The International Politics of the Asia-Pacific

This fully updated and revised edition of Michael Yahuda’s extremely successful textbook includes four whole new chapters on the post-Cold War period and introduces students to the international politics of the Asia-Pacific region since 1945. As well as assessing the post-Cold War uncertainties that challenged balance and power within the region, Yahuda also examines the most recent period that includes major developments involving the US ‘war on terror’, globalization and the increased cooperative security embraced by China, Japan and Russia as a result. Yahuda analyzes politics in terms of global, regional and local trends, combining narrative with analysis. This new edition features:

- threats to US security including those from Afghanistan, Iraq, HIV/AIDS, environmental degradation and weapons of mass destruction;
- China – cooperation and confrontation involving a more regionally involved Russia and a newly rising India;
- globalization, multilateralism and the regionalization of world affairs.

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The International Politics of the Asia-Pacific

Second and revised edition

Michael Yahuda
To Ellen
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Of course, I alone am responsible for any shortcomings the book may have.
Introduction to the revised edition

The revised edition consists of a whole new section with four major chapters on the period since the end of the Cold War. It is therefore much more than an updating of the previous edition, which was published in 1996. It was decided not to alter the chapter on the Cold War period. Although new material has become available since the publication of the first edition, it is not such as to require changes to the core arguments of that section of the book. The focus of the new chapters has remained, as before, the analysis of the interaction between politics at international, regional and domestic levels. But the end of the Cold War has proved to be such a major break from the previous period that a new intellectual framework was required.

The Cold War provided a framework of bipolarity by which international politics was shaped very much by the incipient conflict between the two superpowers who not only headed two opposing alliance systems, but who also led two competing ideologies and economic and political systems. That international axis of conflict affected the world as a whole and determined very much when and how the United States and the Soviet Union intervened in third world countries. The bipolar system was complicated in the Asia-Pacific region by the defection of China from the Soviet camp and its formation of an alignment with the United States in 1971. Nevertheless the main lines of conflict in the region were determined by the Cold War, even though many had local roots.

The end of the Cold War was abrupt and not anticipated by either academics or diplomats. It gave rise to a new situation of great complexity and uncertainty, so that fifteen years after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 it is still customary to describe the current period as ‘post-Cold War’ – which of course tells us little about the contemporary characteristics of the new period and indeed may even be misleading, as it implies that the period is still shaped by the legacy of the Cold War.

However, for the purposes of analysis the key characteristic of the period since the end of the Cold War is taken to be the pre-eminence of the
United States, the surviving superpower. But that has been accompanied by a new recognition of the speed and scale of globalization and the resultant deepening of interdependencies. American predominance, especially in the military field, has in effect ruled out conflict between the remaining major powers. That has had the effect of giving greater salience to conflicts within states and of persuading Western governments of the merits of humanitarian intervention. But they, and the United States in particular, have experienced difficulties in determining the priorities for intervention. Bereft of the disciplines of the bipolarity of the Cold War, the strategic priorities of the United States have not been immediately apparent. For example, the Clinton administration intervened in Somalia and then withdrew under humiliating circumstances, never to return; but it did not intervene to prevent genocide in Rwanda, only to regret not having done so.

Curiously, as the process of globalization intensified, so did the regionalization of world affairs. Once the axis of conflict of the Cold War was removed there was no longer a compelling strategic requirement to link the different regions together. Thus Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 adopted an entirely different agenda from East Asia. While the former focused on deepening its formal rules of integration and on expanding membership beyond the defunct iron curtain, Asia focused on the enhancement of sovereignty and the pursuit of economic growth and development. Although multilateralism flourished in both regions, the European variety was based on rule-making and rule-enforcing that necessarily weakened the sovereignty of participating states, while the Asian one was based on a consensual process and non-interference designed to enhance the sovereignty of member states.

Finally, such was the predominance of the United States that the major security threats to its dominance came less from established major states than from ‘rogue states’, non-state terrorist groups and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Moreover, the concept of security was enlarged to encompass threats to civil order as posed by transnational crime involving narcotics, trafficking in people and money laundering. Similarly, threats of disease spread by the ease of communications, notably HIV/AIDS, were increasingly seen as security issues. Environmental degradation too increasingly began to be seen in security terms. These new perceptions of threat required new policies and methods of coordination between agencies and bureaucracies previously considered to be confined in scope to their domestic spheres. After the terrible attacks of 11 September 2001 on the symbols of American economic and political power in New York and Washington, American attention focused exclusively on the so-called ‘war on terror’, which led to the wars against Afghanistan and Iraq. In one sense, this intensified the significance of
international cooperation to meet the new kinds of security threat, but in another, it widened the gap between the concerns of the United States and those of its partners, new and old.

The consequence of these trends for the Asia-Pacific region has been to narrow the range of the junctions between the global interests of America and those of the region. The principal concerns of the countries of the Asia-Pacific region have been to develop their economies and to consolidate the political order of their respective states in the face of greater exposure to exigencies of the international economy and rapid social change at home. To these ends there has been a trend towards enhancing cooperative security through an array of multi-tiered and overlapping economic and security associations. That has been accompanied by a strengthening of America's alliances with several countries in the region.

Perhaps the key change in the region has been the rise of China, which has become the key locomotive for economic growth in the region as a whole. Its embrace of multilateralism and cooperative security has been appreciated by many of its smaller neighbours, especially as they have been able to hedge against growing Chinese power by relying on the American military commitments in the region. At the same time the region is characterized by a complex pattern of cooperation and competition between the major powers, including notably China and Japan, but also a newly rising India and a Russia that is trying become more regionally involved.

These developments raise entirely new questions about both the region and the major states in the post-Cold War period. Hence the revised edition provides an entirely new section to examine the period. First it will consider the significance of these changes for the region as a whole and then it will look more closely at the roles of the major powers, including the United States (which is both a global and a regional power), China and Japan.
Section I

The Cold War, 1945–1989
Part I

The international politics of the Asia-Pacific
Introduction

The Atlantic Era is now at the height of its development and must soon exhaust the resources at its command. The Pacific Era, destined to be the greatest of all, is just at its dawn.

Theodore Roosevelt, 1903

It still remains to be seen whether the ‘Pacific Era’ has at last begun to unfold, 100 years after President Roosevelt proclaimed its dawn. But one important difference between his time and the eve of the twenty-first century is that the Asian countries have long since ceased to be pawns of the major external powers and have increasingly become masters of their own destinies. Accordingly, it is more appropriate to describe the region as the Asia-Pacific.

The emergence of the Asia-Pacific as a region in international politics is a modern phenomenon. Indeed, it might best be conceived as a region that is still in the process of evolution and whose identity has yet to be clearly defined. It is a product of several developments associated with the modernization and globalization of economic, political and social life that has involved the spread of what might be called industrialism and statehood throughout the world. Derived from Europe and still bearing the marks of their origin, these great forces have shaped and continue to shape what we understand to be the contemporary Asia-Pacific. At the same time, their implantation in this part of the world has involved accommodation and adaptation to prior non-European traditions and institutions. Thus, although the states of the Asia-Pacific may be defined in common legal terms (involving concepts of sovereignty, territoriality and citizenship) that would be recognizable to Europeans of the nineteenth century, the governance of the states of, say, contemporary China, Japan or, indeed, Indonesia cannot be fully understood without reference to their respective different historical antecedents.

The regional identity of the Asia-Pacific may be said to derive from geopolitical and geo-economic considerations rather than from any
indigenous sense of homogeneity or commonality of purpose. Unlike Europe, the Asia-Pacific cannot call upon shared cultural origins or proclaim attachment to common political values as a basis for regional identity. But the Asia-Pacific can claim to have been located at an important geographical junction of post-Second World War politics, where the competing Cold War interests of the two superpowers intersected with each other, with those of the two major regional powers and with those of the smaller resident states. The way in which these different sets of competing and cooperative interests have interacted has given this region its distinctive if evolving identity which has acquired recent significance through geo-economic factors. The development of what the World Bank once called ‘the East Asian economic miracle’ has transformed East Asia from a region of poverty and insurgency into one of the most important centres of the international economy. The pattern of consistent high rates of economic growth and an increasing share of the world’s GNP and trade that began with Japan and became true of the four little dragons (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore) has become true of southern China and most of the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN – Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand). Vietnam too is on the threshold of participating in the ‘miracle’. The continuing economic dynamism of the region and the confidence that resident governments have drawn from their economic achievements have enhanced a new sense of national pride and assertiveness that is in the process of acquiring regional expression.

It was only once the great powers began to treat the diverse countries of the area as a distinct arena of international politics and economics that it became possible to identify the area with some sense of coherence. It was first treated as a separate geographical region at the Washington Conference of 1921–1922 when the great powers of the day formally agreed to fix the ratio of the warships they would deploy in the Pacific. That was designed to limit the geographical and military scope of the challenge of Japan – the first state in the Asia-Pacific to adapt to the modernizing imperatives. By the 1930s the Japanese had not only repudiated the agreement that had restricted their naval deployments, but they sought to exclude the Western powers altogether from the region as proposed in the scheme formally declared in 1938 as the East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. It had appeared in different guises earlier in the decade as in the concept of a ‘new order in East Asia’. Japan’s initial victories over the Western powers and its attempts to encourage anti-Western sentiments around the slogan ‘Asia for Asians’ stimulated local nationalism. However, the brutality and domineering behaviour of the Japanese conquerors undermined their image as liberators and engen-
dered fears and animosities among local peoples that have yet to be expiated more than fifty years later. However, the Japanese sphere of military operations also defined the sphere of the allied response in the Pacific War. The several agreements among the wartime allies, beginning in 1941, followed by the Quebec Conference of 1943 which set up the South East Asian Command, continuing with the 1943 Cairo Declaration and culminating in the Yalta and Potsdam agreements of 1945, helped to give parts of the region greater geopolitical coherence. But they also marked the last time in which the region would be defined by the great powers in accordance with their interests without even informing the local states, let alone consulting them.

It was not until after the Pacific War (fought partly to deny Japan an exclusive sphere) that the local countries of the region acquired independence and began (or in some cases resumed) to assert their own identities and to develop patterns of conflict and cooperation among themselves, and the region began to be shaped by its variety of indigenous forces. But the region was still largely defined in terms of the international struggle for the balance of power, with the Soviet Union and communist China replacing Japan as the object of Western (primarily American) containment.

The evolution of the region may therefore be seen as beginning with great power arrangements to accommodate the distribution of power within the Asia-Pacific to the global balance of power. Or put another way, it began with the recognition by the Western powers of the rise of Japan as a major power within a geographically circumscribed part of the world. Following the defeat of Japan, a new balance of power emerged as, under the impact of the Cold War, the United States sought to contain the challenge of the two major communist powers. That was seen to be linked to the struggles for independence from colonial rule and the subsequent attempts to consolidate independence and build new nations. In some states the nationalist challenge was led by communist forces and in others they constituted a threat, sometimes by armed insurgencies to incumbent governments. Local elites tended to seek external support and patronage. Thus linkages were formed between external balance of power considerations and regional and local conflicts that were defined primarily in terms of the Cold War.

The next major stage in the development of the region was its transformation from being merely an object of geopolitical interest to the great powers of global significance to one in which its constituent members as independent states sought to articulate an independent approach to international politics in the guise of what was later called non-alignment. The first notable expression of this was the Asian–African conference in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955. Although this helped to identify what was
later called the third world as a new dimension in international politics and, indeed, contributed to developing the agenda that emphasized anti-colonialism and the need for economic development, it was unable to overcome the differences of interests and competing security concerns of the resident Asian states. Indeed the enormous diversities of the region have militated against the development of the kind of integrative regionalism associated with Western Europe since the end of the Second World War. Interestingly, the one relatively successful regional organization, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) which was formed in 1967, as its name implies, is restricted to Southeast Asia and was designed in practice to enhance the effective independence of its members. Far from seeking to integrate the region by merging sovereignty and unifying the operations of their economies, the national leaders sought to strengthen their hard won and vulnerable separate systems of government. They sought to reduce the challenges to their domestic rule by containing intra-regional disputes through the recognition of the junction between the stability of the region and that of the domestic order of member states.

The Asia-Pacific became a region of global significance, counting as it does as its resident members both the global powers, the United States and the Soviet Union (although its successor state, Russia, is less than global in its scope), and the major regional powers of international significance, China and Japan. The two major wars of the Cold War were fought in the region, and developments within the region have contributed to changing global alignments of great import. Thus the transformation of China from an ally of the Soviet Union to a position of revolutionary isolationism and then to alignment with the United States helped to undermine the congruence between ideological and strategic affinities that typified the early stages of the Cold War. The Chinese ‘defection’ from the alliance with the Soviet Union introduced a third factor into the global strategic equation, which was increasingly regarded as tripolar. But the main ramifications of this change were felt within the region, where the Soviet–American axis of conflict was joined by a parallel Soviet–Chinese one whose outcome was a Sino-American alignment and the end of the Vietnam War (or Second Indo-China War), followed by the outbreak of the Cambodian War (or Third Indo-China War). Similarly, developments within the region played a part in the ending of the Cold War for the world as a whole, but its impact upon the communist regimes in Asia has been altogether different from that experienced by their European former counterparts.

The end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union was not accompanied by the collapse of the key communist regimes in the Asia-Pacific of China, Vietnam and North Korea. And, as a result, an element of the Cold War has survived in the region, as they fear the polit-
ical agenda of the United States, the sole surviving superpower. The end of bipolarity has brought to an end the central strategic balance that had hitherto dominated international politics and as a result it has detached regional and sub-regional conflicts from the larger global axis of conflict to which they had previously been joined. The ending of the international and then the regional dimensions of the Cambodian conflict facilitated a settlement brokered by the United Nations, and has reduced the ensuing domestic struggles within the country to primarily local significance. The Korean conflict has also been transformed, but its resolution is more complex as it involves two separate states in an area of geopolitical significance to four of the world’s greatest powers. In so far as it involves global dimensions, these centre on the acquisition by the North of nuclear weapons, the challenge to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty regime and the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD).

The new strategic situation in the region is regarded as uncertain. A predominant America is more focused on the global war on terror, while the region is adjusting to the rise of China. New patterns of multilateralism and greater fluidity in relations between the major powers have emerged in the region. Immediate concerns about the management of the rising power of China prompted the establishment in 1993 of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) as an embryonic regional security organization. It may be seen as paralleling the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC) that was established in 1989, which (although also essentially consultative in character) has been boosted by American-led attempts since 1993 to enlarge its scope to promote an Asian Pacific community dedicated to free trade. The global economic significance of the region has already been noted, but the political and strategic significance of the region’s economic dynamism should also be appreciated. These economic changes are beginning to challenge the character and the distribution of global power. They have already transformed thinking about the character of security and political stability of so-called third world states.

Accordingly, this book is concerned with the inter-play between the interests of the great, the regional and the local powers in this part of the world. These may conveniently be depicted as operating simultaneously at three levels – the global, the regional and the local. During the period of the Cold War, the first may be said to have involved the dynamics of the central balance between the United States and the Soviet Union, the manner in which that impacted upon the other two levels and the way in which these also fed back into the first. The second involved the conflicts and accommodations affecting the major regional powers in their relations with the other two levels. The third involved the problems of identity and security as played out by the elites of the new or newly established states.
At the local level, security tended to be defined, especially in the first two or three decades after the Second World War, less in terms of conventional military threats than in terms of the survival of the ruling elites and the socio-economic systems that sustained them. In the period immediately following that war, the states of contemporary East and Southeast Asia either re-established themselves anew after civil war and alien military occupation or they acquired independence from colonial rule. The experience contributed to shaping their territorial bounds (and territorial claims) as well as the character of their social and economic development. Their domestic political cultures and their views of the outside world were also shaped by historical experiences that in most cases long predated the advent of the Europeans and the modern era. Nevertheless the majority of what might be called these new states were not secure initially in their social and political orders – and indeed some are still insecure or have acquired new sources of instability.

These domestic insecurities have had regional and international dimensions, first because competing elites have sought support from beyond their own states and external powers have in turn competed for regional influence by supporting them, and second because the outcomes were sometimes perceived as potentially significant for the management of the central or global balance of power by the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union.

Therefore, this book will examine the interactions between three factors which have shaped the evolution of the political and security developments in the region since 1945. These may be characterized as: first, the impact of the dynamics of the central balance; second, the conflicts and accommodations involving the regional great powers; and third, the problems of identity and national security of the new or newly established states. The junctions and disjunctions of security and political interests between these three levels may be seen as having occasioned such patterns of order or disorder that have emerged from time to time within the region. The book will conclude with an assessment of the impact of the end of the Cold War upon the region and of the new significance of the region in international politics.

**The region: an overview**

The region may be defined in a broad fashion so as to include the littoral states of the Pacific of North, Central and South America; the island states of the South Pacific; Australasia; and Northeast, Southeast and South Asia. A more common definition includes the states of North America, Australasia and Northeast and Southeast Asia. But in order to keep this
study manageable, we have defined the Asia-Pacific somewhat narrowly to include the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union (and its more circumscribed successor, Russia); the two regional great powers, China and Japan; and the local countries of Northeast and Southeast Asia. Other parts of what may legitimately be regarded as the Asia-Pacific, namely South Asia, Australasia, the South Pacific, Canada and parts of Latin America, will be included only when necessary to explain the international politics of the others.

Even as defined in this relatively restricted way, the scope of the region is immense and hugely diverse. That in itself is detrimental to the emergence of an indigenous sense of a common regional identity. Leaving aside the United States and those former members of the Soviet Union that have claims to being Asia-Pacific countries in their own right, the region embraces eighteen countries and territories that vary from, at one extreme, China with a territory of more than 9,561,000 square kilometres and a population in 2003 of 1,300 million people, to Singapore, at the other, with a territory of only 625 square kilometres and a population of 3.2 million people. The two countries also serve to point up further disparities as the per capita GNP in Singapore in 2003 was US$24,000 compared to US$1,084 in China (although it should be noted that in terms of purchasing power parity the Chinese figure was US$5,000; that was still only 13.1 percent of that of America as compared to 63.4 percent for Singapore).\(^6\) As can be seen from these figures, China essentially still belongs to the third world whereas Singapore is classified as a newly industrialized country or economy (NIC or NIE). The economic disparities of the region would loom even larger if Japan were to be compared with Vietnam or Burma.

In addition to these geographical and economic factors, attention is usually drawn to the wide divergences in religion, culture, historical associations, social traditions, language, ethnicity and political systems that further divide the region. Many of these divisions cut across state borders and not only make for tensions between regional states, but also exacerbate the problems of nation building and consolidating state power from within. This is particularly true of the states of Southeast Asia where the colonial experience promoted links with the metropolitan power. Thus the Indo-Chinese states were tied to France; Burma, through India, was orientated to Britain, as were Malaya and Singapore; Indonesia, however, was attached to Holland (with the island of Borneo divided between the Dutch and the British). And the Philippines was under Spanish rule until 1898, when it was taken over by the United States and remade in its image. Indeed some of the states were actually the creations of the colonial powers. Indonesia and Malaysia, for example, in their present forms do
not have precise historical antecedents, although their nationalistic elites draw on pre-colonial traditions. At the same time, the borders which all the Southeast Asian states inherited from the colonial period have left them with territorial disputes with neighbours, and the colonial legacy has also given rise to highly complex domestic communal problems, highlighted, for example, by the ethnic Chinese.

The region is also marked by considerable diversity in its security arrangements. The situation in the Asia-Pacific for most of this period and certainly for the duration of the Cold War was more fluid than in Europe, where two tightly coordinated military alliance systems confronted each other across clearly defined lines in seemingly implacable hostility. And although it was in the Asia-Pacific that the two major wars of the Cold War were fought, in Korea and in Vietnam, the fact that they were ‘limited’ and that they did not become general wars is indicative of the greater flexibility that applied in the region. It was possible to insulate conflicts and prevent them from engulfing the entire region. The different countries of the region did not on the whole join multiple or regional alliance systems. The alliance systems that have predominated in the region have tended to be of the bilateral kind – typically between a superpower and a regional partner. Such arrangements have allowed for significant variation within the region with regard to how the links or junctions between the global, regional and local levels could apply at any given time. China’s evolution from a close ally of the Soviet Union in the 1950s to being aligned with the United States in the 1970s perhaps illustrates the point most clearly.

The diversity within the region and the fluidity of the security arrangements are indicative of the absence of what might be called a regional order. There is as yet no basis for the establishment of a regional order, if that is taken to mean the existence of stable relationships based on accepted rules of conduct between states, of shared views about the legitimacy of government within states and of common assumptions about the interrelationships among regional and external states. 7

Until the establishment of the ASEAN Regional Forum in 1993, there were no intra-regional political institutions that linked together the various parts of the region, and even the ARF is best considered as an embryonic rather than a fully fledged security organization. Unlike in Europe, there are no effective institutional arrangements that would facilitate collective consideration by the states of the Asia-Pacific of the security problems of, say, Northeast Asia such as the disputed territories between Japan and the Soviet Union or the division of Korea. Similarly, the complexities involving the questions of Taiwan and Hong Kong are left to the parties directly involved. Even the one inter-state organization in the region that is usually
regarded as a successful example of a regional organization among third world countries, ASEAN, has studiously refrained from attempting to become a conventional security organization. Its members may have agreed on certain principles of state conduct, such as the unacceptability of military intervention by a regional state to change the government of a neighbour – that formed the basis for its diplomatic campaign against Vietnam’s actions in Cambodia. But the governments do not necessarily feel confident about the long term durability of their respective political systems, they do not share a common view about the principal security threats to the region, nor do they agree about the roles that external powers should play in Southeast Asia.

Not surprisingly, these divergences have combined to militate against the development of a regional consciousness comparable to that of the more homogeneous Europeans. Such regional consciousness that has emerged is of relatively recent origin and has been confined largely to the economic sphere, and then only in part. It has been articulated by elites within the worlds of business, academe and government. It has taken the form of a variety of trans-Pacific non-governmental or semi-governmental organizations that so far have been largely consultative in purpose. But, especially since the end of the Cold War, influential voices within the region have called for the upgrading of regional institutions so that they are both more comprehensive in membership and better able to address formally matters of security as well as of economics. This may be regarded as an open acknowledgement of the absence of such a facility so far.

Nevertheless, in surveying the evolution of the region into the world’s most dynamic centre of economic growth and technological change, it is clear in retrospect how important the role of the United States has been in providing the security structure and economic environment that have made this possible. In the absence of a multilateral security treaty organization along the lines of NATO, the United States put in place in the 1950s a series of bilateral security treaties or their equivalents of sufficiently broad geographical scope as to provide for a series of military bases and facilities that made a Pacific Rim strategy militarily viable. The United States established treaties that have endured with Japan and South Korea in Northeast Asia, with the Philippines and Thailand (the Manila Pact) in Southeast Asia and with Australia and New Zealand (the effective membership of the latter has been in abeyance since 1985). This Pacific perimeter defence structure was further buttressed by the American bases in Guam and Hawaii, and the Philippines until 1992, and by its special arrangements with island groups in the central and southern Pacific (notably the Marshall Islands). These separate arrangements were overseen administratively by the commander-in-chief for the Pacific of the US Navy.
The result has been that while the United States perceived its strategic role in the Asia-Pacific area as part of a larger strategic rationale that was both global and regional in scope, its series of bilateral partners have tended to perceive their part in narrower parochial or self-interested terms. The latter have tended to judge the value of their strategic association with the United States mainly in terms of particular national interests or even in terms of those of the local holders of political power. Hence the frustration the United States experienced in the 1980s and early 1990s, in re-negotiating its bases treaty with the Philippines or in finding a mutually acceptable arrangement with New Zealand over the question of disclosure of whether visiting American ships are carrying nuclear weapons. Since the end of the Cold War there has been widespread support within the region for the continued deployment of American forces in the west Pacific, which is seen as essential for maintaining stability in the region. Even China has refrained from calling for an American withdrawal – at least in the short term. But at the same time, there has been apprehension within the region that American domestic opinion may not support the deployment in the long term. Continuing trade disputes and criticism of America within the region, as part of the resistance to the perceived attempt to export American political values, have added new complexities to the strategic relationship.

