

This article was downloaded by: [Australian National University]

On: 11 February 2015, At: 21:06

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954

Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## The Pacific Review

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rpre20>

## The Shangri-La Dialogue and the institutionalization of defence diplomacy in Asia

David Capie<sup>a</sup> & Brendan Taylor<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> International Relations , Victoria University of Wellington , New Zealand

<sup>b</sup> Strategic and Defence Studies Centre , Australian National University

Published online: 05 Jul 2010.

To cite this article: David Capie & Brendan Taylor (2010) The Shangri-La Dialogue and the institutionalization of defence diplomacy in Asia, *The Pacific Review*, 23:3, 359-376

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2010.481053>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly

forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

# The Shangri-La Dialogue and the institutionalization of defence diplomacy in Asia

*David Capie and Brendan Taylor*

**Abstract** The gradual institutionalization of defence diplomacy is becoming an increasingly prominent and potentially important feature of security dialogue in the Asian region. This stands in marked contrast to Asia's recent history, where across the region multilateral defence or military interactions have traditionally been regarded with suspicion. This article examines the emergence of Asia's most prominent exercise in defence diplomacy: the Shangri-La Dialogue (SLD). Within a relatively short space of time, this forum has developed into one of the most important opportunities for regional defence ministers and senior military officers to meet and exchange views on security issues. Yet despite its growing standing, the SLD has received virtually no scholarly attention. The article begins by reviewing the origins and development of the SLD, before outlining its operating modalities. It seeks to account for the apparent appeal of the SLD, measured in terms of its capacity to consistently attract high-level representation and favourable reviews. The article explores how the SLD might develop in the future and outlines some of the challenges it faces, including the rise of potentially competing mechanisms for defence diplomacy in East Asia. The article closes by outlining a number of areas for further research.

**Keywords** Defence diplomacy; security dialogue; East Asia; security; Shangri-La Dialogue; ASEAN.

David Capie is a senior lecturer in International Relations at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. His research focuses on regionalism in the Asia-Pacific with a particular interest in debates about norms and socialization.

Address: Political Science and International Relations Programme, Victoria University of Wellington, PO Box 600, Wellington 6014, New Zealand. E-mail: david.capie@vuw.ac.nz

Brendan Taylor is a senior lecturer at the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University. He is the author of *American Sanctions in the Asia-Pacific*, Routledge, 2010.

Address: Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Hedley Bull building #130, Garran Road, Australian National University, Canberra ACT 0200, Australia. E-mail: brendan.taylor@anu.edu.au

*The Pacific Review*

ISSN 0951-2748 print/ISSN 1470-1332 online © 2010 Taylor & Francis

<http://www.informaworld.com/journals>

DOI: 10.1080/09512748.2010.481053

Asia's crowded market of security dialogues has seen the rise of an important new forum: the Shangri-La Dialogue (SLD). In a comparatively short period of time, this annual meeting of regional defence ministers and senior military officers has developed from a small conference, regarded with scepticism and suspicion by some, into the one of the most important opportunities for regional officials to exchange views on security issues. The US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has said the meeting 'has no peer in Asia' (Minnick 2008). Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd describes it as the 'pre-eminent defence and security dialogue in the Asia-Pacific region' (Rudd 2009). One regional correspondent describes it as having a Hollywood-like quality, gushing about the presence of the 'Spielbergs and Clooneys of military power' (Ampikaipakan 2008).

Despite its growing profile and importance, however, the SLD has attracted almost no scholarly attention. Compared to the vast literature on ASEAN, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and ASEAN-Plus-Three (APT) processes, there is almost nothing written on the SLD. This is surprising for a number of reasons. First, at a time when multilateralism in Asia is facing criticism for its perceived lack of progress, the SLD has consistently managed to generate favourable opinion among regional elites. While the ARF has had difficulty consistently attracting high-level participants (for example, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice skipped several meetings during the Bush administration) the SLD has been able to attract senior US officials on a consistent basis. Former US Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld enthusiastically attended three SLDs. His successor Robert Gates attended in 2007, 2008 and 2009, bringing with him members of Congress, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and senior military and civilian defence officials. Moreover, senior military officers and defence officials from across the Asia-Pacific region are also giving the SLD importance. China has sent larger and higher ranked delegations in the last three years.<sup>1</sup> India and Japan have been represented by their defence ministers, along with most other ASEAN and East Asian states. In sum, while many Asian security dialogues are struggling to maintain their relevance, the SLD seems to be on the rise.

Second, the emergence of the SLD seems to reflect a deeper change in attitude towards multilateral defence dialogues in Asia. For years, defence cooperation in ASEAN was undertaken almost exclusively on a bilateral basis. Across the region multilateral defence or military interactions were regarded with suspicion. Now, alongside the SLD, ASEAN defence ministers have begun to meet multilaterally on an annual basis. There is growing discussion about creating a broader regional forum of defence ministers, including East Asian nations, Australia and New Zealand (Walters 2008). A wide range of states, including China, now talk about the utility of multilateral 'defence diplomacy' in advancing regional security. In a short period of time, a long-established norm of Asia's international relations seems to have been modified.

Third, the SLD represents a different kind of international grouping. While most regional meetings in Asia are organized by states, typically with ASEAN sitting in the 'driver's seat', the SLD is run by a private body, the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS), backed up with the financial support of large multinational corporations, a philanthropic foundation and some governments. Its success also seems to raise some questions about the ongoing salience of ASEAN's supposed diplomatic culture in facilitating cooperation. For all the talk about the importance of indigenous norms and the role of the 'ASEAN way', the IISS is a London-based institution with only a small presence in Asia. How then has an outsider come to manage one of the most successful regional meetings in Asian security? And what does this mean for the future of Asian security institutions in the 'Asian Century'?

