



THE NEW GEOPOLITICS OF PEACE OPERATIONS: A DIALOGUE WITH EMERGING POWERS

North East Asia Regional Dialogue

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On 11–12 April 2013 a regional dialogue meeting of the project ‘New Geopolitics of Peace Operations: A Dialogue with Emerging Powers’ took place in Ulan Bator, Mongolia. The meeting, which was jointly organized by SIPRI and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), brought together a range of leading experts, government officials and representatives of international organizations to discuss the future challenges for peace operations and the roles that states from North East Asia can play in future peacekeeping.

A CHANGING WORLD ORDER: NORTH EAST ASIA'S PERSPECTIVE

The meeting participants generally agreed that the world is moving towards multipolarity. Several concerns were raised about the implications for regional and international stability. Some participants suspected that multipolarity and the resulting increased divergence among great powers would hinder responses to conflicts and the establishment of peace operations within the United Nations Security Council, particularly due to the use of veto powers. One participant cited the difficulty the League of Nations experienced in making decisions during the period of multipolarity between the world wars. Others argued, however, that a multipolar world could be stable.

The role of the largest emerging power, China, received much attention. A Chinese participant stressed that the Chinese Government would continue to adhere to the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs and foster closer diplomatic ties in the region. Another participant from China noted that on occasions China might practise ‘constructive engagement’, which suggests that while China remains adamant about staying out of host countries’ domestic affairs, it is willing to go slightly beyond strict non-interference in exceptional cases, due to emerging expectations from the international community. Also, it was noted that while China does not seek to transform the current international system, it would like to improve it, among other things by increasing the role of the so-called BRICs: Brazil, Russia, India and China.

* This report summarizes the contents of each workshop session. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of SIPRI or of the majority of the participants

PROJECT OVERVIEW

● In the past 20 years there has been a far-reaching shift in the nature of international conflict management. Within this context, the traditional notion of peace operations has been broadened by ever more robust missions, the expansion of mandates towards peacebuilding, and by an unprecedented growth in both the number and the size of operations.

Today, many are questioning the sustainability of the paradigm of peace operations that has emerged since the cold war. It is becoming evident that shifts in international power relations as a result of rapid economic growth in parts of the Global South are calling into question the existing structures of international conflict management, including peace operations.

SIPRI has launched the ‘New Geopolitics of Peace Operations: A Dialogue with Emerging Powers’ initiative with support from the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and in partnership with the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES). The initiative aims to identify potential future challenges for peace operations and new initiatives that will strengthen the legitimacy of peace operations and create greater capacity, enabling peace operations to meet these future challenges. SIPRI, in cooperation with FES, will be conducting a series of dialogue meetings around the world to support these aims.

**Agenda**

Day 1, 11 April 2013

Opening remarks

Introductory round

A changing world order: what implications for the future of peace operations?

Norms and concepts: a fragile consensus?

Day 1 wrap-up

Day 2, 12 April 2013

Engagement objectives: high politics and interests of stakeholders

A new peacekeeping landscape: peacekeeping 2.0?

Final reflections and closing remarks

However, this picture of China as a ‘harmonious power’ in the future was questioned by one participant, who argued that given the strategic rebalancing of the United States from Europe and the Middle East towards East Asia, China was likely to become more confident and forceful in the near future.

A Japanese participant said that Japan would support structural reform of the UN, potentially including expansion of the permanent membership of the UN Security Council to include Brazil, Germany, India and Japan as well as the current permanent members: China, France, Russia the United Kingdom and the USA (the P5). Such a reform would probably involve reconsideration of the roles and responsibilities of key member states. It was stressed, however, that the current P5 are unlikely to embrace any reform initiative that dilutes their own power.

Referring to the role that emerging actors will play in the future landscape, one participant pointedly asked whether they would act as constructive stakeholders or further complicate decision making and implementation in the international system.

In addition to potential challenges resulting from multipolarity, it was suggested that peace operations will also be challenged by the increasing complexity of intrastate conflicts, which are likely to remain the primary type of conflict that missions are deployed to address. These conflicts are often characterized by tensions around natural resources, religious rivalries, and lack of resilience of local societies and their institutions. Not only does this make the success of peacekeeping operations more difficult to achieve but it also raises concern in the region about adherence to the principle of non-interference. As peacekeeping operations in intrastate conflicts have a greater tendency to encroach on the host state’s internal affairs participants feared that this meant operations generally might become increasingly intrusive.

