

**The East Asian environmental situation:  
Problems and prospects**

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## ABSTRACT

The environment is an emerging transnational threat for the East Asian region. Acute environmental difficulties will be the norm by the end of the century, with significant water, air, land and maritime problems evident now in East Asia. Environmental stress covers a vast array of problems that can be linked to potential major conflict, or may be minor factors behind current regional disputes, and yet environmental security is also a subject that is difficult to ‘wrap up’ as a threat package. Regardless of contested links between environmental problems and the causes of conflict, there is little doubt that environmental pressures ‘ratchet up’ the level of stress between nations.

East Asia environmental degradation is increasing. The region’s quest for economic growth stalled in the late 1990s, but now continues, and sustainable development is jeopardised. Populations are increasing, manifested in swelling cities and urbanised coastlines. Diminishing arable land, deforestation and polluted waterways abound across the region. Governments of some Asian nations are unable to stop corrupt environmental practices or alter industry structures causing environmental decline. The region was jolted by the 1997 Indonesian forest fires and regional smoke haze, which demonstrated environmental issues were a new reality. More environmental challenges are emerging, such as shared water between nations, particularly in the Mekong River Delta. Diminishing maritime resources in the South China Sea pose similar problems, including contested ownership of the Spratly Islands.

Overlapping Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and shared borders mean environmental degradation is now a common threat to nations in East Asia that demands improved regional cooperation. As the region’s lone security forum, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) is best placed to challenge emerging transnational security threats, like the environment, terrorism and weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Traditional multilateralism may not, however, arrest the region’s rapid environmental decline, and the ARF must reform to address new threats.

Emerging transnational threats also challenge Australia’s traditional defence policies. Recognition of the region’s growing environmental security threat comes amidst a significant debate within Australia over future defence strategies. The changing nature of conflict and new geo-political context coincides with divisions over whether a Defence of Australia (DOA) construct, or an expeditionary structure, should drive Australia’s self reliant defence policy. While the environment is not the only driver of the ADF’s future structure, it typifies new transnational security challenges that Australia and regional

neighbours face when tailoring future capabilities to protect their respective national interests. To appropriately equip the ADF for conventional threats and new transnational security challenges is costly, thus increased defence spending must occur, otherwise capability cuts are inevitable.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### **Why the environment is important**

Conjecture over the world's environmental status, and the implications for global and regional security, arises frequently. Many acknowledge that widespread environmental problems exist and are worsening. 'Doomsday' predictions at times arise, leading many to speculate whether the human race will, in time, over-extend the globe's resources or cause irrevocable environmental damage.<sup>1</sup> The environment is thus generally accepted as an emerging security issue—a 'world-wide problem on the rise'. The availability of useable resources will play a key role in the future of East Asian security, and this is increasingly recognised as a significant driver in an evolving regional security architecture. Environmental issues should be addressed as a security issue by national, regional and international forums, much like any traditional threat.

An accurate 'state of play' of East Asian environmental damage and resource degradation is not easily obtained, nor accepted, as it often overlaps national boundaries and interests. Scientific evaluation of environmental issues is also disputed—debate over the veracity of issues such as global warming, ozone layer depletion, water usage or levels of fishing stocks arises constantly.<sup>2</sup> Technology offers no immediate solution to these problems caused by humanity, while inter and intra-state cooperation to resolve these environmental issues—loosely phrased as 'resource politics'—is often unsuccessful. As environmental awareness grows, so too environmental security has emerged as a normative concept since the late 1980s. In the post-Cold War era the reaction of governments to emerging transnational, non-military security threats—like the environment—varies widely.<sup>3</sup>

