Conflict Prevention and Management in Northeast Asia
Conflict Prevention and Management in Northeast Asia:
The Korean Peninsula and Taiwan Strait in Comparison

Edited by

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# List of Abbreviations

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APEC</td>
<td>Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation</td>
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<td>ARATS</td>
<td>Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait</td>
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<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asian Nations</td>
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<td>CBMs</td>
<td>Confidence-Building Measures</td>
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<td>CCP</td>
<td>Chinese Communist Party</td>
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<td>CSCAP</td>
<td>Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific</td>
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<td>DMZ</td>
<td>Demilitarized Zone</td>
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<tr>
<td>DPP</td>
<td>Democratic Progressive Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>DPRK</td>
<td>Democratic People’s Republic of Korea</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEU</td>
<td>Highly Enriched Uranium program</td>
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<tr>
<td>IAEA</td>
<td>International Atomic Energy Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>KEDO</td>
<td>Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>KMT</td>
<td>Kuomintang</td>
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<tr>
<td>LWRs</td>
<td>Light Water Reactors</td>
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<tr>
<td>NPT</td>
<td>Non-Proliferation Treaty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLA</td>
<td>People’s Liberation Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRC</td>
<td>People’s Republic of China</td>
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<tr>
<td>ROC</td>
<td>Republic of China</td>
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<tr>
<td>ROK</td>
<td>Republic of Korea</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEF</td>
<td>Straits Exchange Foundation</td>
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Northeast Asia’s recent history tells a story of war and conflict that spans from the Japanese invasion of the Koreas in the late 1800s, through the Sino-Japanese war, the Chinese civil war, the Korean War, and the Cold War. Although the Cold War has formally ended, the European experience of reintegration since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the implosion of the Soviet Union has simply not been replicated in Northeast Asia. Indeed, Northeast Asia remains a divided region and interregional state to state relations are strained, marked by distrust and skepticism. Moreover, few attempts have been made at the intergovernmental level to decrease tension, and efforts undertaken on other societal levels have been modest and often designed only with national interests in mind. However, despite the high levels of tension and the many unsettled territorial disputes, the region has been spared armed conflict since the mid-1950s.

Adherents to the realist tradition of international relations accredit the relative peaceful development in the region to the practice of balance of power politics by the involved states. Indeed, it may well be that military power politics has contributed to regional stability, even though it has failed to reduce tension. Nevertheless, as several of the chapters in this volume highlight, it is also possible to identify non-military factors that seem to have been crucial in the creation of a relatively stable Northeast Asia. In accordance with the liberal tradition, such factors include for example the growing economic integration between the regional states. However, the underlying assumption in this volume is that various efforts within the field of conflict prevention and management have made an indisputable contribution to the absence of major armed conflicts in the region. Although there are different explanatory approaches to the security situation in Northeast Asia, few attempts have been made to examine a broad range of the undertaken measures and actions from a conflict preventative approach.
Moreover, the security situation in Northeast Asia is far from static. A number of developments, such as increased economic integration, the rapid information flows, China’s rise, and the increasing militarization in several states will impact interstate relations in the region and possibly also reshape the security landscape in the years to come. Against this background, it becomes important to analyze how Northeast Asia managed to discontinue the trend of violence that plagued the region in the first decades of the twentieth century, thereby increasing the likelihood that a path toward peace will be forged.

**Aim**

This volume addresses Northeast Asia’s two conflict flashpoints—the Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan Strait—in a comparative manner. Although the sources of instability in both cases differ in many aspects, they share a number of similarities. For instance, despite the existence of the two conflicts for over half a century, neither has erupted into military violence. At the same time, neither of the two seems closer to resolution today compared to the mid-1950s. It is also true that an escalation on either the Peninsula or in the Strait would quickly embroil all of the region’s states and most likely the United States, too. Therefore, in addition to immense human suffering—potentially as a consequence of the use of nuclear weapons—a military conflict in Northeast Asia would also have far-reaching consequences for the global economy and the international community.

The consequences of an escalation of these conflicts and the apparent difficulties to bring about a resolution to them highlight the need to identify and apply new strategies. Therefore, past and ongoing undertakings in regard to conflict prevention and management need to be reflected upon and reevaluated. The aim of this volume is to compare and evaluate the various approaches to conflict prevention and management that have been undertaken in regard to the Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan Strait. In this way, the regional states’ behavior can be identified, analyzed, and comprehended. By comparing the measures undertaken on the Korean Peninsula and across the Taiwan Strait respectively, it is hoped that lessons learnt from each case can prove informative for the other. Moreover, by identifying both successful measures and hurdles, it will hopefully be possible to develop improved and better-suited undertakings in the future.

In this volume, China will receive somewhat more attention than other regional states. There are a couple of reasons for this decision. First of all,
China plays a major, albeit different, role in both these conflicts. Second, China’s rise and growing great power status will likely have great implications for the geopolitical balance in the region. In spite of this, China’s engagement and skills in the fields of conflict prevention, conflict management, and preventive diplomacy has been largely neglected, which Samuel Kim highlights and explains in his chapter (Chapter 7).

**Conflict Prevention and Management**

Before presenting an overview of the past and present undertakings within the field of conflict prevention and management in Northeast Asia, it is appropriate to look closer at the very concepts applied.

