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## Landscape of Regional Cooperation: Its Meaning for a Security Sector Reform Network in Asia

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### Prologue

This article presents a brief introduction to the political landscape of regional cooperation and networking in Asia. The regional cooperation in Asia that focuses on sub-regional approach has been functioning to promote trust and confidence in the region, but they have not addressed the agenda of security sector reform (SSR).<sup>1</sup> Looking at this reality, there is a need to encourage the existing networks in the region to bring the SSR agenda to the table for better understanding and good practice in security sector governance.

Despite its limitations, the existing regional and national network can function as a forum to promote wider discussion on security sector, which is still lacking in Asia. In this context, this paper attempts to explore the landscape of existing network that is relevant to the field of SSR. The term 'network' here refers to the regional cooperation, either at the state or at non-state level that deals with issues related to security sector. Understanding an existing network in the region will help to identify and promote a strategy for SSR activities in the region.

### Regional Setting

Asia is a very large continent and the home of more than half of the world's population.<sup>2</sup> It is misleading to treat Asia as a monolithic political landscape, and

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<sup>1</sup>According to the UK Global Conflict Prevention (GCPP) SSR Strategy: "The 'security sector' includes the armed forces, paramilitary units, the police and the intelligence services. It also includes the civil authorities mandated to control and oversee these agencies. This may include legislatures, judicial systems, defence, finance and interior ministries, national security agencies, and civil society groups, which play a 'watch-dog' role. All of these bodies are key to achieving democratic control of the security sector."

<sup>2</sup> Achieving the Millennium Development Goals, UNFPA Series No. 10, 2003

to assume that SSR could be promoted through a single perspective. Here the uniqueness of Asia challenges the initiatives for security sector reform. Asia is a large continent that consists of several sub-regions including Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, and South-Asia. However, West Asia, and Central Asia are rarely discussed in the mainstream Asian political context, as West Asia is often categorised as the Middle East, while the Central Asia sub-region is generally treated exclusively as a region of five former Soviet republics that are not connected to the existing regional cooperation of Asia.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, in international studies, both International Relations (IR) and International Political Economy (IPE), the term East Asia has been widely used to refer to Northeast Asia and later to include Southeast Asia as well. Moreover, an attempt to enlarge the geographical definition of East Asia was proposed by Australia<sup>4</sup> that cover the existing East Asian region *plus* Australia and New Zealand. Australia's argument to propose this new East Asian map is based on in the dynamic and regional economy as well as regional security considerations. In addition, in the security realm, the term 'Asia-Pacific' is also widely used to refer to major countries in Asia spanning the landmass from India to China, and countries on the East coast of the Pacific Ocean, including the United States, Canada, and Mexico.<sup>5</sup>

This paper will not debate the geographical boundaries of the region or sub-region itself, rather it will try to understand the geographical context to reflect the diversity of the region. It will focus on South Asia and Southeast Asia which have relevance to the agenda of SSR in Asia. At sub-regional level, only South Asia and South East Asia have workable regional cooperation,<sup>6</sup> as North East Asia does not have any regional organisation. It also needs to be understood that the dynamic of Asian security, cooperation and networking is directly linked to the Asia-Pacific as a whole.

## Political Setting

The Asian political landscape varies from one country to another, ranging from democracies, constitutional monarchies, socialist states to authoritarian military

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<sup>3</sup>There is security agreement on security between the Central Asian countries with China. The members are: China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Source:

<http://www.rferl.org/nca/features/2001/06/15062001122345.asp>, also at: <http://www.westerndefense.org/articles/CentralAsia/july01.htm>

<sup>4</sup> In the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Meeting in 1994 in Brunei Darussalam, Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans proposes a new map for Asia that includes Australia and New Zealand. This Map is based on the azimuthal projection of Australian geographer under the direction of foreign minister. This proposal is significant to explain the notion regional cooperation in the Asia region.