Distinctions between 'environmental security' and 'traditional security' are increasingly accepted in the fields of both international law and strategic studies. This was not always so, as traditionalists argued that non-military security issues (like the environment) have no place in the study of conflict.<sup>4</sup> The possibility of environmental degradation generating conflict within and between states is also a debated concept, with a decline in resources—such as the quality of water, air and arable land—arguably being only causes of regional tension, but not causing conflict. 'Environmental stress' is also now a common term, covering the vast array of environmental problems that inevitably 'ratchets up' tension between nations, either causing conflict or at least being a minor player in the shifting balances of power between nations.<sup>5</sup> Environmental organisations claim a stronger link between the environment and conflict exists, estimating that 'one quarter of the world's 50 wars of recent years were a struggle for natural resources like oil or timber', especially in developing countries where

ethnic tensions are inextricably linked with territory and resources.<sup>6</sup> Realists see emerging transnational issues, like the environment, as ‘dangers and evil in new masks constantly ushering in new struggles for survival’ for humanity, with periods of idealism—such as after the Cold War, or the Wilsonian period after World War I—only ever temporary episodes.<sup>7</sup>

Contemporary writers claim the environment’s importance is understated, being overwhelmed by domestic politics and international differences. Consequently, less important issues emerge with higher relative profiles, and public concern over the environment does not generally result in sufficient political weight, leaving the environment ‘on the periphery of international relations studies and policies’.<sup>8</sup> Yet the rising potential for disputes between and within states, from many forms of environmental degradation and unsustainable resource usage, is now better recognised. The increasing need for regional cooperation in a globalised world—to address common problems—challenges traditional realist security notions that associate a nation’s status with levels of power, resources and dominance, with states constantly maximising their own interests.

### **East Asian environmental concerns**

The environmental situation in the East Asian region is worsening, with concerns over the unsustainable use of resources and environmental damage in the renewed quest for economic growth following the financial crisis in the late 1990s.<sup>9</sup> Many East Asian nations face significant future demographic challenges. Rising population growth and urbanisation pose dilemmas for future governments attempting to sustain and manage nation states. National governments of some developing regional countries have not demonstrated they can adequately address environmental issues, by neglecting the problems or being unable to reign in corrupt elements abusing resources for short-term gain, often flaunting stated government policies. Indonesia’s 1997 forest fires, and the consequent regional smoke haze, typify a paralysis of government when attempting to stop illegal practices to control an environmental crisis. Deforestation and indiscriminate burning of land from poorly controlled logging companies resulted in the haze that caused much hardship for regional neighbours.<sup>10</sup> Similar environmental challenges, causing regional tensions, are emerging. These include the future flow of the Mekong River, contested access to fishing and seabed resources in the South China Sea, water scarcity in China and shared water between Malaysia and Singapore. More generally, there is concern and frequent recrimination regarding the deteriorating state of the air, land and water throughout the region.

Environmental issues will inevitably affect regional security in future decades, as resources become more acute in a more populous region consuming more per

capita than any previous generation.<sup>11</sup> Existing regional environmental tensions are unlikely to escalate into conflict between states, but could aggravate current interstate disputes; hence the need for improved multilateral cooperation. For East Asia, the institutions most likely to facilitate such regional cooperation are the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Both forums have critics, with accusations they are ‘talk shops’ with a minimalist approach. Intra-mural tensions already caused by environmental issues—such as the Indonesian smoke haze—are forcing the ARF to change, and challenging ASEAN principles of non-interference and traditional multilateral relationships.<sup>12</sup> As an ASEAN neighbour and ARF member, Australia benefits from a stable, prosperous region. But Australia and the US remain unwilling to ratify the 1997 Kyoto Protocol limiting greenhouse gas emissions. This Kyoto stance, and the long-term alliance partnership with the US, could limit Australia’s influence in regional multilateral agreements concerning the environment.

For Australia, the changing regional security architecture and new transnational security threats necessitate constant reviews of defence strategy. Emerging transnational security threats—such as terrorism, weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and the environment—require reviews of defence strategies and capabilities to refine the Australian Defence Force (ADF). Many transnational problems—such as illegal fishing—threaten the sovereignty of Australia and neighbouring nations. Other regional environmental problems may not directly challenge Australia yet, but the ‘welfare of countries in the region gives Australia an interest in their good management’.<sup>13</sup> A future security scenario for Australia may well involve increased protection and surveillance of maritime boundaries and offshore natural resources, while also requiring conventional forces able to assist in resolving regional tensions. The ADF should also become more interoperable with regional neighbours and the US, including improved intelligence sharing.

