



1st Meeting of the CSCAP Study Group on Preventive Diplomacy: Promoting Prospects for Mediation and Peaceful Settlement of Disputes in the Asia Pacific

Prince Hotel, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

27-29 April 2015

Co-Chairs' Report

Introduction

This Study Group was approved by CSCAP in 2014 with an overall life-span of 12 months. The purposes of the Study Group and its intended output are here:

<http://www.cscap.org/index.php?page=towards-preventive-diplomacy>.

The Study Group itself follows a line of CSCAP activity that began as early as 1996 with examination of Confidence Building Measures and has progressed slowly ever since. This present activity meets an ARF call for greater understanding of what works and does not work in the Asia-Pacific and for the preparation of training material to assist the ARF in preparing its official for PD activity.

The co-chairs for this Study Group are CSCAP Malaysia, CSCAP EU, CSCAP Singapore and CSCAP New Zealand.

The Study Group's first meeting was held in Kuala Lumpur on 28-29 April 2015. The first meeting had two purposes: to address lessons from preventive diplomacy activity; and to identify gaps and a way forward. The first day examined case studies in intra and interstate tension in which preventive diplomacy processes had been used, either successfully or less than successfully. The second day considered the gaps exposed by the lessons and considered the way ahead for the Study Group.

The meeting reviewed the ARF's approach to PD, noting its relatively narrow definition and principles for applying it. It is an issue the SG may address in its next meeting

Lessons Learned

Case studies and examples were introduced by both presenters and discussants. The discussion was as much about failure as it was about success. In part this was because there is perhaps more to be learned from failure than success and in part because there is a perception that there has not been a lot of success in any case; a perception that is probably inaccurate and that will be examined systematically by the Study Group.

Reasons for failure include, in broad terms, the 'failure to act' and the 'failure of action'. In the first case there are fears of intervention; fears of cost; and an underestimation of the strength of the interests at stake. In the second case, there are examples of flawed analysis leading to counter-productive use of PD tools; of faulty assumptions being utilised; a lack of clear and coherent goals; and lack of understanding of a proper examination of other instruments. These may all be addressed with proper leadership, solid will to act and detailed analysis of specific situations.

In the cases of success the meeting noted that it was important that all relevant actors be involved in PD processes, the need for resilience in the processes and that there is no 'template solution' to resolving disputes and tensions between states. Instead, the framing of issues, the willingness to consider win-win rather than winner take all solutions and the ability to amend the approaches used according to changing situations were all important components.

Overall, the meeting concluded that although there are often no clear cut 'success' or 'failure' outcomes, there is an appetite for creative approaches to preventive diplomacy. These will include the understanding that there is no 'one size fits all' approach to PD solutions in specific situations. Equally,

however, the meeting noted that there will be times when preventive diplomacy will not be possible or will not be relevant.

Gaps in the PD Framework

The meeting discussed the gaps in the ARF preventive diplomacy framework, based on the discussion of cases on the first day. Gaps were identified in the broad concept of PD which, for good reasons, focuses on interstate differences but which thereby leaves a gap where intrastate issues affect the regional security environment. Although the gap was identified, there was no thought that the non-intervention approach to issues should be re-examined and no thought that the principles of national sovereignty and consent should not continue as central to regional approaches.

Three broad gaps in our understanding of the environment within which PD activities take place were identified. They were of the international environment; a range of new factors and actors operating within the environment; and consequently the need for new thinking about preventive diplomacy.

International Environment. The world has become increasingly interconnected and interdependent, with threats that transcend national borders and impact the security of all. This new global reality brings about new challenges, as well as opportunities, which need to be reflected in the way PD is understood, conceptualised and implemented. For this reason, the SG noted possible alternative interpretations of the concept of PD and aims at working towards a consensual vision for the ARF's future consideration.

New factors and actors. The emergence of new technologies, as well as new (non-state) actors on the IR scene have to be taken into consideration. A thorough analysis of the new circumstances is therefore necessary to understand all available tools and mechanisms that may not have been recognised. This process needs to be accompanied by targeted training and education in order to understand the utility of specific tools and their appropriateness for specific situations.

New thinking and proper use of the tools available. Finally, the SG highlighted the crucial need for a change of mindset - both at a governmental as well as individual level - so as to sustainable peaceful solutions and exclude the use of force for the settlement of disputes. Gaps were also identified between the range of tools available to policy makers and their use. It is important for regional stability that policy makers are aware of all instruments available to them and the advantages and disadvantages of them.

Way Ahead

The next meeting of the Study Group will probably be held in Singapore in November 2015. By the end of that meeting the Study Group intends that it will be in a position to:

- Develop lessons learnt from regional cases studies and how best to apply them;
- Suggest additional PD tools that should be available to policy-makers;
- Devise appropriate education and training material for future use of the ARF and its members; and
- Make suggestions of alternative approaches to PD mechanisms and their relations to the new environment