From the perspective of international politics it is striking that the main convenient dividing point in the history of the region during the Cold War period should also be the main turning point in American policy towards the region. The transformation of the pattern of global alignments and the role of China in 1969–1971, which changed the balance of power within the region, were interconnected with profound changes in American strategic policies, as marked by the ‘Nixon doctrine’ of 1969 that forswore further commitment of American ground forces to major combat on the Asian mainland and by the Sino-American alignment of 1971–1972. These developments reflected both the escalation of China’s disputes with its giant communist neighbour to the level of armed conflict and the ending of the military phase of America’s policy of containment in Asia. This found institutional expression in the abolishment of the military structure of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) in February 1974 and then the organization itself in June 1977. During the 1970s, in the Asia-Pacific, the congruence between ideological and strategic affinities was erased. Yet the American system of bilateral alliances survived the change, especially that with Japan. Even though the alliance with Taiwan had to be formally abrogated in 1979, a way was found through the domestic legislative mechanism of the Taiwan Relations Act to preserve much of the substance of the former treaty. Containment
was still practised, but more indirectly through diplomacy and assisting third parties to resist the territorial expansion of Soviet power either by proxy, as through Vietnam in Indo-China, or directly, as in Afghanistan.

In addition to providing a militarily secure international environment for its allies and associates in the region through the exercise of hegemonic power, the United States also provided an international economic environment that has facilitated the remarkable growth of the economies of most of these friends. By opening its domestic markets and by applying liberal economic principles without demanding reciprocity (at least not until recent times), the United States made it possible for first Japan and then the East Asian NIEs to follow policies of rapid economic growth that combined various mixes of export orientation and import substitution. Certainly the United States has benefited from Asia-Pacific economic dynamism, but its benefits have become disproportionate to the costs. According to the *IMF Direction of Trade Statistics*, in 1985 the United States accounted for nearly 40 percent of the value of the total trade of the East Asian countries, as compared to 15 percent that was counted as trade amongst themselves. But even excluding America’s trade with Japan, its total trade with Asia was valued at US$158.8 billion, and that involved a trade deficit of US$43.9 billion which was not far behind the trade deficit with Japan of US$52.5 billion. In 1980, however, according to the same IMF source, the United States had a trade deficit with Japan of US$12.2 billion and a trade surplus of US$1.5 billion with the other East Asian countries. Thus in the 1980s the American trade deficit with the East Asian countries as a whole leapt from just over US$10 billion to nearly US$100 billion. By 1993 the overall American deficit with Asia and Japan had grown to US$121.2 billion. Japan by contrast enjoyed a surplus with Asia and America with a combined value of US$104–115 billion.8

Although the seeds for the economic transformation of the region were sown earlier, it was not until the 1970s (in the case of Japan) and the 1980s (for the East Asian NIEs) that the region began to be recognized as a centre of economic growth and technological development of global significance. Unlike in the security realm, where the United States is still unquestionably the dominant (if not unchallenged) military power, American economic leadership in the region has long been contested by Japan. As early as 1965 a leading Japanese scholar graphically depicted Japan’s envisioned role as the leader of a ‘flying-geese formation’ to characterize the future economic development of East and Southeast Asia. With Japan in the lead, economic dynamism would be diffused first to the NIEs, who in turn would be followed by some of the ASEAN countries and possibly China, Vietnam, North Korea, Burma and even the Soviet Union.9 Yet even as Japan’s trade with Asia has leaped in total value from
US$7.9 billion in 1970 to US$49.5 billion in 1980 and to US$147.6 billion in 1989, it has always enjoyed a surplus. The trade surplus in 1989 came to US$17.6 billion and in 1993 to US$50.1 billion. It is clear that although American trade may have declined as a proportion of overall Asian trade, access to its domestic markets on a non-reciprocal basis was still of great significance to the economic dynamism of the region in the 1990s.

Thus, in terms of the region as a whole, it is the United States that has provided the general security and other ‘public goods’ as its friends and allies have benefited while pursuing their more parochial concerns. For some time, Americans have been debating whether their country has been declining as a hegemonic power. But since the ending of the Cold War, governments, business elites and academics in East Asia have begun to question whether the United States will continue to provide the secure strategic and economic environments that have proved to be so advantageous to the countries in the region. Within the United States there is uncertainty about the character of the emerging post-Cold War period and the role that the United States should play now that it is effectively the only superpower left. There is also uncertainty about the United States continuing to provide the economic ‘public goods’ in the Asia-Pacific, as it has done so far.

The economic success of the Western orientated countries in the region since the 1970s has doubtless contributed to stabilizing their political systems and to encouraging the development of more democratic forms of political representation. Yet in most instances the consolidation of statehood is too recent and the sources of conflict both within and between the states of the region too apparent for any complacency to emerge in this respect. Indeed these uncertainties contribute to the difficulties in developing regional security institutions.

This is true even in Southeast Asia, where the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1992 marked its 25th anniversary as a generally acknowledged successful regional organization, especially in the third world. Yet its members do not share a common strategic outlook. They differ in their assessments of the sources of threats to regional security and on the extent to which they should seek to exclude the external great powers. Moreover, even after three or four decades of independence the member states still find that communal problems, challenges from fundamental Islam and intra-mural disputes about borders and territory have been contained rather than solved.

Relations within the region are also complicated by historical legacies from different eras. The legacy of the colonial period still endures in many respects in Southeast Asia, long after the European powers were compelled to retreat from Asia. For example, at certain levels communi-
cations and social/educational ties with the former metropolitan powers are easier and more visible than those with neighbouring countries. The legacies of historical relations of even earlier eras continue to complicate more contemporary arrangements. This is most evident in the case of China, which is central to the concerns of the region as a whole. Its sheer size and the memory of China’s traditional assertion of superiority and its former claims to bestow legitimacy on local rulers sustain unease among its neighbours in the region. That memory has also contributed to giving a keen edge to the response within the region to the sponsorship by China’s communist rulers of revolutionary insurgencies that challenged social order and the local regimes for nearly forty years after the end of the Pacific War. Not surprisingly, unease remains about the character of China’s appeal to the ethnic Chinese residents in the region, who exercise an economic influence disproportionate to their relatively small numbers and who have become major investors in China. These concerns are exacerbated by China’s territorial claims, especially in the South China Sea, where as recently as 1995 naval forces were deployed to advance them.

The ways in which traditional and contemporary sources of conflict can combine to accentuate problems may be seen from a brief consideration of the recent history of Indo-China, which has been the most persistent focus of major power conflict in the region. Long standing enmities between some of the local and regional forces had been interrupted by the French colonial intervention in the nineteenth century. The series of wars that followed the Pacific War saw these ancient enmities become enmeshed with the external involvement of the two superpowers. At the risk of oversimplifying, it can be argued that the settlement of the Cambodian conflict as an international problem in the early 1990s only became possible once the more distant great powers disengaged, to leave the historically engaged neighbouring countries to accept a settlement based on the then-current distribution of power between them. Above all, once the Soviet Union was no longer able or willing to support Vietnam, the Vietnamese found that they could no longer sustain their position in Cambodia. Vietnam, which in 1986 had shifted its main priority to domestic economic reform and development, then sought to mend relations with China. These developments de-linked the Cambodian conflict from the global and regional rivalries that had hitherto blocked all attempts at a settlement. With the conflict localized, it became possible for the United Nations to tender its services in an attempt to reconcile the differences between the warring factions. Meanwhile there can be little doubt about the enhanced position of the regional ‘victors’ China and, up to a point, Thailand.
In Northeast Asia too, the legacies of the conflicts of previous centuries as well as of the Pacific War and the Cold War continue to shape the international relations of the region. Here, too, the resolution of long term conflicts has in some, but not all, respects eased with the ending of the superpower confrontation. The disengagement of the major external sources of conflict has not in itself solved the conflicts of Korea, nor the territorial dispute between Russia and Japan, and especially not the China–Taiwan problem, but by being disentangled from the wider global conflict of the Cold War it has become possible to reduce the stakes of the conflicts and to introduce greater flexibility into their management.

The ending of the Cold War provides a convenient point to look back at the previous forty-five years to identify the underlying themes that have shaped the agenda of international politics in the Asia-Pacific region and to establish the points of junction and disjunction between the global, regional and local levels of politics noted earlier. But the ending of the Cold War has also ushered in a new era characterized less by a tangible sense of new order than by one of transition and uncertainty.

The ending of the bipolar divide between the United States and the Soviet Union has broken the basis of the linkage that used to enmesh some regional questions with global issues. Indeed, the character of what is of global concern has changed. For example, the potential conflict between the two Koreas has ceased to be regarded as a possible trigger that could ignite a third world war; rather it is now seen as being of local or, at most, of regional significance. But the possible acquisition of nuclear weapons by the North is perceived with alarm as an issue of global importance.

The world has become more complex and its lines of conflict more disparate. In retrospect the Cold War era provided the United States government with an organizing framework that bound together questions of global strategy with those of ideology, politics and even economics. Now that that framework has gone, it is proving to be much more difficult for Washington to develop a coherent strategy to address the new situation. It can no longer override domestic concerns and special interests by invoking the strategic imperatives of foreign policy. In fact, now that the global agenda has changed, it is the domestic arena that is claiming attention in the United States. These developments have raised new concerns within the Asia-Pacific as to whether the American public and Washington will have the political will to maintain current levels of forces in the region and to fulfill the commitments of the United States. As a result there is concern within the region that a new distribution of power may be in the process of emerging that may prove disruptive of the relative stability of the last decade.
The impact of the ending of the Cold War on the Asia-Pacific has been altogether different from that on Europe. The Asian communist regimes (with the exception of Mongolia – which in any case had many of the characteristics of an Eastern European satellite of the Soviet Union) have not collapsed. The East Asian economic ‘miracle’ continues to unfold as it has spread to the ASEAN countries and most spectacularly to China itself. But as China stands on the threshold of developing the economic weight to match its leaders’ great power aspirations, new questions have arisen, or perhaps old questions have emerged afresh, about its capacity to survive as a unitary state. Meanwhile its weaker neighbours seek to draw China into closer engagement with the region, particularly through participation in the new regional organizations, the ARF and APEC.

This book will first provide a historical overview of the region as a whole as it has evolved since 1945. It will be subdivided chronologically so as to facilitate discussion of the possible links between local developments and changes in the balance of power at both regional and global levels. Subsequent chapters will analyze separately the interests and policies of the two global powers, the United States and the Soviet Union/Russia, as these have taken shape within the region. That will be followed by chapters on China and Japan, respectively, as the two major regional powers of global significance.

Notes

4 Interestingly, the Japanese government decreed immediately after the attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941 that the term ‘the Far East’ (kyokuto), an ‘obnoxious’ reflection of the notion that ‘England was the centre of the world’, was no longer to be used, and that henceforth the war was to be known as that of ‘Great East Asia’ (Daitoa). See Christopher Thorne, The Far Eastern War: States and Societies 1941–45 (London: Counterpoint, Unwin Paperbacks, 1986).
6 All figures are drawn from the CIA World Factbook.
Asia (London: Macmillan, 1986). The question of order should be distinguished from that of regime, to which it is closely related, as the latter is usually related to principles and procedures as these apply to a particular issue area.

8 The range of the Japanese surplus arises from discrepancies in the IMF statistics between those listed for the US and those for Japan, see IMF Direction of Trade Yearbook 1994.


10 As before, these figures are drawn from the IMF Direction of Trade Statistics Yearbooks.
1 The impact of the Cold War and the struggles for independence, 1945–1954

It was the advent of the Cold War in the late 1940s and early 1950s that brought about a junction in the Asia-Pacific between the international, regional and local dimensions of politics and military strategy. More precisely, it was the Korean War, begun in June 1950, that effectively integrated the Asia-Pacific into the Cold War system that had first emerged in Europe. But unlike the situation in Europe where the Cold War divided the protagonists into two clearly defined camps of opposing ideological, economic and political systems separated by an ‘iron curtain’, the divisions in Asia were less clear cut and were still being contested long after they had been settled in Europe. Moreover, in Asia there also emerged a non-aligned dimension registered at the Asian–African Conference held in Bandung in 1955. The difference between Asia and Europe was also apparent from the way the Second World War was conducted in the two theatres, and from the different consequences of that war in each sector. The European war had been fought over established states by vast land armies, and ended in a division of Europe between the Soviet and Western victorious armies. The war in the Asia-Pacific was won essentially through American naval and air power culminating in the dropping of the two atomic bombs. This left a scramble for power in many parts of Asia involving both civil wars and struggles for independence against the returning colonial powers.

Although the Pacific War had provided a strategic rationale for treating the region as a whole, the Western allies came to treat Northeast and Southeast Asia separately. As the United States concentrated its forces on the assault on Japan itself, Britain was in effect entrusted with winning the war in Southeast Asia, with initial responsibility for Burma, Thailand, Malaya (including Singapore) and Sumatra. In July 1945, the rest of the Dutch East Indies, excluding the island of Timor, as well as Indo-China south of the 16th Parallel of latitude were transferred to the Southeast Asia Command under Admiral Mountbatten. Indo-China north of the
The 16th Parallel was allocated to the China Command of Chiang Kai-shek, and the rest was designated as the Southwest Pacific Command. This division of labour was to accentuate the differences between the two sub-regions of Northeast and Southeast Asia in the early years after the war, since the immediate agenda for the north centred on relations between the United States and the Soviet Union and the domestic evolutions of China and Japan, whereas that of the south turned on the struggles for independence with the returned colonial powers. As became evident from the American involvement in the struggles in Indo-China from the late 1940s, it was the advent of the Cold War that began to link the two sub-regions together from both global and local perspectives. It was only then that the results of local struggles for power or independence were regarded as having implications for the global distribution of power and influence. That provided a basis, on the one hand, for competing local elites to seek and to obtain external patronage and, on the other hand, for the external powers to extend such support for their own competitive advantages.

**Northeast Asia**

The immediate aftermath of the Pacific War was shaped by the understandings reached at the Yalta Conference, which in turn reflected the realities of American maritime hegemony in the Pacific and Soviet dominance of the landmass of Northeast Asia. The result was a division into spheres of interest. The United States exercised predominance in the Pacific Ocean, including the Philippines, Okinawa and Japan. The Soviet Union regained Sakhalin and the Kuriles as well as obtaining rights in Manchurian railways and ports and gaining Chinese recognition of the independence of its protégé, the former Outer Mongolia. Headed by the British, the colonial rulers sought to restore their positions in Southeast Asia. China had been expected to emerge as a sovereign power and to join the other three great powers in establishing a trusteeship over Korea. In the event, a trusteeship did not emerge in Korea. Instead a hasty agreement about the division of responsibility for accepting the Japanese surrender was concocted between the Americans and the Soviets which, to the agreeable surprise of the former, was observed unilaterally by the Soviet forces, who stopped at the 38th Parallel even though American forces had yet to arrive.

The American view of international order was not confined to balance of power considerations, it also put a premium upon domestic stability in the form of democratic institutions within states. The linchpin of Roosevelt’s original post-war strategy in the Asia-Pacific was that a ‘united and democratic China’ would emerge capable of exercising decisive influ-
ence as one of the great powers in the kind of post-war order envisaged in his ‘Four Freedoms’ speech of January 1941 and in the Atlantic Charter, which he announced with Churchill in the August of that year. The Charter asserted such principles as denial of territorial aggrandizement, guarantee of the right of self-determination for all nations, creation of an open liberal economic system, and international cooperation to preserve peace and security. Although these principles were incorporated with Soviet agreement in the United Nations Charter at the San Francisco meeting in 1945, and despite Soviet attendance at the Bretton Woods meetings that agreed the framework for a world economy based on free trade, it became clear that the Soviet Union had no intention of following them in terms understood in the West. By 1946 the American disillusionment with Soviet behaviour in Poland was affecting American attitudes in the East.6

Nevertheless, the American disappointment with China’s failure to live up to their wartime expectations coupled with the failure of the 1945–1946 Marshall mission to avert a civil war did not lead the American administration to cast the rivalry between the nationalists and communists within the framework of the Cold War at that point.7 The origins of the Cold War were in Europe, and that was the main focus of the attentions of both the Soviet Union and the United States. The Truman Doctrine of March 1947, which elevated the specific obligations being undertaken towards Greece and Turkey to a universal commitment to ‘support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or outside pressures’, was in fact made some time after the Americans had begun to assist those two countries. As many have argued, the high moral tone and the universal character of the doctrine was directed as much at mobilizing the American public back home as it was aimed abroad. By this stage a good number of American problems stemmed from the absence of means to carry out the growing international commitments the US was undertaking. Immediately the war had ended, the US began a rapid and extensive de-mobilization of its armed forces. These had stood at 12 million at the end of the war with Germany, and had come down to 3 million by July 1946 and to 1.6 million a year later. Defence spending followed a similar trajectory. By 1945, the last year of war, it had reached US$81.6 billion; in fiscal year 1946 it came down to US$44.7 billion and in fiscal year 1947 it dropped to US$13.1 billion.8

Just as the hoped-for cooperation with the Soviet Union was being replaced by confrontation, the American capacity to meet even the needs of Western Europe had diminished. The Truman Doctrine was designed at least in part to galvanize the American public. It was a factor in building support for the Marshall Plan for Europe and in providing further aid for Chiang Kai-shek. But the disappointment with China had already led to a
reconsideration of the American interest in retaining forces in Korea south of the 38th Parallel. Indeed, by 1947–1948 it had been decided to withdraw them. Meanwhile the United States had begun to regard Japan not only as a country that had to be encouraged to develop along liberal lines, but also as one that had to undergo reconstruction as a potential ally and as a source of stability in Northeast Asia.\(^9\)

Despite Soviet apprehensions, the United States government had no intention of intervening in the Chinese civil war. As the communist victory loomed the US government took the view that deep indigenous forces were at work and that the costs of intervention were unacceptably high and had little chance of success. Although there is evidence to show that Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai on their side had hoped to cultivate relations with the United States, perhaps for economic reasons and to avoid becoming exclusively dependent upon the Soviet Union, nothing came of their private overtures. Leading US administration figures also hoped to wean the Chinese communists from Moscow along the path pioneered by Tito.\(^10\) Whether or not such developments amounted to a ‘lost chance’, Sino-American relations diverged more and more markedly in the course of the nine months from the establishment of the PRC in October 1949 until the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950. At home an anti-communist hysteria, sparked in part by the administration’s own Cold War rhetoric and fanned by Senator McCarthy’s campaign against so-called domestic traitors including those in the State Department who were alleged to have contributed to the ‘loss’ of China, contributed to the difficulties in deciding upon foreign policy by rational calculations of measured interests. Meanwhile Mao in public encouraged hostility towards the United States, proclaimed his adherence to the Soviet Union in July when Liu Shaoqi was secretly sent to Moscow, and in December 1949 went himself to Moscow to negotiate an alliance that was eventually signed in February 1950.

Nevertheless the Truman administration had decided early in 1950 that US interests in Taiwan were not important enough to prevent its conquest by the Chinese communists. Even the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who recognized the damage that that would cause to American strategic interests, were unwilling to recommend military intervention because the limited American forces available might be needed for higher priority use elsewhere.\(^11\) With the Yalta system having broken down in the Asia-Pacific because of the communist victory in China, US policy became less than consistent and coherent. Its policy of limited assistance to the Kuo Min Tang (KMT or Nationalist) government ‘pleased no one and gained nothing’.\(^12\) In January 1950, as Mao was still embroiled in difficult negotiations with Stalin, first Truman on 5 January made it clear that the US would not defend Taiwan and then on 12 January Acheson stated at the
National Press Club that the American defence perimeter in Asia ran from the Aleutians through Japan and Okinawa to the Philippines. Korea was not included among those listed as being of vital strategic importance to the US, instead it was said to be under UN protection.

The perimeter defence concept would have been badly flawed if indeed the PRC had taken over Taiwan. But had the US sought to defend Taiwan it would undoubtedly have ensured the enmity of the PRC by undermining its national aims of unifying China, thereby driving it still further towards the Soviet Union. The trouble was that the policies designed to serve the US administration's long term policy goal of weaning China away from its Soviet ally were not in accord with its own short term strategic interests. Being still disillusioned with the KMT but bound by a Republican congress to extend aid to Chiang Kai-shek, the administration still clung on to the hope that a separate Taiwan might emerge under different auspices.

Thus on the eve of the Korean War the US perimeter defence strategy involved a strong commitment to the defence of Japan and to upholding the liberal domestic system that was evolving there under the American aegis, and it also included Okinawa and, further south, the Philippines. But despite American aid to the Chiang Kai-shek regime in Taiwan and to the Syngman Rhee regime in South Korea, the American commitment to them was more qualified. Although there was some support for these regimes among Republicans in Washington, there was no fundamental disagreement among the leaders of the Truman administration that even though it was in American interests to uphold them the means to do so had been stretched very thin. The main American priority was Europe and care had to be taken to avoid being over-committed elsewhere. On the communist side, there was continued distrust between China and the Soviet Union despite the alliance between them. Nevertheless, both Mao and Stalin had given Kim Il-sung the go-ahead to seek to reunify Korea by force. Yet it is still not clear how each had calculated the security interests involved. Clearly they had reason to believe that the Americans would not intervene, but they did not appear to have contingency plans ready in case they did. Moscow was absent from the Security Council at the crucial time in June 1950, ostensibly in protest at the exclusion of the PRC from the UN. Western analysts have found no evidence to suggest that the Chinese were involved in the preparations for the war or that they intended to become involved in it. The Soviet Union had played the major part in establishing and arming the Kim regime right up to late spring 1950, and it is possible that Stalin may have approved Kim's war plans with a view to increasing Soviet influence over China. Although Kim had effectively been put in place by the Soviet forces in 1945, the character
of Kim’s relations with Stalin remains unclear. How much of a free hand did he have? Was there any idea of tying in Kim’s plans with Mao’s plans to attack Taiwan? Despite the increased availability of archival material, many questions remain. But there can be little doubt that both sides regarded the existence of a friendly regime (which at that time could only have meant a communist one) on their Korean borders as vital to their respective securities. In that sense, Korea was more important to the Soviets than to the American side.

