DCAF Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance

Asia-Pacific Regional & Sub-Regional SSG Forums 2023

Summary Report

Colombo, Sri Lanka

01-05 May 2023

ASIA-PACIFIC

SECURITY SECTOR GOVERNANCE NETWORK

About DCAF

DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance is dedicated to improving the security of states and their people within a framework of democratic governance, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and gender equality. Since its founding in 2000, DCAF has contributed to making peace and development more sustainable by assisting partner states, and international actors supporting these states, to improve the governance of their security sector through inclusive and participatory reforms. It creates innovative knowledge products, promotes norms and good practices, provides legal and policy advice and supports capacity-building of both state and non-state security sector stakeholders.

Disclaimer

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ASIA-PACIFIC

**SECURITY SECTOR
GOVERNANCE NETWORK**

List of Acronyms

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AU	African Union
BIMSTEC	Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation
CSO	Civil society organization
DCAF	DCAF - Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EAO	Ethnic Armed Organizations
HADR	Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response
IUU (fishing)	Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (fishing)
JSDF	Japan Self-Defense Forces
NWG	National working group
PIF	Pacific Islands Forum
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SAC	State Administrative Council (Myanmar)
SDGs	UN Sustainable Development Goals
SSG	Security Sector Governance
SSR	Security Sector Reform
YNSS	Youth National Security Strategy
YPS	Youth, peace, and security

Opening session of the 2023 Asia-Pacific SSG Forum. Photo: DCAF.

Executive Summary

The 2023 Asia-Pacific SSG Forum and the 2023 South Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asia Sub-Regional Forums took place in Colombo, Sri Lanka, from 1-5 May 2023. The four SSG forums are an integral part of the initiative to Promote Good Security Sector Governance (SSG) in the Asia-Pacific Region, which is coordinated by DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance.

In addition to providing a space for discussion about the many shared SSG challenges countries in the Asia-Pacific currently face, the 2023 Asia-Pacific Forum focussed on three thematic topics: the provision of SSG/R support during fragile transitions; the lessons learned from local and global COVID-19 responses for future health crises; and the nexus between climate change, climate security and SSG/R. The forum also featured a special session on the SSG challenges currently faced by Pacific Islands States.

The forums took place in Colombo's Galadari Hotel. Photo: DCAF.

The three sub-regional SSG forums explored the SSG challenges encountered in the individual sub-regions in more detail. They also focussed on thematic topics particularly relevant to their specific region. The South Asia SSG Forum focussed on the topics of Preventing Violent Extremism, and Migration, Refugees and Security Provision. The Southeast Asia SSG Forum paid special attention to the topic Youth, Peace and Security; and the East Asia SSG Forum focussed on the Role of Gender in the Security Sector, as well as on Lessons learned from the Ukraine War.

To round off the programme, the forums also featured two crisis management simulation exercises. These focussed on counterterrorism and on humanitarian assistance and disaster response (HADR), respectively.

Key takeaways from the four forums are outlined on the following pages.

Asia-Pacific Forum Key Takeaways

- The importance of good SSG in the Asia-Pacific region and worldwide has been underscored by recent developments in Afghanistan, Myanmar, Sudan, Ukraine, and others. Efforts to ensure good SSG and carry out security sector reform in the Asia-Pacific region should therefore be intensified.

- The Russia-Ukraine war has had significant political and economic impacts on the entire Asia-Pacific region. It has also led to a strategic re-thinking within Asia, with several countries publishing new security documents and stepping up their security provisions in the wake of Russia's invasion. Further analysis of the wider geopolitical implications of these shifts within Asia is needed.

- Pacific Islands States face a number of unique security threats that are often transnational in nature and thus require regional responses. The effects of climate change in particular present existential threats to all Pacific Islands States, which, together with heightened geopolitical competition in the region, requires coordinated action. Here, institutions such as the Pacific Islands Forum could provide mechanisms to deal with these and related SSG challenges.

- The question of whether and how to provide SSG/R support during fragile political transitions remains controversial. However, sustaining low-level efforts and engagement on SSG/R might be more beneficial in the long term, as complete withdrawal can thwart opportunities for subsequent re-engagement or increase the financial and reputational costs thereof.

- Almost four years after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, studies are now needed on whether security sectors in the Asia-Pacific region have undertaken necessary reforms or adaptations to be better prepared for future health crises.

- Climate change is already posing and will continue to pose significant challenges to the Asia-Pacific region's security sectors. Possible entry points for SSR to address climate-change related challenges include: an improvement of understanding of conflict risks, environmental law enforcement, training and awareness raising, legal revisions, Disaster Risk Reduction and Management framework revisions, reviews of civil-military relations and community engagement.

- The crisis management simulations on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response and counterterrorism underlined the importance of good advance planning for crises. They showed the need for international agreements and (information) cooperation, legal framework revisions, and standard operating procedures in anticipation of both humanitarian emergencies and terrorism.

The 2023 Asia-Pacific SSG Forum again included both plenary (pictured) and working group sessions. Photo: DCAF.

South Asia Key Takeaways

- It is useful to reframe South Asian security in terms of non-traditional security threats, such as water shortages, locust attacks and other climate security threats, which affect day-to-day life in all South Asian countries, and so present a good entry point for communication between the security sectors of individual countries in the region.

- Climate security should be discussed more at forums such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation. Collaboration among South Asian countries on activities such as climate threat mapping and multi-sectoral climate discussions should be promoted more.

- Regarding the Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE), recommendations included: implementing programs that facilitate cross-border interreligious dialogue to address the regional drivers of radicalisation; implementing inter-community outreach programmes to address misinformation and disinformation among different ethnic communities; training female security personnel as effective agents of PVE to benefit from their often significant reach in local communities; strengthening the role of local police in supporting individuals vulnerable to radicalisation; more strictly monitoring online platforms and social media to combat cyber radicalisation; and promoting educational reform.

- On the topic of migration and refugees, recommendations included organising multinational seminars to facilitate further exchange of information and experience; putting in place arrangements for data-sharing on migration and refugees, and establishing cooperation mechanisms on these topics; and promoting greater regional collaboration on these topics, including by using platforms such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation.

Working group sessions during the 2023 South Asia SSG Forum (top) and the 2023 East Asia SSG Forum (right). Photos: DCAF.

Southeast Asia Key Takeaways

- One pressing security issue in Southeast Asia is the persistence of internal armed conflicts, such as in Myanmar and Indonesia. Stronger national and regional efforts are needed to resolve these conflicts peacefully; and existing regional institutions relevant for peace and conflict resolution, such as the ASEAN Institute for Peace Resolution, need to be further developed.

- A further problem relates to authoritarianism. Many countries in the region are still considered authoritarian, which also impedes SSG efforts. Stronger efforts are therefore needed to promote values of democracy, human rights and gender equality, also in the security sector.

- Southeast Asia faces significant challenges when it comes to maritime security. Several maritime Southeast Asian states are involved in disputes with China in the South China Sea. At the same time, Southeast Asia's maritime spaces are still used by pirates and terrorists. Stronger regional cooperation can help to address these challenges.

- Security actors in Southeast Asia need to be more adequately prepared for emerging, non-traditional security challenges, particularly in the domains of cyber and climate security. Regional cooperation on shared challenges such as cybercrime and natural disasters can improve both regional and national, as well as human, security.

- Key recommendations on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) included: the need to conduct further research on existing frameworks for YPS at both country and the ASEAN levels; to address the wide generational gap in Southeast Asian countries, which impedes efforts to increase inclusion of youth in policy-making; and to raise greater awareness about the importance of the combined concept of Youth, Peace and Security, as its components are often still considered in isolation.

East Asia Key Takeaways

- Tensions in the Taiwan Strait continue to be of the most pressing challenges to security in East Asia. To alleviate the current situation, strategic communication to deal with potential escalation should be improved, e.g., by providing regular multilateral multitrack dialogues and ad hoc neutral platforms for dialogue; and hot lines between China's and Taiwan's military leaders should be established to ensure swift communication in case of a crisis.

- The Russia-Ukraine war suggests a number of lessons for a potential conflict in East Asia: crucially, it has underlined the importance of stockpiling weapons in advance of a conflict. It has also provided many other strategic and tactical lessons: for example, Ukraine's use of an arsenal of deterrent "quills" could be imitated by Taiwan to deter or resist a potential military take-over. Additionally, the Russia-Ukraine war has had several concrete economic repercussions on East Asia, such as a rise in energy prices and inflation, and also entrenched the region's political divisions. Further research on the lessons and implications of the Russia-Ukraine war for East Asia, including its security sectors and security architecture more generally, is therefore recommended.

- To effectively achieve gender mainstreaming, it is crucial for national governments to adopt a series of approaches that address the barriers hindering women's meaningful participation in security institutions, including within UN peace operations.

- East Asia sees itself confronted with emerging non-traditional security challenges, such as climate insecurity. Countries should enhance regional cooperation on disaster relief to address the threats posed by a rising numbers of climate change-induced disasters.

Introduction

Under the "Promoting Good Security Sector Governance (SSG) in the Asia-Pacific Region Initiative", the Asia-Pacific Unit of DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance coordinates a unique network of partner institutions and associates from 22 countries and territories across the region.[1] The network creates space for exchange, comparison, and debate on key SSG challenges, opportunities, and security sector reform (SSR) requirements as they apply to the Asia-Pacific region. The Asia-Pacific SSG Forum, as well as the integrated South Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asia SSG Forums (hereinafter simply "the SSG Forums") convene partners and associates of the network on an annual basis. Along with offering opportunities for the exchange of good practices, experiences and lessons across the network, this dialogue triggers practical and policy recommendations and initiatives in conformity with good SSG principles, public service orientation towards provision of security services, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and international and regional standards, norms and principles.

The 2023 SSG Forums were held in Colombo, Sri Lanka.[2] The 2023 Asia-Pacific SSG Forum took place on 1, 4 and 5 May 2023 and paid special attention to SSG/R support during fragile transitions, revisiting pandemic response and security sector preparation for future health crises, and the nexus of climate change, climate security and SSG/R. The sub-regional SSG Forums took place on 2 and 4 May 2023. The 2023 South Asia SSG Forum paid special attention to Preventing Violent Extremism and Migration, Refugees and Security Provision. The 2023 Southeast Asia SSG Forum paid special attention to Youth, Peace and Security. Finally, the 2023 East Asia SSG Forum paid special attention to Gender and the Security Sector, and Lessons learned from the Ukraine War. In addition, the Forums featured two crisis management simulation exercises on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response (HADR) and counterterrorism. While the network currently covers only South, Southeast and East Asia, the 2023 SSG Forums marked the first opportunity for participants from the Pacific Islands to join (virtually) and share their unique SSG/R perspectives and challenges.

