

America's Nationalist Turn and Territorial Revisionism in the Asia-Pacific

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The U.S.-led liberal international order is eroding, a process only exacerbated by the election of Donald Trump. Meanwhile, China has solidified its regional posture and signaled its global economic and military aspirations. This article details changes in the balance of power driven by China's rise and the nationalist turn in America's foreign policy that has accelerated the erosion of legitimacy of the international order. It then discusses Chinese, Japanese, and North Korean revisionist aspirations with respect to the East Asian security environment as a whole. China's revisionist territorial claims in the East China Sea are moving it toward a collision specifically with Japan, which also claims vast maritime sovereignty. Tokyo's revisionist claims are also likely to undermine trilateral U.S.-ROK-Japan cooperation absent the checks and security guarantees of institutions like the E.U. or NATO. Finally, North Korea's provocations aim to capitalize on the vulnerability of the United States' extended-deterrence commitments.

Keywords: balance of power; China's rise; East Asia; liberal international order; territorial conflict

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I. Introduction

The crisis over North Korea's nuclear and Intercontinental Ballistic Missile tests comes at a time when the liberal international order—broadly understood as the framework of global governance that includes economic and financial globalization, sovereignty and human rights protections, democracy promotion, and commitment to international law—has come under threat both by the changes in the global balance of power that had underlined it and by a widespread populist reaction to its legitimacy.¹ Since the early 2000s, China's economic and military rise and Russia's military interventions in Georgia, Ukraine and Syria seemingly ended America's "unipolar moment" enjoyed after the Soviet Union's disintegration and the end of the U.S.-Soviet two-way competition for power in the international system. So did the rise of militant national and transnational "jihadism" in the Middle East, North

¹ Richard Haass, *A World in Disarray: American Foreign Policy and the Crisis of the Old Order* (New York: Penguin Books, 2017); Michael J. Mazarr et al., *Measuring the Health of International Order* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2017).

Africa, and South Asia, and the growth of the influence of Iran in the Persian Gulf area. As America's nearly two-decades-long military involvements in South Asia and the Middle East weakened rather than strengthened its global influence, China in particular, with its uninterrupted economic and military buildup, solidified its regional posture, intensified pressures on the states in its geographic vicinity, and perhaps sooner than expected by most, signaled its economic and military aspirations extending beyond East Asia.

Erosion of legitimacy of the international order and its institutional structures largely coincided with this observed shift in the global balance of power. It may have started already in the course of the 1997 Asian economic crisis, which revealed limitations of the International Monetary Fund and other global financial institutions.² This was followed in the early 2000s with the abrupt end of the "third way of democratization" and the subsequent "democratic recession."³ Further weaknesses of international order were demonstrated in the populist movements against neoliberal economic policies that followed the global recession of the late 2000s: first in the course of the 2010-2011 Arab uprisings, and then with the 2011 protests in Israel, Spain, Italy, Greece, and the U.S. (Occupy Wall Street).⁴ As to the protection of sovereignty and commitment to international law, the 2014 proclamation of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria threatened to undermine the relevance of the system of nation-states in the Middle East, while the Russian annexation of Crimea posed challenges to the principle of inviolability of borders in

² Thomas Hale, David Held, and Kevin Young, *Gridlock: Why Global Cooperation is Failing when We Need It Most* (Cambridge, MA: Polity, 2013); Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003).

³ Larry Diamond, "Facing up to democratic recession," *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 1 (2015): 141-55.

⁴ Marion Dixon, "An Arab Spring," *Review of African Political Economy* 38, no. 128 (2011): 309-316; James Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East: A History*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Europe. While the 2009 debt crisis in the European Union demonstrated flaws in its monetary integration (of the “Euro-Zone”), the lack of coordinated response of Brussels to the 2015 refugee crisis revealed the E.U.’s political weaknesses. Then the 2016 British vote to leave the E.U. (“Brexit”) and the near electoral victory of Euroskeptics in France and the Netherlands demonstrated the popular backlash against economic and financial globalization in Europe, and threatened to dismantle the E.U., one of the institutional pillars of liberal international order over the last several decades.