Although the Cold War had already begun to influence the international politics of the Asia-Pacific, as was demonstrated by the US despatch of aid to Indo-China in May 1950, the Korean War had the effect of drawing a sharp demarcation line in Northeast Asia between the communist countries on the one side and the so-called ‘free world’ on the other that was to last for the next twenty years. The North Korean attack on the South across the 38th Parallel on 25 June 1950 may have been regarded by Kim Il-sung as a national civil war to unite his artificially divided country, but in the international climate of the time, it was bound to have been seen as more than that. In Washington it was immediately regarded as a new instance of communist aggression and a test of Western resolve, especially after the success in countering the Soviet blockade of West Berlin a year earlier. The impact in Europe of the possible successful communist use of force in Asia was very great, and North Korea’s sudden attack was an important element in the decision to establish a unified NATO command. The consequence in Asia was President Truman’s immediate announcement that an economic embargo would be imposed on China and that the US Seventh Fleet would be interposed in the Taiwan Straits, thus preventing a pending Chinese communist attack upon the island. Truman’s intention was to deny Taiwan as a potential base to the Soviet Union in the western Pacific. The effect of the decision on Mao was to confirm his view that the Americans supported Chiang Kai-shek in the hope of invading the Chinese mainland to reverse the result of the Chinese civil war. In retrospect the Chinese were to argue that this was the decisive turning point in their relations with the Americans.

However, it was the crossing of the 38th Parallel by the American-dominated UN forces in October 1950 (after their defeat of the forces of the North) and their approach to the Chinese border in total disregard of Chinese warnings to desist that led to military intervention by the Chinese. What was seen by the UN as a move towards uniting Korea was perceived by Mao as a threat to China’s security and the survival of his newly established revolutionary regime. Local, regional and international political and security issues became enmeshed together in an apparent seamless web.
Instead of seeking to distinguish between primary and secondary strategic interests, the outbreak of the Korean War caused the Truman administration to define its interests in absolutist terms and to try to apply the strategic doctrine of containment in Northeast Asia as laid out in NSC-68 of 1949 – the first comprehensive attempt to extend Cold War strategic thinking to Asia. Following the European pattern a sharp geographic line was drawn on the map between two opposed systems whose security was ultimately guaranteed by each of the superpowers. The line ran between Japan and the USSR in the Sea of Japan, along the armistice line (roughly the 38th Parallel) between North and South Korea and through the Taiwan Straits between Taiwan (the Republic of China – ROC) and the Chinese mainland (PRC). The disposition of some of the offshore islands in the Straits was to become the ostensible cause of two major crises in the Cold War era. At the same time, it is important to recognize that the strategic divide that was underlined by a political and ideological bifurcation between the US and the USSR as global powers was mirrored not only by a regional divide, as described above, but by local ones in which both Korea and China were split into two separate states claiming exclusive jurisdiction of the whole country. The sharpness and immobility of the line drawn between ‘East’ and ‘West’ was paralleled by a stalemate in the civil war between the divided states. The competitive junction between the two global powers and their local allies had become very close indeed.

The Korean War itself may be regarded as being essentially a domestic or civil war that had unanticipated international consequences. Despite the release of new source material in the last few years, the motives and the calculations of the different communist leaders are still unclear. Both Kim II-sung of North Korea and Ho Chi Minh of Vietnam visited Moscow during the course of Mao’s negotiations with Stalin. Kim obtained Stalin’s approval to go to war and apparently that of Mao too, who’s advice to Kim to pursue a more guerrilla based strategy was ignored. The veil of secrecy over Mao’s relations with Stalin has been lifted to reveal extraordinary degrees of distrust. As Mao put it a dozen years later:

after the victory of the revolution [Stalin] … suspected China of being a Yugoslavia, and that I would be another Tito. … When did Stalin begin to have confidence in us? It was at the time of the [Korean War] from the winter of 1950. He then came to believe that we were not Tito, not Yugoslavia.

Whether by accident or by design, the Korean War was beneficial to Moscow in that it ruled out for a long time the possibility of an accommodation between Beijing and Washington.
Despite the enormous destruction unleashed upon Korea and its people and the high rate of casualties of the opposing armies, the Korean War is credited as the first limited war of the Cold War era in which the US and the USSR exercised calculated restraint so as to avoid its widening. Both sides, for example, connived in effect to suppress news of extensive clashes between the Soviet and American air forces. It should be noted, however, that at the end the Eisenhower administration threatened to use nuclear weapons so as to bring to an end the armistice negotiations that had been dragging on for two years.

The Korean War also prompted the US to seek to include Japan in attempts to strengthen the 'free world' in the region. This involved preparing for the conclusion of a peace treaty and for tying Japan into some kind of regional alliance. The administration’s special envoy, John Foster Dulles, who visited Japan in early 1951, was unable to persuade the Japanese to rearm and settled instead for a policy of economic cooperation by which Japanese productive capacity would be used in support of the war effort. American ideas of establishing a regional Pacific pact also foundered on residual allied distrust of Japan and on differences between them. In the build-up to the peace treaty itself, the US signed a mutual defence treaty with the Philippines in August 1951, and one month later a similar treaty with Australia and New Zealand. The Japanese Peace Treaty was also signed in September in San Francisco. Japan and the US signed a mutual defence treaty and the following year the American occupation came to an end as Japan resumed full sovereignty.

Despite American efforts, the end result was a Cold War alignment in Northeast Asia very different from the one that emerged in Europe. Although the first hot war of the era had been fought in this part of the world, regional ties were relatively weak on both sides of the divide. On the Soviet side its dominance over Eastern Europe was not matched in Northeast Asia. It exercised influence but not control over North Korea, and the PRC was too big, independent and proud to be dominated in that way, especially as it had proved itself to be a major power on the battlefields of Korea, where for the first time in modern history Chinese forces had fought a modern Western army to a standstill. On the American side too there was no Asia-Pacific equivalent to the Marshall Plan, let alone NATO. Instead there were a series of primarily bilateral treaties across the Pacific.

Southeast Asia

The end of the Pacific War saw the return of the colonial powers to a very changed world. The legacy of the Japanese had been, first, to have shattered the myths of colonial white superiority and, second, to have
The impact of the Cold War accelerated the nationalist drive for independence. Three levels of foreign relations may be identified in the early evolution of the foreign relations of the states of Southeast Asia. The process of acquiring independence and the character of the post-colonial settlement involved relations with former rulers. In some cases these endured in relative harmony well beyond the transfer of sovereignty. The second level involved local reactions to great power involvement in the region. The third involved intra-regional relations among the resident states. More broadly their different roads to independence became embroiled in the wider struggles of international politics that centred on Cold War issues, and they greatly influenced the subsequent alignments and international roles of the new states.

The international aspects of the end of the Pacific War also contributed to shaping the subsequent development of independence in the resident states. The SEAC under British leadership lacked the resources to cope with the sudden and unexpected surrender of the Japanese forces in Southeast Asia. This led to delays in establishing a significant SEAC presence in the Dutch East Indies and French Indo-China in particular. Nationalist groups filled the vacuum, which led to armed confrontations as the Dutch and the French later returned in force. Indeed armed struggle that inevitably acquired external dimensions became a feature of the acquisition of independence in both territories. The impact of the communist victory in the Chinese civil war in the late 1940s was also widely felt in the region as an inspiration and source of support for insurgents and as a challenge to incumbent elites.

The Philippines became independent as a close associate of the United States and it was not until the US abandoned its bases there at the end of the Cold War that the Philippines began to move away from its highly ambivalent position that sought to balance its professed Asian identity with its dependence on America. This pattern was evident from the acquisition of independence. The US had promised independence even before the war and moved to implement it speedily once the war had ended. The Philippine Republic was inaugurated on 4 July 1946, but from the outset the Filipino elite accepted a dependency on the United States, to whom it was indebted for its continued dominance of the country. The American supreme commander, General Douglas McArthur, chose to overlook the collaborationist record of much of this elite, as the principal resistance movement to the Japanese was the communist-led Huks (People’s Anti-Japanese Army). The United States contributed to the economic rehabilitation of the Philippines, but at the same time it insisted upon a trade act that benefited American agrarian and manufacturing interests. In March 1947 it was agreed that huge American bases would be installed on Filipino territory. By 1949 the communist-led Huks had
turned to armed struggle against the corrupt ruling elite. This led to greater American military aid and to relative success in containing the insurgency. In January 1950 the American secretary of state, Dean Acheson, declared the Philippines to be part of America’s strategic defence perimeter in the Pacific.

The Filipino elite has been called bi-national on account of its attachment to the US. By virtue of geography and history the Philippines has been set somewhat apart from the other Southeast Asian countries. Compared to them, the historical influences of Indian and Chinese cultures have been relatively small. There was no national centre or state before the Spanish conquest in the sixteenth century. Islam had spread from Borneo and from what is now Indonesia to the island of Luzon, but it was driven back south by the vigorous extension of Catholicism by the missionaries who accompanied the conquistadors. Having in effect created the Philippines as a state, the Spaniards also left their mark on the social structure, leaving behind a wealthy mestizo elite based on large rural estates who have come to dominate politics, as well as a legacy of extensive rural poverty. Not surprisingly, the Philippines has often been depicted as a piece of Latin America located offshore of East Asia. The newly independent country ‘acquired a reputation [in Asia] for being a spokesman for American interests’. Indeed, right up until the closure of the American bases at the end of the Cold War, the Filipinos’ sense of identification with Asia continued to be ambivalent. Notwithstanding shared linguistic and ethnic origins with their near neighbours, Indonesia and Malaysia, the Philippines remained somewhat aloof from their regional concerns. In 1963 it formed the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA) with Malaya and Thailand – the other two pro-Western states of the region – which soon foundered because of the Filipino claim to Sabah. The Philippines became involved in the Vietnam War under the influence of the United States. Its membership of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) did not make a substantive difference initially, but over time the intra-regional dimension carried increasing weight in Filipino foreign policy. However, the Philippines remained the Asian state with the closest ties to the United States.

Indonesia, by contrast, professed great attachment to what became known as non-alignment. This may be traced to the impact of the complex struggle for independence, when the great powers were found wanting, and to the Indonesian sense of an entitlement to exercise the leading position in Southeast Asia. Interestingly, despite the anti-communist outlook of the Indonesian army, there was a tendency among its senior officers to feel that they had much in common with their Vietnamese equivalents, because their respective struggles for independence involved
anti-colonial armed struggle. In fact the Indonesian road to independence involved both armed struggle and diplomacy.

Indonesian independence was first declared on 17 August 1945, two days after the surrender of the Japanese. The latter had left behind a trained Indonesian military force and an active youth movement. The British arrived in September to be followed by the Dutch a month later to confront a mass movement. The Dutch established influence over the outer islands and attempted to crush the independence movement by two ‘police actions’. By the time of the second in December 1948, the international political environment had changed to the advantage of the Indonesians. In the first two or three years after the Second World War, American sentiment in favour of national independence rather than old world colonialism was tempered by the need to shore up the weakened West European countries and their fragile democracies against the perceived communist and Soviet threat. But by late 1948 a new dimension had entered the equation, as the impact of the Cold War began to be felt in Southeast Asia too. The Americans now began to fear that the appeal of communism to the peoples of Asia would grow if the nationalists were continually to be frustrated in their rightful quest for independence. Moreover, the Americans took note of the crushing of the communist uprising in Medan by the Indonesian Republican forces earlier in September 1948. The Dutch then came under increasing American pressure to concede. Paradoxically, it was the success of the second ‘police action’ in December that hastened their end. Amid a context in which the Indonesian army had begun a guerrilla campaign, a negotiated settlement was eventually reached and the Republic of the United States of Indonesia was formed, initially under UN auspices, in December 1949. These events reaffirmed the Indonesian attachment to independence, as in a bipolar world the Soviet Union had proved to be untrustworthy because of Medan and the United States unreliable because of inconsistency.

This left two sets of tensions that were to dominate Indonesian politics and foreign relations for a long time thereafter. First, a tension developed between the army and the politicians; and second, a tension emerged between the efficacy of struggle and diplomacy in the conduct of foreign affairs. The army came to see itself as even more than the ultimate protector of the Indonesian state and, under President Sukarno’s Guided Democracy, the army became part of the uneasy triumvirate in charge of the ship of state. In the end, after the failed 1965 coup, it eventually took over supreme power in 1966 under the leadership of General Suharto. Until his fall, Sukarno combined elements of both struggle and diplomacy in his assertive foreign policy. This was most evident in his successful campaign to annex West Irian (the former West New Guinea) in 1963.
where he played the United States and the Soviet Union against each other and in the unsuccessful attempt to undermine the newly formed Malaysia in his campaign of *Konfrontasi* of 1963–1966. Notwithstanding the diplomatic support of the United States in the struggle for independence, and even on the West Irian question, Indonesia became firmly wedded to the non-aligned position of Asian nationalists and indeed it became a leading exponent of it.26

In contrast to the Dutch in Indonesia and the French in Indo-China, the British sought to encourage Malaya on the road to independence, and indeed there was a Malay elite that was close to Britain and that espoused democratic values. But the British task was complicated by the consequences of having encouraged the settlement of migrant labour from China, particularly in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By the outbreak of the Pacific War the Chinese and also Indian immigrants had come to account for nearly half the population. During the occupation the Japanese cultivated the resentful Malays at the expense of the Chinese, who had been greatly influenced by stories of the resistance of their kith and kin and fellow nationals to Japanese aggression in China itself. During the war the British supported the communist-led and Chinese-dominated resistance against the Japanese. Their support was in many ways similar to that of the Americans for the communist-led Vietnamese resistance to Japan at the same time.

After the war the British were unable to persuade the ethnic Malays of the virtues of a projected Malayan Union with equal citizenship for Chinese and Indians, despite excluding the Chinese-dominated city of Singapore. It was rejected by the newly formed United Malays National Organization (UMNO) which dominated the alternative Federation of Malaya established in 1948. The Malayan Communist Party (MCP) with its constituencies among the Chinese communities found that its political effectiveness within the trade unions was being curtailed and it turned to armed struggle in June 1948. That insurrection also reflected the changing international circumstances associated with the beginnings of the Cold War and the inspiration of the pending victory of the communists in the civil war in China and of the armed struggle begun by the communist-led Vietminh against the French.

The British declared a state of emergency in June 1948. The Emergency lasted officially until 1960; a rump insurgency force continued to operate in the jungles of the Thai–Malay borders until the late 1980s. But the back of the insurgency was broken in the early 1950s after the resettlement of some half a million (Chinese) squatters on whose support the insurgents depended. The costs to the victorious side were nevertheless enormous. Against guerrillas whom at no stage numbered more than
8,000 men were deployed 40,000 regular British and Commonwealth troops, 70,000 Malay police and some 200,000 home guards. But the Emergency itself led to the establishment of the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) in February 1949, made up of anti-communist Chinese Chambers of Commerce and educated professionals. A pact between the two communal organizations UMNO and MCA at municipal elections in 1952 at the expense of a multiracial rival eventually paved the way to independence in 1957.27

The only country in Southeast Asia that did not experience colonialism, Thailand, nevertheless had to make difficult adjustments in order to adapt to post-war conditions. It chose a path of adhering closely to the United States, primarily because it was the dominant power and also because Thailand's regional interests coincided with the Cold War objectives of the United States in the area.

The military government, which came to power following a coup in 1932 that overthrew the absolute monarchy, accommodated to the power of Japan and allowed its armies transit to British-held Burma and Malaya. Immediately after the Japanese surrender a new Thai government, headed by a civilian member of the 1932 coup group who had led a wartime resistance to Japan, nullified the arrangements made with Japan and promised to return with compensation the territories the Japanese had granted the Thais from Burma and Malaya. The United States helped the Thai government, which was now headed by its former minister to Washington, to resist pressure for further concessions from Britain. At the end of complex diplomacy Thailand also gave up territories in Laos and Cambodia, and it was admitted to the United Nations at the end of 1946. Thailand has enjoyed a continuity of diplomatic style that goes back a long time in history.

Though it is often wrongly construed as one of neutrality, in fact it has always been a diplomacy which has been ‘hard’ towards small neighbours and ‘soft’ towards the dominant regional power: China before the Opium wars, then Britain, then Japan, and, particularly evident ever since 1954, the United States.28

Interestingly, even earlier Thailand had sent a contingent to participate in the Korean War, which contributed to securing benefaction from the United States. Thailand became a party to the 1954 Manila Pact with the US that secured a formal American commitment to come to the defence of the country, and Bangkok became the headquarters of SEATO.

Burma, one of the historic political centres in Southeast Asia, became a province of British India in the nineteenth century, which led to an inflow
of immigrants from India. Burmese nationalism before the Pacific War had a distinctive anti-Indian flavour. In 1937 Burma was separated from India and given considerable control over domestic affairs. During the Japanese occupation it was granted nominal independence in 1943, but this proved to be illusory, and although the British return was welcomed in 1945 there was now impatience for independence. The leader of the nationalist movement, Aung San, was a former student leader who had been commander of the Japanese-sponsored Burmese National Army. The British offered independence within dominion status that in the end was rejected. Aung San, along with six of his colleagues in the cabinet, was assassinated in July 1947 before the formal transfer of power had been completed. Association with the Commonwealth had already been rejected and the Republic of the Union of Burma became formally independent in January 1948. But faced with ethnic rebellions and opposition from China's communist leaders, combined with a lack of interest in its security from Britain and the United States, the new Burmese government opted for a policy of what Michael Leifer has called 'non-offence', especially towards its giant neighbour to the north. By the early 1950s it became active in voicing the concerns of Asian neutralism (in the Cold War) and it was one of the key Asian powers that met in Colombo to help convene the first Asian–African summit conference in Bandung in 1955.

Vietnam was the most important country in Indo-China and its history after 1945 was dominated by the armed struggle for independence from France, led by the communist Vietminh, that began in 1946 and culminated in the Geneva Agreements on Indo-China of July 1954 that resulted in the recognition of the independence of Laos and Cambodia and of a communist North Vietnam and a non-communist South. These eight years of armed struggle, later known as the First Indo-China War, brought together the three main dimensions of conflict: the global, the regional and the local. It also began a process of international and regional conflict that was not to be concluded before the end of the Cold War itself. At this stage the conflict initially involved the intensely nationalistic and fervently communist Vietminh against the returning French forces who had desperately and largely unavailingly sought to recruit a credible Vietnamese nationalistic alternative to the Vietminh. The two warring parties were soon to be backed by the victorious Chinese communists on the one side and by the Americans on the other. American support became possible only after the Elysee Agreements of March 1949, which gave the Indo-Chinese states nominal independence.

Once the Vietminh in the North had secured access to Chinese communist support after the latter's domestic victory in 1949, the terms of the war turned remorselessly against the French. Up to that point the French forces had been in possession of most of the cities and towns in
Vietnam, but had difficulty in controlling the rural areas. Thereafter the Vietminh were able to escalate their fighting capabilities from guerrilla to positional warfare. The French finally conceded that they should withdraw after their defeat at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954. That surrender has been called ‘the worst defeat any Western colonial power ever suffered on the battlefield at the hands of an Asian people’. The war which drew in the external powers became the primary agency that led to what has been called the internationalization of the problems of Southeast Asia. Within the context of the Cold War, it highlighted an American concern with the domestic conditions of the states of the area. It provided a framework for placing the domestic developments and the contending elites of the countries of the region within a Cold War syndrome that at its height joined them with the axis of international as well as regional conflict.

The Geneva Conference

The Geneva Conference of 1954 which convened to address the Korean and Indo-Chinese issues may be seen as the benchmark that signalled the completion of the integration of East Asia into the Cold War system. It also confirmed China’s great power status (even though John Foster Dulles is famously reputed at one point to have refused to shake the hand of Zhou Enlai). It affirmed the stalemate of the Korean armistice and it helped to end what turned out to be the First Indo-China War.

The Geneva Agreements of July 1954 effectively ended the French presence in Indo-China. They arranged a partition of Vietnam that, although provisional in principle, resulted in practice in a victorious communist regime in the North beyond the 17th Parallel and an insecure anti-communist regime in the South. The two were supposedly to be united through elections to be held two years thereafter. The Geneva settlement also called for an independent but neutral Cambodia and Laos. The Geneva Agreements satisfied the Chinese government by preventing an immediate American military intervention – which was one of the routes that Mao feared the Americans might follow in order to attack China itself. Moreover, following the Korean War, the Chinese adopted a new diplomatic stance that favoured peaceful coexistence so as to be better able to concentrate on economic development at home and cultivate newly established Asian governments. The post-Stalin Soviet leaders also sought to reduce tensions with the Americans. That is why the two communist giants had combined to put pressure on the Vietnamese communists to give up ground they controlled below the 17th Parallel. Twenty-five years later, after the 1979 Chinese attack on Vietnam, the Vietnamese leaders publicly revealed their anger at what they regarded as the Chinese betrayal at Geneva.
The Americans too were displeased with the agreements and, together with the government of South Vietnam, they refused to accept the final declaration. The United States, however, did not block the Geneva settlement because of the position of its European allies, notably the British and the French, but neither did it wish to condone formally the communist victory. The American representative confined himself to declaring that his government would regard any attempt to upset the terms of the settlement by force as a threat to peace. Dulles himself regarded Geneva as confirming that ‘the tide is running against us in the channel of [his] tough policy. If we are to continue to pursue it we shall lose many of our allies.’

By the middle of 1954 the Cold War had left its mark on Southeast as well as Northeast Asia. The Philippines and increasingly Thailand were closely tied to the United States. North Vietnam, as a communist state, belonged to the socialist camp and South Vietnam sought to consolidate its precarious statehood under American protection. The fragile states of Laos and Cambodia were nominally neutral by an agreement of the regional and external powers. Burma had perforce to choose inoffensive neutrality. Indonesia was increasingly identifying its independent course in what came to be called non-alignment. Malaya, which was still subject to the Emergency, had yet to be granted independence as its colonial ruler gradually asserted mastery of the one Cold war insurgency still active in the region. But it was clear that in the aftermath of independence that would not long be delayed, the Malay elite would lean to the British side.

More generally, the very different paths by which the countries of Southeast Asia acquired independent statehood were to have marked effects upon their subsequent political developments and upon their foreign relations. Some, especially Thailand and the divided Vietnam, could draw on traditions of national identity and statehood that long antedated the colonial era. However, others such as the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia were new successor states to the previous colonial order and although these too could draw on pre-colonial antecedents, this were true of only parts of the new states, such as the old trading principalities in parts of what is now Indonesia. Nation building for the very new states encompassed a wider task than the enormous problems of seeking to establish good governance. The conduct of foreign affairs became an essential part of the new nation building as it provided potent new symbols for evoking national unity.

Yet in many respects some of the profound challenges that confronted the older and the newly established states in the aftermath of independence were similar. In varying degrees, with the exception of the Indo-Chinese states they were led by Westernized elites with limited experience in government who had to deal with wide disparities in cultural and
political traditions and with deep divisions between town and country. Their inadequate infant administrations had to tackle the still destructive remains of the war and to develop their national economies quite often against the legacies of one-sided economic development of the colonial period. The attempts by their leaders to strengthen national consciousness frequently met with only limited success when faced with ethnic, religious and local particularisms. Moreover none of the new states was free of border or territorial disputes. The rhetoric of Asian solidarity often failed to take into account the realities of differences within and between states, the limited capacities of governments and the paucity of the opportunities to cooperate to solve common problems. Moreover, none could really escape the patterns of alignments set by the Cold War.