This article attempts to address these questions. Its goal is modest. As one of the first analyses of the SLD, it seeks to offer an introductory 'first cut' exploring the history, evolution and role of the forum. Its findings are drawn from more than two-dozen interviews with participants, regional commentators and officials, and representatives of the IISS in 2008 and 2009.<sup>2</sup> The article is structured in three parts. The first section provides an overview of the origins and development of the Dialogue and outlines its operating modalities. The second section attempts to explain its apparent appeal. Why has the SLD been able to attract high-level representation and sustain such favourable reviews? The third part explores how the SLD might develop in the future and some of the challenges it faces, including the rise of potentially competing mechanisms for regional military dialogue in East Asia. The article closes with some brief thoughts about areas for future research.

### **Origins and evolution**

Asia's leading defence forum has its origins in Europe. The SLD (known formally as the Asia Security Summit) was the brainchild of the Director-General and Chief Executive of the IISS, John Chipman.<sup>3</sup> According to a IISS staffer, the idea was born in February 2000 during the 36th Munich Conference on Security Policy, where Chipman apparently 'noticed Asian officials receiving short shrift' and came to the realization that 'Asia needed its own defence institution at which defence ministers met and spoke' (correspondence with IISS staff member, 2 March 2009). Since the 1960s, the Munich Conference (sometimes called the 'Davos of Security') has been the premier gathering each year on NATO security issues. Attended by in excess of 200 statesmen, policymakers, opinion leaders and military experts from more than 30 countries, it offered an initial template for how the SLD might be structured and implemented.

The evolution of the SLD also needs to be seen as part of an attempt by IISS to raise its profile and globalize its role. This effort came against the backdrop of at least two decades of perceived institutional bias on

the part of the organization toward Europe and the Atlantic, juxtaposed against a peripheral treatment of East Asia. Interviews conducted for this project suggest that two Australian academics and former IISS Council members – Robert O’Neill and Desmond Ball – had been working since the early 1980s for a more substantial IISS presence in Asia – in terms of research, conferences and an office somewhere in the region. For a long time this perceived Atlantic bias was also evident in the make-up of the IISS Council itself – which by the year 2000 included only a small number of representatives from Asia: namely newly elected Council members Toshiaki Ogasawara and Akihiko Tanaka of Japan, Jusuf Wanandi of Indonesia and Han Sung-Joo of South Korea. This neglect was starkly exposed when the IISS held its 42nd Annual Conference in Manila around the theme ‘The Powers of Asia’. This gathering was attended by a smaller than usual number of predominantly American and European participants – due apparently to the additional financial expense of travelling to an Asian conference destination – with Asian representatives significantly outnumbered and the majority of these coming from Japan and, to a lesser extent, Taiwan (IISS 2000).

The IISS’s decision to initiate an Asian Security Summit was timely in terms of the broader institutional landscape of Asia. The observation that the region lacked a mechanism through which its defence ministers could interact – both formally and informally – was not an altogether new one. Indeed, there had been a number of previous attempts to organize a meeting of Asian defence ministers. In 1996, for instance, US Defense Secretary William Perry and Thai Defence Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh each proposed separate initiatives to gather their Asian counterparts together in a single forum. Malaysia’s defence minister also publicly expressed interest in a ministerial meeting (Huisken 2002). Such proposals seemed to have the effect of raising regional sensitivities, however, and ultimately came to nothing. The closest approximation to a meeting of this kind came through the ARF, which in 1996 agreed to let defence officials participate in its Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) and encouraged increased defence involvement in its inter-sessional activities.

Chipman’s personal role seems to have been important in terms of enabling the IISS to convene a meeting of regional defence ministers where earlier attempts had essentially floundered. First, he was able to secure the participation in the inaugural SLD of a US Congressional delegation comprising three Republicans (Senators Chuck Hagel, Fred Thompson and Representative Jim Kolbe) and three Democrats (Senator Jack Reed and Representatives Vic Snyder and Ellen Tauscher) (Thompson 2002). According to a former IISS Council member, ‘with these signed up, it became much easier to get senior figures from the region involved. The process then became self-generating in a way, with senior US officials willing to attend once those from the region signed up’ (Interview, former IISS Council member, 22 August 2008). Indeed, Deputy Secretary of

Defense Paul Wolfowitz ultimately headed this American delegation to the inaugural gathering of the forum in 2002, providing a high profile representation that has been a consistent feature of US participation in subsequent Shangri-La Dialogues.

Amongst regional governments, Australia and Singapore were the earliest and most enthusiastic supporters of the new process. Speculation existed at the time that Australia might be willing to host the SLD and formal approaches to this effect were made (Interview, former IISS Council member, 18 August 2008). The Japanese government was initially lukewarm regarding the prospect of the establishment of the Dialogue, but it has since become a strong supporter and has also made approaches indicating that it would be willing to host the event (Boey 2003). Not everyone was persuaded by the IISS's plan, however. Beijing was amongst the most reluctant of regional governments when the idea was first mooted. This reticence appears to have stemmed largely from a perception that the IISS is a Western-dominated organization with a reputation for being sympathetic towards Taiwan (Interview, former IISS Council member, 18 August 2008). At the time, Beijing was also suspicious of the new Bush administration. Coming not long after the EP3 incident in 2001, it feared the forum might be 'an exercise in China bashing'. IISS representatives had to work to reassure the Chinese that the new grouping would be 'an environment where debate is reasonable and rational' and by coming up with a formula that would limit participation from Taiwan. Taiwanese participants at the SLD are not allowed to be officials, nor are they permitted to arrange formal bilaterals with other delegations (Interview with IISS staff member, 20 March 2009).