The forum took place opposite Sri Lanka's Old Parliament Building (pictured with the statue of D.S. Senanayake, the country's first Prime Minister). Photo: DCAF.

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[1] As of May 2023, DCAF's network in the Asia-Pacific region consists of partnerships in 22 countries and territories: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand and Timor-Leste. Partnerships in Laos, North Korea and Vietnam remain under consideration.

[2] In 2019, the South, Southeast and East Asia sub-regional SSG Forums were held in Dhulikel, Manila and Seoul, respectively. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020 and 2021 all meetings went virtual. In 2022, the network was able to again convene in person, this time in Bali, Indonesia, where a 4-in-1 format was adopted to combine the South, Southeast and East Asia sub-regional SSG Forum as well as the Asia-Pacific region-wide SSG Forum. This year, the 2023 SSG Forums continued the 4-in-1 format.

Asia-Pacific Regional SSG Forum

Associates from all sub-regions convened together for the regional SSG Forum on 1 and 4-5 May 2023. This Forum provided an opportunity for discussion and exchange about issues concerning the Asia-Pacific region as a whole, as well as about topics and trends in SSG/R that were relevant to the majority or all of the participating countries.

Overview, Outlook and Priorities of the Asia-Pacific SSG Network

Developments in Afghanistan, Myanmar, Sudan, Ukraine and elsewhere in the world have underscored the importance of good SSG, whereby security provision is seen as a public service, and whereby the military, police and other security-providing institutions are held accountable to the people they serve. Rather than a stopgap, SSR activities that strive toward good SSG may be seen as a preventive long-term solution against armed conflict or other situations of violence or civil unrest. Civilian control, rule of law and respect for human rights build strong institutions, which are crucial to securing peace and sustainable development. The main activity of DCAF's Asia-Pacific Unit is promoting good SSG in the region through its "network" approach, which aims to facilitate the sharing of experiences, knowledge and insights at the regional level and generate support for joint SSR activities at the bilateral and/or national levels.

Currently, the DCAF Asia-Pacific Unit remains oriented towards the network and focused on improving knowledge on key issues through thematic workshops and joint publications. Since the 2022 Bali Forums, as a direct result of virtual thematic SSG workshops that have been held as part of the Asia-Pacific SSG Network, a number of thematic SSG briefs have been written together with SSG associates and experts:

- ♦ Cybersecurity Governance in South Asia
- ♦ Maritime Security Sector Governance and Reform in Southeast Asia
- ♦ Protecting Migrants through Good SSG in Southeast Asia
- ♦ Climate Security and the Security Sector in Southeast Asia
- ♦ Climate Security and Security Sector Governance in East Asia

Additionally, with the help of the network, the Asia-Pacific Unit has contributed to DCAF's SSR Backgrounder Series a new edition on Maritime Security Sector Governance and Reform. The network also continues to update its biannual SSG Update Series that highlights new developments in SSG/R in each country, including challenges and entry points. A summary report of the 2022 Bali Forums can be found here. Otherwise, DCAF has been providing support to network members' activities and projects and initiating SSR activities and related fundraising.

SSG Challenges in the Pacific Islands Region

The Pacific Islands have been subject to increasing international attention over the past few years. Given the growing importance of the region, several states have adopted new strategies for the region: these include Australia (Pacific Step-Up), New Zealand (Pacific Reset), the United States (Pacific Pledge) and the United Kingdom (Pacific Uplift). This attention has generally been welcomed by Pacific Islands States, since they see themselves confronted with a growing number of key security threats. During the session, an overview of both regional security threats and specific national-level challenges faced by the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Palau, Tonga, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu was provided by the DCAF Asia-Pacific team, which had recently conducted a study assessing SSG/R in the Pacific Islands region. Additional expertise was provided by Rouben Azizian and Anna Powles, who have undertaken extensive research on the security of the Pacific Islands at the Centre for Defence and Security Studies, Massey University, New Zealand.

Regional Challenges

The Pacific Islands face a number of key security threats which are often transnational in nature and, as such, necessitate regional responses. The foremost regional challenge, climate change, poses an existential threat to the Pacific Islands. Since it impacts the Pacific Islands perhaps more than any other region in the world, the region is one of the most genuine and passionate champions for climate security. Relatedly, together with climate change, Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, decreasing ecosystem health, and poor governance and management have rapidly transformed fishing systems, impacting employment, income and food security.

The second primary regional security consideration in the Pacific Islands is geopolitical competition. The Pacific Islands are rich in resources and major producers of fish, timber and minerals, which is why they are often referred to as the "Blue Pacific Continent". They are also home to a number of important shipping lanes and military bases. For these reasons, the Pacific Islands have been of great geopolitical interest to major foreign powers, including Australia, China, New Zealand and the United States. This geopolitical competition on one hand draws much needed attention and support to the region; on the other hand, however, it also arguably distracts the region and its partners from existing security priorities, most significantly, climate security.[3]

National Challenges

The character of the security sector varies significantly between Pacific Islands States and gives rise to differing national-level challenges. One factor which largely shapes the security architecture is foreign influence. For example, Fiji, Tonga and Vanuatu maintain their own sovereign armed forces. Conversely, under the Compact of Free Association, the Federated States of Micronesia and Palau have given the United States authority and responsibility for

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[3] Pacific Islands Forum (2002) "The Pacific Security Outlook Report 2022-2023", p. 34, https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Pacific-Security-Outlook-Report-2022-2023.pdf.

their defence and security matters, and under the Solomon Islands-China treaty, China maintains wide-ranging military, police and intelligence powers in Solomon Islands. Overall, however, there remain gaps in both security provision and the oversight thereof. Vanuatu is relatively rare in the Pacific Islands in having a full national security strategy, national security council, and development plan in furtherance of the sustainable development goals (SDGs). Other nations, such as Fiji and Palau, have limited legal frameworks on security provision and oversight, and no national security strategy or policy despite some attempts to develop them. Another common gap is Ombuds offices. Fiji, Palau, Solomon Islands and Tonga all either have Ombuds offices provided for in relevant legislation, but no office has been created, or else do have an actual Ombuds office but it lacks adequate powers or resources to fulfil its function. Finally, a sticking point in good SSG in the Pacific Islands is the armed forces' and/or police's involvement in politics, and the appointment of both former and active military officers to public office, such as in Fiji.

Several promising entry points exist to address these challenges. The Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) is currently developing a Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility that aims to guide governments in addressing the legal, policy and practical issues arising from four main types of climate mobility: displacement, migration, evacuations, and planned relocation. In the area of IUU fishing, technological advancements, increased multinational information sharing, and monitoring, control and surveillance arrangements have shown positive results. Overall, the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent represents an ongoing commitment of the region to work together, develop sustainable approaches to peace and security and adhere to the principles of good governance.[4]

SSG/R Support During Fragile Transitions

The DCAF Asia-Pacific Unit is currently undertaking a study on whether SSR programmes and activities should continue in contexts with military takeovers/coups, democratic backsliding or declining national commitment to reforms. The primary focus of the study is Afghanistan and Myanmar. However, a secondary focus is other contexts with increasing militarisation or authoritarianism. Some proposed countries include Bangladesh, Cambodia, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand in Asia, as well as countries such as Burkina Faso, Egypt, Niger and Rwanda beyond Asia.

Guiding questions for the study include: what are the arguments for remaining engaged, especially in contexts where many international or national actors are withdrawing their support? What do external actors stand to benefit from remaining engaged, sometimes against all odds and without prospects for short- to mid-term achievements? How should external actors engage with an illegitimate regime? How should SSG/R support be different when political will and buy-in are lacking? How can affected societies and local communities continue to benefit from engagement? What role can be played by regional organisations? By civil society?

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[4] Pacific Islands Forum (2019) "2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent", p. 21, https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/PIFS-2050-Strategy-WEB-11July2022.pdf.

The network brainstormed motivations – and reservations – on continued engagement from various perspectives. For oversight actors such as parliaments and civil society, remaining committed to SSR activities increases trust and acceptance by the international community, thus bringing about possibilities for financial assistance. However, international presence risks encroachment on state sovereignty and independence, imposition of strategic foreign agendas and possibly heightened intra-governmental competition.

Security institutions stand to gain legitimacy in the eyes of both international and domestic audiences, support in providing law and order, and maintenance of power in a more stable environment. If willingness to engage in SSR activities is geo-strategically or financially motivated, however, engagement may be superficial and not lead to meaningful change. There can also be great resistance to change in the first instance, whether due to failure to acknowledge any need for improvement, or whether due to fear of criticism or loss of authority at the hands of international actors or civilian rule.

Finally, from the perspective of the international donor community, low-key efforts and engagement might help in the long run, as exit often either ruins opportunities for subsequent-re-engagement or renders re-engagement only possible at great financial and reputational cost. They are also not as expensive as previous full-fledged reform projects. On the other hand, this can be difficult to justify when remaining engaged means using limited donor resources that could be invested in other contexts/societies with more welcoming and promising reform environments. As with all actors, whether international or national, physical safety also poses a very real concern.

Overall, this gathering of perspectives from actors across Asia helped to direct and finetune the project's methodology and research questions, and to understand more deeply the ethical quandaries implicated by the decision of whether to remain engaged in or exit a fragile context.

Revisiting Pandemic Reponses and Preparation for Future Health Crises

In the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, the Asia-Pacific SSG Network published a book reviewing the roles and responsibilities of security providers in managing and stemming the pandemic, as well as those overseeing security providers. The review included the challenges faced, lessons learned and recommendations for preparing to meet future health crises more effectively, efficiently and accountably. The study considered the perspectives of the armed forces, police, border management, intelligence services, local security actors, international security actors, national governments, legislatures, the media, civil society and think tanks. The results underscored the need to strengthen multilateral and bilateral networks, and the importance of oversight and management of the security sector.

Nearly two years have passed since the book's publication, and the World Health Organization has announced that COVID-19 no longer constitutes a global health emergency. Yet at the same time, in a speech at the World Health Assembly on 22 May 2023, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned that the threat of

another pathogen emerging with even deadlier potential remains and stated that "the painful lessons we have learned, the investments we have made and the capacities we have built must not go to waste" as we "transform that suffering into meaningful and lasting change".[5] Therefore, the time is ripe to take stock of whether the security sector has undertaken any reforms or adaptations following COVID-19. Have any recommendations been heeded? The network agreed that it would be worthwhile to reflect on the pandemic experience and address the question of improved preparedness. As the world now also turns its focus to accountability, participants pointed out the harms that came from politicisation of the pandemic, and the continued value in depoliticisation of health and human security.