<sup>5</sup> The Asia-Pacific covers countries of the three regions: Asia, North America, and Latin America, which are: Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, China (People's Republic of), Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Laos, Malaysia, Mexico, Mongolia, Myanmar, North Korea, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Russia, Singapore, Chinese Taipei, Thailand, United States, Vietnam

<sup>6</sup> North East Asia for example, do not have any formal of subregional cooperation. An attempt to promote regional cooperation in Noreast Asia has been promoted by Canada through the basket of North Pacific Cooperative Security Dialogue (NPCSD). However, there is no much progress that have been achieved.

regimes. Generally speaking, Asia is a relatively dynamic region that is experiencing a degree of successful economic development. In East Asia for example, the label on “East Asian miracle” was given to the countries in the region for their remarkable economic and industrial development until the economic crisis of 1997. Five years after the economic turmoil, the economic recovery is progressing that will dictate future economic direction of the region, which in turn is a direct link of economic performance to security sector. Understanding of relations between economic development and security sector is important as there direct impact of the economy to defence spending and regional military balance.<sup>7</sup>

This region is also home to the two most populous nations in the world, China and India, with their different political systems and the way they manage their security sector. India for example is democratic, while China is still under communist rule even though it has opened up its economy. The Asian political setting leans towards a more open system, reinforced by China’s adoption of free market economy and its entry into the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Other countries are still following the socialist path especially Laos and Vietnam, while Burma/Myanmar still practising isolationist economic policy that disconnects them from the outside world.

### South Asia

In the South Asian sub-region, India is the largest country with entrenched democratic tradition since the post-colonial era, despite the high degree of ethno-religious tensions that characterise its political process. India had a rich experience in democratic security sector management. However, it has been embroiled in a protracted conflict between India and Pakistan on Kashmir that has brought the two countries *head-to-head* in a scenario of mutual nuclear threat. This conflict is of major concern to regional security and stability in the region. But despite the existing political standoff on Kashmir, India provides an example of democratic security sector management.

Most neighbouring countries have experienced unstable domestic politics, especially Nepal and Sri Lanka. Bangladesh is coping with its development problems and unstable democracy with a record of military *coup d’etat*. Pakistan provides a classical example of military intervention in politics through several *coups d’etat*. Sri Lanka has long suffered the separatist movement of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Jaffna, the Northern region. The peace process and dialogue between the government and the rebel group is at risk of collapsing. The LTTE proposal of 30 October 2003 to establish the so-called Interim Self Governing Authority (ISGA),<sup>8</sup> created political tension within the government and resulted in the declaration of a state emergency.

Nepal is now facing a more difficult politico-security problem with the emergence of the Maoist rebels.<sup>9</sup> The poverty and lack of development in this landlocked country provide fertile ground for the growth of the Maoist insurgency.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The ancient Chinese proverb of “strong economy, strong army” is well understood in the regional security dynamics in Asia.

<sup>8</sup> South Asia Terrorism Portal ([www.satp.org](http://www.satp.org))

<sup>9</sup> On October 31, 2003, the US declared the Maoist group with its Communist Party of Nepal –Maoist (CPN-M) –as a terrorist group and froze its assets. See: “US Embassy Confirms Maoist Declared National Threat”. In *Nepal News* ([www.nepalnews.com](http://www.nepalnews.com)) November 2, 2003.

<sup>10</sup> For an account of Maoist movement from the Maoist perspective see: Baburam Bhattarai. *The Nature of Underdevelopment and Regional Structure of Nepal: Marxist Analysis*. (New Delhi: Adroit Publisher, 2003; Baburam Bhattarai is Nepali intellectual holding PhD from Jawaharlal Nehr University, and the leader of

Consequently, the rise of insurgency is deeply affecting the intra-state conflict and security in Nepal. The government of Nepal now allocates more money to the armed forces and has expanded the military police for counter-insurgency purposes. With the growth of conflict with Maoists, Nepal is on the way to state collapse unless it finds a peaceful solution. To counter the rebels the government is now strengthening the military as well as building armed police. As the poorest country in the region, this trend will reduce the development programme and endanger future humanitarian programmes in the country.

### Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia consists of continental and the “insular” or maritime Southeast Asia. Continental Southeast Asia comprises five countries: Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar. These countries share the Mekong River, that flows from the North to South of the Indochina peninsula. However, historical circumstances over recent years have brought about considerable political and economic differences between these countries. Thailand underwent a rapid development from the 1980s onward and has propelled development in the region. With the exception of Thailand, each Indochina country has experienced civil war and political chaos. That has resulted in their economies lagging behind eastern Asia as a whole. The continuation of socialist regime in Vietnam and Laos is directly related to their approach to security sector management. In Cambodia since the civil war ended, the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) has laid the foundation for growth and stability, and security sector reform continues to be promoted.

