Prospects for International Peace and Security Cooperation in East Asia and Korea's Role[1]

Brendan M. Howe

Abstract

East Asia is a region deeply affected by conflict. Colonial, ideological, and national wars have left their scars and legacies, including disputed borders and divided loyalties. This article focuses on the challenges facing traditional multilateral security cooperation in East Asia. It also, however, considers the evolution of security and governance conceptualisations, assesses and proposes new structures for international cooperation, and addresses the rise of new actors, especially the Republic of Korea (ROK), all of which offer a degree of hope for the future provision of peace and security in the region. The first analytical section considers global shifts in security and governance conceptualisations, from conflict management and resolution to transformation of conflictual relationships, noting the rise of non-traditional security (NTS) issues, and the extent to which the region has been able to adapt. This is followed by a critique of the existing security architectures, whether middle-power led multilateralism, or great power dominated minilateralism. The third section identifies new potential security architectures (NTS minilaterals and regional international commissions) led by an emerging new categorisation of second-tier powers, of which South Korea is one of the most notable.

Keywords

Peacebuilding, security cooperation, multilateralism, minilateralism, East Asia

Article History:
Submitted: 09.06.2024
Accepted: 10.11.2024
Published: 04.02.2025

Brendan M. Howe

Graduate School of International Studies
Ewha Womans University
52 Ewhayeodae-gil
Seodaemun-gu
Seoul 03760
South Korea
Email: howeb@ewha.ac.kr

Introduction

This article focuses on the challenges facing traditional multilateral security cooperation in East Asia. It also, however, considers the evolution of security and governance conceptualisations, assesses and proposes new structures for international cooperation, and addresses the rise of new actors, especially the Republic of Korea (ROK), all of which offer a degree of hope for the future provision of peace and security in the region.

Although the drawing of regional boundaries is always difficult, and this is particularly the case for East Asia, the societal and organizational approach of this article, requires evaluation of the international governance of affairs between countries belonging to both the Northeast Asian and Southeast Asian subset. The boundaries are drawn to include those countries which both have historically shared the densest patterns of interaction (both positive and negative), and which have been viewed as sharing a degree of value conformity or community identity.[2] Broadly speaking, therefore, this research incorporates analysis of the challenges to and opportunities for the international management of relations between the Northeast Asian states, China (including Hong Kong) and Taiwan, Japan, and the two Koreas, members of the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), as well as the United States (US) as security guarantor. Other states and actors are considered to the extent that they have the potential to become actively engaged in non-traditional security (NTS) cooperation and leadership in the region.

East Asia is a region deeply affected by conflict. Colonial, ideological, and national wars have left their scars and legacies, including disputed borders and divided loyalties. It has been considered the most Westphalian region in the world.[3] That is to say, the region most wedded to traditional, state-centric conceptualizations of security, threat, and peacebuilding, as well as to state-centric national economic development projects. Hence, "conventional wisdom on East Asia's prospects carries more pessimism than optimism".[4] Richard Betts called the region "an ample pool of festering grievances, with more potential for generating conflict than during the Cold War, when bipolarity helped stifle the escalation of parochial disputes".[5] It seems that the region is on the cusp of fulfilling Aaron Friedberg's prediction that it is likely to become a "cockpit of great power conflict", and Victor Cha's that it is "ripe for rivalry".[6] Thus, East Asia has been considered among the most dangerous and insecure regions.

The region lacks a collective security international organization (IO) along the lines of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) which evolved into the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) could be considered something of a regional equivalent, but it faces serious challenges in its evolution into a fully-fledged security IO, and currently remains something of a talking shop. Also, while the ASEAN Defense Ministerial Meeting (ADMM) was first convened

1
Based on a paper presented at the 2023 DMZ OPEN Eco-Peace Forum, and on research supported by the POSCO Fellowship at the East-West Center published as "East Asian Security Cooperation Shortcomings and Opportunities for Second-Tier Actors in the Region" *Journal of East Asian Affairs* 36(1) (2023), pp.39-78. The author gratefully acknowledges the helpful suggestions and contributions from the editors and reviewers of KER.

2
Björn Hettne and Fredrik Söderbaum, "Theorising the Rise of Regionness" *New Political Economy* 5(3) (2000), pp.457-473.

3
Amitav Acharya, "Guns and Butter: Why do Human Security and Traditional Security Co-exist in Asia?" *Global Economic Review: Perspectives on East Asian Economies and Industries* 32(3) (2003), p.9.

4
Kishore Mahbubani, "The Pacific Way" *Foreign Affairs* 74(1) (1995), p.102.

5
Richard Betts, "Wealth, Power, and Conflict: East Asia after the Cold War" in Ross, R.S. (ed.) *East Asia in Transition* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.40.