**Conflict Prevention**

Despite the wide array of writings on conflict prevention, the implied meaning of the term tends to vary between analysts and scholarly publications and a consensus has yet to be reached. In addition, it has developed over time. During the Cold War, many practitioners and academics viewed preventive action as synonymous with pre-emptive strikes. In the post-Cold War era, however, the emphasis has shifted to the peaceful prevention of disputes. David Carment and Albrecht Schnabel suggest a rather inclusive definition that depicts conflict prevention as

> a medium and long-term proactive operational or structural strategy undertaken by a variety of actors, intended to identify and create the enabling conditions for a stable and more predictable international security environment.

Another broad definition is put forward by Michael Lund, who suggests that the concept implies

> any structural or intercessory means to keep intrastate or interstate tension and disputes from escalating into significant violence and use of armed forces, to strengthen the capabilities of potential parties to violent conflict for resolving such disputes peacefully, and to progressively reduce the underlying problems that produce these issues and disputes.

These, and other broader definitions, are often promoted by policy makers and can be seen as a reaction against earlier narrow definitions of security such as the absence of direct military threats. Today, it is commonly accepted that threats to a society or state can have a number of sources and may well originate in bad governance, poverty, or social
injustice. Thus, measures undertaken under the framework of conflict prevention also need to acknowledge the importance of economic and social development, as well as developments within the security, military, and judicial field (so called Security Sector Reforms). Today, these aspects of security, both on a state and individual level, form an integral part of conflict prevention and have contributed to the growing effectiveness of preventative measures.

Direct and Structural Prevention

Conflict prevention is often divided into two categories: direct prevention and structural prevention. Direct conflict prevention refers to measures aimed at preventing the short-term, often imminent, escalation of a potential conflict, such as the dispatch of a mediator or the withdrawal of military forces. Direct prevention is thus directed at more pressing issues that have been defined by the actors or the third party. Such direct strategies are constructed to fit the specific conflict and can be initiated by the actors themselves or by external actors. Structural prevention focuses on more long-term measures that address the underlying causes, as well as factors that could potentially escalate or trigger a conflict. Such measures include economic development assistance or measures to further political participation.

Although there is a real distinction between structural and direct prevention, especially within the policy field, the two strategies are often used concurrently and some measures, such as military disarmament, can have both structural and direct effects. Indeed, the two conflicts focused on in this volume illustrate well the interconnectedness of structural and direct prevention.

Conflict Management

Like the term conflict prevention, there are different takes on how conflict management should best be defined. Fred Tanner defines conflict management as the limitation, mitigation, and/or containment of a conflict without necessarily solving it. Peter Wallensteen and Niklas Swanström expand on this definition and argue that conflict management should imply a change, from destructive to constructive, in the mode of interaction. Yet another scholar, I. William Zartman, who also contributes a chapter to this volume, focuses on the presence of violence and argues that conflict management refers to eliminating violent and violence-related actions so that the conflict can be addressed on a political level. For several of the
definitions of conflict management, an armed conflict is a prerequisite for them to be applicable. Swanström, on the other hand, suggests that conflict management measures can, and in some cases should, be applied even in the absence of a military clash.\textsuperscript{8} He argues that as soon as a structural problem is defined, or a direct conflict is manifest without being militarized, it can and should be addressed by the active parties and the international community.

The reasoning is straightforward given that it is easier to change the mode of interaction from destructive to constructive in an early rather than a late phase of a conflict. The larger the conflict-related costs, both in human suffering and in financial terms, the more difficult it becomes for the political actor to compromise. Moreover, if the parties fail to manage the conflict at an early stage, the trust between them will continue to decrease and the mutual demonization will grow. To reverse this negative cycle, confidence-building measures (CBMs) are crucial in order to strengthen the conflict management process by increasing trust between the actors.

**Conflict Resolution**

The process of conflict management is the foundation for more effective conflict resolution. Although conflict resolution is not the main focus of this volume, it is necessary to make a distinction between management and resolution of a conflict. As opposed to management, conflict resolution refers to resolving the underlying incompatibilities in a conflict and bringing about mutual acceptance of each party’s existence.\textsuperscript{9} Conflict resolution can be both formal and informal. It can either aim at resolving or terminating conflicts in an open and predictable process in accordance with legal principles,\textsuperscript{10} or focus on efforts to increase cooperation among the parties to a conflict and deepen their relationship by addressing the conditions that led to the dispute, fostering positive attitudes and allaying distrust through reconciliation initiatives, and building or strengthening the institutions and processes through which the parties interact.\textsuperscript{11}

Lund’s definition above encapsulates the fundamentals of conflict prevention, management, as well as resolution, and the real difference between these strategies lies in the expected outcome: during the prevention and management phases, the goal is to hinder the conflict from erupting and spreading whereas resolution aims at resolving the underlying divergences. Thus, for a number of Western scholars, the
difference between conflict management and conflict resolution is one of a short-term versus a long-term perspective. Whereas conflict management is about resolving current problems, i.e., in a short-term perspective, conflict resolution should be seen in a long-term perspective aiming at resolving the underlying problems.\(^\text{12}\)

On the other hand, other scholars, especially from non-Western societies, argue that conflict management is a successful long-term tool for resolving conflicts as it creates the foundation for effective conflict resolution.\(^\text{13}\) However, these two approaches entail no inherent contradiction and can thus be applied concurrently to different issues and stages within the same conflict.

