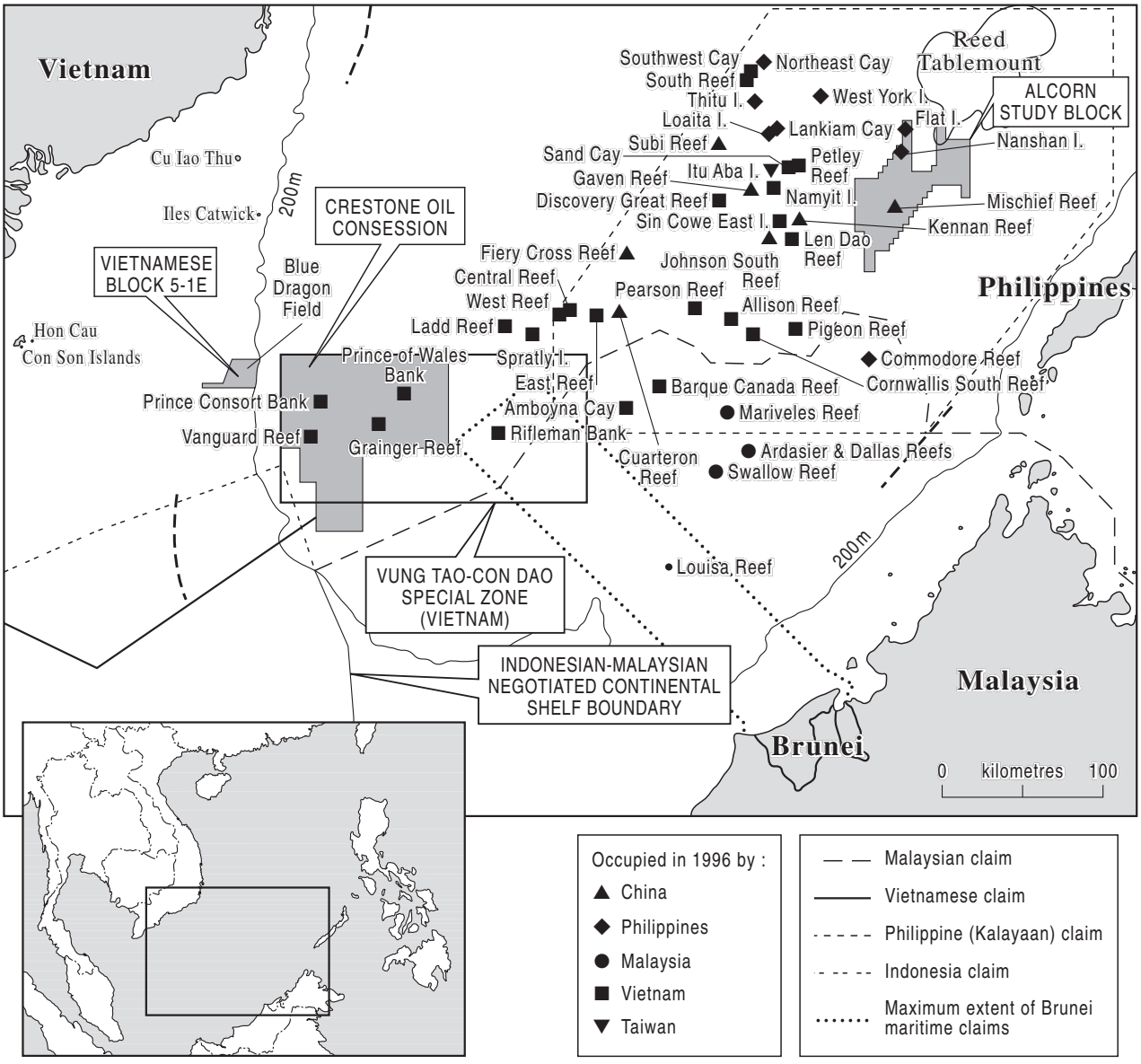
The most serious hindrance to progress in the region-wide negotiations is Chinese resistance towards multilateral approaches to security and traditional Japanese reluctance towards involvement in regional security issues. Chinese reservations concerning multilateral security provisions are no surprise.

During the latter decades of the Cold War, the PRC has perceived of herself as a great power not recognised as such and therefore not enjoying the international political influence she was entitled to. Consequently, she did not consider herself responsible for region-wide security.

The end of the Cold War enhances the PRC's possibilities of obtaining the political status of a great power. The PRC's neighbours recognise that her military capabilities and economic potential endow her with determining influence on the security order of Eastern Asia. The fact that her surroundings have called for the PRC's participation in the regional security dialogue may be seen as an invitation to demonstrate that she is also capable of administering her power as one of the great custodians of a stable regional order. However, in return the PRC demands acceptance that she does not merely have special responsibilities, but also special rights. Until she obtains this concession, the PRC will remain reluctant towards multilateral negotiations, because time and again she will find herself in a minority position when attempting to champion her interests.

