

APC CONFERENCE OVERVIEW

The contemporary world can be described with one word - uncertainty. The continuous transformation of the international world order marked by the emergence of new players on the global scene brings about both new opportunities and challenges. Due to modern technologies, the world is becoming more integrated than ever and globalization brings benefits especially in terms of trade and economy. However, while distances have shortened due to air travel and modern means of communications, the threat of terrorism, nuclear proliferation and spread of weapons of mass destruction, deadly diseases, drug trafficking as well as energy and food security have become global issues. These challenges are daunting and increasingly complex, as they have no respect for state's borders, i.e. they can hardly be dealt with exclusively by one government only.

The Asia-Pacific area is the most unstable region of the contemporary world. Consider the following: the fallout from Middle East tensions, particularly the conflict in Iraq; potential nuclear proliferation stemming from the Iranian regime of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad; instability in Afghanistan; terrorist insurgencies basing themselves in lawless Western Pakistan, possibly along with Osama bin Laden; and a nuclearized North Korea. Yet another challenge is brought about by rising China, which some call the world's workshop, offering huge trade opportunities, while still remaining authoritarian in character. China seems to seek a position of a regional hegemon, challenging the influence of the U.S. In effect, China's goal may be to fundamentally change the post-WWII strategic balance in the region, carefully built by the Americans, in its favor.

China's hunger for energy resources has led Beijing to engage unscrupulously in relationships with authoritarian regimes, such as those in Sudan, Venezuela, and Myanmar. By offering unconditional trade relationship to such regimes, China is undermining the effort to persuade and pressure these countries into joining the international community and to meet the accepted norms of international behavior.



The above-mentioned topics and others were debated at the **conference on Asia-Pacific Security**, organized by the *Prague Security Studies Institute* (PSSI) at the beginning of September 2008 in Prague. For the first time, Central Europe, and particularly the Czech Republic, had the opportunity to engage in a thorough, comprehensive debate about all these important regional challenges. To gain a diversity of views and to engage in a collective search for solutions, the event brought together a number of leading politicians, policy-makers, diplomats, academics and business experts from 25 countries. Among the most prominent speakers were the former Czech President Václav Havel, Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg, Indian Minister of State for External Affairs Anand Sharma, Philippine Foreign Minister Alberto Romulo, Executive Director of the International Energy Agency Nobuo Tanaka, Richard Lawless, former Under Secretary of Defense for Asia-Pacific Affairs, C. Richard D'Amato, former Chairman of Congressional U.S. - China Economic and Security Review, former Chief of the Czech General Staff Jiří Šedivý, and Pierre Morel, EU Special Representative for Central Asia. Among other speakers and participants, there were also representatives of influential American think tanks, such as the *Claremont Institute*, the *Center for Security Policy*, and the *Institute of the North*.

The conference covered a wide spectrum of topics, including politics, security, and trade. One of the most animated debates occurred in the panel discussion on North Korea's nuclear crisis, which is currently regarded as one of the most perilous challenges to the international community. Not only does nuclear North Korea destabilize the region by elevating security concerns, it has also led to higher military spending by the U.S. and Japan. Japan feels particularly threatened by North Korea's missiles and has taken precautionary measures, including the deployment of missile defense systems. At the same time, the North Korea missile threat has also revived the question of Japan possibly exploring its own nuclear capability.

The panel on energy demands of China and India brought together experts from the People's Republic of China, Russia, the U.S., and the Czech Republic. Emphasizing the increasing demand for energy, the panel focused on Central Asia, yet another regional flashpoint. Rich in energy resources (e.g. oil, gas, and uranium), the states of Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan are attracting interest of both of their large neighbors – China



and Russia. The PRC clearly seeks to greatly expand its energy trade with these states, which would decrease China's dependence on sea transportation of vital resources.

The final panel on regional democracy and human rights discussed the challenges of democracy-building in the Asia-Pacific region. It focused on Myanmar's Saffron Revolution as a missed opportunity by the international community to press Myanmar's Junta in the direction of democracy and respect for human and civil rights. The panel also debated the human rights abuses in Tibet and the possibility of the PRC implementing, at least to some degree, the lessons of democratization in Taiwan.

The PSSI's conference on Asia Pacific security represented an important contribution – even a breakthrough – for Central European policy debate concerning global security challenges. Let us hope that this exceptional conference was not an isolated event but rather a beginning of a new tradition of similarly oriented meetings.

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