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TIGERS AND DRAGONS: SUSTAINABLE SECURITY IN ASIA AND AUSTRALASIA

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1) INTRODUCTION

Asia is a region in transition, and transition creates uncertainty. The political, economic and societal landscape is shifting, with major new powers emerging and smaller states attempting to protect their interests in this changing dynamic. At the same time, climate change and the other long-term emerging threats to security will require regional responses and thus a degree of regional unity.

This report is based on the outcomes of a consultation that Oxford Research Group (ORG) and the Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA) held in Singapore in September 2008. Bringing together security experts, academics, government officials and civil society leaders from across Asia and Australasia, the two-day meeting explored the implications of the sustainable security framework for the region (see Appendix for a list of participants). All the participants attended in a personal capacity and this report does not necessarily represent a consensus view or the view of any individual participant, organisation or government. The Ford Foundation-funded consultation was the first in a series of six regional meetings to be held over 2008-09 as part of ORG's *Moving Towards Sustainable Security* programme.

In many ways, the Asian region has always defied definition, lacking clear geographical, political or ethnic boundaries, and in any case dividing the world up into regions and sub-regions can itself be an artificial geopolitical exercise. However, for the purposes of this report, "Asia and Australasia" is taken in a broad sense: from India in the west to Japan and some of the South Pacific islands in the east, and China in the north to Australia and New Zealand in the south. There will, however, be clear overlap with related countries that, rightly or wrongly, have been included in the other planned consultations, such as Pakistan, Russia and some of the Pacific Rim countries.

As each of the regional consultations take place, it is hoped that a set of coherent proposals may begin to emerge that can be fed directly into the policy-making processes in Europe and the US, as well as inform the development of regional security policies that can be promoted by partner organisations around the world.

2) SUSTAINABLE SECURITY

As in much of the world, the current security discourse in Asia and Australasia is dominated by what might be called the 'control paradigm': an approach based on the premise that insecurity can be controlled through military force or balance of power politics and containment, thus maintaining the status quo. The most obvious global example of this approach is the so-called 'war on terror', which essentially aims to 'keep the lid' on terrorism and insecurity, without addressing the root causes. Such approaches to national, regional and international security are deeply flawed – particularly if not complemented by diplomatic efforts – and are distracting the world's politicians from developing realistic and sustainable solutions to the non-traditional threats facing the world.

In contrast, this report explores an alternative approach, that of 'sustainable security'. The central premise of sustainable security is that you cannot successfully control all the consequences of

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insecurity, but must work to resolve the causes. In other words, 'fighting the symptoms' will not work, so policies must instead 'cure the disease'. Such a framework is based on **an integrated analysis of security threats and a preventative approach to responses.**

Sustainable security focuses on the interconnected, long-term drivers of insecurity, including:

- **Climate change:** Loss of infrastructure, resource scarcity and the mass displacement of peoples, leading to civil unrest, intercommunal violence and international instability.
- **Competition over resources:** Competition for increasingly scarce resources – including food, water and energy – especially from unstable parts of the world.
- **Marginalisation of the majority world:** Increasing socio-economic divisions and the political, economic and cultural marginalisation of the vast majority of the world's population.
- **Global militarisation:** The increased use of military force as a security measure and the further spread of military technologies (including CBRN weapons).

All of these trends are present in the Asian security dynamic, as demonstrated in the next section of this report. The sustainable security analysis makes a distinction between these trends and other security threats, which might instead be considered symptoms of the underlying causes and tend to be more localised and immediate (for example terrorism or organised crime). It promotes a comprehensive, systemic approach, taking into account the interaction of different trends which are generally analysed in isolation by others. It also places particular attention on how the current behaviour of international actors and western governments is contributing to, rather than reducing, insecurity.

Sustainable security goes beyond analysis of threats to the development of a framework for new security policies. It takes global justice and equity as the key requirements of any sustainable response, together with progress towards reform of the global systems of trade, aid and debt relief; a rapid move away from carbon-based economies; bold, visible and substantial steps towards nuclear disarmament (and the control of biological and chemical weapons); and a shift in defence spending to focus on the non-military elements of security. This takes into account the underlying structural problems in national and international systems, and the institutional changes that are needed to develop and implement effective solutions. It also links long-term global drivers to the immediate security pre-occupations of ordinary people at a local level (such as corruption or violent crime).