Interestingly – albeit for completely different reasons – the Canadian government, usually an enthusiastic multilateralist, was also hesitant regarding the establishment of this new piece of regional architecture. According to one well placed former IISS Council member, bureaucratic politics played an important role, in that 'the Canadian foreign ministry didn't want the defence ministry stealing the limelight from them' in terms of taking on a more prominent role in advancing Canada's Asian regional engagement (Interview with former IISS Council member, 18 August 2008). As a result, Canada did not send its defence minister to the Dialogue until 2008. It was hardly unique in this respect. As one analysis of regional institutions in Asia notes, 'foreign ministries have jealously guarded their prerogatives at multilateral meetings' (*The Japan Times*, 2002).

With Australia's perceived remoteness essentially ruling it out as a venue, and given Japan's initial reticence toward the concept, Singapore emerged as the preferred location for the first meeting of this new grouping. Chipman approached President S. R. Nathan of Singapore in February 2001 to propose the idea. Nathan, who had formerly headed Singapore's Institute for Defence and Security Studies (IDSS) was supportive (as, indeed, were a number of the Singaporean political elite, including Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Tony Tan Keng Yam) (Interview with IISS

staff member, 20 March 2009). Nathan offered to provide a staff member to assist with organizing the SLD and facilities at the IDSS, until such time as the IISS had arrangements in place to run the dialogue independently. The establishment of a new IISS Asia Office in Singapore in 2004 – and the appointment of respected scholar of Southeast Asia Tim Huxley as its inaugural Director – led to a natural, albeit unexpectedly swift transition to a situation where the SLD was independently owned and operated by the IISS (correspondence with IISS staff member, 2 March 2009).

Even prior to the establishment of an IISS Asia office, however, the Dialogue was already growing in prominence. The first meeting was held at Singapore's Shangri-La hotel from 31 May to 2 June 2002. A total of 22 nations were represented, with ministers attending from 11 countries – Australia, Britain, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea and Thailand. China sent the Director General of its Foreign Affairs bureau of the Ministry of National Defence to this inaugural gathering and, while Beijing has yet to send a ministerial level representative, it has continued to send higher ranked delegations to each subsequent SLD (Taylor 2008). Consistent with this upward trend, a total of 17 governments had sent their defence ministers to the Dialogue by the time it reached its fifth anniversary in 2006, while the number of governments represented continued to expand to a total of 27 by the seventh gathering of the SLD in mid-2008.<sup>4</sup> The 2009 Dialogue was the largest to date, with 27 governments in attendance and more than 350 registered participants. Some states – most notably North Korea – have yet to be represented, despite efforts by IISS to secure their participation (Interview with IISS staff member, 20 March 2009). Pyongyang's absence notwithstanding, it is difficult to dispute IISS's own characterization of the SLD as 'the most important regular gathering of defence professionals in the region ... a vital annual fixture in the diaries of Asia-Pacific defence ministers and their civilian and military chiefs of staff' (IISS 2008: 7).

### **Structure and modalities**

The composition of participants in the SLD has also evolved during the course of the forum's relatively short lifetime. To be sure, the gathering has consistently been attended by a mix of some 200-plus government ministers, politicians, high ranking military officials, academics, businesspeople, think tank analysts, media and non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives. However, the IISS has made a conscious effort to ensure that the composition of attendees remains dynamic and is not prone to stagnation, as can sometimes become the case in the regional dialogue business. As one IISS staff member put it 'we don't want [the SLD] to become a club. In that way it is different to indigenous institutions like CSCAP and the Asia-Pacific Roundtable, with all respect to them, but we are not interested in inviting the same people back year after year' (Interview with



IISS staff member, 20 March 2009). Where the composition of participants has changed most visibly as the SLD has evolved, however, is in terms of those included as speakers on the formal agenda, where there has been a noticeable shift toward greater official representation. At the second SLD of 30 May–1 June 2003, for instance, a total of six academics/think tank analysts were included as speakers on this agenda.<sup>5</sup> By 2006, however, a new practice had been introduced whereby all speaking slots were allocated to a minister or a senior official delegate (IISS 2006).

This shift in terms of the prominence afforded to official over non-official participants has subsequently rendered classification of the SLD difficult. Some analysts, for instance, have referred to this gathering as a Track 2 process, given that the lead organizer (the IISS) is a think tank and there is an explicit effort to encourage involvement by non-officials in the gathering. Two problems with this approach are immediately apparent. The first is that officials appear in their official capacity at the SLD, whereas a key feature of second track diplomatic processes more generally is that officials generally participate as individuals in their 'private' capacities. Added to this, despite the presence of a range of government and non-governmental representatives at the SLD, there remain few opportunities for any extensive interaction between these two groups, not least due to the security issues associated with the participation of some of its more high-profile attendees. Once again, this is in contrast to the relatively easy and extensive networking between officials and non-officials which is a feature of any genuine second track process.