In sum, conflict management and conflict resolution are different concepts, but at the same time closely interrelated. They are two mechanisms on different sides of a continuum, applied to the same conflicts but at different stages. This has led scholars like Zartman to argue that the difference between the two concepts merely exists in theory, since in the practical implementation they are closely intertwined.\(^\text{14}\)

**Conflict Prevention and Management in Northeast Asia**

In regard to conflict prevention and management, Northeast Asia is in many ways a region of contradictions. On the one hand, it has a war torn recent history, with serious latent conflicts remaining on the Korean Peninsula and across the Taiwan Strait, and a number of unresolved territorial disputes that are at risk of intensifying. On the other hand, the major conflicts have been kept under control and Northeast Asia has not seen a full-scale war since the Korean War in the 1950s; and several of the regional border disputes have, somewhat unexpectedly, been peacefully resolved over the past couple of decades. Obviously, the reasons for the relative stability in Northeast Asia are many and complex. However, as mentioned previously, the underlying assumption here is that efforts within the field of conflict prevention and management have played an important role in preventing the outbreak of a major armed conflict in the region. Against this background, it is important to identify and analyze what measures have been implemented; how they have contributed to the stability; and why they have not served to improve or transform the conflicts they have targeted.

The first section below discusses the two main categories of conflict prevention—direct and structural—with regard to the two Northeast Asian conflicts in focus. The second section of this chapter focuses on the involved actors, their roles, and room for maneuver. Thereafter, two
sections follow that take a closer look at the strategies of the involved actors, as well as some of the concrete undertakings in the field of conflict prevention and management across the Taiwan Strait and on the Korean Peninsula respectively.

**Type of Prevention and the Role of the Involved Actors**

As the chapters in this volume demonstrate, there is no consensus within the region on how conflicts are best prevented or managed. Consequently, the two case studies of this volume display significant differences both regarding the strategies and concrete measures that have been implemented.

**Direct versus Structural Prevention**

As was noted in the first section, conflict prevention is often divided into either direct or structural prevention. However, as Chyungly Lee points out in her chapter (Chapter 2), there are not only important differences between direct and structural prevention, but also within each category. Lee illustrates how the dominant theoretical background of the practitioners determines the actual content of the applied measures. Strategies for direct prevention promoted by adherers to the realist school of thought are likely to include direct dialogue, engagement, and negotiation, with arms control regimes, codes of conduct, and the like as possible outcomes. When such strategies, on the other hand, stem from the internationalist paradigm, the focus will more likely be on dual systems of early warning and response. Lee also identifies similar differences between the two paradigms’ approaches to structural prevention. Realism stresses the importance of enhancing the common interests of the parties and transforming their perceptions of the security environment. This means a move away from relations marked by balance of power thinking to functional cooperation. As cooperation expands it becomes increasingly expensive for the actors to commit to actions that endanger that cooperation. According to internationalism, on the other hand, structural prevention measures should be proactive, peaceful, and aimed at narrowing the gap in economic, political, and social development between the involved parties. Such measures include for example capacity building, the promotion of human rights, and the building of a civil society.

After stating that relations and policy actions in Northeast Asia are more congruent with the realist paradigm, Lee moves on to discuss the different approaches to direct and structural prevention in the conflict
across the Taiwan Strait and on the Korean Peninsula. The conflict on the
Korean Peninsula has typically been addressed by direct measures of
conflict prevention in the past. One example is the first round of the Six-
Party Talks that was held in 2003, with the aim of resolving the nuclear
stand-off and ridding the Peninsula of nuclear weapons. However, as Lee
points out, it seems like the momentum of conflict prevention on the
Peninsula has now shifted from direct to structural prevention. This shift is
apparent in the policy of energy supply to North Korea, the support for
civil nuclear technology, and the expansion of alternative energy
sources—strategies that actually aim to tackle the root causes of the
nuclear tensions.

The cross-Strait conflict looks slightly different according to Lee, and
the room for maneuver seems more restricted than on the Korean
Peninsula. Important in this aspect is the persistent Chinese view of the
conflict as an internal affair in which it accepts no foreign interference.
This approach closes the door for several of the direct prevention measures
suggested by internationalism, such as the possibility for an international
institution to act as a third party. In addition, the perception of “a rising
China” substantially increases China’s geo-strategic leverage in
international institutions, which lessens the ability of any institution to act
as an objective peace broker.

Against this background, it is hardly surprising that the Six-Party Talks
had, until their suspension in April 2009, been allowed to develop into a
reoccurring multilateral phenomena on the Korean Peninsula, which may
even yet develop into a viable institution for conflict management in
Northeast Asia according to some contributors to this volume, whereas the
Taiwan issue has been “safeguarded” against any regional or international
interference.

The Actors

Although the conflicts on the Korean Peninsula and across the Taiwan
Strait directly and indirectly impact regional stability, and thereby all
states in Northeast Asia, the regional powers are involved in different
ways and have varying stakes in these two conflicts. In addition to the
regional states, the United States has played, and continues to play, a
unique role in the region. The regional security system centered on a
number of bilateral defense alliances with the United States that was
implemented following World War II, and America’s continued emphasis
on bilateralism, has complicated the growth of indigenous regional
structures. Although the United States in history has played a key role in
stabilizing the situation on the Korean Peninsula and across the Taiwan Strait, its presence today, both militarily and politically, is more disputed.

