

# Asia–Pacific Challenges for Diplomacy

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I will begin with a brief overview of the changing world of diplomacy and diplomats, then canvass changes in the world at large since 1945, followed by the lagged changes in Asia–Pacific. Fourth, prompted by North Korea’s nuclear test last month, I will take up the theme of the anomalies undermining the global governance of nuclear weapons before concluding with a catalogue of challenges to diplomacy in Asia–Pacific.

## I. Changes in the World of Diplomacy and Diplomats

There has been a threefold change in the world of diplomacy and diplomats:

- (i) In the *levels* of diplomatic activity, from the local through the domestic-national to the bilateral, regional and global;
- (ii) In the *domain and scope* of the subject matter or content, expanding rapidly to a very broad array of the different sectors of public policy and government activity; and
- (iii) In the rapidly expanding *numbers and types of actors*, from governments to national private sector firms, multinational corporations, NGOs and regional and international organisations.

The business of the world has changed almost beyond recognition over the last century. A generation ago Raymond Aron argued that ‘the ambassador and the soldier *live* and *symbolize* international relations which, insofar as they are inter-state relations, concern diplomacy and war’. Today, alongside the horde of diplomats and soldiers, the international lawyer, the multinational merchant, cross-border financier, World Bank technocrat, UN peacekeeper and NGO humanitarian worker jostle for space on the increasingly congested international stage.

In the classic formulation, the overriding goal of foreign policy was pursuit of the national interest. The über-realist Hans Morgenthau defined diplomacy as ‘the art of bringing the different elements of national power to bear with maximum effect upon those points in the international situation which concern the national interest most directly’. The four core tasks of the diplomat were to *represent* his country’s interests, *protect* his country’s citizens visiting or residing in his accredited country, *inform* his own and host government and people about each other, and *negotiate* with the host country. This was conducted in a world of ‘club diplomacy’ (and occasionally the even more intimate ‘boudoir diplomacy’).

Because of the threefold changes identified above, the overriding goal of foreign policy in the contemporary world is to forge issue-specific coalitions with like-minded actors. China and India teaming up with Brazil and South Africa to ensure that any Doha accord will be a development outcome in reality and not just in rhetoric is a perfect example. The matching core task of diplomacy is to engage in issue-specific ‘network diplomacy’. The latter has more players than club diplomacy, is flat rather than hierarchical, engages in multiple forms of communication beyond merely the written, is more transparent than confidential,

and its 'consummation' takes the form of increased bilateral flows instead of formal signing ceremonies. The motto of new diplomacy could be: networking to promote welfare and security by managing risk and reducing vulnerability in a world of strategic uncertainty, increasing complexity and rapid globalisation. Parenthetically, I note with interest that our host for this event, the Asia-Pacific College of Diplomacy, is itself a networked college rather than the more traditional self-contained college.

Those attached to the old world of pomp and pageantry, rituals and procedures, are increasingly detached from the real world of modern diplomacy, and are the less effective for it. Not only can presidents, prime ministers and foreign ministers go over the ambassador's head directly to their counterparts in other countries; often so can business executives, trade union leaders, journalists and NGOs. The bigger departments from the home country's bureaucracy, better staffed and resourced, often place their own personnel in overseas embassies: not just defence, but also agriculture, education, and so on. The agenda-setting capacity of many NGOs – Amnesty, Human Rights Watch, the ICRC, Greenpeace – is greater than that of most governments. If, therefore, the diplomat wishes to escape from Peter Ustinov's withering description as 'nothing but a headwaiter who is allowed to sit down occasionally', then he and she must learn to engage and communicate with the full range of social, economic and political actors, across all domains of subject matter, and at all levels of interactions. Ambassadors' lives no longer consists, if it ever did, of equal parts of protocol, alcohol and geritol. They must engage with the host society in which they live, not merely negotiate with the government to which they are accredited. No longer is the ambassador someone sent abroad to lie for his country; prime ministers and presidents manage to do that quite well at home directly. Instead, in attempting to navigate the shoals while exploiting the opportunities of a globalised and networked world, the diplomat must cultivate all manner of constituencies in home, host and sometimes even third countries. That is the key to network diplomacy: cultivating all relevant constituencies.