The PRC's exclusive rights attitude is apparent in the question of Taiwan's status. This issue has never been on the regional security agenda. The PRC defines the Taiwan question as an internal affair, over which the PRC has ultimate political authority and which no other state or international organisation has a right to interfere in. Hence, increased Taiwanese appeals for recognition and deviation from the autocratic Chinese tradition with the democratic presidential elections were perceived as unacceptable attempts at internationalising the issue and departing from the 'one China' idea. Consequently, the Taiwanese moves received prompt Chinese responses in the form of missile tests and military exercises in the Taiwan Strait in 1995 and 1996.

Japanese contributions towards regional governance are equally limited because she is not accepted as a



political great power by her neighbours. Japan is expected to use her economic power for the benefit of the region, but she is not trusted as a responsible great power. The widespread concern over the future implications of Japanese contributions to non-combatant peacekeeping UN troops in Cambodia and ASEAN's refusal to stage regular summits with Japan on security issues are instances which confirm the negative attitude towards Japanese attempts at influencing regional security arrangements. Moreover, Japan has not yet come to terms with the idea of playing a leading security role in the region. Japanese acceptance of playing a limited role in the Korean conflict resolution process illustrates that Japan is not at ease with the great power label and still prefers to rely on US security provisions.

The principal achievement of the ARF may be that it has engaged the US, the PRC and Japan in a regional security dialogue. With this initiative, the great powers have been given the opportunity to demonstrate that they can shoulder the responsibility of regional order provision without neglecting the interests of the lesser powers.

The establishment of an organisational framework is only the first stage towards a regional order. To ensure that the security dialogue moves beyond the stage of a talking shop, a code of conduct is needed which explicitly stipulates what all states accept as legitimate behaviour.

Code of Conduct

A crucial element in a stable regional order is the establishment of a code of conduct, to which all states have given their express consent. Eastern Asia does not have a separate code of conduct, but relies on the global rules agreed within the confines of the UN system. The absence of a separate code of conduct for Eastern Asia means that the states have not defined their social obligations towards each other. Consequently, they cannot be held responsible for their actions if the effects do not reach beyond the regional level. What are the options of altering this regulatory void?

ASEAN's TAC from 1976 is the most obvious basis of a region-wide code of conduct in the area of security because it has proved its worth as a reference for acceptable behaviour in maritime Southeast Asia. For example, when common statements on issues of concern have been disclosed, the principles of the TAC have been suggested as a useful guide for dispute settlement, as was the case with the 1992 ASEAN Declaration on the South China Sea (ASEAN Declaration on the South China Sea, 1992).

The TAC is a conservative code of conduct which resembles the fundamental principles of the global UN rules: absolute sovereignty, the legal equality of states and popular self-determination. Absolute sovereignty means that states control their internal affairs and are externally independent, since no authority above the states exists which may oblige them to specific actions without their consent. Absolute sovereignty is valued as protection against unwanted external interference in state policies, and as an asset which most of the states only obtained in the course of the twentieth century. In addition, the consistently high number of threats towards the sovereignty of individual states in Eastern Asia does not invite them to compromise on this point. Thus, even where states agree on joint models of resource exploitation they do not call in question the principle of absolute sovereignty.

The principle of the legal equality of states means that states mutually recognise each other's equal rights and obligations under international law. The principle enjoys widespread support in Eastern Asia because most states have been subject to discriminatory Western practices during the colonial period. During the Cold War, the principle was interpreted in egalitarian terms with the significant exception of the veto of the five permanent members of the Security Council, one of which is the PRC. The PRC portends that as a great power it too should have special rights in Eastern Asia. The PRC's neighbours only accept this claim if it does not affect their immediate interests. On these grounds, they do not interfere in the Taiwan question. By contrast, they refuse to accept Chinese sovereignty over the South China Sea. Even if the PRC only demands recognition in principle, such a concession would open up for a reintroduction of discriminatory practices in the region. Such practices are not conducive to contemporary Eastern Asia, where the small and medium powers pursue a regional order which enshrines their interests.

The principle of popular self-determination means that the majority within a delimited territory enjoys the right of constitutional independence. During the Cold War, this principle was taken to imply that minorities did not *per se* have a right of self-determination and that existing territorial borders were frozen unless a state *de facto* ceased to exist. This interpretation goes well with the need of the

numerous multiethnic states of Eastern Asia to avoid internationalisation of nationality conflicts, which may threaten the states' survival. Because of the importance attached to the Cold War interpretation of popular sovereignty, Western pressures for Eastern Asian recognition of liberal-democratic principles of internal state conduct are resisted. For example, ASEAN rejected Western demands for the exclusion of Myanmar, since a policy of exclusion on the grounds of unsatisfactory internal state practices would call in question the legitimacy of most regimes in the region. International rules for the relationship between states and peoples are thus not likely to gain a foothold in Eastern Asia.

