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The Contribution of Track Two Dialogue towards Crisis Prevention[1]

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The emergence of many think tanks and security-related track two processes in the Asia-Pacific during the last two decades has given rise to speculation about their contribution to the peaceful resolution of disputes and the search for strategies to address the manyfold nontraditional security threats caused by globalization and growing interdependencies. After placing track two dialogues in an basically institutionalist theoretical framework, the article briefly sketches the genesis and development of track two processes since the early 1980s. It then goes on to argue that security-related track two processes represent an innovative response to the region's security problems and helped to shape an Asian security identity. However, track two dialogues are far from being a panacea. They are plagued by a number of flaws such as their great proximity to government, lack of independence, a traditional, state-centric approach to international relations which is strongly informed by the realist paradigma and a certain degree of exclusiveness.

1 Introduction

Globalization, economic liberalization, and the concomitant growing interdependence have given rise to the emergence of new actors in international relations. International organizations and regimes as well as transnational actors such as multinational corporations and internationally organized NGOs are not only numerically proliferating as empirical evidence suggests (Kaiser 1969; Shanks et al. 1996), but also factually playing an increasingly prominent role in international politics. So visible have they become that liberal institutionalists see them seriously challenging the nation state as the main actor in international relations (Keohane/Nye 1989; Czempiel 1999). Accordingly, these new actors have ceased to be considered merely as dependent variables of international relations. There is growing recognition that they are well able to influence international relations as an independent variable.

Think tanks are part of this new set of transnational actors. While they have been a well known phenomenon in the United States already for a long time, they began to mushroom in Asia in the 1980s. Their rise went hand in hand with East and Southeast Asia's period of unprecedented rapid economic growth prior to the Asian Crisis. In many instances, the emergence of Asian think tanks was a product of moderniza-

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tion under the auspices of authoritarianism, an admission of military and civilian rulers alike that they have lost the capacity of handling the growing complexities of newly industrializing societies. It was a conservative and minimalist way of power sharing to preserve the economic miracle and, by coincidence, their legitimacy through the professionalization of government operations. Conservative and minimalist it was, because they delegated some advisory and recommendatory authority to a small group of persons whose only resource was technical and scientific knowledge in a specific and narrowly defined policy sector. These technocrats could hardly challenge authoritarian rule because they lacked a constituency of their own. Moreover, many of them with a decidedly elitist outlook firmly believed that popular participation in political decision-making was at variance with technical rationality and therefore had to be curtailed.

Think tanks proliferated in two policy sectors: The economic sphere and in the field of security. Both sectors, however, were closely intertwined. Economic growth – endowing East and Southeast Asia's authoritarian regimes with the "legitimacy of results" (Tay)[2] – was strongly dependent on a favorable international environment in which tension and armed conflicts were to be minimized or – still better – completely eradicated. Development was seen as the best remedy against communist insurgencies which at the time were still viewed as the most serious internal security threat. External and domestic stability were thus regarded as major prerequisites for the attraction of foreign investment on which the East and Southeast Asian growth model hinged.

The close relationship between economic growth and security called for a specific concept of security: a concept of cooperative and comprehensive security. Cooperative, because peace and an economically favorable international climate depend on congenial neighbors and, hence, joint efforts to address sources of interstate conflict, comprehensive, because economic growth was obviously interlinked with a great variety of social, cultural, and environmental issue-areas which were basically regarded as domestic risks. As a result, the need for a coordinated security policy became a major catalyst for the networking of think tanks on a regional scale. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, academics from the leading Southeast Asian thinks tanks had evolved into epistemic communities which have been defined by Peter M. Haas as "a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area" (Haas 1992:1).