Notes


6 Gaddis, ‘Korea in American Politics …’ (op. cit.), p.278.

7 See the argument and citations by Aruga Tadashi, ‘The United States and the Cold War’ in Nagai and Iriye (eds), *The Origins of the Cold War in Asia* (op. cit.), p.78.


9 See the point made by the US Joint Strategic Survey Committee in April 1947 noted in Akira Iriye, ‘Continuities in U.S.–Japanese Relations, 1941–49’ in Nagai and Iriye (eds), *The Origins of the Cold War in Asia* (op. cit.), p.403. It should be recognized, however, that the entire thrust of Iriye’s argument is to show that, until 1949, US policy in Asia operated within the pre-Cold War ‘Yalta system’.


13 For an account of the Chinese side see Chen Jian, *China’s Road …* (op. cit.); and for an account of the Soviet side see Kathryn Weathersby, *Soviet Aims in Korea and the Origins of the Korean War, 1945–1950: New Evidence from Russian Archives* (Washington, DC: Cold War International History Project, Woodrow Wilson Center, Working Paper no.8, November 1993). See also her ‘New Findings on the Korean War’, *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* no.3 (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center, Fall 1993). All these are based on archival sources that only recently became available. It should be noted that the findings must be treated with caution, as access to the Russian archives is incomplete and Chinese documentation is still only available second hand through the writings of official Chinese scholars who have had access to the archives.


15 Gaddis, ‘Korea in American Politics …’ (op. cit.), p.289.

16 Hao Yufan and Zhai Zhihai, ‘China’s Decision to Enter the Korean War: History Revisited’, *The China Quarterly* 121 (March 1990), pp.94–115.

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18 See Hao and Zhai, ‘China’s Decision to Enter the Korean War’ (op. cit.). But Goncharov, Lewis and Xue (Uncertain Partners (op. cit.), p.146) show that Mao could hardly have objected to Kim’s proposed war because of fear of American intervention when he himself had secured a promise of Soviet support for his proposed invasion of Taiwan. He could hardly have expressed fears about American intervention in Korea without tacitly admitting to Stalin the likelihood of similar involvement in Taiwan, thereby jeopardizing his support.


21 According to Jon Halliday and Bruce Cummings, 2 million North Korean civilians and 500,000 soldiers and at least 1 million Chinese soldiers died on the communist side. They estimate that 1 million South Korean civilians died. See their Korea: The Unknown War (London: Viking, 1988), p.200. Max Hastings gives the following figures for the UN side: ‘1,319,000 Americans served in the Korean theatre, and 33,629 did not return. A further 105,785 were wounded. ... The South Korean army lost 415,000 killed and 429,000 wounded.’ The figures for the remaining thirteen states that sent combat forces were 3,063 killed and 11,817 wounded. See his The Korean War (London: Pan, 1988), p.407.


28 Lyon, War and Peace ... (op. cit.), p.34. This account has also drawn on Colbert, Southeast Asia in International Politics (op. cit.), p.90ff.; and Hall, A History ... (op. cit.), pp.896–898.

29 Leifer, Foreign Relations ... (op. cit.), p.14.
This account has relied mainly upon Lyon, *War and Peace* ... *(op. cit)*, pp.46–55; and Hall, *A History* ... *(op. cit.)*, pp.770–788, 878–885.


Hao and Zhai, ‘China’s Decision ...’ *(op. cit.)*, p.106.


2 The application of bipolarity, 1954–1970

This was the period when international politics in the Asia-Pacific, as elsewhere in the world, was greatly shaped by the attempts of the United States and the Soviet Union to consolidate their respective sides of the Cold War as part of the management of the central balance of power between them. Although the alliance patterns in the Asia-Pacific were bilateral and much more volatile than in Europe – as attested by the collapse of the Sino-Soviet alliance into acrimony and bitter rivalry – they nevertheless reflected the essential bipolar character of international politics of the period. Most of the countries in the region were linked to one or other of the two superpowers, and the changing character of Soviet–American relations had a discernible impact upon the points of conflict and cooperation in the region.

Perhaps one of the most important ways in which the operation of bipolarity was distinctive in the Asia-Pacific during this period centred on the role of China. As a relatively independent strategic actor that had proved its entitlement to great power status in the Korean War, China moved from being a close ally of the Soviet Union in the early 1950s to become its most implacable adversary by the end of the 1960s. Indeed, for much of the 1960s it challenged both the superpowers simultaneously. Moreover, within the Asia-Pacific region itself China exercised considerable weight independently of all other powers. However, it was not until relations were opened with Washington at the beginning of the 1970s that the main features of a broader strategic triangle involving Beijing as well as Moscow and Washington became evident. Nevertheless, as we now know, the Eisenhower administration sought to drive a wedge between China and its Soviet ally by a policy of calculated toughness towards the former so as to increase pressure upon the alliance beyond breaking point. The irony is that when that point was reached during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, the United States became too focused on Vietnam to exploit it. Hence tripolarity did not fully emerge until
1971/1972 when Chairman Mao and President Nixon recognized their common interest in managing an augmented Soviet threat.

If the unity of the communist side of the bipolar divide in the Asia-Pacific was threatened by the nationalist sentiments of independent governments (and that included North Vietnam and to a degree North Korea as well as China\(^2\)), the pro-Western side was also characterized by greater diversity than obtained in Europe. The Cold War rhetoric that characterized the application of the containment policy of the bipolar period was even less appropriate here than in Europe. Thus India – the world’s largest democracy – enjoyed closer relations with the Soviet Union than with the United States. The Indian attachment to non-alignment stopped it from joining the Western alliance systems in the early years, especially as Pakistan became allied to the United States. Once the conflict with China deepened as a result of the border skirmish of 1959 and open warfare of 1962, India’s links with the Soviet Union were correspondingly consolidated. The notion that the Cold War consisted of a conflict between the ‘free world’ and that of communist dictatorships did not accord with the situation elsewhere in Asia. Although the economies of the pro-Western states in East Asia were orientated towards the market, the majority were not ruled by ‘free’ democratic governments. Additionally, with the possible exception of Japan, most governments, especially in Southeast Asia, were fragile in their exercise of power and fearful of a variety of challenges to their survival. These came not only from communist insurgencies that exploited rural discontent, but also from ethnic unrest, disorders based on religious forces, and from separatist elements – all of which could be aided and abetted from the outside, and not necessarily by communist forces alone.\(^3\)

Unlike the European theatre, the threat to the pro-Western side beyond Taiwan, Korea and to a degree Vietnam, was not on the whole one of conventional military assault. If the two superpowers tended to approach these regional and local preoccupations from the global perspectives of bipolarity, local elites and governments sought external support and even patronage with their own more parochial security interests in mind. The conjunction between the two worked best in the cases of Korea and Taiwan where the divisions of the Cold War and the respective civil wars coincided. But, as we shall see, even there the correspondence was less than complete. In Southeast Asia the conjunctions were on the whole less clear cut. Even in the case of Vietnam, where after 1954 the United States may be said to have had a global strategic interest in assisting the regime in the South to survive the threat from the North, it did not follow, as the prominent ‘realists’ Hans Morgenthau and George Kennan pointed out at an early stage, that the American interest was so vital that the fall of the
South would undermine its standing in the central balance with the Soviet Union. Moreover they also argued that American power could not substitute for effective government backed by popular support.4

The nationalist sentiments of the majority of the countries of the Asia-Pacific did not coincide with the Cold War cleavage. Many of the states had newly emerged from colonial or semi-colonial rule and were economically less well developed. Their leaders claimed to have much in common that transcended the East–West divide. Led by the five powers which met in Colombo in April 1954, many sought to establish a separate and distinctive international identity that was epitomized by the Asian and African Conference that met in Bandung in April 1955. Leaders of communist and anti-communist governments rubbed shoulders together in the name of Asian–African unity as they sought to register their own separate international agenda. Although conflicts of interest soon shattered its rhetoric of the solidarity of the ‘Bandung spirit’, the conference paved the way for the development of the non-aligned movement and other third worldist institutions. Yet, whatever their public protestations, governments faced with domestic or external challenges to their survival and to the national security of their states often turned for support to precisely the same external great power they were otherwise denouncing – usually the United States.

The actual balance of power between the Soviet Union and the United States was more uneven in the Asia-Pacific than in Europe. Despite its credentials as a Pacific power, the Soviet Union was much more of a European power. Its political, historic and cultural heartland was in Europe. The Soviet Far East was more of an outpost of empire. It was strategically important, but it was sparsely populated and of minor economic significance. Consequently, the Soviet economic impact on the region was restricted to its communist allies, possibly India and to a point Indonesia and Afghanistan.5 As for the bulk of the Asia-Pacific, the significance of the Soviet Union was limited to strategic considerations. The United States, by contrast, bestrode the Pacific like a colossus. Until brought low by the war in Vietnam during the late 1960s, the United States exercised its hegemonic economic power with great self-confidence. It sponsored and oversaw the re-emergence of Japan and provided the favourable ‘public goods’ that facilitated the astonishing economic dynamism of the Pacific Rim. The means available to the United States to influence if not actually control international developments in the region far exceeded those available to the Soviet Union.

Accordingly, this chapter will first consider the application of the American strategy of containment before proceeding to discuss the attempt to establish Asian and African solidarity and the two offshore
island crises in the Taiwan Straits that shaped the conduct of Sino-American relations. It will then turn to the communist side of the Cold War divide by examining the collapse of the Sino-Soviet alliance before evaluating the significance of the Second Indo-China War. It will conclude with an assessment of the impact of the development of bipolarity on the other points of conflict in the region.

The American strategy of containment in the Asia-Pacific

Containment became more than a strategy designed to limit the possible expansion of Soviet power – as was originally envisaged by George Kennan, who first coined the term. It became inflated with the aim of stopping the expansion of communism wherever it seemed likely to spread. In much of the rhetoric of the American government, communism was seen as both monolithic and international, with its centre in Moscow. Arguably, in Europe this was very much one and the same thing, where the confrontation with Soviet power was more than a balance of power matter, as it constituted a clash between two incompatible systems. The military divide was bolstered by a clash of ideologies, by fundamental differences in running the economies and by radically different political systems. The dividing line between the two was soon tightly demarcated by heavily militarized borders. In Asia, however, the division was less clear cut and there was not the same correspondence between the spread of communism and the expansion of Soviet or Chinese power. Containment, as applied by the United States government, was not a doctrine that allowed for the greater subtlety and discrimination that Asian conditions required. Moreover, unlike the West European countries, few of the Asian states allied or associated with the United States could be described as democratic. Consequently, there was the danger that the United States anti-communist crusade in the name of the free world could backfire if it were perceived to be carried out in support of an unpopular dictatorial regime.

There was an economic corollary to the strategy which involved the United States in extending massive economic assistance, in order to rehабilitate the economies of the ‘free world’ so as to strengthen the resilience of their societies against the appeals of communism. The Marshall Plan that was extended to facilitate the economic recovery of Western Europe had originally been offered to Europe as a whole, including the East, and it only became a keystone of containment after its rejection by Moscow in late 1947 and the communist coup in Czechoslovakia early in 1948. Although no such grand scheme was applied to Asia, the United States extended economic aid both in the form of investment and technical assis-
The application of bipolarity, 1954–1970

...tance and in the form of favourable trade policies. Japan was the main focus of attention. In the event, it became the principal economic beneficiary of the Korean War, as the provision of supplies to the Western war effort helped to re-establish Japanese industry. In general terms these policies played an important part in helping the reconstruction of South Korea and Taiwan, which contributed to ensuring the survival of the respective regimes. In Southeast Asia the situation was complicated by the political problems attendant upon nation building in newly independent states in the aftermath of colonial rule. The conditions of most of the states seemed so fragile that in the 1950s and 1960s, beginning with Eisenhower, successive American presidents persuaded themselves that were South Vietnam to ‘fall’ to communism, a domino effect would be created in which the rest of the states in Southeast Asia would also fall.7

The evolution of the American strategy of containment was of major significance in shaping the development of the Asia-Pacific as a whole. The doctrine of containment actually followed by the Truman administration owed more to the formulation of a document drawn under the leadership of Kennan’s successor, Paul H. Nitze, than it did to the original view as articulated by the former. The Nitze version, known by its bureaucratic code name, NSC-68, ‘derived its view of American interests primarily from its perception of the Soviet threat’ which had the effect of denying the utility of distinguishing between those American interests that were peripheral and those that were vital. It went on to argue that American interests depended as much on the perception of power as on the reality of power itself. In other words, the balance of power depended as much upon appearances as upon rational calculation of strategic significance and advantage. If America ‘even appeared to be losing ground to its adversaries, the effects could be much the same as if that loss had actually occurred’. The document also called in effect for America to ensure that it always negotiated with the Soviet Union from a position of strength. The purpose of policy in Asia was to deny any further advances to communism in any form. Although the significance of nationalism even for communists was appreciated, it was nevertheless held that countries that came under communist sway necessarily followed a path of hostility towards the United States.8 The application of the NSC-68 version of containment was prompted by the Korean War. That war was also significant, as it occasioned massive rearmament by the United States which led to the ‘militarization of containment’ that was to have profound consequences, especially in East Asia.9

The Eisenhower administration sought to improve upon the earlier containment policy, which it criticized for surrendering the initiative by being essentially a strategy of response. Its ‘New Look’ strategy was
designed to seize the initiative and reduce costs by reacting to the adversary's 'challenges in ways that were calculated to apply to one's strengths against the other side's weaknesses, even if this meant shifting the nature and location of the confrontation'. Nuclear weapons were a key element in that strategy, but the strategy also involved building alliances, conducting psychological warfare, carrying out covert actions and, when appropriate, holding negotiations. The two concepts most readily associated with Secretary of State John Foster Dulles were nuclear 'brinkmanship' and 'massive retaliation'. Resort to them was threatened in the 1954 and 1958 crises over the offshore islands of Quemoy and Matsu, precisely because they could not be defended by conventional means. But had nuclear weapons been used, it would have been difficult to argue that the interests at stake really justified the resulting devastation or the risks of possible retaliation. Typically, Dulles argued that the issue at stake was Taiwanese morale. If Taiwan were lost, the security of the entire western Pacific would be damaged, and Southeast Asia would come under communist influence.

John Lewis Gaddis, the principal historian of containment, has faulted the Eisenhower administration, particularly for lacking confidence in its own supposed reliance upon the independence and nationalism of third world countries. Accusing the administration of 'hyperactivity', he argued that the attempts to tie third world governments into alliances coupled with unilateral security guarantees were overbearing and in reality unenforceable. Moreover, accusations about the 'immorality' of third world 'neutralism' only made matters worse. Although the administration hoped to split China from the Soviet Union, no strategy had been devised for exploiting the consequences. As early as 1954, General Ridgway, who had succeeded MacArthur in Korea, had pointed out that that would require bringing 'Red China to a realization that its long range benefits derive from friendliness with America.' That was ruled out by Eisenhower himself on the grounds that the requisite diplomatic contacts were unacceptable, as they would pose problems with allies, destroy Chiang Kai-shek and be resisted by an American people still 'emotional' about China.10

The Kennedy administration, followed by that of Johnson, favoured a symmetrical rather than the asymmetrical response espoused by the previous administration. The earlier emphasis upon nuclear brinkmanship that entailed either inaction or a response that was wholly disproportionate to the original provocation was sharply criticized for lacking credibility. The new strategy of 'flexible response' called for an appropriate and careful response to any act of aggression, be it a limited or general war, conventional or nuclear, large or small. Top priority went to decreasing
reliance upon nuclear weapons and to developing mobile forces capable of fighting and assisting allies in fighting different types of war. Accordingly, a much enhanced counter-insurgency capability was developed replete with so-called ‘special forces’ so as to be able to counter wars of national liberation. At the same time, the Kennedy administration continued with the programme of acquiring a greater variety of nuclear weapons. Alongside the strategy of ‘flexible response’ came that of graduated response through carefully controlled escalation and crisis management. Ironically, given the outcome in Vietnam, the Kennedy administration also saw itself as favouring the forces for change and the new emergent classes in third world countries.

Gaddis argues that the fundamental reason why the Kennedy and Johnson administrations regarded the ‘loss’ of such a small and distant country as South Vietnam in such catastrophic terms was because of their undifferentiated view of American security interests: ‘They tended to view the American stake there as determined exclusively by threats and obligations. The security of the United States, indeed of the entire non-communist world, was thought to be imperilled wherever communist challenges came up against American guarantees.’ There was an element of self-fulfilment in this since the more the policies towards Vietnam were upheld as necessary to safeguard credibility the more American credibility required those policies to be successful.

Furthermore, the employment of a supposedly calibrated ladder of escalating responses to persuade the other side to desist or to compromise could work only if there were a clear adversary who accepted that the other side were willing and able to escalate to a point that would be destructive of its key values. Since the escalatory responses in Vietnam were aimed at several targets (Hanoi and the Vietcong directly, Moscow and Beijing indirectly), and since the United States had long indicated that there were limits beyond which it would not go in the war, lest it bring in Chinese and Soviet forces, the strategy became ensnared in finding what Gaddis calls disparagingly, ‘some middle ground between the insanity of nuclear war and the humiliation of appeasement’. The very disproportionate character of the American commitment brought about its own undoing. Despite the huge American military presence, the communists carried out uprisings in the main cities of South Vietnam in early 1968. Although the communist ‘Tet offensive’ was eventually defeated, it became a political success as President Johnson threw in his hand by refusing to escalate further and by refusing to run for re-election. It fell to the new President Nixon to change the direction of American international politics, bringing means and ends into closer alignment and opening the way to cooperation with China and to détente with the Soviet Union.
In terms of actual policy, the Eisenhower administration attempted to consolidate its containment strategy in East Asia by concluding a series of treaties that aimed ultimately at establishing a multilateral arrangement that would bring together the various parties in a collective defence pact against communist expansion. The preambles of the American security treaties with the Philippines and ANZUS of 1951 and that with South Korea of 1953 all referred to the development of ‘a more comprehensive system of regional security in the Pacific area’. In the spring of 1954 (i.e., coincidental with the Geneva Conference) and into the summer the United States was active in promoting a multilateral security pact for Southeast Asia that bore fruit of a kind in September in the signing of the Collective Defence Treaty for Southeast Asia – the Manila Pact. Formally speaking, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was established the following year in Bangkok. The United States, Britain, Australia, New Zealand, France, Thailand, Pakistan and the Philippines agreed to act together ‘in accordance with [their] constitutional practices’ to encounter an ‘armed attack’ if they could unanimously agree on its designation and they further agreed to consult if any signatory felt threatened. South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos were not signatories, but the provisions of the treaty were extended to them gratuitously by a protocol attached to the treaty. The highly qualified security commitments of the Manila Pact and SEATO in particular compared unfavourably with the more explicit ones of NATO and of the bilateral pacts the United States had signed in the region.

In the event, SEATO did not provide a basis for the collective defence of South Vietnam. Moreover it was noticeable that even in its attenuated form, the Manila Pact did not attract other Asian members such as Indonesia, Burma, Ceylon (as it then was) or India. Asian non-alignment was already beginning to become a factor in international politics. Meanwhile Cambodia in 1955 rejected the gratuitous protection on offer as being inconsistent with its neutrality, and Laos was eventually excluded from it by the outcome of the Geneva Conference of 1962. Thus the underlying rationale of the Manila Pact had already been removed before it could be invoked in 1964. The Americans were left to intervene unilaterally.

The first Taiwan offshore island crisis of 1954–1955

The People’s Republic of China (PRC) nevertheless felt that in 1954 it had cause for alarm, especially as it became clear that a mutual defence treaty was in prospect between Washington and Taipei. That provided the occasion for the first offshore island crisis of 1954–1955. It can be seen as an
example of how local, national, regional and international issues were enmeshed. From Beijing’s perspective the Taiwan problem not only involved the question of China’s national security, but it also constituted the tail end of the uncompleted civil war and, above all, it was a question of sovereignty and territorial integrity. Taiwan was the last remaining province beyond Beijing’s control, and there was fear that a treaty with the Americans that was linked to the other American allies would put Taiwan, with international endorsement, permanently beyond the reach of the PRC short of a world war.

By shelling the islands close to the Chinese shore Beijing was first declaring its determination to lay claim to Taiwan as well; second, it was implicitly warning off America’s allies from the putative alliance; third, it was complicating the American position by compelling it to include the protection of those islands in its treaty commitment so as to make it more difficult to establish Taiwan as a separate entity; and finally, it was hoping to begin a dialogue with the United States so as to break out of the economic embargo and isolation imposed upon it by the United States. Taipei sought an American commitment that would both ensure it relative equality with America’s other Asian allies and uphold its occupation of the offshore islands in the hope of an eventual return to the mainland to overthrow the communist regime. Constituting the Republic of China, the Chiang Kai-shek government saw itself as the legitimate representative of the whole of China and, as Chinese patriots, its leaders were unwilling to contemplate a separate Taiwan. Indeed one of the American concerns was that a collapse of morale on the island might cause the regime to make its own deal with Beijing. The American interest was to link Taiwan in the emerging security system of the Asia-Pacific and so complete the cordon of containment. To this end it did not wish its security commitments to be subject to military conflicts over islands where the PRC enjoyed overwhelming geographical advantage. Still less did it wish the crisis to lead to splits with allies. 11

In the event, none of the other American security agreements in the region mentioned Taiwan, and the United States and the Republic of China (Taiwan) signed a mutual defence treaty on 2 December 1954, but it was carefully limited to the defence of Taiwan and the Pescadore (Penghu) Islands. On 29 January President Eisenhower signed the Formosa Resolution, passed by Congress, giving him the discretion to defend the offshore islands should he judge that necessary for the security of Taiwan itself. Meanwhile Eisenhower gave separate assurances to Chiang Kai-shek about the offshore islands of Quemoy and Matsu, but not about the more northerly Dazhen (Tachen) Islands which were evacuated and then promptly taken over by the PRC. That reassured Beijing, as it confirmed
the statements emanating from Washington that President Eisenhower opposed any plans for invading the mainland. If the US was unwilling to support Taipei in holding on to outposts such as the Dazhens, it was unlikely to lend support to a beachhead on the mainland. At the same time and against its better judgement, the United States had in effect been manoeuvred into supporting Taipei’s occupation of Quemoy and Matsu on the grounds that their loss would undermine the morale on Taiwan. But in truth, that suited both Beijing and Taipei at the time as it precluded the formal separation of Taiwan from the mainland. The outcome in the end was mixed for all sides. The United States was able to include Taiwan within its western Pacific security perimeter, but it had to give up on its hope of a collective defence system amid uncertainties about the character of its commitment to Quemoy and Matsu. In the process of reaching that point Washington had threatened the possible use of nuclear weapons and had given a practical demonstration of how points of no geopolitical significance to itself could influence its main interests. If the readiness ‘to go the brink’ over such an issue was designed to assure allies in principle of American resolve, in practice it frightened them off lest they be dragged into conflicts in which the general interest was not apparent.