Climate Change, Climate Security and SSG/R

The forum dedicated two sessions to the topic of Climate Change, Climate Security and SSG/R, as well as to the connection between the environment and SSG/R more generally. The first session focused on environmental protection and the second session focused on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). The sessions first introduced the conceptual linkages between these themes and SSG/R, then offered examples from ongoing research work focused on the Philippines, followed by break-out groups.

For environmental protection, the discussed linkages between SSG/R and environmental protection focused especially on environmental crimes and harms, such as waste dumping and pollution, illicit logging and mining, wildlife trade and poaching, Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, land conversion, and trafficking in wildlife, waste, or natural resources. The case of the Philippines was highlighted as an example from DCAF's work, showing the SSG/R challenges of environmental protection in a megadiverse country that is undergoing rapid industrialisation. The session discussed the challenges posed by this, such as the politically sensitive background of environmental protection (e.g., with regards to mining and logging rights), violence committed against environmental activists, the lack of prioritisation, and the lack of data. This was complemented with some examples of promising Philippine initiatives, such as in environmental peacebuilding and DRR, as well as community-based law enforcement initiatives like the Bantay Dagat and Bantay Gubat to protect marine and forest areas.

The diversity of tasks that fall under environmental protection translated into different approaches across the sub-regions and their countries: in some countries, the military is actively engaged in environmental protection and countering deforestation (e.g., India, Indonesia); in others, police play a more important role in environmental law enforcement (e.g., Sri Lanka); in yet others, specific roles are assumed by NGOs (e.g. Myanmar) or by agencies with specific tasks (e.g. the coast guard for IUU fishing in South Korea); and some countries see no role for the security sector at all (e.g. Japan). Broader themes relate to transboundary issues (fire hazes, dust storms, overfishing, climate change), urban expansion, corruption and political interference, lack of awareness and political will,

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[5] World Health Organization (2023) "WHO Director-General's Opening Remarks at the Media Briefing", 5 May, https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing---5-may-2023.

government models (e.g., federalism), and more generally to the open question of which roles security sectors should play in environmental protection. Opinions on this range from no role at all to active monitoring and training, and from regional cooperation to greening militaries themselves and revising their legal frameworks and training manuals.

The session on DRR discussed the roles of security sector actors in this, one of its more traditional, responsibilities. At the same time, security sectors have long been more focused on response and recovery (building on their logistical, medical, and Search, Rescue and Retrieval capacities) than on preventive actions that they can support, for instance in environmental protection, environmental remediation, and risk monitoring. The example of the Philippines as a country with very high levels of disaster risk and occurrence shows how the security sector has developed strong response and relief capacities. The quality of their service was seen by many communities as an indicator how much they trusted the security sector institutions: security actors can build and lose public trust with their DRR work. At the same time, slow onset disasters like climate change are not only more difficult to prepare and plan preventive measures for, but they can also amplify existing conflict risks.

The subsequent group discussions reflected on very different experiences and expectations of the security sector in disaster response. Many saw clear impacts from climate change on social cohesion, for instance in that it drives water (in)security issues, competition and conflict for scarce resources and land, threats to densely populated low-lying areas at risk of flooding, and subsequent migration pressures. These are also entry points for SSR: focusing on better understanding conflict risks, environmental law enforcement, training and awareness raising, legal and Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) framework revisions, reviews of civil-military relations, and community engagement. This way, the two sessions provided a good overview of how environmental protection, climate change and SSG/R are connected, as well as useful discussions of the implications for SSR and for each respective partner.

Crisis Management Simulation Exercises

In this session, the United Service Institution of India led a crisis management simulation exercise on two topics: Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) and counterterrorism. The session introduced the concept of net assessments and started with the premise that some of the most terrible events in history were unthinkable before they happened. The classic example of the *Maginot Line* in France during World War II was given. The line extended for about 450 kilometres and is estimated to have cost what would today be USD 9 billion, a technological marvel featuring state of the art defences, dozens of artillery fortresses and bunkers, underground telephone and electrical lines – all of no use when the Germans simply circumvented the line and crossed through the unmanned borders to the North. More recently, the world did not imagine and thus adequately prepare for a global pandemic with the scale and mortality of COVID-19. These examples show the limitations of conventional thinking.

Net assessments propose an approach to long-term strategic planning in which one "expects the unexpected" and essentially runs a rehearsal for the future. After identifying plausible

scenarios (based on primary data, field surveys, unorthodox literature and alternative views) stakeholders can simulate their crisis response, analyse causes and effects, foresee tangible and intangible outcomes, identify potential adversaries or allies, review and refine protocols, and generally narrow the zone for unpleasant surprises. Thus, simulations can serve as a valuable tool for security providers as well as governance and oversight institutions. Together, the two crisis management simulation exercises on HADR and counterterrorism in this session were an opportunity to share best practices, develop common approaches and explore future areas of cooperation.

Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief

The first crisis simulation exercise aimed to highlight the security impacts of climate change-induced disasters, as the effects of climate change are faced by most, if not all, countries in the region. The exercise aimed to develop a broad framework for disaster relief operations. Issues raised included: command and control structures, civil-military relations, inter-agency cooperation, international assistance, and relief and aid distribution.

One requirement that emerged from the discussions was the need to conclude international agreements in advance of an emergency. In some cases, a state of emergency can be declared to authorise reactive and timely executive decision-making. In absence of such authorisation, and once an emergency is already underway, there is too little time to conclude international agreements. A visiting forces agreement can anticipatorily delineate, amongst other operational matters, entry and exit requirements. For example, in response to the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan, a number of German Shepherd dogs were sent by Switzerland to help with search and rescue. However, because Japan had no border management policy in place that was adapted to fast-moving emergency situations, and no prior agreement had been made between Japan and Switzerland, the dogs were stuck in quarantine for 10 days, after which the critical 72-hour "golden window" for finding survivors had long since passed and the aid was moot. Another point raised on international coordination was the importance of having a central headquarters in the affected country, to coordinate the receipt of goods and delineate the roles of foreign and local rescue teams to avoid repetition or gaps.

An overall challenge discussed was the disparate impact of climate-induced disasters on those of lower socioeconomic status, especially in situations where crops or livestock – and thereby livelihood – is destroyed. Those with disabilities are also disproportionately affected, and evacuation plans should account for diverse needs. Security impacts from displacement, whether permanent or in a temporary shelter, were also discussed: these included an increase in gender-based violence, lack of access to clean drinking water, disease outbreak, and looting and related crimes.

Counterterrorism

The objective of the second crisis management simulation exercise was to assess the complex threats from terrorism in South, Southeast and East Asia and formulate a broad response strategy addressing, amongst other items: policies and good practices for the

media, civil-military relations, inter-agency coordination, and the roles and responsibilities of the many different security (and non-security) institutions implicated in a terrorist threat. Participants also discussed how regional cooperation, such as instruments for intelligence and data sharing, and organisations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) could help in preventing and mitigating terrorism.

A delicate balance between certain aspects of counterterrorism operations and fundamental rights emerged as a key consideration. One such balance is between freedom of the press on one hand, and the right to privacy of those taken hostage or killed in a terrorist attack, as well their families, on the other hand. Public availability of some information may also interfere with ongoing counterterrorism operations. Given all these factors, many countries have developed specific policies on managing the media under such conditions. However, the internet and social media are more complicated to monitor than traditional media and pose a greater risk of instrumentalisation by terrorists who may, for example, share disturbing content in real time or publish their negotiation demands to the public. Detention proved to be another divisive consideration: while detainees can offer invaluable intelligence and states are also motivated to promote a zero-tolerance stance against terrorists, they must also respect due process and fair trial obligations.

In sum, both the HADR and counterterrorism simulations highlighted the importance of advance planning. For both disaster management and terrorism, multinational sharing of intelligence and data can help with prevention, or, should a crisis be unavoidable, with early warning and mitigation of the effects. The time sensitivity of crises also necessitates having in place legal frameworks and standard operating procedures for efficiency and interoperability between state governments, security providers and other responders, and military and civil institutions.

In conclusion, the 2023 Asia-Pacific Regional SSG Forum provided for full days of very stimulating discussion and exchange about a number of key issues currently relevant to SSG/R in the Asia-Pacific region. Individual sessions covered such diverse topics as SSG/R support during fragile transitions, pandemic responses of the security sector, climate change and climate security, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief, and counterterrorism. For the first time, the Forum also saw the virtual attendance of participants from Pacific Islands states during a session specifically dedicated to security sector governance in their countries. While highlighting the many issues and challenges the Asia-Pacific region currently faces, the Forum also showed that there exist equally many promising opportunities and possible solutions, as well as a willingness and ability among the countries in the region to collaborate on these shared challenges.

Member of the Southeast Asian delegation debate courses of action in the Crisis Management Exercise offered by USI of India. Photo: DCAF.

Sub-Regional SSG Forums

The sub-regional SSG Forums took place on 2 and 4 May. Continuing the 4-in-1 format that had already been adopted for the 2022 SSG Forums in Bali, the associates split into their South Asian, Southeast Asian and East Asian networks to convene for their respective sub-regional forum during these days. The following sections will provide an overview of the sessions and activities undertaken by each of the three sub-regional forums.

South Asia Sub-Regional SSG Forum

The 2023 South Asia Sub-Regional SSG Forum comprised three sessions: one session provided an overview of the South Asia SSG network and country updates, while the other two sessions focused on the specific topics of Preventing Violent Extremism, and Migration, Refugees and Security Provision.

Overview of the South Asia SSG Network and Country Updates

In this session, SSG associates from South Asia and DCAF staff members reflected on developments and activities that had taken place in South Asia since the 2022 Bali Forums.

Regional SSG/R Developments and Activities

Some of the most pressing SSG/R challenges facing South Asia continue to stem from the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, as violence spills over the Afghan-Pakistan border and Afghan refugees seek protection in neighbouring countries. Countries in the region also grapple with extremist violence, with most of them having experienced fatal terrorist attacks over the past few years. At the same time, geopolitical tensions between India and China persist. In 2022, border clashes occurred in the Tawang sector, Arunachal Pradesh state, India. Other SSG/R challenges relate to gender equality, as many South Asian security sectors display a lack of gender inclusivity; climate security, especially as the region experiences a growing number of increasingly intense natural disasters, such as the devastating floods that struck Pakistan in summer 2022; and cybersecurity, a relatively new field that poses a variety of new challenges to the region's security sectors.

The 2022 Bali Forums already identified a number of key recommendations for addressing these and related challenges and strengthening SSG/R in the region, including:

- Discussing climate security at forums such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and promoting collaboration among South Asian countries on activities such as climate threat mapping, webinars, publications and other multi-sectoral discussions.
- Framing South Asian security in terms of future security threats, including non-traditional ones, such as water shortages, locust attacks and other climate security

threats, as well as migration. These non-traditional security threats affect day-to-day life in all concerned countries and present a good entry point for communication between their respective security sectors.