By aiming to cooperatively resolve the root causes of threats using the most effective means available, sustainable security is inherently preventative in that it addresses the likely causes of conflict and instability well before the ill-effects are felt. In doing so, it incorporates and builds upon many elements of previous important attempts to reframe thinking on security, including:

- **Common security:** Security is dependent on cooperation, demilitarisation and mutual trust.
- **Comprehensive security:** Security must go beyond military defence, and take into account the other social, environmental and economic issues that are vital to national stability.
- **Human security:** A people-centred, rather than state-centred, view of security is necessary for national, regional and global stability.
- **Just security:** Security is dependent on international institutions and the rule of law.
- **Non-traditional security:** Governments must move beyond defining security in terms of relationships among nation states and address newly developing trends and transnational security threats.

Many of these approaches have long been recognised and embraced by academics in Asia (particularly the amorphous concept of non-traditional security), though national security policies continue to be dominated by the 'control paradigm'.

3) DRIVERS OF INSECURITY

While there are many immediate security concerns in the region, there are perhaps three principal drivers of insecurity over the medium- to long-term:

- **Maintaining state integrity**
- **The regional power shift**
- **Environmental and humanitarian disasters**

a) Maintaining state integrity

Given the history of the region, it should hardly be surprising that so much of the energy of governments is focussed on maintaining national security and the integrity of the state. Much of this focus is the result of relatively recent struggles for independence from colonial powers, the events of World War II, the end of the Cold War, or the simple fact that they are trying to govern large areas of land with huge, and often diverse, populations (for example, China and India are the only two countries to have a population greater than one billion and together make up more than a third of the world's population). In the main this attention is focussed on maintaining internal stability; be it tackling separatist movements – such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the Southern Philippines, the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) in India, or the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka – or dealing with the violent consequences of socio-economic divisions – such as rural protests in China, the Maoist insurgency in Nepal or the Naxalite rebellion in India (incidents that are only set to worsen given the growing rich-poor divide in the region and the rise of a new middle class and super-rich elite). On the whole, the dominant approach to these issues has been one of police control and military confrontation. Such efforts are doomed to failure if they are not complemented by diplomacy, dialogue and attempts to address the root causes of the problem.

A related issue is the numerous border, territorial and sea disputes that the region is cursed with. Some of the most complex are the various competing claims over the South China Sea and its resources. China, Taiwan, the Philippines and Vietnam each claim almost all, or significant portions of, the South China Sea, and Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and Malaysia claim all, or parts of, the Gulf of Thailand. Perhaps the best known dispute is over the Spratly Islands, which are heavily contested due to their importance in establishing international borders and exclusive economic zones, and thus control over the area's resources (including oil reserves, natural gas fields and commercial fishing grounds). Although the potential for conflict is less so now than it was during the 1990s, some forty five or so of the islands are occupied by small military forces from China, Malaysia, Taiwan, the Philippines and Vietnam, and there have been occasional naval clashes in the area.

There are further border disputes involving military action between Thailand and Cambodia over the areas that surround the Preah Vihear and Ta Moan Thom temples; Burma and Thailand over a contested stretch of their border along the Moei River; and India and Pakistan over the disputed region of Kashmir. There are also the ongoing issues of China's annexation of Tibet, potential aggression towards Taiwan, and several outstanding disagreements with India. Such disputes are heavily tied to perceptions of national pride and protecting the sovereign integrity of the state. As such, they are at best a source of difficulties in bilateral relations that hamper efforts at regional integration, but the worse case scenario is that these flashpoints erupt into military confrontation. It should, however, be highlighted that some disputes have already been successfully mediated by the International Court of Justice – including between Indonesia and Malaysia and, more recently, Malaysia and Singapore – which suggests a potentially positive route to achieving sustainable security in the region.

b) The regional power shift

The economic downturn of recent months may aggravate some of these sources of insecurity, since economic growth in Asia has been a major factor in mitigating conflict. At the same time the region is experiencing a profound and dynamic power shift. For the first time, there are three great economic powers in the region: Japan, India and China. However, each of the three has its own problems, meaning it may be some time, if at all, before a regional hegemon emerges. Japan's standing is marred by history, and it is often pushed on the defensive by China and South Korea over its actions during WWII. India is held back by its poor relations with its neighbours – Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal – which is also weakening its economy, as they would be its natural trading partners. One of China's main weaknesses is its authoritarian and unaccountable regime and lack of transparency.