### **The environment and regional security**

Four distinct issues emerge from a review of the East Asian environmental situation. First, there is uncertainty as to whether environmental concerns are sufficiently recognised within national security policies of modern governments, coupled with how environmental security ‘fits in’ with more traditional models of international relations study. Second, analysis of the many environmental issues in East Asia is important, to address the open question as to whether environmental damage and resource availability is as bad as some maintain. The collective implications of environmental problems are not well articulated within the region. Yet ‘resource politics’ is an increasing global issue, with unique implications for a diverse and developing East Asian region. Whether

future environmental solutions are achievable—to sustain the region’s increasing populations at current living standards—remains an open question.

A third issue is whether existing multilateral mechanisms are capable of resolving future transnational environmental problems in the East Asian region. While multilateral cooperation will be essential for resolving the ‘common threat’ of many environmental issues, the East Asian security architecture is still evolving, and multilateralism is not embraced by all nations in the region. The ARF—the region’s only security forum—is best placed to tackle environmental security issues, but must reform and represent all East Asia, rather than just ASEAN. The ARF should also develop a ‘collective voice’ to better contribute to United Nations (UN) programs and other international discussions. Many multilateral bodies, like the European Union (EU), have managed to achieve successful regional goals at UN forums through effective cooperation by member states.

Thus, a fourth issue for discussion is the implications for Australia—as a near neighbour and ARF member—of regional environmental degradation and multilateral responses. Australia’s defence strategy, and structuring of the ADF for emerging transnational security threats, are currently issues of national debate. Replacing obsolescent ADF capabilities appears unaffordable, while the nature of modern conflict is changing and questions the suite of current ADF capabilities. But conventional defence forces remain relevant in an increasingly globalised and fragmented world, where sovereignty is questioned and transnational threats (like the environment) increase global uncertainty. A balanced suite of conventional capabilities is therefore ‘good insurance’ for any national government facing an uncertain future security outlook.

Chapter 1 of this monograph examines whether environmental security and sustainable development is a true determinant of regional security. This remains a contested concept in world politics, as security has traditionally involved the notion of protecting people and territory.<sup>14</sup> Two schools of thought have emerged in strategic studies, with a ‘traditional politico-military restricted view’ of security, and newer views of security dividing economic, social and environmental security studies. In the post-Cold War era, the identification of East Asia as a critical theatre in the world’s global struggle for environmental security is widely documented.<sup>15</sup> Until recent years—until the 1997 regional smoke haze—comparatively little had been written on how environmental security is perceived by regional governments, or how East Asia’s future security architecture will be influenced by resource politics.

Traditional security issues—such as defence and economic prosperity—remain prime considerations for national governments, but increasingly nations face stark choices between economic growth and environmental security. The

reality facing humanity is that ‘the rush to achieve material development is predicated on the physical environment being capable of supporting it—in short we are running out of resources’.<sup>16</sup> This situation challenges existing realist concepts of regional security,<sup>17</sup> as liberal institutionalist and constructivist approaches appear inevitable in the future to collectively overcome regional environmental challenges. Unlike the boundaries of nation states, resources are spread unevenly across the region and are often shared—becoming transnational issues with regional implications. By emphasising national power, realism (as the leading theoretical paradigm in international relations) does not adequately ‘accommodate’ transnational security issues.<sup>18</sup> Conversely, history demonstrates that idealist liberal views—often emerging from post war periods, like Wilsonian liberalism in the 1920s—are only ever temporary phases of international cooperation. Further wars and civil violence are inevitable, thus conflicts of the future could be triggered or partly attributable to scarce resources.<sup>19</sup>