During interviews conducted for this project, some IISS staff members suggested that the SLD has actually evolved to become an official Track 1 process. Parts of the SLD – such as the extensive bilateral meetings which occur on its sidelines and the exclusive ministerial lunches – bear many of the hallmarks of a first track process. However, the central organizational role played by the IISS – a non-government think tank – coupled with the relatively unfettered manner in which any participant in the dialogue (including journalists and academics) is able to stand up and ask a question without giving prior notice is not typically a feature of Track 1 in the region. Perhaps, therefore, the most appropriate description of the SLD is as a Track 1.5 process. Track 1.5 processes are officially sponsored; the participants include a large proportion (typically a majority) of officials, usually in their official capacities, but non-officials from Track 2 (and sometimes even Track 3) processes are also included; while the activities generally involve exchanges of views, and are usually exploratory rather than conclusive with regard to policy outcomes.<sup>6</sup>

While the composition of speakers on the agenda has shifted as the SLD has matured, the content of the agenda and the format of the dialogue programme have each remained relatively consistent. Naturally enough, new issues have been included on the agenda – such as the subjects of 'securing energy in the Asia-Pacific' and 'restoring peace in complex emergencies' at

the 2008 SLD – to maintain the gathering’s contemporary salience. Other issues appear consistently, including the role of the United States (and Asia’s great powers more generally) in regional security, counter-terrorism, force modernization, weapons of mass production (WMD) proliferation, maritime security and regional security architecture. Each of these themes was certainly represented, in some shape or form, in the agenda for the 2009 SLD.

The format of the SLD has also remained relatively stable. Each gathering typically consists of an opening keynote address. Up until 2009, the keynote was given by a prominent Singaporean figure – in 2008, for instance, the Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong. In 2009, however, this role was assigned to the Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. This practice of inviting a head of government from a participating state to deliver the opening address looks set to continue. On the first day of the dialogue, time is also allocated for defence ministers and officials to conduct separate bilateral discussions, which the IISS affords a high degree of privacy to and has little if any direct involvement with. Rooms are also reserved for similar discussions to be held during breaks between formal conference sessions. Five ‘plenary’ sessions are then held across the two remaining days of the dialogue. These sessions are each led by a government minister, they are treated as ‘on the record’ sessions and all participants are present. A series of simultaneous ‘break out groups’ are also held. At the 2008 SLD, for example, six such break-out groups were run simultaneously addressing issues of climate change and Asia Pacific security, the prospect of a regional arms race, counter-terrorism in the Asia-Pacific, strategies for resolving proliferation challenges, regional security architecture and maritime disputes in the Asia-Pacific. These ‘break out groups’ are typically chaired by a IISS staff member and speaking slots are, once again, allocated to a minister or senior official. Unlike the plenary sessions, however, these sessions are treated as strictly off-the-record. So, too, are the two closed ministerial lunches which are held on the second and third day of the dialogue, as is the dinner hosted by the president of Singapore at the official governmental compound, the Istana, at the end of the second day of the dialogue.

Although a good deal of emphasis is given to the Track 1 interactions at the Summit, IISS also gives attention to the Track 2 component. It claims that the Dialogue provides ‘the environment for legislators, experts, academics and businesspeople to engage with senior officials in a manner that animates fresh policy thinking’ (IISS 2009). The Institute claims it has a broader vision of Track 2 participation, inviting ‘not just academics and think tank representatives, but journalists, business, lawyers and opposition MPs ... from those countries that have opposition MPs’ (interview with IISS staff member, 20 March 2009).

### **Bilateralism or multilateralism?**

If there has been some confusion about whether the SLD is an official or Track 2 enterprise, some also question whether it is really multilateralism. The formal name of the meeting – the Asian Security Summit – suggests a multilateral initiative, and indeed with senior government representatives from 27 countries attending, numerically this is as large a forum as any in the Asia-Pacific region. IISS has called it ‘a unique experiment in multilateral defence diplomacy’ (IISS 2004). But as John Ruggie notes, multilateralism is about more than numbers. Qualitatively, the process requires a commitment to non-discrimination, indivisibility and diffuse reciprocity – the idea that all members can expect to receive roughly the same amount of benefit in aggregate over a period of time. This can be contrasted with bilateralism, where ‘specific reciprocity’ or *quid pro quos* shape relations between parties (Ruggie 1993).

While the SLD has a multilateral shell, interviews suggest that officials undoubtedly put the greatest value on the short bilateral interactions which occur on the sidelines of the conference. These typically last for about half an hour and allow ministers and senior military officers to meet with their counterparts to share information and make formal agreements. A national delegation might arrange 15–20 of these encounters over the duration of the conference (Interview with regional defence official, Kuala Lumpur, 5 June 2008). In 2009, for example, the Australian defence minister used bilaterals to sign an agreement with his South Korean counterpart about the protection of classified information, and another with the Singaporean defence minister to renew a treaty granting the Singapore Armed Forces access to training facilities in Australia (*BBC Asia-Pacific Monitoring* 2009).

But while it is tempting to regard the bilaterals as the real purpose of the gathering, there are parts of the Dialogue where ministers and military officials gather and interact in group settings. The two working lunches for the defence ministers, for example, are open and unscripted exchanges, similar to the modest encounters that launched the ARF in 1994. In addition, while there are no formal multilateral negotiating sessions, recent Dialogues have elicited some tangible collective commitments by participating states. The 2008 meeting, for example, took place not long after the Cyclone Nargis disaster had occurred in southern Myanmar and the devastating Sichuan earthquake in China. Following a wide-ranging discussion during the ministers’ working lunch, participants agreed to a set of three principles to guide humanitarian responses to disasters. While these did not represent a shattering breakthrough in formal cooperation, they helped resolve concerns some states had about the use of unilateral military force to deliver aid, while also emphasizing that governments have an obligation to respond to a disaster in a timely fashion (Kin and Lin 2008). In 2005, the SLD also provided the venue for the negotiation of a smaller but also important agreement concerning maritime air patrols in the Malacca Strait. Then Malaysian Defence

Minister Najib Razak proposed the so-called 'Eyes in the Sky' initiative, which called for joint maritime air and sea patrols by Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore. The result, according to one analysis, has been a 'dramatic drop in piracy incidents' in the Strait (Choong 2009). Most recently, Secretary Gates met with his Japanese and South Korean counterparts on the sidelines of the 2009 SLD. Officially at least, this was the first trilateral meeting to take place in the history of the SLD and discussions focused primarily upon coordinating the responses of Seoul, Tokyo and Washington to the protracted and increasingly tense North Korean nuclear crisis.