Following the “Brexit” vote, Donald Trump’s 2016 victory in the U.S. presidential elections not only confirmed the broader trend of erosion of legitimacy of the international order but in effect intensified it. President Trump’s announced turn to nationalist foreign policy, aimed at restoring America’s primacy in the international system, questioned the necessity of any international order altogether and not simply its specific components. The Trump administration has not gone as far as to dismantle America’s multilateral and bilateral commitments as candidate Trump’s bid for the presidency had called for. But it has clearly challenged the concept of liberal international order (pursued by successive U.S. administrations since 1945), and implicitly accepted the idea of “selective engagement” where America, instead of assuming a leadership role in actively promoting liberal international order, opts to settle for the protection of the *status quo* as necessary and in an *ad hoc* manner, but with little regard for free trade and seemingly no concern for human rights protections or democracy promotion. This new case-by-case transactional approach to America’s foreign policy caused significant disruptions, disarray, and uncertainty among American allies and strategic partners the world over, not the least in East Asia. Despite the absence of noticeable changes in U.S. military posture and alliance commitments in the region, the future direction of America’s foreign and defense policies lacks clarity and leaves specifically Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK) guessing, encouraging each to reconsider their

own policy options.

There is no shortage of literature discussing alternative scenarios of future international relations in East Asia based on significant changes in China's material (especially military) capabilities and the dangers its rise poses to peace and the balance of power in the region. The consequences of the much less tangible of the two changes in liberal international order described above, namely erosion of legitimacy of that very order, has received considerably less attention by scholars. Despite the economic benefits that Japan, the ROK, and China all obtained from liberal international order underwritten by the U.S. since 1945, historical memories of the decades preceding the end of World War II in each are still vivid. As legitimacy of that order seemingly fades away, historical memories of perceived injustices in the region that preceded Pax Americana are likely to play a greater role in shaping the preferences of individual states in the region. Successful overcoming of historical enmities in international politics is rare, with Anglo-American and Franco-German rapprochement as two notable examples. Shared liberal democratic values may have played a role in each of those two exceptional cases, as the democratic peace theory of international relations would predict. But perhaps more importantly a long history of shared economic and political interests, as well as cultural values, over an extended period of time played a role in the case of U.K.-U.S. rapprochement, while German participation in the European Union and NATO may have helped moderate its historical rivalry with France.

Similar pacifying tendencies and institutional mechanisms are remarkably lacking in East Asia. Even prior to the election of Donald Trump, regional changes in the balance of power and the weakening of the legitimacy of the international order in East Asia created a window of opportunity for both China and Japan to voice their revisionist claims. The twin processes have also encouraged North Korea's hopes about eventually decoupling the ROK from U.S. extended deterrence and keeping alive its offensive designs on the Korean peninsula. Although

China and Japan both presently share commitment to the regional order in East and Southeast Asia and have well-developed economic ties, the two are also locked in a geostrategic rivalry over natural resources in the East China Sea that involves claims and counter-claims and is likely to intensify with the passage of time. Japan's revisionist claims, its recent improvements of military capabilities, and the constitutional amendments to remove pacifist constraints on its military, all aimed primarily to address the threats from China and North Korea, also directly threaten the ROK. Despite its participation in trilateral cooperation with Japan and the U.S., the ROK is wary of Tokyo's long-term objectives and refuses to treat it as a military ally.

This article argues that China's revisionist territorial claims in the East China Sea are going to place it on a collision course specifically with Japan's claim to vast maritime sovereignty. Absent institutional mechanisms equivalent to the E.U. or NATO to provide security guarantees to the ROK and keep Japan's territorial aspirations vis-à-vis Seoul in check, Tokyo's revisionist claims are likely to undermine the management of trilateral US-ROK-Japan cooperation. The article first details the changes in the balance of power driven by China's rise and the nationalist turn in America's foreign policy that accelerated the erosion of legitimacy of the international order. It then discusses separately the Chinese, Japanese, and North Korean revisionist aspirations and draws conclusions for the security environment of East Asia as a whole.

II. China's Economic Rise and Improved Military Capabilities

As the U.S. coped with the financial and economic consequences of the 2008-2009 "great recession" and the costly military and economic efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, China's manufacturing sector and international trade grew steadily. Over the first decade and a half of the twenty-first century, China became the world's biggest exporter of manufactured

goods and the largest trading partner of more than one hundred countries around the world (including Japan, South Korea, and the U.S.). Its share of global GDP rose from less than five percent in 1980 to 14.9 percent in 2017.⁵ In addition, China has made significant progress in robotics, aerospace, new-energy vehicles, and advanced medical products. As it further develops research on information technology and artificial intelligence, it aims at attracting the world's cutting-edge scientists and innovators to China. It emerged as the principal regional economic power in East Asia, but its economic influence now spreads to Southeast and Central Asia, turning Beijing into a dominant actor in the global economy.