Environmental problems in East Asia are typified by the examples discussed in Chapter 2. Extensive illegal logging and deforestation continues in Cambodia, Laos, Burma, the Philippines, and Indonesia; with recent political debate too over logging in Malaysia. Depleted fishing stocks and water scarcities in China and ASEAN nations are worsening, while disputed maritime areas in the South China Sea, especially the Spratly Islands, cause regional tension. Pollution is acute; crossing national borders and best typified by the disastrous regional smoke haze following the 1997 Indonesian forest fires.<sup>20</sup> Added problems arise from criminal elements exploiting natural resources, flaunting official government policies and international conventions, or extending their operations into piracy and drug trafficking.

East Asia typifies the increasing global requirement for nation states to balance economic growth with realistic resource usage and environmental care. Rapid industrialisation across the region, particularly since the 1960s, has led to significant increases in per capita energy demands for increasing national populations, and consequential environmental damage. Individually, these problems can appear manageable, but collectively the potential damage from a combination of environmental problems is disturbing. Unsustainable clearing of forests, over-fishing, water contamination, pollution, climate change and urbanisation—all emerging individual threats to the standard of living in the region—are mammoth issues when considered as combined, multiple threats for governments and multilateral forums to address. The social and human costs—particularly health, human rights and poverty—are also related issues of growing concern across the region, aggravated by environmental decline.<sup>21</sup>

Chapter 3 examines whether regional cooperation can successfully arrest environmental security issues. ASEAN has been the focus for South East Asian cooperation, and the ARF is arguably the most appropriate multilateral security forum to address emerging transnational issues like the environment.<sup>22</sup> Critics note that ASEAN and the ARF have not progressed sufficiently to manage environmental issues. While there has been considerable cooperation and enhanced dialogue on regional issues in recent years, little of the desired ‘preventative diplomacy’ or ‘conflict resolution’ has emerged from these forums.<sup>23</sup> While these multilateral forums have enjoyed partial success in the ASEAN region, their influence does not extend to the wider East Asia region, with many environmental issues linked to China. Furthermore, the environment is not at the forefront of these forum’s agendas, partly because nation states have not adequately addressed environmental problems as security issues. Some nations also seek to avoid provoking China, as near neighbours, trade partners, or as members of ASEAN or the ARF.<sup>24</sup>

Critics recommend reform of the ARF, yet its value as an institution lies in its very existence as the only multilateral security forum for East Asia. Previously, ASEAN demonstrated it could unite against a common threat—as it did when being formed in 1967 based on a fear of communism.<sup>25</sup> This threat has now passed, causing speculation that ASEAN has lost its most important ‘driver’. But ASEAN and the ARF have new common transnational challenges—such as terrorism, WMD and the environment—for their future focus.<sup>26</sup> Environmental tensions are already apparent in East Asia, with acute problems of environmental scarcity expected by the end of the century.<sup>27</sup>

ASEAN states already deal with contentious overlapping issues of resource politics that test regional relations, such as shared water between Malaysia and Singapore. Both ASEAN and the ARF have traditionally dealt with tensions through a minimalist approach of incremental dialogue, noting the non-interference principle enshrined in the ‘ASEAN way’. As environmental pressures increase, ASEAN states may use military forces—many of which are modernising—to secure scarce resources like oil, timber or gas. These tensions demand multilateral cooperation, and the security architecture will be influenced significantly by major powers such as the US, China and Japan. Chinese interests already extend into the ASEAN region (such as the South China Sea) while the US has extensive bilateral security links underpinning the regional security architecture. For the ARF, there is much to gain from recognising environmental security as an emerging transnational issue requiring innovative multilateral solutions, notwithstanding the many bilateral arrangements in the region.<sup>28</sup> The ARF must balance the ‘ASEAN way’ with the need for more tangible and timely outcomes, moving beyond the notion of non-interference to tackle environmental problems.<sup>29</sup>