The forum therefore includes multilateral, bilateral and now trilateral dimensions. However, an accurate description of the SLD might be that the key interactions are bilateral, nested within a modest but nonetheless discernible multilateral framework. As we note later, this multilateral component may also become more important as time goes on.

### **Funding and sponsorship**

In terms of modalities, a final word about funding is also in order. While the precise figures are not available publicly, interviews conducted for this project indicate that the SLD has become a major source of income for the IISS. Some of this funding is provided by participating states, most notably the Australian, Japanese and UK governments.<sup>7</sup> In addition to its own significant financial contribution, the Singaporean government also covers the considerable costs associated with the conference security. In 2009, the IISS announced that it had agreed to a new contract with the Singaporean government, which would see the Dialogue continue there through until at least 2014.

A number of private companies also contribute financially to the running of the Dialogue, including BAE Systems, Boeing, Northrop Gruman, EADS, Keppel Corporation, Mitsubishi Corporation and Japanese newspaper *the Asahi Shimbun*.<sup>8</sup> As one journalist put it simply, 'Defence diplomacy and defence deals go hand-in-hand at the Shangri-La Dialogue' (Chow 2009). The incentive for defence companies is obvious: the Dialogue provides a useful entrée for senior company representatives to interact directly with high-ranking politicians and government officials in a relaxed conference setting. In 2009, a roundtable meeting with Boeing's head of Integrated Defence Systems Jim Albaugh was advertised in the conference programme. Boeing used the meeting as an opportunity to meet with Indian defence officials as part of an ongoing effort to sell F/A-18 aircraft to the Indian Air Force (Wong-Anan 2009). Interestingly, however, one IISS staff member suggests that 'while defence companies are the key sponsors, there is no assumption that they will continue to be the dominant sponsors forever' (Interview with IISS staff member, 20 March 2009).

Finally, and perhaps more surprisingly, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation also provides funding, principally intended to

facilitate the participation of greater numbers of non-official participants, to maintain the quality of non-official participants, and to encourage the participation of more non-official representatives from smaller states and younger participants.

### **Challenging the ASEAN way?**

Much has been made over the last decade of the importance of the supposed 'ASEAN way' of regional diplomacy. A number of scholars have asserted the importance of conforming with an 'Asian' security culture that stresses informality, consensus and slowly building a level of comfort (Ball 1993; Acharya 1997). Others have stressed the important role of 'localizing' agents, including well-connected local networks like the ASEAN Institutes for Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS), in building regional support for new institutions and imported 'global' norms (Acharya 2004). How does the rapid rise of the SLD fit with the expectations of this work? Based on our findings, it seems to challenge it in several respects.

First, although IISS now has a small Asia office and is expanding its presence and work in East Asia, the SLD is still widely perceived in the region as a Western and European initiative without roots in Asia. One senior figure in Southeast Asia's international relations described the Dialogue as '75 per cent outsiders talking about *our* security' (Interview, Kuala Lumpur, 5 June 2008). The IISS has ruffled feathers by simply ignoring some long-standing ways of doing business in ASEAN. Part of this is undoubtedly a question of personalities, but interviews revealed resentment on the part of some towards what was seen as an outside organization that had ignored the traditional way of working in the region, and excluded had many long-serving non-governmental participants. According to some sources, the leadership of one leading Southeast Asia think-tank had responded by forbidding its staff from taking part in the Dialogue (Interview with long-time participant in Southeast Asian security dialogues, Kuala Lumpur, June 2008).

Second, unlike other regional governmental gatherings that stress the equality of participants and which in some respects *privilege* the role of small and middle-sized states (for example by putting ASEAN in the driver's seat), the SLD is explicitly hierarchical, acknowledging in its very structure the hard power capabilities of participants. For example, every meeting to date has begun with an opening plenary featuring an address by the senior US representative. This first session is the only plenary with a single speaker. The second plenary typically features multiple speakers from the 'second tier' of major powers (in 2009, the Japanese minister of defence shared the stage with Indian and Chinese military officers), while after that the line-up becomes much more mixed.

Given this apparent break with tradition, what explains the considerable success of the SLD? At a most basic level, the event fills a gap in the regional diplomatic calendar. While existing security arrangements such as the ARF

include some defence officials, they are dominated by foreign ministry officials and ministers. The SLD provides defence bureaucracies around the region with their own network, giving officials and senior officers the opportunity to meet and exchange views, to commit to formal agreements and informally exchange ideas and information.

For the host government, the meeting provides Singapore with a valuable international profile and facilitates a high-level defence dialogue without the responsibilities of organizing the event. The presence of senior figures from the United States and China gives other small nations the opportunity to schedule bilateral meetings and interact informally with major powers, something that might be more difficult to achieve independently.

As was noted above, US participation has been vital in building the profile and reputation of the Dialogue. This began with the assiduous cultivation of key American figures by IISS, but in the last few years, the SLD has developed a momentum of its own. According to one leading American commentator, it has become institutionalized as 'the Asia trip' for the Secretary of Defense each year (Interviews with Ralph Cossa, Kuala Lumpur, June 2008; State Department official, Washington DC, February 2009). Like many other participants, from Washington's perspective the summit offers a useful chance to engage bilaterally with key regional players. In 2007, for example, the American delegation wanted to raise a number of issues with their Chinese counterparts and so arranged a 'chance encounter' between General Peter Pace and Lieutenant-General Zhang Qinsheng in one of the hotel corridors. The US used the meeting to press Beijing for greater openness in the wake of a test of an anti-satellite weapon, while the Chinese delegation expressed concern about a Pentagon report criticizing China's military acquisitions (*The Straits Times* 2009). More productively, the US revived the idea of a 'hot line' between the two militaries, a proposal which the Chinese agreed to discuss (Kan 2009).

