

NON-TRADITIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGES IN ASIA:

WHAT ROLE FOR MULTILATERALISM?

Jointly Organized by the Consortium of Non-Traditional Security Studies in Asia (NTS-Asia) and the International Peace Academy (IPA),
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INTRODUCTION

The Consortium of Non-Traditional Security Studies in Asia (NTS-Asia) presented its ongoing research at a meeting in New York on 5 March 2007. NTS-Asia marks the third phase of the Ford-IDSS Project on Non-Traditional Security Issues. The project is funded by the Ford Foundation, and is led by the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. As a network of research institutes in Asia, NTS-Asia aims to advance networking among scholars and analysts working on non-traditional security (NTS) issues in the region; to build long-term and sustainable regional capacity for research on NTS issues; and to promote and mainstream the field of non-traditional security studies in Asia. The meeting was held in cooperation with the International Peace Academy (IPA), a leading policy and research institution specializing in multilateral approaches to peace and security with a particular focus on the United Nations (UN). Throughout its more-than-35-year history, IPA and its diverse staff have promoted effective international responses to armed conflict and



crises through research and policy development.

The meeting was held at the Permanent Mission of Malaysia and opened by Ambassador John Hirsch on behalf of IPA, and Ambassador Barry Desker, Dean of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies. The first session on “Threats to Human Security” was chaired by H.E. Mr. Hamidon Ali, Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations; the second session on “Trans-national Armed Groups” was chaired by H.E. Mr. Vanu Gopala Menon, Permanent Representative of Singapore to the United Nations; and the third

session on “The UN and Regional Organizations in Asia” was chaired by Dr. Bruce Jones, Co-Director and Senior Fellow, Center on International Cooperation, New York. Speakers included members of the Consortium.

This meeting was held under the Chatham House Rules¹ and the report below reflects the substance of the discussion which took place. The content represents the views of presenters and participants, and not necessarily those of NTS-Asia or IPA.

¹ “When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rules, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.”

OVERVIEW OF NON-TRADITIONAL SECURITY STUDIES

What began as a narrow research programme on “non-traditional” security threats has now become a collaborative Asia-wide effort to broaden the concept of security in the post-Cold War era and evolved into the present-day Consortium. Contemporary challenges like environmental degradation, poverty and extremism may differ from traditional military ones, though they nonetheless may also pose threats to national security and regional stability. Furthermore, such challenges require widespread and collaborative trans-national responses, highlighting the need for cooperation among states in order to find effective coping mechanisms through alternative non-political agencies, such as those focused on health, police, labour migration and the environment.

The Stern Report² revealed that approximately five per cent of global economic output could be lost every year if climate change is not addressed; if the wider range of impacts and costs is taken into account, this cost could rise to 20 per cent of global GDP annually.³ Asia, with its vast agrarian population, can ill afford such losses and this link between the consequences of environmental degradation and economic loss highlights the complex nature of the challenges faced by the region today. Further examples of non-military security challenges to Asia include the spread of infectious diseases like H5N1 (bird flu) or Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), managing the aftermath of natural disasters like the 2004 tsunami, and pollution, which has caused the haze over Southeast Asia. Each of these poses dangers to the region, irrespective of national boundaries. As such, they demand trans-national solutions.

In seeking responses to these evolving challenges, scholars have gone beyond the traditional understanding of security threats to look beyond the nation state, which alone cannot address many of these issues that are not limited in influence to areas within political borders. Analysts who focus on “human



Amb. Barry Desker having a word with a participant during coffee break.

security” have instead called for the replacement of state-centrism with a framework that encompasses the security of individuals, societies and groups, many of whom in Asia face threats that are not military in nature.⁴ Consequently, greater efforts are necessary to guide policy regarding complex challenges towards increased regional cooperation.

On a more cautionary note, there is also some concern about “securitizing” issues such as health, migration or the environment, and inadvertently legitimizing the reflexive resort to military responses. To blanket a range of issues solely as “security concerns” brings with it the risk of expanding military influence at the expense of civilian control and capacity. As a counter-measure to this scenario, it is important that responses to these challenges expand the scope for engagement among a variety of actors—local, national, regional, multilateral and international—to offer alternatives to military measures. Furthermore, the definition of a “security threat” requires careful consideration so that responses may be accurately calibrated to the nature of the threat without an automatic assumption of the security dimension.

² “The Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change”, a paper commissioned by HM Treasury, UK, January 2007, available at www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews/stern_review_economics_climate_change/stern_review_report.cfm.

³ Stern Report Summary, p. 1, available at www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/8A8/C1/Summary_of_Conclusions.pdf.

⁴ Mely Caballero-Anthony, “Non-Traditional Security and Infectious Diseases in Asia: The Need for a Global Approach to Health and Human Security”, a paper prepared for IPA-NTS Asia meeting on “Non-Traditional Security Challenges in Asia: What Role for Multilateralism?”, New York, 5 March 2007, p. 1.