In the study of conflict management and prevention, it is common to make a distinction between the roles of primary, secondary, and third parties. The primary actors are directly involved in the conflict, for example as warring parties. The secondary parties are thought to be supporting the primary actors of the conflict. The third party is not directly involved in the conflict, but works toward a solution of it. It can have a range of different functions, depending on both the needs of the primary actors as well as on the status and strength of the third party itself.

As mentioned above, Lee illustrates in her chapter that the possible role assigned to the third party will not only depend on the desires of the primary actors and the particularities of the situation at hand, but also on the primary actors’ perception of reality. For example, a third party actor can play a proactive role as mediator or arbitrator. It can also refrain from making independent contributions to the solution of the conflict, and restrict its actions to that of a host, facilitator, or messenger. However, one of the most important roles for the third party is arguably to establish direct contact between the primary parties. Although it is often in the direct interest of regional states that a third party gets involved in a conflict, it is nevertheless difficult for neighboring states to play that role due to their geographic proximity to the conflict and their own stakes involved.

**Prevention and Management across the Taiwan Strait**

In theory, the above classification of primary, secondary, and third parties would seem to be unproblematic. However, in the Northeast Asian conflicts, reality is somewhat more complicated. In the conflict across the Taiwan Strait, the identification of Mainland China and Taiwan as the two primary actors is evident. There are at present no obvious secondary parties in this conflict, something which most likely would change if the conflict was to become militarized. It is also not possible to identify any formal third party, the United States included, in the conflict between Taiwan and the Mainland since the involvement of a third party, per definition, requires the consent of the primary parties. At present, this is an unthinkable scenario for Chinese leaders who regard the conflict as a strictly internal matter that should be dealt with in accordance with the “one-China” principle. However, this approach entails a too narrow definition of the third party, which in reality may play a role both in inter-state conflicts as well as in the internal affairs of states.
Nevertheless, even if Beijing would be prepared to co-manage the Taiwan Strait conflict with the United States, as suggested by Quansheng Zhao (Chapter 12), the active involvement of a third party in this conflict nevertheless seems unlikely. It is also improbable that regional states such as Japan or South Korea would be allowed, or capable for that matter, to get involved in any other capacity. Nevertheless, this is not to say that other states by default are irrelevant to this conflict. On the contrary, it is well known that the United States plays a major role in this conflict, not least as Taiwan’s security guarantor and possible defender in a potential attack by China. Washington thus has a strong interest in the cross-Strait issue and tries to influence the primary parties both through official and unofficial channels.

Confidence Building Measures

The prevention and management of the cross-Strait conflict has formally been limited to actions and undertakings by the primary actors. Although this conflict today is as far, or even further, away from a resolution than it was a decade ago, it is possible to point at actions undertaken by both sides aiming to improve relations between China and Taiwan.

Actions undertaken by one or both primary actors are often classified as CBMs. This concept developed out of the European Cold War experience and referred, during that time, solely to military measures undertaken in a multilateral context. Its value and relevance to present-day conflicts outside Europe and the Western hemisphere have consequently been questioned and the meaning of the term altered to fit the “new” contexts to which it is being applied. Today, CBMs are a rather broad term that can be applied to any measures used as instruments to increase trust and confidence. In addition, the European and Asian approaches to confidence building differ somewhat. Whereas the Europeans primarily focus on the outcome, in Asia the process is often just as important. Another discrepancy of perceptions that should be noted is that the Western bottom-up approach to these measures, where one small step leads to another, contradicts, for example, China’s top-down view of diplomacy. Due to the Mainland’s insistence on the one-China policy and its interpretation of CBMs as measures implemented between sovereign states, it has been more or less impossible for Beijing to adopt far-reaching CBMs across the Strait. However, as Lee points out, Taiwan has also been reluctant to adopt military CBMs due to the dilemma of military transparency and the sensitivities involved.
In his chapter (Chapter 8), Arthur Ding offers a comprehensive overview of the past fifty years of cross-Strait relations and summarizes the preventative and managerial attempts between China and Taiwan as an “ambiguous tacit practice.” According to Ding, this informal practice without binding legal document, or the like, provides for a certain degree of uncertainty. He argues that long-term peace and stability requires more than the present practice of self-restraint and that the need for written CBMs or a written agreement has increased along with the changing political climate.

Several obstacles to confidence building between Taiwan and the Mainland have existed, and to a certain extent, been resolved. It is obvious, for example, that Beijing distrusted the former Taiwanese leader Chen Shui-bian, partly due to his refusal to accept the one-China policy. One well-known consequence of this is that China rejected Taiwanese representation at any state-to-state meeting, thereby purposely undermining confidence building in a multilateral setting and also making it close to impossible in a bilateral setting. Today, there have emerged official contacts between the new leadership in China and Taiwan. And links between the Chinese leadership and the Kuomintang (KMT), and other Taiwanese parties more favorable to unification, have improved, thereby contributing to a more positive environment. A barrier, however, is that the KMT sees itself as having the mandate to make agreements with the Mainland regarding unification. Since only a minority of the Taiwanese population supports unification with the Mainland, the KMT would likely meet with fierce opposition if a deal was struck that opposed the will of the Taiwanese people.

