



**MacArthur
Asia
Security
Initiative**

The Australian National University

**The Australian National University
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**Focus Group 1
Interim Progress Report**

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**“Policy Alternatives for Integrating Bilateral and
Multilateral Regional Security Approaches in the
Asia-Pacific”**

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**MacArthur
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**Australian
National
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Exploring Processes for Achieving a Bilateral and Multilateral Security Nexus in the Asia-Pacific

Focus Group 1

Interim Meeting
(2-3 November 2010)

Paper 1
Conceptualizing the Bilateral-Multilateral Security Nexus: Processes for Achieving a Bilateral and Multilateral Security Nexus in the Asia-Pacific
Dr. Brendan Taylor
(The Australian National University)

Dr. Taylor explained to the Focus Group that his paper would attempt to conceptually unpack the bilateral-multilateral security nexus. He noted that the nexus was mostly a new phenomenon, as Asian security arrangements had largely been bilateral during the Cold War. He outlined four possible approaches to the nexus between bilateral and multilateral modes of security arrangements. The first approach viewed the two modes as incompatible. The second approach saw the nexus as creating synergies that enhanced bilateralism, and the third approach saw it as creating synergies that enhanced multilateralism. The fourth approach viewed the two modes as creating mutually reinforcing synergies.

Dr. Taylor argued that interaction between the two modes of security arrangements is happening more frequently, and while elements of each of the four approaches can be seen in the contemporary Asia-Pacific security environment none is dominant. The second and third approaches are the most prevalent, and great power strategic competition means the fourth, mutually reinforcing, approach is likely to be present mainly on non-traditional security issues.

Paper 2
The Contradictions and Synergies between Bilateral and Multilateral: Comparing US and Chinese Approaches to Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific
Dr. Evelyn Goh
(Royal Holloway, University of London)

Dr. Goh observed that her paper, which compares the US and Chinese approaches to security cooperation, has become more conceptual since the Focus Group's March meeting. She argued that the differences between the two countries' approaches can be explained by great power assurance and hierarchical negotiation.

The first section of the paper, on great

Introductory session to the Focus Group meetings (Hedley Bull Center)



Photo: David Envall

power assurance, discussed how the US and China decide between multilateral and bilateral security approaches. It argues that US assurance is given through provision of public goods (especially security) and self-restraint. US choices between bilateralism and multilateralism are driven more by the preferences of the US and its constituencies than by the security issue in question. China gives assurance through self-restraint, agreeing to dilute its power through accepting norms and other restraints on its behavior.

The second section, on competition between great powers, argued that great power competition between the US, China and Japan accounts for the relatively underdeveloped state of multilateral security cooperation. The paper also argued that discussion on whether multilateralism or bilateralism is better is less important than determining how to combine multilateral and bilateral options to optimize the balance of assurance, status and power between Japan, China and the US so as to maximize security benefits for the region.

Discussion of Papers 1 and 2

Subsequent discussions concentrated on how some of the key concepts for the Focus Group were being defined. The scope of “multilateral security cooperation” was disputed, with the specific question being whether the concept implies NATO-style alliance with full participation by members. Some participants argued that multilateralism should be defined by the number of participants or by principles such as inclusivity. Although no consensus was reached, it became clear that the concept needed refinement, and the suggestion was made that multilateralism may cover too broad a range of mechanisms to be useful for analysis.

A related problem arose in with regard to “bilateral security cooperation.” Because there was agreement that bilateral security cooperation meant alliances and similar arrangements, whereas mul-

tilateral security cooperation could include groups that discuss security issues, it was hard to find a base for comparison.

The concept of “the region” was also seen as controversial, with some participants viewing East Asia as one region for security purposes and others regarding it as two: land and maritime. A related discussion questioned whether there were two security orders, with China hegemonic on land and the US at sea, or three competing security orders in the US and its allies, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and ASEAN.

Finally, the meaning of regional “order” was discussed. One proposed definition referred to such an order as the sum of processes, institutions and norms, with regional security architecture being its material side. Objections were raised, however, on the basis that this definition was effectively the same as “functional cooperation.” Discussions then moved to the purpose of the papers. One suggestion was that the Focus Group should determine what value is added to the status quo ante when security is multilateralized, while another was that it should examine the alternatives to multilateralization.