In the process, this academic community became the backstop for an emerging track two diplomacy which gained increasing influence on the policy-making both in the economic as well in the security domain. The latter was designed by security thinkers in the region as an approach to discuss, analyze, and minimize the manyfold security risks of the postbipolar era in the Asia-Pacific. If the official government diplomacy has become known as track one, track two brought together think tank experts, diplomats, military officers, and politicians – the three latter all in an unoffi-

[2] See *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 1 September 2000 (Internet edition).

cial capacity. Track two was accorded the task to focus on issues too sensitive for official negotiations which, as a consequence, have been bracketed by track one. The nonofficial, informal, and to a certain degree confidential format of these meetings gives participants ample opportunity to discuss these issues frankly and free from fears that any party would be embarrassed in the process (Wanandi 1995). So long will issues be discussed, until a solution takes shape. At this point the issue will be swiftly transferred back to track one for final resolution (Rüland 1995; Johnston 1999:301). The Asian version of track two diplomacy thus deviates from North American and European connotations of the concept. The latter regard track two processes as only one among many tracks in a so-called multi-track diplomacy which much stronger than the Asian format relies on the mediatory roles of NGOs and other elements of civil society (Notter/McDonald 1996).

2 The Rise of Track Two in the Asia-Pacific

Track two processes in Asia first developed in the field of economic cooperation under the auspices of the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC). Founded in 1980, the PECC evolved into an international network of scholars, officials, and business representatives which is widely acclaimed as the precursor of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) (Hoshino 2000:274).

Security-related track two processes were spearheaded by the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS). Building on contacts among individual scholars and their institutions, ASEAN-ISIS was officially launched in 1988.[3] The main objective of ASEAN-ISIS, which is registered with the ASEAN Secretariat as an NGO, was to strengthen cooperation in the field of research on strategic and international problems. ASEAN-ISIS also organizes the prestiguous annual Asia-Pacific Round Table, which in the past was attended by more than 300 policy-makers, business leaders, and academics (Ball 1993:42).[4]

ASEAN-ISIS soon also became a key player in the establishment of a wider Asian-Pacific network known as the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP). CSCAP was organized "for the purpose of providing a structured process for regional confidence building and security cooperation among countries and territories in the Asia Pacific region".[5] Established in 1993, the founding members, apart from ASEAN-ISIS, were the Strategic and Defense Studies Center (SDSC) at the Australian National University, the University of Toronto-York Joint Center for

[3] The four founding institutes were the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Indonesia, the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS), Malaysia, the Singapore Institute for International Affairs (SIIA), and the Institute of Security and International Studies (ISIS), Thailand, complemented by an individual scholar from the Philippines who later became the director of the Institute of Security and Development Studies (ISDS). The Institute for International Relations (IIR), Vietnam, and the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP) joined in 1995 and 1997, respectively. See Kao Kim Hourn (2000:135).

[4] For a critical assessment of the Asia-Pacific Roundtable, see Dickens (2000).

[5] See CSCAP, The Charter of the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP), Article II: The Purpose and Functions of CSCAP, Kuala Lumpur 1993:9.

Asia Pacific Studies in Canada, the Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA), the Seoul Forum for International Affairs, and the Pacific Forum CSIS from the USA. CSCAP formed four working groups which undertake studies in the areas of Maritime Cooperation, Security Cooperation in the North Pacific/Northeast Asia, Comprehensive and Cooperative Security as well as Confidence and Security-Building Measures.[6] In the meantime CSCAP has expanded to twenty country member committees.[7]

A third major track two process was launched in the immediate aftermath of the first summit of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) held in Bangkok in March 1996. Formed in June 1996 by twelve European and Asian institutes,[8] the main purpose of the Council of Asia-Europe Cooperation (CAEC) is "to encourage and facilitate greater cooperation among Asian and European intellectuals and policy specialists in order to enhance discussions about the future direction of Asia-Europe relations" (Japan Center for International Exchange, n.d.). Subsequently, CAEC task forces studied ASEM's functional and institutional contributions to global governance or discussed more specifically security-related topics.

Apart from these major track two dialogues a plethora of other, frequently overlapping track two meetings emerged. Some of them such as the meetings in Venice (1995) and Manila (1996) were partly funded and organized by the EU, others by governments or foundations such as Germany's political foundations, the Herbert Quandt Foundation in Munich; the Asia Foundation and, with increasing frequency,

3 Track Two and Crisis Prevention

After having briefly sketched the genesis and the key actors of the track two processes in the Asia-Pacific region and between Asia and Europe, this section seeks to assess the performance of track two toward crisis prevention. All in all, preempting the answer, security-related track two processes represent an innovative response to the region's security problems and at the same time helped shape an Asian security identity.[9] However, while they had their merits, they did not match the high, sometimes exaggarated, expectations placed on them, although they did better than the economic track two. A few examples may illustrate this.