## **II. A Changed World**

The world of international relations – the 'field' in which diplomats operate – has changed substantially since 1945 and is vastly more challenging, complex and demanding. The issues and preoccupations of the new millennium present new and different types of challenges. With the new realities and challenges have come corresponding new expectations for action and new standards of conduct in national and international affairs. The number of actors in world affairs has grown enormously, the types of actors have changed very substantially, the interactions between them have grown ever more dense and intense and the agenda of international public policy has been altered quite dramatically in line with the changing temper of the times.

### *1. The Cold War*

The end of the Cold War terminated the US-Soviet great-power rivalry, brought victory for the liberal over a totalitarian ideology, and marked the triumph of the market over the command economy model. We are the better for the Cold War having been fought, how it was fought, and who won.

The elimination of countervailing power to check the untrammelled exercise of US power did not just produce a unipolar world; it also ushered in a quasi-imperial order. Imperialism is not a foreign policy designed to promote, project, and globalise the values and virtues of the dominant centre, but a form of international governance based on an unequal hierarchy of power. The reality of inequality structures the relationship between the imperial centre and all others. This is not a matter of malevolence on the part of a particular administration in Washington, but an artefact of the reality of a unipolar world that will shape the foreign relations of any administration.

This is perhaps the biggest challenge for diplomacy at the global level: how to interact with a unipolar Washington that views itself as uniquely virtuous, resistant to ‘Gulliverisation’, exempt from restrictions that apply to all others, oscillating between neoisolationism and neoconservatism. The challenge is as acute for Japan and India as it is for Australia. If friends and allies are to be useful, they must avoid both slavish obedience and instinctive opposition; be prepared to support Washington when right despite intense international unpopularity; but be willing to say no when America is wrong, despite the risk of intense American irritation. A second and related challenge is how to interact with one another without always routing relations through Washington in a hub and spoke model.

## *2. Decolonisation*

There has been something of a revival of the enterprise of liberal imperialism which rests on nostalgia for the lost world of Western empires that kept the peace among warring natives and provided sustenance to their starving peoples. This is at variance with our own memory and narratives of our encounter with the West. Typically, our communities were pillaged, our economies ravaged and our political development stunted. The experience of the former Soviet satellites is not all that different in essence, with the one significant exception of the abiding sense of gratitude towards the United States for unstinting support in the long shadow of Soviet oppression.

There are several resulting diplomatic challenges. For most former colonies, from the South Pacific to Southeast and South Asia, the triple challenge of national integration, state-building and economic development remains imperative. We also need to avoid state collapse and failure and the resulting humanitarian emergencies, from Pacific Island states to East Timor, North Korea, Myanmar, Nepal, Afghanistan and some others. Former colonial powers and settler societies have to be sensitive to the foreign policy input of historical trauma, while former colonies must make an effort to escape the trap of viewing current events and motives from a historical prism. One of the clearest examples of the dual danger is in relation to providing international assistance to victims of atrocities inside sovereign borders.

## *3. Changing Nature and Locale of Armed Conflict*

According to several data sets, the number of armed conflicts rose until the end of the Cold War, peaked in the early 1990s and has declined since then. The nature of armed conflict has changed. War used to be an institution of the states system, with distinctive rules, etiquette, norms and stable patterns of practices. Now the line between war as a political act and organised criminality is being blurred. The locale

of warfare has shifted. Today we have more wars, and more UN peace operations, in Africa than the rest of the world combined.

Few modern conflicts are purely internal. The networks that sustain them can involve a range of ancillary problems like trafficking in arms, drugs and children; terrorism; and refugee flows. Whole regions can be quickly destabilised. Sometimes the rich world is deeply implicated. Civil conflicts are fuelled by arms and monetary transfers that originate in the developed world, and in turn their destabilising effects are felt in the developed world in everything from globally interconnected terrorism to refugee flows, the export of drugs and the spread of infectious disease and organised crime.