The Bandung Conference of April 1955

In contrast to the group of countries that were to set up SEATO, Ceylon had earlier taken the initiative to bring together at Colombo the prime ministers of Burma, India, Indonesia, itself and Pakistan. Other than Pakistan they held that military pacts increased insecurity and they favoured Nehru’s policy of ‘neutralism’. This was defined in terms of the ‘five principles of peaceful coexistence’ agreed to by India and China in April 1954. That agreement of the two great Asian powers was reached at a time when there was a prospect of an imminent American military intervention in Vietnam. A year later some thirty countries held the first ever Conference of Asian and African nations in Bandung, Indonesia. They demonstrated their desire to be heard on matters of international affairs especially on issues of peace and cooperation. The delegates talked loudly about affairs for which they had no responsibility and in subdued tones about those such as Korea, Vietnam or Kashmir, for which they did. They were divided about cooperation with the West and the communist countries. No bloc or permanent organization emerged from the meeting. It solved none of the questions on which the participants had conflicts of interest and it made little difference to the distribution of power. But it was of great symbolic significance as it for the first time articulated a third world voice that was to become a growing feature in international politics.
thereafter. It provided an opportunity for leaders to meet who would other­wise have found it difficult to do so.

It also provided the occasion for China to establish what would now be called its third world credentials. In the not inconsiderable person of Zhou Enlai, Chinese diplomacy presented a more reasoned face to several leaders of anti-communist governments. He helped to convert Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia to accept the desirability of the neutral status of his country. The conference also provided the occasion for the signing of a nationality treaty with Indonesia. Reversing the old Republican or KMT position on the dual nationality status of overseas Chinese that had been the cause of constant friction with Southeast Asian governments, the new treaty in effect enjoined the Chinese residents to choose either Indonesian or Chinese nationality. The new approach was designed to mollify governments more generally in the region who had professed concern about the potential ‘fifth column’ aspects of their resident Chinese. In the event, the agreement was not ratified until 1960 and it meant that those traders who retained Chinese nationality became subject to laws that prohibited aliens from trading in rural areas. The PRC duly protested at these harsh laws, but in the interests of placating Indonesia, with whom the Chinese sought to be on good terms, the PRC undertook to repatriate those Chinese who wished to return to China. Some of the tens of thousands who were repatriated were descendants of migrants who had left China several generations before. The episode demonstrated some of the difficulties of the Chinese position in seeking simultaneously to cultivate friendly relations with Southeast Asian governments and to protect the interests of resident Chinese nationals, for whom in any case the PRC was not well placed to offer practical assistance. Moreover, in practice neither the PRC nor the governments and peoples of Southeast Asia punctiliously observed the distinctions between the different nationality credentials of the Chinese resident in the area.

To return to the Bandung Conference, Zhou used the setting as a platform on which to demonstrate his government’s ‘reasonableness’, especially in contrast to the position of the United States. He skilfully used the occasion to appeal for a dialogue with the United States that in effect brought the first Taiwan offshore crisis to an end. This led to an agreement to hold Sino-American talks at ambassadorial level in Geneva.

The ‘Bandung spirit’ soon evaporated. Local disputes between member states proved to be no easier to resolve. Thailand and the Philippines, whose leaders had apparently been impressed by Zhou Enlai’s performance, still refused to recognize the PRC. Although the PRC had abandoned its earlier revolutionary approach in favour of a more conventional diplomacy, especially towards its Asian neighbours, profound problems remained. Although
relations had improved with India, as indicated by their agreement of April 1954 by which India recognized Chinese sovereignty over Tibet (thereby giving up its residual interest in the region as the successor to the British Raj), there were still outstanding boundary questions and a more intangible sense of rivalry between the two major Asian powers with the different political visions embodied in their respective political systems. Indeed remaining boundary and territorial questions were problems that affected China’s relations with all its neighbours. It became evident that these could raise deep problems when the negotiations with a compliant Burma took four or five years before eventually an agreement was reached, even though there was manifest goodwill on both sides. China’s neighbours suspected that a newly reunified China would be influenced by the legacy of the more distant past when imperial China exercised a kind of superior overlordship over the other Asian rulers. The communist issue deepened the distrust: Beijing was seen as a supporter of local communist parties dedicated to the overthrow of the newly established and fragile regimes by subversion and by rural insurgencies. It was feared that China would seek to exploit domestic weakness and intra-regional disputes. Moreover the PRC’s new approach towards the nationality of the millions of ethnic Chinese resident in Southeast Asia, welcome as it was, did not dispel the distrust about their potential as a fifth column; still less could it address the many communal problems they faced; and China’s residual patrimonial attitudes suggested a responsibility that in reality it lacked the capacity to discharge. These misgivings about China intensified in 1958 when Chinese foreign policy shifted away from the moderation of Bandung towards a more militant revolutionary line, which was in part caused by the failure to improve relations with the United States.\footnote{15}

If some of the earlier hopes that a sense of Asian solidarity would promote a wider sense of community failed to materialize, the Bandung Conference was not without a lasting impact. It placed the third world and its concerns firmly on the international agenda. It contributed to de-legitimizing colonialism and to widening the demands for independence. In foreign policy terms it was the precursor of the non-alignment movement. Although the separate visions and interests of the independent states and their leaders before too long undermined the ‘spirit of Bandung’, the conference marked the emergence of the third world as a factor in international politics.

**The second offshore island crisis of 1958**

As in the previous crisis, the issue combined elements of local and international questions. In fact the second crisis may be said to have followed from the failure to solve the deeper problems inherent in the first. The price that
the United States and China each demanded of the other for improving relations was making concessions regarding Taiwan that neither was in a position to make. The Sino-American Geneva talks had begun in August 1955 in a favourable international atmosphere. The treaty ending the military occupation and division of Austria had been signed in May and the four powers, the US, the USSR, Britain and France, had just concluded their summit meeting. But the Sino-American talks soon foundered on their irreconcilable positions. The Americans wanted Beijing to agree to renounce the use of force in the Taiwan area and the PRC wanted the Americans to agree to withdraw from the area. The only agreement they were able to reach was on the subject of citizens of each country held or detained by the other.

Over the next two years the Americans sought to consolidate the status quo and establish a fait accompli that would give Beijing no alternative but to accept international opinion that the situation was similar to Germany, Korea, Vietnam and even Ireland. By 1958, having failed to obtain a renunciation of force by Beijing vis-à-vis Taiwan and having succeeded in maintaining Taiwan’s participation in numerous international fora, the United States suspended the talks. Angered by the breakdown of the link with the US that had been forged with such difficulty and having found that its policy of peaceful coexistence with Washington and Taipei had not turned out well, Beijing chose to take the initiative once again by generating a crisis on the offshore islands.

In the summer of 1958 Beijing began an orchestrated campaign over the Taiwan question that culminated in carefully considered bombardments of Quemoy in which days of intensive shelling would be followed by lighter shelling. The US Navy escorted Taipei supply ships to within three miles of the island. Having decided that the loss of Quemoy could lead to the loss of Taiwan, amid talk of the use of nuclear weapons, Eisenhower and Dulles issued a public warning to Beijing on 4 September. The following day Beijing stopped the shelling and on 6 September Zhou announced that the PRC would accept an American offer to resume talks. On 7 September the Soviet leader Khrushchev felt safe to warn Eisenhower that an attack on the PRC would be considered as an attack on the Soviet Union. From 8 September until 6 October Beijing resumed intensive shelling and then announced a cease fire. On 25 October Beijing announced that it would resume shelling but only on odd days – a state of affairs that was to continue for the following twenty years. For Mao and Zhou Enlai the Taiwan problem had two aspects, an international one involving the United States, and a domestic one involving the KMT. Their consistent aim was to negotiate the removal of the former before proceeding to settle the latter. The offshore islands were never
considered as a separate issue, rather they were thought of as a way of bringing pressure to bear on Washington over its Taiwan commitment as a whole. The fact that the exercise was never repeated suggests that Mao and his colleagues recognized that to do so might be counter-productive: Washington might be pressed to respond to international sentiment and to growing voices at home that the offshore islands were not worth the high stakes invested in them. In other words the danger from Beijing’s perspective was that rather than being a peg to which the United States was tied in a noose (as Mao had once put it), the islands might be discarded and thus pave the way for a more formal separation of Taiwan from the mainland. From the perspective of Washington the successful management of the crisis proved something of a pyrrhic victory – at least for the strategy of nuclear brinkmanship that underlay it. The disproportionate response paved the way for the development of the new strategy of flexible response. But it left Taiwan firmly embedded within the American scheme of containment. It was not until that issue had been addressed between Beijing and Washington in 1971 that their bilateral dispute over Taiwan could be reconsidered in 1972.

The collapse of the Sino-Soviet alliance

The breakdown of the alliance was a complex and protracted affair that took about ten years to unravel from its beginnings in 1956. The Sino-Soviet alliance which had seemingly been cemented by the Korean War began to unfold as differences of interest began to emerge. Many factors played their part given their previous history, the vast differences of culture between them and the disparities in their socio-economic conditions. But as these had obtained when the alliance was first established, the most significant factors that occasioned the collapse of the alliance were those of international politics and strategy. As the senior ally, the Soviet Union could not allow China to place its global strategic interests in jeopardy. For its part, an independent China could not be expected to subordinate itself to the degree of compliance demanded by its Soviet ally. As the major communist powers, the character of their relations affected the character of the relations between the Soviet Union and the other communist states, as well as the character of the international communist movement as a whole. All these relations were expressed in ideological terms and, since ideology was at the heart of the legitimacy of Communist Party rule in both the Soviet Union and China, the legitimacy of the regimes in Moscow and Beijing was necessarily affected by their disagreement. That may explain why by the early 1960s both sets of leaders were condemning the other as traitors to the communist cause. Ultimately for
Marxist–Leninists there could be only one correct view and no true comrade would persist in publicly putting forward a contrary view.17

At the heart of their dispute were their respective relationships with the United States. After establishing his authority as successor to Stalin, Khrushchev sought to diffuse some of the tension with the United States partly in order to carry out reforms at home, but primarily because of the unacceptable risks associated with nuclear weapons and the high costs of maintaining a military confrontation with the United States and its allies. To this end he sought to reach various understandings with the United States and declared an interest in preventing local wars and wars of national liberation from escalating into conflicts between East and West. Ironically, in the mid-1950s the Chinese leaders had also sought to diffuse tensions with the Americans because they wanted to concentrate upon economic development at home. But unlike their Soviet colleagues, Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai found an obdurate Eisenhower administration that refused to respond in kind. As was noted earlier, Dulles took the view that the way to drive a wedge between the two communist giants was to keep up the pressure on China. Not only were the Chinese denied the diplomatic openings that became available to their Soviet colleagues, but they also found no evidence, as far as they were concerned, of the United States having developed more moderate or reasonable approaches as claimed by Khrushchev. Consequently the Chinese leaders found that the Soviet leaders tried to prevent them from standing up for what they regarded as their sovereign and irredentist rights and from supporting wars for national liberation in the third world. For example, in 1959 Khrushchev publicly charged the Chinese leaders in Beijing with seeking ‘to test the international stability by force’. For their part, the Soviet leaders were unwilling to allow the Chinese to determine the nature of Soviet dealings with America.

A major turning point was the refusal of the Soviet Union in 1959 to supply China with a sample atomic bomb. The logic of the situation in fact was for the United States and the Soviet Union to combine together to restrain China from developing its own nuclear weapons. Indeed that was one of the factors that led to the signing of the Test Ban Treaty in 1963. Undaunted, however, the Chinese tested their first device the following year.18 Meanwhile the Soviet Union declared itself neutral in the border conflict that had reared up suddenly in 1959 between China and India. In 1960 it withdrew all its several thousands of experts from China. Taking their blueprints with them, they dealt the Chinese economy a severe blow at a time of low ebb as the country faced famine and economic downturn after the disastrous Great Leap forward. By 1962 the Soviet Union was to be found alongside Britain and the United States in support of India after
The Cold War, 1945–1989

its humiliating defeat by China in their border war. Thereafter the Chinese and Soviet leaders took opposite positions on all the key international issues. In 1963 and 1964 the Chinese deepened the inter-state conflict when they publicly raised the issue of the ‘unequal treaties’ imposed by Tsarist Russia on the weak Qing Dynasty and other border disputes, which they argued had yet to be settled.

By this stage they had each condemned the other as betrayers of communism and of the interests of their own people. Not even the removal of Khrushchev in 1964 (which coincided to the day with the testing of China’s first nuclear device) changed the situation. Meanwhile Mao, having condemned the Soviet leaders as revisionists who had used state power to bring about a counter-revolution by peaceful means, began to identify similar alleged revisionists alongside him in China. This was to culminate in the Cultural Revolution. Clearly foreign and domestic policies had become closely inter-connected.

The impact of the collapse of the Sino-Soviet alliance on the international politics of the rest of the Asia-Pacific was not immediately obvious. As observed earlier, the United States, which had played a role in fomenting it, seemed to have no plans to exploit it. The Kennedy and Johnson administrations took the view that difficult though it was, they could do business with a post-revolutionary Soviet leadership, but not with the revolutionary Chinese, whose aggressiveness had to be stopped. It was only with the advent of Nixon and Kissinger that the Americans took positive steps to take advantage of the conflict between the two communist giants. Nevertheless the impact of the communist schism was real enough. It divided the communist world on national lines, thus weakening the general appeal of communism and its effectiveness as a force for change. The conflict also provided greater opportunities for independent manoeuvre to the smaller communist powers, which in the Asia-Pacific meant primarily North Korea and North Vietnam. Although the Soviet Union in 1963 withdrew its assistance from Vietnam this was resumed after Khrushchev’s ouster. Curiously, the United States chose to start bombing North Vietnam in 1965 just as the Soviet premier was visiting Hanoi to determine the character of Soviet aid. The Soviet Union not only became the main supplier of advanced weaponry to the North during the war with the United States, but it also began to reduce Chinese influence in Vietnam. However, for reasons of geography and ethnicity the communist parties of Southeast Asia (with the exception of the Philippines until 1969) continued to accept Chinese patronage.

The most immediate impact of the Sino-Soviet dispute was felt in the third world, where the two competed for power and influence among the newly independent countries and for the allegiance of the various libera-
tion movements. The dispute complicated the attempt to reconvene the Bandung Conference in Algeria in 1965. China’s greater militancy and its opposition to India may have won it adherents among the more radical governments and movements, but that served to alienate others, especially in Southeast Asia. The experience of Indonesia is instructive in this regard.

The rise of President Sukarno from the mid-1950s and the progressive weakening of parliamentary government were accompanied by a more assertive foreign policy that focused on the acquisition of West Irian (or Dutch New Guinea) from the Netherlands, who had refused to include it in the transfer of sovereignty in 1949. The failure to elicit full support from the still American-dominated General Assembly of the United Nations resulted in the expropriation of Dutch economic interests in Indonesia in late 1957. This tended to consolidate the interests of Java and the central government against the outer islands. This was further confirmed by the government’s declaration of an archipelagic principle on 13 December. That challenged American claims to rights of passage through the high sea. Accordingly, covert American aid was offered to rebellion that broke out in early 1958 that was centred in Sulawesi and Sumatra. Britain, Taiwan and the Philippines were also seen as active in the rebel cause. The failure of the rebellion by the summer helped to bring about an uneasy coalition between President Sukarno as the country’s leader, the army as the defender and upholder of national unity and the Communist Party, which could mobilize mass support. Thus although there was a temporary accommodation with America when it pressured Holland to give up West Irian, it soon petered out. Sukarno, meanwhile, had accepted Soviet and East European military aid. Indeed a degree of competition emerged between the two superpowers over cultivating the support of Indonesia.

As Sukarno became more militant as a third world leader he began to lean more to the Chinese side as the Sino-Soviet conflict unfolded. Sukarno’s claims as a nationalist and anti-imperialist leader coalesced in his belligerent response to the proposal to establish Malaysia; triggered by a revolt in Brunei in December 1962. The armed confrontation (or Konfrontasi) that was countered by British and Commonwealth troops threatened to further subdivide Southeast Asia, as Sukarno responded by creating ‘the axis of Djakarta–Phnom Penh–Hanoi–Peking–Pyongyang’. Others identified a more modest but more sinister Sino-Indonesian axis. Close links were also established between the Indonesian and Chinese communist parties. This in turn heightened tensions between the Indonesian army on the one side and the communists and Sukarno on the other. In the event, an abortive coup attempt took place on 1 October 1965, which resulted in the deaths of six generals. Under the leadership of
Major General Suharto the coup forces were overcome within two days. Whether or not the Chinese were involved in the coup in 1965, their influence in the country was eliminated and the limitation of their capacity to exercise power cruelly exposed as many tens of thousands of ethnic Chinese as well as alleged communists were killed. President Sukarno was finally removed from power in 1966 and General Suharto as the new leader was able to bring confrontation to an end. The following year the new relations with Malaysia were to form the core of the newly established ASEAN. This was immediately denounced by both Peking and Hanoi as a proto-imperialist organization. The divisions in the communist world had combined to cause losses for both the Soviet and Chinese sides. But these events also demonstrated the extent to which the fortunes of the external powers could be determined by the inter-play of domestic forces in the smaller regional powers.

Sino-Soviet relations deteriorated still further during the Cultural Revolution that began in China in 1965/1966. That also prevented them from joining forces to assist Vietnam. The Chinese had rejected Soviet overtures to this effect, as Mao suspected that the ultimate Soviet purpose was to broker a deal with the United States to the detriment of China. Rejecting Soviet requests for an air corridor and for use of Chinese bases in the south, the Chinese reluctantly agreed to allow Soviet military aid to be sent through Chinese territory by train. Soviet military assistance soon exceeded that of the Chinese in both quantity and quality. In fact it was essential for Hanoi in combating American air power. By this stage the Soviet Union had begun to upgrade its military forces to the north of China. A security treaty was signed with the Mongolian People’s Republic in 1966 that led to the stationing of Soviet forces in the south of the country. In 1967 China began to match the Soviet build-up in quantity if not quality. In 1968 the Chinese had a fright, with the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and the proclamation of the Brezhnev Doctrine that allowed the Soviet Union the right to intervene in a socialist state to ‘safeguard the revolution’. Interestingly, the North Vietnamese supported the Soviet rather than the Chinese position, while North Korea did not commit itself.

In March 1969 the Chinese instigated a limited conflict on one of the disputed riverine islands. After unsuccessful attempts to open negotiations, Soviet victorious sorties into Xinjiang and hints about a possible Soviet surgical nuclear strike eventually led to a meeting at Beijing airport between the Soviet premier, Kosygin, and Zhou Enlai in September, as the former returned from the funeral of Ho Chi Minh that both had attended in Hanoi. That diffused the immediate crisis. The Chinese had sought to convince the Soviet Union that the PRC could be credibly defended on the
basis of self-reliance. The Soviet side feared that an uncontrolled China could open a second front in addition to the main front in Europe. It additionally attempted to persuade the West that they shared a joint interest in restraining China and it continued to drop broad hints that it was contemplating a strike against Chinese nuclear targets. It was only then that Kissinger and President Nixon were alerted to the possible implications for the United States. The Sino-Soviet conflict had finally reached the point where the changes it had wrought to the fundamentals of the central balance of power during the Cold War became clear.

**The Second Indo-China War**

This war arose from the perception in Washington that a communist victory in the South, building upon the earlier victory in North Vietnam, would work to the advantage of its global adversary and that it would lead to the fall of the rest of Southeast Asia to the enormous disadvantage of the West. Back in April 1954 President Eisenhower had claimed that all Southeast Asia was like a row of dominoes. If you knocked over the first one, what would happen to the last one was ‘the certainty that it would go over very quickly’.

In the late 1950s Hanoi reactivated the war through insurgency in the South, which consisted initially in a systematic campaign to assassinate local officials. The regime in the South that was led by the Catholic Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu had a narrow social base of support and it was destined never to succeed in generating a South Vietnamese nationalist ethos. Certainly they lacked the national authority of Ho Chi Minh and the communist movement that he led. The Diem regime was ineffective and it faced opposition from different social groups that it tried to suppress. In December 1960 the establishment of the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NLF) marked an important stage in the development of the armed struggle. The incoming Kennedy administration regarded the struggle as aggression from the North that initially was blamed on Moscow and then attributed to Beijing. The administration took the view that the Chinese had to be shown that wars of national liberation could be stopped and that the United States had to show its allies and friends in the third world in particular that it stood by its commitments. It was this kind of thinking that the realists were to criticize, for its failure to distinguish peripheral from vital interests – even before American liberals attacked the moral basis for prosecuting the war.

The regime in the South was ineffective in carrying out the economic and socio-political programmes recommended by American advisers.
The American government, however, persuaded itself that, in the words of Defense Secretary McNamara in June 1962 after his visit to Vietnam, ‘every quantitive measurement we have shows we’re winning this war’. In one of his last press conferences President Kennedy declared, ‘Our goal is a stable government there, carrying on a struggle to maintain its national independence. We believe strongly in that. … In my opinion for us to withdraw from that effort would mean a collapse not only of South Vietnam but Southeast Asia. So we are going to stay there.’ Not long afterwards Diem and his brother were killed in a military coup of which the US government had prior knowledge. Three weeks later President Kennedy was assassinated in November 1963 and Lyndon Johnson became president. Under his direction, the United States armed forces replaced the South Vietnamese army as the main combat troops. The attempt to compel the North to negotiate through a graduated escalation of bombing backfired. The United States misunderstood the commitment of the communists to the nationalist cause and that bombing, as shown by the bombing of Nazi Germany in the Second World War, would stiffen resistance, especially of a dictatorship. In 1968, as a result of the Tet Offensive and its impact within the United States, President Johnson decided that he could continue no longer. By that stage the United States had 525,000 troops in Vietnam. It took another five years before an agreement was reached with North Vietnam in 1973 on American withdrawal and a political settlement, and a further two years before the final American humiliation as the Northern army reunified Vietnam by force in April 1975. By that stage, however, the Sino-American rapprochement had long destroyed the original American rationale for containing China in Vietnam.

The war had also embroiled the other two weaker countries of Indochina, Laos and Cambodia, whose neutrality had supposedly been established by the Geneva Agreements. Indeed that of Laos had been reconfirmed by an additional Geneva Conference in 1962. Of the two, Laos had developed less of a national identity and statehood. Its fortunes were very much the by-play of external forces. The main figures and even elements of the military were dependent upon external patrons within the region and at times even beyond the region. The most powerful politically and militarily were the Pathet Lao who were very much in effect a provincial branch of the Vietnamese communists. Although other regional interests were also engaged, it was in keeping with Hanoi’s strategic perspectives that its interests should predominate, especially as the supply routes to the south (the Ho Chi Minh Trail) ran through Laos. Consequently, the victory of the communist forces there followed closely on the tails of those of Vietnam.
Although Vietnamese interests were broadly similar in Cambodia, through which the Ho Chi Minh Trail also ran, Cambodia was more developed politically and more coherent nationally than Laos. One of the keystones of Cambodian nationalism was resentment against the Vietnamese for having encroached upon their once strong and extensive kingdom. The Mekong Delta of South Vietnam was once Cambodian land and there were still ethnic Khmers resident there. But events in Cambodia too were shaped by the war in Vietnam. Prince Sihanouk manoeuvred to retain neutrality for his country by conceding territorial access to the Vietcong, which served as the pretext for his overthrow in 1970 by a rightist military coup which set up a fragile and oppressive administration. The Vietnamese communists then acted to crush the Cambodian army so enabling the extremist indigenous Khmer Rouge to expand its power, ultimately seizing Phnom Penh in 1975.