Myanmar/Burma continues to be ruled by the military *junta* that facing an ethnic based separatist movements across the country. The authoritarian regime in Yangon has renamed itself as State Peace and Development Council (SPDC),<sup>11</sup> which has the same purpose as the SLORC to continue its repression against democratic movements and its people. Security sector management in Myanmar is totally undemocratic since the military controls the entire social and political life. In this political landscape, security reform is far from being achieved, since the first step must be the removal of militant *junta* in Yangon.

The *insular* Southeast Asia comprises of six countries: Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia, the Philippines and East Timor. Indonesia is the largest nation in Southeast Asia that is consolidating its democracy after 30 years of centralistic government rule. Security sector reform is ongoing, with the main problem being the management of democratic consolidation. Malaysia is successful in the development of civil supremacy but political freedom is controlled under the Internal Security Act (ISA). The transition of power on 30 October, 2003 that ended 25 years of Mahathir Mohamad’s leadership provided the hope for major changes toward greater freedom of expression.

Singapore is the most modern country in Southeast Asia, as the hub of finance, services and trade in the region. The security sector is under civil authority, and the country’s military and security apparatus are well trained and equipped. Singapore is, however, a “security state” with limited political freedom. Brunei is a very rich country under a monarchy in which the King determines the fate of

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Communist Party of Nepal (CPN). See also: Arjun Karki and David Seddon, *The People’s War in Nepal*, (New Delhi: Adroit Publisher, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Renamed from SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council) that was set up by the military group after violently aborting the electoral results in 1990 won by the NLD (National League for Democracy) led by Aung San Suu Kyi. See: Ardeth Maung Thawngmung, “Preconditions and Prospects for Democratic Transition in Burma/Myanmar”, in *Asian Survey*, Vol. XLIII, No. 3, May/June 2003.

security sector with little or no mechanism for oversight. While East Timor is emerging as a new nation, and is in the process of developing its security sector. The Philippines started to democratise since fall of Ferdinand Marcos dictatorship. The country is struggling with democratic instability in which the military still has a strong influence in politics. However, it still continues to strive to promote democratic control of the armed forces.<sup>12</sup> Yet the Philippines and Thailand make up the first generation of democratisation in the region where the term 'security sector reform' has never been introduced – rather, in both countries their approach to security sector reform is more from the angle of civil-military relations.

## Dialogue Setting: Track I and Track II

The dialogue in Asia primarily focuses on political, cultural and economic aspects as interlinking factors in security that have been acknowledged through the 'comprehensive security'<sup>13</sup> approach. On the political side, the dialogue about security strengthens commitment and understanding at the regional level. While cultural cooperation is more on the basis of "common values" which cement the relationship. Economic cooperation is also crucial in advocating an open market economy. The spill over effect of this cooperation is the promotion of confidence building measures (CBMs) through preventive diplomacy. Asian regionalism, particularly ASEAN, has built a condition of amity and reduced the enmity among countries in the region.

Since the end of the Cold War, the region has made progress in security dialogue both at the Track I and Track II channel.<sup>14</sup> The terms Track I and Track II are widely used in Asia and the Pacific security discourse. The Track I diplomacy refers to the dialogue or forum at the governmental level, while Track II refers to the dialogue of the 'epistemic communities' as a non-governmental process. But, participants may come from the government official in their private capacity. Studies on security issues in the region are growing richer as the Track II plays a crucial role in developing alternative policies to help the process and strengthen security dialogue at the Track I in the region.

### Track I level

Against this political backdrop, Asian Track I process of regional cooperation is mostly conducted through sub-regional approaches such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Despite its weaknesses, ASEAN is recognised as one of the most successful regional organisation in the Southern hemisphere. Since its cautious beginning in 1967, during the height of the Vietnam war, ASEAN has come to be regarded as an important factor for stability in Southeast Asia and the most successful regional organisation in the Third World. To lesser extent, SAARC has been able to provide regional mechanism in South Asia to strengthen cooperation, but there is a degree of uneasiness in relations between India-Pakistan, and India with its neighbouring countries due to the fact that India is the biggest and strongest country in the region.

