

Section I

Antinomies of Peace, Democracy and Diplomacy

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The opening section of the inaugural edition of JJIA comprises a series of articles which raise broader questions about the links, and in some cases the lack thereof, between great power diplomacy and the desire of people in different regions of the world to live a life of dignity based on peace and democracy. Promotion of ideals cherished universally by human societies has always been a favourite talking point for foreign ministries of great powers, especially liberal ones like the United States. Yet, the empirical record of powerful states in advancing peace and democracy has been patchy and mostly dissatisfactory. The contradiction between avowed moral pursuits and actual diplomatic practices based on *realpolitik* is an age-old one that gave rise to the very foundations of International Relations theory in the early decades of the 20th century.

The articles in this section traverse this classic dichotomy between ‘Truth’ and ‘Power’ by juxtaposing people’s movements and aspirations with the geopolitical games that major regional and global state actors are pursuing. Ishak Mastura analyses the intensifying competition between China and the US in the Philippines and broaches the kingmaker’s role that could be played by Malaysia in this process. It places the endless wars in the Mindanao region of southern Philippines in the larger context of a Southeast Asian chessboard pitting the world’s two greatest powers against each other.

Subodh Atal’s article on the prospects of democracy in authoritarian Central Asia is a comparative work of great merit that again draws on the dubious acts being played by the US, Russia and China in a mineral rich region with suppressed civil liberties. It contrasts Central Asia with the Middle East and offers a fascinating account of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the five ‘stans’ to move towards democracy.

Mohammad Sajjadur Rahman and Saimum Parvez study American public diplomacy with regard to democracy in Iran and show how there is a thin line between propaganda and information in this major tussle for control over the Middle East. They conclude that technological tools widely available to young Iranians are ironically empowering them to reject the Cold War-style public diplomacy which Washington has deployed against Tehran.

Michael Davis' piece on the political economy of human rights in East Asia resoundingly rejects the 'Asian Values' thesis and argues that there are enough democratic indigenous traditions in the Great China region and beyond, ways of thinking and organising society and polity which have been suppressed by political elites. This article places faith in constitutionalism based on democratic values and concludes that the East Asian experience may actually have lessons for the wider developing world.