The rise of China, in particular, is viewed by many outside the region with suspicion, and the United States has resorted to a dangerous balance-of-power politics in encouraging Japan, India and Australia as potential counter-weights to Chinese regional dominance (China in turn has often supported Pakistan in its stand-off with India). While the US may remain the ultimate guarantor of security for many in the region for some time to come (particularly South Korea), it is undeniable that it is experiencing a relative decline in economic and military power at the same time as China is emerging as a potential regional and world power. The US is heavily bogged down in the Middle East with the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, and President Obama will have to focus much of his attention on the domestic economy. The exact implications of waning, though by no means finished, US influence in the region are not yet entirely clear. However, the shifting power dynamic is itself a potential source of uncertainty and instability; something neighbouring powers such as Russia are watching with interest.

This dynamic is particularly dangerous given the emerging, though largely unrecognised, Asian arms race. India and China are rapidly modernising their military forces and expanding their submarine building programmes as a means of giving weight to their rising international status and supporting their domestic industries. In addition, for perhaps the first time (other than with India-Pakistan) most of the region is experiencing an action-reaction dynamic, whereby military advancements and arms purchases by one country are closely followed by similar developments from its neighbours. This is particularly worrying for two reasons. Firstly, there is a complete lack of adequate regional arms control agreements or even forums where control and disarmament might be suitably discussed. Secondly, there are several nuclear weapon states either within or neighbouring the region – including China, India and North Korea, as well as Russia and Pakistan – and several nascent nuclear powers, including Japan, Iran and even Burma, which could have nuclear weapons within the next decade or so. In fact, worryingly, the wider region contains the highest concentration of nuclear powers in the world – at a time when the Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) is in urgent need of strengthening. In response to the North Korean nuclear weapons programme, the Six-Party Talks have been established with China, the United States, Japan, South Korea, Russia and North Korea. While some progress has been made, this process has also had the unintended effect of excluding many regional players from an increasingly important dialogue.

c) Environmental and humanitarian disasters

One of the most serious causes of instability must be the numerous environmental and humanitarian disasters to affect the region. In the last few years there have been three major environmental disasters in Asia: the December 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and resulting tsunamis which devastated coastal regions in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India and Thailand; the catastrophic destruction that Cyclone Nargis caused in Burma in May 2008; and the terrible earthquake and aftershocks that hit Sichuan province in China, also in May 2008. These three disasters alone caused nearly half a million deaths, with massive destruction to property and infrastructure that will take many years to fully recover from. But in addition to these well-known incidents, the region is hit by many smaller tropical storms, earthquakes, landslides and floods every year, each one killing hundreds and displacing many tens of thousands; incidents that

would grab the attention of western policy-makers and publics far more often should they occur in English-speaking countries.

Events such as these place massive demands on governments, creating internal instability and potentially leading to the displacement of peoples across borders, destabilising neighbouring countries. They are often made worse by poor governance and inadequate or slow responses, which can turn an environmental disaster into a humanitarian catastrophe. There has already been much comparison made of the differing responses of the Chinese and Burmese governments to the disasters mentioned above that struck each country in May 2008. The Chinese authorities were quick to put rescue plans into action and commit 130,000 troops to the affected region in a massive relief effort. Although the earthquake resulted in a huge loss of life, had the Chinese government response not been so prompt and efficient many more would have died. In contrast, the Burmese junta wavered: failing to recognise the scale of the emergency, heavily politicising the relief effort and, at first, refusing to accept foreign aid. It is likely that the junta's response caused the unnecessary deaths and suffering of many thousands of people.

Such disasters may occur more frequently as the region is affected by climate change over the coming decades. The latest findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) suggest that coastal areas will be at greatest risk due to more frequent tropical storms and increased flooding, particularly the heavily populated megadelta regions in South, East and Southeast Asia. They are also predicting a shift in rainfall patterns and a decrease in freshwater availability in most of Asia (particularly for those states dependent on Himalayan glacier melt water). In addition, serious food and water security problems can be expected in Australia and New Zealand within the next twenty years due to increased levels of drought. With Tuvalu and other Pacific islands set to completely disappear under rising sea levels and Bangladesh likely to lose a third of its land mass to flooding, perhaps the biggest problem for the region will be managing the huge numbers of environmental refugees that can be expected. While New Zealand has agreed to accept the Tuvaluan population once the island becomes uninhabitable (they are only accepting limited numbers of refugees in the meantime), the response from India has been to accelerate the building of a 2,500 mile security fence along its border with Bangladesh, a surely unsustainable measure. The problem of environmental refugees will hit Asia particularly hard and regional responses must be developed with some urgency.