**China’s Approach and Strategy**

As one of the two primary actors in the more than half-a-century-long conflict, China has unsurprisingly developed its own approach to conflict prevention and management in the Taiwan Strait. In his chapter (Chapter Nine), Suisheng Zhao analyzes China’s approach to conflict prevention and management, as characterized by the “two hands strategy,” which mixes military coercion and peaceful offense. Transformed into everyday politics, this approach typically means talking tough but acting prudently. The much debated and criticized Anti-Secession Law (ASL) that was passed by the Chinese National People’s Congress in March 2005 is highlighted by Zhao as one example of how China’s dual hands strategy may operate in a real world setting. As such, it provides a telling example of the strengths and weaknesses of the Chinese conflict prevention and
management approach. Although the ASL may have deterred the Taiwanese leadership from adopting countermeasures that would risk escalating the conflict, it has hardly made the long-nourished Chinese dream of unification any more attractive to the Taiwanese. In this way, the dual hands strategy is indeed symptomatic of the conflict in which the status quo has been cemented and any resolution to the issue effectively blocked. Zhao concludes that although this strategy did not stop the Taiwanese from continuing along a path toward independence under the DPP, it has nevertheless prevented an explicit declaration of independence and the outbreak of a full-scale war. Under the KMT, this has changed significantly with the improvement of relations.

Although the dual hands strategy would seem to prevail, Quansheng Zhao (Chapter 12) identifies signs indicating that China’s traditional approach to foreign policy in general, and conflict management more specifically, is undergoing changes. He argues that the two most important factors in Chinese foreign policy making—historical legacy and national interests—have recently been accompanied with an approach of co-management in regard to international crises. This co-management approach from Beijing’s side is, according to Zhao, not restricted to China’s somewhat surprisingly active diplomacy on the Korean Peninsula. In addition, Zhao identifies signs suggesting that Beijing is moving toward co-management with Washington in regard to the cross-Strait conflict. However, Beijing is evidently more prone to multilateralism on the Korean Peninsula than across the Strait. In the latter conflict, the co-management aspect is best described as an implicit understanding between Washington and Beijing and lags far behind the multilateral security framework that was set up, in 2003, to address the problems on the Peninsula.

**Prevention and Management on the Korean Peninsula**

The conflict on the Korean Peninsula involves more actors than the cross-Strait conflict, but the classification of the concerned parties is not as simple as it may seem at the outset. North Korea is definitely a primary actor in this conflict. The North Koreans, in turn, depict the United States as their main adversary, and especially when seen in a historical perspective, many analysts would also label the United States a primary actor in the conflict on the Korean Peninsula. Washington, however, generally refuses to view the conflict in bilateral terms and, thus, engage in direct negotiations with Pyongyang. Instead, the United States wants this issue to be addressed multilaterally through the Six-Party Talks.
In this volume, Andrew Scobell (Chapter 5) focuses on one, and arguably the most unpredictable, of the primary actors on the Korean Peninsula—North Korea. He argues that in order to understand the limited success of conflict resolution between the two Koreas, the domestic political systems need to be accorded greater attention. Scobell analyzes North Korea’s political system and, in turn, how domestic political development has impacted the potential for conflict management on the Korean Peninsula. He concludes that totalitarianism, the rule of the day in North Korea for more than half a century, has prevented the North from addressing the situation on the Peninsula from a conflict management perspective. Indeed, totalitarianism requires an “enemy” to justify its repressive forms of control and its exaggerated military focus, which means that an improvement in the conflict situation could risk undermining the state’s very foundation. Thus, unless the political system in North Korea goes through significant changes, and Scobell argues that there are signs indicating that change may well be underway, the prospects for conflict prevention on the Korean Peninsula will remain bleak.

In regard to third party involvement in a conflict, it is often argued that it is difficult for a regional state to act as such due to their geographic proximity to the conflict. However, China’s role in the conflict on the Korean Peninsula, which will be discussed at further length below, shows that a neighboring state can indeed act as a third party. At the same time, Beijing’s involvement, which has required strenuous efforts, clearly illustrates the restrictions and limitations of a neighboring state with major stakes involved. For example, as Samuel Kim argues, the conservative nature of Chinese diplomacy prevents China from adopting aggressive mediation tactics in any conflict, and that such restrictions become even more manifest in a conflict between its next-door socialist ally North Korea and its second most important trading partner, the United States.

The Six-Party Talks

Whereas the attempts at conflict prevention and management across the Strait typically have been limited to unilateral and bilateral approaches from the two main actors, the conflict on the Korean Peninsula has seen a wide range of actions undertaken by different parties. Although attempts at structural prevention, such as poverty reduction through aid, have been made by states such as South Korea and China, the major channel for conflict prevention and management on the Peninsula has been, and still is, the Six-Party Talks. Although the talks between the two Koreas, China, Russia, Japan, and the United States can be seen as an example of direct
prevention, set up as a direct response to a crisis, the concrete outcome of the talks nevertheless contains elements of structural prevention.

