

## **A Survey of Security System Reform in Asia-Pacific**

Dipankar Banerjee and Mallika Joseph

## About this survey

The security environment in Asia has undergone a dramatic transformation in the last quarter of a century. Authoritarian dictatorships and one party rule have given way in a large number of countries to multi-party democracy. Yet security system governance remains woefully weak in almost all countries across the region. Old security paradigms still predominate with the result that security reform processes tend to focus narrowly on the military and are not always consistent with improving governance. This survey, commissioned by the OECD-DAC, found that the concept of SSR finds no place in security discourses in the Asia region. However, while the term 'SSR' may be alien, the concerns are not. Non-traditional security issues such as trafficking in drugs and weapons, refugees, the environment, and governance problems are increasingly coming to be seen as major security issues in their own right that concern the general population.

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# CSDG Papers

Number 4 ■ May 2005

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# Summary

The security environment in Asia has undergone a dramatic transformation in the last quarter of a century. Authoritarian dictatorships and one party rule have given way in a large number of countries to multi-party democracy. Yet security system governance remains woefully weak in almost all countries across the region. Old security paradigms still predominate with the result that security reform processes tend to focus narrowly on the military and are not always consistent with improving governance.

The survey<sup>1</sup> found that the concept of SSR, as defined by the OECD-DAC, finds no place in security discourses in the Asia region. This is the case both at a governmental level, and among the academic and policy communities. However, the survey also found that while the term 'SSR' may be alien, the concerns are not. Non-traditional security issues such as trafficking in drugs and weapons, refugees, the environment, and governance problems are increasingly coming to be seen as major security issues in their own right that concern the general population.

The key priority for SSR in Asia is to foster an understanding of the need for more integrated and wide-ranging concepts of security that address human development concerns. The survey confirms the impact made by external actors, including multilateral development agencies, donor governments, and non-governmental organizations in getting this issue on government reform agendas. Yet donors themselves still lack a common approach to SSR in the region. This has made it more difficult for partner countries to develop new institutional frameworks that will allow for traditional and non-traditional security concerns to be addressed in a more integrated manner.

The events of 11 September 2001 have had a mixed impact in the region: while they have set in motion some positive changes in countries like Afghanistan, where attempts are being made to reconstruct the state security apparatus, in others the state has assumed more power and fragile civil society voices are being stifled under programmes for countering terrorism. There is a risk that recent progress in developing may be reversed in some countries if external engagement is not sustained.

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<sup>1</sup> This survey was managed by the Conflict, Security and Development Group (CSDG) at King's College London ([www.securityanddevelopment.org](http://www.securityanddevelopment.org)). For further information on the methodology for the survey, the key findings, and the implications for donors, see *CSDG Papers* No. 2, *A Global Survey of Security System Reform*, by D. Hendrickson.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction<sup>23</sup>

This chapter presents the findings of a survey of security system reform (SSR) in Asia that was conducted during 2002-03. The survey covered 26 countries across four sub-regions of Asia: Central Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Asia-Pacific.<sup>4</sup>

The Asian countries covered in this study straddle half the globe and include about thirty percent of the world's population. An enormous diversity is encompassed within this spread of countries: from India, with armed forces numbering about a million and a quarter, to the newly emerged Timor-Leste, with a population of less than half a million and a barely formed military. Against this backdrop no simple categorisation of SSR is possible. While the SSR concept is new to the region, the democratic and developmental principles which underpin this policy agenda are receiving greater attention within the context of wider state reforms. Within the security system, however, old security paradigms still predominate with the result that security reform processes tend to focus narrowly on the military and are not always consistent with improving governance.

This chapter is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 examines the availability of information on SSR issues in Asia.<sup>5</sup>
- Chapter 3 examines the context for SSR in Asia, highlighting the factors that have put security on government reform agendas.
- Chapter 4 focuses on how 'security' is defined in the region, and contrasts this with the OECD-DAC SSR concept.
- Chapter 5 assesses the status of SSR in Asia, highlighting key factors that are necessary to understand current trends in this region.

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<sup>2</sup> The Asia survey was carried out by the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS) in New Delhi, India. The team was led by Maj. Gen. Dipankar Banerjee and included Mallika Joseph, Suba Chandran, Paolienlal Haokip and N. Manoharan. Maj. Gen. Banerjee and Mallika Joseph are the authors of this report.

<sup>3</sup> This paper was first published by the OECD-DAC as part of a report entitled *Security System Reform and Governance*, DAC Guidelines and Reference Series, Paris 2005.

<sup>4</sup> The countries covered in Asia-Pacific were: Bougainville, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands; Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan; South Asia: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka; Southeast Asia: Brunei, Cambodia, East Timor, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. A number of countries were omitted from the survey: Japan and South Korea, which are OECD countries; China, North Korea, Mongolia, the Maldives, Bhutan, and most of the Pacific island territories, where external involvement in SSR is limited.

<sup>5</sup> Annex B provides a bibliography of selected publications on SSR in Asia.