6
Aaron Friedberg, "Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia" *International Security* 18(3) (1994), pp.5-33; Victor Cha, "Ripe for Rivalry: Has Asia's Moment of Reckoning Finally Arrived?" *Foreign Policy* (2012). December 13, 2012. https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/12/13/ripe-for-rivalry/.

in 2006 and the ADMM Plus in 2010, which included Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, and the US, such multilateral groupings are structured differently and are too broad in terms of membership to be considered strictly regional entities, or to contribute to the construction of regional identity-driven peace. East Asia further appears a unique region in that it combines outstanding economic growth with minimal international organization. The major achievements of the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) forum that functions as a coordinator of co-operation between the Southeast ASEAN states and Northeast Asia, are limited to the creation of the Chiang Mai Initiative (CMI), a multilateral currency swap arrangement among the ten members of ASEAN (in the process of being expanded to include Timor-Leste as an eleventh member), China (including Hong Kong), Japan, and South Korea.[7]

Thus, not only is there no formal multilateral security organization in place to transform the multitude of regional security dilemmas, there is also an absence of Helsinki-like processes through which to begin the minimal task of mutual confidence-building.[8] Meanwhile, the "complexity of challenges in the Indo-Pacific region, including US-China tensions, territorial disputes, and the Myanmar crisis, has resulted in a paradox of multilateralism," wherein these developments have underscored the importance of cooperation, while at the same time testing inter-governmental frameworks such as ASEAN and its related fora.[9]

Instead, much of the security architecture is a product of the San Francisco hub-and-spokes system of bilateral security alliances with the US. As such, regional peace and security are more dependent upon great power leadership and cooperation than perhaps anywhere else. Yet, hitherto, such leadership and cooperation between the great powers has been in short supply. And things are getting worse, with tensions between China and the US viewed as amounting to a new Cold War, and, following invasion of Ukraine, Russia teetering on the brink of a hot war with America's NATO allies.[10] John Ruggie points out that because, in the immediate postwar period, it was not possible to construct multilateral institutional frameworks in the region, "today, the absence of such arrangements inhibits progressive adaptation to fundamental global shifts".[11] The next section considers global shifts in security and governance conceptualisations, and the extent to which the region has been able to adapt.

The Evolution of Security and Governance Conceptualisations

The continued regional dominance of the neorealist-neoliberal duopoly in theory and practice, despite the rise of competing theoretical perspectives, has been a function of the ongoing primacy of the state in both domestic and international governance in East Asia. Related to this has been the ongoing hegemony of great state powers (both global and regional) despite their abdication of constructive leadership and the systemic security threats posed by their competition. A rigid adherence to state-centric conceptualizations, ideological divides, and divergence between actors in East Asia has hampered the emergence of regional collective security mechanisms or a peaceful international society.[12]

Realist, power-political interpretations have focused on coercing peace from the truculent or ensuring that the distribution of authority in the international system

7
Brendan M. Howe, "Challenges to and Opportunities for International Organization in East Asia" *Global Society* 35(4) (2021), p.507.

8
John Ruggie, "Multilateralism: The Anatomy of an Institution" *International Organization* 46(3) (1992), p.563.

9
Alisha Chhangani, Audrey Tey, and Elina Noor, "Is Minilateralism the Future of the Indo-Pacific?" *Summary Report of Asia Society Policy Institute* March 29, 2022. https://asiasociety.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/ASPI_IndoPacific_SummReport_finalize.pdf

10
Tereza Novotná, Thomas Christiansen, and Moosung Lee, "EU-Korea Relations at 60: Managing Cooperation in the Context of Great Power Rivalry" *Asia Europe Journal* 21 (2023), p.482.

11
John Ruggie, "Multilateralism", p.563.

12
Moosung Lee and Thomas Diez, "The EU, Korea, and Conflict Transformation through Regional Integration" *Asia Europe Journal* 21 (2023), pp.493–506.

reflects the balance of capabilities, adopting a conflict management approach emphasizing order and stability over justice. Neorealist-inspired coercive tactics have been prevalent in the international relations between the great powers and among other states in East Asia as they attempt to structure the decision-making of the other, whether it be militarized international disputes (MIDs), sabre-rattling, name-calling, overt threats, or political and economic sanctions.

Facing diverse challenges, successive governments in regional states have adopted state-centric national security policies with an emphasis on national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national unity. The most extreme manifestation of this state-centricity can be found on the Korean Peninsula where the two regimes, North and South, view each other as existential threats; across the Taiwan Strait, between the similarly mutually exclusive regimes of Beijing and Taipei; and in the state-centric security tensions very much in evidence in the East China Sea and South China Sea. Yet even between democratic allies of the US, such as South Korea and Japan, diplomatic relations can be strained at best, and take on power-political overtones. While there have been several attempts at thawing relations between the ROK and Japan, every time a South Korean leader advances such an initiative they have been faced with an electoral backlash, while populist measures have undermined diplomatic and security relations.

Under the Park Geun-hye (2013-2017) administration, diplomatic settlement of the comfort women issue between Seoul and Tokyo contributed to the street protests which eventually led to the downfall of the President, her impeachment, and her imprisonment. Under the following Moon Jae-in (2017-2022) administration, prosecution of Japanese companies for their use of Korean forced labour led to the disintegration of security and intelligence cooperation between Japan and South Korea, mutual de-listing as trusted partners, and the undermining of the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA). Most recently President Yoon Suk Yeol's (2022-) attempts to promote cooperation with Japan have led to a severe backlash in the polls.