4) BLOCKAGES TO CHANGE

Many of the drivers outlined above can be addressed and mechanisms put in place to resolve the long-term causes of insecurity in Asia and Australasia. However, there are three major, though not insurmountable, blockages to achieving such a change:

- **The regional focus on sovereignty and non-interference**
- **The lack of inclusive and effective regional security architecture**
- **The absence of a powerful but respected and neutral country to take the lead**

The regional obsession with sovereignty and non-interference, coupled with historical and ideological enmity between many countries, makes cooperative approaches difficult to achieve. Many of the post-colonial countries in the region are understandably reluctant to compromise their own sovereignty in any way, even if this creates difficulties in addressing pan-regional issues. Often the need to maintain national security takes precedence over achieving regional stability and global security. Furthermore, there are still many unresolved historical grievances, particularly from WWII (such as those between China and Japan), that make cooperation difficult and feed aggressive and unhelpful political rhetoric. There are also a range of political systems across the region, from the democracies of Japan and India, to the authoritarian regimes of Burma and North Korea, with many other shades in between. Those with similar political systems may often find it easier to work together, but the regions numerous historical differences and border disputes in no way make this a certainty.

This is made even more difficult by the lack of inclusive regional security architecture with the strength to effectively implement a new security agenda. Despite a plethora of regional institutions and forums, few include all the major regional powers (particularly China, India and Japan) and many are not set up to adequately address security issues. Asian integration and intra-regional cooperation would surely help attempts to address the long-term drivers of insecurity in the region. While the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) does encourage such regional communication and has been successful in many respects, its makeup is perhaps too localised to have any wider impact (despite the ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Security Community and ASEAN+3 processes) and is seriously hampered by the principle of non-interference mentioned above. This lack of effective security architecture means that policy responses to the identified drivers of insecurity will continue to be formed at the national level, even though regional cooperation is vital to address these sustainably.

While in many parts of the world a powerful but respected and neutral country can often be called upon to take the lead and put their moral weight and influence behind initiatives of change, it is very difficult to identify such a country in Asia and Australasia. New Zealand may have the neutrality, but demilitarisation has cost it any serious chance of being an influential player. Australia under Prime Minister Rudd may still take the initiative, but many feel his government has already lost much of the energy it came to power with only a year ago. India's poor relations with its neighbours in South Asia also make it an unlikely candidate. Some are asking whether China – as the major emerging economic power and a permanent member of the UN Security Council – might fulfil this role in future; but much will depend on whether Beijing can successfully manage the huge social changes and internal instability that they are experiencing as well as finally make their peace with Japan. China's lack of transparency also means it is viewed with suspicion by many key players in the region and further afield (despite its willingness to engage through multilateral institutions). It remains to be seen whether these hurdles can be overcome.

5) RECOMMENDATIONS

The blockages to change identified above must be urgently addressed in order to allow the development of mechanisms that will ensure the drivers outlined in this report do not develop into sources of insecurity and conflict over the medium- to long-term. Specific initiatives in four key areas include:

- 1) **Climate change:** China, India and other developing countries in the region who are not signatories to the Kyoto Protocol need to recognise that they too have a responsibility to stabilise then cut their greenhouse gas emissions and accept that economic development cannot come at the expense of social and environmental stability. In return, the US and other developed countries must negotiate a fair post-Kyoto agreement that includes radically reducing their own emissions.
- 2) **Regional architecture:** International institutions such as the UN and EU, and other influential players both within and outside the region, should support the development of a strong, inclusive regional security architecture and encourage such institutions to:
 - a. Seek negotiated settlements to outstanding territorial and historical disputes.
 - b. Develop mechanism and treaties for controlling the emerging Asian arms race.
 - c. Agree regional responses to the problem of environmental refugees.
- 3) **Power shift:** President Obama and the new US administration need to accept the rise of China and move from destabilising balance of power politics (designed to encourage India, Japan and Australia as counter-balances) to policies of engagement and trust-building, particularly in the areas of trade, environmental protection and regional security. At the same time, China can allay many suspicions by increasing its transparency and allowing the development of a free civil society (including the media and trade unions).