WHAT ARE NON-TRADITIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGES?

Non-traditional security challenges have taken as their reference point the concept of human security in order to promote a focus on the security of individuals, societies and groups, and to encompass the chronic and complex insecurities confronting Asia. There has been a growing trend in the region to class all non-military threats as “non-traditional security threats”, and to encompass a wide range of potential crises, including environmental degradation, infectious disease and illegal migration. While these challenges are not within the purview of more traditional military concerns, they may nonetheless pose a challenge to national security and regional stability.

Many of these challenges have been exacerbated by the increased opportunities for rapid travel,

communication and the movement of labour facilitated by globalization. However, notwithstanding the opportunities it has made possible, globalization has also been blamed for increased tension among host societies and migrants, alienation among newly urbanized populations, economic and social inequality and facilitating the rapid movement of infectious disease.⁵ As these challenges have threatened the well-being of individuals and often compromised their physical safety, they have been deemed security threats. This use of “security framing” is significant because it has been deemed that the only way to bring attention to these NTS challenges, to convey their urgency and command governmental resources to address them, has been to “securitize” these concerns.⁶

THREATS TO HUMAN SECURITY

1. INFECTIOUS DISEASE

Warnings about the threat of the next global pandemic, reflected in the World Economic Forum's Global Risks 2006 Report, have increasingly gained traction in policy circles.⁷ Consequently, the lexicon of health security is increasingly visible at the forefront of the global agenda.⁸ Adding to this threat is the re-emergence of new strains of older diseases like TB and cholera that are increasingly resistant to medical treatment. Furthermore, the unprecedented scale of movement of people and goods, along with other “disease multipliers” such as the misuse or over-use of antibiotics, accelerating urbanization in “mega-cities” with poor sanitation and weak healthcare infrastructures, exacerbates the possibility of a global pandemic and threatens to overwhelm the healthcare capacities of many of Asia's states. For example, the World Health Organization estimates a full-fledged bird flu pandemic can result in two million to

eight million deaths, and up to 20–40 million in a worst-case scenario.⁹ Already, Indonesia and Vietnam have the highest number of fatalities from H5N1, totalling 105 deaths and, behind these, hundreds more who suffer economic hardship as a result. The inadequate compensation offered to many poultry farmers, in Java, for example, hampers government efforts to enforce measures aimed at containing the virus. On a regional scale, H5N1 is already responsible for \$10 billion of direct economic costs to Asia¹⁰. Forecasts indicate an estimated cost of \$99–\$283 billion for a bird-flu pandemic in East Asia alone, highlighting the impact of such a challenge on the healthcare and economic sectors in Asia.¹¹

Responding to such a challenge has been difficult, given the divergence of interests among the relevant actors. As each state must prioritize the threats it perceives, it is not easy to attain a global



5 For a discussion on how these issues have manifested themselves in Europe, see Shada Islam, “Europe: Crises of Identity” in *Coping with Crisis Working Paper Series*, International Peace Academy, New York, February 2007, available at www.ipacademy.org/asset/file/122/CWC_Working_Paper_EUROPE_SI_3.pdf.

6 Caballero-Anthony, “Infectious Diseases in Asia”, p. 1.

7 “Global Risks 2006”, World Economic Forum, Davos (Switzerland), January 2006, pp. 4, 10–11, available at www.weforum.org/pdf/CSI/Global_Risk_Report.pdf.

8 See Margaret Kruk, “Global Public Health and Biosecurity: Managing Twenty-First-Century Risks” in *Coping with Crisis Working Paper Series*, International Peace Academy, New York, March 2007, available at www.ipacademy.org/our-work/coping-with-crisis/working-papers.

9 *ibid.*

10 Global Public Health, p. 10.

11 Caballero-Anthony, “Infectious Diseases in Asia”, pp. 3–7.

consensus, or necessary action, on the threat. The current “Global War on Terror” has influenced many Asian states to prioritize terrorism though it is not perceived to be an immediate threat by most local actors confronting endemic poverty, disease or violence. It is therefore necessary for individual countries and societies to determine their own priorities so that urgent threats may be addressed. However, in order to make informed decisions on internal and external challenges, a greater degree of government transparency is necessary so that the public and relevant experts can more adequately prepare a suitable response. With longer incubation periods (ranging from seven to ten days), diseases like SARS and H5N1 can easily cross national borders via travel and shipping, and it is therefore crucial that governments detecting the virus immediately alert health experts and other governments to minimize the impact.¹²