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<sup>12</sup> Videl Ramos, "Democratic control of the armed forces: Lesson from East Asia", in *Asia-Pacific Review*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2001

<sup>13</sup> In Southeast Asia, the concept of 'comprehensive security' was promoted by Indonesia since the beginning of 1970s. In Indonesian term, the concept of "*keamanan*" (security) encompasses *IPOLEKSOSBUD-HANKAM* (ideology, politics, economy, social, defence).

<sup>14</sup> Similar term that also use is the First Track and Second Track diplomacy, which is the similar in meaning. Both of terminology is widely understood and use in the Asia-Pacific security dialogues.

None of these organisations address the specific issue of SSR, and none of them consider democracy and human rights as basic values for developing regional organisation. Neither ASEAN nor SAARC is driven to promote democratic values such as the European Union (EU)'s process of regionalism. ASEAN members agreed on the tradition of the so-called "ASEAN way", which is based on consensus and avoidance of interference by one state in the domestic issues of another state.<sup>15</sup> This creates a problem for advocacy of universal values as resentment may appear at the governmental level of networks. An attempt to change this political culture so far has not yet had any success.

ASEAN has proved to be the most successful sub-regional organisation in creating stability in the region. Even though ASEAN did not develop as a conflict resolution organisation, through cooperation with the international community, especially France and Australia, ASEAN has previously productively worked for the resolution of the Cambodian conflict. In the post-Cold War era, ASEAN enlarged all countries in Southeast Asia. ASEAN also served as a mechanism of regional economic development by promoting the free market economy. The establishment of an ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA)<sup>16</sup> shows its commitment to the dominant approach of economic liberalism. In addition, in the Mekong region, the cooperation of 'Greater Mekong Subregion' (GMS Project) attempts to promote development in the countries surrounding the 4,800km Mekong River, which include Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and the Southern province of China.<sup>17</sup> The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and other countries such as Australia and Canada also provide substantial support for the project.

Regional cooperation in Asia does not manage to address domestic politics of member countries, which is sensitive and regarded as interference in domestic matters. This position relates to the old politically sensitive mindset of the Westphalian system that no is longer compatible with current features of international norms that underpin the human security agenda. Several factors account for Asia's preoccupation with Westphalian sovereignty especially collective memory of the colonial past, experience of major wars, and strong nationalist sentiment that embedded in most Asian countries.<sup>18</sup> Another significant aspect in the feature of Asian politics is the importance of 'informality'<sup>19</sup> in opposite to Western process which is focusing more to the "formal" approach.

In addition, the sub-regional approach of cooperation is relevant to the promotion of regional security, and the multilateral approach receives new attention to discuss security matters in Asia-Pacific. The ASEAN induced concept of regional

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<sup>15</sup>John Funston. "ASEAN and the Principle of Non-Intervention" in David Dickens and Guy Wilson-Roberst, *Non-Intervention and State Sovereignty in the Asia-Pacific*, (Wellington: Center for Strategic Studies, 2000), pp. 9

<sup>16</sup> See for example: Rodolfo C. Saverino, "The ASEAN Free Trade Area: Reaching Its Target", in *ASEAN Economic Bulletin*, 19/2, August 2002. On critical side see: Eul-Soo Pang, "AFTA and MERCOSUR at the crossroads: Security, managed trade, and globalization", in *Contemporary Southeast Asia*. Singapore: Apr 2003. Vol. 25, Iss. 1

<sup>17</sup>Iluminado Varela, Jr., Mekong Region: To be Free of Poverty and Border Barriers, The ASEAN Secretariat (<http://www.aseansec.org/13204.htm>)

<sup>18</sup> Chung-in Moon and Chaesung Chun, "Sovereignty: Dominance of the Westphalian Concept and Implication to Regional Security", in Muthiah Alagappa, *Asian Security Order: Instrumental and Formative Features*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) p.111

<sup>19</sup> On the practices of informal politics in Asia see: Brantly Womack and Tun Jen Cheng, "Informal Politics in Asia." *Asian Survey*, 36:3 (March), 1996. pp. 320-337

security through the establishment of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)<sup>20</sup> is a very positive step in bringing countries in the region together to discuss security concerns.<sup>21</sup> At the economic realm, the Asia Pacific Cooperation (APEC),<sup>22</sup> as a first track channel for economic dialogue, covers most of the countries in the Asia-Pacific rim.