One of the avowed objectives of security-related track two processes in the Asia-Pacific region is the prevention of armed interstate conflict through reducing uncertainties and threat perceptions. Paramount among these uncertainties, which helped to generate track two, was the transition from the old bipolar to a new, still unknown, world (dis-)order. Salient among the sources of post-Cold War uncertainties was the reduction of American military presence in Asia which, many feared, would create a power vacuum in the region. This was seen as facilitating the rise of new regional powers with suspected hegemonial ambitions such as China, India, and Japan. Many states in the region responded to these developments by deftly increasing defence spending, thereby creating the spectre of an arms race.

Viewed against this background, the ASEAN-ISIS track two dialogue must be credited for keeping the region's emerging security dilemma manageable. ASEAN-ISIS has successfully lobbied Southeast Asian and other governments in the Asia-Pacific to accede to the *Treaty of Amity and Cooperation* (TAC) which may be regarded as a Southeast Asian *Magna Charta* for the peaceful settlement of disputes.[10]

Although the proposal to create a Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (SEANWFZ) dates back to the mid-1980s and hence cannot in the first place be attributed to track two dialogues, after its formation ASEAN-ISIS persistently pushed for its realization. In 1995, ASEAN's Fifth Summit held in Bangkok finally launched the SEANWFZ to which all ten Southeast Asian nations acceded. Unfortunately, however, track two was unable to convince the five officially recognized nuclear powers to sign a protocol of accession.

Similarly important, ASEAN-ISIS was also instrumental in launching the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which now constitutes the framework for a fledgling multilateral security architecture where previously had only been bilateral alliances. A memorandum prepared by ASEAN-ISIS in 1991 for the Fourth ASEAN Summit in Singapore (1992), called for the establishment of an Asia-Pacific Political Dialogue, which – supported by similar initiatives from Canada and Japan – was adopted by ASEAN leaders and paved the way for a decision made at the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM) in Singapore in 1993 to establish ARF (Ball 1993:41; Kerr

[9] Such a conclusion may be drawn from assessments such as Desmond Ball's who argued that "the importance of the track-two process to the new CSBM activity is distinctively Asian". See Ball (1994:173).

[10] For details, see Haenggi (1992).

1994:402)). The first ARF meeting was held as part of the annual AMM Postministerial Conferences (PMC) in Bangkok in 1994. Since then, the ARF met regularly every year after the AMM. The Forum was further strengthened by the creation of an intersessional Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) which was entrusted with preparing and implementing decisions of the ARF (Ball 1993:41; Kerr 1994:397; Nesadurai/Stone 2000a:26). CSCAP, for its part, was paving the way for engaging seclusive North Korea which first participated in CSCAP's North Pacific/Northeast Asia working group before becoming a member of the ARF in 2000 (Hoshino 2000:282).

Although the ARF proposal replaced earlier Canadian and Australian initiatives for the establishment of a Conference for Security and Cooperation in Asia (CSCA), a security regime to be patterned after the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) (Uhe 1996), ARF nevertheless adopted key components of the European security regime. Among them were confidence building measures,[11] preventive diplomacy and moves to establish an Asian arms register. In the process, Defence White Books were published by a number of countries, military maneuvers announced in advance and intentions declared to contribute to the arms register. Yet, while these moves to some extent enhanced the transparency of military strategies and defence policies, many of them had a placebo effect at best. The White Books, for instance, were of limited value as for the most part they were little more than statements of well known facts and figures. In most cases – though China is usually singled out in this respect – they provided hardly any deeper insights into the country's arms modernization and defence expenditures, which remained open to guess even for well-informed defence analysts. Moreover, Asian track two dialogues did little to address the enormous rise in the region's defence spendings. Military acquisitions – even of a power projecting and, hence, offensive quality – were usually downplayed to mere acts of defence modernization. Dangers that the purchases of military hardware could escalate into an arms race were in most cases flatly denied. Unlike in Europe, few voices lobbying for disarmament were heard from inside the track two dialogues.