China's economic ambitions now extend to other regions where it has pledged to invest more than one trillion dollars for two separate initiatives designed to restructure the Eurasian economy: the silk-road economic belt (infrastructure and trade investments projected to stretch from Bangkok to Budapest) and the twenty-first-century maritime silk road (a program focused on the waterways between the South China Sea and the Mediterranean). The two initiatives combined involve infrastructure development projects in more than sixty countries and include building high-speed railroads and nuclear reactors. Over the last decade and a half, China has made additional big scale investments in Africa, North and South America, Europe, Russia's far east, and the Middle East. Beijing is also making progress with a free trade agreement that will include the major Asian economies plus Australia and New Zealand. In sum, China's capability driven behavior has over time brought about slight but steady changes in the distribution of economic power both in the region and globally.

Although China's remarkable economic growth benefited from

⁵ International Monetary Fund, "Seeking Sustainable growth: Short-Term Recovery, Long-term Challenges," *World Economic Outlook* (October 2017).

U.S. hegemonic naval power in the Asia-Pacific region, Beijing's growing economic capabilities could allow it in the future to challenge militarily that very hegemony should it choose so. China's defense forces are currently limited to reducing the ability of the American navy to operate close to its own littoral. Specifically, the Chinese military seeks to deny America's ability to come to Taiwan's aid in case of a Sino-Taiwanese confrontation. Over the last twenty-five years, China has notably improved its ability to restrict hostile access in the air and waters off its coast. But most agree that its longer-term objective is to reduce the U.S. security role in Asia, and eventually become a regional hegemon itself.⁶ Many in the U.S. now believe that China's "A2/AD" ("antiaccess, area denial," a phrase coined by the U.S. military) capability will eventually be highly effective in excluding the U.S. from parts of the Western Pacific, an area the latter has traditionally controlled.⁷

Some even believe that China will ultimately be able to extend its zone of exclusion to the so-called "Second Island Chain"—a line that connects Japan, Guam, and Papua-New Guinea, some 3,000 kilometers away from China's coast. Although most still see China's current arsenal of weapons as limited and U.S. naval and air superiority over the Pacific unchallenged, the trajectory of technical and acquisition trends suggest that in the medium to long term, China could develop such capabilities.⁸ The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has recently bolstered China's position in the South China Sea where Beijing is also growing its civilian and paramilitary capability. The PLA is manifestly developing the capacity to project military power into the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean. It has improved its ability to protect its oil imports by patrolling

⁶ Robert Blackwill and Ashley Tellis, *Revising U.S. Grand Strategy Toward China* (U.S.A.: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 2015).

⁷ "China's military rise: The dragon's new teeth," *The Economist*, 2012. www.economist.com/node/21552193. Accessed on November 17, 2017.

⁸ *Ibid.*

the choke points for accessing the Indian Ocean and by building its first overseas military base in Djibouti.⁹ And it projects further expansions in the near future as China's military budget is estimated to reach \$233 billion by 2020, more than all E.U. countries combined, and double the figure from 2010.¹⁰

China improves its military capabilities in tandem with diplomatic efforts to assert more effectively its interests in global international organizations (IGOs). It has now become the second largest contributor to the United Nations budget for peacekeeping operations. Moreover, China has recently increased its voting shares at the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and added its currency to the IMF's Special Drawing Rights list. In other global IGOs, China seeks to get an upper hand in agenda setting, and generally to develop a positive global image of itself (particularly in developing countries in which it invests). Additionally, it has already started building alternative regional institutions where it uses its own financial power to gain political and diplomatic influence (e.g. China's Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership). China is interested in promoting multilateralism, often in opposition to U.S. unilateralist tendencies, but it avoids direct confrontation with Washington. It seemingly prepares favorable conditions for itself to shape an emerging world order in the long term.

III. America's Break with its Commitment to "Liberal Hegemony"

American unilateralism in international politics endorsed by the Trump

⁹ "Chapter 6: Asia," *The Military Balance* 117, no. 1 (2017): 237. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/04597222.2017.1271212>. Accessed on November 17, 2017.