◆ Conducting legislative reviews and reforms, pushing for greater public-private cooperation on cybersecurity, setting up oversight committees and undertaking capacity building in the cyber domain.

◆ Addressing the increasing politicisation of security sectors, which is one of the key challenges to achieving good SSG.

◆ Conducting a study on the lessons learned and good practices in SSG in Afghanistan over the past 20 years.

Since the 2022 Bali Forums, the South Asia SSG Network has also undertaken a variety of other events and activities, including:

◆ Thematic online workshops and public webinars, including on cybersecurity in South Asia.

◆ National Working Group (NWG) meetings.

◆ Bilateral meetings.

◆ Drafting of SSG updates.

◆ Publication of thematic briefs, including a brief on Cybersecurity Governance in South Asia.

National SSG/R Developments and Activities

In addition to these regional developments, there have also been various significant SSG/R developments and activities at the national level.

Bangladesh. In April 2023, Bangladesh announced the launch of its own "Indo-Pacific Outlook", which echoes the Indo-Pacific strategy of the QUAD group (Australia, India, Japan and the USA), and focuses on safeguarding ocean security, establishing peace and preventing transnational crimes. It remains to be seen how the Outlook will affect Bangladesh's security posture in practice. In other developments, the influx of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar continues to pose a serious SSG challenge: in March 2023, a fire broke out in a Rohingya refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, causing casualties, injuries and the displacement of approximately 45,000 refugees. This has raised serious concerns about the adequacy of current security provisions in refugee campaigns and Bangladesh's handling of the Rohingya refugee crisis generally.

Bhutan. In Bhutan, out-migration continues to pose a significant SSG challenge: due to the emigration of many Bhutanese nationals to destinations such as Australia, the country's civil service experiences a shortage of new recruits and has also lost a significant number of employees, including senior- and mid-career civil servants. This includes civil servants working in the security sector. Another SSG challenge relates to climate security: many glaciers in Bhutan are currently melting, which has wide- ranging repercussions, including on Bhutanese energy security which relies on hydropower plants.

India. A significant development for the Indian Armed Forces that occurred during 2022 was the introduction of a new military recruitment policy, called the "Agnipath Scheme". Under

this scheme, soldiers below the rank of commissioned officers will initially only be recruited for a tenure of four years, not 15 or more years, as had previously been the case. On completion of four years of service, 25% of recruits will then be retained by the military, and some will also be taken over by the paramilitary forces or police. Recruits will also not receive many of the benefits traditionally provided by the army, such as a life-long pension. The scheme has therefore been subject to criticism and protests in India, some of which turned violent. Nevertheless, there have also been positive responses to the scheme, which has so far received a great number of applications.

Maldives. The most pressing SSG challenge in the Maldives is violent extremism: the country continues to experience instances of extremist violence, such as the attempted assassination of the Speaker of the People's Majlis, Mohammed Nasheed, by religious extremists in 2021.

Nepal. In Nepal, one of the most significant SSG/R developments relates to the impact of India's Agnipath Scheme on military labour migration from Nepal to India. The Nepalese government suspended the recruitment of its nationals into the Indian Army's Gorkha regiment until further notice, claiming that shortening the tenure of new recruits to four years violated the original 1947 agreement regulating the recruitment of Nepalese nationals into India's army. As a consequence, it is anticipated that a significant number of young Nepalis may opt to join the Nepali Army, despite the relatively lower prestige, perks and pay associated with it. However, the Nepali military may face challenges in accommodating a rise in potential recruits, as it already has a surplus of military personnel. This problem is compounded by the country's impending financial crisis. The situation has therefore given rise to discussions about a "rightsizing of the military".

Pakistan. Over the past years, Pakistan's security environment has been heavily influenced by the situation in neighbouring Afghanistan, as violent conflict spills over the border and there is a significant influx of Afghan refugees into the country. In Pakistan itself, there has also been a rise in violent extremism. Another key SSG challenge relates to climate security: the country is becoming increasingly vulnerable to natural disasters, as exemplified by the devastating floods that struck Pakistan in the summer of 2022 and killed more than 1,700 people. In other developments, Pakistan has experienced significant political upheaval following the removal from office of prime minister Imran Khan in April 2022, and then following Khan's arrest on corruption charges in May 2023. Against this backdrop, Pakistan is set to hold general elections during the second half of 2023, which are expected to have a significant impact on the country's future course, including its foreign and security policy.

Sri Lanka. Like other countries in South Asia, Sri Lanka continues to grapple with violent extremism. On a related note, a 2023 supreme court investigation found that the country's political establishment had failed to act on credible intelligence to prevent the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings. This caused significant domestic criticism and also flagged up a number of SSG-related shortcomings in Sri Lanka's security sector, such as in efficiency and transparency. Furthermore, amid the ongoing financial crisis, a debate is ongoing about rightsizing the military. This debate revolves around the need to evaluate and potentially

adjust the size and composition of the military forces in response to evolving circumstances and resource constraints.

Overall, the session provided a comprehensive overview of the many pressing SSG challenges South Asia currently faces, as well as the developments and activities that had occurred during the last year. It also provided an opportunity to explore possible solutions and entry-points to address these challenges. In-depth discussion on two particularly pressing issues was then provided during the subsequent sessions.

Preventing Violent Extremism

The second session of the 2023 South Asia Sub-Regional SSG Forum focussed on the topic of Preventing Violent Extremism. Violent extremism is a serious problem in all South Asian countries. The concept of Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) came to the fore of the global agenda in 2016 with the announcement of the UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism. PVE shifts the discourse away from a reactive and negative approach towards more proactive measures that address root causes of violent extremism and promote the values of peace, rights and pluralism in response to violence. In South Asia, a significant milestone on PVE was reached in 2021, when the South Asian Network on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism was launched. South Asian countries have also already adopted a variety of PVE strategies to tackle violent extremism. However, significant challenges remain, and the session provided a forum to exchange experiences and explore possible solutions.

Root causes of violent extremism. Following an introductory presentation on PVE, the participants engaged in a fruitful discussion that focussed on the root causes of violent extremism in South Asia and the challenges that exist to implementing PVE strategies in the region and also explored possible solutions to these challenges. Among the root causes they identified as being common to all or most countries were poverty and lack of socio-economic opportunities: individuals, particularly, young men, are often driven into the hands of extremists due to poor economic and social prospects. In some countries, there has also been a significant rise in religious hatred: for example, in Pakistan, young men are increasingly indoctrinated and thus are more likely to fall prey to Jihadi groups. The marginalisation of minority groups is another factor contributing to violent extremism in South Asia: politicians frequently marginalise certain minority groups for political purposes or even incite ethno-religious hatred, which fuels grievances and thus further contributes to radicalisation of minority groups. Participants also expressed concern about the increasingly prominent role that the internet and online platforms play in violent extremism: cyber radicalisation, particularly of young men, has become one of the most serious problems over the past few years. In some countries, violent extremism is also conditioned by the specific national context: the constitution of the Maldives, for example, designates Islam as the fundamental basis for the country's laws and policies, and so also significantly shapes its government structure and decision-making processes. Measures to address religious extremism must therefore be carefully balanced with the need to respect religious

sentiments and maintain social harmony, and can sometimes give rise to problems, such as by alienating certain parts of the population.

Challenges to PVE in South Asia. In response to the rise in violent extremism, South Asian countries have already adopted various PVE strategies: for example, India has started to monitor more strictly social media to address growing cyber radicalisation of youth. However, there remain many challenges to successfully implementing PVE strategies in South Asia. Among the most pressing challenges identified by the participants was the population's lack of trust in institutions, caused in part by security sector actors' violations of human rights. Participants also flagged the states' failure to engage with all critical stakeholders, particularly faith-based organisations, as well as the marginalisation of individuals and communities, as another issue that severely impeded PVE efforts. On a related topic, security sector actors often narrowly focus on gathering intelligence at the expense of using other PVE strategies, which can create distrust by and exacerbate grievances among local communities. Other challenges include the increasing politicisation of legislation on violent extremism, a lack of interorganisational coordination within the security sector and constant changes in the organisational structure of individual security sector actors, as well as a lack of good governance more generally.

Potential mitigation strategies and recommendations. To address these various challenges and shortcomings, participants identified various potential mitigation strategies and recommendations. For example, they advocated implementing programmes that facilitate cross-border interreligious dialogue to address the regional drivers of radicalisation. They also called for inter-community outreach programmes to address misinformation and disinformation among different ethnic communities. With regard to actions at the community level, they recommended to train female security personnel as effective agents of PVE, and so benefit from their often significant reach in local communities, as well as strengthening the role of local police in supporting individuals vulnerable to radicalisation. Other recommendations included a stricter monitoring of online platforms and social media to combat cyber radicalisation, and the promotion of educational reform, as well as stronger engagement with religious schools and madrasas.

Potential activities. On the basis of these recommendations, participants then identified a number of potential future activities to be undertaken by the network. For example, on the national level, it was suggested that NWG meetings conduct threat mappings, discuss opportunities for capacity-building, and review relevant legislation and regulatory frameworks, amongst other things. On the regional level, participants advocated exploring opportunities for collaboration on shared challenges, such as the set-up of inter-community outreach programmes, and using platforms such as the South Asian Network on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism more effectively to facilitate this collaboration.

In summary, the session provided a forum for a fruitful exchange on the problem of violent extremism and the many challenges that remain for successfully implementing PVE strategies in South Asia. The session also presented an opportunity for exploring possible solutions and for identifying possibilities for regional collaboration on shared challenges. As

such, it encouraged further engagement on the topic of PVE on the regional, as well as national, level.

Migration, Refugees, and Security Provision

The second session of the 2023 South Asia SSG Forum focussed on Migration, Refugees and Security provision. Migration and forced displacement present many challenges to SSG in South Asia and globally. The session kicked off with an introductory presentation that first provided an overview of the current situation of migrants and refugees worldwide, and then went on to focus on the specific case of the Rohingya crisis. The Rohingya crisis has seen the forced displacement of a significant part of the Rohingya ethnic minority group in Myanmar, many of whom have relocated to Bangladesh: 919,000 Rohingya refugees are currently living in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar region alone. These refugees, more than half of whom are women and children, are extremely vulnerable to exploitation, violence and abuse, including by Bangladeshi security sector actors. They also present an increasing burden to their host communities, and so contribute to regional instability. Concerted action to address this issue is therefore needed, including by providing more funding to support the protection need of refugees and hold security sector actors accountable for human rights abuses in refugee camps, as well as by working towards a sustainable, safe, voluntary and dignified repatriation of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar.

