

## SECURITY AND DEFENCE COOPERATION: PRACTICAL AND SUBSTANTIAL UNILATERAL, BILATERAL AND REGIONAL STEPS

Presentation by Gareth Evans, Deputy Leader of the Opposition and former Foreign Minister of Australia, to the Fourth Pacific Dialogue, Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia, Selangor, 12 January 1998

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The trouble with conflict prevention is that too many people see it as boring. Killing people does, sooner or later, tend to get noticed. And stopping people killing each other, after they have started, also tends to be the stuff of which political reputations and journalists' expense accounts are made.

But try and work away at an agenda for peace that takes prevention really seriously - which works at addressing the underlying causes of conflict, building the processes and institutions, the social and economic conditions, the attitudinal changes, the international regimes, that may over time really make a difference . . . When you do that, in the way that, for example, the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict has been trying to do for the last three years, you tend to find that - as we on the Commission did, not to our complete surprise, when we launched our final report last month - the world is agog with indifference.

All that said, governments around the world - and groups such as this - must continue to work away at practical and substantial steps, bilaterally, regionally and globally, that will reduce frictions and maximise the chances of a stable peace.

If dialogue forums like this achieve nothing else, let us at least make our own contribution toward establishing an international *culture of prevention* - by ourselves taking prevention seriously; talking to each other, and the media, as much about preventive diplomacy and peace building as we do about the resolution of violent conflict; recognising, in our speeches and statements, successful preventive efforts which would otherwise go unremarked; and making the commitment, to the extent that we are ourselves leaders, or can influence them, to increase the resources allocated for conflict prevention.

When it comes to specific measures and approaches that might be endorsed by this Pacific Dialogue, there is a large menu from which to choose. For present purposes there are three significant matters I would emphasise.

*(1) Continue to develop the ASEAN Regional Forum as the Asia Pacific region's key security dialogue and cooperation institution.*

The ARF has come a considerable distance in its first four years of operation. Matters discussed at the annual Ministerial meetings - with 21 Foreign Ministers now present - have included a

number on which some countries have been extremely cautious, including the South China Sea, and the internal situations in Burma and Cambodia. And the ARF, in dealing with them, has had some modest visible successes: there is reason to believe, for example, that the mere existence of a forthcoming ARF Ministerial in 1995 was an important element in defusing what had become a quite disconcerting buildup of activity and rhetoric around competing territorial claims over the Spratley and Paracel islands.

Intersessional officials meetings have become institutionalised, as have "second track" meetings involving a broader range of participants helping generate a creative range of new ideas. There is now participation in intergovernmental meetings by defence personnel as well as the foreign policy establishments, and the beginnings of some significantly greater transparency in the way defence issues are addressed. And generally, although some issues have lent themselves to sub-regional consideration - eg. with the four party talks on the Korean Peninsula - there is no competing attraction to the ARF as far as a regional security body is concerned.

All that said, it is fair to suggest that the ARF has nowhere near yet reached its potential role.

There is still too much dependence on the Chairman of the day to give shape and substance to the proceedings, to ensure that issues are talked through systematically, topic by topic, rather than there being a desultory series of set-piece UN-General Assembly style tours d' horizon.

Much more could be done than has been done so far on specific agenda areas like maritime security. And it has been particularly disappointing to me that the whole subject of preventive diplomacy continues to be treated with show-stopping caution, in particular by China. The way forward on preventive diplomacy would appear to be in the first instance to recognise a "good offices" role for the ARF Chairman, which would extend over the whole year of office and not be confined to the occasion of the Ministerial meeting, as effectively at present.

As a longer term exercise, I have thought for some time that there is value in building up on a regional basis, under ARF auspices, a store of professional expertise and experience which could be available as a source of assistance in dealing with disputes and potential disputes as they arise, both within and between countries. Of course if a more formal preventive diplomacy capability for the ARF is to ever win any acceptance at all, the normal ground rules for such activity would have to apply: namely that it be informal, low-key, non-binding, non-judgmental, non-coercive and confidential.

Probably the most obvious missing ingredient in the ARF process is Summit chemistry, the regular Leaders' meetings which have been so important in giving new momentum, vitality and direction to APEC. This leads me to the second particular step I would propose for advancing regional security cooperation.

*(2) Move to unite the present wholly separate and parallel streams of Asia Pacific institutional cooperation - economic and security - through the holding of an annual Asia Pacific Leaders' Summit, meeting successively in Economic and Political Sessions.*

The APEC Leaders' Meeting, or Summit, which has been part of the APEC landscape since Seattle in 1993, does at the moment have an unequivocally economic character, with any political or security dialogue taking place bilaterally, or in smaller groups, informally in the margins. Things could not be otherwise - given Taiwan's non-sovereign status, and China's concern that it remains so - and I do not argue for diluting the purely economic character of APEC itself.

But it should not be impossible to devise a mechanism where the Asia Pacific Leaders' Summit meets successively in Economic Session and Political Session, with the seats at the table changing to reflect the marginally different composition of the two groupings. APEC and the ARF would continue to maintain their separate functional identities, but the Leaders' Summit would be the capstone of the arch, providing support - and authority - to both.