In other areas, too, track two failed to substantially reduce uncertainties. That Asian governments distanced themselves from proposals for a CSCA may in the first place be attributed to the pivotal role democracy and human rights played in Basket One of the *Helsinki Declaration* (von Bredow 1991:58), which – not only in Asia – was widely interpreted as a factor facilitating the implosion of the socialist bloc. Adopting such norms was seen as seriously undermining national sovereignty, thereby subjecting Asian countries to interferences into their internal affairs. Moreover, these norms were at variance with the "Asian Way" – a relativist and essentialist response to Western conditionality. It may be noted here only incidentally that ASEAN-ISIS has been a prime mover behind these exercises of identity-building. Cooperative security as propagated by the region's track two dialogues may thus be characterized as the CSCE's tool kit minus the normative substance.

[11] Proposed were bilateral military exercises, exchange visits and training programs of military officers, exchange of intelligence information, and the notification of forthcoming military exercises.

While it was undeniable that ASEAN-ISIS gained tangible influence on ASEAN governments – perhaps most adequately represented by the fact that since 1993 ASEAN-ISIS delegations annually met with ASEAN's Senior Officials prior to the AMM – its impact on the region's other lingering problems was less clear. Although ASEAN-ISIS consistently discussed the conflicting maritime claims in the potentially resource-rich South China Sea, in more than a decade it has not brought the issue closer to a solution. Neither has CSCAP. Yet, members of both networks are supporting – and, in fact, are involved in – a series of informal *Workshops on Managing Potential Conflicts in the South China Sea* organized in tandem by the Indonesian government and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) which in more than ten meetings has discussed a wide range of maritime topics, but conspicuously eluded the key political and jurisdictional issues. Although early workshop resolutions may be regarded as a precursor of ASEAN's *Declaration of the South China Sea* (1992) (Busse 2000:175), neither the workshops, nor ASEAN-ISIS, nor CSCAP initiatives have so far succeeded in extracting from China (and, by coincidence, ASEAN members as well) an unambiguous commitment to the acceptance of a *Code of Conduct*. Consequently, the ongoing talks at various levels notwithstanding, claimants have not abstained from unilateral actions which heighten tensions in the region.[12]

Viewed through the lense of an European observer it must appear that the strengths of Asia's track two dialogues undoubtedly lay in the area of preventing and defusing interstate conflicts. Yet, it is a well known fact that armed interstate conflicts have been of declining frequency. Instead, the post-World War II period saw the rise of violent domestic conflict.[13] Much of this conflict has its roots in ethnic, religious, and linguistic grievances. The September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center's twin towers and the Pentagon have tragically but unequivocally highlighted another, though not entirely new danger – the threats emanating from transnationally organized terrorism. While Asia – in consonance with the rest of the world – has virtually been unprepared to deal with the latter threat, Asian track two dialogues also did little to address the region's internal rebellions and thereby have, at least to some extent, unwittingly helped to compound the latter problem. Addressing the numerous insurgencies in ASEAN member countries was anathema for the track two dialogues, as they too adopted the track one *mantra* that these conflicts constitute internal affairs and their discussion would be a violation of ASEAN's sacred principle of noninterference. NGO conferences on East Timor organized in Manila, Bangkok, and Kuala Lumpur in the second half of the 1990s were obstructed by the governments of the host countries upon Indonesian insistence. Participants were harrassed by security forces and in one case even by mobilized mobs. It is thus hardly surprising that ASEAN as a regional organization was unable to formulate a collective

[12] For a more optimistic assessment of the norm-building effects of ARF and the South China Sea workshops see Busse (200:172-180).