Current regional challenges and problems. Following the introductory presentation, participants engaged in a discussion about current challenges and problems, as well as sharing their experience with migration and refugees in their country-specific contexts. The fact that most South Asian countries currently do not possess a comprehensive refugee policy is one of the most pressing regional issues. This makes managing and regulating the influx of migrants and refugees and providing protection to vulnerable individuals much more difficult. Moreover, no formal arrangement of data-sharing between countries in the region exists, which impedes regional cooperation. There is also a lack of national oversight committees, as well as of adequate technical training of security actors on handling migration and forced displacement. Finally, participants highlighted that many migrants are exploited and subject to sexual and gender-based violence, while, at the same time, some migrants are also involved in criminal activities. However, current provisions to tackle both these issues at the national and regional levels are insufficient.

Bangladesh. Turning to the experience of individual South Asian countries, as already discussed, Bangladesh currently grapples with the Rohingya refugee crisis. In this context, there have been accusations of abuse against security actors, as well as instances of threats against Rohingya refugees by local communities. There has also been a related rise in human trafficking and an increase in small arms trafficking.

Pakistan. Pakistan experiences similar problems regarding the influx of refugees particularly from neighbouring Afghanistan: there has also been a related spike in arms and drug trafficking, human smuggling and terrorism. At the same time, Pakistan witnesses outward migration of its nationals to countries such as Italy, due to unemployment and a lack of economic opportunities.

Maldives. The Maldives experiences both internal migration, mostly to the capital Malé, which is due to the fact that certain types of education and health facilities are only available there, and external migration, especially from Bangladesh. With regard to external migration, a number of problems need to be addressed. First, Maldives has no refugee policy, which makes it significantly harder to receive those worthy of protection. On the other hand, some migrants are already radicalised on their arrival, which exacerbates the country's problems with violent extremism. Migrants also often overstay their visa or immigrate illegally to the Maldives. Measures that have been taken to address these issues include the regularisation of non-documented workers. However, more needs to be done to address these issues.

India. India's biggest challenge with regards to migration and refugees is the lack of a comprehensive refugee policy. It has also not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention. This poses significant problems when it comes to dealing with migrants and refugees. Like Bangladesh, India is also grappling with the influx of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar.

Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has seen a rise in outbound migration over the past few years, which has led to a significant brain drain. Contributing factors are the country's long civil war, as well as its current economic situation. At the same time, the island nation is also used as a hub for refugees from Afghanistan. This situation is significantly complicated by the fact that, like other countries in South Asia, Sri Lanka has no refugee policy in place.

Nepal. In Nepal, the situation of the Bhutanese refugees that settled in Nepal during the 1990s, most of whom belong to the Nepali-speaking Lhotshampa people, remains an issue. Bhutan and Nepal never reached an agreement on their repatriation, and so a great number of them remain in Nepal (although a majority have now resettled to other countries, including the USA). More recently, the issue was also at the heart of a corruption scandal in which politicians, including high-profile members of the government, received bribes for reclassifying Nepali citizens as Bhutanese refugees so that they could resettle in the USA and other countries. This raised serious questions about the integrity of the Nepali political class, and also harmed Nepal's international reputation.

Bhutan. Similarly to Nepal, Bhutan has seen a rise in outward migration, in particular to Australia. This has, as mentioned, caused a shortage in new recruits, as well as a loss of staff, in Bhutan's civil service. On a different note, the climate-change induced melting of glaciers in Bhutan is significantly increasing the risk of flooding, and so also of internal displacement.

Recommendations. Following the review of national contexts, participants set out to formulate some recommendations to tackle these problems and challenges they had identified. Amongst other things, they recommended to organise multinational seminars to facilitate a further exchange of information and experience. They also advocated to put in place arrangements for data-sharing on migration and refugees, as well as to establish regional cooperation mechanisms on these topics. Additionally, they recommended to promote greater regional collaboration on migrants and refugees via platforms such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). The SAARC has also

already adopted a Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children, which could provide guidance for regional collaboration. Additionally, the BIMSTEC Convention on Cooperation in Combating International Terrorism, Transnational Organized Crime and Illicit Drug Trafficking also has some implications for the safety and security of migrants and refugees.

Overall, the session saw a stimulating discussion on the many issues and challenges related to migration, refugees and forced displacement. It also revealed that many countries in South Asia experience similar problems and have a set of shared challenges, which necessitates, although at this point encourages greater collaboration on the topic. This was also reflected in the recommendations formulated by the participants, which focussed heavily on improving regional cooperation on issues related to migration and refugees.

In conclusion, the South Asian Sub-Regional SSG Forum flagged a number of crucial SSG/R challenges the region currently faces and provided many stimuli for future work. One crucial lesson that emerged from the Forum was the need for stronger regional cooperation, both on tackling violent extremism and on migration and refugees, as well as on issues of SSG/R more generally. The Forum also gave rise to several useful recommendations with respect to improving SSG in South Asia, which can serve as a promising starting point for further engagement.

Associates representing (left to right) Maldives, India, and Bangladesh discuss during the 2023 South Asia SSG Forum Photo: DCAF.

Southeast Asia Sub-Regional SSG Forum

The 2023 Southeast Asia Sub-Regional SSG Forum was held on 2 and 4 May, concurrently to the South Asia and East Asia Sub-Regional Forums. It comprised one session that provided an overview of important SSG developments in the region and the activities that the Southeast Asia SSG Network had undertaken over the last year, and a double session on the topic of Youth, Peace and Security.

Overview of the Southeast Asia SSG Network and Country Updates

In this session, DCAF and its sub-regional associates provided reflections on important SSG/R developments and activities that have taken place in Southeast Asia since the 2022 Bali Forums.

Regional SSG/R Developments and Activities

The session started with an introductory presentation that provided an overview of significant SSG/R developments and the current political context in Southeast Asia. This was followed by a discussion session. Important topics presented and discussed included the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war on Southeast Asia, the persistence of non-international armed conflicts in the region itself, deteriorating political tensions across the entire Asian continent, as well as security threats related to maritime, cyber and climate security.

Russia-Ukraine war. The Russia-Ukraine war has caused an increase of oil prices in Southeast Asia, which has in turn affected consumer goods prices and inflation. A further escalation of the conflict would also risk drawing in some Southeast Asian nations directly: for example, the Philippines could be required to support the USA under the Mutual Defense Treaty and the Visiting Forces Agreement if the latter were to be attacked by an external party, and vice versa. More generally, Russia's actions could also set a dangerous precedent and embolden countries in Southeast Asia to themselves violate the existing international order.

Internal armed conflicts. The persistence of non-international armed conflicts in Southeast Asia is another pressing concern. Here, the conflict in Myanmar and the Rohingya refugee crisis were flagged as particularly pressing problems that have significant impacts across the region. The ongoing conflict in Indonesia's Papua region similarly illustrates the region's persistent problem with long-standing non-international armed conflicts. Participants engaged in a fruitful discussion about how to best facilitate the resolution of internal conflicts. They debated the role that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) could play, as well as how to engage all relevant stakeholders in the respective peace processes. An important recommendation that emerged from the discussion was the need to further develop existing institutions relevant for peace and conflict resolution, such as the ASEAN Institute for Peace Resolution.

Deteriorating tensions across Asia. The current security climate in Southeast Asia is heavily influenced by political tensions across the entire Asia-Pacific region. Several

Southeast Asian nations are involved in an increasingly intense dispute with China over the South China Sea. Furthermore, if growing tensions between China and Taiwan and between North and South Korea were to lead to armed conflict, this would also have severe repercussions for Southeast Asian states. Significantly, some countries have special agreements with the US, which would require them to support each other if one is attacked by an external party.

Authoritarianism. The authoritarian nature of many Southeast Asian states creates a further challenge. While democracy, human rights and gender equality are considered to be desirable values by a variety of actors in Southeast Asia, many states in the region are still authoritarian. With specific regard to SSG, many Southeast Asian states also remain firmly wedded to a traditional, national security paradigm, which makes it harder to implement reform and address emerging non-traditional security challenges, such as climate security and cybersecurity threats. Participants also noted that the elections in Thailand, which promised political change after nine years of military rule, were a sign of hope and could pave the path to wider defence reform.

Maritime security and terrorism. The South China Sea dispute between maritime Southeast Asian states and China is of particular concern. Controversies over the freedom of navigation in the South China Sea and other maritime spaces has also attracted the attention of other large powers, such as the USA and Australia. At the same time, concerns exist about the presence of terrorists and pirates in Southeast Asia's maritime spaces. Although more recently greater regional cooperation has helped reduce incidences of kidnapping and piracy in the region, terrorist organisations such as al-Qaeda continue to use maritime routes, such as in the Sulu-Sulawesi seascape, to transport personnel and equipment.

Emerging non-traditional security challenges. The COVID-19 crisis has raised urgent questions about how to deal with future pandemics and public health emergencies. The environmental impact of climate change also significantly influences Southeast Asia's security environment and could even contribute to the outbreak of future conflicts in the region. So far, only insufficient provisions have been made regarding climate security. Similarly, cybersecurity is currently being neglected by security actors in the region. Participants debated steps that could be taken to address these non-traditional security challenges, and whether these challenges should in the long run lead to a re-orientation of the priorities of the region's security sectors to address new threat environments. Security actors in Southeast Asia need to be more adequately prepared to meet these new challenges, for example by developing greater cybersecurity capacities and by being properly trained and equipped to assist in disaster relief efforts.

Network activities. Over the last year, working groups continued to regularly meet, and SSG updates were periodically reviewed. 2022 also saw the publication of thematic briefs that were based on experts' workshop, including on Maritime Security Sector Governance and Reform in Southeast Asia; Protecting Migrants through Good SSG in Southeast Asia; and Climate Security and the Security Sector in Southeast Asia. Moreover, the SEA network

has been running online events, most recently with the Cambodian partner on the recently released Cambodian national defence strategy, focusing on digitalisation and cybersecurity. A SEA thematic workshop on cybersecurity governance will take place in July 2023, to be followed by the publication of a thematic brief on the same topic. Finally, the Southeast Asian SSG Forum's double session on Youth, Peace and Security is intended to lay the groundwork for future work on the topic, including for national-level projects.

National SSG/R Developments and Activities

Following the regional overview, the Southeast Asian SSG associates presented on the SSG/R developments and activities in their individual countries.

Cambodia. The upcoming elections in July 2023 are unlikely to bring significant change for the security sector. The government lacks a vision of security sector governance. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated that situation by further blurring the roles and responsibilities of the various state security providers that are operating in Cambodia. Overall, opportunities to promote SSG/R in the country remain limited. It also remains difficult to engage representatives from the state security institutions in discussions about SSG/R. This makes it difficult to develop a NWG that includes members beyond civil society actors such as academics, CSO representatives and human rights activists. Nevertheless, there exist several possible entry points for further work on SSG/R: for example, state representatives may be more open to "softer", less controversial topics such as climate security. Another promising approach is to focus on research and capacity building that targets mostly students and young officers, and so make a future generation of leaders engage more strongly with the topic of SSG.