2. ILLEGAL MIGRATION

Migrants have increasingly become a feature of the global economy as globalization has opened up opportunities for an unprecedented movement of people, ideas and investment. Demographic trends indicate that, by 2008, most people will live in cities and, by 2030, urban areas in developing countries will double. Two to three billion people will be added to the global population by 2050 and a number of strategic relationships will be reversed. India will overtake China as the world’s most populous state and Pakistan’s population will triple that of Russia. To face challenges like climate change, armed violence and mass unemployment, people will continue to seek opportunities abroad. As populations in some developed countries age and decline, international migration will continue to challenge community identities.¹³

However, since September 11, 2001, migration has been increasingly seen by academics and policymakers through a security lens focused on its role in facilitating the movement of militant groups. The use of “speech acts”, the vocabulary used to discuss migration, has highlighted only its negative aspects and painted a picture of the migrant as a threat to the identity of the host state

and attempts to “securitize” the issue of migration.¹⁴ As a result, migrants are often depicted as “cultural others” and this discourse has shaped a conflictual relationship between host societies and migrant communities.

To study the phenomenon of migration in South Asia, the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU), University of Dhaka, undertook a collaborative research project entitled “Population Movement: Non-traditional security in South Asia” involving scholars from five South Asian states, interviewing over 800 migrants collectively. Among the questions it sought to answer were:

- 1 Why is migration being securitized? How has this discourse impacted migrants?
- 2 Who are the securitizing actors and who are the referents?
- 3 Are migrants really a threat to security?
- 4 What is the outcome of the securitization of migration?

The study found that, rather than pose a threat to their host society or tax its often-scarce civic services and facilities, migrants tend to fill niches in the labour market often shunned by local populations. They contribute to the host economy by reducing costs of production as well as becoming a lively entrepreneurial sector. Nonetheless, RMMRU’s study found that all relevant actors—including the government, security and public agencies—believed that migrants posed a threat to national security. As a consequence, there have been attempts to indigenize the labour force, arrest and deport foreign labourers, erect border fences and create bureaucratic processes that have forced even legal migrants to become illegal because of the cumbersome restrictions imposed on migrants.¹⁵

The securitization of migration has led to its confluence with other transnational challenges, such as armed violence and criminal activities. However, there is a danger of emphasizing the links between terrorists and the means some terrorists have used to move between countries, that is, migration. Moreover, the issue of migration has often been used in the service of internal political or ethnic struggles, where it has served as a scapegoat for communal



¹² The incubation period for H5N1 is three to seven days (www.adb.org/BirdFlu/faqs.asp#4). SARS has an incubation period of about 10 days (www.who.int/csr/sarsarchive/2003_05_07a/en/).

¹³ Joseph Chamie, “Population Trends: Humanity in Transition” in *Coping with Crisis Working Paper Series*, International Peace Academy, New York, March 2007, available at www.ipacademy.org/ourwork/coping-with-crisis/working-papers.

¹⁴ Tasneem Siddiqui, “Securitization of Migration: The South Asian Case”, a paper prepared for IPA-NTS Asia meeting on “Non-Traditional Security Challenges in Asia: What Role for Multilateralism?”, New York, 5 March 2007, pp. 2–3.

¹⁵ Siddiqui, “Securitization of Migration”, pp. 4–5.



competition. For example, the rationale for securitizing the issue of immigration in Pakistan suggested that the influx of Burmese and Bengali migrants posed a threat to its identity and internal security by undermining law and order imposed on foreign cultural traditions.¹⁶

The connections were emphasized when law enforcement officials highlighted the ethnic origins of those committing crimes rather than focusing the discourse on the nature of the activity.

The image of the migrant has therefore been confirmed as an “enemy other” and a threat to the host state’s identity, and prompted a need to de-securitize migration and frame it as a human-rights issue. “Human rights” is a preferable framework to that “human security”, which portrays migrants as victims, while the former places emphasis on their rights. Furthermore, migration is increasingly taking place in a “buyer’s market”, where it is demand-driven by countries requiring further labour, which may not have substantive human rights frameworks in place. This presents an opportunity for greater engagement by the United Nations to promote a more favourable environment for migration and protect the rights of migrants.

TRANS-NATIONAL ARMED GROUPS—TERRORISM, PIRACY AND EXTREMISM IS ARMED VIOLENCE A NON-TRADITIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGE?