Liberal perspectives have focused on promoting the virtuous triangle of democratic peace, international organisation, and economic interdependence in the region in the hope of resolving conflict through treaties and other international conventions, and the rationality of universal win-win scenarios. Throughout East Asia a premium has been placed on economic development, with rapid success in this field combined with high levels of industrialization, urbanization, and modernization across the board. Regional developmentalism has been labelled "econophoria," whereby the solution to all governance challenges, whether domestic or international, is sought through the prioritization of economic growth. State-centric macroeconomic development has been described as assuming "cult-like status" in East Asia.[14]

Economic development itself, however, does not automatically lead to an interdependence-induced peace between states. Competition for limited pools of resources necessary for development raises the perspective of resource wars. Already tensions are high in the Mekong region of Southeast Asia due to hydroelectric dam construction along the river dramatically impacting the security of those living downstream. Tensions in the South China Sea are as much about marine resources and trade routes as they are about geopolitics. Recent tensions between Japan and South Korea, between the great powers China and the US, and between Russia and the EU have been amplified by resource competition, trade wars, and economic sanctions.

13 Barry Buzan and George Segal, 1998, "Rethinking East Asian Security." In Michael T. Klare and Yohgesh Chandrani (eds.) *World Security: Challenges for a New Century*, pp.96-112. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998) p.107.

14 Kenneth Christie and Denny Roy, *The Politics of Human Rights in East Asia*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p.5.

Competition for markets among the export-orientated economies of East Asia can severely undermine incentives for cooperation between them. It can also impact on strategic policymaking, with lesser powers being caught between the rock of dependence on the US-led economic Washington consensus and security San Francisco system of hub-and-spokes, and the hard place of dependence on the Chinese market. In the competitive rush to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) to rise up the development status ladder, countries in the region have mortgaged their autonomy, and thus a significant element of their traditional national security to first, the US, then after the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and most recently, to the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

Neither of these traditional state-centric perspectives has proven up to the task of promoting peace in an increasingly complex operating environment. They have limited the opportunities to move beyond zero-sum perceptions, and restricted attempts to overcome the challenges of antagonistic relationships to the level of mere conflict management or at best symbolic conflict resolution. Or, in the words of John Ruggie, "a reasonably stable balance is the best that one can hope to achieve in the Asia-Pacific region".[15] Conflict management is the long-term management of an intractable conflict to avoid its worst manifestation (interstate war). Conflict resolution seeks to bring an end to a conflict through some type of "final" agreement, but potentially leaves ongoing trust issues unresolved. Increasingly, therefore, theoretical and policy discourse has turned to the concept of conflict "transformation". This implies the further step of transforming conflictual relationships by seeking "to change the conditions that give rise to the underlying root causes of the conflict" and drawing attention to the systematic transforming of "social relationships" potentially leading to a comprehensive and lasting peace.[16]

Transformative approaches emphasise "positive, proactive programs that promote peace building, rather than negative, reactive programs intended to reduce violence", with a focus on harmony, understanding, and effective problem-solving.[17] They tend to be culturally nuanced rather than universalist/solidarist, and reflect the roles of national, organizational, professional, cultural, and gender frames in shaping the building of peace. The logical implications of a comprehensive peace include a focus on human security rather than the security of states. Earl Conteh-Morgan further notes that human security at the personal, institutional, and structural-cultural levels can be more effectively realized in the process of peacebuilding if "culture and identity and an interpretive bottom-up approach to peacebuilding are taken into account when addressing the problems of marginalized individuals, groups, and communities;" and both material as well as socio-cultural contexts are considered critical factors.[18] Hence, new perspectives reflect more of a social construction of peace combining top-down and bottom-up initiatives through a process of hybridity.

Furthermore, in the contemporary governance discourse and increasingly in practice, peace and security are contested concepts in terms of the referent object, the scope of issues covered (the degree of securitization), and indeed within specific issues. New thinking on security has come to the fore, with input from academics and from practitioners in IOs and middle-power states. NTS perspectives and new security challenges have seen the broadening of the scope of enquiry along the x-axis of issues from a strict focus on national survival in a hostile operating environment and questions related to war and peace, to include some or all the

15 John Ruggie, "Multilateralism", p.563.

16 Louise Diamond, "On Developing a Common Vocabulary: The Conflict Continuum." *Peace Builder* 1(4) (1994), p.3; Hugh Miall, Oliver Ramsbotham and Tom Woodhouse, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), p.21.

17 Paul Kimmel, "Assessing the Impact of Peace Building Processes" *Modern Science and Vedic Science* 5(1-2) (1992), p.125.

18 Earl Conteh-Morgan, "Peacebuilding and Human Security: A Constructivist Perspective", *International Journal of Peace Studies* 10(1) (Spring/Summer, 2005), p.69.

following: a focus on non-military rather than military threats, transnational rather than national threats, and multilateral or collective rather than self-help security solutions. Within both security and peacebuilding discourses, there has also been increasing emphasis on individual human beings and the planet or global biosphere, corresponding to a bi-directional expansion along the y-axis of referent objects. The following section considers the responsiveness of international cooperation and security architectures to the new issues and policy prescriptions.