Focus Group 1 Leader, Dr. Taylor, concluded by noting that there seemed to be a range of understandings of the bilateral-multilateral nexus, so some effort would need to be made to develop a more consistent definition.

Paper 3 From Pinstripes to Khaki: Asia’s Bilateral and Multilateral Defence Diplomacy Dr. David Capie (Victoria University of Wellington)

Dr. Capie’s paper examined how bilateral and multilateral strategies are combined by individual actors by looking at a specific kind of security cooperation: defense diplomacy, or diplomatic contact between the defense and military officials of one government and those of

another. Dr. Capie noted that the concept is very popular in Asia and, although it has been mostly bilateral, in the past decade multilateral defense diplomacy has also become popular. He also argued that multilateral and bilateral approaches to defense diplomacy seem to coexist without major issues, and many of the most important contacts take place at an operational, rather than leadership, level. The final paper, Dr. Capie noted, would raise several key questions and would examine: why multilateral defense diplomacy started so late in East Asia; how bi-, multi-, tri- and mini-lateral defense diplomacy interrelate; what commonalities exist in defense diplomacy between states that are not like-minded; and whether socializing norms have been successfully emerging at the operational level.

Paper 4
Stretching the Japan-US Alliance
Professor Rikki Kersten
(The Australian National University)

In her paper, Prof. Kersten's discussed how her research had moved from an exploration of how Japan has used bilateral and multilateral arrangements to promote its security to a consideration of whether Japan's desire to be involved in an East Asian regional security community is compatible with the US alliance. The government of former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi instituted a policy of proactively promoting pacifism, and the new Japanese government elected in 2009 has embraced this policy, whilst recognizing that there is some distance between a type of regionalism that also relies on the US alliance and one that demonstrates some political distance from Washington. Prof. Kersten's paper will examine whether the alliance can be "stretched" to cover these distances, and what the consequences of this are for Japan and the region.

Discussion of Papers 3 and 4

The subsequent discussion focused on

two issues, with the first looking at Japan in East Asia and the second considering the nature of the bilateral-multilateral security nexus.

The first issue opened with the observation that Japan is clearly declining as a power relative to China and thus has little choice but to rely on the United States for its security or otherwise adopt an independent nuclear deterrent, which thus far it has rejected. Consequently, Japan's strategic behavior is decided in light of the US alliance which, although appearing to weaken, remains the bedrock of security in the region.

The question of China's responsiveness to US pressure was then raised. One participant suggested that multilateral pressures were more effective because it was politically easier for China to acquiesce to the global or regional demands than to demands put by America alone.

"Japan is clearly declining as a power relative to China and thus has little choice but to rely on the United States for its security or otherwise adopt an independent nuclear deterrent ..."

Another participant noted, however, that China's response to American bilateral pressure has improved as the Chinese have become stronger. Consequently, China has moved from blunt responses to more nuanced approaches.

Another question to emerge concerned the way bilateralism and multilateralism connect in the context of how Japan signals its political distance from the US in order to be closer to Asia. It was suggested that the most important task for current research on Japan was to determine what purposes were served by signaling distance in this way, and why it seemed to be necessary for the alliance to function. One participant suggested that the US would not reject Japan over

this signaling, because it would be unable to give up voluntarily its security position.

The dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands was also raised. There was some disagreement over whether Japan saw the US as reliable in its support for Japan's claim to the islands. The dispute over a collision between Chinese and Japanese boats had, it was argued, broken a long-standing pattern of Chinese non-official boats approaching the islands, only to be arrested then quickly released without further incident.

The second part of the discussion

Dr. Brendan Taylor: unpacking the bilateral-multilateral security nexus



Photo: Darren Boyd / ANU CAP

asked whether it is possible to define the bilateral-multilateral security nexus and how viable might such a definition be. The members of the Focus Group agreed that the "nexus" should not be defined as a mere connection, but should also include interactions and the reasons why they occur in some areas but not others. The Group also agreed that "bilateral" refers to more than just the San Francisco system of US alliances, and "multilateral" means more than regional "talk shops."