# Chapter 2

## Information availability

Information was gathered from a variety of sources including: the internet, research institutions in the Asia region, participation in regional conferences on security matters, interviews with government officials and members of security establishments, and a range of governmental, inter-governmental, and non-governmental institutions.<sup>6</sup> The Delhi Library Network and the collections at the Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS), New Delhi were particularly useful. The survey also drew upon the country-specific expertise of the team members.

The largest obstacle to data collection was the general lack of quality information on SSR which is a new concept in the Asia region. While there is a wealth of security-related information on issues ranging from more traditional security matters such as defence and policing to wider 'human security' challenges that include environmental security, trafficking in humans, HIV/AIDs, etc., there is little systematic analysis of these issues from a governance perspective. This survey was therefore pioneering in its effort to bring together a disparate body of information on the topic in a manner that bridges 'hard' and 'soft' security issues. In the absence of an established governmental and academic discourse on SSR, the OECD-DAC definition was the point of reference for the research.

In the Central Asian societies, in particular, which have long been closed to outside scrutiny, the data collected was predominantly from external sources. Across Asia in general, care had to be exercised in processing data as few governmental sources offer a critical assessment of security matters. In South Asia, the primary source of information was news portals and magazines though the annual reports produced by various Indian ministries, including Defence and External Affairs, were useful. In Southeast Asia, none of the government portals provided relevant information, with the exception of Cambodia's; and even here the

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6 These include, for example, the Centre for Policy Alternatives, Colombo (<http://www.cpalanka.org>); the Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad; and the Foundation for Research on International Environment, National Development and Security, Rawalpindi (<http://www.friends.org.pk>).

information pertains only to 'demilitarization'. Another useful source of information on Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands was donor websites, though few provided critical assessments of their activities.

In general, across Asia, there appears to be a correlation between the form of government and the availability of information on security issues: democratic countries tend to be more transparent about their reform activities; there is generally much less information available in countries with authoritarian regimes, with the exception of what is provided by official sources which is difficult to cross-check and verify. The absence of a common language of 'security' across the region further hampers efforts to increase openness and debate.

# Chapter 3

## Context for SSR

Three broad developments have impacted upon the environment for SSR in Asia in recent years. Starting in the 1990s the traditional state-centric realist paradigm of security was challenged by new approaches emphasising human security and cooperative security. Attention increasingly turned to a new range of non-traditional security threats such as environmental degradation, population movements, trafficking in people, drugs and arms, shortages of energy resources, and the harmful impact of globalization on marginalised groups. This has served to broaden the security agenda and focus greater attention both on governance issues and the role of civilians in security policy processes. Human rights and development issues have slowly come to be seen as important security issues in their own right even as the capacity of governments to meet development challenges has been declining.

This trend towards broader, non-military notions of security was strengthened in some ways by the economic downturn that struck the region in the autumn of 1997, affecting Southeast Asia in particular. This crisis not only exposed the vulnerabilities facing many segments of Asia's population, but also led to reductions in defence spending in many countries, slowing down new acquisitions as well as exerting pressure on force levels in regional armies. The dependence of many Asian countries on international assistance to bail out their failing economies gave external institutions leverage over national policies and defence expenditures which have long been seen as squeezing out social and economic spending. This, in turn, resulted in increased pressures for accountability and transparency among security institutions, and adherence to human rights norms.

However, the trend towards broader notions of security suffered a major setback after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 in New York and the onset of the global 'war on terror'. In many Asian countries terrorism has now come to be seen as the principal security challenge facing the state and its population. This has adversely affected the climate for SSR as state-centric realist paradigms of security have begun to reassert themselves in security planning. Of particular concern is that the police and armed forces in many countries have been given greater powers for search and arrest under the guise of tackling terrorism. In addition, special laws

have also been passed in many cases to restrict civil liberties and civil oversight of security institutions. This has not facilitated efforts to increase accountability.

More recently, China's increasingly assertive regional role as well as North Korea's declaration that it has a nuclear weapon capability have raised concern across the region and may result in some countries developing their own military capabilities to counter the perceived emerging threat. These factors increase the risk of an arms race that may threaten recent developmental gains across the region.

The security challenges facing Asia are nonetheless diverse and need to be understood at a sub-regional and country level.

## **Central Asia**

The five states of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) emerged as independent nations just over a decade ago. Under Soviet rule their identity and cohesion was deliberately undermined through the arbitrary demarcation of state boundaries and the forced settlement of Russian and other ethnic minority populations in these Republics. At independence in 1991 the communist governments in each country converted themselves into political parties and assumed political power, which they retain today through tight control of the political process and elections. The current climate of authoritarianism across the region is not conducive to accountability and transparency in the security system.

Legacies of the Soviet era continue to haunt the Republics in dealing with their security problems. The region is afflicted by economic stagnation, rising influence of political Islam, drug-trafficking, and arms smuggling. National security structures are still based on the Soviet model and the Republics remain dependent on Russia for both weapons and training for their security forces. At the same time, because of conflicting interests among the Republics and with Russia, a number of Republics have formed security cooperation arrangements with external powers like the United States and China. With the support of the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) there have been attempts to cooperatively address a number of security challenges in the region, though the focus has largely been on issues relating to regional stability and cross-border security rather than the governance of state security institutions.