The fundamental aim of the code of conduct is to bring about peaceful coexistence. This goal is more modest than the widespread cooperative practices followed in the West. In Eastern Asia, cooperation is not seen as a necessary means of order creation. Cooperation is possible where sufficient agreement on an issue exists that the states can establish a practice without having to bring up numerous issues of contention or, alternatively, in cases where the states are met with the prospects of violent conflict. Peaceful coexistence means that as a general rule, the states are allowed to look after their national interests provided they do not pose a threat to the security of other states and unless they find it beneficial to do otherwise. Thus, cooperative practices are not likely to be a pervasive feature of state interaction, but is instead confined to specific issues. Fundamentally, the states retain the right to be left alone.

The fact that continental Southeast Asia have signed the TAC implies that the treaty is becoming acceptable outside ASEANs Cold War area of jurisdiction. However, the primary aspiration of the new signatories was to become members of ASEAN. As small states and neighbours of the PRC they are in need of the protection of this multilateral cooperative forum. Of more consequence is the question whether the principles of the TAC are acceptable to Japan and the PRC.

Japan has not yet defined its role in the post-Cold War security environment. Consequently, no official principles guiding its state conduct in the area of security have been issued. However, Japan has demonstrated that her views on regional security are in line with those of ASEAN. Significantly, Japan was the first to propose the establishment of a regional security forum (Japan Digest, 23/7/91). Although the Nakayama proposal of 1991 was turned down, the subsequent ASEAN proposal resembled it. Moreover, Japan has approached ASEAN to establish closer security links with this entity. Provided that the militarisation scenario does not gain ground in the Japanese policy establishment, it is difficult to see which objections Japan could have to a code of conduct modelled on the TAC.

The PRC is the main stepping stone in any attempt to establish a general code of conduct for Eastern Asia. The reason is not so much PRC difficulties with accepting the basic principles of the TAC as it is the idea of committing herself to a code of conduct within a regional environment which she perceives as potentially hostile towards Chinese interests. Concerning the issue of principles of state conduct, the PRC has reiterated her commitment to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence issued in 1954: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence (China Daily, 28/6/94). These principles are in line with the Ten Principles adopted by the Asian-African Conference in Bandung on 25 April 1955, as are the TAC.

The PRC's policy on principles of state conduct is not a barrier to agreement on a regional code of conduct. Rather, the problem is Chinese resistance towards the idea of giving express consent to social obligations to states who are not perceived as conducive to Chinese interests. The policy of engagement, which the security dialogue with the PRC is an expression of, is a reasonable way of trying to overcome the mistrust which pervades the relationship between the PRC and her surroundings. At the bilateral level, the PRC has established a code of conduct with the Philippines concerning their area of overlapping claims in the South China Sea. Hopes have been expressed that such initiatives spread and gradually pave the way for a general code of conduct (Djalal, 1997: 280). Whether this hope comes true depends on the PRC's inclination to give up her resistance towards multilateral frameworks of state interaction to the advantage of the common interest in a stable order in Eastern Asia.

Conclusion

This article has discussed the characteristics of the new regional order emerging in Eastern Asia. The preconditions of this order evolved in the second half of the Cold War, where maritime Southeast Asia established a multilateral organisational framework and a code of security conduct within a structure of

great power deterrence. In the post-Cold War era, these characteristics are evolving into the principal elements in a new order, which does not represent an alternative to that of the Cold War, but rather a moderation of it. The US, the PRC and Japan are beginning to align themselves as the primary pillars in a governance structure based on deterrence, which resembles the power political structure of the Cold War. Within this structure, a security dialogue is emerging through the extension of the ASEAN organisational framework to include all of Eastern Asia as well as powers with vested interests in the security of the region. The security dialogue increases the prospects of agreement on a code of conduct which secures peaceful coexistence in the region.

The main obstacle to the development and consolidation of this conservative order which combines Cold War practices with limited cooperation is the fact that the PRC and Japan have not yet positioned themselves as great powers with special rights and obligations towards the maintenance of regional order. However, with the initiation of a region-wide security dialogue they have been given the opportunity to demonstrate that they are willing and able to shoulder this responsibility. On this background, the prospects of the consolidation of a regional order which combines deterrence with limited security cooperation are good.

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Notes

[1] Eastern Asia encompasses East Asia and Southeast Asia.
[2] Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Brunei, the Philippines, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, Papua New Guinea, the US, Japan, Canada, the EU, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Russia, the PRC and India participate in the ARF.

Liselotte Odgaard is conducting research towards a Ph.D. at the Department of Political Science, Aarhus University, Denmark and is a Visiting Fellow at the International Boundaries Research Unit.