Noncombatants are now on the frontline of modern battles. The need to help and protect civilians at risk of death and displacement caused by armed conflict is paramount. Diplomats will be judged on how well they discharge or dishonour their international responsibility to protect.

#### *4. Human Rights*

The rise and diffusion of human rights norms and conventions and the extension and diffusion of international humanitarian law were among the truly great achievements of the last century. Human rights advocacy rests on 'the moral imagination to feel the pain of others' as if it were our own and can be viewed as 'a juridical articulation of duty by those in zones of safety toward those in zones of danger'. The origins of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the experiences of European civilisation are important: not for the reason that most critics cite, but its opposite. It is less an expression of European triumphalism and imperial self-confidence than a guilt-ridden Christendom's renunciation of its ugly recent record; less an assertion of the superiority of European human nature than revulsion at the recent history of European savagery; not an effort to universalise Western values but to ban the dark side of Western vices like racial and religious bigotry.

The challenge for diplomacy, therefore, is how best to interpret and apply universal values with due sensitivity to local contexts and Asian sensibilities. Far from cross-cultural divisions, the loss of a son killed by government thugs unites mothers of all religions and nationalities in shared pain, grief and burning anger.

#### *5. Environmental Protection*

The rise of environmental consciousness, the need to husband resources more frugally and nurture our fragile ecosystems more tenderly as a common legacy for future generations, was another great social movement of the last century. The concept of 'sustainable development' was one of the major norm shifts. How best to operationalise the concept in concrete policy and actual practice remains intensely contentious and thus a major diplomatic challenge.

Nothing illustrates this better than climate change. There is substantial agreement among scientists that the rate of climate change driven by human activity dwarfs the natural rates of change. Yet much of the Western media has preferred to give 'equal' time to contrarians whose scepticism is sometimes supported by the fossil fuel industry. 'Balanced' coverage reflects, not the balance of scientific consensus on the subject, but rather the ability of special-interest groups to capture media and political attention. The newly-published Stern report has issued a deadly

sober warning. Some have argued that given scientific uncertainties built into the climate change models and the high costs of action that may ultimately prove surplus to requirements, the prudent policy is to wait, see and adapt if necessary. Sir Nicholas Stern reverses the argument: given the same uncertainties and the relatively much lower costs of acting now rather than later, the best policy is immediate action. Delayed action will cost more and deliver fewer benefits. Kofi Annan remarks that remaining sceptics are 'out of step, out of arguments and just about out of time'. Effective programs for tackling what may well be the gravest challenge confronting humanity require active partnerships among governments, scientists, economists, NGOs and industry. The traditional paradigm of value-maximising national interest is simply irrelevant.

### *6. Human Security*

Its irrelevance has been accentuated also with the rise of the human security paradigm which puts the individual at the centre of the debate, analysis and policy. He or she is paramount, and the state is a collective instrument to protect human life and promote human welfare. The fundamental components of human security – the security of *people* against threats to personal safety and life – can be put at risk by external aggression, but also by factors within a country, including 'security' forces, acid rain, forest fires, rising sea levels, floods, earthquakes and tsunamis. The reformulation of national security into human security is simple, yet has profound consequences for how we see the world, how we organise our political affairs, how we make choices in public and foreign policy, and how we relate to fellow-human beings from many different countries and cultures.

### *7. Globalisation*

National frontiers are becoming less relevant in determining the flow of ideas, information, goods, services, capital, labour and technology. Globalisation releases many productive forces that can help to uplift millions from poverty, deprivation and degradation. But it can also generate socially and politically disruptive forces. There has been a growing divergence, not convergence, in income levels between countries and peoples, with widening inequality among and within nations. Assets and incomes are more concentrated. Wage shares have fallen while profit shares have risen. Capital mobility alongside labour immobility has reduced the bargaining power of organised labour: the ease of capital movement leads to threats of exit unless taxes, wages and worker benefits are reduced. The rise in unemployment and the accompanying casualisation of the workforce, with more and more people working in the informal sector, has generated an excess supply of labour and depressed real wages. Finally, globalisation can unleash destructive forces – 'uncivil society' – such as flows of arms, terrorism, disease, prostitution, drug and people smuggling, etc. that are neither controllable nor solvable by individual governments. Moreover, even the industrial countries are now experiencing something of a blowback effect of globalisation. The powerful global labour arbitrage generated by globalisation, for example when the rich outsource jobs to the poor countries while the latter outsource their brains, has put unrelenting pressure on the income earning capacity of high-wage workers in the industrial economies like Japan and Australia.