¹⁰ "IHS Jane's: China defense budget may skyrocket in 2020," *International Reports/International Media Reports on China*, December 14, 2016.

presidency is not new. While the U.S. played a decisive role in shaping the contemporary international order, it has also been, as Henry Kissinger noted, a most ambiguous participant in that very order.¹¹ Given the reservations of many about placing America’s sovereignty under constraints of international laws and global governing institutions, the U.S. has opportunistically adopted unilateral policies in international affairs. More recently, America’s unilateralist tendencies prevailed during President George W. Bush’s first term (2001-2005), as the U.S. backed away from multilateral agreements such as the Kyoto Protocol and the Rome Treaty that established the International Criminal Court, and went ahead with the invasion of Iraq in 2003 over public objections of the political leaders of France and Germany, two of America’s key European allies. Moreover, by practicing “enhanced interrogation techniques” in its offshore military bases in Guantanamo Bay (Cuba), Bagram (Afghanistan) and Abu Ghraib (Iraq), the U.S. was in violation of provisions of international humanitarian law, the law that it itself played a key role in developing since 1945.¹²

Nor are President Trump’s criticisms of America’s costly military over-commitments abroad anything new; such criticisms were frequently voiced by earlier administrations. What is new with the Trump presidency is the outright rejection of the notion of multilateral arrangements as a way of advancing U.S. national interest and the disdain for international organizations, military alliances, and international law, all perceived as restraining the U.S. by limiting its policy options. President Trump’s “America First” policy reflected a new nationalist sentiment. While still campaigning for the presidency, Trump questioned the value of military alliances, and promised to abandon some of the country’s longest-standing trade agreements. According to the new perspective in the

¹¹ Henry Kissinger, *World Order* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014).

¹² Philippe Sands, *Lawless World* (New York: Viking, 2006).

White House, the U.S. was to conduct foreign policy by relying on its military and economic capabilities and re-evaluate its long-term commitments to alliances and strategic partnerships according to its needs. It would accordingly remain a party to the international agreements that it clearly benefits from and use its military force only when and where directly challenged.

Some of the initial policy decisions of the new administration clearly broke with the practices that defined U.S. global strategy since at least the end World War II. Shortly after coming to office, President Trump ended Washington’s strong bipartisan consensus on Asia policy by signing the executive order to withdraw the U.S. from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the largest free-trade agreement in history that brought together a dozen Pacific Rim nations, including Australia, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, and Vietnam. President Trump further pulled the U.S. from the 2015 Paris climate change agreement (signed by more than 190 other nations), sent mixed signals about America’s commitment to its allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and East Asia (Japan and South Korea), and made cuts in U.S. funding to international institutions. Meanwhile, some of the punitive measures that the Trump administration threatened Mexico with in renegotiating the North America Free Trade Agreement are likely to violate the laws of the World Trade Organization. If so, the U.S. might opt to ignore the rulings of this organization and perhaps even pull out of it altogether.¹³ Since the Trump administration holds a view that the costs of maintaining the rules-based international order outweigh its benefits, the U.S. was to significantly reduce the role for American diplomacy and its global programs. It plans to downsize America’s diplomatic representation abroad, suspend the hiring of new Foreign Service officers, and substantially reduce

¹³ “Top US business group says Trump’s Nafta stance ‘dangerous.’” <https://www.ft.com/content/97179336-aab2-11e7-ab55-27219df83c97>. Accessed on November 17, 2017.

America's commitment to international organizations such as the United Nations and its specialized agencies. While pushing budget cuts in diplomacy, the administration proposed an increase in defense spending roughly equal to the entire budget of the State Department.

Even before Donald Trump was elected U.S. President, the liberal international order had already been under significant strain.¹⁴ Although President Trump's anti-multilateralism, since moving into office, turned out to be selective and America's retrenchment from its global obligations partial, the credibility and commitment of the U.S. have been openly questioned by its allies and strategic partners in Europe, Southeast and East Asia, and the Middle East. Some have signaled their willingness to fill in on their own what they perceive as potential power vacuums. Germany's Chancellor Merkel, for example, declared the need for Europe to "chart its own course" and began efforts to set up a European Army under its own control.¹⁵ Alarmed by the prospects of America's withdrawal from its military commitments, India, Japan and Saudi Arabia all called for sustained U.S. presence in their respective regions to help keep in check their principle regional rivals. To the countries in Southeast Asia, the U.S. withdrawal from the TPP marked the abandonment of America's leadership role in the region. President Trump's policies have thus initiated fears about power vacuums and raised concerns over the rise of protectionism globally. At the same time the administration pushed for militarization of U.S. global policies.

