

Building Cooperative Security in Asia Pacific: Canadian Track-Two Initiatives, 1989-2005

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The full report is available at: <https://sppga.ubc.ca/news/building-cooperative-security-in-asia-pacific/>

For fifteen years between 1989 and 2005 at the heart of the Asia Pacific era, Canadian academics and officials initiated more than a dozen ideas-driven programs intended to promote cooperative security and human security with Asian partners. The distinctive feature of these efforts was the leadership, resource commitments, and ambition to advance “track two” multilateral dialogues on a wide range of security issues with the objective of promoting the habit of dialogue, broadening the scope of security discussions beyond conventional defence matters, and strengthening Canadian links with the region.

The Research Report is an *aide mémoire* prepared by three of the principal organizers of a chain of 14 projects. Some of these like the formative North Pacific Cooperative Security Dialogue, collaborations with the ASEAN ISIS group, and the Council for Security Cooperation in Asia Pacific (CSCAP) were explicitly multilateral and inclusive by design. Others were multi-year series organized bilaterally with China, Japan and South Korea.

The international activities were linked to and supported by three newly-created institutions at home, the Canadian Member Committee of CSCAP, the Canadian Consortium for Asia Pacific Security, and the Canadian Consortium on Human Security.

The outputs included some 60 Canadian-led or sponsored meetings around the region and more than 20 in Canada. They benefited from, and helped sustain, a comparatively benign moment in great power competition and opened new channels for Middle Power initiative.

The projects were distinctive and significant in seven ways:

First, at their core as initially spelled out in the NPCSD in 1990 was the idea of cooperative security as a supplement to existing arrangements for national defence. Cooperative security was based on a philosophy that security needed to be built with neighbours not against them, that the habits of dialogues needed to be constructed across ideological and political divides, and that the agenda of security needed to be extended beyond traditional matters of military defence to include non-conventional threats such as climate change, communicable disease, and natural disasters. In the late 1990s the concept of human security was introduced to focus upon a variety of threats

to individuals and groups within nations including protection of civilians in situations of armed conflict.

Second, special attention was devoted to engaging Chinese and North Korean experts and officials with the aim of preparing the ground for inclusive multilateralism parallel to efforts by ASEAN.

Third, all were directed by academics and involved more than a hundred professors, graduate students and experts across the country. Most of them were constructed on a “track two” basis which had at the table academics, experts and, in their private and occasionally formal capacities, government officials. Consultations with Ottawa were frequent, multi-tiered and benefited from some novel institutional arrangements.

Fourth, from a research and scholarship perspective, it strengthened the human capital base. The activities generated a large number of books, articles, working papers and reports and brought a large number of established scholars and graduate students into policy-related discussions Canada and in the region.

Fifth, from a diplomatic perspective, the events raised the profile of Canada as a constructive and visible regional player. In several instances the networks generated contacts with emerging Asian leaders in governments and institutes that were useful in official channels as well.

Sixth, the projects secured funding averaging about a million dollars a year from a range of sources, EAITC and CIDA principally but also organizations abroad. The ability to sustain continuous support as governments changed and priorities shifted was essential and unusual.

Seventh, they raised the visibility of Canada and Canadians in the region. They were an example of creative Middle Power diplomacy combining proactive senior political leadership, engaged bureaucrats, innovative ideas, academic talent, and diplomatic agility at a ripe moment.

In the current Indo-Pacific era, Canada is positioned in a very different way. The norms and practices of cooperative security remain entrenched in Southeast Asian-style multilateralism even as the broader security situation is marked by deepening great power competition, the growth of minilateral coalitions of the like-minded, and increased military spending.

In this slide to Cold War-like strategic confrontation, mechanisms for confidence and trust building, tension-reduction, and inclusive dialogue with the like-minded and non-like-minded alike are needed more than ever. By looking back, the report highlights ambitions and mechanisms that some day may again inform a distinctive and constructive Canadian contribution to the regional architecture.