The challenge of diplomacy is how best to harness the productive potential of globalisation while muting the disruptive forces, taming the destructive forces and protecting national identity.

#### 8. *Nonstate Actors*

NGO-led sceptical dissenters in the streets offer an antidote to the unbridled enthusiasts of global capital in boardrooms and treasuries. Governments can satisfy only a small and diminishing proportion of the needs of human beings as social animals. 'Civil society' refers to the social and political space where voluntary associations attempt to shape norms and policies for regulating public life in social, political, economic and environmental dimensions. The new actors have brought a wide range of fresh voices, perspectives, interests, experiences and aspirations. They add depth and texture to the increasingly rich tapestry of international civil society.

The net result of expanding global citizen action has been to extend the theory and deepen the practice of grassroots democracy across borders. We are likely to witness increasing issue-specific networks and coalitions. Global policy networks can constitute highly effective *coalitions for change* that bridge the growing distance between policy-makers, citizens, entrepreneurs, and activists.

Civil society operating on the soft and well-lit side of the international street poses fewer and lesser problems than 'uncivil' society: nonstate actors on the rough and dark side of the international street who too have become increasingly globalised and interlinked in their operations, funnelling drugs, arms, hot money and terrorists across state borders. The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 were dramatic proof of the democratisation of the means of violence, as a result of which a motley collection of fanatics was able to inflict on the US homeland casualties on a scale that has been beyond the capacity of any state actor since 1941.

The threefold challenge for diplomacy is how to counter uncivil society, give voice to civil society, but neither a vote nor a veto to them: for that would be an abdication of responsibility to govern on behalf of all citizens. Some Asian-Pacific governments complain about the activities of international NGOs as interference in their internal affairs and view them suspiciously as instruments of 'soft' Western intervention. They are surely right in the implied belief that NGOs augment foreign policy tools. The US is indeed a more powerful world actor for being able to draw on a rich civil society, a depth of scholarly knowledge and a media that has market dominance and reaches into the farthest nook and cranny around the world.

But this begs the question: instead of keeping NGOs at arms' length, should not governments learn how best to strengthen civil society in their own countries and enter into partnership with them in the pursuit of shared international goals? Even more crucially, why is it that non-Western governments complain about biased coverage by Western media instead of doing something constructive? Journalists are censored, manipulated, harassed and sometimes even imprisoned and liquidated. To be sure, English is the dominant medium of global communication, and the BBC and CNN are truly global brands in the world of media. Yet today they are being challenged by Al Jazeera, to the point where Washington has had a strained if not antagonistic relationship with the group in relation to their coverage of Afghanistan and Iraq. Of the large and well-established Asian democracies, India and Japan could easily by now have supported the emergence of truly global media brands as well. Quite a few Indian journalists have world recognition but, almost without

exception, they work for Western print and electronic media. In its desperation to control information, news and analyses, the Indian government has effectively aborted the rise of independent Indian news services with the authority and credibility to command a global following. The BBC provided the model; is it the West's fault that Indians failed to emulate such a positive example? The net result is that India does indeed lack a key agent of international influence and a crucial ingredient of soft power in the modern networked world. In this respect, sadly, India is a metaphor for all of Asia. The challenge for enlightened national interest diplomacy, therefore, is how best to nurture civil society and credible media so that they help to project local values and perspectives to a receptive international audience.

### **III. A Changed Asia–Pacific**

The framework for the world order resting on superpower rivalry was adopted at Yalta in 1945. Reflecting the two theatres of the Second World War, that order had two geographical components: Europe and Asia–Pacific. The kaleidoscope of cultures, cleavages and conflicts in Asia–Pacific does not permit a simple intercontinental transposition of the Euro–Atlantic security architecture.