The SLD's organizational modalities also seem to appeal to a wide range of participants. Unlike most Track 1 regional meetings, where senior officials work to draft a chairman's statement or finalize some sort of 'achievement' before the meeting occurs, the SLD does not seek to produce any kind of agreed communiqué. This thin institutionalization seems to be an attractive feature. As one participant remarked, 'People don't want to come to meetings where they have to sign up to an outcome statement' (Interview with IISS staff member, 20 March 2009). The Singaporean ministry of defence describes this as being 'insulated from the demands of political deliverables'. Nonetheless, it argues that because the SLD is 'supported by security establishments from the region and beyond' it is still able 'to provide a robust framework for cooperation' (Karniol 2008).

Finally, although the literature on the localization of norms suggests the importance of 'insider' credentials when it comes to pressing new initiatives, the fact that the SLD is organized by a think tank headquartered *outside* the region may have been more of a help than a hindrance (Capie 2010). Some

claim that its outsider identity actually helped IISS to propose the idea of a multilateral defence dialogue in an unthreatening way. It has 'no stake in regional politics and is considered to be neutral by all participants' while a similar proposal coming from a regional government might have been seen as too sensitive or reflecting particular national interests (*The Japan Times* 2002). As one IISS staffer remarked, IISS is 'interested in the region but doesn't have a vested interest in the region' (Interview with IISS staff member, 20 March 2009). This may explain why the SLD has gone from strength to strength, while some other proposals for defence dialogue from regional governments have found it hard, at least to date, to get traction.

### **Future challenges and opportunities**

In a very short time, the SLD has grown from nothing to be an important part of the regional security landscape in Asia. Despite that, its organizers remain ambitious. The 2009 Dialogue was marked by an effort to further raise the profile of the meeting by including a head of government from outside Singapore as the keynote speaker. The decision to invite Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd to give the opening address was described by IISS as 'begin[ning] the practice of receiving ... a head of government of one of the participating regional states' (Chipman 2009). The organization is also generally seeking to raise the level of participation by some governments, seeking the most senior defence representatives from regional states.

Second, although the Shangri-La Dialogue's thin institutionalization and informality has been identified as a positive feature by both the organizers and participants, the IISS has hinted that it would like to see the summit take on a larger role in the future. In 2002, Chipman described the Summit as 'a nascent institution disguised as a conference' (Wain 2002). In 2009, he told reporters that the IISS's vision for the SLD is to go beyond being 'just a conference' to 'a process that directly contributes to defense transparency' (Vitug 2009). Only in terms of the summit's membership and geographic footprint do the organizers seem content with the status quo. While it continues to work to secure North Korean participation, IISS has rejected calls to widen the forum to include Central Asian states (Interview with IISS staff member, 20 March 2009).

The organizers' ambitions for the conference reflect the fact that the SLD faces competition. Although the SLD has established itself as the leading site for defence dialogue in Asia, it is already beginning to face challenges from indigenous initiatives from within the region. Three have been the most successful. Foremost amongst these is the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM) process. It had its origins in the 2003 Indonesian proposal for an ASEAN Security Community (ASC). The 38th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Vientiane in July 2005 eventually agreed to convene an ADMM and ministers met for the first time in Kuala Lumpur in May 2006.

In 2007, the ministers met again, this time at an informal retreat in Bali, where they discussed an ADMM work programme and the possibility of expanding into an ADMM-plus format that Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand and the United States have expressed an interest in joining (*Thai News Service* 2008). Although the ADMM remains in an embryonic stage, its goal is to provide a 'much-needed platform for open and constructive dialogue on strategic issues at the ministerial level as well as a platform to promote practical cooperation among the ASEAN armed forces.' Interestingly, one ADMM paper also speculates that it 'has the potential to serve as a platform through which ASEAN engages the defence establishments of countries outside Southeast Asia' (ASEAN 2007).

In addition to the ASEAN-driven ADMM process, Beijing has attempted to advance its own ideas for defence dialogue. In 2004, it put forward a proposal for a new ARF Security Policy Conference (SPC), involving senior defence and security officials (*BBC Asia-Pacific Monitoring* 2004a). In 2008, Beijing called for a strengthening of regional security cooperation, singling out the SPC idea as a forum that could be further developed (*BBC Asia-Pacific Monitoring* 2008). According to some observers, the SPC idea was a direct response to the establishment of the SLD (Interview with IISS staff member, 20 March 2009). Certainly, when it was first announced, Beijing had very high hopes for the initiative. A Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman described it as 'an event of the highest level within the ARF framework in which national defence officials will participate' predicting 'most of the forum members have confirmed they will send vice-ministerial level representatives from their defence ministries' (*BBC Asia-Pacific Monitoring* 2004b). Although regional officials interviewed for this article say they believe the SPC has value, to date it has not generated the profile of the SLD. The SPC is held at the same time as the ARF Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) and governments are typically represented at the deputy or assistant secretary level (Interview with regional defence official, Kuala Lumpur, 5 June 2008).