The Second Indo-China War is usually considered to have been an unmitigated disaster for the United States. It was America's first defeat in a major war and the repercussions of the failure still resonate at home more than twenty-five years later as a constraint against committing American troops to foreign combat. The war also resulted in a sense of America's relative decline, especially as the Soviet Union, after its experience in the Cuban missile crisis, had taken the opportunity to narrow substantially the gap with the United States in nuclear and conventional power. But the extent of the damage can be exaggerated. Although SEATO was shown to be a broken reed and, unlike during the Korean War, the European allies stayed at home, regional allies such as Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, South Korea and Thailand did contribute forces in one form or another. Arguably, the United States also missed opportunities to exploit the Sino-Soviet rift, but the war divided the two communist powers still further, even though they both had to assist the North. There can be little doubt that the conflict took on a momentum of its own as its original objectives were overtaken by the mechanics of prosecuting the war. The roots of the Vietcong insurgency were traced to Moscow and by 1964 they were located in Beijing but by 1965 Moscow assistance was being sought to put pressure on Hanoi and by 1966 tacit understandings were reached with the Chinese on how to limit the war from escalating into a Sino-American one. In the end the larger strategic purposes of the war got lost altogether as Washington aligned with Beijing and pursued détente with Moscow.

A positive lesson was soon learned from the war: that American resources were not unlimited. A chastened President Nixon announced in Guam in July 1969 a new security doctrine for the United States in Asia. Henceforth its allies would be expected to do the bulk of the ground
fighting while the Americans would contribute with their navy and air force from offshore, as well as with military supplies and military training. Within the region it can be argued that the defeat in Vietnam marked the beginning of gnawing uncertainties about the durability of American capacity and will to deploy, when needed, countervailing power. Yet, as seen from the perspective of the 1990s, it is difficult to point to long term damage to American interests in the Asia-Pacific. No dominoes fell beyond Indo-China and most of America’s allies prospered, leaving America still as the dominant force in the region, while a socialist Vietnam embraced free market economics.

The impact elsewhere in Pacific Asia

The acute polarities of the Cold War ensured that the status quo in Northeast Asia was not challenged during the 1950s and 1960s. The stalemate of the Korean War had resulted in a local settlement that was endorsed by the great powers. No matter that both North and South regarded it as no more than provisional, neither could challenge the division of the country without the support of the external powers. Since that division did not challenge their interests sufficiently to warrant a resumption of the war, a stand-off ensued that was directly comparable to the one between East and West in Europe. The North was able to sustain its independence by taking advantage of the Sino-Soviet rift, but each had too much to lose by challenging the status quo to allow its interests to be tied to the North’s war chariot. For its part the South did not have its confidence in the American commitment tested until the changes wrought by the Sino-American rapprochement and its own economic revival. That left both North and South to focus on domestic reconstruction amid the costs of sustaining a high degree of military preparedness. Although both were dictatorships, the communist North was tighter and more pervasive in its control of society and the economy as its leader, Kim Il-sung, consolidated its grip. The South Korean dictator, Syngman Rhee, by contrast, had to allow for parliamentary politics. His attempts to subvert them eventually brought him down after student disturbances in 1960. A brief period of rule by a democratically elected government that was badly divided and ineffective was ended by a military coup a year later that brought Park Chung Hee to power for another eighteen years.

Japan’s position as the key nodal point of American strategy and economic concerns in the Asia-Pacific was not seriously challenged by either the Soviet Union or China. As part of its policy of accommodation towards the West in 1955/1956, the Soviet Union initiated talks with Japan also. This culminated in mutual recognition and in Japan’s entry to
the United Nations. But no agreement was reached on the groups of four islands adjacent to Hokkaido still occupied by the Soviet Union. Consequently, they were unable to agree upon a peace settlement. This left Japan firmly in the American camp. Although the Japanese found ways to trade with the PRC (contrary to the American embargo), that too did not affect the country's international position. By focusing upon economic development Japan was able to emerge by the end of the 1960s as one of the world's leading economic powers.

There were few vital interests at stake for the two superpowers in Southeast Asia. This was also largely true for the two major regional powers, China and Japan. Under these less restrictive circumstances, the more fluid geopolitical conditions of Southeast Asia allowed for a greater degree of change to take place. As we saw in the previous chapter, the states of Southeast Asia, with the exception of Thailand, had all experienced European colonial rule. That, together with the manner of their emancipation, had a profound effect upon their subsequent identities as states. These identities in turn shaped both their domestic politics and their foreign relations. Indeed the two have been closely linked from the perspective of international politics. The internal and external politics of the states of Southeast Asia were closely inter-linked. Whether considering the question of treating an ethnic minority such as the Chinese, or assessing the importance of Islam as a political influence, or indeed even examining the question of the territorial claims of states, it is not always clear whether the external dimensions are derived from the domestic political arena or vice versa. It should also be recognized that although the major external powers in this period may not have identified vital interests for which they were prepared to fight major wars, this did not mean that they lacked interest in the region. Indeed, at times they showed willingness even to intervene in support of territorial claims and disaffected elite groups. With these broad considerations in mind, the international history of each of the main states will be surveyed briefly.

The Philippines, as previously noted, has been described as ‘being simultaneously a kind of detached bit of [Latin America], an East Asian offshore island, the occasional and uncertain champion of an embryonic community of South-east Asian states, and indubitably a part of the Malay world’. The central pillar in its foreign relations continued to be the manifold connection with the United States, which in addition to the alliance and the military bases also included pervasive American commerce and culture. Filipino troops were deployed in Vietnam and American airfields were used, albeit not for bombing. The sense of dependence has also evoked a certain anti-American rhetoric in Filipino nationalism and a concurrent search for ways to assert a Southeast Asian
identity and to find endorsement within the region for such an identity. Essentially the Philippines has been self-absorbed with its own problems, such as the continued rumblings of the Huk insurgency, and the discontent of the Muslim minority in the south centred on the island of Mindanao. But the overwhelming problem has stemmed from a political system that has been strong on the rhetoric of democracy and weak on orderly governance, which consequently has been unable or unwilling to address the economic, social and administrative difficulties that have existed since independence. Its relations with its Southeast Asian neighbours have been somewhat guarded, despite institutionalized regional links, notably that of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, but also the two ill-fated regional associations that preceded it. In addition to the degree of distance from neighbours caused by their separate identities and the Filipino ties with the United States, the Philippines’ claim to Sabah, which was incorporated within the Malaysian Federation, created problems too, even though it was not pursued with much vigour.

Thailand is on the whole more homogeneous than most of the other Southeast Asian states with around 90 percent of the population identifying themselves as ethnic Thais, as Buddhist and as Thai speakers. The traditional concern with the threat from Burma abated in the post-independence period as the Burmese state became tied down by its various domestic insurgencies. But Thailand has been troubled to the east. There was periodic fear of subversion through Thai-speaking Laos in the 1950s and 1960s, partly because of suspected Chinese influence through their road building activities in the north and partly through a Vietnamese-inspired communization of Laos. Accordingly, the Thais supported the so-called right-wing Lao leaders and they felt vindicated when their suspicions that the 1962 Geneva Agreement on Laos would work out in favour of the Vietnamese were confirmed. Part of the problem from a Thai perspective was the vulnerability of their adjacent northeast provinces, which were relatively neglected. Meanwhile traditional Thai–Khmer animosities were exacerbated by complaints about the way in which Khmer and Thai minorities were treated in each other’s countries. Essentially Thai governments thought of Cambodia as an unreliable buffer against Vietnam. To the south, the Malay-speaking areas of Thailand’s Kra peninsula have posed problems less because of possible separatism than as a base for insurgency and cross-border smuggling. Here there has been more cooperation with Malaysia to quell the troubles, rather than the eruption of discord over possible irredentism. The alliance with the United States was crucial as much for the Thai military in enhancing its domestic political primacy as in sustaining Thailand’s international position. But it has been an alliance that served Thai interests too;
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and it proved to be no barrier to Thailand’s active pursuit of schemes for regional inter-governmental cooperation.

Malaysia, whose official religion is constitutionally defined as Islam, has been troubled by its ethnic mix, which even after the expulsion of Singapore in 1965 (see below), was made up of some 45 percent Malay, 35 percent Chinese, 10 percent Indian and a further 10 percent from elsewhere. It was formed as a federation in 1963 to include the two states of Sarawak and Sabah in northern Borneo, Singapore, and peninsular, Malaya itself. Brunei was originally proposed as a member, but in the end it did not join. The Federation was seen as a means of divesting remaining British colonial possessions in Borneo and using them to counterbalance the Chinese population of Singapore. Its formation brought to a head a number of factors that have been central to Malaysia’s domestic and international concerns. The communal problems between Malays and Chinese are both domestic and external issues of great complexity. As elsewhere in the region, the Chinese are resented both because of their command over much of the commerce and because of their preservation of their distinctive ways of life with their ties to the Chinese homeland. They are also regarded as the beneficiaries of the colonial era. As Muslims, the Malays are subject to the twin pressures of asserting their Islamism and of temporising that in order to accommodate the Chinese and Indians in their midst. Even the Islamic world in Malaysia is divided between the more tolerant and those of a more fundamentalist persuasion. Not surprisingly, communal conflict has been a continual spectre and indeed, in 1969, when the establishment Alliance Party incorporating members of both communities did less well in the elections than expected, severe rioting broke out. The subsequent regrouping of the ‘grand coalition’ implemented a ‘New Economic Policy’ which allocated a greater share of the nation’s wealth to the Malays, whose cultural heritage was to be better protected and whose advancement was to underpin political dominance with economic control. These events had an extensive impact upon the region, as they drew attention both to the inability of Chinese governments in either Beijing or Taipei to protect the overseas Chinese and to their economic significance in each of the countries in the region.

Similarly, the challenge of a more assertive Islam within the Malay community may be seen as simultaneously a domestic matter for the less fundamentalist UMNO leadership and as a regional and/or international one that affected the wider world of Malay culture, especially after the 1967 Arab–Israeli war and the Israeli control of the holy places. In fact pan-Malay solidarity (with anti-Chinese undertones) had been briefly fanned in 1963, with the short lived formation of Maphilindo – an acronym comprising Malaya, the Philippines and Indonesia. But its development was
aborted by the establishment of Malaysia only a few weeks later. The two initial challenges to its legitimacy by the Philippines and Indonesia respectively may have abated soon, but they too may be seen as illustrative of wider problems. The Philippines’ claim to Sabah has been a continual reminder that Malaysia’s territorial integrity cannot be taken for granted. The Indonesian denunciation of Malaysia as a neo-colonial entity and its political, economic and military confrontation (Konfrontasi) of the Federation from 1963 to 1966 highlighted contradictory elements in the Malaysian international posture. Its defence and economic interests placed it within the Western camp, but its changing regional interests and domestic predispositions involved a degree of unease with that. Hence Malaysia sought membership of the non-aligned movement not long after.

Ethnic tension resulted in the expulsion of Singapore from the Federation within two years. The question of regional identity arose towards the end of Konfrontasi in late 1966, when the Malaysian government began to cultivate relations with Indonesia and to distance itself from Britain despite its having defended the Federation along with Australia and New Zealand military. Yet at the same time, however, the Malaysian government made a number of gestures favourable to the United States. Kuala Lumpur, for example, was the only Asian capital that President Johnson visited in 1966 that was not a co-belligerent in Vietnam. Against that, however, there were countervailing regional associations, notably those that led to the establishment of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967. Signifying a new understanding between Malaysia and Indonesia, its five member governments committed themselves to strengthening their economic and social stability so as to prevent external interference and to accept the temporary character of foreign bases which were not used to interfere with other states in the region.

Indonesia, which is made up of more than 13,000 islands, of which 1,000 are inhabited, has been subject to a sense of weakness and vulnerability arising from social and geographical fragmentation and to a sense of what Michael Leifer has called an ‘entitlement’ to play a leading role in the management of regional order in Southeast Asia. In the first decade after independence the state successfully overcame challenges to its integrity. In particular, in 1958 it overcame an armed revolt based on several major islands that had a degree of assistance from external forces including the United States. The vociferous objection to external interference that has been a marked feature of successive Indonesian governments should not obscure the fact that American diplomatic pressure was instrumental in gaining ultimately independence from the Dutch in 1949 and in recovering what came to be called Irian Jaya (the former Dutch New Guinea). In both instances it proved possible to use Cold War factors to
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Indonesian advantage. The circumstances of the first occasion were discussed in the previous chapter. The Irian Jaya case was facilitated in part ‘by Sukarno’s ability to use Soviet arms transfers to persuade the government of the United States of the political utility of persuading, in turn, the Netherlands government to revise its adamant opposition to transferring the territory to Indonesia’.27

In Indonesia too, there was a close correspondence between domestic and external policies. The period of parliamentary democracy 1950–1959 saw a commitment to an ‘independent and active’ foreign policy which involved non-alignment as part of a policy designed to cater to a national mood that was still shaped by the experience of the national revolution or struggle for independence. But it also ‘served as a way of sustaining domestic priorities designed to overcome economic, social and administrative shortcomings’.28 However, it was with the advent of the period of ‘Guided Democracy’ under the leadership of President Sukarno that the linkage became even more evident. Sukarno balanced two incompatible coalitions, first, with the more conservative armed forces and second, with the Communist Party (PKI). The former provided physical power and the latter a mass base. Their incompatibility led to the avoidance of taking critical decisions on domestic policy. Foreign policy issues which evoked a nationalist response had the great virtue of providing Sukarno with ‘great freedom of political manoeuvre without arousing domestic discord’.29 His confrontationalist style against the West, depicted as the ‘old established forces’ ever anxious to thwart and obstruct the ‘new emerging forces’ such as Indonesia, was most evident in the campaign to acquire West Irian (Irian Jaya) from the Dutch and in the armed confrontation with Malaysia as a creature of neo-colonialism after its creation in 1963.

With the collapse of Guided Democracy after the abortive coup of 1965, the new government of General Suharto established a new domestic order that soon found expression in a different approach to foreign policy. While still upholding the long standing goals of abjuring military alliances and asserting pre-eminence in the affairs of the Southeast Asian region, the new government abandoned the leftist-style rhetoric of Sukarno for a growing association with the Western industrialized states. Relations immediately soured with Beijing as it was openly accused of being implicated in the 1965 coup. This accentuated the impression of a new pro-Western tilt that was only slightly mollified by the retention of correct relations with the Soviet Union. The ending of the confrontation with Malaysia resulted in a situation in which the five governments of Southeast Asia who were interested in regional cooperation were sufficiently like-minded to combine that with the exercise of reconciliation with Indonesia. Thus on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN),
comprising Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines, came into being. Since the last two were allied to the United States and were involved in the American war effort in Vietnam, which was then at its height, and in order to minimize communist and non-aligned possible suspicions about its orientation, the main emphasis was placed on ASEAN’s role to facilitate cooperation in economic, social and cultural matters. The goal of encouraging peace and stability in the region was given less public attention, but it was considered to be of the utmost importance. The extent to which this was done, however, did reflect long standing Indonesian perspectives. Thus the members committed themselves to strengthen the economic and social stability of the region and to preserve their national identities and security from ‘external interference in any form and manifestation’. They also affirmed the temporary character of foreign bases that could remain only with ‘expressed concurrence’ of the host countries and with the proviso that they did not subvert countries within the region. 

Singapore, as a city state made up predominantly of ethnic Chinese, was acutely conscious under its leader, Lee Kuan Yew, of its vulnerability given its geopolitical location between Malaysia and Indonesia. This was particularly true after its expulsion from the Malaysian Federation in August 1965. It had reason to fear both Sukarno’s Konfrontasi and the profuse expressions of pan-Malay solidarity after its end. Accordingly, it welcomed both the formation of ASEAN in 1967 and the decision to form the Five Power Defence Arrangements by the British Conservative government on its coming to power in 1970 by way of recompense for the British decision to retreat militarily from East of Suez. The agreement committed Britain, Australia and New Zealand to maintain a modest defence presence in both Malaysia and Singapore. Singapore has sometimes taken high profile positions that would not always be welcome to its vastly larger neighbours as a way of securing their proper respect. Moreover, unlike perhaps either Malaysia or Indonesia, Singapore has a geostrategic interest in encouraging rather than discouraging the presence of external great powers in the seas of the region. Such is the Singaporean concern about being absorbed by its neighbours that its defence posture has been likened to that of a poisonous shrimp that draws attention to itself by its brilliance as a warning to potential predators about the terrible pains that would follow from swallowing it.

This period of bipolarity began with an assertive American attempt to consolidate the containment of communism in East Asia and ended with the United States in a more chastened mood after its travails in Vietnam. The heady days of the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations interpreted every gain to a supposedly monolithic international communist
movement as something to be denied in principle rather than something to be responded to in terms of variable geopolitical significance. But one of the first decisions of the Nixon presidency in 1969 was to limit American military interventions in East Asia to air and naval power alone. Meanwhile the Sino-Soviet rift which the West had anticipated in the late 1940s and early 1950s duly took place, but the West was ill placed to exploit it until after the debacle in Vietnam, when Kissinger and Nixon appreciated the geopolitical significance of the rift. Also, a stalemate developed in Northeast Asia, while in Southeast Asia the United States got bogged down in Vietnam. As China turned inwards during the Cultural Revolution the other Southeast Asian states were able after the fall of Indonesia's President Sukarno to contain their differences and various disputes by establishing a regional association. Although more modest in its scope, the more pragmatic orientation of ASEAN ensured it a longer and more effective life span than did the more trumpeted declarations of Asian and African solidarity, as epitomized by the Bandung Conference. However, the established bipolar character of containment in Asia had run its course as the deeper significance of the emergence of China as a separate centre of power was to emerge in the course of the pending Sino-American rapprochement.

Notes


3 Much of this is captured in a book written at the end of the period under review. See Milton Osborne, *Region of Revolt, Focus on Southeast Asia* (Australia: Pergamon Press, 1970).


This account draws upon Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* (op. cit.), ch.4, and the quotations are from pages 98 and 103, respectively.


 Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* (op. cit.), chs 5–6. The quotation from Ridgway is on page 195.

 This and the following paragraph have benefited from the excellent analysis by Thomas E. Stolper, *China, Taiwan and the Off-Shore Islands* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1985).

 These were: respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty; non-aggression; non-interference in internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful coexistence.


 This account relies strongly on Stolper, *China, Taiwan and the Off-Shore Islands* (op. cit.), ch.VIII.


 For the most complete account of China’s development of nuclear weapons, see John Wilson Lewis and Xue Litai, *China Builds the Bomb* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).


 See note 7.


 Leifer, *Indonesia’s Foreign Policy* (op. cit.), p.xiv.

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28 Ibid., p.29.
29 Ibid., p.55.
3 The period of tripolarity, 1971–1989

The structure of the international system during this period has often been depicted as a strategic triangle comprising the United States, the Soviet Union and China. There is some merit in this view, but it should not be exaggerated. China did not carry the same strategic weight as the other two and its impact on global configurations of power was still quite limited. The essentials of the Cold War between Moscow and Washington and the centrality of the strategic balance between the two superpowers and their allies remained in place. The principal change that occurred was that China became more openly recognized as a complicating factor in the conduct of American–Soviet relations, especially in East Asia where its influence was more evident. Henry Kissinger’s surprise visit to Beijing in July 1971, which may be said to have formally ushered in this new phase in international politics, did not suddenly elevate China to superpower status. Unlike either of the superpowers, China’s military reach continued to be limited to areas adjacent to its land borders. It lagged far behind in military technology and its economy was not yet of global significance. What gave a new salience to China’s significance was the new strategic weight the Soviet Union had gained as a result of its sustained military build-up while the United States had been bogged down in Vietnam. Now that the Soviet Union had ‘caught up’ with the United States, the China factor acquired a new importance.

China’s international strategic importance stemmed first from the fact that alone of the other countries in the world it claimed to be able to defend itself from either of the superpowers, who in turn had gone to great lengths to contain Chinese power; and second from its independent diplomatic stance as demonstrated by its shift from alliance with the Soviet Union to revolutionary isolationism and now to an alignment with the United States. China also benefited from its geographical location and its perceived potential. But China’s elevation into the diplomacy of tripolarity also stemmed from the importance the two superpowers accorded the
country in their conduct of relations with each other. That, however, did not alter the fact that the dominant strategic relationship in world affairs was still that of the United States and the Soviet Union. The key pillars of the Cold War remained in place throughout this period and these emanated from the confrontation in Europe where the Chinese impact was not great. The Soviet leaders regarded themselves as representatives of the fellow superpower, with whom the Americans had to deal over serious issues. As Brezhnev once put it, Nixon went ‘to Peking for banquets but to Moscow to do business’.

Each of the parties to the strategic triangle perceived it differently and changed their policies over time. The Chinese, whose principal foreign policy concerns to date could be described as seeking to manoeuvre between the two superpowers in order to preserve China’s independence, opened to America in order to better contain the Soviet Union. Later, however, the Chinese shifted to a more independent position as the Soviet threat declined and as the Reagan administration no longer seemed to need the Chinese counter-weight as much as its predecessors. Kissinger and Nixon, as the architects of the new structure of international relations, saw it less as a means of bringing unrelenting pressure on one party by the other two than as a means of bringing about a balance or equilibrium in which the Soviet leaders would see it to be in their interests to act with restraint. Their successors, however, argued as to whether it would be possible to rein in a Soviet Union that had not acted with ‘restraint’ by supplying sophisticated weaponry to China – what became known as playing the ‘China card’. The issue was finally settled by the Reagan administration’s huge military build-up, which made the Chinese role almost redundant. The Soviet leaders, who had less room for manoeuvre in the triangle than the other two, first emphasized their significance to the Americans as a fellow superpower, only to later describe the Chinese as extreme ‘anti-Soviets’ who had got the Americans on side, and finally to end up in a position in which they sought to cultivate relations with the Chinese partly in order to limit American unilateralism.

Even within the Asia-Pacific, the effect of tripolarity was not to change the fundamental pattern of alliances involving the United States and the Soviet Union but rather to change the position and relations of China. Thus American alliances with South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Thailand, etc. all held, as did the Soviet alliances with Mongolia, North Korea and North Vietnam (soon to be a reunified Vietnam). Even the one American international alliance that was ended – that with Taiwan – was soon renewed through domestic American legislation in the form of the Taiwan Relations Act. As against that, China’s relations in the region changed radically, notably in Southeast Asia where relations were soon
established with former adversaries Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand, but deteriorated rapidly with its former ally Vietnam. Moreover the underlying strategic enmity between the United States and the Soviet Union was complicated in the Asia-Pacific by a Sino-Soviet conflict that was particularly intense in the 1970s and whose influence was still apparent for much of the 1980s.

The period of tripolarity may be divided roughly into two: from 1971 until 1979, when the United States still sought détente with the Soviet Union and when Sino-Soviet relations continued to be marked by deep enmity; and from 1980 to 1989, which was characterized initially by greater enmity between the United States and the Soviet Union and a slow improvement in Sino-Soviet relations that by the late 1980s ended in a more balanced relationship between the three powers culminating in the normalization of Sino-Soviet relations and the ending of the Cold War. As seen from the more mechanistic view of the strategic triangle, the United States was favoured by the ‘pivot’ position during the first period as it alone enjoyed good relations with the other two who in turn sought to cultivate Washington against the other rival. But it was principally China who became the ‘pivot’ in the second period as it benefited from the deterioration of relations between the other two and was accordingly cultivated by them. However, tripolarity was only one of the elements that shaped relations between the three great powers. Other factors must also be taken into account such as strategic developments, questions of ideology, changes in the domestic political circumstances in each of their societies and the impact of developments elsewhere. Nevertheless the periodization also accords with other important developments. The year 1979 was a turning point in many ways, as it was then that China launched its brief incursion into Vietnam. The Soviet Union later invaded Afghanistan which led the United States to adopt a more confrontationist policy towards the Soviet Union. It was also the year in which China’s new policies of economic reform and openness began to take shape and in which the United States and China commenced a new period of normalized relations.