The importance of the Six-Party Talks goes beyond any improvements in U.S.-North Korean relations. Indeed, the talks can be seen as the beginning of a mechanism that could be developed into dealing with the many outstanding bilateral issues between, for example, China and Japan, Japan and Russia, or Japan and the two Koreas. In regard to bilateral relations between the two Koreas, it is acknowledged that confidence had increased thanks to more economic and civilian exchanges and greater balance in terms of military capabilities and that this trend was reinforced by the multilateral talks on the nuclear issue. Since North Korea’s nuclear tests, however, discussions have been halted, and relations between the two Koreas have worsened.

Indeed, without any formal interstate security regimes, the Six-Party Talks are possibly the closest to an institutionalized mechanism for conflict prevention there is in Northeast Asia. The prospect of a further institutionalization of the talks will be discussed in more detail below and in some of the chapters in this volume. Nevertheless, although supportive of the idea, Zhang Li (Chapter 6) also sounds a note of caution, warning that previous endeavors could easily be erased and credibility and future success called into question unless there are signs of tangible progress in any resumed talks.

The Third Party on the Peninsula

China is often singled out as the most important broker between Pyongyang and Washington regarding the North Korea nuclear stand-off and has been crucial in the establishment and execution of the Six-Party Talks. China’s newfound, self-confident diplomacy on the Korean Peninsula indicates a departure from its previous reactive rather than proactive foreign policy. Indeed, China’s “hands-off” approach in the first crisis in 1993–94, and its broker position during the second crisis a decade later, illustrates this shift. Consequently, Beijing’s promotion of bilateral negotiations between the United States and North Korea during the first crisis was, a decade later, replaced by active engagement to set up and execute the multilateral, and regionally unique, Six-Party Talks. One important reason for the support of a multilateral rather than a bilateral solution to the nuclear issue was, according to Zhang Li, that a multilateral framework would curb Washington’s resolve to deal with the matter alone, which in turn could have severe consequences beyond China’s reach.
Samuel Kim summarizes the proximate and underlying factors explaining China’s “proactive mediation-as-conflict-management diplomacy” in the second crisis as greater danger, greater stakes, and greater leverage. In the early 2000s, the risk of an armed conflict in China’s strategic and geographical backyard between one of its allies and the United States became overarching enough that it pushed China to secure the main objective of preventing a military conflict between North Korea and the United States. At the same time, China’s resource leverage, and thereby its ability to take action, had increased significantly in the decade between these two crises.

Kim describes Beijing’s diplomacy on the Korean Peninsula as a mix of shuttle/visitation and aid diplomacy aimed at creating face-saving exits for the parties in the U.S.-North Korean deadlock. However, the usage of aid to gain influence is a strategy that can have negative consequences as well. Its former function as an inherent part of an allied relationship as close as “lips and teeth” has today taken the shape of an essential means for Beijing to secure regime survival in North Korea and thereby avoid the destabilization of not only the Peninsula, but also China’s northeastern regions. North Korea is, according to Kim, well aware that China provides aid out of its own interest, which is the underlying reason for the limited North Korean gratitude and Beijing’s restricted leverage over Pyongyang. In terms of interests, China’s proactive role on the Peninsula as a result of China’s wish to act and appear as a responsible great power has also to be acknowledged.

One often stated reason for China’s ability to play a role as a third party is its unique ties to the North Korean leadership. However, Zhang Li argues that although China may be the state with the greatest influence over North Korea, its capacity to practice this influence has been exaggerated by outside forces, intentionally or unintentionally. In reality, China’s room for maneuver is, in this context, highly restricted and the Chinese leadership will have to base any moves or undertakings on serious considerations of China’s long-term security interests.

Just as influence can be difficult to exercise, it can also prove hard to maintain. The history of international relations on the Korean Peninsula illustrates that the influence of states comes and goes. From a conflict management perspective, it can thus be dangerous to place too much focus and hope on one external party. China’s future role in the North Korean nuclear stand-off and its ability to make its voice heard in Pyongyang in general is in question. If the expression “money gone, friends gone” holds true, China’s links to North Korea require a strong Chinese economic interaction with North Korea.
A Note on the Chapters of this Volume

The chapters of this volume offer a broad insight into the previous and ongoing strategies of prevention and management in regard to the two major conflicts in Northeast Asia. Moreover, they offer detailed discussions on precise measures and obstacles regarding conflict prevention and management in this region. Simultaneously, several of the contributors also give an account of the theoretical debate within the academic tradition of conflict studies, tailored to fit the conflicts across the Taiwan Strait and on the Korean Peninsula.

The first three chapters, following this introduction, look especially at the theoretical foundation of conflict management and prevention. Chapter 2 by Chyungly Lee offers an analytic framework for these two conflicts based on both the security and peace paradigms within international relations theory. Based on this framework, she identifies and categorizes suitable measures to reduce tension in inter-Korean and Sino-Taiwanese relations. In Chapter 3, I. William Zartman discusses the prospects for, and obstacles to, conflict prevention on the Korean Peninsula and across the Taiwan Strait according to the ripeness theory. Chapter 4, by Björn Hettne and Fredrik Söderbaum, provides an overall discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of regional approaches to conflict prevention and management, by looking at the experiences of other regions.