Responsiveness of International Organization and Multilateralism

The traditional role of the process of international organization has fundamentally, even though not exclusively, been to address the problem of interstate war. The institutionalization of multilateral security cooperation at the global level, under first the League of Nations (albeit a false dawn), and more recently and successfully, the UN system, has contributed significantly to the resolution of existing conflicts and the generation of a more peaceful international society. International organization can further be seen as a transitional process from the international anarchic conditions which generate conflict, towards the aspiration of global governance, whereby states are actively brought together to solve common problems, reconcile conflicting interests, and generate collective good. Meanwhile, "global public governance" can be viewed as the formal and informal multilateral institutions, networks, and regimes, through which high-minded "utopian" ideals are translated into "real-world" international political action.[19]

Multilateralism is part of this broader conceptualization, and "can be defined as the practice of co-ordinating national policies in groups of three or more states, through *ad hoc* arrangements or by means of institutions" and which has become increasingly important since the end of World War II.[20] Key elements of multilateralism include aspiration to universality, welcoming of large numbers of participants, and a strong levelling impulse.[21] The formal sovereign equality of states within multilateral architectures allows greater participation and leverage in institutional decision-making by states that are not great powers, and do not (or no longer) aspire to be. International commissions are prominent among these new forms of collective action. They are *ad hoc* transnational investigative mechanisms, aimed at transforming "the assumptions and staid thinking that plague long-standing problems in international relations".[22] They have featured prominently in consideration of both traditional security challenges and NTS issues of global governance.

Middle powers have featured prominently in these international organisational initiatives. These actors lack "compulsory power," the military resources to dominate others or the economic resources to bribe countries into adopting policies that they would not otherwise pursue. Yet they differ from the small or "system ineffectual" states which have little or no influence. They are, potentially, "system affecting states" which can have a significant impact within a narrower policy area, or in conjunction with others.[23] This also differentiates them from another class of understudied agents, "rising powers", which may ultimately have the capacity to act as great powers or have already newly arrived at this level.[24]

19 Sorpong Peou, *Global Public Governance* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2022), pp.12-13; Timo Kivimäki, *Paradigms of Peace* (London: Imperial College Press, 2016).

20 Robert Keohane, "Multilateralism: An Agenda for Research" *International Journal* 45(4) (1990), p.731.

21 Miles Kahler, "Multilateralism with Small and Large Numbers" *International Organization* 46(3) (1992), p.681.

22 Jeffrey Robertson, "In Search of a Middle-Power Rethink on North Korea Policy." *The Interpreter*, November 25, 2020. https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/search-middle-power-rethink-north-korea-policy.

23 Matthias vom Hau, James Scott, and David Hulme, "Beyond the BRICs: Alternative Strategies of Influence in the Global Politics of Development" *European Journal of Development Research* 24(2) (2012), pp.187-188.

24 Shahar Hameiri, Lee Jones, and John Hethershaw, *Rising Powers and State Transformation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).

Middlepowermanship also refers to the behavioural characteristics of this class of actor. They are enthusiastic advocates of multilateral co-operation at the global level. So much so, that middle powers can be considered the chief proponents of multilateralism, and initiators of most of the global international commissions. In pursuit of niche diplomatic areas where they can secure the most influence for their limited geopolitical resources, middle powers are most identified with new, NTS, and human-centred policy platforms, earning reputations, or consciously aspiring to be known as the secular saints of global governance.

Freed from Cold War divides and flush from a successful collective security operation pushing Saddam Hussein's Iraq out of its occupation of Kuwait, President George H. W. Bush proclaimed a "new world order" governed according to the rule of law.[25] His successor, Bill Clinton noted that "multilateral action held promise as never before".[26] After the institutions of global governance had been placed on the back foot during the unilateralism of the George W. Bush Presidency, "moral multilateralism" formed part of the Obama doctrine. Unfortunately, such optimism appears to have been unfounded. The administration of President Donald Trump disdained multilateralism in all forms and dealt the process of global governance a blow from which it has yet to recover. President Joe Biden was unable to rebuild faith in US support for global governance. His single-term administration, despite recommitting to some of the international accords from which Trump had signalled an intention to withdraw, exacerbated rather than alleviated international concerns about US leadership (or lack thereof). The international community is now faced with a second Trump administration, which promises to further undermine US support for global governance and cooperation. Yet, the seeds of the demise of universalism were sown well before.

Many multilateral IOs and less formal institutions are currently under pressure and the demise of the liberal international order (LIO) is "the talk of town".[27] In particular, IOs with diverging preferences among members (as is most likely among those with the largest membership) and those that are less institutionalized are more likely to fail.[28] Responses to contemporary challenges and collective action problems such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the humanitarian crisis of refugees and forced migration, and climate change have revealed multilateral global governance to be particularly weak.[29] The need for effective multi-country collaboration has soared, but at the same time multilateral talks have inevitably failed. "These failures represent not only the perpetual lack of international consensus, but also a flawed obsession with multilateralism as the panacea for all the world's ills".[30] In particular, the challenges faced by the structures of multilateral cooperation can be seen as a failure of maxilateralism (the aspiration to include the largest possible number of participants in the regime).[31] At the same time and in a related fashion, middle powers have experienced severe challenges in operating on the global stage, often coming up against the harsh realities of great power intransigence, but also regional epistemological resistance to their normative universalism.