In the wake of 9/11, Central Asia's strategic significance to the West has been enhanced dramatically which has resulted in a weakening of external support and pressures for governance-related reforms. The United States government, in particular, has strengthened its military relations with a number of the Republics in view of tackling the crisis in Afghanistan and waging its wider 'war on terror'.

## **South Asia**

The security discourse in South Asia is dominated by the persistent tensions between India and Pakistan and by their nuclear weapon capabilities. The region is marked by differing forms of violent conflict characterized by religious

fundamentalism, insurgency, separatism, terrorism, and caste politics. Gun-running, drug trafficking, money laundering and organized crime conglomerates sustain and fuel some of these conflicts. Unfinished agendas of nation building, coupled with the colonial legacy of unsettled borders, have served to sustain and magnify many of these conflicts.

In certain instances such as Afghanistan, decades of devastation wrought by conflict and destabilising external interventions are only now being addressed. The writ of the current government does not extend much beyond the capital, Kabul, and it faces huge challenges in maintaining security and stability. Local warlords remain dominant in the provinces and maintain independent armed forces. The law and order situation is grim due to the presence of renegade Taliban and al Qaeda fighters, ethnic in-fighting within the country and the divided loyalties of state security forces. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is as yet unable to exercise its jurisdiction much beyond Kabul. Millions of unexploded landmines and unexploded ordnance, a thriving small arms market, drug-trafficking and extortion pose additional threats to security and development. While the international community remains the primary guarantor of stability and security in the country, disbursements of foreign assistance are falling far short of what will be required for Afghanistan to rebuild and recover its full sovereignty.

Barring India, democratic institutions across the region are fragile and vulnerable to external pressures and internal fractions. Rampant corruption and mal-governance has given rise to the growing political influence of the military and fundamental forces in many countries. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) remains ineffective in resolving regional problems and its main agenda to develop greater cooperation in economic and social areas has failed to have an impact on the lives of the citizens of South Asia.

## **Southeast Asia**

Regional organizations like ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) play a stabilising role in the region by facilitating dialogue to address regional problems. However, security reform agendas within Southeast Asian nations have advanced much more slowly. The prominence of the military in the political affairs of most countries, which is a consequence of the militant nationalist struggles for independence, has seen most of these countries struggle to assert effective civil control over their armed forces. A complex ethnic mix in most countries, which contributes to political tensions and instability, has in turn served to prolong the role of the military in internal affairs.

Continuing communist rule in the Indochinese states of Vietnam and Laos, and its legacy in the case of Cambodia, has resulted in authoritarian one party rule with a prominent role for the Army. Myanmar has been under military rule for over forty years. In Indonesia, which is a nominal democracy, the military maintains a significant role in all aspects of national life despite much vaunted reforms in several areas. In general, the obstacles to SSR stem from wider governance problems outside

the security system. Issues of corruption, accountability, capacity building, and the absence of an effective civil society affect wider state-building processes in the region and need to be addressed hand-in-hand with SSR.

### **Pacific Islands**

The countries surveyed in this region share a number of characteristics including weak governments, economic stagnation, and aid-dependency. Fiji has been unstable due to the difficulties of adjusting to inter-ethnic power sharing within its small population. Over the past few years, the Solomon Islands have experienced a destructive armed conflict between competing militia forces that was only stabilised in mid-2003 following an intervention by regional peace-keeping forces. In Bougainville, a secessionist conflict has also recently come to an end, again with external assistance, and the status of the island is being negotiated. In each of these cases, the security forces have assumed prominent roles in internal politics that need to be addressed as part of a wider strategy to restore stability and security to these island nations.

# Chapter 4

## How security is defined in Asia

The Asia-Pacific region provides a complex and varied picture of national and popular perceptions of security. Each sub-region and even individual states have different perspectives of what constitutes security. In countries with unsettled borders, security is most often defined as defence of national territories. This realist view of security, which catapults the state and its security to centre stage, prevails in the capitals of most countries, particularly in Central Asia. In South Asia, India-Pakistan relations dominate security thinking and approaches in the region. This is based on the realist approach, emphasizing military preparedness, enhancing military capability through weapons acquisitions, and improving military postures. Major national resources continue to be diverted towards acquiring comprehensive nuclear delivery capabilities and defensive arrangements.

Traditional concepts of security continue to shape security discourse in Asia, though the non-traditional security concerns that make up the SSR agenda are increasingly receiving attention. Other issues such as water resources, trans-border trafficking in drugs and weapons, refugees, the environment, problems of governance, and the adverse effects of globalisation are coming to be seen as major security issues in their own right that concern the general population. In the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia, in particular, Islamic fundamentalist movements have emerged as a major issue affecting national and regional security. This move towards more comprehensive and cooperative understandings of security has nonetheless been jeopardised in the wake of 9/11.

