

***Conflict Management and Dispute Settlement in East Asia.* Edited by Ramses Amer and Keyuan Zou. Ashgate: Farnham, Surrey, 2011. Hardcover: 228pp.**

This volume is largely based on a conference entitled “Dispute Settlement and Conflict Management in Pacific Asia” organized by Stockholm University in 2009. Some of the substantive chapters are worth highlighting to get a sense of the book itself. Hari Singh’s “Conflict Management in East Asia” is a comprehensive and thoughtful overview of Cold War and post-Cold War security issues, with the post-Cold War period being marked by the decline of ideological drivers and the challenge to Realist conceptions of state-based threats (although all of these non-state threats, terrorism, refugees, piracy, natural disasters and environmental problems occurred to a degree during the Cold War too). Singh begins with the proposition that conflict, broadly defined, is inherent in international relationships, but that it can be moderated in a variety of ways.

Ramses Amer offers a good overview of recent and anticipated developments in ASEAN, including the ASEAN Concord II, the ASEAN Charter and the ASEAN Political Security Community (by 2015). Amer judges ASEAN’s record to be “impressive”, with no interstate armed conflict between the “original” member states (an important qualifier given the occasional shooting matches between Thailand and its neighbours Myanmar and Cambodia) (p. 52). Other chapters include: Johan Saravanamuttu on the Southern Philippines conflict; Malin Akebo on Aceh, Sri Lanka and (also) the Southern Philippines; Gabriel Jonsson on the 1968 Pubelo Incident; Jenny Clegg on Korean “Denuclearization”; and three chapters on the South China Sea by Keyuan Zou, Nguyen Hong Thao, and Kang Baijing and Li Jianwei.

Singh raises the idea that totalitarian regimes are more prone to conflict than democratic governments, declaring that this does not hold water in Asia (p. 25). What about the various shades of authoritarian regimes? It is clear that Singh is treating “totalitarian” as a synonym for communist regime and therefore “democratic” for non-communist. In noting Indonesian President Sukarno’s “confrontation” with Malaysia, it has to be acknowledged that Sukarno could not be considered a democratic leader at that time. Modern democratic Indonesia on the other hand has managed to resolve situations in East Timor and Aceh, and is more generally not the threat to its neighbours that Sukarno represented.

Bearing in mind Singh's starting point that conflict is inherent, Amer's chapter on ASEAN notes the tension between Malaysia and Singapore after the 1997–98 Asian Financial Crisis as well as Thai-Cambodia border clashes. This may draw together different senses of conflict; the armed clashes between Thailand and Cambodia are an order of magnitude greater than ordinary bilateral spats. Bilateral issues between Malaysia and Singapore — Amer notes water, retirement money transfers, and railway land (although the list is in fact far longer) — have been long standing, have never involved actual armed conflict, and are characteristic of what occurs between any two neighbours. Furthermore, these issues can cause casual observers to overlook the strong interdependencies that exist between the two countries. One could just as easily highlight significant bilateral problems between any two Southeast Asian neighbours. The question revolves more around how these differences are handled and ultimately settled or resolved, not necessarily that they have occurred throughout the duration of ASEAN's existence.

In a phenomenon not unknown in Asia-Pacific discourse, a few chapters here resemble country positions. University of Central Lancashire's Jenny Clegg notes (quoting Peter Van Ness) "US aggressive militarist hegemonism" (p. 128), and claims that the United States has used and exacerbated the North Korean situation to justify its military presence. In a general critique of America's supposed heavy handling of the North Korean problem, Clegg notes that it was only after US normalization of relations with China and Vietnam that either country took the economic reform path — by implication North Korea might too. That remains an open question in North Korea's case (are China and Vietnam even useful comparisons?), but Clegg's view about China and Vietnam requires further examination. Rapprochement between the United States and China could be dated to 1972, with actual diplomatic normalization in 1979, but Chinese economic reforms are generally dated to 1978 — the consolidation of Deng Xiaoping in place of the then deceased Mao might have been the actual trigger. One might even be tempted to conclude that China's economic reform track had little to do with US-China relations during that time period. In Vietnam's case, reforms (*Doi Moi*) date to 1986, whereas the United States restored its diplomatic relationship nearly a decade later in 1995. Clegg sees US foreign policy in contrast to "China's cooperative security approach": "one which aims to uphold equal treatment and sovereign rights, ensuring that the security concerns of all parties in a conflict be mutually respected" (p. 128). Clegg

summarizes China's approach as the seeking of "win-win" solutions. If one is wondering if the rest of Asia shares in Clegg's assessment, the following two chapters throw up some diametrically opposed views. Zou quotes the concerns that many ASEAN countries have about China's extensive "U-shaped" South China Sea claims — one Malaysian official is cited as calling this "frivolous, unreasonable and illogical" (p. 161). Nguyen, a Vietnamese foreign affairs official and professor of international law at the University of Hanoi, argues that: "China has made clear its determination to secure maritime interests in the South China Sea without any concession" (p. 186). Nguyen also claims, based on the Vietnamese experience one assumes, that China gives preference to bilateral discussions over multilateral forums (p. 187). This is all the complete opposite of Clegg's "win-win" view of Beijing's approach — but a useful and salient debate nonetheless.

In essence this volume is strong on a discussion of relevant security dynamics during and after the Cold War (with the Korean situation remaining a constant throughout), gives a good sense of ASEAN as a diplomatic community, and also highlights the role of third parties (and particularly third party NGOs) in helping facilitate discussion in instances of sub-state violence. What is missing is a full discussion on the wider forums of the Asia Pacific, such as the East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus, the Shangri-La Dialogue, and Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific, while the discussion on the Six Party Talks is confined to Clegg's defence of the Chinese and North Korean positions. What all those institutions represent for the Asia Pacific is a concerted attempt to manage relations and security challenges, in a region characterized by political diversity, but where the actors see the benefits of close cooperation.

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