There are areas of overlap where “soft-security” challenges interact with the more traditional “hard-security” threats like terrorism and armed groups. These have historically been addressed by elements of the security sector, including the military, police and intelligence agencies of the state. However, certain elements favour taking a “non-traditional security” perspective to these issues. First, there is the question of the causes that create a permissive environment for armed violence, including poverty, limited access to education, healthcare, employment and the need to express political grievances. In China, for example, the most significant threat of armed violence comes from separatist movements linked to political grievances fuelled by increasing poverty and ethnic

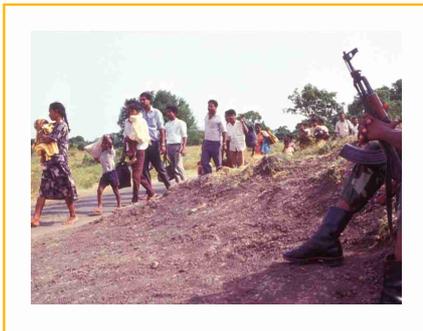
tensions.¹⁷ While poverty cannot be identified as a definitive cause for terrorism, it is a significant element in making populations vulnerable to carefully designed campaigns that promote radical views.

Second, these concerns are closely linked with globalization, organized crime, increased migration and the trans-national movement of capital, ideas and groups. The ease of communications and transportation has simplified the means of conveying ideologies, transferring skills needed by militant groups and for creating communities bound by a common ideology in spite of the geographical distance between their members. Finally, “soft” and “hard” security concerns alike require collaborative regional and multilateral responses, which may prove complementary in their efforts to resolve complex and interconnected challenges. For example, measures addressing illegal migration and corruption in governments also contribute to campaigns against trans-national organized crime, as will joint national initiatives in patrolling, intelligence-sharing and region-wide efforts to develop policing capacities.

3. ARMED GROUPS IN ASIA

Armed groups and political violence have long posed the most direct challenge to the authority of the state and Asia has witnessed multiple insurgencies, violent political movements and assassinations, challenging the legitimacy of central governments. In India alone, there are about 12 armed insurgencies currently in progress and Pakistan is beset by fighting in Baluchistan, the North-West Frontier Province and along its border with Afghanistan.¹⁸ In Southeast Asia, groups have been fighting the authority of governments in Jakarta, Manila and Bangkok, among others, and the Bali bombings of October 2002 highlighted the saliency of jihadist rhetoric in places like Indonesia.

As a consequence of such ongoing violence, a number of states have adopted preventive measures as part of their national security strategies. In some cases, this has also included negotiations, either public or confidential,



¹⁶ Siddiqui, “Securitization of Migration”, p. 3.

¹⁷ Jia Duqiang, “Extremism and its Implications for China”, a paper prepared for IPA-NTS Asia meeting on “Non-Traditional Security Challenges in Asia: What Role for Multilateralism?”, New York, 5 March 2007, pp. 13–15.

¹⁸ *ibid*: also, for a brief overview of armed groups in South Asia, see Ajay Dharshan Behera, *The Politics of Violence and Development in South Asia* (Colombo: Regional Center for Strategic Studies), available at www.rcss.org/policy_studies/ps_6.html and also via NTS-Asia.



with militant groups.¹⁹ According to the “Nelson Mandela test”, engagement with groups sufficiently influential to threaten any possible peace process is an important tool in the arsenal of state responses to violence by non-state actors focused on national self-determination issues.²⁰ An example of such a resolution may be found in the recent inclusion of Maoist groups in the interim Nepalese government, where they assume five out of the 21 ministerial portfolios.²¹ However, in other cases, responses need to be carefully tailored to reflect the variation in the motivations, modalities and practices of violent groups. Recognition of these differences and an understanding of the historical context are key elements in the development of effective and sustainable efforts to counter the threat of terrorism or political violence, in both a national and transnational context.

Given the range of groups and causes, it is important to develop a taxonomy that reflects their differences.²² One possible classification system divides groups according to the scope of their grievances and objectives:

1. Universalist groups like Al-Qaeda, whose objectives reach beyond national borders
2. Groups with local grievances, such as those fighting discrimination or poor living conditions
3. Secessionist or nationalist groups, such as the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) in Northeast India/Bangladesh or the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka
4. Mercenary militias
5. Groups with traditionally anti-state agendas
6. Criminal syndicates tied to the trade in small arms and light weapons, and which maintain links with armed political groups

Alternative taxonomies may focus on the modality of violence, such as suicide bombers, assassins or groups fomenting communal riots. Groups may also be classified according to their inspirational affiliation as “religious”, “political”, “left wing” or “right wing”, as were nineteenth-century anarchists.

In China, for example, the most significant threat of armed violence comes from separatist movements, many of which are fuelled by increasing poverty and ethnic tensions. Consequently, there has been a great deal of attention paid to extremist violence posed by religious and ethnic groups seeking independence or formal separation from the central government. Along with modernity and the frustrations and alienation it generates in populations that are urbanizing, tensions²³ arising from ideological competition often threaten the precarious balance between groups in vast states like China or India. To counter these forces, which threaten regional stability when they take place in frontier areas, it is important to address underlying factors such as poverty, education and political inclusion.

