

# Non-Traditional Security A Panacea for Asian Regional Institutions?

In today's increasingly globalized and interdependent world, countries are acutely aware of the porous nature of their borders and their amplified vulnerability to transnational problems. Even security concerns, once considered the sole domain of individual states, are not as clear-cut as they once were. "Non-traditional security issues" arise primarily out of non-military sources, such as climate change, resource scarcity, infectious diseases, natural disasters, drug and human trafficking, and transnational crime. These dangers are often transnational, defying unilateral remedies and requiring comprehensive political, economic, social responses.

The inability of states to deal with these concerns individually makes NTS a natural candidate for the agendas of various Asian regional multilateral institutions. Saddled with elusive or ambiguous domains, many of these fora are eager to embrace NTS as a relatively uncontroversial arena in which to further interstate cooperation and produce tangible results – it is difficult to argue against fighting infectious disease or protecting vital sea lanes from pirates, and any progress on these issues presents a valuable contribution to the region. Consequently, ASEAN, ASEAN Plus Three (APT), the East Asia Summit (EAS), APEC, and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) have all pursued NTS issues to some degree (see table).

Despite the indisputable value of NTS cooperation, however, the adoption of these issues is not without its detractors. While NTS proponents from governments such as the U.S. argue that these issues enable the eventual pursuit of these institutions' loftier, and presently unachievable, goals, critics worry that NTS may actually present a barrier to these long-term objectives, stalling fora at a lower level of cooperation or distracting them from higher priorities.

In the aftermath of 9/11, countries such as Malaysia complained about the increasing securitization of APEC, which was originally envisioned as an exclusively economic forum. How does an issue like infectious disease relate to APEC's Bogor Goals of free trade and investment by 2010? The ASEAN Regional Forum has also become increasingly involved in NTS over the past decade. How does disaster relief relate to the ARF's long overdue transition from confidence building to preventive diplomacy? While some NTS issues are ostensibly closer to institutions' original mandates than others, it is clear that the pursuit of non-traditional security exists in tension with the pursuit of other organizational goals.

In addition to internal concerns about organizational domain, problems arise from potential duplication of efforts across different fora. With little coordination between these five regional bodies, it is yet unclear whether the actions of these institutions are conflicting or complementary. Do different problems naturally lend themselves to treatment by different organizations, with a division of labor that lends coherence to their separate efforts? If so, Asia may be well served by overlapping organizations with different memberships.<sup>1</sup> If not, however, a greater degree of intentionality is required

to reconcile these multiple institutions, either by nesting them hierarchically or achieving a division of labor through parallel linkages.<sup>2</sup> Cooperation without coordination may be a troubling matter, calling to mind images of disaster-stricken areas inundated with an overabundance of clothing donations but totally lacking in fresh water.

Though the answers to questions about institutional distraction and effort duplication are yet unclear, two things can be deduced. First, NTS is a salient issue area on which countries can agree to cooperate – an invaluable contribution in a region with such diversity of culture, language, ideology, religion, and economic development, and with such a divisive historical legacy.

While Asia continues to be permeated by strong norms of sovereignty, making states reluctant to relinquish control over key issues, room still exists for regional institutions to make a difference, if only at the margin – NTS may be the stuff of which this margin is comprised. Secondly, despite

the institutional opportunity represented by NTS, it cannot serve as a panacea for the problems of Asian regional institutions. These institutions were not originally created to deal with NTS concerns, and a sustained, dominant focus on these issues will eventually reduce their legitimacy and effectiveness in achieving their espoused goals.

That being said, these regional institutions need to produce results in order to remain relevant to actors, and NTS provides one possible path

forward. Given the plethora of dialogue options currently available in Asia, fora must craft unique niches for themselves or fade into irrelevance as other institutions step up to meet the challenge. In terms of NTS, organizations should avoid pursuing issues indiscriminately, instead choosing those closely related to their espoused institutional aims.

For APEC and ARF, and ASEAN, their well-defined organizational domains may make this relatively straightforward. For those dialogue processes still in search of a mission, namely APT and the EAS, it may be more difficult. Some type of coordination should be achieved among fora, weaving these disparate entities into either a hierarchically-nested regional order or one with overlapping, multi-tiered institutions exhibiting a horizontal division of labor along issue area. It remains to be seen which of these organizations will emerge as most relevant in the years to come; while non-traditional security cannot provide the solution to all of their shortcomings, it will almost certainly have some role in their future endeavors. ❖

Issue	ASEAN	APT	EAS	APEC	ARF
Climate Change					
Counterterrorism					
Human Trafficking					
Drug Trafficking					
Disaster Relief					
Infectious Disease					
Maritime Security					
Transnational Crime					

Non-traditional security cooperation across Asian regional institutions

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1 Pempel, T.J. "The Race to Connect East Asia: An Unending Steeplechase." *Asian Economic Policy Review* 1 (2006): 239-254.

2 Aggarwal, Vinod K. "Reconciling Multiple Institutions: Bargaining, Linkages, and Nesting." In *Institutional Designs for a Complex World: Bargaining, Linkages, and Nesting*, edited by Vinod K. Aggarwal, 1-31. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998.