[13] Asian security experts did not seem to concur with this assessment. An ASEAN-ISIS memorandum, for instance, states that internal disturbances have dramatically declined if not definitely arrested. The main security challenge consists in defence of their (ASEAN countries, J.R.) territories including their exclusive economic zones (EEZs). See ASEAN-ISIS (1993:9).

response to the East Timor crisis unfolding in 1999. ASEAN's silence – which must basically be attributed to its unresolved debate over the noninterference principle – left leadership of the intervening international peace force with Australia, a problematic choice if taking into account the sensitive hate-love relationship between Indonesia and Australia. The laudable participation of large Philippine and Thai Interfet and UNTAET-contingents mitigated,[14] but could not repair the damage done for the reputation of ASEAN as a regional peace broker.

In line with their comprehensive security concept, ASEAN-ISIS, the Asia-Pacific Roundtable as well as CSCAP have been busily addressing so-called nonconventional security threats. Annual seminars on human rights, and occasional conferences on democratization, international migration, environmental problems, desaster relief, transnational crime, and social security are among the topics discussed.[15] This shows that the close interrelationship between these issues areas, on the one hand, and security and economic development, on the other, has been recognized by the policy communities of the Asia-Pacific. In the ASEAN case, this has facilitated in good functionalist fashion the establishment of functional cooperation. Yet, while track two dialogues may have enhanced consciousness for these problems, generated new ideas and served as agenda-setters, they have had little impact towards crisis prevention. Although individual ASEAN members such as the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia have set up human rights commissions, there is – frequent calls for it notwithstanding – no such body at the ASEAN level (Timmermann 2001).[16] Track two concerns over Burma's accession to ASEAN were ignored by policymakers as was the ASEAN-ISIS memorandum on the Cambodian coup in 1997. Similarly, track two dialogues could neither prevent the desastrous forest fires in Indonesia and the haze in many parts of the region, nor were they able to delineate workable strategies to decisively combat the problem. ASEAN's functional cooperation – albeit elevated to a priority in 1995 – has never received the same attention as "high politics" and economic issues. Moreover, many of ASEAN's modest activities in this area are overly dependent on external funding.

Economic development has likewise been a persistent topic of Asian track two dialogues which could draw from earlier dialogue networks such as the Pacific Trade and Development Conference (PAFTAD) and the Pacific Economic Cooperation Conference (PECC) (Ball 1994:169). It would certainly be unfair to blame participants for failing to predict the collapse of several Asian currencies in 1997 and the subsequent Asian economic crisis. Virtually nobody has, calling into question the prognostic capacities of social scientists and economists.[17] The perhaps only excep-

[14] Interfet is the International Force on East Timor, UNTAET the United Nations Transitional Authority for East Timor.

[15] See, for instance, Regional Security Dialogue: A Calendar of Asia-Pacific Events, January-December 1998 and January-December 1999 (http://aus-cscap.anu.edu.au/calendar98.htm).

[16] The topic was inconclusively treated at the 34th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Hanoi, see Joint Communique of the 34th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, Hanoi, 23-24 July 2001.

[17] As happened during the conference *"Asien: Zum Wandel verdammt – Wege aus der Krise"*, organized by the German Association for Asian Studies, The Institute of Asian Affairs Hamburg, on 20 November 1998 in Bonn.

tion was American economist Paul Krugman, although his famous *Foreign Affairs* article forecasting the slowing down of Asia's economic growth rested on arguments different from those causing the collapse. Yet, while Krugman – as he himself maintained – was 10 percent right, think tank economists in the Asia-Pacific region (and, of course, elsewhere, too) were 150 percent wrong.[18] The great majority of them was unable or unwilling to read the signs on the wall such as high current account deficits, mounting foreign debt and a sluggish export performance. Educated in the United States, many of them were – and still are – unpertubed adherents of a neoliberal growth model, which they saw thriving on the economic virtues of the Asian value hypothesis. As the Asian value hypothesis was a deliberate attempt to construct a distinct Southeast and East Asian regional identity, few Asian scholars were prepared to admit publicly the contradictions between an intransparent, because highly personalized, patronage-driven political culture, and the neoliberal agenda which needs a certain degree of predictability, good governance, and rule of law. Critical voices refusing to consent with the all too familiar euphemisms portraying corruption and nepotism as personalism, pragmatism and flexibility, and warning of the widening social disparities and regional imbalances were branded as mavericks rocking the boat. When the crisis finally struck, it became very obvious that Asia's think tanks and track two dialogues had failed to develop contingency plans to deal with a major recession. This is surprising as some Southeast Asian countries had already gone through a short, yet painful recession in the mid-1980s. Evidence for this was the fact that, in the ASEAN track two dialogues as well in ASEAN ministerial rounds, monetary issues had played an absolutely subordinate role. The hubris displayed by some public figures during the boom years and the firm belief that the 21st century would be the "Pacific Century" and witness "Asia's rise to the sun" (Mahbubani 1993) left virtually no room for the discussion of more austere scenarios.[19] Political decision makers as well as the epistemic communities have thus ignored a well-known aphorism of ancient Chinese strategic thinker Sun Tzu: "To rely on rustics and not prepare is the greatest of crimes; to be prepared beforehand for any contingency is the greatest of virtues."[20]