4. TERRORISM AND PIRACY

Closely linked to the problem of armed groups in Asia are the challenges posed by terrorism and piracy, both of which have challenged the monitoring and policing capacities of many Asian states and threatened to expand the military’s influence over governments in a number of cases. These challenges have posed the subsequent problem of balancing civil liberties with security in responding to perceived terrorist threats and external pressures to combat terrorism in the region.

Associated with the threats of terrorism and political violence in Asia is endemic poverty. In spite of decades of positive macroeconomic development, more than 900 million people in the region still live on incomes of under \$1 a day, and that number jumped by 10 million following the Asian financial crisis of 1997–1998.²⁴ While poverty cannot be definitively identified as a “root cause” of terrorism, it leaves populations vulnerable to extremist ideologies that offer them some respite from their plight and access to even rudimentary facilities like education and healthcare — sponsored by numerous religious groups. Though senior cadres of terrorist organizations may not face such



19 See SSRN-NUPI Research on Political Violence, “Briefing on the Study of Durable Political Violence and Policy Recommendations”, a paper prepared by the Social Science Research Council, New York, and the Norwegian Institute of Political Affairs, available at programs.ssrc.org/gsc/publications/SSRC-NUPI.pdf, pp. 19–21.

20 SSRN-NUPI, “Political Violence”, p. 13.

21 news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6515159.stm.

22 Rifaat Husain, “Armed Groups in South Asia”, a paper and presentation prepared for IPA-NTS Asia meeting on “Non-Traditional Security Challenges in Asia: What Role for Multilateralism?”, New York, 5 March 2007, pp. 2–3.

23 Jia Duqiang, “Extremism and its Implications for China”, a paper prepared for IPA-NTS Asia meeting on “Non-Traditional Security Challenges in Asia: What Role for Multilateralism?”, New York, 5 March 2007, pp. 13–15.

24 www.adb.org/Documents/News/2000/nr2000041.asp.



challenges, poverty often affects the “foot soldiers.” It is consequently crucial that development, education and healthcare efforts in the region are aimed at providing a countermeasure to recruitment efforts by armed groups seeking to resolve political grievances related to the issues of poverty, employment and standards of living. The Straits of Malacca, surrounded by the “littoral states” (Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia), ranks second only to the Straits of Hormuz in the transportation of global oil supplies. On average, 200 ships pass through the straits each day, as do approximately 11 million barrels of oil. Given the volume and nature of the products, they have long been vulnerable to acts of piracy. In the first three-quarters of 2005 alone, 205 incidents took place.²⁵ However, in recent years there has been a decline in piracy, especially in Southeast Asia, due to increased cooperation among the littoral states.²⁶ Coordinated patrols carried out jointly by Indonesian and Singaporean agencies, for example, have been able to reduce incidents at sea and states like Singapore have been active in UN fora to engage stakeholders in the region to provide more assistance in combating piracy.²⁷ There are also incidents of “petty theft at sea”, which take place within 12 nautical miles of state territory, thus evading the legal preconditions for the classification of “piracy”. States themselves need to do more to combat these, though increased anti-piracy activities may have a complementary effect in countering such crimes. Incidents of piracy in the South China Sea have also decreased, thanks to increased cooperation between Singapore and India.²⁸

The non-traditional security perspective offers a few insights into this challenge, as it does with that of armed groups described above. First, there is the question of motivation, and the non-traditional security perspective addresses a number of elements that generate a permissive environment for political violence, as noted above. Second, there are only limited options for tackling the challenge of global terrorism as, “guards, gates and guns” have not worked to eliminate the threat. Instead, these challenges suggest a need for collaborative regional response mechanisms. A strategy of the 4 D’s may be adopted. These include measures to:²⁹

- 1 De-legitimize extremist rhetoric and the objectives of armed groups
- 2 De-weaponize cultures in which ownership of weapons adds prestige
- 3 Disarm militants
- 4 Demobilize armed groups and paramilitary forces

Third, the material capability to harm is no longer the exclusive domain of the state, which has lost its monopoly on violence, and this reflects the search for solutions to NTS issues beyond a purely statist discourse. The multiplicity of armed groups and terrorists poses the strategic challenge of dealing with multiple, diffused small groups, which are often able to move between porous national borders and evade state-based law-enforcement agencies.³⁰ Finally, terrorism poses a challenge to democracy in the region, raising the question of how to empower people without disempowering the state, and interacts with the focus of NTS issues on human and group security.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

A number of common threads emerge in the responses necessary to address non-traditional security challenges in Asia.

1. STRENGTHEN NATIONAL CAPACITIES

The importance of building robust national capacities is a recurring theme

in discussing responses to a range of threats, from infectious diseases to terrorism and armed groups. Asia’s experience of the SARS and H5N1 outbreaks demonstrates the importance of developing a healthcare sector able to detect, treat and contain these diseases. With regard to terrorism and armed conflict in particular, the

²⁵ “Global piracy decreasing but hotspots remain deadly”, London, 31 October 2006, available at www.iccccs.org.uk/.