Thus, Moisés Naím proposes that we abandon the "fool's errand" of multilateralism in favour of a new form of security architecture: "minilateralism," by which is meant "a smarter, more targeted approach, bringing to the table the smallest possible number of countries needed to have the largest possible impact on solving a particular problem".[32] This smallest possible number is usually identified as being between three and five state actors. Minilaterals have proliferated in the Indo-Pacific and interest in them among the states of East Asia, especially those in Northeast Asia, is at an all-time high. The "standard-bearer" of

25 George H.W. Bush, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Persian Gulf Crisis and the Federal Budget Deficit." George Bush Presidential Library and Museum. (1990) https://bush41library.tamu.edu/archives/public-papers/2217.

26 Clinton, William J, "Address to the UN General Assembly." U.S. Department of State. (1993) https://2009-2017.state.gov/p/io/potusunga/207375.htm.

27 Maria Josepha Debre and Hylke Dijkstra, "Institutional Design for a Post-Liberal Order: Why some International Organizations Live Longer than Others" *European Journal of International Relations* 27(1), (2021), pp.311.

28 Debre and Dijkstra, "Institutional Design", p.311.

29 Mario Telò, *Reforming Multilateralism in Post-COVID Times. For a More Regionalised Binding and Legitimate United Nations* (Brussels: Foundation for European Progressive Studies, 2021).

30 Moisés Naím, "Minilateralism" *Foreign Policy* 173 (2009), p.137.

31 Debre and Dijkstra, "Institutional Design", p.311.

32 Naím. "Minilateralism", p.135

regional minilateralism is the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), "the boldest minilateral" is AUKUS, announced in 2021, which brings together the already close allies Australia, the US, , and the UK, and the most recent US-Japan-Korea trilateral.[33]

Yet there are major problems with regional minilaterals and their traditional security focus. The first problem is that such frameworks are "largely a Western construct that attempts to fill the expectation and capability gaps in regional security systems".[34] With colonial overhangs and regional resistance to external strategic interference, they face immediate obstacles to the generation of collective public value. Indeed, there are "lingering concerns that minilateral partnerships are designed to serve large power interests and not individual state interests in the region". Most suspicion must of course fall on the US, as the driving force behind the most prominent minilateral security arrangements, but there are similar concerns regarding the motivations behind Chinese minilateral initiatives.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) although now expanding its membership, started life as a minilateral, and is often depicted as providing a counterweight to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Mechanism (LMC) involves five states other than China: Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam and Thailand, and is seen as potentially replacing the Asian Development Bank (ADB) led Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) initiative.[35] China and Russia's activism in the Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (BRICS) minilateral poses a direct challenge to the Western-led LIO.

A second, related challenge to the efficacy of such minilaterals, therefore, is that they risk narrowing the space available for small and middle powers to contribute to the discourse or security policy platforms, as they are thrust into "with us or against us" narratives by the great powers which dominate each of the architectures. This links to a third problematic area for regional security multilateralism, that of its exclusionary rather than inclusive nature. Such institutions threaten to "replace the provision of international public goods with club goods benefiting a narrower range of countries, while marginalizing formal international institutions".[36]

Here, then, we return to the inherently less confrontational nature of NTS issues and policy prescription for regional actors. Furthermore, only through addressing NTS issues and the spillover between them and traditional security challenges can we hope to transform conflictual relationships in East Asia. The next section addresses how new conceptualisations of regional security architectures not only offer greater hope for meaningful international governance in East Asia but can also benefit from the rise of a new category of actor in a symbiotic relationship.

Disruptive Innovation and Second-Tier Actors

In 2005, United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Kofi Annan referenced the interrelatedness of the three pillars of the UN by noting, "[W]e will not enjoy security without development, development without security, and neither without respect for human rights. Unless all these causes are advanced, none will succeed".[37] In doing so he neatly encapsulated the progress made by the evolution

33 Arzan Tarapore and Brendan Taylor, "Minilaterals and Deterrence: A Critical New Nexus" *Asia Policy* 17(4) (2022), p.2.

34 Kei Koga, "A New Strategic Minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific" *Asia Policy* 17(4) (2022), p.7.

35 Sovachana Pou and Bradley J. Murg, "The Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Mechanism: Confronting New Realities in Cambodia and the Greater Mekong Subregion" *CSCAP Regional Security Outlook Jan*. 1 (2019), p.2.

36 Stewart Patrick, "The New ´New Multilateralism´: Minilateral Cooperation, but at What Cost?" *Global Summitry* 1(2) (2015), p.130.