The concept of SSR as defined by the DAC, which is based on a system-wide approach to meeting the security needs of states and their populations, finds no place in security discourses across the region. This is the case both at a governmental level, and among the academic and policy communities. While this provides a major challenge to donors seeking to influence the security policies of Asian countries, it cannot be concluded that there is no discourse on the range of issues that make up the SSR agenda. While the term 'SSR' might be alien, the concerns are not. The major challenge facing Asian countries, therefore, is to develop new conceptual-institutional frameworks that will allow for both traditional and non-traditional security concerns to be addressed in a more integrated manner.

# Chapter 5

## Assessment of findings

A wide range of security-related reforms are underway across Asia, though the predominant focus is on the military, and in particular on measures to enhance military effectiveness rather than accountability. This is the case in both internally and externally-driven reforms. The impetus for reform tends to be internal in countries that are more developed and hence less dependent on external aid; the opposite is true in the more aid-dependent countries. Countries with vibrant civil societies tend to have more comprehensive reform programmes, though reforms are rarely termed SSR as such. While there are many barriers to reform across Asia, opposition to reform seems to be more common where external actors are driving it. The events of 9/11 have had a mixed impact: while it has set in motion some positive changes in countries like Afghanistan, where attempts are being made to reconstruct the state security apparatus, in others the state has assumed more power and fragile civil society voices are being stifled under programmes for countering terrorism.

### Central Asia

The climate for SSR in Central Asia is weak as a consequence of both the global 'war on terror' and the nature of political regimes that prevail across the region. Weak legislatures and judiciaries, emasculated medias and low levels of civil society activity have only reinforced the conservativeness of the Central Asian regimes. A major success in the region a decade ago was the removal of weapons of mass destruction from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan with the encouragement of external powers. Since then a range of externally-driven security initiatives have made headway in terms of shoring up regional stability, though mutual suspicion among neighbours is another hindrance to developing a viable collective security system.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Among the regional initiatives, the Partnership for Peace Programme (PfP) with the assistance of NATO and the CIS annual summits are noteworthy: see <http://www.nato.int/pfp/pfp.htm>.

On the whole, little progress has been made on the domestic front, particularly with regard to governance reforms. Remnants of Soviet military form the backbone of the security forces in each country with the same legacy of total state control. The volatile political environment in Afghanistan has in many ways served as a barrier to reform in the neighbouring Republics. Political and policy initiatives that address security problems rarely involve the legislature. In the policy arena, civil management bodies and civilian capacity-building initiatives are generally conspicuous by their absence. Kyrgyzstan is notable in that, under its own initiative, attempts have been made to review security legislation and policy within the wider framework of constitutional reforms, but this review has not thus far been translated into new institutional mechanisms that would enhance civil oversight of the security forces.

The Central Asia region was directly affected by the consequences of 9/11, which had a major effect on the nature of external involvement in the region. Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism are now the principle concern of outside actors, particularly the US, whose influence in the region has grown steadily in the past two years. It is still too early to assess the impact of US involvement. However, initial indicators are that the narrow focus on addressing the crisis in Afghanistan and neutralising the threat posed by the remnants of the former Taliban regime and their al Qaeda supporters mean that governance-related reforms will take a back seat to strengthening the operational effectiveness of regional security forces. The case of Uzbekistan illustrates this well (see Box 1).

#### **Box 1. Uzbekistan's military doctrine**

Uzbekistan, the most populous country in Central Asia, is also the region's largest military power. Uzbekistan's new military doctrine, announced in February 2004, identifies trafficking-related terrorism and religious extremism as two of the most serious threats to national security. Uzbekistan has looked towards both Russia and the United States for help in maintaining and restructuring its military forces. While new security infrastructure is desperately required to initiate and sustain the reform process and inject a greater appreciation of new security concepts into the policy arena, the focus of external assistance has been on military equipment and training. The present reform strategy is based on the idea that 'internal opposition and troublesome outside influences can be minimized during the transition period through the heavy-handed but paternal guidance of a dominant central government'. Domestically, the Uzbek government has acted vigorously to crush unsanctioned forms of religious expression, resorting to mass arrests and other practices that have drawn international criticism. Human rights experts have said domestic repression is fueling a vicious cycle that serves to increase opposition to the government.

#### **South Asia**

The new governance-based security thinking which underpins the SSR agenda is not yet reflected in South Asia, where emphasis remains primarily on enhancing military postures and capabilities. The dominance of governments across the sub-region in security debates continues to marginalise civil society and media voices,

though this is slowly beginning to change. The persistence of violent struggles across the region suggests that peace-building will be a particularly important component of SSR in the sub-region which donors need to explicitly build into their programming. This is most evident in Afghanistan which provides a particularly unique set of issues for SSR.

Central governmental authority in Afghanistan currently extends only notionally outside Kabul where local warlords rule supreme, maintain independent armies and collect revenue directly, without any accountability to the central government. A new national army is being created together with the institutional mechanisms required to manage it, although this process is slow and faces various obstacles. In particular, the Taliban and al Qaeda continue to enjoy passive support in much of the population which poses a challenge for reconstruction efforts. Continued support from the international community is, therefore, vital to ensuring security in the country and laying the foundations for more substantive reforms.