The Yalta-based order has crumbled in Europe but not Asia–Pacific. Here, walls have not come tumbling down, Korea is still divided, empires have not dissolved nor come apart, and armies have not gone marching home. Internal developments in the former Soviet Union had immediate and far-reaching consequences for Eastern Europe but lacked a similar resonance in the Asian communist countries.

There is a greater variety of political systems in Asia–Pacific, ranging from robust and explosive democracy, fragile democracies and something less than full democracies to communism. Many countries are characterised by socio-economic fragility and regime brittleness and some suffer from enduring low-intensity insurgencies. The disparities in social and economic indicators are greater. Terrorist cells are feared to have taken deep root in parts of Indonesia and the Philippines, while Northeast Asia is the setting for such other non-traditional security concerns as worsening water and energy scarcity, environmental degradation and human trafficking.

The mantle of being the most heavily militarised region – entailing massive armies, fortified and mined borders, heavy long-range weapons systems and nuclear weapons – has passed from central Europe during the Cold War to Northeast Asia today. Intensive militarisation is proof of the persistence of the national security paradigm across Asia–Pacific. Yet the challenge posed by the massive earthquake and devastating tsunami of 26 December 2004 was a vivid illustration of the advantages of conceptualising security within the inclusive framework of human security.

The structure of power relations is more fluid and complex, resting on five powers: America, China, Japan, Russia and India. Even while attempting to improve relations with one another, they are also jockeying for advantages in case relations should deteriorate sharply, for example in their control over sea lanes of communication and choke points through which critical and potentially very vulnerable energy supplies transit.

In summary, US influence and prestige have fallen due to Iraq's demonstration of the limits to American power, its perceived hostility to the Muslim world and its

relative retreat from engagement with Asia-Pacific, but it remains the most influential external actor; Japan's has continued to decline, albeit slowly over the decades rather than precipitously as with the US; Russia is marking time, still; India is starting to recapture the region's and world attention and interest; and the real winner is China with an ascendant economy, growing poise and self-confidence and an expanding array of soft power assets in regional diplomacy.

The corresponding diplomatic challenges are how to dampen prospects for conflict among the major powers of Asia-Pacific and promote cooperation instead as a regional public good; how to encourage policies by the major economic players that will cushion economic shocks for others and draw them into region-wide economic expansion and prosperity; how to promote trade policies, practices and arrangements that are inclusive, open and market-led but also fair and equitable; and how to cope with the growing list of non-traditional security threats like energy and water scarcity, drug and human trafficking, and pandemics, for example by creating an Asian energy grid.

#### **IV. Nuclear Weapons, Anomalies, and Global Governance**

India was the first country to break out of the nuclear arms control regime centred on the NPT with a nuclear test in 1974 and then several more in 1998. In doing so, India challenged not just the NPT but also the system of global governance. Now North Korea has done the same and thrown down the gauntlet, yet again, to a basic inconsistency in our definition of the problem. Is it nuclear weapons, on the ground that their very destructiveness somehow makes them so evil that they should be proscribed for all? Or is it rogue states, whose behaviour is so bad they cannot be trusted with weapons which are tolerable, if not desirable, in more mature and responsible hands?

Sensible policies to deal with the problem cannot be devised if our understanding of the problem is itself riddled with conceptual confusion. Even an administration that prides itself on moral clarity fell into the trap of conflating the two by saying that we cannot tolerate the world's most destructive weapons falling into the hands of the world's most dangerous regimes.

It truly is remarkable how those who worship at the altar of nuclear weapons excommunicate as heretics others wishing to join their sect. If the problem is not nuclear proliferation, but nuclear weapons, then the solution is not nonproliferation, but disarmament through a nuclear weapons convention. The core nonproliferation-disarmament bargain of the NPT is based on the assumption of nuclear weapons being the problem. From this follows the compelling conclusion that the logics of nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament are essentially the same. The only way to escape the trap is to think outside the NPT box. The triple crisis today arises from non-compliance with NPT obligations by some states engaged in undeclared nuclear activities and others that have failed to honour their disarmament obligations; states that are not party to the NPT; and nonstate actors seeking to acquire nuclear weapons.