²⁶ Statement made by Ambassador Vanu Gopala Menon, Permanent Representative of Singapore to the United Nations, at the IPA-NTS Asia meeting.

²⁷ These are also outlined in a speech given by Lim Teck Ee, Deputy Director (Policy), Maritime Port Authority, Singapore, 2004, available at www.mima.gov.my/mima/htmls/conferences/som04/papers/lim.pdf.

²⁸ For more on this subject from NTS-Asia, see J. N. Mak, “Piracy in Southeast Asia”, available at www.rsisntsasia.org/transnational_crime.htm#PiracyinSEA.

²⁹ Hussain, “Armed Groups in South Asia”.

³⁰ *ibid.*



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importance of building efficient policing capacities was highlighted. In Indonesia, for example, the police remain the primary vehicle through which to address terrorism and bilateral arrangements, as in Australia, and remain the primary channel for capacity building in this sector.

2. INCREASED ENGAGEMENT BY CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil-society actors play a strong role in supporting democratic efforts to combat security threats. However, they also help shape the discourse on many non-traditional security issues, such as migration, and form a crucial bulwark against violations of human and civil rights. Furthermore, debate among members of civil society is a crucial mechanism with which to counteract religious extremism. It was also noted during the discussion that the input of moderate Muslims would be a crucial factor in attempts to counter Islamist rhetoric and undermine the legitimacy of extremist groups.

3. TAKE A LONG-TERM APPROACH AND RESPOND TO POLITICAL AND SOCIAL GRIEVANCES

In the case of terrorism and extremist violence, for example, it was noted above that a number of factors, including endemic poverty, provide a motivating rationale for supporters and foot soldiers. Excluded from the benefits of

modernity and alienated from familiar environments by migration and globalization, they were vulnerable to extremist rhetoric that promise them material and social benefits. It is therefore crucial that governments address political and social grievances that create a permissive environment for extremist rhetoric and armed violence. Measures to counter this threat can include increased government funding and engagement in impoverished areas, increasing access to non-religious education, higher education and employment schemes, and creating a democratic environment that promotes tolerance and encourages pluralism, giving marginalized groups a voice and stake in the government.

4. DE-SECURITIZE THE ISSUE AND THE RHETORIC

Not all threats to individuals or societies fall under the rubric of “security challenges”. It was felt that issues such as migration would be better met if such issues were de-securitized. Blanket securitization of migration adds an element of urgency to government initiatives and legitimized negative responses by linking them to a threat to the state and its identity. However, removing the rhetoric of security would allow these challenges to be addressed in a “normal” rather than an “emergency” mode and through a framework based on civil and human rights.



5. TAKE A HOLISTIC APPROACH

Many of these problems have trans-national inter-linkages and cannot be addressed in isolation. The problem of armed groups and terrorism, for example, is closely tied with that of organized crime, corruption, illegal trafficking and poverty. These inter-linkages may pose a domestic cross-sectoral challenge but also develop into a trans-national issue when they spill

across political borders. Responses need to take into account the motivations for violence, the means used and the objectives in order to be both effective and sustainable, and gain public support. Without the latter, actions taken by governments may be delegitimized and, consequently, render them ineffective as public support ensures that counter-measures cannot be enforced.



Prof. Amitav Acharya of RSIS, NTU and Dr. Bruce Jones of the Center on International Cooperation, NYU

WHAT ROLE FOR MULTILATERALISM?

Although the United Nations has been involved in East Timor, Cambodia and, more recently, Myanmar and Nepal, it has not played as central a role in Asian peace and security issues as it has in other areas, most notably Africa and the Middle East. Furthermore, representation in the Security Council is disproportionate to Asian demographics, underscoring the impression in Asia that the United Nations was created primarily as an Atlanticist organization to deal with European and American problems. However, Asia is faced with a number of regional and trans-national crises that it may not be able to solve without external assistance and input.³¹ Additionally, the world body will increasingly have to demonstrate some resonance among Asian societies in order to retain its global relevance in the

future. With an Asian Secretary-General at the helm of the world body and a number of regional organizations aspiring to more active roles, there is an opportunity for re-engagement on both sides to meet the complex challenges that confront them.

1. REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN ASIA

Many of the challenges faced by Asia today have been categorized as non-traditional security challenges. Many of which, like environmental degradation and infectious disease, cannot be contained by political borders. Consequently, they require national responses to be coordinated with regional mechanisms. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has made some effort to address these

³¹ Michael Vatikiotis, "Asia: Towards Security Cooperation" in *Coping with Crisis Working Paper Series*, International Peace Academy, New York, March 2007, available at www.ipacademy.org/ourwork/coping-with-crisis/working-papers.

issues by installing an early-warning system to try and prevent a repetition of the 2004 Asian tsunami and taking measures to combat cross-boundary pollution. However, these have not been particularly effective as declarations have outpaced action. Furthermore, the organization is hindered by low levels of cooperation and joint-action initiatives, no automatic mechanism to respond to regional humanitarian crises or diplomatic crisis management, and the lack of a regional peacekeeping architecture such as that of the African Union. Founded on the absolute belief in sovereignty and non-interference, ASEAN states and their regional neighbours are often reluctant to make interventions in matters deemed a domestic concern for the state.

Relations among members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) have been characterized by many of those shared by ASEAN states. Furthermore, a tense relationship between India and Pakistan has prevented SAARC from realizing its full potential, given the level of mistrust among two of its prominent members. The ultimate objective of economic integration has continually been postponed due to bilateral disputes and the domestic political environment of SAARC member states. However, the recent *détente* in the Indo-Pak relationship has invigorated the association and opened up prospects for increased effectiveness. Furthermore, the attention of external observers—the foreign ministers of China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and representatives from the United States and the European Union—highlights the growing importance of the region and preliminary talks in the summit indicated the members' desire to focus strongly on cooperative action.³²

While the discourse on NTS issues may suggest that "great power" influence is waning, they certainly continue to play an active role in the region. China is a central figure in many of the issues covered by non-traditional security studies, including infectious diseases, armed groups and trans-national crime. In addition, India's growing economic status and its increasing activity on the global cultural and social front have reinforced its status as a regional power,

which has shaped bilateral relationships with, and among, its neighbours. Its quest for a seat in the UN Security Council to reflect its growing economic, social and demographic weight has further challenged the composition of the world body where the most powerful roles of the UNSC Permanent Members continue to reflect the geopolitical circumstances of the mid-twentieth century. In addition, there is a pervasive suspicion of regional involvement by major powers, leading many Asian states to prefer bilateral mechanisms for coping with crises. It was also noted that there has been a preference for UN action to that of regional organizations in a number of areas, such as migration, given its universal membership and consequent moral authority.

2. THE UNITED NATIONS

Given Asia's multiple regional organizations and complex bilateral and multilateral relationships, it has been one of the most difficult regions for the United Nations to work with in recent years. However, its increased engagement in contemporary conflicts such as that in East Timor and Nepal indicates that when the UN has been creative and resourceful in how, and with whom, it works in the Asian context, there has been a greater space for interaction. Alternatively, it is also important for Asians to articulate more creatively their demands for engagement by the UN in order to target its efforts on the region's most pressing needs.

The United Nations has been active in Asia primarily in the areas of peacekeeping operations (PKOs), development and humanitarian assistance. The projected increase in UN uniformed and civilian personnel from just under 100,000 in 2006 to a possible 140,000 in 2007 reflects the fundamental shift taking place in the management of international conflict.³³ This number is important to both recipients and providers. While the former may benefit from the services of peace operations, the latter will need to meet the demand for contributions in order to fulfil UN mandates. With three of the top troop contributors to UN PKOs being South Asia, these developments will closely involve Asian member states on the peacekeeping front for the foreseeable future.



³² Nidhi Razdan, "SAARC Summit: Leaders urge action", available at www.ndtv.com/convergence/ndtv/story.aspx?id=NEWEN20070007644.

³³ United Nations Peace Operations, Year in Review 2006: New Challenges, New Horizons. UN Document No. DPI/2446, New York, February 2007.



Assoc. Prof. Ralf Emmers (front row, 3rd from left),
Assoc. Prof. Mely Caballero Anthony (front row 4th from left) and
Amb. Barry Desker of RSIS, NTU (front row 2nd from right)

On the development front, however, Asia has taken its own path and generated its own dynamism. Nonetheless, many elements of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are as relevant to Asia as they are to Africa. Asian states need to develop a common framework on these targets to ensure they remain on the MDG map.

Regarding humanitarian work in Asia, the period after the 2004 tsunami has witnessed a number of reforms undertaken by the UN's humanitarian arm, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Among these is the new "cluster approach", designed to group relevant partners in order to deliver assistance more rapidly and effectively.³⁴ In addition, the General Assembly adopted the Central Emergency Response Fund to ensure a more predictable and timely response to the humanitarian crisis. The long-term results these initiatives will produce cannot now be known, but they are a step in the direction of positive reform.³⁵ In the context of global health challenges, the UN has also been active and engaged in deliberately discreet efforts to coordinate responses to the outbreak of bird flu, for example. Although many may have considered it a regional challenge, it is in fact a global threat that recognizes no national boundaries. The UN has a reciprocal relationship with Asia in many ways. It is increasingly being called upon to

undertake work in relation to democracy and governance issues, where its perceived neutrality has allowed it to assist in diffusing internal conflict, most recently in Nepal. The UN and its agencies also play an active role in humanitarian assistance to Asia, as seen in the 2004 tsunami and the recent earthquake in Pakistan, but also on a daily basis through education programmes and refugee assistance, for example. From Asia, the UN has benefited from the troop contributions of Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Nepal, which contributed a total of 45 per cent of UN forces.³⁶ In a number of cases, the UN has worked in parallel with Asian actors to ensure the sustainability of their mutual efforts and investments.