37 Kofi Annan, "In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All" *Report of the Secretary-General* (2005). https://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/in_larger_freedom.shtml.

of security and governance conceptualizations, as well as ongoing challenges. Over time, security provision in both theory and practice, has become increasingly entwined with other global value aspirations and provisions. Policy prescription and obligations for those who govern, as well as putative peacebuilders, therefore, must increasingly consider spillover between these diverse agendas, and this has been reflected in the newly emerging humanitarian-development-peace nexus (HDPN) discourse. The operational shortcomings, almost two decades after Annan's original call to action for a more integrated and human-centred approach to peace and security amount to "noble opportunities" for a new category of actor.[38]

Second-tier actors (the author's construct) is a new category introduced by the author that is both qualitatively (normatively) and quantitatively (in power hierarchical terms) different from other categories. They are herein conceptualized as actors that have greater than "middling" power resources, but also concentrate their resources into geographically distinct regions. They have more pragmatic, or "realistic" aspirations for their contributions to international cooperation and governance, focusing their niche diplomacy on areas of international public policy where there is a happy coincidence of national interest and "collateral benefit" to other members of the international community and vulnerable individuals and groups. While they have greater independent capacity for action than middle powers, they are also more sensitive to cultural relativity and more focused on regional rather than universal public value creation.

They are, therefore, distinguished from traditional middle powers with their more limited resources, but global normative aspirations. They are likewise also distinct from rising powers, as they do not have, or at least no longer have great power aspirations, and are cognisant of their geostrategic limitations. They may be considered good regional citizens rather than global secular saints. The emphasis here is on distinct policy formation and initiatives, and opportunities for leadership and cooperation. Hence the term is also different from conceptualisations of in-between and pivotal powers, which are geopolitical terms, in which the referent objects are only considered in relation to the great powers and their policies rather than as sources of independent policy action beyond mere hedging, balancing, or bandwagoning.

What then can and should the regional second-tier powers and their societies do to promote solutions to international public value challenges? Rather than lament geostrategic inadequacies and challenges, it would benefit regional second-tier actors to divert at least some of their resources to cooperation to generate public value in ways that are not dependent on global consensus, or the involvement or acquiescence of the great powers. In business theory, the term 'disruptive innovation' was coined to describe an innovation that creates a new market and value network and eventually disrupts an existing market and value network.[39] Lingfei Wu, Dashun Wang, and James A. Evans later generalised this term to identify disruptive science and technological advances.[40] Basically, it means coming up with radically different policies and ways of doing things that challenge and unsettle existing norms, in the hope of achieving progress. Here it is proposed that we adopt the term to apply to the radical out of the box thinking and practices needed to address both traditional security and NTS challenges in the regional context. These would include but would not be limited to minilateral NTS cooperation between three to five second tier powers, and regional, as opposed to global, international commissions.

38 Seungjoo Lee, "Multilayered World Order and South Korea's Middle Power Diplomacy: The Case of Development Cooperation Policy." *EAI MPDI Working Paper*, October (2014). https://www.eai.or.kr/data/bbs/eng_report/2014102816225492.pdf.

39 Clayton Christensen, *The Innovator's Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1997).

40 Lingfei Wu, Dashun Wang, and James A. Evans, "Large Teams Develop and Small Teams Disrupt Science and Technology" *Nature* 566 (2019), pp.378–382.

There are numerous advantages to taking this type of institutional approach. First, it would empower new second-tier agents. Second, it would remove the great power tensions from NTS security promotion. Third, it would allow for spillover from NTS problem solving to traditional security de-escalation and confidence-building by establishing a non-threatening, non-confrontational cooperative culture of yes-ability in the region being addressed. As new actors, second-tier powers have a noble opportunity to pursue their own interests while simultaneously promoting an expansion of the international provision of public value and public goods. This in turn leads to an expansion of public value provision through international organisation to include greater, and more targeted NTS cooperation. Furthermore, these proposed institutions represent arenas of potential cooperation between second-tier actors, and can serve as confidence-building measures allowing reconciliation between formerly antagonistic entities, and ultimately spillover into more traditional security issues.

South Korea is a paradigmatic example of what the author has in mind when talking of second-tier powers. It is also well-placed to exercise leadership in the construction of NTS minilaterals and regional international commissions. In hierarchical power measurement terms, South Korea has long been more than a middle-ranked power. While in terms of territory it is on the small side, especially when compared with global powers, and its population base is somewhere in the middle of the pack, measurements of its military and economic might are far greater than this hierarchical position. The country's 550,000 active service men and women places eighth globally, while if reserves are included, South Korea's total of 3,699,000 is second only to that of Vietnam. South Korea's defence budget is in the top 10 at more than US$50 billion. Hence the ROK military ranks number 6 in the world, just behind that of Japan. South Korea also ranks in the top 10 in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) and is part of an exclusive club of only eight states with over 50 million population, and over US$30,000 GDP per capita.

South Korea has an important tradition of NTS advocacy and engagement. Successive governments in Seoul have promoted South Korea's role as a convener, conciliator and proactive agenda-setter in international negotiations and multilateral platforms such as the 2010 G20 Seoul Summit, the High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in 2011, the Nuclear Security Summit in 2012, and the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI). The Moon Jae-in administration's proposal for a Northeast Asia Peace Community (NEAPC) contained three components: a Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Platform (NAPCP), a New Northern Policy (NNP) and a New Southern Policy (NSP). The ambitious aim was to build a sustainable regional system of cooperation with the ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the middle power grouping of MIKTA, India and Northeast Asian states. This is an area of continuity with the Yoon administration retaining many of the key aspirations in its Indo-Pacific Policy platform.

