THE COBRA AND THE MONGOOSE:
CHINA AND JAPAN IN CONFLICT

Course Description and Weekly Topics

Over the last 2000 years, China and Japan have been the dominant civilizations in the Far East. Their influences over their neighbors and with each other have been profound, leading to major political, cultural, and religious advances that still exist today. However, both of these ancient civilizations have also resorted to war as a means to promote their interests and ambitions. Open conflicts between them have been particularly frequent during the last 150 years, with Japan winning most of those military confrontations. Today, however, China has resumed its power ascendancy over Japan by provoking military confrontations with pacifist Tokyo over expanded ocean borders, island-atolls, and even airspace in the western Pacific—all of which have historically been considered Japanese territory. Furthermore, China has extended its territorial ambitions across most of the South China Sea, confronting its smaller neighbors with military power and economic dominance to achieve its ambitions.

Where does the United States stand in the face of these escalating confrontations between our treaty ally, Japan, and our global economic partner, China? American strategic interests in maintaining a peaceful status quo in the Asia-Pacific region since 1975 are supported by the presence of significant American military and naval forces throughout the region. Will the “rise of China” be seen through the lens of China’s recent territorial aggression against Japan and its southern neighbors, and therefore require a new American “containment policy” against China? Is another Asian war the inevitable conclusion to this dangerous and unstable confrontation between Asia’s twin giants and the United States?

Week One: Overview of the Asia-Pacific: Multiple Conflict Zones
Week Two: Origins of Current Conflicts between China and Japan
Week Three: Focus on Primary Conflict Zones in East and South China Seas
Week Four: America’s “Pivot” toward Asia: What does it really mean?
Week Five: China’s and Japan’s strategic objectives in Asia
Week Six: Intangibles and imagery leading to war between China and Japan