There is also a trans-regional mechanism for dialogue, the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM), a co-operative framework established in March 1996 between Europeans as represented by the fifteen European Union (EU) member states plus the European Commission, and Asians as represented by ten East and Southeast Asian states comprising China, Japan, South Korea, Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. ASEM was to be a symbol of Asia's and Europe's rediscovery of each other after a long period of relative neglect. It was first conceived to be the bridge between Asians and Europeans.<sup>23</sup> In sum, ASEM is an informal process of dialogue with the objective of strengthening the relationship between the two regions.<sup>24</sup>

### Track II Level

Within the Track II level, 'epistemic communities'<sup>25</sup> play a prominent role in addressing security in the region. In international studies, the term of 'epistemic communities' is defined as "a network of professionals with an authoritative claim to policy relevant knowledge within their domain", is widely used in Asia to refer to the role of academic, expert and professional in Track II process in addressing security. The Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP), and the ASEAN Institute for Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN ISIS) is the most credible example. ASEAN-ISIS for example effectively helps the Track I (ASEAN) in addressing peace and security through intensive consultation and developing policy alternative. Similarly, CSCAP was set up as a regional forum (Asia Pacific) for exchanges and studies on security in the region to help the policy development process of the ARF. CSCAP organises its activities into 5 (five) working groups, which include: (1). Confidence and security building measures, (2). Transnational crime, (3) Maritime cooperation, (4). Cooperative

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<sup>20</sup> ARF was inaugurated as an extension of ASEAN-Post Ministerial Conference – the forum for dialogue between ASEAN and the dialogue partners. On the role of ARF in promoting peace in Asia see: Mely C. Anthony, "Partnership for Peace in Asia: ASEAN, ARF and the UN", in *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 24 No. 3, December 2002, pp. 528-545.

<sup>21</sup> ARF Member States are: 23 countries consisting of: the 10 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Laos, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam); the 11 "Dialogue Partners" (European Union (EU) Australia, Canada, China, India, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, North Korea, Russia, the United States); Papua New Guinea; and Mongolia

<sup>22</sup> APEC members are Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, People's Republic of China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Russia, Singapore, Chinese Taipei, Thailand, United States, and Vietnam.

<sup>23</sup> Yeo Lay Hwee, "ASEM: Looking back, looking forward" in *Contemporary Southeast Asia*. Singapore: Apr 2000. Vol. 22, Iss. 1; pg. 113

<sup>24</sup> For further background on ASEM See: *An Introduction to the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM)*, (Luxemburg: European Community Publication, 2002)

<sup>25</sup> See: Peter Hass, "Introduction to Epistemic Communities and international policy coordination", in *International Organization*, Vol. 46 No. 1, 1992. p.3).

and comprehensive security, (5). North Pacific Security.<sup>26</sup> This relationship between Track II with Track I is non-formal, but, both ASEAN-ASIS and CSCAP has been able to contribute in shaping policies of ASEAN and ARF.

At the sub-regional level, South East Asia has the ASEAN-ISIS serves as an independent network of think-tanks on security and strategic studies in the ASEAN countries. In South Asia, the Regional Centre for Security and Strategic Studies (RCSS) in Colombo also serves as the hub for the epistemic community on security in the region to explore and develop policy related aspects of security. RCSS has been initiated to develop a network of research institutions in South Asia through conferences, research, and publications.<sup>27</sup>

Other fora that shape the network have developed in their areas of concern such as human rights, media, conflict resolution, anti-corruption etc. In human rights front, regional networks such as Asia Human Rights Forum (Forum Asia) and South Asia Forum for Human Rights (SAFHR) play a role with in promoting SSR through different angle. Southeast Asia Press Association (SEAPA) and, Southeast Asia Conflict Studies Network (SEACSN) for example could play a role in promoting SSR trough their specific approaches.