Although not yet fundamentally altering the values that have for decades underlined international arrangement and that America helped build and defend, the new U.S. administration seems to have suspended them. The new nationalist America refrains from spreading its values to other countries and opts out of multilateral arrangements; it challenges

¹⁴ Mazarr, *Measuring the health of international order*.

¹⁵ "Merkel: Europe 'can no longer rely on allies' after Trump and Brexit," *BBC News*, May 28, 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-40078183>.

the ideological foundation of the international order from above. Even if partial, this abandonment of America's leadership could lead to the collapse of much of the structures of rules, norms, and institutions that has defined international relations for decades. Most importantly, it could end a degree of ideological agreement among the main sponsoring powers and encourage aspirations for alternative concepts of legitimacy.

It is against this background that territorial revisionism since 2010 in the East China Sea, Yellow Sea, Japan Sea, South China Sea, and the Korean Peninsula should be observed. Global erosion of the international order invoked memories of the earlier history of the region and settlements created under a substantially different regional distribution of power than the current one. The next three sections detail the efforts of China, Japan, and North Korea to adjust to those new conditions and probe pushing the boundaries of the regional *status quo*.

IV. China's Territorial Revisions in the South and East China Seas

Claiming to be a legal successor to the Kuomintang government of the Republic of China and alleging the latter's sovereignty over the South China Sea, Beijing is involved in taking possession of islands and reefs of this maritime area in order to lay claim to the waters and seabed in between (i.e. "internal waters."). Although claiming its "historic right" to do so, China in effect violates the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) according to which this maritime area should be apportioned among all the littoral states. Predictably, Brunei, Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines have all vigorously protested China's claims and favor a diplomatic solution, but the Chinese continue to act unilaterally instead. In the area known as the "nine-dash line" that includes the Parcel, Spratly and Pratas Islands, the Macclesfield Bank and the Scarborough Shoal, China is building artificial islands, equipping them with advanced listening devices, and constructing runways and

hangars that could reportedly be converted to military use. Five of the artificial islands have been built on previously submerged features, which, under the UNCLOS, do not grant entitlement to the twelve-mile territorial waters. Despite its proclamations about the freedom of navigation operations to maintain UNCLOS, the U.S. does not seem willing to press China to reverse its course.

In the past, China had used low-intensity coercion to establish maritime rights by carrying out invasive patrols, encroaching on other claimants' waters, and denying littoral countries (e.g. Vietnam) the rights to drill the seabed. In 1974 and 1988 it attacked Vietnamese positions in the Paracel and Spratly Islands, respectively. Both incidents ended with casualties on the Vietnamese side and Chinese territorial gains. More recently, Chinese boats have attacked Vietnamese vessels, and threatened military action against Vietnamese bases in the South China Sea (some twenty-eight outposts in the Spratly Islands). In 2016, the Chinese government objected to the ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration that denied Beijing the right to extend its exclusive economic zone over the Spratly Islands at the expense of the Philippines by disputing the panel's jurisdiction over this matter. Despite its legal victory, the government of the Philippines, reportedly intimidated by China, abandoned the project of exploring the seabed natural gas reserves off its coast and agreed to China's offer for joint explorations of energy resources, which seems to imply Beijing's version of "shared" ownership based on its own determination of who can exploit which resources.

Many scholars agree that China aspires to restore its status as a regional hegemon that it lost almost two centuries ago and inevitably seek further adjustments to the current international order as part of what President Xi Jinping called the "China Dream" of national rejuvenation.¹⁶

¹⁶ Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017); Howard French, *Everything Under the Heavens: How the Past Helps Shape China's Push for Global Power* (New York: Alfred A.

As China's military capabilities continue to grow, it may decide to deny territorial arrangements created by others and especially those features of the existing order that were put in place while China was economically and militarily weak. China, of course, could decide to impose reunification on Taiwan. But it could also decide to challenge the maritime regime created by the 1982 UNCLOS that entitled Japan to vast maritime areas (very high proportionate to the length of its coastline). Citing UNCLOS, Japan claims that it established sovereignty over what it calls the Senkaku islands (uninhabited islets) in East China in the late nineteenth century based on the *terra nullius* principle of maritime international law.

