The rapidly changing security landscape in East Asia in recent years has created growing pressures to re-examine the existing security architecture for the region and seek new ways of meeting future challenges.

Political scientist G. John Ikenberry, who served as guest editor of our cover package for this issue of Global Asia, provides an introduction to the topics covered in the essays that follow.

The policy debate on security cooperation in East Asia has quickened in recent years. This is because the region is undergoing extraordinary change with the rise of China, the “normalization” of Japan (its emergence from the constraints placed on it after World War II and its resumption of a more normal geopolitical and security posture) and the ongoing nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula. Economic downturn, nuclear proliferation, rising defense budgets, unresolved territorial disputes and frayed alliances are together reshaping the security landscape. Newer, non-traditional issues such as energy security, climate change and transnational crime are also creating new interests and constituencies for expanded security cooperation.

Amid these regional transformations, what sort of new mechanisms or institutions are needed? There is some discussion of building on the Six-Party talks mechanism to create a permanent forum for security dialogue in Northeast Asia. A Six-Party working group has been created to explore this. Some experts have proposed wider mechanisms encompassing the whole of East Asia, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). One of the preeminent concerns in debates about a new or expanded security architecture in East Asia is how to engage and incorporate a rising China into a stable and ongoing regional security structure. Another concern is the future role of America’s bilateral security alliances. How would fundamental features of today’s regional security system operate in the context of new, more inclusive mechanisms? There are questions about what the central focus of a new security mecha-
nism might be. Would it be primarily concerned with traditional great power issues like arms control, nuclear weapons, defense budgets and the like, or would it be concerned with newer issues such as energy, the environment and human security?

The essays in this cover package together provide a portrait of this debate. The contributors represent a cross-section of national views — Wang Yizhou (China), Hitoshi Tanaka (Japan), Susan Shirk and Michael Green (the US), Cho Hyun (South Korea), Kishore Mahbubani (Singapore) and Dmitri Trenin (Russia). What is clear is that countries in the region are interested in expanding security cooperation for a variety of reasons. Some see a new security mechanism as essential for mitigating the insecurity and competition that might follow from the region’s shifting power relations. The rise of China, the normalization of Japan and great power politics could trigger a spiral of conflict. Proponents of a new security mechanism argue that without efforts to address the sources of insecurity it is almost inevitable that conflict between China, Japan and the US will grow. A regional security institution or dialogue mechanism can provide diplomatic tools and an information flow that can dampen this sort of conflict. As Susan Shirk’s essay points out, a security institution could do various things: encourage transparency and early notification of members’ military or security-related actions; resolve misunderstandings and prevent miscalculations over others’ intentions; promote peaceful resolution of disputes; and facilitate diplomatic exchanges needed to generate principles and visions for regional peace and stability.

Proposals for a new security architecture are also advanced with the hope of promoting wider collective actions. Opportunities for cooperation may be missed because of a lack of knowledge of joint interests, problems that call for collective action and uncertainties about commitment. China, for example, may have an interest in establishing a cooperative security environment that will allow it to address energy security, environmental degradation and other emerging non-traditional security problems. The extraordinary growth of the Chinese economy is creating externalities in the region — economic, political, environmental and security — that should worry Beijing. China is clearly searching for a regional strategy that will allow it to address these emerging dangers and instabilities. Japan and other states have also proposed various new regional institutions aimed at tackling “new” security problems. Hitoshi Tanaka’s essay provides one of the best statements of this vision of an East Asian Community that would develop several layers of inclusive and rules-oriented mechanisms to expand cooperation on common economic and political problems.

Existing institutions are already doing a lot of work in these areas. Perhaps the most explicit regional grouping that aims at collective action is the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, which seeks to build stronger open economic ties across Asia. The various efforts by ASEAN to work with China, Japan and South Korea on regional monetary and financial stability also are examples. In this sense, institutions are useful in providing tools for states to address problems that come with growing interdependence.