The latest forum in Asia to address security is the Shangri-La Defence Dialogue that was sponsored by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS),<sup>28</sup> and inaugurated in Singapore in 2002. The conference is held annually as a forum for the defence ministers in the region to address relevant topic on defence and security. The Shangri-La Dialogue the forum in the Asia-Pacific region that brings together the region's defence ministers in multilateral format for discussions on defence issues and regional defence co-operation. Other conference participants are Chiefs of defence staff, legislators and parliamentarians, former defence and foreign ministers, leading analysts and journalists, and other influential decision makers from the wider Asia-Pacific.

## Security Focus

Studies and discussions on security issues in the region mostly focus on strategic studies such as regional security issues, the role of superpowers, bilateral political and security relations, inter or intra-state conflicts, confidence building measures (CBMs) and preventive diplomacy. However, since the Cold War ended, the focus on non-military security issues, such as human security, has received more attention. Several studies on non-traditional security have been undertaken or are still in progress both in South and Southeast Asia.<sup>29</sup> In some ways, attention is turning to non-traditional security issues such as the link between sustainable development, conflict prevention, and how the security sector is managed.

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<sup>26</sup> For the account on the role of CSCAP in the ARF see: Sheldon W. Simon, "Evaluating Track Two approach to security in the Asia-Pacific; the CSCAP experience", in *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2002.

<sup>27</sup> Some of relevant works are: Directory of Individuals and Institutions Engaged in South Asian Strategic Studies, (1998); Dipankar Banerjee (ed), *South Asian Security: Futures, A Dialogue of Directors regional Strategic Studies Institute*. (2002); CBMs in South Asia: Potentials and Possibilities (2000). The official web is [www.rcss.org](http://www.rcss.org)

<sup>28</sup>Shangri-La Defence Dialogue is actually not fit with the strict definition of Track II. However, it is attended by highly leaders in defence and security. See information at the IISS website: [www.iiss.org](http://www.iiss.org)

<sup>29</sup> Regional Centre for Strategic Studies (RCSS) in Sri Lanka has been working on non-military security issues in South Asia. In Southeast Asia, the IDSS (Institute for Defence and Strategic Studies) is working on the Non-traditional Security in Asia. These kinds of studies could be used as entry point for discussion on security sector reform.



The growing concern to peace and security has also stimulated the emergence of a network in conflict studies especially by the setting up of regional network on peace studies, like SEACSN, that approaches security in Asia from a different angle from the established network such as ASEAN-ISIS and CSCAP. SEACSN is an extensive network for peace and conflict studies of academics of all countries in Southeast Asia. SEACSN is able to coordinate the activities at the national and regional level.

In this context, security sector reform *per-se* has not received special attention beyond classical studies on approaches to security, building confidence and trust. This approach is understandable due to the fact that the region had previously drifted into enmity, bilateral conflict, and the ideological cleavages between the socialist states and non-socialist. As already mentioned above, the political sensitivity on countries in the region strongly influence this tendency. However, the growing of focus and attention from the Track II activities to the new security perspectives, such as on “securitisation” (Copenhagen School), human security and comprehensive security are open the opportunity to the debate on security sector reform that is needed to promote democratic security sector in Asia.

## Opportunities and Challenges

SEACSN is the main actor in the field of security in the region. ASEAN has been able to promote peace and security in Southeast Asia, and to a lesser extent, the SAARC in South Asia is doing the same. ARF is the only Track I forum in the region that is dealing with security matters and has also opened up its membership to the European Union (EU) as a member to represent countries in Europe. Though this forum is high profile, the ARF is not yet able to emerge as a conflict resolution body – it is still a talking-shop.

ASEAN and SAARC are serve similar roles in their sub-regions, and have been advocating the “developmentalist” approach of national goals for its members. Unfortunately, as the security sector can be considered to be ‘sensitive’, none of the above networks ever talk about security sector reform. In the case of ASEAN, the lack of criticism against the military regime in Myanmar strongly reflects this limitation. Domestic politics of other countries remain a sensitive issue in a *realpolitik* sense, but it is no longer sacrosanct in the current era of democratic governance in which ‘sovereignty’ has been broadened to include individual level.<sup>30</sup>

However, there is still an opportunity to develop a network on SSR in the region through reviving the existing mechanisms, and possibly establishing the network. In this regard, there is a need to encourage the actors in the network to start to address security sector reform on their agenda. There is a need to help to build network of SSR epistemic communities in Asia. Looking at the above, there is a potential network at an embryonic state in the form of several institutions and individuals who have focused on human rights, strategic studies, conflict resolution, media, anti-corruption etc that now still concentrated narrowly in the micro perspective which is actually could contribute to SSR in general.