The Asian-European policy networks, which beyond a somewhat bumpy political dialogue, also chiefly centered on economic relations likewise did little to prevent the crisis. One may even argue that the Asian-European dialogue has accelerated the unfolding of the crisis. It induced European banks and other investors, who as latecomers felt they were losing out in the race for a foothold in the world's economically most dynamic region, to indiscriminately step up investments. The race to Asia's markets resulted in less than prudent investment decisions as investors teamed up with dubious partners and channelled large amounts of money into intransparent projects. On the eve of the crisis, European banks were more exposed to nonper-

[18] Quoted from Rüdiger Machetzki's lecture at the conference *"Asien: Zum Wandel verdammt – Wege aus der Krise"*, organized by the German Association for Asian Studies, The Institute of Asian Affairs Hamburg, on 20 November 1998 in Bonn.

[19] For a more positive evaluation of Asian multilateralism to crisis management, see Harris (2000).

[20] Quoted from Ball (1994:173).

forming loans than their competitors from North America and even Japan. As a result, when the crisis struck, panicking European bankers feverishly struggled to pull out their investments from the region, thereby only exacerbating the downward spiral. CAEC, as most think tanks and track two networks, also responded belately to the crisis. A steering committee meeting in November 1997 decided to set up a task force on the "Changes in the Global Financial System" – half a year after the crisis erupted. Moreover, none of CAEC's task forces addressed the social security issue. This is surprising, as the crisis has tragically exposed the lack of social security networks in Asia, ASEM in cooperation with the World Bank had set up a trust fund to study social security systems and Europe has to offer considerable expertise in this domain.

4 Conclusion

Summing up, there is no doubt that the track two dialogues enhanced the consciousness of decision-makers and the wider public for a broad range of policy issues in the region which – if left unattended – have the capacity to evolve into serious crises. But there is also no doubt that except for the area of "high politics", track two dialogues did not meet the high expectations as a mechanism towards crisis prevention. They have not effected paradigmatic changes in the region's strategic thinking and their role as "propellers of policy learning" (Nesadurai/Stone 2000b:183) must be placed in proper perspective. In fact, track two dialogues are no panacea were track one failed. Much depends on the framework under which they operate. Yet, in this regard several constraints must be discussed.

Undeniably most track two participants were renowned experts in their domain. However, taking into account the authoritarian origins of think tanks and track two meetings, the issue of autonomy inevitably emerges (Kraft 2000). Most think tank scholars and other track two participants, even though attending in an unofficial capacity, are closely affiliated with their governments. While this does not necessarily mean "self-censorship" as maintained by Pauline Kerr (1994:400), it is nevertheless true that there were limits to the scope of experimentation with reformist ideas. Yet, it should not be overlooked that in the aftermath of the Asian Crisis and the concomitant intensified democratization in some ASEAN countries track two dialogues have also developed a more open, more pluralist, and more discoursive format.

