

## Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region: Challenges and Prospects

**On the 26<sup>th</sup> of October 2011 an Academic Forum on "Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region: Challenges and Prospects" was organised by the International Relations Institute of the Royal Academy of Cambodia (IRIC) in cooperation with the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS). Recent political developments in the traditional security realm in ASEAN - as the confirmation of preserving the region of South-East ASIA a Nuclear Weapon Free Zone, the current de-escalation of the Cambodian-Thai border conflict and the adoption of the Guidelines for the Implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea at the ASEAN PMC+1 - are encouraging signals for a more stable and secure ASEAN and Asian Pacific region. At the same time non-traditional security threats become increasingly important and present real challenges for the region. Tackling counter terrorism, providing maritime security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, combating human trafficking, organising an effective integrated water resource management, define regional solutions for adapting to climate change might, if not solved in a transparent and coordinated way, endanger political stability and provoke distributive conflicts in the region in the long term.**

Mr. Denis Schrey, Country Representative of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung mentioned in its opening remarks that traditional security threats still prevail in the Asia Pacific region. The nuclearisation of the larger Asian continent and the dramatic and continuous rise of regional military expenditures, 80% in East Asia and 100% in South Asia between 1988 and 2008, are still a non deniable fact. Furthermore, he mentioned that territorial claims in the South China Sea between China and several neighbors are still to be clarified. He questioned if current institutional arrangements in the Asia Pacific region are prepared to effectively deal with

escalating traditional and non-traditional security threats. Current multilateral security institutions in the Asian Pacific Region, he said, are organized as an open form of regionalism with preserved norms of sovereignty and non-interference with minimal institutionalization and non-binding lowest common agreements, which disable them to compel major power commitments.

Prof. Ros Chantrabot, Personal Advisor to Hun Sen, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia, stressed that besides the traditional security issues new forms of security threats had emerged. Those are epidemics, terrorism and environmental disasters that are beyond the control of nations. He mentioned that bilateral accords, commercial as well as cultural exchange, are currently the main driving forces to create stability and freedom in the region, but that much more needs to be done to effectively reply to the new non-traditional threats.

David Fouquet, invited Senior Advisor at the European Institute for Asian Studies (EIAS) in Brussels, described the Asian security environment as characterised by classic territorial tensions, challenged by natural disasters as well as trans-border crime and terrorism. He also referred to the "NEW ASEAN Community" which encompasses the emergence of a new Asian security dimension with focus on rivalries and tensions in the surrounding seas, and wide-ranging attempts to define the new security architecture - which, until today remain in his view wishful thinking. In his opinion the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the planned ASEAN Security Community are the only mechanisms that have a chance to be functional and operational in the near future. Especially the ARF will, in his point of view, be tested in the future, as it will be pivotal in the negotiations concerning the South China Sea territorial tensions. He fears that US interventions in the region might have destabilising consequences. Regarding new challenges, which have emerged in the Asian region, he emphasized the importance of non-traditional security which has gained,

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JANINA KANDT

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not only in the region but also international-ly more and more weight.

Dr. Chheang Vannarith, Executive Director of the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP), focussed on the challenges the Asian Region might face in the near future. He pointed out that the competition among the superpowers China and the US might in future split the small countries into two fractions and cause instability in the region. As further threats towards human and state security he named the widening gap between the rich and the poor, food insecurity, water scarcity and climate change accompanied by natural disasters. The Cambodia-Thailand Border Conflict and the South China Sea issue are identified as political security threats. He concluded that the key to regional stability and peace is 'Preventive Diplomacy' (PD) and actions on the strategic level as well as the institutional level, in order to overcome the strict adherence to the principles of non-intervention and sovereignty, mutual distrust and the lack of a common identity.

Ho Jiin Chang, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea, defined the borderless nature of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons as the primary threat to global security. As single country countermeasures are limited, he emphasized: Collaboration between countries and joint actions are necessary to deal successfully with transnational threats. In the following he gave a short overview over North Korean foreign policy and the connected threat towards South Korean security, which in turn led him to the description of Korean security policy. He pointed out that Korea will contribute to the peaceful, prosperous and safe world through the concept of comprehensive security.

Jeff Daigle, Chargé d'Affaires a.i. of the Embassy of the United States of America in Cambodia, emphasized the importance of Asia for US economic interests. The US is committed to broaden and deepen its relations with Asian allies, to increase engagement in multilateral fora such as ASEAN, and to support the development of a diverse and flexible security framework with the aim to build mutual confidence among the Asian and Southeast Asian governments and militaries, he stated. In order to address complex transnational challenges, he added, institutions that facilitate collective actions and a more coherent regional architecture to reinforce a system of rules and responsibilities would be required. Besides the importance of regional engagement, as an ef-

fective way to counter transnational security challenges, he names the importance of state capacity: before collective state actions can be performed, states must have the capacity to defend their own interests and provide security beyond their borders. Daigle described the US role in this regard as follows: the United States helps to increase the existing capacity of regional allies and it seeks further cooperation with Asian partners in bi- and multilateral fora to promote reforms that improve governance and protect human rights. This is of importance, as the fundament for long-term stability and sustained economic growth consists, according to him, in effective self-governance and the protection of civil liberties.