**Tripolarity phase I, 1971–1979: the problems of détente**

Tripolarity, according to its chief exponent, Henry Kissinger, was meant not only to serve American interests, but also to promote the goal of equilibrium among the main powers and thus serve the general interest. The United States seemingly enjoyed the key position of being the ‘pivot’, as it could deal directly with the other two while they in turn froze each other out in bitter confrontation.
The period of tripolarity, 1971–1989

But the immediate effect of Henry Kissinger’s visit to Beijing in July 1971 was to serve China’s interest by accelerating the return of the People’s Republic of China to full participatory membership of the international community. That autumn the UN General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to expel the Republic of China (i.e., Taiwan) and replace it with the PRC. The general trend of improving state relations with the PRC reached a high tide as nearly all states rushed to normalize relations with Beijing. But the startling diplomatic success of the Americans in establishing a strategic alignment with the Chinese, according to Kissinger’s own account, was followed not by immediate conciliatory moves by the Soviet Union, but by Moscow’s encouragement of India to act boldly in facilitating the break-up of Pakistan, a staunch ally of the PRC. After signing a treaty with the Soviet Union in August 1971, the Indian government assisted the rebellion in East Pakistan in seceding and in establishing the state of Bangladesh. According to Kissinger, only American pressure (including the so-called ‘tilt to Pakistan’) prevented India with Soviet connivance from proceeding to capture the whole of Kashmir and in the process destroying the remaining Pakistani army and bringing about the dismemberment of West Pakistan. That in turn would have left China vulnerable and it could possibly have undermined the Nixon/Kissinger initiative to establish a new and necessary balance of power. It is clear even from this self-serving account that the opening to China did not automatically result in more ‘restrained Soviet behaviour’ and it also pointed up that the weakness of China could make it a liability for the United States under certain circumstances as well as an asset under others.

In fact, from the outset each of the powers not only understood tripolarity differently but they also experienced the pressures of tripolarity in different ways. This arose in part from the lack of symmetry among the three powers and in part because of the ways in which domestic factors interacted with the external pressures. Thus China’s relative weakness made it court the United States in the first place against the perceived threat of the Soviet Union. But ideological rivalry with the Soviet Union which went to the heart of the legitimacy of Mao and his Cultural Revolution intensified his hostility towards the country and, at least in the eyes of his Soviet adversaries, precluded any prospect of an accommodation until his death. Thus for most of the 1970s China’s leaders sought in vain to establish an international coalition to confront the Soviet Union and openly derided the American development of détente with the Soviet Union as appeasement. The Soviet leaders were so convinced that Mao personally was at the heart of Chinese hostility towards them that they put out feelers towards the Chinese after Mao’s death in 1976. In the event, it was not until Deng Xiaoping had gained ascendancy in Beijing in late
1978 and jettisoned much of Mao’s ideological legacy that China’s leaders were in a position to explore the prospects for improved relations.

The Soviet leaders during this period focused almost entirely on their relations with the United States, with whom they felt that a broad strategic parity had been achieved that was only marginally affected by the Chinese factor. As long as the Soviet leaders thought that the United States sought détente and stability they concluded that the Americans would resist Chinese efforts to transform the dynamics of tripolarity into an anti-Soviet united front. Only when the United States abandoned détente in President Carter’s last year did the Soviet leaders believe that Washington had combined with Beijing against them. In other words, even then the Soviet leaders saw tripolarity as a function of bipolar relations between Moscow and Washington. It was not until 1982, when the Soviet Union was bogged down in Afghanistan and demonstrably in a weakening position compared to the United States, which was engaged in a rapid military build-up, that the Soviet leaders responded positively to earlier Chinese initiatives to improve relations.

The United States’ leaders, and Henry Kissinger in particular, consciously sought to exploit the dynamics of triangular diplomacy. Yet it is not easy to identify what specific tangible gains the United States achieved in its dealings with the Soviet Union, either in the arms control negotiations or in the attempts to constrain Soviet activism in the third world. Indeed, it can be argued that Soviet activism was in part activated by concern about the China factor. Furthermore, it has been argued persuasively that the intensification of the Soviet military build-up to the north of China in the mid-1970s threatened American strategic interests too. Moreover, during the Nixon and Ford administrations, when Kissinger played a major role in shaping foreign policy, the American efforts to consolidate détente with the Soviet Union were made at the expense of exciting suspicion in China’s leaders.

Following the departure of Kissinger in 1976, the main effect of tripolarity seemed to be to excite divisions between American decision makers. The Carter administration consciously sought to pursue a more idealist foreign policy, but it felt the pressure of tripolarity through divisions within the administration about whether or not to use the threat of arming China as a means of restraining aggressive Soviet behaviour. The arguments between Secretary of State Vance and National Security Adviser Brzezinski were continued into the next administration, as exemplified by the contrast between Secretary of State Haig and his successor, Shultz. Haig went so far as to argue that China ‘may be the most important country in the world’ for American security interests. For Shultz, China was little more than an important regional power, albeit of great potential,
that was constrained by its communist system and, as far as Asia was concerned, for him ‘the centrepiece ha[d] always been Japan’. The issue was finally settled as a result of the changing balance of power in favour of the United States, which had the effect of reducing China’s potential strategic significance.

**The regional impact**

The transformation of China’s position in the central balance between the United States and the Soviet Union may have had less impact on the global bipolar system than was previously thought, but it certainly had an immediate effect on the Asia-Pacific region. From being a target for American containment policies, China had become a partner in alignment with the United States. Moreover, the Sino-Soviet enmity that had hitherto been confined to the ideological realm and to direct bilateral confrontations was now to become more readily apparent in the region as a whole. Given the significance of China for all the countries in the region, the political, security and economic consequences were both immediate and far reaching.

The first to feel the impact was Taiwan. Hitherto, it had been one of the key cornerstones of American global strategy. It was at the centre of the American containment strategy in Asia and, in particular, of the confrontation with Chinese communism. For the Chinese too, Taiwan had been seen as being of key significance in America’s geopolitical strategy, and as one of the critical points from which an invasion of the mainland might have been launched. Henceforth, from the perspective of Beijing, Taiwan returned to being a problem of sovereignty and Chinese unity. It was important, but not a pressing issue that threatened the survival of the state, and it was at best a secondary problem in Sino-American relations. Its significance had changed as the Sino-American international geopolitical alignment had changed. This was confirmed by the famous Shanghai Communique of February 1972, signed by US President Nixon and the PRC premier, Zhou Enlai, which as Kissinger rightly claims, ‘was not about Taiwan or bilateral exchanges, but about international order’. Interestingly, the terms of the communique were to allow America alone of all the Western countries to maintain full diplomatic relations and a security treaty with Taiwan while simultaneously maintaining a quasi-embassy in Beijing. Even when relations were normalized between Washington and Beijing in January 1979, Washington was still able to insist on its interest in a peaceful resolution of the Beijing–Taipei dispute and on its intention to continue to sell arms to the island. Although the United States had to abrogate its defence treaty with Taiwan (technically, the Republic of China), the Taiwan Relations Act
of the US Congress, that was signed by the president in April 1979, committed the US to maintain a capacity to ‘resist any resort to force … that would jeopardize the security … of the people on Taiwan’. Much as this was resented by Beijing, it did not stop the Chinese leaders from cultivating the United States as a strategic partner, nor from seeking to deepen economic and other relations with the US.

The Taiwan issue had in effect become a bilateral issue between the peoples on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, with the United States as the guarantor that the issue would not be settled by force. The formal position of the PRC did not change until relations were normalized in January 1979. At that point the Beijing leaders dropped their harsh threat to ‘liberate’ Taiwan in favour of a milder offer of ‘re-unification’, to be based on the granting of what on paper was a considerable degree of autonomy. The threat to use force was retained, according to Deng Xiaoping, lest the island ally itself with the Soviet Union, declare independence, or prolong matters unduly. The government in Taipei rejected the blandishments of Beijing, as it was buttressed by Taiwan’s economic success and promises of American support. Little changed until the second half of the 1980s, when the development of economic ties across the Strait and the beginnings of democracy on the island introduced important new factors into cross-Strait relations.

Japan also reacted smartly to the dramatic news of the American opening to China by accelerating its own moves to normalize relations with its giant neighbour. But it was not before the Japanese had replaced the relatively right wing Eishiro Sato, who had links with the Kuomintang in Taiwan, with Kakuei Tanaka as prime minister that the Chinese agreed to establish diplomatic relations in September 1972. The American démarche came as a shock to the Japanese – another soon followed with a major change in American economic policy of surcharging imports and ending the trade of dollars at a fixed price for gold. It was, to say the least, disconcerting for a country that had hitherto been regarded as America’s most important ally in Asia to find that its democratic friend, economic partner and strategic associate had suddenly sought an alignment with communist China, Japan’s giant neighbour, and until that point, their joint protagonist, without even informing Tokyo in advance. Indeed such was the fascination of China for Henry Kissinger that Mao ‘went so far as to advise [him] to make sure that when he visited Asia [he] spend as much time in Tokyo as in Peking’. It was as if Mao and Zhou Enlai appreciated the significance of the US alliance with Japan as a constraint upon the Soviet Union and as the bedrock of strategic stability in East Asia better than Nixon and Kissinger. Indeed, according to Kissinger the Chinese leaders never sought to play off Japan and the US against each other.
Japan was therefore able to develop relations with the PRC without encountering international pressures or constraints except for those emanating from the Soviet Union. Thus Japan normalized relations with the PRC amid a piece of creative diplomacy by which it was able to maintain diplomatic relations with Taiwan in all but name.\textsuperscript{14} The PRC, like its predecessor the ROC, waived aside potential claims to reparations then estimated to be worth US$50 billion.\textsuperscript{15} Disputes about the sovereignty of the Senkaku (or in Chinese, Diaoyutai) Islands were put aside by joint agreement, and within three years agreements were reached about fishing, navigation and communication matters as both sides deepened their economic relations.

Until 1978, Sino-Japanese relations were conducted almost entirely as simple bilateral matters, sheltering as they did under the Japanese security alliance with the United States that the Chinese also regarded as a stabilizing factor. The issue that raised larger regional and international questions was the signing of a peace treaty. The Soviet Union was also anxious to sign such a treaty with Japan, and at the same time it was concerned by Chinese attempts to persuade Japan to sign a treaty that \textit{inter alia} expressed opposition to 'hegemony', which was widely regarded as a Chinese code word for the Soviet Union. However, Soviet-Japanese negotiations broke down on Soviet refusal to acknowledge even the legitimacy of the Japanese right to dispute ownership of the four islands to the north of Japan. Soviet diplomacy was judged to be overbearing, and that paved the way for the Chinese to obtain Japanese agreement to sign a Treaty of Peace and Friendship in August 1978 with them instead. To assuage Japanese sentiments the Chinese agreed that opposition to hegemony should be mentioned in the preamble rather than being dealt with in a separate clause. They also accepted the wording that the treaty was not directed against any third party.

It was nevertheless the Soviet factor that brought Sino-Japanese relations back into the maelstrom of international and regional politics. In the Soviet perception, the United States had already adopted a more pronounced anti-Soviet position in the course of the visit to China in May 1978 by Z. Brzezinski, President Carter's national security adviser,\textsuperscript{16} and now the Sino-Japanese treaty contributed to the Soviet sense of isolation and encirclement. In the view of the Soviet leaders, they were now confronted in East Asia by an alignment of the most populous, the most economically successful and the most powerful states (i.e., China, Japan and the United States). That may well have played a part in the Soviet decision to support Vietnam in its conquest of Cambodia in late 1978 and in its own invasion of Afghanistan a year later. The Sino-Japanese treaty also contributed to emboldening the Chinese to mount their attack on
Vietnam in early 1979. Whether or not Japan’s leaders appreciated the larger significance of their treaty with the PRC, Sino-Japanese relations were necessarily a part of the international dimensions of the Asia-Pacific region and could not be seen or understood primarily through the prism of bilateral relations, important though they were for both countries. Nevertheless Sino-Japanese relations always had dimensions that could only be understood in a bilateral context.\(^1^7\)

Interestingly, the situation on the Korean peninsula was not greatly altered by the change in Sino-American relations. The North felt that its capacity to pursue an independent course had been considerably limited as it saw its two giant neighbours and allies separately seek détente with its principal enemy, the United States. In 1972 it made a gesture towards opening talks with the South and it began to purchase industrial plants and other forms of advanced technology from the smaller capitalist countries. However, little came of these cautious beginnings and the North was left in default of loan repayments to a number of countries. It was not until the latter half of the 1980s that the impact of the Gorbachev changes in the Soviet Union and the primacy of economics in China’s foreign policy began to make a difference to the international dimensions of the Korean divide between North and South.

The 1970s were still marked by the North having worse relations with the Soviet Union than with China. Although the Soviet Union no longer sought to control the North, it nevertheless sought to constrain it from possible adventurous acts that might embarrass the Soviet Union in its relations with the United States, in what was still one of the world’s most dangerous trouble spots. Unlike in the case of Vietnam, the opportunity to recruit North Korea to the Soviet side because of China’s alleged ‘defection’ to America simply did not arise. The Koreans did not regard the Chinese as a long standing historical threat to their independence, nor could the Soviet Union assist the North in achieving nationalist aims of unification without considerable risk to its own national security interests. On the contrary, these Soviet concerns led its leaders to dilute their support for the claims of the North to be the only sovereign body with the legitimate right to rule the whole of the Korean peninsula. Instead they suggested to the North that the model of the two Germanys should be applied to Korea.

The Chinese, by contrast, quickly apologized for the excesses of the Cultural Revolution, and Zhou Enlai’s visit in 1970 assured Kim of Chinese acceptance of the sole legitimacy of the North. At that point he shared the Northern view that the danger of Japanese militarism was once again evident. China’s new relations with the United States that began only a year later entailed a certain cooling of relations. The two allies also
began to differ on the alleged menace of Japan, and by 1978 the Chinese had signed a treaty with Japan. Nevertheless the North continued to tilt towards China without cutting off links with the Soviet Union. This may be seen from the North’s criticism of the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and its corresponding silence about the Chinese attack on Vietnam. Not surprisingly, in this period the Chinese rather than the Soviets were the principal suppliers of weaponry to the North.\footnote{18}

The South was principally concerned about the depth and durability of the American defence commitment in Korea. Indeed that had been a primary consideration in the deployment of 50,000 combat troops to fight in South Vietnam in response to President Johnson’s request for international support for the American war effort. The Nixon and Ford administrations were careful to give assurances of continued support to South Korea after the opening to China and in the course of the stages of the American withdrawal form South Vietnam, culminating in the final debacle of 1975. However, the anxieties that were raised the following year by the incoming Carter administration because of the campaign pledge to withdraw American forces from South Korea were not completely assuaged, even though President Carter was soon persuaded to change his mind.\footnote{19} These considerations were not a function of tripolarity, but rather they arose from the impact on the United States of its disastrous experience in Vietnam and from different assessments of principally Soviet behaviour. In other words, the Korean situation continued to be dominated by the Cold War considerations associated with the bipolar system, even though that system itself had weakened. The reason for the persistence of the stalemate stemmed from the mutual hostilities of North and South supported by the external powers, rather than primarily from the external powers themselves.

The impact of the Sino-American rapprochement and the emergence of tripolarity was immediate and far reaching in Southeast Asia. America’s new relations with China coupled with the pursuit of détente with the Soviet Union removed the last vestiges of the original strategic purposes for the American intervention in Vietnam. The potential success of the North could no longer be seen as a victory by proxy for the geopolitical interests of the Chinese communists. Nevertheless the American process of withdrawal was prolonged, principally because of the perceived need to withdraw ‘with honour’ in order to sustain America’s credibility as an ally and to assuage domestic forces. To this end the United States sought to use the linkage with the Soviet Union to bring pressure to bear upon North Vietnam and to persuade the Soviet Union that it should act with restraint in international affairs if détente was to work as a basis for international order. In the event, the negotiations with the North dragged on in a
context in which it was by no means apparent that Moscow could dictate to Hanoi or that Hanoi could determine Soviet reactions.

Meanwhile the repercussions of the Sino-American alignment were bringing about new divisions and realignments in Indo-China that were to culminate in the Third Indo-China War. The new challenges from the changes in the region's international environment had the effect of transforming the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) into a more cohesive diplomatic community. These changes must be set within a wider context than that of the emergence of tripolarity alone. The British had decided in January 1968 to accelerate the timetable of their military disengagement from East of Suez. Three months later a Soviet naval flotilla made its first appearance in the Indian Ocean, which was soon to be seen as the harbinger of a more active Soviet naval presence in that part of the world. In March that year, after the Tet offensive by the Vietnamese communists, President Johnson's decision not to seek re-election and to pursue a solution by negotiation was seen as a decisive turning point in acknowledging the limits of American power. This was confirmed when, to the manifest unease of America's Asian allies, the recently elected President Nixon stated in Guam in July 1969 that the United States was no longer prepared to undertake principal combat roles in their defence. The American opening to China was seen therefore as indicating a new role in the region for China. It was also to pave the way for introducing the Sino-Soviet conflict as an additional interposition in the region.

The impact of these changes was felt deepest in Indo-China. This was not immediately apparent, as China's leaders sought to assuage Vietnamese fears of Chinese betrayal. Chinese aid continued to flow and Chinese diplomatic support for North Vietnam remained formally correct. But the North Vietnamese, who were already reliant upon the Soviet Union for the supply of advanced weaponry and had reason to fear Chinese attempts to subordinate Vietnamese interests to their own, leaned still further towards the Soviet side. In January 1973 the Americans and the North Vietnamese finally signed agreements in Paris that confirmed the final American military withdrawals. Two years later, in April 1975, the North swiftly overran a demoralized South. Meanwhile the Chinese took the opportunity in 1974 to seize by force the remaining part of the Paracel Islands occupied by the South. These islands in the South China Sea are claimed by both China and Vietnam, and the Chinese opportunistic seizure further added to the growing enmity between Hanoi and Beijing that was still largely concealed behind a veil of diplomatic niceties. However, the American debacle in Indo-China exacerbated Chinese fears of a Soviet attempt to fill the vacuum left by the departing American forces.
The period of tripolarity, 1971–1989

The critical point of division between China and Vietnam centred upon Cambodia. April 1975 also witnessed the final victory of the Khmer Rouge in their capture of Phnom Penh from the forces of Lon Nol, whose pro-Western army had ousted Prince Sihanouk five years earlier. The virulent anti-Vietnamese nationalism of the Khmer Rouge served Chinese interests as it served to deny Vietnam the opportunity of dominating the whole of Indo-China. But the prospects of finding a basis of accommodation between the competing parties did not materialize, as the Khmer Rouge initiated a series of provocative assaults along the borders with Vietnam. These in turn heightened Vietnamese fears about Chinese attempts to limit their independence. Emboldened by its closer links with the Soviet Union, the government in Hanoi which had experienced difficulties in imposing the command economy upon the south took measures in 1978 to encourage the ethnic Chinese (who, as elsewhere in Southeast Asia, dominated much of the local commerce) to leave. There also emerged a conjunction of interests between the Soviet desire to constrain China and the Vietnamese security objectives of removing the Khmer Rouge challenge and defying Chinese attempts to prevent the Vietnamese from asserting their claims to exercise special influence over Indo-China as a whole.

By the end of 1978 the international, regional and local lines of conflict had combined to bring about the Third Indo-China War. Backed by membership of COMECON in June and by a formal friendship treaty with the Soviet Union in November, the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia on 25 December, captured Phnom Penh on 7 January, and imposed a regime of their choice. The Khmer Rouge forces retreated as guerrillas to hideouts, primarily near the borders with Thailand. The Chinese, having signed a treaty with Japan in the summer and after agreeing to normalize relations with the United States in December 1978, followed up with visits by Deng Xiaoping himself to both Washington and Tokyo in which he vowed to ‘teach Vietnam a lesson’. Despite obtaining less than enthusiastic backing, the Chinese launched an attack on 17 February 1979 into northern Vietnam, ostensibly because of border violations. Three weeks later the Chinese troops were withdrawn after inflicting considerable damage, but not before their limitations as a fighting force had been exposed by the Vietnamese. This then resulted in a stalemate that lasted ten years, in which an internationally isolated Vietnam was dependent upon the Soviet Union to sustain its dominant position in Cambodia while being confronted on the margins by resistance forces that enjoyed international legitimacy and the support of China, the United States and the ASEAN countries.
The impact of these international and regional changes to the security environment of the ASEAN countries was to facilitate their emergence as a more cohesive diplomatic body after first highlighting some of their different security perspectives. Their first response to the new international position of China illustrated these divisions. In 1971, under pressure from the US State Department to resist the PRC’s claim to the China seat, the Philippines acquiesced in the interests of its American alliance; Thailand and even non-aligned Indonesia abstained; but Malaysia and Singapore voted in favour of the PRC. Singapore was concerned about the sentiments of its majority community; and the Malaysian government sought to find an accommodation with Beijing so as ‘to demonstrate to the country’s resident Chinese community and to its insurgent Communist Party that its legitimacy was recognized and endorsed by its counterpart in Beijing’. In fact this was the origin of the initiative to declare Southeast Asia a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN). As first conceived, Malaysia sought formal neutralization to be guaranteed by the external powers including the PRC. But at Indonesia’s insistence, all reference to external guarantees was removed and the resulting declaration of November 1971 specifically called for recognition and respect for a ZOPFAN that would be ‘free from any form or manner of interference by outside powers’.

In 1974 Malaysia became the first ASEAN country to recognize the PRC. Thailand and the Philippines followed suit a year later but not until after the victories of the revolutionaries in Cambodia and Vietnam. Indeed, the victories fundamentally changed the regional security environment of ASEAN. The American debacle in Vietnam raised doubts about its residuary security role in Southeast Asia, at a time when the relatively conservative governments of ASEAN suddenly found themselves directly confronted by triumphant revolutionary regimes to the north. In response a summit was held in February 1976 that sought to affirm the purpose of the association as a body primarily concerned with internal security and of its vision for an attainment of a regional order that emphasized the peaceful settlement of disputes. It held out the prospect of the socialist Indo-Chinese states becoming associated with ASEAN through a ‘Treaty of Amity and Cooperation’.

As the new lines of conflict emerged between Cambodia and Vietnam, China and Vietnam, and China and the Soviet Union, the ASEAN countries found themselves being courted in 1978 by the two sets of disputants. Vietnam’s invasion and occupation of Cambodia proved to be the turning point. By imposing by force on a recalcitrant neighbour a government of their own choosing, the Vietnamese had violated a fundamental tenet that held ASEAN together. But perhaps more to the point, they challenged the
immediate national security interests of Thailand. As the frontline state, Thai interests predominated in shaping the ASEAN response. However, they did not entirely override the long standing tendency among ASEAN members, especially Malaysia and Indonesia, to regard China as the long term threat to the region and to see Vietnam as something of a buffer against the spread of Chinese influence. Thus the ASEAN response was to avoid condemning Vietnam while at the same time refusing to accept the legitimacy of the new government in Phnom Penh. Accordingly, recognition continued to be granted to the previous government and state of the Khmer Rouge – regardless of the latter’s gruesome record.