The Japanese government regards the islets to be “intrinsic to Japanese territory” (*ryodo*). Although China had not challenged Japan's sovereignty over the islets until 1970, it has since claimed its own commercial and diplomatic ties to the islands—what Beijing and Taiwan instead call the Diaoyu Islands—as part of China-Ryukyu relations under the East Asian tributary system that lasted about a millennium before the late nineteenth century Japanese conquests.¹⁷ The islands lie well within 200 nautical miles of China's coast and are on the edge of its continental shelf that stretches all the way to the Okinawa trench. The two sides in 2008 agreed to respect an equidistant median line from each country effectively separating their respective EEZs and that they would conduct joint development of four different oil and gas fields spanning the line. The Japanese government later accused the Chinese of breaching the 2008 consensus by conducting field development alone.¹⁸

Knopf, 2017); Henry Kissinger, *On China* (New York: Penguin, 2012).

¹⁷ Gavan McCormack, “Troubled Seas: Japan's Pacific and East China Sea Domains (and Claims),” *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 10, no. 36 (August 28, 2012). <http://apjff.org/2012/10/36/Gavan-McCormack/3821/article.html>. Accessed on November 18, 2017.

¹⁸ “Old Scores and New Grudges: Evolving Sino-Japanese Tensions,” *International Crisis Group*, July 24, 2014. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/north-east-asia/china/old-scores-and-new-grudges-evolving-sino-japanese-tensions>. Accessed on November 18, 2017.

In November 2013, China announced an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ), overlapping with that of Japan's and covering the disputed islands. It has since done some probing around the islands, perhaps signaling the gradual change in the regional maritime order. Sovereignty over the islands would allow the claim of Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) rights over a sector of the East China Sea believed to contain significant deposits of oil and natural gas. For China, this maritime area is also important from a geostrategic point of view. If China is indeed pursuing the goal of moving its line of naval defense from the first to the second chain of islands in the East China Sea, Japanese sovereignty over the Senkaku islands would be a significant barrier in its path.

V. Japan's Revisionist History Movement and Claims

The changes in the regional balance of power and the uncertainty about America's commitments in East Asia encouraged Japan, the ROK and North Korea to pursue their respective national agendas more aggressively. Japan's concerns over its shrinking economic opportunities in East Asia and potential military threat, both resulting from China's increased economic power and influence, are understandable. China's recent resurgence has diminished Japan's economic stature particularly in Northeast Asia compared with what it was in the late 1980s and early 1990s when Japan was contributing up to fifteen percent of world GDP. Unable to use its economic influence as effectively as it did in the past, Japan is resorting to a new form of nationalism as a way of shaping and protecting its security interests. In 2014, the Japanese Foreign Ministry published a map (translated into twelve languages) that extends Japan's internationally recognized national borders. The map depicts Japan's *ryodo* (i.e. "inherent territory") that includes numerous islands that fall outside of Japan's current sovereignty such as the Liancourt Rocks and the Kuril islands claimed by its neighbors the ROK and Russia, respectively.

Part of Japan's territorial revision is economic in nature. In addition to challenging China regarding seventeen percent of the East China Sea area discussed above, Japan also claims portions of the seabed between Japan and the Korean Peninsula also believed to hold significant deposits of oil and natural gas, both of which Tokyo could use as substitutes for imports. But Japan's territorial revisionism is also strategic. The concept of *ryodo* implicitly dismisses as partial the terms of the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty, which formally ended World War II between Japan and the Allies. The 1951 agreement redrew Japan from the massive empire it had become during the war stretching from northern China to Guadalcanal. The concept of *ryodo* also deliberately circumvents the history of how Japan laid claim to these islands in the first place—through imperial wars with China and Russia, wars of conquest against Korea, and through the extermination or assimilation of indigenous peoples.¹⁹

This strategic revision raises questions about Japan's acquiescence to the status quo driven by the imperatives of its survival and long-term economic success. Still, the most recent U.S.-Japanese agreement (April 27, 2015) expanded the reach of Japan's military—now limited to its own defense—allowing it to act when the U.S. or countries American forces are defending are threatened. In 2016, the Japanese Diet amended Article 9 of the constitution that limited the country's use of offensive weapons to its territorial limits. Prime Minister Abe Shinzo and his supporters are likely to continue to eliminate constitutional barriers to an even greater international military role. At the same time, the Japanese Ministry of Defense has continued to receive steady budget increases of one to two percent a year since 2013, ostensibly breaking the pattern of