Indonesia. At the time of the forum, three topics were of particular relevance to SSG in Indonesia. Firstly, the need for police reform persists: the weak oversight of the police is a particular problem that needs to be addressed. While Commission III (Law and Legislation, Human Rights, and Security Affairs) of the House of Representatives of Indonesia was supposed to provide this oversight function, it proved to be insufficient for doing so, because several of its key members have been pursuing their own interests and displayed a lack of professionalism. However, a possible entry point for reform could be created by recent scandals that involved high-ranking police officers, which have made the government more proactive on addressing shortcomings of the police to reduce potential reputational damage. The second pressing issue concerns the conflict in the Papua region, which urgently requires negotiation and peacebuilding efforts. At the moment, violence in the region is escalating and neither of the conflict parties is genuinely interested in reaching a peaceful solution, despite the fact that none of them is likely to achieve a decisive military victory. The final and third topic of concern is cybersecurity: currently, no clear national level policies or even guidelines on cybersecurity exist. Instead, each state security actor applies its own rules and approaches, which results in incoherence and inefficiency.

Malaysia. Due to its current political instability, Malaysia's political environment is not conducive to security sector reform. Between 2018 and 2023, the government has been headed by three different coalitions, and there was no government during the interim period.

In the foreseeable future it is unlikely that any one party will gain long-term control of the government and opposing parties will continue their attempts to form coalition agreements. This situation makes topics such as SSG/R a low priority on the national political agenda. However, there are several topics that are of concern to all parties and can be entry points for reforms, such as border control and maritime security. The relevant security actors have so far performed poorly as they lack adequate training. Any potential government party would, however, be interested in support in the context of the situation in Sabah: here, local authorities and security actors need adequate training and empowerment to tackle human smuggling and trafficking, as well as other human security concerns such as child labour. A further problem is presented by the sharp rise in ethno-religious and xenophobic tensions, caused in part by recent political instability, as all parties rallied their supporters around ethnic identification. While a "Harmony Act" is currently being developed with the intention to reduce ethnic tensions, the lack of a stable government is impeding the Act's finalisation. Finally, a Defence White Paper was tabled by the government in 2020 but has since then neither been repealed nor pursued further and might have fallen victim to the politically uncertain situation.

Myanmar. In Myanmar, fighting has grown slightly less intense, as both sides are growing more wary of the conflict. Military intelligence has also increased in efficiency and has been able to limit the armed opposition's theatre of operation. This situation has generated some limited space for dialogue and peacebuilding efforts: many stakeholders are beginning to accept that a decisive military victory will be difficult to achieve and that they might have to consider a negotiated peace agreement. However, dialogue between conflict parties remains sparse and informal. The State Administrative Council (SAC) is increasingly conscious that it needs to accommodate the Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) into its security infrastructure. However, the EAOs are keen to retain their independence and power. At the same time, the People's Defence Forces are trying to define a more unified line and improve their internal organisation. Engagement with the military regime remains very difficult: the UN Representative has struggled to engage meaningfully with the SAC, and ASEAN efforts to mediate in the conflict have remained largely unanswered. It might take another few years until opportunities for meaningful discussions on security sector governance emerge. It is likely that the SAC will postpone the announced elections until 2025: in their opinion, by then the results of the 2020 elections can be considered as void, as the regular time span of five years between parliamentary elections will have passed. In the meantime, the army is likely to identify and build up a successor for the current leader of the military junta, General Min Aung Hlaing.

Philippines. The security environment of the Philippines is heavily shaped by deteriorating tensions between China and the USA. At the same time, the country is also still experiencing internal insurgencies, mostly by communist groups. Peace negotiations are limited and proceed only slowly. Violent extremism remains a real threat. This situation also serves the armed forces as a justification to be involved in internal security provision, as they cast the police as being too weak and corrupt to deal efficiently with insurgents. On a more positive note, the peace process and Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration efforts with

various groups in Southern Philippines continue. The goal is to complete the peace process ahead of the 2025 national elections, in which the Moro Front is expected to compete as a political party. The police have recently undergone significant change: following accusations that parts of the police were involved in the drug business, authorities requested senior officers above and including the rank of colonel to resign. Another problem concerns nepotism, which pervades all state security institutions. There is also a lack of overall oversight of the security sector. Furthermore, the Philippines are increasingly facing new non-traditional security threats, particularly threats related to climate and cybersecurity. Entry points for addressing these threats could be the next revision of the National Security Policy. There are also opportunities for promoting broader security sector reform in the Philippines, as was demonstrated by a course run by DCAF's partner in the Philippines at the time of the Colombo Forum at the Armed Forces of the Philippines Command and General Staff College.

Singapore. The Singaporean government has identified five major security challenges that need to be addressed. These include the consequences of the Russia-Ukraine war, which has led to a steep increase of prices and put pressure on the lower income segments of society, thus fostering social tensions; the growing US-China tension, which has both significant political and economic repercussions; and an increasing global economic protectionism, which could have severe long-term consequences for Singapore, whose economy relies heavily on international trade. The other two pressing security challenges identified by the government are terrorism and cybercrime. Turning specifically to the security sector, Singapore's government is planning to significantly strengthen its armed forces through a "Total Defence" programme. This programme includes an increase of national conscription and a modernisation of the armed forces. It also foresees investments in overseas military facilities, which will allow Singapore's armed forces to conduct training exercises in scenarios that cannot be carried out in Singapore due to the small size of its territory. The Total Defence programme also aims at involving all citizens in Singapore's defence infrastructure. Investments to modernise Singapore's defence and internal security, including by increasing the use of new technologies, are planned to continue until 2040. Finally, Singapore is also increasing its cooperation with Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei to create more rapid communication links between the countries.

Thailand. Thailand's general election was set to take place soon after the Colombo Forums, on 14 May 2023. While the general population has historically not been overly interested in military reform, interest in reform has significantly increased after nine years of military rule. Even the military itself seems to have become conscious that it needs to make some concessions in this regard. For example, the armed forces continue to be heavily involved in business and conflict of interests are therefore a widespread issue. A strong drive for reform is provided by the Move Forward Party, which arrived on the political scene ahead of the 2023 general election. The party has committed itself to drafting a new constitution that would make military coups much harder to execute, for example by giving officers the right to disobey their commanding officers in the case of a coup attempt. It also promises to further empower civil courts by providing them with the capacity to prosecute all officers involved in

a coup. Additionally, the party proposes to reduce the size of the army and the number of generals, to create mechanisms for effective oversight of the armed forces, and to abolish conscription. The other leading opposition party, Pheu Thai, also proposes to abolish conscription and make the army more professional.

Timor-Leste. Since achieving independence, Timor-Leste has been facing three main security challenges. First, its society is subject to continuous low-level, but widespread violence. Violence is widely tolerated as a means of settling disputes, resolving domestic problems and disciplining children. On a related point, martial arts groups, which enjoy great popularity, have become increasingly politicised. Secondly, state security forces, as well as other state institutions, currently inadequately adhere to rules; in particular, there exists only weak control of firearms. Thirdly, while the security sector receives significant donor assistance, many interventions have had only limited impact and have often been unsustainable. Dependence on donor assistance has also undermined local ownership of projects, which has led to a lack of strategic goals and local needs analysis. Consequently, money and equipment are often perceived to be more valuable than learning and development.

Youth, Peace and Security

The idea to hold a double session on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) at the next Southeast Asia SSG Forum emerged during the 2022 Colombo Forums, where the issue of a lack of participation of the younger generations in the SSG/R discourse was raised by participants in various different contexts. The double session was therefore conceived as a first step for future work on the topic by the Southeast Asian SSG network. As next steps, a thematic workshop and thematic brief on YPS are planned for late 2023. The double session's first part offered general background information and a variety of examples from across the globe, while the second part focussed specifically on the existing interest in and feasibility of promoting the YPS agenda in Southeast Asia.

Different organisations, governments and government institutions define youth differently. The term "youth" is defined more by socio-cultural than biological or statistical factors. Around the world, median ages have been going up: in Southeast Asia, the median age has risen from between 15-30 years in 1990, to between 20-40 years nowadays. Timor-Leste is the youngest (median age: 19.7 years) and Singapore the oldest (40.7) country in Southeast Asia. The larger countries in the region mostly lie somewhere in the middle: the Philippines have a median age of 24 years, and both Indonesia and Malaysia have a median age of 29 years. However, the demographic weight of youth is often not reflected in decision and policy-making bodies. This raises problems of inclusivity. It also creates significant shortcomings in terms of innovation and economic development, as youth are significant drivers of innovation and agents of change. Many youth-led movements also assume leading roles in activism and protests and so are an important source of accountability.

Turning specifically to the security sector, the lack of representation of youth in decision and policy-making bodies means that the specific security needs of youth are not always fully considered, which can jeopardise their relationship with and trust in the security sector.

Young people are disproportionally likely to both fall victim to and perpetrate crime or violent extremism, as well as to migrate. In many countries, they are also subject to military conscription.

YPS is also worthy of particular attention, because, unusually for "minority categories", youth is a transient category of people: that is, the entire population of a country has at some point during their lives belonged to this category. This makes youth a quintessential part of sustainable security sector reform and peacebuilding.

More attention to the linkages between youth and SSG/R has recently also been paid by the UN, including in several UN Security Council Resolutions, such as Resolution 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018) and 2535 (2020). The resolutions recognised the role of youth in peace processes and called for a concrete strengthening of technical YPS skills, including by formulating national action plans. These priorities, which are also reflected in the UN Youth Strategy and the Report of the Secretary-General on YPS, are also being pursued at the regional level, with the African Union and European Union being particularly active in this regard. Furthermore, while currently only three countries – the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Finland and Nigeria – have completed National Action Plans on YPS, many other countries are currently working on developing them.

To kick off the double session, Thenu Herath, co-founder of the Youth National Security Strategy (YNSS) Initiative in Australia, gave a presentation introducing the initiative. The YNSS initiative aims to incorporate the perspectives of young people into Australia's national security strategy and so make use of their untapped potential to benefit national security. To achieve this goal, YNSS members organise workshops in which participants identify the security challenges that Australia currently faces and then discuss how the country should deal with them. The YNSS initiative also organises working groups that are facilitated by experienced mentors and that change composition regularly to make full use of Australia's geographic, ethnic, gender, socio-economic, educational and professional diversity. In a participative writing process, the YNSS initiative has outlined a youth-led vision of Australia's security policy for the 21st century, which includes 60 sets of policy recommendations covering a variety of different security issues. Based on these recommendations, it also developed a strategic framework. This framework sees Australia's security as interconnected with that of the region and the world, and to consist not only of national, but also economic, societal and environmental security. It also identifies three strategic interests that are defined geographically: a secure and resilient Australia, a favourable regional environment – fostered by supporting civil society and governance in the region – and global stability thanks to a rules-based international order.