Capstone summits of the kind suggested would reflect the reality of the interplay and interdependence of economic and security developments, give new shape and drive to regional, political and security cooperation; and may well give us the opportunity to move the course of Asia Pacific peace, stability and prosperity a significant leap forward.

With all of this emphasis on dialogue and cooperation, I would not wish to suggest, any more than I ever have, that old-fashioned balance of power *realpolitik* has completely reached its use-by date in the Asia Pacific. I have always been completely at ease with, among other things, a continued strong "balancing wheel" presence in the region by the United States. This is something that I am told, incidentally, had strong and explicit support from at least three ASEAN countries - as well as all the other more usual suspects - at last year's ARF Ministerial. And I do continue to believe that there is a case for continuing to consolidate bilateral and sub-regional security and cooperation arrangements of the kind that have been developed, for example, in the ASEAN and Australasian region. So long as these arrangements are accompanied by maximum transparency, and a renewed effort through the ARF and other dialogue mechanisms to build the maximum possible contact and confidence between political and military establishments around the region, they should be seen as reinforcing the prospects for durable peace, not undermining them.

*(3) To play a leading role in ridding the world of nuclear weapons.*

One area in which it would be particularly desirable to see the principles of security cooperation translated into action is in relation to arms control and disarmament. It should be said immediately that there is no evidence in our region, despite occasional assertions to the contrary, of anything that can at the moment be reasonably be described as an arms race. The modernisation of many conventional defence forces has been proceeding apace, much assisted by the health of national economies and budgets - now under strain - but it would be a misuse of language to describe this as itself constituting a threat to security. And there has been a strong, and I believe genuine, commitment in our region to the global effort to outlaw the scourge of chemical and biological weapons.

Where the countries of the Asia Pacific region could play a major role, advancing both their own

and wider global security in the process, would be in leading the charge on the elimination of nuclear weapons. This is an issue which has somewhat gone to sleep in governmental and popular concern, but it shouldn't. Even if the United States and Russia fully implement START II by 2003, which seems unlikely, that still allows each to keep 3500 nuclear warheads, equivalent to 440 pounds of TNT for every human being now alive. And as we all know, these two countries - and the other declared nuclear weapons states - are not the only current players in the nuclear weapons retention game. The end of bipolar confrontation has not removed the danger of nuclear catastrophe.

As the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons said in its pathbreaking 1996 Report, the proposition that nuclear weapons can be retained in perpetuity and never used - either accidentally or by decision - simply defies credibility. The only complete defence is the elimination of such weapons, and the assurance, through full scale and effective verification mechanisms, that they will never be used again.

The Canberra Commission report makes a compellingly hard-headed military and strategic case for elimination - not just reduction - and points step-by-step to the way by which this might be actually achieved. Immediate steps to be taken by nuclear weapons states should include agreeing to reciprocal no-first-use undertakings, and to non-use in relation to non-nuclear weapon states. All states should support these measures through immediate steps of their own, including comprehensive disclosure of fissile material stocks and negotiation of a fissile materials cut-off convention. The Canberra Commission then maps the series of steps necessary to prevent horizontal proliferation, to develop effective verification arrangements for a non-nuclear world, and lay the foundations for the final achievement of a "zero nuclear weapons" world.

This agenda has been endorsed more or less in its entirety by the Carnegie Commission, and has won the expressions of support from many other government organisations, and indeed governments, around the world. But nothing much is happening in practice to move things forward. A number of the really key players in the nuclear debate are members of the ARF, and with the commitment already evident from the South East Asian and Oceanian members of the Forum in the establishment of our own nuclear weapons free zones, the ARF could be an ideal vehicle for generating real momentum toward the achievement of what should be now, in the post-Cold War world, at last within our reach.

At the end of the day, moving forward on all these fronts - and moving out of the cycles of conflict and war and needless human suffering that are as old as human history - is a matter of will and leadership.

There is less reason now than there ever has been - in a world and a region as interdependent and, as prosperous notwithstanding recent events, as ours is - for violent conflict to be pursued by any country for reasons of national interest. But for thousands of years, commentators have been pointing out that considerations like honour (real or imagined) and fear (whether or not

well founded) have driven people to war when they had no discernible interest to advance or protect.

The only way we can ever begin to be confident that we really have broken out of this ugly cycle is to genuinely create around the globe a new culture of prevention, applied at the top but starting at the bottom. As we put it in the Carnegie Commission report - optimistically, but I hope not naively:

Taught in secular and religious schools, emphasised by the media, pursued vigorously by the UN and other international organisations, the prevention of deadly conflict must become a commonplace of daily life and part of a global cultural heritage passed down from generation to generation. Leaders must exemplify the culture of prevention. The vision, courage, and skills to prevent deadly conflict - and the ability to communicate the need for prevention - must be required qualifications for leaders in the twenty-first century. There is a challenge to educate, a challenge to lead, and a challenge to communicate.

This Pacific Dialogue can be a critically important contributor in meeting those challenges.