¹⁹ "The Shape of Japan to Come," *The New York Times*, January 16, 2015. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/17/opinion/the-shape-of-japan-to-come.html?_r=0. Accessed on November 18, 2017.

stagnant budgets over the previous decade.²⁰ The relaxation of national-security laws and increased defense spending allow the Japanese navy to co-operate much more closely with allies on a greater range of missions. Although Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force lacks power-projection, it is regarded as the fifth-best navy in the world capable of rapid response to threats anywhere in Japan and especially defending or retaking the remote southwestern islands facing China. Japan's apparent interference in the South China Sea disputes formed the background for renewed bilateral tensions with Beijing on the East China Sea.

Some have traced Japanese revisionism to the mid-1990s when several politicians voiced their objections to the publishing of junior high school history textbooks that made references to the Korean women enslaved by Japanese soldiers (i.e. "comfort women") and insisted that such a "masochistic" version of history teaching be abandoned and replaced by an alternative that will instead boost students' love for their country. Back in 1997, recently re-elected Prime Minister of Japan Abe was among the founders of the Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) Group of Young Diet Members for the Consideration of Japan's Future and History Education that promoted such changes until Japan's Education Ministry eventually forced publishers of middle-school textbooks to recast descriptions of historical events. In 2014, the Abe government tried unsuccessfully to get the U.N. to revise a 1996 human rights report on the women Japan forced into sex slavery. In 2015, the Prime Minister also initiated the "Japan House" project reportedly aimed at launching an international public relations campaign in support of Japanese claims for the islands falling outside its sovereignty. In addition, while Prime Minister Abe formally expressed remorse for the atrocities the Japanese forces committed during World War II and said he would honor Japan's past apologies for its aggression, he and his political allies from the

²⁰ "Chapter 6: Asia," 337-350.

governing LDP continue to question history.²¹

VI. North Korea's Revisionist Aspirations

North Korea clearly developed its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile systems to protect its regime as it perceives U.S.-ROK joint military exercises as rehearsals for an invasion. But its hostility towards the U.S. is not simply a matter of the regime's official propaganda to generate legitimacy and thus prolong it in perpetuity. While the U.S. government perceives its confrontation with North Korea as one involving a defiant and malevolent dictator, the North Korean leadership takes a longer historical perspective on the confrontation with the U.S.. Memories of the Korean War may not be vivid on the American side but they reportedly play a role in Pyongyang where the U.S. air force's massive onslaught of the Korean population during that time is still being commemorated.²² The North Korean regime has seen itself resisting the U.S. ever since. But vivid memories in North Korea seemingly extend even farther into history as the regime continues to celebrate the beginning of the Korean guerilla struggle against the Japanese in Northeast China (officially dated to April 25, 1932). Furthermore, memories of Japan's brutal occupation of Korea (1910-1945), including atrocities and enslavement of thousands of women forced to work as sex slaves or "comfort women" in wartime brothels, are being kept alive.²³ The North Korean regime seems to believe that if it can get the U.S. out of the region, North Korea could prevail over South Korean forces and

²¹ Tomomi Yamaguchi, "The 'Japan Is Great!' Boom, Historical Revisionism, and the Government," *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, 15, is. 6, no. 3 (March 15, 2017). <http://apjif.org/2017/06/Yamaguchi.html>. Accessed on November 17, 2017.

²² "Inside North Korea, and Feeling the Drums of War," *The New York Times*, October 5, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/05/opinion/sunday/nuclear-north-korea.html?_r=0. Accessed on November 18, 2017.