Constraints in human and financial resources, as well as weak coordination among the ministries of the Transitional Administration in Afghanistan (TAA) are a major hindrance to reforms. Significant aid promised by donor countries to rectify these problems has been slow to materialise. The continuing threats posed by local warlords is in part a consequence of US support provided to these armed groups to help address the threat posed by al Qaeda and remnants of the Taliban regime. The emphasis of internationally-driven reforms is therefore on the military. Much less effort has been put in to revitalising the infrastructure for ensuring general law and order, including the judicial system, which received special attention in the Bonn Agreement.<sup>8</sup>

In Bangladesh, which is more stable, the focus of security-related initiatives has to date been on addressing the large quantity of weapons circulating in the country and problems of border insecurity. These initiatives have met with mixed success. Political institutions are weak, preventing long-term strategic planning in the security arena. The rise of fundamentalist parties may also stall any external initiatives to usher in reforms in the security system. The influence of the media, academia and civil society are generally weak. But these groups represent important potential sources of an alternative security reform agenda that might include initiatives to strengthen governance of the security system and demilitarize society, both of which are greater priorities now than narrowly-focused defence reforms.

In India, national defence has traditionally been the sole competence of the military and the higher echelons of the Indian administration. This has begun to change in recent years, especially following the latest round of nuclear tests, which witnessed increased public interest and commentary. The media, however, has not yet fully assumed its role of a 'watchdog', and often uncritically supports measures to increase national military capabilities. The academic and policy communities are yet to initiate a wide-ranging debate on security issues though the issue of defence expenditure has received extensive attention. However, public debate is yet to

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<sup>8</sup> Bhatia, M., Lanigan, K. and Wilkinson, P., 'Minimal investments, minimal results: The failure of security policy in Afghanistan', report prepared for the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, Kabul, June 2004.

crystallize into concrete pressures to initiate specific defence reforms, much less in other parts of the state security apparatus. Recent scandals related to defence procurement and the diversion of public resources, by both private and government bodies, have highlighted the necessity for reforms in the defence sector.

There have been relevant developments on a number of fronts in recent years. Arrangements have been made to rationalize defence acquisitions and make these more transparent; higher defence organizations have been streamlined and major reorganizations undertaken in the armed forces at higher levels; the Parliament and its specialized committees, such as the Public Account Committee and Standing Committee on Defence, are more active in monitoring defence activities; the Comptroller and Auditor General, an independent and statutory institution created under the Constitution, submits annual reports to the Parliament on defence related expenditure and make suggestions on effective utilization of funds. These achievements notwithstanding, the Pakistan problem remains the primary focus of Indian security policy, as a consequence of which the non-traditional security problems facing the country do not attain the prominence they might deserve in the national security agenda.

In the past five years, the Maoist insurgency in Nepal has set the framework for security debates and reform efforts. Continuing political instability has hampered Parliament's ability to discuss vital security issues, while the non-governmental community has until recently focused primarily on economic and environmental issues. Various NGOs involved in developmental activities are nonetheless placing growing pressure on the government (through appeals for more effective governance, changes in security policy and reductions in defence expenditure) to initiate SSR-related reforms.<sup>9</sup> The donor community has provided some support for this, for instance in the policing and justice sectors, where the UK Department for International Development is active. NGOs have also been urging the government to enter into a sustained dialogue with the Maoists, concerned that a reliance on a military response, made possible by sophisticated weaponry and military training received from the US, UK, China and India, may widen the conflict.

Pakistan's approach to security, like that of India, is heavily influenced by the conflict that pits the two countries against each other, which militates against the adoption of a more comprehensive approach to security. The return of the military to power in Pakistan in effect precludes meaningful civil oversight over defence issues, though this was rarely achieved in any meaningful way even under civilian rule. Active involvement by the military in politics and the economy has helped to ensure its autonomy. The crises facing the country along its borders with both India and Afghanistan, as well as increasing activity by radical Islamic groups internally, are also used to justify exceptional security policy measures that make civil oversight more difficult to achieve. While the media has often been critical of the military's security policies over the years, this has not led to significant change. Given the nature of the current government and the lack of effective civil society

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9 HPCR Conflict Prevention Initiative, Nepal, [http://www.preventconflict.org/portal/nepal/nepal\\_resources\\_general\\_portals.php](http://www.preventconflict.org/portal/nepal/nepal_resources_general_portals.php).

engagement with security issues, the climate for reform will remain weak for the foreseeable future.