- 4) **Taking the initiative:** Given the lack of any powerful but respected and largely neutral country in the region, Asian civil society organisations might fill this void and draw together an independent high-level panel of respected individuals, including security experts and elder statesmen, to take the lead in promoting a sustainable security framework for Asia and Australasia, with a particular focus on preventative diplomacy and educating publics and governments on the seriousness of the threats the region faces.

Over the next 5-10 years, a radical shift towards sustainable approaches to security will be hugely important. If there is no change in thinking, security policies will continue to be based on the mistaken assumption that the status quo can be maintained: an elite minority can maintain its position, environmental problems can be marginalised, and the lid can be kept on dissent and insecurity. Alternatively, a change in thinking could lead to an era of substantial progress in developing a more socially just and environmentally sustainable regional order for Asia and Australasia.

APPENDIX) LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

The following experts participated in the ORG-SIIA Regional Sustainable Security Consultation for Asia and Australasia, held at SIIA House in Singapore, 10-12 September 2008. All the participants attended in a personal capacity and this report does not necessarily represent a consensus view or the view of any individual participant, organisation or government.

REGIONAL PARTICIPANTS

- **Professor Desmond Ball (Australia)**, Professor in the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at the Australian National University, Canberra, and former Co-chairman of the Steering Committee of the Council for Security Cooperation in Asia-Pacific (CSCAP).
- **Professor Carolina Hernandez (Philippines)**, Founding President of the Institute for Strategic and Development Studies and Member of the United Nations Secretary General's Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters.
- **Dr. Pradeep Jeganathan (Sri Lanka)**, Consultant Social Anthropologist and author who has held appointments and fellowships at the University of Minnesota, The New School, the University of Delhi and the International Center for Ethnic Studies.
- **Dr. Abdur Rob Khan (Bangladesh)**, Research Director and Head of the Non-traditional Security Studies Division at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies and recent Fulbright Fellow at the University of Pennsylvania.
- **Luan Thuy Duong (Vietnam)**, Deputy Director General of the Institute for Diplomatic and Strategic Studies and the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam, both part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Acting Director of the APEC Studies Center of Vietnam.
- **Ambassador Ma Zhengang (China)**, President of the China Institute of International Studies and former Vice-Minister of the Foreign Office of the State Council and Ambassador to the United Kingdom.
- **Professor Sorpong Peou (Cambodia/Japan)**, Professor of International Security at Sophia University, Tokyo, and author of *Human Security in East Asia: Challenges for Collaborative Action* (Routledge, 2008).
- **Dr. Rizal Sukma (Indonesia)**, Deputy Executive at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies and Chair of the International Relations Division of Muhammadiyah (the second largest Islamic organisation in Indonesia, with 25 million members).
- **Tan Sri Mohamed Jawhar (Malaysia)**, Chair and CEO of the Institute of Strategic and International Studies, Malaysia, and former Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Home Affairs and Principal Assistant Secretary in the National Security Council.
- **Dr. Tin Maung Maung Than (Burma/Singapore)**, Senior Fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and the Associate Editor of the ISEAS journal *Contemporary Southeast Asia* and the Series Editor of *ISEAS Working Papers*.
- **Dr. Lim Tai Wei (Singapore)**, Research Fellow of the East Asian Institute at the National University of Singapore, former SIIA Overseas Associate Fellow and author of *Oil in China: The Quest for Self-Reliance* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2008).

FACILITATORS

- **Chris Abbott (UK)**, Deputy Director of Oxford Research Group, Honorary Research Fellow of the Centre for Governance and International Affairs at the University of Bristol and lead author of *Beyond Terror: The Truth About the Real Threats to Our World* (Random House, 2007).
- **Dr. Hank Lim (Singapore)**, Director of Research at the Singapore Institute of International Affairs, the first Singapore Representative to the APEC Eminent Persons Group, and former Director of the Centre for Advanced Studies at the National University of Singapore.

- **Professor Simon Tay (Singapore)**, Chair of the Singapore Institute of International Affairs, Associate Professor of International Law and Public Policy at the National University of Singapore and former Visiting Professor at Harvard Law School and the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy.
- **Dr. John Sloboda (UK)**, Executive Director of Oxford Research Group, Honorary Professor in the School of Politics and International Relations at Royal Holloway, University of London and co-founder of Iraq Body Count.

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- **Sophie Marsden (UK)**, Intern and research assistant at Oxford Research Group.