A second presentation was made by Dr. Rhuks Temitope Aku, Senior Analyst in the Department of Political Affairs for Peace and Security at the African Union Commission. He presented on the work that the African Union (AU) is currently undertaking on empowering youth as part of its YPS agenda. Some parts of the AU, particularly its Peace and Security Council, were initially sceptical about involving youth in policy-making processes. However, some early positive experiences in this regard provided an incentive for the AU to establish a

programme specifically dedicated to involving young people. There is now an annual session on YPS at the AU Peace and Security Council, and five Africa Youth Ambassadors for Peace have been selected to spread the concept of YPS in Africa and globally. The programme has also produced a range of knowledge products about the role of youth in peace and security, which provide important lessons for others. A central recommendation from this experience holds that it is important to include all young people in the political discourse, regardless of their pedigree or social background.

The sessions were concluded by a group exercise in which participants reflected on how to promote the YPS agenda in Southeast Asia. Key insights and recommendations emerging from this exercise included the following: first, the Southeast Asian SSG network would need to conduct further research on the frameworks that already exist for YPS at both the individual country and the ASEAN levels – for example, ASEAN has already passed some resolutions on YPS, but these have so far not been widely communicated or applied. Secondly, the wide generational gap in most Southeast Asian countries impedes efforts to include youth more prominently in policy-making processes. Additionally, policymakers in Southeast Asia often refrain from engaging with youth, as they are spearheading anti-government protests and clamouring for change and more democracy in several countries. Finally, the three notions of Youth, Peace and Security are still rarely considered together in Southeast Asia; greater awareness-raising about the importance of the combined concept of YPS is therefore required.

In conclusion, the Southeast Asia Sub-Regional SSG Forum provided much food for thought. The national updates not only highlighted the many challenges that Southeast Asia is currently facing, but also identified various possible solutions and entry points to address them. The double session on Youth, Peace and Security offered an overview of the topic, provided examples of approaches to YPS from different countries, and also hopes to have inspired stronger engagement on YPS in Southeast Asia.

Participants in the 2023 Southeast Asia SSG Forum pose with Thenu Herath and Ruks Temitope Aku as part of the Youth, Peace and Security session. Photo: DCAF.

East Asia Sub-Regional SSG Forum

The 2023 East Asia Sub-Regional SSG Forum took place on 2 and 4 May, concurrently to the other Sub-Regional SSG Forums. It provided a platform for the East Asian SSG associates to exchange experiences and address many of the challenges currently faced by the region. The forum consisted of three sessions: the first session provided an overview of the East Asia SSG Network, as well as updates from the individual countries and territories; the second and third sessions focussed on the specific topics of Gender and the Security Sector and Lessons learned from the Ukraine War.

Overview of the East Asia SSG Network and Country Updates

In this session, the East Asian SSG associates and members of DCAF reflected on the developments and activities that had taken place in East Asia since the 2022 Bali Forums.

Regional SSG/R Developments and Activities

US-China rivalry and tensions over Taiwan. Important geopolitical developments since the last Forum included the repercussions of the increasingly tense US-China rivalry, which is perceived to be one of the greatest geopolitical challenges not only in the region, but globally. The related tensions over Taiwan provide another threat to the region's security: in particular, fears over an escalation of the situation in the Taiwan Strait have grown, first after Speaker of the US House of Representative Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan in August 2022 and China's People's Liberation Army held military exercises simulating a takeover of Taiwan in response, and then after Taiwanese president Tsai Ing-Wen met with Pelosi's successor Kevin McCarthy in the USA in April 2023, which was again answered by large-scale military exercises on China's part.

North Korea and territorial disputes. Increasingly provocative behaviour by North Korea is also raising concerns, as is North Korea's development of nuclear strike capabilities. In particular, participants noted that, if North Korea were to develop second-strike capabilities, this would significantly change the East Asian strategic environment. It would likely cause every country and territory in the region to pursue nuclear development, which would present a "strategic nightmare". Smaller geopolitical flashpoints in East Asia include territorial disputes and contested issue of sovereignty, for example in the South China Sea.

The Russia-Ukraine war and its implications. Political tensions in East Asia have been further stoked by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent global political division. The war has also had widespread economic and social effects in East Asia, including inflation and a rise in energy and food prices. Additionally, it has led to both an increased armament in East Asia and a growth in arms sales abroad. This has also caused a relegation of development as a priority on the agenda of regional actors.

New, non-traditional security challenges. At the same time, East Asia also sees itself confronted with a host of new, non-traditional security challenges. One important new area in need of attention is cybersecurity: East Asian countries and territories are increasingly

targets of cyberattacks and cybercrimes but are still in the process of developing their cyber capabilities and concrete frameworks to regulate the cyber space. Another area is climate security: the region is experiencing a growing number of natural disasters and other climate change impacts. This has serious implications for both national and human security. For instance, natural disasters, as well as a climate change-induced rise in sea levels poses a grave threat to critical military infrastructure and can cause widespread displacement of populations.

Recommendations. Following the identification of the many SSG challenges East Asia currently faces, participants set out to formulate recommendations, as well as following up on the recommendations they had already formulated at the 2022 Bali Forums. One key recommendation concerned the need to improve significantly strategic communication to deal with a potential military escalation of cross-strait relations or an escalation on the Korean peninsula. For example, international actors could provide regular multilateral multitrack dialogues, while regional actors could provide ad hoc neutral platforms for dialogue. Furthermore, participants advocated for the establishment of hot lines between China's and Taiwan's military leaders to ensure swift communication in case of a crisis. Another recommendation was to develop concrete international frameworks on cybersecurity and establish regional governance on cyberspace with the help of international organisations and mechanisms, including DCAF, to ensure cybersecurity in East Asia. Finally, participants also advocated enhancing regional cooperation on disaster relief to address the threat of an increasing number of climate change-induced disasters.

Network activities. In conclusion of the regional overview, participants reflected on the activities of the East Asia SSG network during the past year. Activities included NWG meetings, bilateral meetings, and the 2022 East Asia Sub-Regional SSG Forum in Bali. The network also continued to contribute to the publication of SSG updates and thematic briefs, including a thematic brief on [Climate Security and Security Sector Governance in East Asia](#). For the remainder of the year, the network is also planning to organise thematic online workshops, followed by the publication of further thematic briefs.

National SSG/R Developments and Activities

Following the regional overview, the East Asian SSG associates provided updates on national developments and activities.

China. As already mentioned, the most pressing items on China's security agenda are the growing US-China rivalry, tensions over Taiwan, and their repercussions. The country also faces significant challenges when it comes to climate security: crucially, its military and critical infrastructures are highly vulnerable to climate change-induced disasters. Its armed forces also play an important role in disaster relief; they thus need to be adequately equipped to deal with that additional responsibility. In terms of important SSG developments, in February 2023 China released its concept for a "Global Security Initiative", which outlines its proposed solutions to traditional and non-traditional security issues. China's NWG is currently focussing on the topic of international agreements and the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war.

Japan. In 2022, Japan published three new security documents – a revised National Security Strategy, a National Defence Strategy and a Defense Buildup Plan. These documents highlighted the activities of China and North Korea as the most pressing challenges to Japan's national security and announced some significant innovations, such as the deployment of long-range missiles. This has been interpreted by some analysts as a significant departure from Japan's traditional security stance, which, since the end of the Second World War, had been dedicated to the country's self-defence. As such, the new security documents could signal a fundamental shift in East Asia's overall security architecture. However, doubts about whether Japan can actually meet its new aspirations have been raised by the fact that Japan's Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) are currently lacking recruits, as Japan's population is growing older and significantly declining. Japan's new national security strategy and policies are also subject to ongoing debate, both domestically and internationally. Any shifts from the JSDF's pacifist outlook to a more active role would therefore likely be accompanied by careful considerations of legal, political and strategic factors, as well as of public sentiment. Network activities have included the organisation of regular NWG meetings with 10-15 members.

Mongolia. Mongolia's security outlook is significantly influenced by its geographical position between China and Russia. It also faces numerous SSG/R challenges, such as challenges related to climate security and cybersecurity. In other developments, in 2022, Mongolia hosted the 7th Ulaanbaatar Dialogue on Northeast Asian Security, as well as a conference on strengthening the role of UN Women Peacekeepers. The latter provided important insights into how to incorporate women more strongly into the UN Operations and drew extensively on Mongolia's own long experience of deploying women peacekeepers. Meetings of the NWG, which comprises representatives from various stakeholders, have also been actively discussing how to use Mongolia's valuable experience to identify strategies to incorporate women more effectively into UN peacekeeping operations. In this respect, the NWG also profited from insights by DCAF's Elsie project, which has identified barriers and challenges to the inclusion of women in peacekeeping.

South Korea. South Korea's security environment is determined by the continuous threat emanating from North Korea, including increasing cyberattacks. Maritime security is another area in which South Korea faces a host of challenges, such as contested maritime borders, territorial disputes and IUU fishing. Against this backdrop, South Korea released a new Indo-Pacific Strategy in late 2022, which calls for a "free, peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific region" and echoes the Indo-Pacific Strategy of the USA and some European countries. The country has also sought a rapprochement with Japan, which could significantly influence East Asia's security architecture. Finally, South Korea has also seen a sharp rise in its arms sales abroad and is set to become one of the most important arms exporters globally, in part because it fills the gap left by a decrease in Russian arms exports caused by the Russia-Ukraine war.

Taiwan. Taiwan's main security concern is protecting its territorial integrity. It also faces significant challenges related to cybersecurity, as it is subject to increasing cyberattacks. Further problems relate to maritime security – crucially, as an island, Taiwan heavily

depends on a secure maritime domain for the import of food and goods, and so also for its food and economic security. Additionally, it grapples with problems related to IUU fishing and the incursion of its waters by foreign vessels. Network activities in Taiwan held over the past year included three meetings with members of the military.

In summary, the first session of the 2023 East Asia SSG Forum provided valuable insights into the region's current geopolitical and SSG challenges. East Asia faces a host of issues that need to be urgently addressed, including deteriorating cross-strait relations, the situation on the Korean peninsula, and the fallout of the Russia-Ukraine war. At the same time, the session also identified many possible solutions and entry points. The overview of activities by the SSG network and NWGs also showed that important work is already being done on tackling East Asia's many SSG challenges. This is a promising sign for future work on SSG in the region.