As well as seeking to define its mean-

ing, the Focus Group sought to define the purpose of the bilateral-multilateral security nexus. Some participants saw its purpose as mostly utilitarian, ensuring security problems were dealt with in an appropriate fashion; while others questioned whether there really has been a distinction between bilateralism and multilateralism at all, noting that many policy-makers think it has been a false dichotomy. Other participants saw it as a normative question, analysis of which could add to security by allowing policy-makers to determine the optimal combination of bilateralism and multilateralism.

Paper 5 Bilateral and Multilateral Approaches to the Management of Territorial Disputes: The Case of the South China Sea

**Professor Aileen Baviera
(University of the Philippines)**

Prof. Baviera examined the operation of the bilateral-multilateral security nexus in maritime territorial disputes in South East Asia, focusing on the disputes over the Spratly Islands and Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. Her paper examined these cases from the perspective of the claimants and the major powers, examining how each has viewed bilateral and multilateral approaches or has used these approaches to pursue their interests, and how these approaches have interacted.

Prof. Baviera argued that each approach has had successes in specific areas, but that much depends on the behavior of the great powers and the maritime disputes may be turning into a proxy for conflict between China and the United States over control of the seas.

Paper 6 Linking the Bilateral-Multilateral Security Nexus: A Three-Tiered Approach **Assistant Professor Ryo Sahashi (University of Tokyo)**

Prof. Sahashi presented a “three-tier” approach to analyze regional security architecture in the Asia-Pacific and thus conceptually position the bilateral-multilateral security nexus. Tier one is the formal bilateral security arrangements (i.e. the San Francisco alliance system, with some additions); tier two is functional cooperation between states on security issues; and tier three is formal regional cooperation. Prof. Sahashi argued that the bilateral-multilateral security nexus could be observed in all three tiers in the Asia-Pacific. His paper then applied this approach to a study of Japan, although Prof. Sahashi indicated that the addition of a second case study was also possible.

Discussion of Papers 5 and 6

Discussion began on the topic of the disputed territorial claims to the Spratly Islands. There was general agreement in the Group that the Spratlys hold very little value in themselves, and that actual military conflict over them is unlikely unless the dispute is used as a pretext for conflict driven by other factors. The question of why there has been so many disputes in view of the islands’ limited value was raised, with general agreement being that this was most likely due to islands’ political symbolism and the reluctance of all parties to the dispute to “give in.”

The Focus Group also discussed whether bilateral or multilateral negotiations were a better way to resolve the question of ownership of the Spratlys. There was no consensus on the answer, though numerous views were expressed, including the view that the goals of participants would be more significant to the outcome than whether or not a bilateral or multilateral process was used to achieve it.

One question to be raised was whether China is commencing bilateral negotiations on issues that are amenable to multilateral resolution as a means of putting pressure on other states. A common view within the Group was that ASEAN

is finding it difficult to deal with internal tensions, thus making the bilateral approach more appealing to China.

The issue of whether the United States is softening or hardening the impression that it is encircling China proved to be contentious amongst the Group. One view was that America’s increasing use of trilateral security arrangements suggested that the US is trying to soften the impression of encirclement of China.

Other members, however, took the opposing view. The reasoning of those who saw the US as hardening its position was that trilateralism is no more than the sum of its parts — the underlying bilateral arrangements — and is thus still perceived by the Chinese as a form of encirclement. The response was that these trilateral arrangements could be more than the sum of their parts. The US-Japan-Australia trilateral security agreement makes it more palatable for Japan to become involved in regional security, for example by conducting peace-keeping training with Australian forces.

Another topic for discussion concerned the quality of interaction between bilateralism and multilateralism at each of the three levels of analysis. It was noted, however, that interaction at different tiers could not be compared because each tier had different reasons for multilateralizing security cooperation. The tiers were currently ranked by achievement, meaning that the first tier had achieved the most in improving security. ■