Seoul has been participating actively in regional multilateralism and is especially committed to ASEAN institution- and community-building efforts. South Korea has also assumed a leadership role in attempted regionalisation initiatives. The inauguration of East Asia Summit (EAS) in 2005 was led by former Korean President Kim Dae-Jung's initiative on the establishment of the East Asian Vision Group (EAVG) in 1998, which in turn grew out of the experience of the 1997 financial crisis. Seoul has been involved in all the major ASEAN-led dialogue platforms. In these multilateral institutions, however, South Korea has striven

particularly to take on a neutral role while keeping a low profile regarding political and traditional security issues, a pragmatic second-tier regional good citizen indeed.

Much of the internal perception of South Korea, as well as the external strategic analysis of its policy options, has focused on the relative weakness and vulnerability of the country in what has been described as one of the most dangerous regions in the world. Yet, the ROK is far from being the "shrimp among whales" as it is often depicted and has consistently focused on NTS issues and development assistance as part of its niche diplomacy as it aims to become, in the language of the current administration in Seoul, a Global Pivotal State (GPS) in the region and beyond. Restoring relationships, especially with countries in the Indo-Pacific region, is seen as a crucial element in achieving President Yoon's GPS vision.[41]

While South Korea may be the paradigmatic example in the region, other potential second-tier actors, reflecting similar capacities and inclinations for action, cooperation, and leadership include Japan, Australia, Indonesia, Vietnam, and even limited regional multilateral organizations such as ASEAN, or, increasingly, the European Union (EU) as it increases its engagement with East Asia, in particular within NTS realms of operation.[42]

Conclusion

Given the absence of traditional multilateral security architectures, the polarisation of international relations, the state-centricity of policy platforms, the existence of multiple flashpoints, great power contestation, and by extension, contestation between the minilateral security alliances they lead, the future might indeed seem grim for East Asian peace and security. Perhaps unsurprisingly, therefore, pessimism has been more prevalent than optimism, and conflict management has been seen the best that one can hope for in the region. Even in these darkest of times, however, the author sees a glimmer of hope through the potential embodied in new or rising actors (especially second-tier powers), new issues, even when they offer additional challenges to governance and international cooperation, and new configurations of international cooperation such as NTS minilaterals or regional international commissions.

While current universal and maxilateral aspirations may, ultimately, be doomed to fail, undermined by the intransigence of and competition between great powers, and inter-regional divergence over conceptualisations of good governance, this does not preclude intra-regional cooperation, even within essentially contested and conflictual East Asia. Indeed, while the liberal international rules-based order, and traditional minilaterals depend on supposed "like-minded" actors, true normative convergence is more likely between co-regional actors with similar power differentials. Ultimately, it may be possible to revisit global multilateralism with more optimism, but only through reconciliation between competing epistemological traditions, and identification of an inter-regional overlapping consensus.

This process is best attempted at the NTS level for three reasons. First, because NTS issues are inherently less conflictual, and are seen as less of a

41 Koyoun Chung, "South Korea's Quest to Become a Global Pivotal State" *The Diplomat November* 4, (2023).

42 Brendan M. Howe. "The Rise, Fall, and (Potential) Rise Again of East Asian Middle Powers" *East Asian Policy* 15(4) (2023), pp.116-132.

threat to national sovereignty. Second, because they are vital for the processes of comprehensive peacebuilding and conflict transformation. Third, because there is already more of an overlapping governance consensus on NTS issues, especially those related to vulnerable individuals and groups. Hence the near universal endorsement of the human security and responsibility to protect (R2P) paradigms. Before attempting to operationalise a universal human rights regime, perhaps we need to start institutionalising the prohibition of universal human wrongs.

Disclosure statement

The author declares to have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

Funding

This article has been produced as part of a research project supported by the POSCO Fellowship at the East-West Center, Honolulu.

References

Acharya, Amitav. "Guns and Butter: Why do Human Security and Traditional Security Co-exist in Asia?" *Global Economic Review: Perspectives on East Asian Economies and Industries* 32(3) (2003).

Annan, Kofi. "In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All" Report of the Secretary-General (2005). https://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/in_larger_freedom.shtml.

Betts, Richard. "Wealth, Power, and Conflict: East Asia after the Cold War" in Ross, R.S. (ed.) *East Asia in Transition* (London: Routledge, 1995).

Bush, George H.W. "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Persian Gulf Crisis and the Federal Budget Deficit." George Bush Presidential Library and Museum. (1990) https://bush41library.tamu.edu/archives/public-papers/2217.

Buzan, Barry and George Segal. 1998. "Rethinking East Asian Security." In Michael T. Klare and Yohgesh Chandrani (eds.) *World Security: Challenges for a New Century*, pp.96-112. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

Cha, Victor. "Ripe for Rivalry: Has Asia's Moment of Reckoning Finally Arrived?" *Foreign Policy* (2012). December 13, 2012. https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/12/13/ripe-for-rivalry/.

