

# Maritime Challenges in the Asia Pacific: Moving Towards Political, Environmental, and Functional Cooperation

## Practical Cooperation in Disputed Waters

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## Practical Cooperation in Disputed Waters

- Questions to be answered:
  - How are EU-Asia relations affected by escalated conflict in the Asia-Pacific region? What is Europe's role in Asia?
  - What are the multilateral institutions and mechanisms that could be developed within the region to enhance maritime security and cooperation?
  - What are the prospects for maritime cooperation in the Asia-Pacific given recent geopolitical developments?

## How are EU-Asia relations affected by escalated conflict in the Asia-Pacific region? What is Europe's role in Asia?

- Europe's role in Asia is distant but involved (Bersick 2014).
- In Asia, the EU is e.g. an important trade power, provider of FDI and of development assistance.
- In security terms the EU is free riding on US security guarantees in Asia.
- The EU would be gravely affected by e.g. a military conflict in the South China Sea because EU trade much depends on open Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC).
- During the 2015 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) business leaders' meeting in Manila it was argued that the economic outfall of a military escalation in the South China Sea would be more serious than a sharp economic downturn in China or the breakdown of the Euro (FAZ 17.11.2015: 16).
- Case of South China Sea is an example how security factors (can) impact on Asian and EU-Asian economic relations.

## Multilateral institutions and mechanisms that could be developed in the region to enhance maritime security and cooperation (I)

- No multilateral regional security organization has been established in the region. There is no functional equivalent to NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) in Asia (see Hemmer/Katzenstein 2004).
- With regard to the South China Sea dispute, neither involved countries (mainly China, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, the USA and Vietnam) or regional institutions, mainly ASEAN and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), nor international law (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, UNCLOS) have provided a solution acceptable to all stakeholders.
- The Philippines' appeal to international law and the arbitral tribunal in The Hague under UNCLOS have not resulted in a joint ASEAN position with regard to the Philippines vs. China case in the South China Sea dispute.
- There is a risk that ASEAN becomes increasingly divided with regard to the South China Sea dispute and China's role.

## Multilateral institutions and mechanisms that could be developed in the region to enhance maritime security and cooperation (II)

- So far, all involved stakeholders are too often part of the problem, not part of a solution.
- Need to provide all involved stakeholders with a new perspective to frame the dispute and act accordingly.
- New paradigm: protect the marine ecosystem of the South China Sea.
- Make the South China Sea a “Marine Park” that protects the marine environment, incl. its biodiversity.
- De-securitize the dispute through multilateral regional environment governance.
- Establish a new institution that allows for marine environment protection and sustainable marine resource management.
- Saving the South China Sea’s ecosystem is an issue where interests and values can align.
- Need to also include non state actors (environmental NGOs, academic expertise, business sector).

## Prospects for maritime cooperation in the Asia-Pacific given recent geopolitical developments (I)

- Because of recent geopolitical developments (looming Brexit and newly US president-elect) uncertainty is on the rise in both Europe and Asia-Pacific.
- UK is important economic actor in Asia.
- EU is important facilitator of multilateral regional integration processes in Asia (esp. ASEAN).
- UK is only European member of the Five Power Defense Arrangement (FPDA).
- Brexit-vote causes uncertainty with regard to EU's role in Asia e.g. in economic, normative and even in security terms.

## Prospects for maritime cooperation in the Asia-Pacific given recent geopolitical developments (II)

- The newly president-elect D. Trump causes uncertainty with regard to future multilateral dimension of the US involvement in Europe and Asia Pacific: Risk of a crisis in multilateralism, especially in the economic and security realm.
- Uncertainty with regard to future membership of USA in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).
- Uncertainty with regard to future US security guaranties in Asia.
- Risk of deepening security dilemmas, further arms build up, nuclear proliferation in Asia.
- Increase of Chinese influence on regional developments in Asia relative to the US' influence, if US disengagement from Asia becomes reality.
- Growing influence of China in future Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).
- Growing importance of China's New Silk Road (One Belt, One Road / Belt and Road) initiative relative to APEC and a Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific (FTAAP).
- De facto hegemony of China over South China Sea (not de jure).

## Consequences

- A more isolationist, protectionist and inward-looking USA impacts on Europe, Asia, and the EU's role in Asia.
- In Europe and Asia-Pacific strategic uncertainty is on the rise.
- At the same time, the EU is increasingly absorbed by internal challenges that could even result in (further) disintegration of the EU.
- EU's overall resources for engaging with Asia will rather decrease than increase.
- Risk that EU's role in Asia will be weakened.
- Asian countries will need to increase their national and regional governance capacities relative to US disengagement from Asia.
- US disengagement from multilateralism in the Asia-Pacific and Europe provides new opportunities for European and Asian actors:
- In economic realm, rationale evolves to work towards an Asia-Europe Free Trade Agreement (AEFTA).
- In security realm, rationale evolves to work towards a Marine Park in the South China Sea.

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