There are, however, opportunities for further engagements in Asia. The first is the new Peacebuilding Commission, designed to propose integrated strategies for post-conflict peace building and recovery, and help to ensure predictable financing for early recovery activities and sustained financial investment over the medium- to long-term. While it is currently focused on Burundi and Sierra Leone, an Asian candidate like Timor-Leste may be put forward for the next round of cases. The PBC presents Asia with a real opportunity to ensure its continued presence on the global agenda as the body was not designed to deal solely

³⁴ See ochaonline.un.org/webpage.asp?ParentID=12255&MenuID=12256&Page=2308 and ochaonline.un.org/cap/webpage.asp?Page=1355.

³⁵ ochaonline.un.org/webpage.asp?Page=2101.

³⁶ Center on International Cooperation, *Annual Review of Global Peace Operations 2007*, New York, February 2007, p. 5.

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with African cases but to be of global relevance. Another opportunity for further collaboration lies in the UN's counter-terrorism initiatives, like the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which provides a channel for invigorated Asian partnership in its implementation phases.

The relationship between Asia and the UN has, to a large degree, been governed by context. Asians have seen the world body as a relevant actor on many issues but regional mechanisms are often preferred to external intervention, especially in the area of peace and security. However, different mechanisms have often been preferred, depending on nature of the challenge. For example, the WHO was the preferred agency for managing the SARS crisis. Consequently, to strengthen the partnership between the UN and Asia, it is crucial that the terms of their engagement be based on issues prioritized by Asia. These efforts can then extend to more traditional security challenges such as that of peacekeeping, in which there is still scope for greater Asian—especially Southeast Asian and East Asian—participation and deepen the source of peacekeeping troop contributions. It was noted that there was some reluctance on the latter point as it was felt that Asian states were often excluded from participating in the development of peacekeeping doctrine. However, it was pointed out that most doctrine is created through practice and there are trends towards greater transparency in peacekeeping operations, with funders and troop contributors participating. Such a process can also aid in the absorption of UN values by participants in peace operations—discouraging military interventions, promoting human rights and gender balance, democracy and pluralism. Asia is clearly not a monolith and it is not useful to treat it as such. Moreover, the subsidiarity of the UN to regional organizations is no longer useful. Instead, the UN and regional organizations ought to act as full partners and coordinate their responses in areas where the UN has played important roles within Asia, such as humanitarian responses and development initiatives. However, it would be useful for Asia to be more “Asia conscious” and have a more unified identity in the multilateral arena because, collectively, it could wield greater influence. Here, there is some concern about its recent interest in Africa and it is crucial that the Cold War not be re-

enacted as Asian states scramble for “spheres of influence” in Africa. However, challenges outside Asia also provide an opportunity for its states to work together without the pervasive suspicion that hampers much of its regional interaction regarding security and engage more directly to address global challenges like climate change, migration, extremism and violent conflict.

CONCLUSIONS

Non-traditional security studies reflect the changing nature of crises in the twenty-first century. They are complex, inter-connected and cannot be addressed by any single government. Furthermore, the securitization of challenges such as infectious disease, environmental degradation, poverty and migration further highlight their connections to armed violence and political conflict. This suggests that even traditional security threats like terrorism and militant movements cannot be addressed without taking into account a number of NTS elements. Therefore, it may be useful to consider a new security framework that combines both elements to reflect a more comprehensive notion of twenty-first-century security threats.

The response to these challenges must be multi-disciplinary and engage the four main groups of actors: local, national, regional and international. Local and national agents, such as those dealing with healthcare, education and policing, will need to be strengthened to enhance their capacities of detection and containment when dealing with infectious disease or terrorism, for example. Porous borders, difficult terrain and increasing migration and the movement of people, arms and ideas require a more cohesive regional approach in Asia that will require innovative cooperative measures to protect national interests. To that end, it will be important for organizations like ASEAN and SAARC to strengthen and further develop their internal relationships but also maintain active channels of communication and institutionalize cooperative mechanisms. Finally, on an international level, Asia must develop a stronger collective voice in multilateral fora to reflect its growing social, economic and demographic strength. It has often been neglected at the expense of Africa but the problems it confronts, as well as the resources it can offer, make it a crucial partner in confronting global challenges in the coming decades.