²³ Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (New York: The Modern Library, 2011).

unite the peninsula on its own terms.²⁴

Military planners and foreign-service officials in the ROK and the U.S. stress that North Korea is developing a hydrogen bomb and ICBMs not to go to war with the U.S. but to prevent American forces from intervening in a possible armed confrontation on the Korean Peninsula. The day after North Korea tested its ballistic missile in the summer of 2016, Christopher Hill, a former U.S. ambassador to the Republic of Korea stated that North Korea believes it can militarily defeat the ROK if the U.S. is kept off the peninsula.²⁵ Some ROK officials fear that North Korea's possession of nuclear-tipped ICBMs could drive a wedge between Washington and Seoul by offering to freeze its nuclear program in return for the withdrawal of American troops from the ROK. In the worst-case scenario, they say, North Korea may attack the ROK and use its nuclear arsenal to deter the U.S. from intervening. Some have asked whether Washington will risk the destruction of an American city by intervening, for example, if the North attempts to occupy a border island, as its soldiers have practiced. North Korea's provocations against South Korea aim to capitalize on the vulnerability of the United States' extended-deterrence commitments.

VII. Military Balancing in the Absence of an Agreed-upon Order

U.S. military strength and diplomacy helped keep the peace in much of Asia throughout the Cold War and over a decade that followed. The U.S.-led post-1945 international order brought unprecedented economic prosperity to a number of countries in East and Southeast Asia including

²⁴ Evan Osnos, "The Risk of Nuclear War with North Korea," *The New Yorker*, September 18, 2017. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/09/18/the-risk-of-nuclear-war-with-north-korea>. Accessed on November 18, 2017.

²⁵ <https://www.cnn.com/asia-squawk-box/>. Accessed on November 18, 2017.

Japan, the ROK, Singapore, Thailand, and Taiwan, and more recently China and Indonesia. It helped spread and consolidate democracy in the region, too. Regarding U.S. defense policy in East Asia, the Trump administration is left with little choice. American military commitment to the region has been structural since the early 2000s and is unlikely to change in the near to medium term. Since almost thirty percent of global maritime trade goes across the South China Sea, \$1.2 trillion of which is bound for America, safeguarding the freedom of the seas is of vital U.S. national interest.²⁶ The free flow of maritime trade in the South China Sea is equally vital to Japan and the ROK, two principal U.S. allies in the region. To protect its own interests and the interest of its allies, the U.S. has developed a complex web of military alliances surrounding China with countries buttressed by American security commitments (e.g. Australia, India, Singapore, and Vietnam). The “One Korea” policy that supports a unification of the Korean peninsula under the leadership of the ROK is the last component of America’s military commitment in the region.

While the U.S. military maintains the ability to deter conflict and coercion, its capacity to promote adherence to international law and standards has seemingly been impaired. Since Richard Nixon’s famous 1972 trip to China, successive U.S. presidents down to Barack Obama attempted to manage China’s rise by drawing it into the international order and engaging it to accept the rules of trade, navigation and other areas. With the gradual erosion of the legitimacy of that order, China has seemingly reached a point where it now aspires to a co-leadership role with the U.S., a relationship that its leader Xi Jinping described as one of mutual respect for “each country’s core interests.” Although not specified in this offer that China’s President first extended to Barack Obama in

²⁶ “Offering to Aid Talks, U.S. Challenges China on Disputed Islands,” *The New York Times*, July 23, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/24/world/asia/24diplo.html>. Accessed on November 18, 2017.

2014, Beijing’s “core interests” could potentially include territorial gains against U.S. core allies and strategic partners in the East and South China Seas.²⁷ In addition, China’s core interests would also include balanced relations between two Koreas, because from Beijing’s point of view, the U.S. One Korea policy poses an American challenge to the regional status quo.

Managing the U.S. dual but separate defense arrangements with Japan and the ROK would be no less challenging due to their territorial claims and counter-claims in the East China Sea. The U.S. provides extended deterrence to both Japan and the ROK based on two separate defense agreements. American attempts to strengthen trilateral cooperation with its two key allies in the region (beyond simply information sharing) is complicated by relations between Japan and the ROK. For historical reasons, many in the ROK are concerned about recent changes in Japan’s defense hardware and doctrine. One could also potentially attack the other over the disputed territory they both claim. Turning trilateral cooperation into a military alliance is unacceptable to the ROK as it could, besides making China wary, also pave the way for Japanese troops to enter the Korean peninsula. It is therefore in the ROK’s vital interest to complement its military alliance with the U.S. with strategic cooperation with China regarding North Korea.

²⁷ “China’s ‘New Type’ of Ties Fails to Sway Obama,” *The New York Times*, November 9, 2014. https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/10/world/asia/chinas-new-type-of-ties-fails-to-sway-obama.html?_r=0. Accessed on November 19, 2017.

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