As global economic and strategic weight shifts to Asia, countries in the region are considering how to protect themselves better in the uncertain strategic landscape of the twenty-first century. Alliances with the United States remain pivotal, but China is an even more dominant presence. Faced with this, and with growing transnational threats such as terrorism, energy insecurity and infectious diseases, Asian governments are increasingly interested in multilateral security cooperation.

New multilateral bodies focused solely on security have been formed, dialogue forums bring together the regional defence community, and even economics-focused organisations are now addressing the issue. There is no Asian equivalent to NATO, but both the Australian and Japanese prime ministers have called for a formal Community that could include security agreements.

Yet Asia today is far from possessing a well-planned security ‘architecture’. This presentation will aim to provide an analysis of the region’s unique security arrangements, and will look at how national rivalries, mutual mistrust and institutional failings frustrate the widespread desire for closer ties. It will analyse the complex array of often overlapping security mechanisms and identifies their most successful features. While concluding that a monolithic Asian security structure is unlikely to emerge in the near future, it will offer suggestions for developing a more effective system.

Nick Bisley is Associate Professor in International Relations and Convenor of the Politics and International Relations Program. His research and teaching expertise is in the international relations of the Asia-Pacific, globalization and the diplomacy of great powers. He is a Senior Research Associate of the International Institute of Strategic Studies and a member of the Council for Security and Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific. Nick is the author of many works on international relations, including Building Asia’s Security: Toward a 21st Century Regional Security Architecture (IISS/Routledge, 2009), Rethinking Globalization (Palgrave, 2007) and The End of the Cold War and the Causes of Soviet Collapse (Palgrave, 2004). He regularly contributes to national and international media including The Australian Financial Review, the ABC, and Al-Jazeera.