The result was a situation in which Thailand in effect forged an alliance with China, alongside its existing formal alliance with the United States, that emboldened it to confront Vietnam by helping the Chinese in particular to assist the remnant Khmer Rouge and other resistance forces lodged in sanctuaries along the porous Thai border with Cambodia. Vietnam, aided by the Soviet Union, maintained an army of occupation in Cambodia that was able to provide relative security for its puppet government to build a degree of administrative effectiveness. However, Vietnam was unable to wipe out the resistance forces without risking a potentially wider conflict with Thailand. Meanwhile ASEAN played an effective diplomatic role in orchestrating the isolation of Vietnam, especially at the United Nations. ASEAN lacked the necessary military muscle or corporate solidarity to change the stalemate. For example, a resolute Vietnam saw no reason to respond sympathetically to Malaysian and Indonesian attempts to draw it into a diplomatic settlement. The stalemate was only broken ten years after the initial invasion, when the Soviet Union was no longer able to continue to supply Vietnam with the material it needed to prosecute the war and underpin its economy.

**Tripolarity phase II, 1980–1989: from confrontation to the end of the Cold War**

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan at the end of 1979 ended whatever remaining interest the Carter administration still had in détente. The president’s complaint that his opposite in the Kremlin had ‘lied’ to him was symptomatic of the view that the Soviet Union was not a responsible treaty partner. As a result, in his last year as president, Carter initiated a significant re-building of American military power that was to be carried to great lengths by his successor, President Reagan, with whom the policy was to be identified. The deterioration in relations with the Soviet Union also had an effect on American policy towards China. President Carter authorized the export to China of ‘non-lethal’ military equipment, including advanced computers and other high technology products.
From a Soviet perspective, the politics of the strategic triangle had already changed more than a year earlier, when in May 1978 Carter’s national security adviser, Z. Brzezinski, had openly indicated an American tilt towards China. But the American response to Afghanistan was such as to persuade the Soviet leaders that it was no longer a question of triangular politics, but one of a growing direct confrontation of the Soviet Union by the United States. The Soviet position in the Asia-Pacific had worsened considerably. It was faced by a hostile coalition of Japan, China and the United States, with the latter now embarked on a huge military build-up. Additionally its major ally, Vietnam, was also isolated and required considerable economic and military support. Lacking also in extensive economic relations in the region as well as being diplomatically isolated because of the double effect of the invasions of Cambodia and Afghanistan, the Soviet Union possessed only military power with which to advance its interests. Having become bogged down in Afghanistan and with its ally stalemated in Cambodia, there was no clear avenue that was open to the Soviet leaders to translate their military power into political advantage, especially as the United States had embarked on a course of a rapid military build-up. The opportunities for reaching new understandings on the basis of détente had gone.

As perhaps the most skilful practitioners of realpolitik, the Chinese sensed the Soviet predicament at an early stage. In April 1979 the Chinese proposed the resumption of talks with the Soviet Union, ostensibly in accordance with the terms of the long defunct thirty year treaty of 1950. Having consolidated their relations with the United States, the Chinese may have been emboldened by the lack of a Soviet move to defend the Vietnamese ally when it was under attack from themselves. The Chinese initiative may also have been a portent of the Chinese diplomacy of seeking a favourable and peaceful international environment in which to pursue the priorities of domestic economic development. Ideology was ceasing to be a problem between the two sides as the Chinese had begun to dismantle much of Mao’s ideological legacy. Sino-Soviet talks began in September, but were then suspended by the Chinese after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. However, the domestic economic imperatives in China were such that there was a steady push to improve relations with the Soviet Union. Before long a succession of cultural, scientific and other kinds of delegations visited each country. Trade began to pick up. The Soviet Union had responded in kind in 1981 and in March 1982 Brezhnev delivered a speech in Tashkent aimed primarily at a Chinese audience, in which he stated for the first time in nearly twenty years that in the view of the Kremlin China was a socialist country.
From the perspective of China’s leaders, and Deng Xiaoping in particular, the new opening to the Soviet Union was important as it reduced tension and perhaps added some leverage to China’s dealings with the United States. But it was the relationship with America that was vital. America was the key to the opening of China to the international economy; it was still the centre and powerhouse of high technology in the world; and its forces provided the kind of strategic stability in the Asia-Pacific that had proved beneficial to China. The declaration of an ‘independent foreign policy’ at the CCP Congress in September 1982 should not be taken at face value. It did not mean that China had placed itself in the middle ground between the two superpowers. China still tilted strongly towards the United States on the important strategic questions. Thus, throughout the 1980s the American intelligence monitoring facility for observing Soviet missile tests in Central Asia remained in place in Xinjiang. The PRC and the US continued to pursue parallel policies in Cambodia and Afghanistan where they each supported the resistance forces and kept up the pressure on Vietnam and the Soviet Union respectively. Certainly irritations grew in Sino-American relations. The Taiwan issue was a problem in the first two years of the Reagan administration and the Americans were displeased by Chinese criticisms of American behaviour in the Middle East and Central America, but the Chinese were more circumspect closer to home. 

In fact, by the end of 1982 the pattern of triangular relations had begun to change because of changes in the underlying distribution of power between the protagonists, rather than because of any mechanistic properties of the triangle itself. The huge American military build-up coupled with the adverse Soviet strategic position was the key. As noted earlier, George Shultz, who replaced Alexander Haig as the American secretary of state in August 1982, reflected some of the implications of this by according Japan a higher priority in US policies in Asia. Essentially, the US no longer needed China in order to deal with the Soviet strategic challenge. Interestingly, Deng Xiaoping was careful to insist that there could be no consummation of Sino-Soviet relations before the Soviet Union had made the concessions of removing the three famous ‘obstacles’ – ending Soviet support for Vietnam in Cambodia, withdrawing the Soviet occupation forces from Afghanistan, and reducing the Soviet military threat on the Chinese border. These obstacles did not prevent distinct improvements in Sino-Soviet relations over the course of the decade, but they did signify to the Americans that the Chinese were not in danger of re-aligning with the Soviet Union. Meanwhile the Reagan administration had retreated from Reagan’s declared intention, during the election campaign, of restoring state relations with Taiwan. But it withstood Chinese threats to
downgrade relations over the question of advanced arms sales to Taiwan. Nevertheless a new *modus vivendi* was reached between Washington and Beijing after the Americans agreed to increase high-tech transfers to China. In practice, however, the Americans had begun to downgrade China’s significance in the management of strategic relations with the Soviet Union.\(^{29}\)

**The unravelling of the Cold War and the end of the ‘triangle’**

The economic stagnation of the Soviet Union had become evident even before Brezhnev’s death. But the full scale of the problem did not become clear until the accession of Gorbachev in 1985. The Soviet economy was declining and general living conditions were deteriorating, more closely resembling those of a third world rather than an advanced industrial country. The economy had been badly skewed in favour of the military. Gorbachev and his team of reformers recognized that there was a foreign policy dimension to this sorry state of affairs and initiated a new policy, under the guise of ‘New Thinking’, that sought to reverse the excessive reliance that had been put upon military force.\(^{30}\)

It soon became evident that Gorbachev’s first foreign policy priority was to manage relations with the West. In fact the new Soviet approach seemed to be to disentangle itself from costly regional conflicts in the third world so as to focus more clearly on bilateral security issues with the United States. In the process, China was becoming marginalized in the management of security relations between the two superpowers. Thus China played little or no part in the negotiations that led to Soviet consent in the Intermediate Nuclear Force (INF) agreement of December 1987 to eliminate all of its SS-20 missiles, including those in Asia. Similarly, China was not a party to the international agreement of 1988 by which the Soviet Union pledged to withdraw all its armed forces from Afghanistan. Yet China was a major beneficiary of both.\(^{31}\)

In two major speeches in Vladivostok in 1986 and Krasnoyarsk in 1988, Gorbachev addressed a number of Chinese concerns. He accepted in principle the Chinese claim that their riverine borders in Northeast Asia followed the middle of the main channel (the Thalweg Principle) rather than the Chinese bank, as had previously been asserted since Tsarist times. He also promised unilaterally to withdraw some Soviet forces from Mongolia and Afghanistan and to negotiate a reduction of forces along the Sino-Soviet border. Additionally, he pledged to withdraw from Cam Ranh Bay, but he argued that that should be tied to an American withdrawal from Subic Bay in the Philippines. More to the point, from a Chinese point
of view, Gorbachev began to cut Soviet assistance to Vietnam, after having indicated that he would not allow Soviet obligations to that country to stand in the way of his larger objective of improving relations with China. By late 1988 he had agreed to press Vietnam to withdraw unconditionally from Cambodia and announced the unilateral reduction of more than a quarter of a million Soviet troops from Asia. The Vietnamese then declared that all their forces would be withdrawn from Cambodia by September 1989, irrespective of a Cambodian settlement. This paved the way for what was termed the ‘normalization’ of Sino-Soviet relations through a visit to Beijing by Gorbachev himself in May 1989. As an indication of how great the change in strategic relations had become, the American side positively welcomed the event, as symbolized by a visit to Beijing by President Bush himself three months earlier. The Sino-Soviet summit, which was overshadowed by the Tiananmen demonstrations, did nothing to harm Sino-American relations. It took place at a time of improved Soviet–American relations, and neither the Chinese nor the Soviet leaders wanted to put at risk their respective relations with the United States. 32

At that point the impact of huge domestic upheavals took over. The unprecedented demonstrations in Tiananmen Square that culminated in the massacre of civilians by the Chinese People’s Liberation Army on 4 June not only threw Sino-American relations into crisis, but they also appalled Gorbachev and prevented any further substantive developments in Sino-Soviet relations. These events were followed in the autumn by the sudden collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe, starting with East Germany and the breach of the Berlin Wall, which has been taken as the symbolic event that marked the end of the Cold War. Collectively, these events also signified the final end of the strategic triangle. The apparent collapse of Sino-American relations was not accompanied by an improvement in Sino-Soviet relations and, in any case, the United States and the Soviet Union had embarked on a closer relationship based on entirely new terms, by which the Americans lent their support to Gorbachev and his reform programme while he in turn ceased to oppose American foreign policy initiatives. In short, the Cold War between the two superpowers was over.

**The regional impact**

The Korean peninsula at first experienced a heightening of tension in the early 1980s, before the accession of Gorbachev changed the course of Soviet policy. From 1985 onwards the impact of the Soviet ‘New Thinking’ coupled with the priority the Chinese gave to economics paved the way for
the transformation of the foreign relations of the two Koreas. By the time of the end of the Cold War, South Korea had successfully developed its ‘northern policy’ of cultivating relations with China and the Soviet Union, and it was clearly only a matter of time before full recognition and diplomatic relations would be established. Although that in itself would not necessarily bring about a settlement of the Korean question, it would disengage it from the conflict of the superpowers.

Such an outcome was far from obvious in the early 1980s. The continued build-up of Soviet naval power in the Pacific had accentuated the importance of its nuclear strategic forces in the Sea of Okhotsk that were targeted on the United States and the means to defend them with advanced weaponry. This in turn raised concern in the American forces in the Far East and in South Korea. That was the context in which the South acquired advanced military aircraft from the US. The North, possessing only the relatively obsolescent Chinese aircraft and troubled by China’s relations with the United States, turned to the Soviet Union. At that point the more conservative Chernenko had succeeded Andropov as the Soviet leader. During his brief rule he presided over a cooling of relations with China that was marked inter alia by gaining access to North Korean ports for the Soviet Pacific Fleet and by establishing rights to overfly Korean territory, thus gaining better intelligence about Manchuria. The Soviet Union also supplied North Korea with more advanced aircraft and related weapons systems. The breakthrough in their relations was symbolized by Kim Il-Sung’s first official visit to Moscow for more than twenty years in May 1984.33

With the accession of Gorbachev in March 1985 the pattern began to change. The commitment to reform at home and the development of a foreign policy based on ‘New Thinking’ inclined the Soviet Union to find ways of disengaging from regional conflicts, to reach arms control agreements with the United States and to improve relations with China. This immediately reduced the scope for North Korea to play off its two giant allies against each other. The Chinese meanwhile had begun to develop economic relations with the South by using the route through Hong Kong. By 1987 their indirect trade was valued at three times that of China’s trade with the North. The Soviet Union had also indicated an interest in cultivating ties with the South. To the dismay of the North, both attended the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul.

Unlike the situation at the end of the 1960s, the South Korean economy now far outshone that of the North. In 1984 the GDP of the South stood at US$83.2 billion, more than double the North’s US$39.9 billion.34 Constrained by the reduction of support from its two giant neighbours and confronted by a South whose economy was technologically
more advanced and whose rate of growth continued to outstrip its own, the North attempted in a small way to open its own economy to the capitalist world along lines pioneered by the Chinese. But it found its options severely circumscribed as it was both unwilling to reform its domestic economy and unable to pay outstanding debts to Western countries remaining from its last attempt to acquire Western technology, more than a decade earlier in 1973–1974. Thus the impact of the changed relations between the superpowers and of China’s economic based foreign policy was to reduce the significance of the Korean peninsula in the management of global strategic relations. This in turn left the North as an isolated Stalinist state at a disadvantage with the South, which by this stage had become one of East Asia’s ‘little tigers’ – a ‘newly industrializing country’ (NIC). These conditions paved the way for the beginning of a dialogue between the two Koreas. But the basis of the divide between the two as sole claimants for legitimacy for Korea as a whole remained.

Japan was little affected, either by the decline or by the re-emergence of détente. Unlike the West Europeans, the Japanese neither attempted to pursue a separate path of improved relations with the Soviet Union, nor entertained the same kind of concerns about the reliability of the American security guarantee. The Japanese public opposition in 1982 to the Soviet deployment of SS-20s in the Far East had less to do with any fears about the possible ‘de-coupling’ of the United States from Japan and ‘had more to do with hurt national pride at having been left out of East–West arms deliberations’.

This was illustrative of those countries that were separately allied to the United States, primary among whom was Japan, who having consolidated its new statehood and attained considerable economic success, went on to develop a sense of patriotic pride and a national assertiveness that found expression in a degree of resentment against what were regarded as the overbearing demands of the United States. From the American point of view, it was considered only proper that these countries should shoulder more of the defence burden under these more propitious circumstances. Hence Japan came under increasing pressure from the United States. Japan did indeed become more active in using economic and diplomatic instruments that in many ways paralleled American strategic policies, and by the end of the 1980s Japan had agreed to undertake responsibility for protecting the seas within a thousand mile radius of Tokyo. But part of the problem was that, unlike in the case of NATO, there was no regional security arrangement that bound the various allies with the United States in a common approach to the region. Consequently, anything that went beyond Japan’s immediate security concerns as understood in Tokyo was in fact resisted.
Perhaps more than the United States, Japan had a special interest in promoting trade and economic development in East Asia as a way of encouraging political stability. For reasons of geography the region was more important to Japanese security than it was to that of the United States. As the constraints of bipolarity diminished, it was to be expected that the differences in emphasis between the United States and Japan should become more evident. As we shall see, Japan was the most reluctant of the G-7 countries to apply sanctions against China after the Tiananmen killings, and it was the first to rescind them.

As the significance of bipolarity declined, long standing trading problems between Japan and the United States acquired more salience. The yawning trade gap in Japan's favour, which continued to grow despite the oil shocks of the 1970s, became a source of deepening recriminations between the two sides. Having encouraged the development of the Japanese economy during the Cold War period, in part by allowing exceptionally favourable terms of trade that did not involve reciprocity, the United States throughout the 1980s was continually engaged in a vain struggle against some of its consequences. It was one thing for an American president to play down the issue during the period of high confrontation with the Soviet Union, but it was quite another when that confrontation began to abate in the second half of the 1980s. However, the full significance of the reduced tolerance of the United States was not to become clear until the Cold War was well and truly over.

The weakening of the significance of bipolarity set the context for a remarkable transformation of Taiwan. In the late 1980s it embarked upon the road of democratization at home and developing economic relations with mainland China across the Straits (primarily through Hong Kong). This was the product of a particular combination of international, regional and domestic factors that in their own way illustrate the dynamic qualities of the interactions of international politics in the region. As we have seen, China's leaders had already perceived by the mid-1980s that the threat from the Soviet Union had abated, and they had accordingly placed an even higher priority on economics in their foreign relations. This led to a remarkable growth in China's economic relations with South Korea – which, of course, had its own reasons for improving relations with the giant ally of North Korea. At the same time Hong Kong was developing ever closer economic ties with neighbouring Guangdong Province – a trend that was intensified by the Sino-British agreement in 1984 to revert sovereignty of the colony to China in 1997. Sino-American ties had settled considerably after the irritations of the early 1980s, so that the Taiwan issue was no longer prominent on their agenda.
Taiwan had already reacted to some of these changes by agreeing to participate in several international institutions alongside the representatives of the PRC even though this required dropping the official name of the Republic of China. For example, its athletes participated in the 1984 Olympic Games under the rubric of ‘Chinese Taipei’. That neatly bypassed the question as to whether it was a rival claimant to the legitimacy of the Chinese state or merely a Chinese province. These changes to the external environment of Taiwan coincided with domestic developments that made continuation of the status quo increasingly untenable. Kuomintang authoritarian rule was subject to increasing challenges from a growing middle class that was the product of the successful economic development of the island. There was a need for a generational change in many of the political institutions, notably the legislature, as many of the original mainlanders who came with Chiang Kai-shek in the late 1940s were incapacitated by advanced age. There was a perceived need to broaden the social bases of the ruling institutions by incorporating more of the local Taiwanese. The proclaimed positions that sustained Kuomintang rule were losing legitimacy, and the absolutely negative response to the appeals from the mainland for greater contact across the Straits carried less support. Moreover, there was a fear that Taiwan would lose its competitive economic position in the rapidly changing Asia-Pacific economy and miss out on the opportunities presented by the opening up of the Chinese economy. Fortunately for Taiwan, the respected Chiang Ching-kuo (Chiang Kai-shek’s son and heir) was still at the helm to initiate the beginnings of the transition to democracy and the opening to China. 36

International concerns in Southeast Asia centred primarily on the Cambodian question. Here too the developments that were later to make a settlement possible should be understood as flowing from the interactions of international, regional and local political developments. The new détente between the Soviet Union and the United States that was manifested by the arms control agreement of 1987 and the agreement by the Soviet Union in 1988 to withdraw from Afghanistan, the priority that Gorbachev attached to improving relations with China, and the constraints that were imposed by his domestic reform agenda and the foreign policy based on ‘New Thinking’, were incompatible with continuing to extend to Vietnam the economic and military assistance that alone made it possible for Vietnam to maintain forces of occupation in Cambodia. Meanwhile at its Sixth Party Congress in December 1986, Vietnam’s leaders committed themselves to replace the conventional socialist economic model with a programme of renovation (Doi Moi), as economic failure was damaging the legitimacy of the regime, but they still upheld their ‘special’ relations with Laos and Cambodia. 37 After the limits to Soviet aid were made clear
in 1988, Vietnam announced in April 1989 that it would withdraw its forces from Cambodia in September. This effectively removed Cambodia from being a critical issue in either Soviet–American or Sino-Soviet relations. That, however, still left unresolved the competition between Vietnam and China for a balance of power in Indo-China favourable to their respective interests. That had found expression in their support for opposing sides in the Cambodian civil war. In 1987 and 1988 the Vietnamese attempted in vain to reach a negotiated settlement that would have excluded the Chinese and ostracized the Khmer Rouge (the faction that had enjoyed Chinese support as the most effective and most determined opponent of Vietnam). But it was not until the Vietnamese sought to make their peace with the Chinese in 1989 and 1990 and deferred to China’s right to broker a deal among the indigenous Cambodian factions that the way was opened for reaching a settlement. Vietnam had found that it ‘could no longer reconcile imperative economic reforms with the preservation of its hegemony over Cambodia.’ This reduced the significance of Cambodia as a critical issue in regional affairs.

Although ASEAN was active as a diplomatic community in isolating Vietnam and in maintaining international support for the Cambodian resistance, it was not critical to determining the outcome of the conflict. Indonesia did join with France as co-chairman of an international conference on Cambodia, which met first in July 1989 in Paris with the other ASEAN countries participating. But the arrangements for power sharing within Cambodia proved elusive at that stage. That problem could only be addressed after the contest between China and Vietnam had been settled in favour of the former. A final agreement on power sharing arrangements was not reached before the end of the Cold War.

Notes

1 Considerable differences exist in the scholarly literature about the character and significance of the strategic triangle. Compare, for example, Steven I. Levine, ‘China’s Foreign Policy in the Strategic Triangle’ in June Dryer (ed.), *Chinese Defense and Foreign Policy* (New York: Paragon House, 1988), which tends to discount China’s significance, with Thomas W. Robinson, ‘On the Further Evolution of the Strategic Triangle’, and Lowell Dittmer, ‘The Strategic Triangle: A Critical Review’, both in Ilpyong Kim (ed.), *The Strategic Triangle: China, the United States and the Soviet Union* (New York: Paragon House, 1987). There have also been attempts to apply game theory or mechanistic principle to explain the operational dynamics of the triangle. See for example, Gerald Segal, *The Great Power Triangle* (London: Macmillan, 1982); Lowell Dittmer, ‘The Strategic Triangle’ (op. cit.) and his earlier ‘The Strategic Triangle: An Elementary Game Theoretical Analysis’, *World Politics* (July 1981), pp.485–515. For a retrospective account of the complexities of the relationships, see Robert
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4 Ibid., p.764


7 See Kissinger’s account of the Indo-Pakistan crisis in his The White House Years (op. cit.), pp.843–918 (especially pp.913–918).


11 Kissinger, The White House Years (op. cit.), p.1086.

12 Ibid., p.1089.

13 Ibid., p.1090.


16 Legvold, ‘Sino-Soviet Relations’ (op. cit.), pp.69–70.

17 For the best account of these, see Allen S. Whiting, China Eyes Japan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). See also Laura Newby, Sino-Japanese Relations: China’s Perspective (London: Routledge, for the Royal Institute of International affairs, 1988).


19 Nam Joo Hong, America’s Commitment to the Security of South Korea: The First Decade of the Nixon Doctrine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).


22 Ibid., pp.147–150.

Legvold, ‘Sino-Soviet Relations’ (*op. cit.*), pp.69–70.

Ibid., pp.76–80.

Kissinger described them as ‘the most unsentimental practitioners of balance-of-power politics I have encountered’ (*The White House Years* (*op. cit.*), pp.1087–1088).


For the best and most detailed account of Sino-American relations in this period that nevertheless tends to exaggerate the depths of the troughs, see Harry Harding, *A Fragile Relationship* (*op. cit.*), chs 3–6.


Reinhard Drifte, ‘Japan’s Relations with the East Asia-Pacific Region’ in Stuart (ed.), *Security Within the Asia Pacific Rim* (*op. cit.*), p.26.


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