RSIS COMMENTARIES

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Responding to Non-Traditional Security Challenges in Asia

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Emerging security challenges in Asia are compelling the international community to take a hard look at their causes and implications on state and human security. Given the growing complexity of these challenges, responding to them require more innovative approaches.

ASIA faces a fundamental challenge of how to respond to a number of emerging issues. This challenge stems not only from competition between states but also from human-induced disturbances to the balance of nature that affect the well being and security of states and societies. These issues, amongst others, are climate change, environment and human security, energy and the new dynamics of internal conflicts. Given the transnational nature of these challenges, it is necessary to identify and examine them in order to inform policy, and foster creative and innovative analysis of multi-level governance.

Transnational Cooperation

To help examine these transnational challenges, research bodies from across regions could band together. It is to this end that the RSIS Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies has been chosen as one of three core institutions in the US-based MacArthur Foundation's new Asia Security Initiative. This initiative aims to increase the effectiveness of international cooperation in fostering peace and security in Asia. The Centre will lead a cluster of 7 institutes under the theme of internal challenges. Together, they will enhance regional cooperation in the Asia-Pacific as a means to manage emerging transnational challenges.

In doing so, the Centre will examine non-traditional security challenges facing Asia, such as climate change, environment and human security, energy, and the new dynamics of internal conflicts and multi-level approaches. In the context of governance, the latter means not only global to local approaches but also state to non-state participation.

The trans-border security implications of human insecurities caused by internal conflicts make for a compelling case to investigate the dynamics of internal conflicts, and multi-level governance and multilateral approaches to conflict prevention and resolution in East Asia.The multiplicity of internal

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conflict patterns in Asia has dramatically increased the human costs of conflicts and violent threats faced by people within states.

These have resulted in an array of human insecurities, from poverty and human deprivation; mass population displacement; worsening human rights abuses; marginalisation; threats of infectious diseases; and forced migration to a host of transnational crimes. In Southeast Asia, these internal conflicts include the the recently-resolved secessionist problem in Aceh and communal violence in Indonesia, the problem in Muslim provinces in Southern Thailand, and the Moro problem in the Philippines.

Climate Change

The interconnectedness of Asia's security is further heightened by the transboundary nature of the challenges of climatic change. In Southeast Asia, the 'immediate' risks and threats posed by climate change include food security, water scarcity and threats of vector-borne diseases. These risks exist because the region is one of the highest emitters of greenhouse gasses (GHGs) and is frequently plagued by serious forest fires, natural disasters and long periods of drought.

Further, the risks and vulnerabilities from climatic change are multiplied as most of Asia's densest aggregations of people and productive lands are on or near the coast. Thus, it is necessary to examine whether regional institutions can develop an effective multilateral approach on energy, environment and climate security. It is also important to ask whether Asia could strengthen institutional and state capacity to help protect communities from the risk-multiplier effects of climate change.

Energy security in the future would be confronted by the projected increase in demand and consumption of primary energy sources, and also by a parallel increase in GHG emissions. The shortage of fuel for economic development could also see Southeast Asia turning to nuclear energy. Given the frequency of earthquakes in the region and the poor safety record of countries that are keen to build nuclear power plants, questions about safety, risks of proliferation and "sanitisation of land" for waste disposal have to be studied carefully. The interdependent nature of these problems underscores the role of markets and governance, involvement of non-governmental actors, and the need for greater international cooperation.

Recommendations for Policymakers

The RSIS Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies seeks to address these questions. It will do so by producing research findings and recommendations that will better inform policymakers and highlight the impact of the challenges of internal conflict, climate change and energy security, on communities and individuals. The Centre will convene policy dialogues and roundtables to bring together representatives from partner institutes, as well as invited representatives from academic and policy communities, and members of civil society organisations across Asia.

Further, research workshops will be held to share the findings of existing research, explore potential for collaborative work, and discuss ways for research work to feed into policy. Research fellowships will be provided for researchers, NGOs, media, and policymakers from the region who are interested in working on projects related to internal conflicts, climate change and energy security.

To facilitate knowledge exchange and collaboration across the ASI network, the Centre will create an ASI web portal as a repository for project outputs. An online collaborative discussion forum will be created to facilitate virtual engagement between policymakers and subject matter experts. The Centre will also produce an Asia Security Initiative policy paper series, and monographs outlining recommended actions for policymakers and civil society in Asia.

Overall, these research products and collaborative tools will aim to maximise synergies between research and policy. The ultimate objective is to encourage international cooperation, and to develop creative solutions to respond to the myriad security challenges facing Asia.

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