Sri Lanka stands in stark contrast to this. The ending of hostilities between the Government and the Tamil Tigers has opened the way to a broad range of reconstruction efforts, including SSR. The primary focus thus far has been on building a new army to respond to peacetime requirements due to the political sensitivities of SSR (see Box 2). Achieving a broader approach will largely depend on the peace being sustained. The media and academia have started to shift their focus from conflict issues to the reform agenda, spotlighting problems such as defence procurement scandals, and calling for greater public participation in defence-related issues. Sections of the media have highlighted the need for more public and political debate on the defence reform agenda. In 2003 the government slashed its defence budget significantly which was an important step in shifting the economy from a war-standing to a position that will be more supportive of the reconstruction effort.

#### **Box 2. SSR as a political process**

SSR in Sri Lanka commenced in 2002 when the Prime Minister established the Defence Review Committee (DRC) which formulated extensive recommendations that encapsulate force modernization as well as restructuring of command and control in ways that would make the army more responsive to civil control. The first task of the Committee was to assess Higher Defence Organisation, given the decision by the President to relinquish the defence portfolio. When a paper drafted by the Committee was inadvertently made public, concerns were raised that the Committee's recommendations for restructuring Higher Defence Organisation might be constitutionally flawed in relation to the role of the President as Commander-in-Chief of the Sri Lankan armed forces. Although the work of the Committee thereafter proceeded apace, the DRC itself became a political football amidst the growing tension between the President and the Prime Minister. In 2003 the President took the decision to bring an end to the work of the DRC and, instead, assigned the task of SSR to the Joint Operations Headquarters, since when little progress has been evident.

#### **Southeast Asia**

SSR in Southeast Asia also shows a highly variable picture. Significant reform in security systems is not currently a serious prospect in those countries that require it most, including Cambodia, Indonesia and Myanmar, due to the central roles which their security forces play in the economic and political systems and more wide-ranging problems of governance and development that afflict these societies. Even in countries like Thailand and Philippines, however, where there has been greater political backing for reform, sustaining the change process has proved to be an immense challenge in the face of economic and political crises. Nevertheless, both countries have a vibrant civil society sector that has contributed to keeping reform on the public agenda. More generally, the low level of engagement by civil society actors in the security arena is an important factor in explaining the weak impetus for SSR across the sub-region.

Security-related reforms were initiated in Indonesia due to a combination of external pressure and popular demand following the country's transition to democracy. The over-riding challenge facing the country post-Suharto has been to reduce the influence of the military in political and economic life. In one of the first steps, the military was nominally separated from the police, in view of more clearly defining their respective security roles. However, the resurgence of internal security problems has ensured that the military remains actively involved in internal security. There has also been discussion, largely promoted by external actors and civil society actors, about ways to reduce the military's formal involvement in business which has long been officially sanctioned as a means of supplementing the defence budget (see Box 3). Budgetary constraints nonetheless make it unlikely that withdrawal from business would be financially feasible, nor would it be easy to convince the military to give up its financial autonomy which has long protected it from scrutiny by the civil authorities.

### **Box 3. Off-budget military spending**

Current defence funding arrangements in Indonesia face real limits. At present, only an estimated 25% of the costs of the military and police are met from the state budget. The remainder of military spending comes from off-budget funds, mainly through the business interests of the foundations under the army's control, many of which are not economically viable. This financial autonomy serves to limit public and government debate over the security role of the army and how it spends its resources. Bringing military spending on budget and involving parliament in determining military policy could enhance professionalism and civil control of the army. However, the government may not be able to meet all of the TNI's spending needs, given competition for an already strained budget. This has dampened the military's enthusiasm for giving up its businesses. At the same time, it also highlights the need for existing defence expenditure—both on-budget and off-budget—to be used as efficiently and effectively as possible.<sup>10</sup>

The impetus for military reform in Indonesia slowed dramatically following 9/11 as Indonesia came under increasing international pressure, particularly from the United States, to more actively address terrorist elements within its borders. Indonesia received assistance from the US to upgrade its 'anti-terror' capabilities, though this was not provided directly to the military. The escalation of the conflict in Aceh, together with the terrorist bombings in Bali and at the Marriott hotel in Jakarta, further contributed to restoring the military's political influence and traditional role as the primary guarantor of the stability and security of the Indonesia nation, even if it officially remains outside formal politics.

The trend toward re-instating militaries as the primary bulwark against both internal and external threats is also apparent across the wider region. In the Philippines, for instance, the armed forces have received specialist training from the Americans to counter insurgents in the south. Despite a powerful popular movement for political change in the Philippines, the military remains influential.

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<sup>10</sup> See Hendrickson, D. and Ball, N., 'Off-budget military expenditure and revenue: Issues and policy perspectives for donors', Conflict, Security and Development Group Occasional Paper no. 1, King's College, London, 2002.

ASEAN has itself passed new resolutions to strengthen regional cooperation to meet the new challenges of international terrorism. It is still too early to determine what the impact of the US-led 'war on terror' will be on SSR in the sub-region, but there are grounds to be concerned that short-term measures to strengthen operational effectiveness of security forces will take precedence over longer-term measures to bolster civil oversight and accountability.