This proximity to government circles may explain, why track two dialogues still stand for a conservative, essentially state-centric approach to security (Kraft 2000). The cooperative security rhetorics of the dialogues which seemingly pave the way for institutionalist policies such as preventive diplomacy and confidence building measures are frequently exposed as a thin layer cast over deeply entrenched realist thinking. As a result, eminent realist concepts such as "balancing" and "power" still permeate track two dialogues (Cheeseman 1999:335). In classical realist tradition, military power is still viewed by many as the resource most able to influence the outcome in other issue areas as well. Institutionalist policies are further inhibited by the norms of the "ASEAN Way" which eschews institution-

fers relationship building (Ba 1997). The primacy of sovereign statehood tallies well with an intergovernmental concept of cooperation and "à la carte multilateralism"[21] targetted toward the enhancement of national power.[22] More advanced concepts of sovereignty pooling and supranational cooperation, however, have been anathema to this discourse (Rüland 2000). Accordingly, track two discourses have been unable to prevent governments from resorting to unilateralist moves whenever such exit-behavior seemed to pay off for them. This failure became most evident during the Asian Crisis, when ASEAN as a regional organization did not even attempt to formulate a common position vis-à-vis the IMF in the negotiations over the bail out packages. Disunity in times of crisis sets a bad precedent for future cooperation. Even though persistently denied by high-ranking ASEAN spokesmen there is no question that since then the grouping is in serious disarray.

The strong involvement of government officials is not only making a fiction out of the nonofficial nature of track two dialogues, it is also creating new orthodoxies to which bureaucaries tenaciously cling. Based on my own observations, diplomats are particularly cautious and averse to bold brainstorming, even if operating under the protection of Chatham House rules. Discussions are thus rarely the frank discourse as which they are advertised by organizers. There is still the tendency – well known from track one – to avoid controversial exchanges of opinion, to resort to euphemisms, indulge in self-congratulatory rhetorics and to sweep problems under the carpet. This holds true for Asian and European diplomats alike. Consequently, as a rule of thumb, it may take two to three years to convince them that ossified, often essentialist formulas maintained for the sake of political correctness need to be adjusted to changing political realities.

It has also been rightly criticized repeatedly that track two dialogues in the Asia-Pacific have failed to incorporate the NGO community and other representatives of civil society (Kerr 1994:399). Although the problem has been acknowledged and is tackled with the establishment of the ASEAN People's Assembly (APA), track two dialogues by and large have not been able to serve as a bridge between the authorities and the activist NGO networks known as track three. Neither have track two meetings been able to bridge the generational gap. Participant observation in Asian-European track two meetings suggests that younger ASEAN scholars take a more critical view of the orthodoxies of ASEAN cooperation and are less inclined to be remote-controlled by their governments. "Track two meetings are noted for the great regularity with which certain people are invited to different meetings while others are excluded", writes Herman Joseph Kraft, calling track two an "exclusivist club" (Kraft 2000:349). His criticism not only reflects a lack of inclusiveness,[23] but also a lack of diversification of think tanks in the region. While in the West think tanks specialize along sectoral lines as a response to the growing complexity of policy matters, in Southeast Asia ASEAN-ISIS dominates most themes. The contribution

[21] For this term, see James A. Goody: "Asia Needs a Common Defence", in: *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 11 October 2001, p. 40.

[22] This, at least is the substance of concepts such as national and regional resilience.

[23] See also Dosch (1997:95).

made by the recycling of conventional wisdom to the enhancement of knowledge, is limited.

These deficiencies, however, must be weighed against the continuity provided by ASEAN-ISIS and CSCAP. Their member institutes are a stabilizing factor especially in countries with a clientelist political culture such as the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, and – to a lesser extent – South Korea. While governments come and go, usually reshuffling the upper echelons of the bureaucracy, the ASEAN-ISIS remain in place serving as an "institutional memory" (Kerr 1994:399) and providing badly needed expertise to the novices in the cabinet and the bureaucracy.

While, based of the foregoing analysis, there is ample room for discussing reforms of the track two, the crux is the political will of governments to adopt the advice provided by the policy community. Yet, given a foreign policy establishment that is still exposed to the strong influence of the military in many Asian countries and a historically and culturally deeply entrenched distrust toward the outside world, it must be suspected that think tanks and track two processes in the Asia-Pacific will fight an uphill battle toward a truly cooperative security concept for a long time to come.

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