Third, following the endorsement of a concept paper on ARF Defence Dialogue in 2002, a defence officials' dialogue has also regularly been held under the auspices of the ARF. Meeting at the same time as the annual ARF foreign ministers meeting, this gathering provides an opportunity for defence officials 'to exchange views on regional security and defence outlook and to discuss issues of mutual concern' (ARF 2008). Participants can occasionally include those ranked as high as deputy secretary level and discussions typically support issues arising on the ARF agenda.

Although each of these distinct processes remains active, none has yet come close to challenging the SLD either in terms of the status of participants or its profile inside and outside the region. Their development, however, suggests that regional states have come to accept the need for defence officials to regularly interact on a multilateral basis. Whether these various



processes will deepen remains to be seen. Certainly, if a regional governmental institution emerged that coordinated all of ASEAN's defence ties to outside actors or which had a busy inter-sessional programme of substantive activities, it could come to challenge the SLD model. For the time being, however, neither seems very likely.

### **Directions for further research**

As we noted at the outset, one of the primary purposes in writing this article was to provide a 'first cut' on a relatively new forum which appears to have emerged as Asia's pre-eminent venue for defence dialogue, but which has received very little analytical attention. In contemplating possible directions for further research, therefore, we acknowledge that more work remains to be done on the SLD itself. Research is needed, for example, on the value individual governments see in the forum and the benefits they believe they derive from it. Given that the SLD model has since 2006 been transplanted to the Middle East in the form of the IISS 'Manama Dialogue', scope also exists for comparing two similar meetings held in quite different regional strategic environments. It would also be interesting to explore the relationship between the SLD and the ARF. Have similar issues been addressed differently in the two meetings? Has the rise of the SLD since 2002 spurred the ARF to greater action?

Second, there is a need for much greater analysis of the burgeoning field of defence diplomacy in Asia. There are a growing number of multilateral defence interactions in the region, including many that go beyond alliance commitments to include non-like minded participants. Not all of these are new. The Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS), now in its twelfth year, seeks to 'to increase naval cooperation in the Western Pacific by providing a forum to discuss maritime issues among regional naval leaders contributing to common understanding and agreement' ("Hawaii to host 10<sup>th</sup> Western Pacific Naval Symposium" US Pacific Fleet Public Affairs press release, 29 October 2006).<sup>9</sup> The 30-member Pacific Armies Management Seminar (PAMS) is an annual meeting that as well as addressing a specific theme, also seeks to 'establish and enhance a set of strong interpersonal relationships among the future leaders of regional armies.'<sup>10</sup> Few of these processes have received any analysis outside of military publications, yet *prima facie* they seem like venues where norm building could occur and where participants might be socialized into habits of dialogue. Analysis of the nascent ADMM-process – which has thus far also received little if any academic attention – would also be valuable. To what extent has ASEAN been able to overcome its reticence about defence dialogue and develop a meaningful work plan? What are its prospects for being able to realize and maintain a profile commensurate with that of the SLD? What challenges is it facing or is it likely to face, including from the SLD itself?

One of the ironies of the remarkable growth in multilateral activity which has taken place in Asia more generally over the past two decades, is that the region's increasingly crowded institutional landscape is generating incentives for competition just as much as it reflects imperatives for cooperation. Predictably enough, as institutions elbow for attention and relevance in this increasingly crowded field – often by seizing upon the most visible and contentious issues of the moment – their agendas are exhibiting an increasing degree of overlap. The area of defence diplomacy is no exception. Purists might argue that there is little cause for concern here and that there can be no such thing as 'too much talk' on any issue of pressing concern (Milner 2003). The potential for overlap between the agendas and participants of the SLD and the emergent ADMM-plus process vividly illustrates the extent to which regional dialogue too can often amount to a zero-sum process characterized by highly competitive as well as cooperative elements. There is certainly scope for further work to be done addressing the dynamics of this potential competition, including the rate at which it might unfold, how it might play out and what it might ultimately mean for regional security architecture more generally in Asia.

### **Acknowledgements**

The authors wish to thank Jacob Grooby and Jesse Winton for their valuable research assistance.

### **Notes**

- 1 Since 2007, China has sent a three-star, Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the PLA. In 2007, that was Lieutenant-General Zhang Qinsheng. In 2008 and 2009 it was Lieutenant-General Ma Xiaotian.
- 2 In the research for this article, our agreement with some of the interview subjects was for anonymity, and so they will be cited only by the date of the interview.
- 3 The dialogue takes its name from the Singapore hotel where the conference is held.
- 4 These being Australia, Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor Leste, the UK, the US, and Vietnam.
- 5 This did not include speakers also allocated to the separate, off-the-record 'break out' groups which are discussed later in this section.
- 6 For further reading on the definition, characteristics and distinctions between these various forms of 'tracked' diplomacy see Capie and Evans (2007).
- 7 According to records, in 2008 the Australian Department of Defence paid A\$68,500 to IISS as a direct contribution towards the cost of hosting the 2009 Shangri-La Dialogue, in addition to contributions towards other IISS activities. This was an increase on the A\$40,000 paid in 2007–08. See 'Discretionary Defence Grants 2008'; accessed at [www.defence.gov.au/publications/GrantsListWebsite.pdf](http://www.defence.gov.au/publications/GrantsListWebsite.pdf), 12 June 2009.

- 8 Conference participants are also asked to consider requests for interviews with the *Asahi Shimbun* 'as warmly as they can' (IISS 2003: 'Joining Instructions', p. 6).
- 9 WPNS members are Australia, Brunei, Cambodia, China, France, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Russia, Singapore, Thailand, Tonga, the United States and Vietnam. Observers are Bangladesh, Canada, Chile and India.
- 10 For information on PAMS, see <http://www1.apan-info.net/Home/tabid/5226/Default.aspx> (accessed 12 June 2009).