The second section of chapters looks specifically at the Korean Peninsula. In Chapter 5, Andrew Scobell analyzes North Korea’s political system and its impact on conflict management and resolution on the Korean Peninsula. Chapter 6, by Zhang Li, evaluates the six-party regime and discusses the prospects of turning it into a more permanent mechanism of regional conflict prevention and management. The following chapter, by Samuel Kim, looks at the highly important third party—China—to this conflict. Not only does he discuss the underlying reasons for the Chinese engagement and the form of engagement, but also the merits and limitations of China’s conflict management approach.

The third section contains three chapters that focus on the cross-Strait situation. In Chapter 8, Arthur Ding analyzes the fragile stability between China and Taiwan and the unilateral and bilateral measures that have been taken to maintain it. Suisheng Zhao, in Chapter 9, looks specifically at China’s approach to conflict prevention in the Taiwan Strait and uses the Anti-Secession Law as a case study. In Chapter 10, John Garver discusses the role of Europe in the cross-Strait conflict and argues for a greater engagement in this matter on the part of the EU.
In the fourth section of this volume, the chapters take a comparative approach to these two cases, although from different angles. In Chapter 11, Mel Gurtov identifies a crucial link between conflict resolution and regional conflict management, and highlights a number of pending issues that need to be addressed to improve bilateral and multilateral relations in Northeast Asia. Chapter 12 by Quansheng Zhao discusses the Chinese approach to these two conflicts and identifies underlying assumptions that guide Chinese actions as well as recent changes to China’s approach. In the concluding chapter, Niklas Swanström and Sofia Ledberg summarize the conclusions made in the various chapters, thereby discussing the obstacles to conflict prevention, conflict management, and confidence building, as well as the prospects of establishing a regional security platform, enhancing economic integration, and encouraging external involvement. The advantages and disadvantages of looking at these two conflicts in a comparative manner will also be underlined, as well as measures that can and cannot be transferred between the cases and the reasons and explanations for this.

The reader will thus find multifaceted discussions on a number of topics relevant to the prevention and management of conflicts, especially in regard to the two conflicts in Northeast Asia. What measures have been applied to these two cases? What obstacles have they met? Why has it proved so difficult to move from managing a conflict to actually finding a long-term resolution to it? In what way can one approach be applicable to both cases? These are some of the questions that are discussed in the chapters of this book.

As in all descriptions of reality, there are no fixed answers to any of these questions. However, it is hoped that the findings in these chapters will inspire further undertakings and studies on any of the many pending issues in the region of Northeast Asia.

Notes


8 Swanström, Regional Cooperation and Conflict Management: Lessons from the Pacific Rim.


12 Zartman and Rasmussen, eds., Peacemaking in International Conflict: Methods & Techniques.

13 Kwok Leung and Dean Tjosvold, Conflict Management in the Asia Pacific: Assumptions and Approaches in Diverse Cultures (Singapore: John Wiley & Sons, 1998), pp. 1–12.


15 Wallensteen, Från Krig till Fred, p. 287.

16 Ibid., p. 288.

17 Ibid., p. 290.
CHAPTER TWO

CONFLICT PREVENTION IN NORTHEAST ASIA:
SUGGESTING AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK
AND LESSONS FROM SOUTHEAST ASIA

CHYUNGLY LEE

The dynamics of political tensions and potential armed conflicts in Northeast Asia are well documented within the literature on geo-politics and strategic security, but are relatively understudied in the emerging paradigm of conflict prevention. More recently, academic exercises on the concepts and practices of conflict prevention in the regional context of Northeast Asia have progressed, but the political will of the involved parties to adopt conflict prevention measures remains insufficient. In contrast, the concept of conflict prevention seems to be better received in both academic and policy communities in Southeast Asia, especially in a multilateral form. The establishment of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967 mitigated tensions among member countries and consolidated regional resilience and resistance to power politics. Although students of conflict prevention agree that the study of conflict is context-specific and that the approaches to prevention and resolutions are hardly fungible across cases, learning from each other’s experiences is, nonetheless, still considered essentially useful for overcoming bottlenecks in the process of conflict prevention.

The objective of this chapter is to suggest the relevancy of Southeast Asian experiences in forwarding conflict prevention processes in Northeast Asia. In the first section, notions of conflict prevention from security and peace studies are synchronized in an analytical framework. In the second section, measures taken to prevent the onset of war on the Korean Peninsula and in the Taiwan Strait are summarized. The third section discusses the impediments to advancing the ad hoc measures into long-term conflict prevention strategies in Northeast Asia. Concepts and
mechanisms applied in ASEAN’s conflict prevention processes are suggested to overcome the bottlenecks.

**An Analytical Framework**

The notion of conflict prevention was introduced in the United Nations Charter to prevent the outbreak of interstate armed conflicts, and it became increasingly used during the 1990s when the phenomenon of intrastate violence came to share the headlines of the international security and peace agenda. In brief, the UN approach to conflict prevention is often described as a ladder of preventive steps: 1) early warning research based on information gathering of minor signs of tension; 2) fact-finding missions operated by either the UN or other organizations; 3) the use of the eight measures enumerated in Article 33 of the Charter; 4) the initiatives of peace-keeping operations, such as preventive deployment; 5) the use of coercive measures, such as sanctions; and 6) the threat to use force as the UN muscle. Measures adopted in these preventive steps are often mission-based and thus lack the long-term utility of preventing the eruption of armed conflicts. However, the Millennium Report of March 2000, presented by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, shifted mission-based conflict prevention operations toward a focus on the long-term efforts of conflict prevention strategies as a new option of the organization. Such an initiative encouraged academic contributions in developing concepts of conflict prevention and translating the rhetoric of policy statements into pragmatic measures and strategies.

