



Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific

MEMORANDUM 2

ASIA PACIFIC CONFIDENCE AND SECURITY BUILDING MEASURES

Introduction

“CSCAP Memorandum No.1: The Security of the Asia Pacific Region”, issued in April 1994, highlighted the importance of regional confidence building measures as an “effective mechanism” to promote peace and security region wide. In an effort first to further define what type of measures are appropriate of the Asia Pacific region in the post-Cold War era, and then to promote their application, a CSCAP Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBMs) Working Group was established. What follows is a summation of many of the key points and insights that emerged during the first two meetings of the CSCAP CSBMs Working Group, in October 1994 and May 1995.

Defining CSBMs

Definitions of CSBMs vary, ranging from the very narrow (looking almost exclusively at military measures) to much broader interpretations encompassing almost anything that builds confidence. This report defines CSBMs as including both formal and informal measures, whether unilateral, bilateral, or multilateral, that address, prevent, or resolve uncertainties among states, including both military and political elements,. Such measures contribute to a reduction of uncertainty, misperception, and suspicion and thus help to reduce the possibility of incidental or accidental war. Measures focused primarily on economics, such as the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) dialogue, are not included, despite the realization that security broadly defined has an economic dimension and that economic mechanisms carry with them some confidence building and security implications.

It is also recognized that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations is, itself, a classic CSBM in the wider sense of the term. It has made an extremely important and valuable contribution to confidence building in the ASEAN sub-region and the lessons learned from the ASEAN experience could also be very relevant for CSBMs in the Asia Pacific as a whole.

General observations

During the Cold War, a broad variety of CSBMs were tried in a number of places, many successfully. The majority were aimed at managing the bi-polar contest between East and West and, when not negotiated between the US and the USSR, normally focused on the European region or, secondarily, on the Middle East. While such measures may not necessarily apply to a post Cold War Asia, an analysis of common denominators that have led to success or failure in the past may provide some lessons for the future.

Some general observations regarding past efforts follow:

- CSBMS cannot work in the absence of a desire on the part of participants to cooperate; they must be viewed in “win-win” not “win-lose” terms.
- CSBMs are most effective if they build upon or are guided by regional and global norms and are in tune with a region’s underlying political, economic, and cultural dynamism.
- Foreign models do not necessarily apply, especially if an attempt is made to impose them from outside the region.
- CSBMs are stepping stones or building blocks; they represent means toward an end.
- Military CSBMs, in particular, should have realistic, pragmatic, clearly-defined objectives and there should be common agreement as to what constitutes compliance and progress.
- Gradual, methodical, incremental approaches seem to work best.
- At least initially, the process may be as (or more) important than the product. However, over time, substantive issues must appear on the agenda; dialogue without a focused, defined purpose can be difficult to sustain and a waste of precious resources and effort.

Asia Pacific CSBMs

Several additional observations are in order when specifically discussing this region. First is the understanding that the Asia Pacific is not itself a homogeneous region, but rather consists of several sub regions (and sub-sub regions) that are different in many aspects from one another.

As a general rule, within the various Asian sub regions:

- there is a preference for informal structures and a tendency to place greater emphasis on personal relationships rather than on formal structures.
- consensus building is a key prerequisite.
- there is a general distrust of Western (especially European) “solutions”.
- there is a genuine commitment to the principle of non-interference in one another’s internal affairs which cannot be dismissed as a mere excuse to avoid living up to international commitments ... nor should it be used for this purpose.

It is also recognized that in a more interconnected world, a nation’s internal developments can have broader regional, and even international ramifications. Differences in interpretation over the external implications of internal events, and over approaches aimed at achieving, measuring, or guaranteeing universal basic rights persist, both between and within Asia Pacific sub regions.

Recommendations

The prospective CSBMs that follow are offered for consideration by regional policy makers. They are presented under four general headings – expand transparency measures, support global treaty regimes, build on existing cooperation, and develop new multilateral approaches – for ease of discussion, with the recognition that overlap exists among the groupings.

Expand transparency measures

Transparency measures represent convenient, low-risk methods for promoting confidence in the near term while laying the foundation for more ambitious programs to follow. Although transparency could in some circumstances contribute to instability, in general, greater transparency about military doctrine, capabilities, and intentions can provide reassurance and help build trust and confidence.

A wide variety of military transparency measures exist. These include direct military to military contacts, visits by military delegations, military personnel exchange programs, intelligence exchange, prior notification of military exercises, the opening of military exercises to international observers, greater openness regarding military budgets and defence planning and procurement, and the preparation of defence white papers or policy papers. Many have been, or could easily be initiated unilaterally or pursued on a bilateral or broader basis.

The development both of minimum standards of openness and of common definitions or uniform outlines for defence policy white papers, arms registries, statements or defence expenditures, and other transparency measures would enhance military transparency efforts. Both governmental and non-governmental organisations should also encourage and facilitate informed public debate on security issues.

In the interest of creating greater trust and understanding, there is also a need for greater dialogue on security issues both among the region's uniformed militaries and between the military and civilian communities. Greater uniformed military participation in security oriented dialogue would facilitate more informed debate and enhance the relevancy of end products, while also increasing the level of understanding between military officers and their civilian counterparts.

Once the regional utility of the UN Arms Register is examined and verified, the creation of a region-wide arms registry merits serious consideration, given the increased military expenditures among most of the region's nations and lingering suspicions about military capabilities and intentions. An Asian (or more inclusive Asia Pacific) Arms Registry could provide more detailed information and entail stricter reporting requirements than the current UN Register.