## References

- Acharya, A. (1997) 'Ideas, identity and institution-building: from the ASEAN way to the Asia-Pacific way', *The Pacific Review* 10(3): 319–46.
- Acharya, A. (2004) 'How ideas spread: whose norms matter? Norm localization and institutional change in Asian regionalism', *International Organization* 58(2): 239–75.
- Ampikaipakan, U. (2008). 'Uncle Sam's security role in Asia', *The New Strait Times*, 4 June.
- ARF (2008) *Chairman's Summary Report*, ARF Defence Dialogue, Singapore, 23 July.
- ASEAN (2007) 'Factsheet: background information on the ASEAN defence ministers' meeting', 14 November; accessed at [http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/mindef\\_websites/topics/admm/media\\_release/14nov07\\_nr/14nov07\\_fs.html](http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/mindef_websites/topics/admm/media_release/14nov07_nr/14nov07_fs.html), 12 June 2009.
- Ball, D. (1993) 'Strategic culture in the Asia-Pacific region', *Security Studies* 3(1): 44–74.
- BBC Asia-Pacific Monitoring* (2004) 'ASEAN Regional Forum begins discussions on security issues', 2 July 2004.
- BBC Asia-Pacific Monitoring* (2004) 'China to host ASEAN regional forum meeting 4–6 November', 26 October 2004a.
- BBC Asia-Pacific Monitoring* (2008) 'China calls for strengthened security cooperation at Singapore meeting', 8 May.
- BBC Asia-Pacific Monitoring* (2009) 'Australia says Singapore defence forum "re-sounding success"', 2 June.
- Boey, D. (2003) 'Personalities hold key to Shangri-La's character', *The Straits Times*, 3 June.
- Capie, D. (2010) 'When does track two matter? Structure, agency and Asian regionalism', *Review of International Political Economy* 17(3): 1–28.
- Capie, D. and Evans, P. M. (2007) *The Asia-Pacific Security Lexicon*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Chipman, J. (2009) *Opening Remarks*, 8th Shangri-La Dialogue, Singapore, 29 May.
- Choong, W. (2009) 'Asia's Shangri-La future: an inclusive regional security architecture has to emerge for stability', *The Straits Times*, 29 May.
- Chow, J. (2009) 'Let's make a deal', *The Straits Times*, 1 June.
- Huisken, R. (2002) 'ASEAN Regional Forum needs the defense ministers', *PacNet*, 15, Pacific Forum CSIS, Honolulu, Hawaii.
- IISS (2000) *The Powers in Asia*, 42nd Annual Conference, Makati Shangri-La, Manila, 14–17 September.
- IISS (2003) *Papers from the 2nd IISS Asia Security Conference: The Shangri-La Dialogue*, Singapore, 30 May–1 June (accessed 10 May 2009).
- IISS (2004) *The 3rd IISS Shangri-La Dialogue*, June 2004.

- IISS (2006) *The Shangri-La Dialogue: The 5th Anniversary IISS Asia Security Summit*, London: International Institute for Strategic Studies (accessed 10 May 2009).
- IISS (2008) *The Shangri-La Dialogue: The 7th IISS Asia Security Summit 30 May–1 June 2008, Singapore*, London: International Institute for Strategic Studies.
- IISS (2009) 'IISS announces 8th Asian Security Summit', press release; accessed at: <http://www.iiss.org/whats-new/iiss-in-the-press/april-2009/iiss-announces-8th-annual-asia-security-summit-the-shangri-la-dialogue/>, 10 May 2009.
- Kan, S. (2009) 'US–China military contacts: issues for Congress', *Congressional Research Service Report*, 19 March.
- Karniol, R. (2008) 'Building on Collective Strength', *The Straits Times*, 2 June.
- Kin, C. C. and Lin, T. J. (2008) 'Defence summit agrees on how to offer disaster relief; Accord reached on 'norms of behaviour' guided by 3 principles in times of calamity', *The Straits Times*, 1 June.
- Milner, A. (2003) *Region, Security and the Return of History*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Minnick, W. (2008) 'Shangri-La Dialogue ends extraordinary meeting', *Defense News*, 3 June.
- Rudd, K. (2009) *Keynote Address*, 8th Shangri-La Dialogue, Singapore, 29 May.
- Ruggie, J. (1993) *Multilateralism Matters: The Theory and Praxis of an Institutional Form*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Taylor, B. (2008) 'China's unofficial diplomacy', in P. Kerr, S. Harris and Q. Yaqing (eds) *China's New Diplomacy: Tactical or Fundamental Change?*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 195–211.
- Thai News Service* (2008) 'Asia: six countries interesting in joining ASEAN defence ministers' meeting', *Thai News Service*, 24 November.
- The Japan Times* (2002) 'Time to talk defence', *The Japan Times*, 18 July.
- The Straits Times* (2009) 'Asia's Shangri-La future: an inclusive regional security architecture has to emerge for stability', *The Straits Times*, 29 May.
- Thompson, F. (2002) 'Senator Thompson to represent US at Asian conference on security issues', *News Release*, 29 May.
- Vitug, M. (2009) 'Defense heads push for transparency', *ABS-CBN News*, 1 June.
- Wain, B. (2002) 'Regional security: different targets', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 19 July; accessed at: <http://www.iiss.org/conferences/the-shangri-la-dialogue/press-coverage/press-coverage-2002/far-eastern-economic-review...regional/> (accessed 5 May).
- Walters, P. (2008) 'Fitzgibbon push to join ASEAN defence talks', *The Australian*, 4 June.
- Wong-Anan, N. (2009) 'Asian's talk of peace, haggle over arms', *Reuters*, 31 May.