The world has managed to live with five, followed by eight, nuclear powers. Over the course of four decades, however, six significant anomalies have accumulated and now weigh it down close to the point of rupture.

First, the definition of a nuclear weapon state is chronological – a country that manufactured and exploded a nuclear device before 1 January 1967. India, Pakistan

Israel and now North Korea could test, deploy and even use nuclear weapons, but cannot be described as nuclear powers. In principle, Britain and France could dismantle their nuclear edifice – what is life without hope? – and destroy their nuclear arsenals, but would still count as nuclear powers. This is an Alice-in-Wonderland approach to affairs of deadly seriousness. But can the NPT definition be opened up for revision through a formal amendment of the treaty with all the unpredictable consequences?

Second, even as the threat from nonstate actors has grown frighteningly real, the NPT can regulate and monitor the activities only of states. A. Q. Khan's underground nuclear bazaar showed how porous is the border between private and state rogue actors. A robust and credible normative architecture to control the actions of terrorist groups who can acquire and use nuclear weapons must be developed outside the NPT.

Third, North Korea's open defiance, spread over many years, shows that decades after a problem arises, we still cannot agree on an appropriate response inside the NPT framework. It is impossible to defang despots of nuclear weapons the day after they acquire and use them. The UN seems incapable of doing so the day before. If international institutions cannot cope, states will try to do so themselves, either unilaterally or in company with like-minded allies. If prevention is strategically necessary and morally justified but legally not permitted, then the existing framework of laws and rules – not preventive military action – is defective.

The fourth anomaly is lumping biological, chemical and nuclear weapons in the one conceptual and policy basket of 'weapons of mass destruction'. They differ in their technical features, in the ease with they can be acquired and developed, and in their capacity to cause mass destruction. Treating them as one weapons category can distort analysis and produce flawed responses. There is also the danger of mission creep. If nuclear weapons are accepted as having a role to counter biochemical warfare, how can we deny a nuclear-weapons capability to Iran which was actually attacked with chemical weapons by Saddam Hussein?

Fifth, the N5 preach nuclear abstinence while engaged in consenting deterrence. Not a single country that had nuclear weapons when the NPT was signed in 1968 has given them up. Can the country with the world's most powerful nuclear weapons rightfully use military force to prevent their acquisition by others? Such behaviour fuels the politics of grievance and resentment. It is not possible to convince others of the futility of nuclear weapons when the facts of continued possession and doctrines and threats of use prove their utility for some. Hence the axiom of nonproliferation: as long as any one country has them, others, including terrorist groups, will try their best (or worst) to get them. Conversely, if nuclear weapons did not exist, they could not proliferate.

The final paradox concerns the central doctrine underpinning the contemporary Westphalian system, which holds that sovereign states are equal in effectiveness, status and legitimacy. In reality, states are not of equal worth and significance, neither militarily, economically, politically nor morally. The 'nonproliferation ayatollahs' lump India, Iran, Israel, North Korea and Pakistan together without discriminating between their respective records, but do discriminate between nonproliferation and disarmament. It seems unlikely that in the eyes of most people and countries, nuclear weapons in the hands of Britain and North Korea are equally dangerous. The logical policy implication is either to condemn nuclear weapons for everyone, or to distinguish bad and rogue from responsible behaviour and oppose regimes, not the weapons. But that threatens the core assumption of the NPT, that

nuclear weapons are immoral for anyone.

North Korea's test is a symptom, not the cause, of the NPT being a broken reed. So how do we articulate a post-NPT vision?

## **Conclusion**

The nature of the North Korean nuclear challenge and possible ways of responding illustrate, only too well, the threefold change that I began with. With regard to levels of activity, efforts have to range from North Korea to bilateral relations, regional diplomacy and the United Nations. The domain and scope have to include not merely national security issues directly and narrowly, but also issues of energy security, technology transfers, food supplies, recognition of North Korea as a 'normal' country and, at the opposite end, criminalisation of North Korea as an actor that has carried out state kidnappings of Japanese nationals in Japan and taken them to North Korea and exported proliferation-sensitive material and equipment.