Both in South and Southeast Asia, there are existing networks dealing with security and strategic studies, which to some extent could provide a basic foundation to promote an SSR network. It should be noted that the notion of SSR in Asia is heavily related to the issue of civil-military relations, the nature of

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<sup>30</sup> Kofi Annan, Two Concept of Sovereignty, *The Economist* 18 September 1999

power struggles in each country and the involvement of the military in politics.<sup>31</sup> For example, the latter is not only a question of who is commanding whom but also the issues of political history, power-struggle, culture and access to resources. In this situation, developing such a network needs careful design since the network must function as a medium to strengthen interest in the subject matter. Focusing on *good practice* and *lessons learned* is a crucial task in addressing the sensitivity and diversity of socio-cultural and political context of each country.

## External Partnership

It is inevitable that democratisation and security sector reform is influenced by external actors, despite domestic efforts. External actors could play a relevant role as partner in reform, provide technical support, as it can also use its expertise to support developing capacity for security sector reform. However, SSR is a process rather than an end state<sup>32</sup>. Democratisation of the SSR process is not like a dream, which will happen instantly. Efforts to promote SSR need continual involvement both by domestic actors in the network and the partners or donors. This is one of the crucial issues in promoting the capacity building of the networks and their activities in the respective countries.

Donor support is crucial to the promotion of SSR activities. The governmental donor agencies have capacity to work directly with the host-country governments in the countries undergoing SSR, such as Department for International Development (DFID)'s involvement in the SSR process in Indonesia and Sri Lanka. In this strategic role, donor countries could link-up to the recipient at the elite policy level to promote reform. This opportunity is important, as SSR will not work without a high level of commitment by the state leader. On the other hand, the non-governmental donor, such as Ford Foundation, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), or National Democratic Institution (NDI) could work with the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs) dealing with SSR. Looking at this situation, there is a need for donors to work together to help the process of SSR to harness the opportunity for synergies and a division of labour.

The presence of donors and external actors is needed to promote the SSR in Asia. Importantly there is a need to harmonise the donor agenda with local content with the spirit of partnership. Learning from practices of donors and external support in a democracy project with the local partners will sometimes result in a superior-inferior relationship that is counter-productive. The success of SSR has to adapt to the culture and tradition that is not always easy to deal with. Understanding the practices at the local level and reconciling this with the external and donor strategy is important to achieve the goal of promoting SSR.

## Epilogue

An Asian network for SSR does not exist, but both South Asia and South East Asia have subregional cooperation that addresses political cooperation. In both

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<sup>31</sup> See for example, the classics work of Morris Janowitz, *Military Institutions and Coercion in the Developing Nations*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977) (expanded edition)

<sup>32</sup> Timothy Edmunds, *Security Sector Reform: Concept and Implementation*, Working Paper Series No. 3, DECAF, 2002, p. 5. Regionalism in the Asia such as the ARF process also follows such perspectives that more concern on process rather the set of definite output. In this situation, the forum then much more as a shop-talk on security rather an action plan oriented such as for conflict resolution.

regions, the existing Track I is focusing on politics and regional security without addressing the domestic political issues as may consider as internal matter. The Westphalian approach of sovereignty is strongly attached to the political behaviour of countries in Asia. This condition means that the promotion of SSR has to deal with domestic politics. In this situation injecting the idea of SSR into the Track I will need a voluntary national actor that is willing to spark the debate in the forum. Because the principle of non-interference is very strong, there is a tendency that discussing SSR at the governmental level may take sometime to evolve.

The opportunity to start a debate should encourage the existing Track II dialogue to move forward on SSR issues. There is potential for the existing dialogue to engage with the lessons learned and helping to spread good practices. Comparative experience from other regions, such as Africa or Eastern Europe, will be useful. Lastly, development of an informal forum at the Track II level to address security is necessary to support wider dialogue and debate on SSR in Asia. Bearing in mind that SSR could be considered a sensitive issue, it should develop in tandem with the initiatives to support stable democratisation, development and conflict resolution.

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