

## **The Many Faces of Asian Security**

Edited by Sheldon W. Simon

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There are hotspots from Korea to Kashmir, which are potential sources of danger for Asian security and represent challenges to national unity, political stability, social harmony, economic progress and territorial integrity. There can be no peace in the world as long as armies continue to modernize and blood continues to be shed. The most prominent form of warfare today is ethnic, tribal and religious inside and outside countries. Other challenges facing Asian security are financial panic in markets, globalization, environmental hazards, transnational crime and corruption. All these undermine the legitimacy of governments in Asia. The Many-Faces of Asian Security deals with all these in detail.

The book is the outcome of a conference on Asian Security held in Arizona State University in April 2000. It deals with traditional, non-traditional and the changing nature of security in Asia-Pacific and East Asian regions. It is presented in two parts. Part 1 deals with military capabilities, balance of power and realist theory, territorial and resource disputes, the effects of new technology on military strategy and the problems involved in maintaining sovereignty in an era of globalization. Part 2 introduces security issues, which have become particularly important to Asia after the cold war. It focuses on domestic situations as they affect not only countries themselves, but also their neighbours. Coping with these spillover effects comprises one of the most important security challenges of the new era. The new security topics include economic and financial stability, the effects of environmental degradation and human rights, political stability and the ill effects of transnational crime.

The book details the role of international organization such as the United Nations, a reinvented and expanded NATO and the new Asian organization ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations), along with US and international community intervention in the internal politics of states in turmoil. The surprising omission is the conflict between two nuclear powers in Asia - India and Pakistan - as the potential for war is particularly real in that region. The book was written before the 11 September 2001 attack on the Twin Towers in New York, so the grave threat of terrorism, which has become the number one security issue in the world today, understandably is not considered.

The book concentrates on security in Northeast and Southeast Asia, with Japan, China and the United States as the key players. The areas of tension are the two Koreas and Taiwan and China's future military development. For example, increasingly accurate Chinese Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) could increase the probability of a crisis over Taiwan if Beijing believes that the United States can be deterred. If the US chooses to keep its forces in Japan and Korea, it will have to develop land, air, sea and submersible missile launchers at considerable cost. If it prefers to withdraw from its bases in Japan and elsewhere in the region, there will be a potential risk of destabilization in Asia.

The economics of Japan and other East Asian states, initially robust, underwent an economic boom in the 1980s to mid-1990s, after which Japan descended into a downward economic spiral. China devalued its currency in 1995. Exports from Southeast Asia were undercut and the region and economy stagnated. The level of private capital investment of 1996 has not been restored up to now.

One of the most important new aspects of the Asian security agenda is the growth of transnational crime and drug trafficking. Open borders facilitate both the legitimate movements of people, goods and finances and also such nefarious products as drugs and illegal arms, as well as money laundering activities. Asian criminal organizations such as the Japanese yakuza and Chinese triads engage in

temporary alliances to promote criminal acts and are a grave risk to the legitimacy of governments and the rule of law.

The key to Asian stability remains in the hands of the US, China and Japan. The US has played a role for the past 25 years in the political and economic stability of the region, in order to protect its own interests. The fear is that if it leaves, the region will be at the mercy of Sino-Japanese rivalry. China has unresolved territorial claims on Taiwan. Japan has yet to show its neighbours that it has sufficiently overcome its military legacy to become a normal nation. The Korean peninsula remains the most militarized place on earth and anti-American sentiment in Japan and elsewhere remains high. A military solution to the future of Taiwan would entail tremendous cost and destabilize East Asia for an extended period. A political settlement between Beijing and Taipei is the only solution and should be the focus of US policy in the area. A favourable outcome is not guaranteed, but will need skill and attention on the part of the US.

The future of Asia at the opening of the twenty-first century holds both promise and risk. The challenge to leadership in all three countries is to manage differences and find a political framework that will enhance peace, common interests, especially economic and social development. The history of the twentieth century of East Asia does not give great confidence in such a future, but the costs of mismanagement are equally evident. No country in Asia can afford to go forward if it does not leave its past behind. This book provides a rich and provocative survey of security in East Asia by outstanding specialists.

The book was reviewed on 11 April 2002

*Vijay Mehta is an author of several books, Chair of Uniting for Peace, President of Mehta Centre and Founding Trustee of Fortune Forum Charity. The Sunday Times described him as a 'longstanding activist for peace, development, human rights and the environment', who along with his daughter, Renu Mehta, has set a precedent for striving to change the world. (The Sunday Times, 1 February 2009). Vijay Mehta's new book "**The Economics of Killing: How the West Fuels Wars and Poverty in the Developing World**" will be published by Pluto Press in spring 2012.*