The expanded range and number of actors is also relevant. For example, a nuclear weapons convention as the meta-solution will likely involve a similar coalition of governmental and NGO actors as produced the Ottawa Convention banning antipersonnel landmines and could emulate the Chemical Weapons Convention in involving the private sector. And of course with respect to threats, there is considerable anxiety about nuclear weapons falling into the hands of and being used by terrorists. The prospect highlights a major shortcoming in the normative architecture of arms control and the use of force, namely, that they are signed by and regulate the activities of state actors only. Any solution to the challenge will require creative and innovative thinking.

The old world order has faded. The new world order is not yet set. The contours of Asia–Pacific are changing. Items for continuing discussion include:

- The economic recovery of Asia–Pacific;
- The short, medium and long-term roles of China, Japan, the United States, Russia, India and the Central Asian states;
- The immediate future of fragile states like the Solomon Islands, East Timor, North Korea, Myanmar, Nepal, Afghanistan, etc;
- The medium and long-term future of Taiwan;
- The future of the two Koreas;
- The integration of Vietnam, Cambodia and Myanmar into the Southeast Asian mainstream;
- The nature of links between ASEAN, ARF, APEC and European countries;
- The place of Australia and New Zealand in Asia–Pacific: should the East Asian community take the form of ASEAN+3 (Japan, China and South Korea – China's preference) or ASEAN+3+3 (Australia, New Zealand and India – Japan's and US preference);
- The proliferation of bilateral and multilateral free trade agreements and other preferential trading arrangements;
- The new security agenda of international terrorism, illicit arms and narcotics flows across borders, human trafficking, pandemics, the looming food, water and energy scarcity, and climate change; and
- The nuclearisation of Asia and the Pacific.

In the main, Asians have been norm takers rather than the setters and enforcers of regional and global norms. They urgently need to learn the art of being norm entrepreneurs and setters instead of playing the role of spoilers, for example with respect to whaling, nuclear weapons, climate change, and the new norm of the responsibility to protect. Even better, they need to develop regional skills in articulating regional norms as global ones and embedding them in regional and global conventions and regimes. That Asia punches well below its weight in international forums like the United Nations, reflecting the fact that it is less cohesive and united than any other regional grouping, should be no more acceptable to governments than to peoples.

They could begin by addressing the need to adapt the classical tenets of sovereign statehood to modern-day realities. Else they will be forced into reactive and defensive positions, yet again. National sovereignty is the mother of all anomalies, befuddled by empirical and conceptual challenges alike, for example with respect to nuclear weapons. We know that many of the most intractable problems are global in scope and will most likely require concerted multilateral action that is also global in its reach. But the policy authority for tackling them remains vested in states, and the competence to mobilise the resources needed for tackling them is also vested in states. The very strength of the United Nations, that it is the common meeting house of all the world's countries, is a major source of weakness with respect to efficient decision-making. For diplomats dealing with Asia and the Pacific, the biggest challenge is to fashion regional responses to the accumulating anomalies of a state-based order with respect to nuclear weapons, human rights abuses and humanitarian atrocities, environmental degradation and resource depletion, the pursuit of national security amidst multiplying human insecurities, the rise in numbers, activities and influence of nonstate actors both good and bad, and the march of globalisation that respects no passports.

The optimistic scenario postulates continuing strengthening of cooperative security relations embedded in regional institutions in Asia-Pacific. Enhanced interdependence through increasing intra-regional flows of people, goods and services will foster and nest a growing sense of community. The pessimistic scenario is of intensified volatility, turbulence and conflict beyond the managerial capacity of the embryonic regional institutions. The prophets of doom fear the re-emergence of old power-political rivalries, or else the rise of new security threats rooted in energy, food and water scarcity.

I believe in the power of negative thinking: an optimist can never be pleasantly surprised. Think of it this way: almost all the things we worry about, never happen. Therefore worrying works. Keep worrying – you are right to do so.