Despite contextual differences in the types of conflicts, theorists and practitioners in various fields of interstate and intrastate conflicts generally agree that instead of identifying operational issues in pre-conflict, in-conflict, and post-conflict phases, or suggesting a comprehensive definition to cover all three phases, a pragmatic modification is now narrowing the definition of conflict prevention measures undertaken during the early phases of conflict. As for measures and approaches of pre-conflict prevention, those aiming at preventing escalating political tensions from erupting into armed conflicts, but that are not necessarily effective at rooting out conflicts are considered *direct (operational)* prevention measures, while *structural* prevention measures often refer to long-term efforts in changing the environment of political tensions and preventing the occurrence and reoccurrence of violent conflicts. Nevertheless, “a tool box” composed of both direct and structural prevention measures is suggested and consistently “reloaded” by academics from different intellectual trainings.
Overall, the concept of conflict prevention, commonly used in both the security and peace paradigms, refers to policies and strategies for preventing political tensions from turning into armed or violent conflicts. The conceptual variations in theoretical assumptions between paradigms, however, are differentiated in their prescribed policies and strategies. In the security paradigm, the possibility of using force cannot be completely ruled out, while, in the peace paradigm, internationalists emphasize the non-use of force in the culture of conflict prevention. The following discussion provides an analytical framework which integrates contending notions and measures of conflict prevention suggested in both security and peace studies.

Students of security studies, traditionally based on realist rationales, see conflicts as an inherent part of international anarchy. Because armed (or violent) conflicts are potential consequences of evolving political tension, preparations for war, particularly the use of force, are thus necessary and imperative to assure state power as well as to safeguard the security interests of individual states. As is familiar to students of international security, such so-called deterrence strategies easily lead to a security dilemma in which a state’s security interests are enhanced at the risk of war. The political will of security cooperation among states emerges when the affordability of managing the security dilemma becomes the common concern of strategic and military competitors. In other words, the mentality of adopting policies and strategies of conflict prevention among involved parties is mainly in response to the inverse impacts of arms races and war preparations. The rationales of a working conflict prevention strategy thus mainly rest on two accounts: risk analysis and cost-benefit (re)calculations.

When the concerned parties in a conflict sense in the evolution of political tensions a high risk of war, they are then more willing to take a direct prevention approach of risk reduction. Measures and mechanisms often used are dialogue, negotiation, norms, and legal devices. Nevertheless, if there is no immediate risk of war breaking out but rather competing national interests, a structural prevention approach which aims at gradually changing the pay-off structure of using force would more likely be accepted. Measures and mechanisms of functional cooperation can be developed in sectors of common interest. The long-term goal is to transform the relationship among political adversaries from one based on deterrence and balance-of-power to one marked by the traits of a cooperation web. The costs of breaking out of this web are then increased.

In contrast, the theoretical foundation of the peace paradigm is internationalism, a combination of idealism and liberalism. Internationalists
do not see deadly and violent conflicts as a natural part of international society, but rather as a positive intervention in the process of achieving international peace. The main theoretical assumption of conflict prevention, thus, is that peace is a possible and desirable state of nature.\textsuperscript{5} Conflicts resulting from evolving political tensions can, according to this paradigm, be resolved through peaceful means. Instead of responding to war preparations, internationalists apply proactive initiatives of peacemaking as a response to evolving political tensions. The basic rationale of conflict prevention from the internationalist perspective is thus mainly to transform a “culture of reaction” into a “culture of prevention.” This transformation is achieved by “embracing all possible actions, policies, and procedures to avoid the threat or use of armed force and related forms of coercion by states or groups as the way of settling political disputes.”\textsuperscript{6}

The \textit{direct} prevention measure to avert imminent crises suggested in the peace paradigm is usually comprised of a dual system of early warning and early response. Early warning is a systematic collection and analysis of information coming from a crisis area, including the provision of policy options to influential actors in the conflict dynamics. Early response consists of timely and targeted actions, undertaken by the affected actors on the basis of the early warning system, with the aim of preventing the (re-)emergence of violent conflict. Action options include fact-finding and monitoring missions, negotiation, mediation, and dialogue among contending groups, etc. More importantly, to internationalists, conflict prevention missions are not merely transitory or ad hoc reactions to emerging or potential problems, but are also long-term proactive strategies to create conditions for a stable and more predictable international environment. Measures taken in such a structural approach include proactive initiatives of promoting good governance, capacity building, human rights, and socio-economic development across borders. When the differences and disparities among involved parties are narrowed, the international security environment becomes more predictable. Individual states, civil society, NGOs, and international institutions are often invited to act as third parties in conflict prevention operations. Both the security and the peace paradigms address the role of a third party. To realists, the third party can play a role as mediator, facilitator, or arbitrator. However, it is the parties affected by the political tension that are expected to carry out the conflict prevention measures. The third party will limit its involvement unless it is in its own interest to intervene. In contrast, to internationalists, the third party, not the disputing parties, is the primary actor to undertake conflict prevention strategies. Thus, international