Two countries emerging from war, Cambodia and Timor-Leste, face a different array of challenges. The impetus for SSR in Cambodia has been external, though international support for security-related reforms has generally been ad hoc, piece-meal and not guided by an overarching understanding of Cambodia's security needs or how the different elements of the state security apparatus come together. The World Bank-managed demobilisation programme, which was launched in parallel to an Australian-supported Defence Review, was largely conceived as a down-sizing and cost-cutting exercise. Little attempt was made to link the two processes or to address fundamental problems of governance within the military that pose a significant threat to the stability of the country and its development prospects. A range of other security-related projects focusing on light weapons, landmines, and the police have contributed to short-term gains in the security situation. While the need for more structural changes in how Cambodia's security system operates is widely recognised, the climate for reform is still very weak. Civil society initiatives are fast developing and might soon begin to influence SSR.

The most comprehensive SSR programme to date in the sub-region has taken place in Timor-Leste which has been faced with reconstructing its entire security system from scratch following the departure of the occupying Indonesian forces. This task has included the formation of a new national army, demobilisation of former combatants, and the establishment of a fledgling judicial apparatus as well as the establishment of basic civil management bodies such as defence and justice ministries and a national security advisory body. Because SSR was undertaken as part and parcel of the country's transition to independence and the wider reconstruction programme, this increased both the internal political will and international support and resources for rebuilding the country's security apparatus. While the initial gains are promising, Timor-Leste remains particularly vulnerable to future reductions in support from the international community on which it is heavily dependent to meet its core development and security needs.

In extreme contrast to these two war-torn societies are a number of other countries in the sub-region which are highly developed. The governance of security institutions in Singapore is very effective and efficient when compared internationally. The primary concerns do not relate to reform per se, but rather to preparing the security agencies to respond more effectively to a new range of non-military security threats such as terrorism, drugs and economic sabotage. Similarly in Brunei there is no pressing need for reform, though for different reasons. The economic wealth of the nation, the high standards of living of its population, the lack of any significant security threats, and the stability of its monarchy mean that SSR does not rank as a priority. In Malaysia law and order reforms dominate the

agenda as a consequence of both the multi-ethnic nature of its society and the nature of its political system, dominated by one party. Both of these factors have in the past resulted in tensions, raising questions about how the security forces are managed.

The communist countries in the region present a different range of challenges. In both Vietnam and Laos, prospects for SSR are inextricably tied up in processes of political liberalisation that are thus far progressing slowly. While the security forces are effectively under civilian control, the Communist party in both countries retains control over virtually every aspect of governance. The Lao Government has been very cautious about letting its citizens form voluntary organizations even though the constitution provides for a right of free association. In practice, it remains virtually impossible to register a voluntary organization. In Vietnam there has been a much greater degree of liberalisation, primarily in the economic domain, where the armed forces are central actors with the full backing of the Communist Party.

Myanmar is similar in many ways in so far as SSR will not really be on the agenda until there are more fundamental changes in the governance of the country. The current military regime is coming under increasing pressure to democratise, but even then governance of the security system will necessarily remain under the control of the military. This is a consequence both of the deeply entrenched nature of the military in political and economic life, but also the lack of civilian capacity on security issues. The need for initiatives that enhance and expand civil capacity to manage and monitor the security system as well as to contribute to security policymaking is pressing across the entire sub-region (see Box 4).<sup>11</sup>

#### **Box 4. Building civil society capacity**

Civil society in Asia has an important role to play in highlighting the need for SSR, helping to develop the agenda for reform, and prodding governments to take action. A key dimension of this work is to assess progress, suggest new approaches and assist in building regional-wide initiatives to support SSR.

This work should include:

- A more concerted effort to redefine security and move the debate from the realist version to a more comprehensive and cooperative approach;
- Assessing and analysing government policies and measures to implement SSR;
- A cooperative and non-official approach to assessing defence expenditure, plans and postures, both nationally and sub-regionally;
- A sub-regional approach as above will introduce a measure of civil society oversight as well as allowing for more cooperation in this vital area;
- Developing regional initiatives aimed at confidence-building;
- An analysis of defence and security policies in the region, focusing in particular on how these affect the perceptions of security policy-makers in each country.

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<sup>11</sup> See Huxley, T., 'Reforming Southeast Asia's security sectors', Centre for Defence Studies Working Paper no. 4, King's College, London, 2001.

## Pacific Islands

Political instability in the island states continues to be the primary barrier to SSR. After several years of negotiation, a final settlement on the status of Bougainville was reached under the Bougainville Peace Agreement. In-built in the agreement were provisions for post-conflict reconstruction, disarmament, and the establishment of autonomous self-government. Core challenges facing the new political authorities include the rehabilitation of ex-combatants, establishment of legal and judicial institutions, and the setting up of a new security apparatus.<sup>12</sup> A constitution that will provide legal backing to these tasks is still at the drafting stage. Delays in clarifying the status of the island and how it will be governed have nonetheless slowed down the demobilisation process. In addition, the task of building security institutions is only one of many challenges the island faces as it seeks to put in place a new administration and address wider development needs, all in the face of extreme resource constraints. This has made the country heavily dependent on external assistance, particularly from Australia and New Zealand, though the United Nations is also playing a role.