Support global treaty regimes

Endorsement by regional states of global arms control treaty regimes that limit or ban unconventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction could provide a measure of assurance that neighbouring states are not embarking on new programmes of strategic significance. Conversely, a failure to endorse or honour global mechanisms could demonstrate a lack of confidence in CSBMs in general and raise questions about regional willingness to embrace other such measures. As a result, Asia Pacific states should attach high priority to the support and implementation of global treaty regimes.

Broad-based Asia Pacific support for the recent indefinite extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is a positive step in this regard. All non-member states are encouraged to join and all nations, to include the nuclear weapons states, are urged to abide fully by the spirit and intent of the NPT. Other global activities or initiatives worth pursuing include measures to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention, the need to implement and enforce the Chemical Weapons Convention, the possible expansion of the Missile and Technology Control Regime into a global treaty, support for a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, universal endorsement of a nuclear "no first use" policies, and the enhancement of IAEA safeguard mechanisms.

Build on existing cooperation

Patterns and habits of practical cooperation already exist on a diverse set of security-related issues within the Asia Pacific. The possibility of building upon or expanding existing mechanisms should be vigorously explored.

The expansion of existing maritime cooperation efforts into a broad-based maritime safety and security regime show particular promise. One possible approach would be the multilateralisation of the old US-Soviet or recent Russian-Japanese Incidents at Sea agreements, perhaps broadened to include safety-at-sea measures as well. Measures to combat smuggling or piracy, to monitor pollution, or to provide common search and rescue or humanitarian relief capabilities should also be explored. (A separate CSCAP Working Group has been formed to examine the topic of maritime cooperation).

Support for nuclear weapons free zones should be seriously considered. The South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone (SPNFZ) proposal, as outlined in the Treaty of Rarotonga, is particularly noteworthy since the treaty accommodates the “right of transit” and “neither confirm nor deny” principles. The advantages of a nuclear weapons free Korean Peninsula seem self-evident; other Asia Pacific sub-regions may lend themselves to such zones as well, e.g. the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (SEA-NWFZ).

Mutual interests in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy also provide opportunities for multilateral cooperation, with early emphasis perhaps focuses on nuclear safety and regulatory issues. The 1994 Japan-ROK-Russia joint study on radioactive contamination in the North Pacific provides one working example of multilateral cooperation on nuclear safety-related issues.

Develop new multilateral approaches

The time does not appear opportune for the creation of new formalised governmental mechanisms to deal specifically with potential hotspots. Nonetheless, Indonesia’s on-going efforts to act as an “honest broker” in establishing an informal (track two) dialogue among all the various Spratly claimants should be supported and encouraged, and careful consideration should be given to the ROK Foreign Minister’s proposal at the 1994 ARF meeting for a Northeast Asia security dialogue. (A separate CSCAP Working Group is investigating possible security frameworks for this sub-region). Cautious, low-keyed approaches seem best when dealing with potentially volatile issues.

Proposals dealing with the establishment of comprehensive or cooperative security mechanisms for the Asia Pacific should also receive careful consideration, even if a NATO-like security arrangement is inappropriate for the region at the present time. (A separate CSCAP Working Group is investigating the concepts of cooperative security and comprehensive security and their possible relevance to, or significance for, the Asia Pacific region). The creation of a formal, comprehensive, region-wide transparency approach analogous to the former Conference on Security Cooperation in Europe is considered neither desirable nor feasible in the Asia Pacific.

How to proceed

Many confidence and security building measures, especially in the transparency area, can be initiated unilaterally and Asia Pacific governments are encouraged to pursue those measures consistent with their own security needs. Bilateral approaches have also been proven successful in the past and should continue, since they provide a useful model and a solid foundation upon which to build broader-based CSBMs. Improved military-to-military relations seem best handled, at least initially, on a bilateral basis and many regional problems can best (perhaps only) be solved bilaterally.

In the multilateral area, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) seems particularly well-suited to becoming the consolidating and validating instrument behind many security initiatives proposed by governments and NGOs in recent years. The ARF is both a political confidence building measure in its own right and a vehicle for examining and promoting Asia Pacific CSBMs. Its support of such ideas as the UN arms register, military transparency, and other confidence and security building measures should generate greater support for, and provide greater focus to, efforts at both the official and track two levels to develop innovative new measures for dealing with potentially sensitive regional security issues.

Progress may also be facilitated if better account is taken of developments at the global level – for example, at the UN Disarmament Commission – which have effectively “internationalised” certain broad principles in relation to confidence building and openness in military matters. In this regards, the UN-sponsored regional security dialogue activities (collectively referred to as the “Kathmandu process”) should be seen as a potentially important complement to other track two efforts. Attempts should be made to promote a mutually beneficial interaction between regional institutions and the UN in its “regional role”.

For its part, the CSCAP CSBM Working Group will continue its comprehensive analysis of several of the measures highlighted above. The Group will further investigate military transparency measures to determine which are most suitable to the Asia Pacific region, with particular focus on such measures as the preparation of defence policy white papers. The Group also urges fullest possible regional participation in the UN Arms Register.

Conclusions

CSBMs, if properly devised and executed, can promote peace and stability in the Asia Pacific. Regional states are encouraged to pursue immediately unilateral and bilateral measures that not only build trust and confidence in their own right but also help lay the foundation for broader-based regional or sub-regional multilateral cooperation. It is critical to focus our combined efforts on what is realistically feasible in the region rather than placing too much emphasis on the structural mechanisms of confidence and security building.

Multilateral organisations such as the ASEAN Regional Forum are encouraged to place CSBMs high on their future agenda and to endorse and promote the study of strategic or security issues on a multilateral basis. Both the ARF and its individual members, as well as other nations and territories throughout the Asia Pacific, are encouraged to support, provide input into, and otherwise participate in CSCAP Working Group activities and other NGO and official initiatives aimed at enhancing trust and confidence and promoting security-oriented dialogue in the Asia Pacific.