Chhangani, Alisha, Audrey Tey, and Elina Noor. "Is Minilateralism the Future of the Indo-Pacific?" *Summary Report of Asia Society Policy Institute* March 29, 2022. https://asiasociety.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/ASPI_IndoPacific_SummReport_finalize.pdf

Christensen, Clayton. *The Innovator's Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1997).

Christie, Kenneth and Denny Roy. *The Politics of Human Rights in East Asia*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

Chung, Koyoun. "South Korea's Quest to Become a Global Pivotal State" *The Diplomat* November 4, (2023).

Clinton, William J. "Address to the UN General Assembly." U.S. Department of State. (1993). https://2009-2017.state.gov/p/io/potusunga/207375.htm.

Conteh-Morgan, Earl. "Peacebuilding and Human Security: A Constructivist Perspective", *International Journal of Peace Studies* 10(1) (Spring/Summer, 2005).

Debre, Maria Josepha, and Hylke Dijkstra. "Institutional Design for a Post-Liberal Order: Why some International Organizations Live Longer than Others" *European Journal of International Relations* 27(1) (2021), pp.311-339.

Diamond, Louise. "On Developing a Common Vocabulary: The Conflict Continuum." *Peace Builder* 1(4) (1994).

Friedberg, Aaron. "Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia" *International Security* 18(3) (1994), pp.5-33.

Hameiri, Shahar, Lee Jones, and John Hethershaw. *Rising Powers and State Transformation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).

Hettne, Björn and Fredrik Söderbaum. "Theorising the Rise of Regionness" *New Political Economy* 5(3) (2000), pp.457-473.

Howe, Brendan M. "Challenges to and Opportunities for International Organization in East Asia" *Global Society* 35(4) (2021).

_____ "East Asian Security Cooperation Shortcomings and Opportunities for Second-Tier Actors in the Region" *Journal of East Asian Affairs* 36(1) (2023), pp.39-78.

_____ "The Rise, Fall, and (Potential) Rise Again of East Asian Middle Powers" *East Asian Policy* 15(4) (2023), pp.116-132.

Kahler, Miles. "Multilateralism with Small and Large Numbers" *International Organization* 46(3) (1992).

Keohane, Robert. "Multilateralism: An Agenda for Research" *International Journal* 45(4) (1990).

Kivimäki, Timo. *Paradigms of Peace* (London: Imperial College Press, 2016).

Kimmel, Paul. "Assessing the Impact of Peace Building Processes" *Modern Science and Vedic Science* 5(1-2) (1992).

Mahbubani, Kishore. "The Pacific Way" *Foreign Affairs* 74(1) (1995), p.102.

Koga, Kei. "A New Strategic Minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific" *Asia Policy* 17(4) (2022), p.7.

Stewart Patrick. "The New ´New Multilateralism´: Minilateral Cooperation, but at What Cost?" *Global Summitry* 1(2) (2015).

Lee, Moosung and Thomas Diez. "The EU, Korea, and Conflict Transformation through Regional Integration" *Asia Europe Journal* 21 (2023), pp.493–506.

Lee, Seungjoo. "Multilayered World Order and South Korea's Middle Power Diplomacy: The Case of Development Cooperation Policy." *EAI MPDI Working Paper*, October (2014). https://www.eai.or.kr/data/bbs/eng_report/2014102816225492.pdf.

Miall, Hugh, Oliver Ramsbotham and Tom Woodhouse. *Contemporary Conflict Resolution* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999).

Naím, Moisés. "Minilateralism" *Foreign Policy* 173 (2009).

Novotná, Tereza, Thomas Christiansen, and Moosung Lee. "EU-Korea Relations at 60: Managing Cooperation in the Context of Great Power Rivalry" *Asia Europe Journal* 21 (2023), pp.481–492.

Peou, Sorpong. *Global Public Governance* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2022).

Pou, Sovachana and Bradley J. Murg. "The Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Mechanism: Confronting New Realities in Cambodia and the Greater Mekong Subregion" *CSCAP Regional Security Outlook* Jan. 1 (2019), pp.1-4.

Robertson, Jeffrey. "In Search of a Middle-Power Rethink on North Korea Policy." *The Interpreter*, November 25, 2020. https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/search-middle-power-rethink-north-korea-policy.

Ruggie, John. "Multilateralism: The Anatomy of an Institution" *International Organization* 46(3) (1992).

Tarapore, Arzan and Brendan Taylor. "Minilaterals and Deterrence: A Critical New Nexus" *Asia Policy* 17(4) (2022).

Telò, Mario. *Reforming Multilateralism in Post-COVID Times. For a More Regionalised Binding and Legitimate United Nations* (Brussels: Foundation for European Progressive Studies, 2021).

vom Hau, Matthias, James Scott, and David Hulme. "Beyond the BRICs: Alternative Strategies of Influence in the Global Politics of Development" *European Journal of Development Research* 24(2) (2012).

Wu, Lingfei, Dashun Wang, and James A. Evans. "Large Teams Develop and Small Teams Disrupt Science and Technology" *Nature* 566 (2019), pp.378–382.