A number of participants talked about challenges such as terrorism and piracy and how peace operations increasingly have to face these, or are actually established to deal with them. A participant from Japan noted



that international cooperation around such common threats would become increasingly necessary as global interdependence and the cross-border character of threats grow. Regional cooperation in this respect would be helpful but insufficient, as global challenges need global solutions. Moreover, the heterogeneous political and cultural conditions in the region, along with the historical burden of past conflicts, impede confidence building. Cooperation on mutual threats outside the region—for example maritime piracy off the Horn of Africa—is perhaps a feasible way to overcome such a lack of trust.

With regard to conflicts and disputes in North East Asia, particular problems identified by the participants included territorial disputes between states, ethnic minority issues and potential upcoming big power rivalries. Participants argued that the most important problems were interstate, rather than intrastate.

NORMS AND CONCEPTS: SUPPORT FOR NON-INTERVENTIONISM AND CONCERNS OVER THE INCREASING USE OF FORCE

Most participants agreed that states increasingly share roughly similar understandings of fundamental norms and concepts of peacekeeping. Despite the convergence on norms and concepts, however, it was suggested that UN peace operations must not impose any norms on host states but rather carefully consider and involve local populations, thereby increasing the legitimacy and effectiveness of the operations.

At the same time, participants argued, different perspectives should be given more attention in the formulation and implementation of the norms underpinning UN peace operations. One participant noted that even though the countries of North East Asia as a whole do not overwhelmingly support an ‘aggressive’ interpretation of the responsibility to protect (R2P), the concept is gradually coming to be perceived as a global, rather than strictly Western, norm. They said that of R2P’s three ‘pillars’, pillars 1 and 2—which respectively set out the state’s primary responsibility to protect its civilians from mass atrocities, and the international community’s role in assisting the state to fulfil that responsibility—are accepted in the region. However, pillar 3—which declares the international community’s responsibility to intervene to protect civilians, coercively if necessary, if the state fails to fulfil its pillar-1 responsibility—remains problematic.

One participant suggested that R2P is not an entirely alien concept to the region: 2000 years ago a Manchurian king would have said that ‘if the king of a neighboring kingdom lets his population starve, you have to overthrow him’. One Chinese participant explained that China no longer opposes liberal proposals such as R2P and ‘liberal peace’, but incorporates and supports them. However, the Chinese Government would prefer to have a division labour in which it provides development assistance while leaving the political role to Western states.

While the states of North East Asia are increasingly open to innovation and adaptation of the international system, there is a perception that peace operations are drifting in a robust and interventionist direction without sufficient consideration of the implications. Participants agreed that the principles of the UN Charter—particularly that of state sovereignty—should not be abandoned lightly. Nevertheless, they said, there is a shared understanding



that interpretation of the Charter must adapt to contemporary geostrategic and capacity concerns. Several participants suggested that conflict prevention should become a greater priority. However, the inherent tensions between preventive engagement and non-intervention were not addressed in the discussion. In addition, one participant remarked that the countries that focused most on prevention in their arguments were those that invested the least in it.

At the end of the session, a discussion of the need to differentiate between R2P and protection of civilians (POC) led to a heated debate about POC. Overall, participants said they were more concerned about the increase in robust and POC mandates—which they perceived as inherently partial and intrusive—than about R2P-style interventions, which they saw as usually falling outside the realm of peacekeeping. They considered the resources provided to peacekeepers to be inadequate to physically protect civilians in a sustainable manner. Participants stressed that mandates that contain POC elements need to reflect these realities in order to manage expectations and set achievable goals. They argued that simply stating in mission POC mandates that the primary responsibility for protecting civilians lies with host government is not enough: POC needs to be operationalized and—according to some—given explicit limits.

Realistic and achievable mandates were not the only issue raised with regard to POC. Participants argued that ultimately, the domestic political effect of potential casualties in peacekeeping missions is a primary deterrent for participation in missions. Participants argued that the states of the region would be more likely to continue their participation if they were given the opportunity to contribute to less controversial, non-lethal areas of peacekeeping and peacebuilding such as infrastructure, education, and health.

OBJECTIVES OF ENGAGEMENT: MAINLY POLITICAL

Most states in the region that have participated in peace operations have done so mainly to achieve political objectives. Economic motivations such as protecting investments have so far been secondary, but could potentially grow in importance. Ethical considerations have been at best a very minor consideration, according to the participants.

Domestic policy debate about participation in peace operations varies greatly in the region. While Japan, South Korea and Mongolia have passed national legislation that supports participation in peace operations and ties it to wider foreign policy objectives, or given it significant attention in defence white papers and other policy documents, China has not yet published any formal document or policy statement on the matter. China and Japan have never contributed combat troops to a peace operation—Japan for constitutional reasons—but South Korea and Mongolia have.