Political uncertainty and Fiji's deep ethnic divide provide a significant barrier to SSR. While pressure from the international community has contributed to stabilising the political situation, any substantive reforms will be dependent on the achievement of new arrangements to govern the relationship between the Indian and ethnic Fijian groups that make up Fiji's population. In addition, the military's role in governance of the country will need to be reviewed given concerns about the impunity it currently enjoys following past abuses.<sup>13</sup> The system of political governance is crucial from an SSR perspective as that will determine what kinds of mechanisms can be instituted to more effectively manage the state security bodies. More inter-ethnic civil networking will likely be key both in preparing the political terrain for reform and elaborating the necessary mechanisms to ensure that the various ethnic groups feel secure regardless of who is in power.

Similarly, in the case of the Solomon Islands, resolution of the political crisis is the pre-condition for the restoration of security as well as more substantial reform. The complete breakdown of law and order in recent years, together with the economic crisis, and large displacements of the population present immense developmental and security challenges. The islands have no standing army, relying instead on police forces which were ill-equipped to manage the inter-provincial rivalry that erupted violently in 1999, eventually affecting most of the populated islands. Despite de-weaponisation programmes, arms availability has increased in the island society in recent years due to endemic corruption and the growing climate of insecurity. Both the Commonwealth and United Nations have emerged in recent years as principal drivers of reforms, carried out under the Framework of the Townsville Peace Agreement. But the final collapse of this process in 2003 and the

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12 Brown, Gary, *Crisis in Papua New Guinea: Military Mutiny and the Threat to Civilian Democratic Rule*, Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Group Information and Research Services, 3 April 2001.

13 Amnesty International report, 2002, <http://web.amnesty.org/web/ar2002.nsf/asa/fiji!Open>.

eruption of violence set the stage for a recent intervention of regional peacekeepers, led by Australia, which are now providing stability to the country.

# Chapter 6

## Conclusions

The security environment in Asia has undergone a dramatic transformation in the last quarter of a century. Authoritarian dictatorships and one party rule have given way in a large number of countries to multi-party democracies. Civil societies have emerged and, in some countries, been empowered enough to make a difference in promoting reform agendas. Yet, a major finding of this survey is that security system governance remains woefully weak in almost all countries. Military influence across the region is strong and, even where not in power, militaries are able to divert scarce resources to enhancing military capabilities without adequate analysis by governments of alternative security strategies. While ‘good governance’ is the new mantra in policy arenas, measures to achieve this—particularly in the security arena—are generally weak. Even though the media is generally vibrant and is often independent, in most cases it lacks the ability to provide effective oversight of reforms.

At the same time, the survey clearly highlights the impact made by external actors, including multilateral development agencies, donor governments and non-governmental organizations in getting security on government reform agendas. It is clear, moreover, that this initial progress may be reversed in some countries if external engagement is not sustained due to the weakness of internal reform constituencies. That said, the policies of external actors providing assistance in the security domain also lack coherence and have made it more difficult for their partner countries to achieve more integrated approaches to security and development. This points to the lack of a shared international understanding of SSR, including both the objectives and the approaches required.

Future priorities for SSR in Asia include:

- Fostering an understanding of the need for more integrated and wide-ranging concepts of security that address human development concerns;
- Strengthening civil democratic control over security structures and making oversight meaningful;

- Independent judicial oversight and national human rights commissions need to be established where they are not functional, and strengthened considerably even where they are in existence;
- Managing defence expenditures more effectively through cooperative threat assessments, transparent processes of defence budgeting and parliamentary control;
- Ensuring that internal security functions are made the responsibility of the civil police rather than the army, and training them to ensure greater civil accountability and adherence to human rights norms;
- Enhancing judicial review mechanisms of military actions;
- Strengthening civil society organisations to allow for more effective oversight of state security activities.

# Annex A

## Organisational details

### **Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS), New Delhi, India ([www.ipcs.org](http://www.ipcs.org))**

The IPCS is a non-governmental research institute on alternate security policy in Asia, established in August 1996. Over the years leading strategic thinkers, academicians, former members of the Civil Services, Foreign Services, Armed Forces, Police Forces, Paramilitary Forces and media persons (print and electronic) have been associated with the Institute in its endeavour to chalk out a comprehensive framework for security studies that caters to the changing demands of national, regional and global security.

While the Institute maintains close liaison with the Indian Ministries of Defence and External Affairs, it seeks to provide alternative approaches to security relevant to India and the World by hosting a wide range of opinion articles on its interactive website. The Institute has also established dialogue processes with leading institutions and think tanks in India and abroad to facilitate the exchange of ideas.

Key programmes of work include:

- Disarmament and arms control
- Non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction;
- Comprehensive and cooperative security;
- Non-military threats to security;
- Confidence-building measures;
- Terrorism;
- Indo-Pakistani relations;
- Regional cooperation in South Asia;
- China's security policies;
- Security and governance;
- Human security.

# Annex B

## Selected publications on SSR in Asia

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