Gender and the Security Sector

The second session focussed on the topic of Gender and the Security Sector. Gender equality is an international norm that stipulates the equal rights of women and men to opportunities and resources, irrespective of their gender or the sex into which they were born. Gender differently affects the security and justice needs of women, girls, men, and boys, and the behaviours of women and men who are security and justice providers. As such, gender is critical to achieving the goals of good governance, as only a security sector which is reflective of those it serves can truly be effective.

Because of the disproportionate impact of armed conflict on women and children, the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 Agenda on Women, Peace and Security urges states to increase equal representation of women in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. As part of the Elsie Initiative, DCAF together with Cornell University has developed the Measuring Women's Opportunities in Peacekeeping (MOWIP) Toolbox, which are data collection tools, templates, and "explainers" to help identify the presence of universal and context-specific barriers for women's full integration in a military or police organisation, and access to deployment opportunities.

Colonel Munkh-Orgil Tuvdendarjaa, Deputy Director and Dean of Research at the Institute for Defense Studies in Mongolia, joined this session virtually to provide her perspective based on service with the UN Mission in South Sudan and extensive work promoting the Women, Peace and Security agenda in Mongolia. She and the participants discussed the institutional, cultural and attitudinal shift that is needed to sustain meaningful opportunities for women in the security sector. For example, in Mongolia, gender roles and expectations dictate that women should remain close to home to care for children; this inhibits women from participating in overseas missions or relocating with their families. Two other key obstacles identified in East Asia included lack of childcare facilities, and the needs to address sexual assault and harassment in security institution, along with strong redress mechanisms.

In order to truly mainstream gender, gender equality should permeate the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs on security sector governance in their entirety. Input should be received from multiple fronts: firstly, at an organisational level, improved recruitment; secondly, at a policy level, strengthened legal frameworks informed by think tanks and contemporary research; and thirdly, at a motivational level, raised awareness of opportunities to women, and willingness across the gender spectrum to change traditional perceptions.

Lessons Learned from the Ukraine War

The final session of the 2023 East Asia Sub-Regional SSG Forum focussed on the lessons learned from the Russia-Ukraine war. It started with a presentation by Dr Iryna Rabotagova, Associate Professor at Kharkiv National University, who provided an informative overview and update on the evolving situation on the ground in Ukraine. The presentation focussed on the security implications of the ongoing war and on potential pathways towards resolving the conflict. This was followed by a discussion among the East Asian SSG associates about the implications of the Russia-Ukraine war for East Asia.

Regional repercussions. Beside political and foreign policy repercussions, the Russia-Ukraine war has had various other, primarily economic, consequences in East Asia, including inflation and a rise in energy and food prices. Additionally, the war has provided an incentive to several countries in the region to fundamentally re-shape their national security strategies, and to foster closer relations with other states. Notably, in late 2022, both Japan and South Korea released new security documents, and both countries have since moved closer together and tried to overcome their historical differences. Another effect of the Ukraine war on the region has been a significant surge in armament, as well as an increase of arms sales abroad. The Ukraine war has thus had a complex, multifaceted impact on East Asia's geopolitical landscape. Below are the individual stances towards the Ukraine war, as well as the implications the conflict has held for each.

China. China released a position paper on Ukraine in February 2023, in which it called for resuming peace talks and ending unilateral sanctions, while reaffirming its opposition to the use of nuclear weapons. Chinese president Xi Jinping then visited Russia in March 2023: during his visit (his first state visit to Russia in four years), Xi outlined a peace plan for Ukraine and declared his willingness to mediate between Russia and Ukraine. In terms of the war's implications for China itself, China is concerned about the USA bolstering its military alliances with its European and Asian allies in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine war and perceives this as a deliberate strategy by the USA to contain China. Crucially, in China's view, the strengthening of the AUKUS security alliance between Australia, the UK and the USA, and the granting of access to Australia to nuclear-powered submarines is significantly increasing the risk of nuclear proliferation in the Asia-Pacific region.

Japan. As already mentioned, Japan released a revised National Security Strategy, as well as a revised National Defense Strategy and the Defense Buildup Plan, which can at least partly be regarded as responses to the Russia-Ukraine war. Notably, the National Security Strategy includes plans to deploy long-range counterstrike capabilities. This would present a

significant upgrade from Japan's current supply of missiles, which are mostly only for short-range defence and signal a significant change in Japan's traditionally pacifist defence posture. At the same time, the Russia-Ukraine war has also given an incentive for Japan to improve its relations with South Korea.

South Korea. South Korea has similarly undertaken some changes to its national security strategies that can be seen as response to the war: significantly, in November 2022, South Korea's president Yoon Suk-yeol released an Indo-Pacific Strategy, which echoes the USA's Indo-Pacific Strategy and calls for a "free, peaceful, and prosperous" Indo-Pacific region. The strategy pursues a "non-exclusive" posture toward any country in the region. President Yoon's statement against any changes of status quo by using military force shows South Korea's efforts to make its policy consistent with the UN Charter. Apart from a change in its security outlook, the Russia-Ukraine war has also had another important effect on South Korea: it is set to become one of the leading global arms exporters, partly filling a gap caused by a slowdown in Russian arms deliveries worldwide. In total, South Korea's arms exports rose to a record 17.3 billion USD in 2022. Most significantly, in July 2022, South Korea struck an arms deal with Poland worth an estimated 15 billion USD. While South Korea is not directly delivering weapons to Ukraine, its supply of weapons and ammunition to the USA and other Ukrainian allies, who have in turn passed on the weapons to Ukraine, has also increased tensions with Russia.

Taiwan. Finally, the Russia-Ukraine war holds some important lessons for Taiwan and cross-strait relations. There exist different interpretations as to what these lessons are: some analysts suggest that a protracted war in Ukraine and a failure of Russia to achieve a quick occupation of the country might deter China from seeking unification with Taiwan by military means. Others argue that Russia's invasion of Ukraine could embolden China, also because the USA and European powers are significantly distracted by Ukraine. In terms of specific tactical lessons that the Ukraine war holds for a potential escalation of cross-strait relations, here too, different opinions exist. Ukraine and Taiwan are fundamentally different, and so do not lend themselves easily to comparison. Taiwan is an island, which makes it arguably much harder to invade than Ukraine, but also much more difficult to support in the event of a conflict. Taiwan is also much smaller than Ukraine both in terms of territory and population. However, one operational key take-away from the Russia-Ukraine war for a potential conflict in East Asia might be the need to stockpile large amounts of weapons and ammunition in advance to avoid bottlenecks. Experts have also highlighted that Ukraine's successful use of an arsenal of deterrent "quills" could be imitated by Taiwan to deter or resist a potential military confrontation with China.

To conclude the session, all participants agreed that it was crucial to prevent a military escalation in the Taiwan Strait and on the Korean peninsula, which would lead to a significant loss of human life and have devastating consequences across the entire region and worldwide. They therefore advocated that efforts must continue to maintain peace and stability in East Asia and to pursue confidence-building measures to prevent the escalation of tensions and outbreak of conflict.

In summary, the 2023 East Asia Sub-Regional SSG Forum highlighted the delicate geopolitical situation that East Asia currently finds itself in. The region has not only been affected by the Russia-Ukraine war but is also itself the site of a number of geopolitical flashpoints that could escalate into a conflict. All participants therefore agreed that efforts should be taken to prevent such a scenario and outlined a number of potential solutions and entry points. The session on Gender and the Security Sector also provided some valuable insights and lessons on how to address the increasingly important role that gender plays in security provision in East Asia. All in all, the Forum thus made important headway on addressing the many SSG challenges that the region currently faces.

DCAF's director, Ambassador Nathalie Chuard, welcomed the participants in her opening speech (top). Aside from the formal sessions (group picture centre), there was also time for informal discussions between associates and a group visit to St Anthony's church, one of the targets of the 2019 Easter Bombings in Sri Lanka (bottom right). Photos: DCAF.

Conclusion

The 2023 Asia-Pacific SSG Forum and the South Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asia SSG Forums provided for a full agenda of very stimulating discussions and debates about topics currently on top of the SSG agenda. From 1 to 5 May, SSG associates, invited experts, and DCAF staff members gathered to exchange experiences, share lessons, and lay the groundwork for future efforts on SSG/R in the Asia-Pacific region. In addition to providing a valuable overview of, and exploring solutions to, the many SSG challenges that the Asia-Pacific region and the three sub-regions of East Asia, South Asia and Southeast Asia currently face, the Forums also addressed a variety of pressing SSG challenges in depth: dedicated sessions focussed on such diverse issues as SSG Support During Fragile Political Transitions; Revisiting Pandemic Responses and Preparation for Future Health Crises; Climate Change, Climate Security and SSG/R; Migration, Refugees, and Security Provision; Preventing Violent Extremism; Youth, Peace and Security; Gender and the Security Sector; and Lessons learned from the Ukraine War. For the first time, the Asia-Pacific SSG Forum also considered the specific SSG challenges in the Pacific Islands region and saw the participation of representatives of Pacific Islands States. Finally, a crisis management simulation provided participants with the opportunity of hands-on experience of managing crises related to counterterrorism and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response.

The 2023 Colombo Forums also provided space for participants to reflect on the network's past activities and to explore its future agenda. Crucially, participants identified key recommendations for future work on SSG in the Asia-Pacific and its sub-regions. These included recommendations to facilitate stronger cross-country cooperation on a variety of shared security challenges, to strengthen regional mechanisms, and to make better provisions to address non-traditional security challenges related to climate and cybersecurity, both at the regional and national levels. Associates also recommended to study whether security sectors in the Asia-Pacific had undertaken any significant reforms or adaptations to deal with future health crises following the COVID-19 pandemic and provided some important inputs on DCAF's ongoing study on SSG/R support during fragile political transitions. In addition, the sub-regional SSG Forums provided many important insights and recommendations related to the respective sub-regions: for example, the South Asian SSG Forum gave rise to a set of useful recommendations on how to tackle violent extremism; while the Southeast Asian SSG Forum made important headway on promoting the Youth, Peace and Security agenda. Similarly, the East Asian SSG Forum provided important lessons on how to promote gender equality in the region's security forces.

All in all, the forums proved successful and laid the groundwork for further SSG work in the Asia-Pacific. The continuation of NWG meetings remains a strong priority for the network. Over the next few months, the network will also continue to work on updating SSG backgrounders, holding thematic workshops – such as the Cybersecurity Workshop coming up on 5-7 July 2023 – and publishing thematic briefs. Most importantly, it will also continue to develop and search for financial support to implement regional and national-level activities to promote SSG/R in the Asia-Pacific, and so significantly contribute to the region's security.

ASIA-PACIFIC

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