Regional institutions also provide a mechanism for states to signal restraint and commitment to others in the region. This is what the US and its allies pursue in their bilateral pacts. The US makes specific security commitments to Japan, South Korea and other regional partners; they tie themselves to the US and support its general strategic presence and goals. China also uses participation in regional institutions as a way to convey restraint and leadership. As Kishore Mahbubani notes in his essay, it has actively participated in institutions such as ASEAN + 3, ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and East Asian Summit (EAS).

These groupings give Beijing a tool to signal what it hopes will be seen as its non-belligerent intentions. Rather than being seen as a disconnected and increasingly powerful wild card, China uses institutions to reassure and engage.
### Military Strength of Key Countries Affecting East Asia

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>2.25 million [800,000]</td>
<td>31,300</td>
<td>760 [1 + 15 + 61]</td>
<td>3,084 [1,895]</td>
<td>$59 billion</td>
<td>Non-Proliferation Treaty signatory. [240]</td>
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<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>1.33 million [1.16 million]</td>
<td>10,340</td>
<td>143 [1 + 8 + 18]</td>
<td>1,409 [653]</td>
<td>$32 billion</td>
<td>Non-signatory to Non-Proliferation Treaty. [60-80]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>239,000 [57,900]</td>
<td>2,040</td>
<td>147 [0 + 15 + 18]</td>
<td>653 [360]</td>
<td>$44 billion</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>655,000 [3.04 million]</td>
<td>10,130</td>
<td>170 [0 + 10 + 10]</td>
<td>1,430 [490]</td>
<td>$25.5 billion</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Korea</td>
<td>1.19 million [7.7 million]</td>
<td>19,700</td>
<td>810 [0 + 0 + 70]</td>
<td>1,770 [920]</td>
<td>$5.5 billion</td>
<td>Withdrawn from Non-Proliferation Treaty. [Up to 10]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>290,000 [1.6 million]</td>
<td>2,592</td>
<td>100 [0 + 11 + 4]</td>
<td>585 [420]</td>
<td>$10.5 billion</td>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>316,000 [400,000]</td>
<td>2,122</td>
<td>111 [0 + 0 + 2]</td>
<td>305 [94]</td>
<td>$4.7 billion</td>
<td>None</td>
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Sources:
- globalsecurity.org
- globalfirepower.com
- South Korean Ministry of National Defense
- US Air Force Association
- Bharat Rakshak
- Japan Ministry of Defense
- indoforce.tripod.com
- Natural Resources Defense Council

All figures 2008 or later, except where noted:  2007  * 2006  † 2005  2 2004  * 2003

**Notes:**
- ° 2007
- § 2006
- † 2005
- # 2004
- * 2003
Looking into the future, it is possible to glimpse the general logic of old and new regional security institutions. First, practical and functionally specific issues will drive the debate over security architecture. Just as European regional institutions were developed to solve practical problems of post-war economic cooperation, so too are Asian governments looking for ways to create a stable and friendly environment for economic and political cooperation. Second, it is highly unlikely the region will merge existing institutions into a singular regional organization, such as an Asian version of the European Union (EU). Rather, there will be a wide array of institutions operating semi-independently. Asia is and will remain a layered cake of regional institutions. Finally, these multilateral institutions and groupings are consistent with America’s bilateral security pacts. The US and the other countries in the region do not need to choose between the old alliances and new multilateral security arrangements. Both have a role.

Overall, regionalism is thriving in East Asia because it is useful to many different constituencies in many different ways. Regional security institutions do not just benefit China or the US. Going forward, these will be growing reasons for regional security cooperation. The security dilemma, triggered by the rise of Chinese military power and the shifting position of Japan, will continue to create insecurity, and so regional dialogues and mechanisms will be useful. There is also a range of functional problems — energy, the environment and human security — calling for regional collective action.

The demand for regional security cooperation is growing. The debate on how old and new institutions should respond to this is just beginning. These essays provide a guide to this lively debate.

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