China

While China has not formalized its policy on participation in peace operations, its attitude towards UN operations has evolved greatly since the end of the cold war, and today Chinese foreign policy accepts peacekeeping's value



in maintaining global peace and security rather than seeing it as a political tool for Western hegemony.

A Chinese participant argued that as China's economic power and influence expands, participation in peacekeeping operations is a way for China to signal its intention to act as a responsible stakeholder in the international system. At the same time, China wants to avoid the perception that it seeks to dominate UN peace operations. This, along with a traditional strong stance on non-interference, explains why China has so far only contributed non-combat personnel and has focused on development activities such as infrastructure and engineering. However, it was argued, China's contributions are also motivated by more direct national interests. For example, China has substantial economic interests in many conflict-affected areas, primarily in Africa. China has an interest in promoting stability in such areas in order to protect its investments and the many Chinese civilians are working abroad.

South Korea

South Korean participation in UN peace operations depends on political and foreign policy considerations. Participants argued that this was illustrated by the fluctuations in contributions under the past three South Korean administrations: its contributions have tended to increase when an administration believed that peacekeeping would help promote Korea's international standing and increase its influence and visibility—particularly by showing support for the USA. Prestige, public opinion, international economic investment, the experience of the Korean War and Korean support for the UN were also cited as factors. The South Korean public has a sense of commitment to global peace and security rooted in Korea's experience of turbulence and war and the ever-present tension on the Korean peninsula.

Japan

For Japan, participation in peacekeeping operations fits in with other important foreign and security policy priorities like the prevention of arms build-ups and escalation of conflicts in its region and beyond. Participants said that Japan also recognizes that contemporary global security challenges require multilateral cooperation. Since North East Asia so far lacks regional cooperation mechanisms similar to, for example, the European Union, Japan sees the international system as a way to increase its own capacity to tackle global issues that might affect it. One participant also noted that regional cooperation on a strategy for participation in UN peace operations could be a confidence-building measure in North East Asia

Mongolia

Contribution to international peace operations is very much in line with Mongolia's overall foreign policy, according to participants. Mongolia is a small democratic country that is attempting to strike a very delicate balance in cooperating with, but remaining independent from, its two much larger neighbours, China and Russia. The country therefore feels particularly vulnerable given the current instability in North East Asia.



To counter potential threats, Mongolia's 'third neighbour policy' proactively builds on its diplomatic ties with large states and organizations within and beyond its immediate region, which includes contributions to the UN and cooperating with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). This is perceived as increasing Mongolia's visibility and security.

Participation in peace operations is seen as a strategy for the country to reach beyond its isolated location between two nuclear superpowers. Mongolia also views participation in peace operations as having direct benefits in terms of training and experience for its armed forces. The country furthermore hopes to be a role model for small states, with its contribution of nearly 950 personnel to UN operations as of March 2013 out of a total population of only 2.8 million.

CONCLUSIONS: PEACE OPERATIONS 2.0

Since participants were particularly concerned with the growing trend towards robust peace operation mandates, there was much discussion of potential non-combat entry points for increased participation in peace operations. The following areas for potential increased participation were highlighted: (a) involvement in the policy-development and reform processes within the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO); (b) technological capabilities; (c) medical support, within or outside missions; (d) financial contributions; (e) police training; and (f) regional assistance with maritime security.

Participants were also favorable to the idea of increased regional cooperation and coordination in peacekeeping. However, since the region currently lacks a framework for such comprehensive cooperation, bilateral efforts are a more realistic prospect in the short to medium term. Urgent regional concerns such as a potential escalation of tensions in the Korean peninsula and territorial and environmental disputes could also inhibit large-scale regional cooperation on peacekeeping in the short term. While it was not directly discussed in the session, all four of the countries represented also contribute personnel to the UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS), a potential area of convergence and confidence building.

Two participants accused Western countries of double standards: on the one hand making unrealistic demands of emerging powers to increase their personnel and financial contributions to UN-led peace operations, while on the other hand progressively shrinking their own personnel and, to a lesser degree, financial contributions. At the same time, some emerging powers and other large troop-contributing countries have little influence in mission mandates and in setting general UN policy. It was suggested that Western powers' influence in peacekeeping should decrease in line with their contributions.

Overall, it was argued, several conditions would facilitate greater participation in peace operations by countries in the region: a bigger role for troop-contributing countries in peacekeeping decision making; more adequate resources for the implementation of mission mandates; and a greater focus on prevention and on more holistic peacebuilding efforts, which would also require additional resources. Furthermore, in order to overcome China's reservations about what it views as more intrusive missions, the interna-



tional community should focus on case-by-case decision making rather than trying to establish universal norms and concepts.

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