Chapter 4 discusses the implications of East Asia's environmental situation on Australia's future defence strategies. This coincides with the current debate in Australia over appropriate self-reliance defence strategies, based on either defence of Australia (DOA), or a more expeditionary basis, and the costs and structures emerging from each standpoint. The effects of environmental security on the region's geopolitical outlook is not widely discussed within the Australian defence community, with terrorism the dominant theme overshadowing environmental concerns. Implications for the funding and structuring of the ADF have been considered in the recent Defence Capability Plan (DCP), reviewed by Federal Cabinet. Huge defence costs due to 'block obsolescence' of ADF equipment have been partially addressed, with a DOA construct driving Australian defence strategy. Notwithstanding improving regional cooperation, or the ANZUS alliance, to counter emerging transnational threats, many seek further changes for the ADF. Examples include new military doctrine like the US concept of the 'Three Block War',<sup>30</sup> or major structural changes such as an Australian Coastguard.

Chapter 5 completes the monograph, with several conclusions emerging from the review of East Asian environmental issues. There is growing acceptance that environmental security is an emerging regional threat demanding improved multilateral cooperation, as common problems of environmental degradation and resource scarcity cross national borders. Human practices in the region must change, as daily environmental damage compounds new problems of population growth and urbanisation. Environmental stress aggravates extant regional tensions, and is arguably already a contributing cause of conflict. Acute environmental scarcity is expected across the region by the end of the century, with problems evident now. Without reform, the ARF appears unable to halt the decline, nor to harness collective security options. Implications for Australian defence strategies arise, demanding policies that support the region and preserve national interests. While not overshadowing the need for traditional security and maintaining the ADF's conventional warfighting capabilities, environmental security will require new, costly ADF response options as the region's natural resources become more scarce and environmental stress worsens.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> H Tibbs, *The Future Global Context: Storm Warning or Reason For Hope?* Synthesys Strategic Consulting, [www.pssm.ssc.govt.nz](http://www.pssm.ssc.govt.nz), p. 12.
- <sup>2</sup> M Horstman, 'Feeling the Heat', *ABC On-Line Health Matters Forum*, 15 May 2003, [www.abc.net.au/health/regions/feature/climate](http://www.abc.net.au/health/regions/feature/climate). There is general scientific agreement that the earth is warming from greenhouse gas emissions, the issue is the rate of heating, which varies among analysts. The effects of rising sea levels is also contested, but agreement exists that sea levels will rise.
- <sup>3</sup> L Elliott, 'Securitising the Environment: Unravelling Environmental Security in Asia Pacific', B Vaughn, *The Unravelling of Island Asia*, Praeger, London, 2002, p. 191.
- <sup>4</sup> A Dupont, *East Asia Imperilled*, Cambridge Press, Melbourne, 2001, p. xi.
- <sup>5</sup> T Homer-Dixon, *Environment, Scarcity and Violence*, Princeton, New Jersey, 1999, p. 5.
- <sup>6</sup> *Resource Wars Fuel Consumer Demand*, [www.worldwatch.org](http://www.worldwatch.org), 21 August 2003.
- <sup>7</sup> R Kaplan, *The Coming of Anarchy*, Random House, New York, 2000, p. xi.
- <sup>8</sup> S Smith, 'Environment on the Periphery of International Relations', *Environmental Politics*, Vol 2, No 4, 1993, p. 44.
- <sup>9</sup> The East Asian region includes the ASEAN nations of South East Asia, and countries in North East Asia including China, the Korean Peninsula and Japan.
- <sup>10</sup> P Dauvergne, 'The Political Economy of Indonesia's 1997 Forest Fires', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol 52, No 1, 1998, p. 1.
- <sup>11</sup> *Environment and Security in Asia-Pacific 2002*, Executive Summary, Asia Pacific Centre for Strategic Studies, [www.apcss.org/conference](http://www.apcss.org/conference), p. 3.
- <sup>12</sup> A Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia*, Routledge, London, 2001, p. 156.
- <sup>13</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade White Paper, *Advancing the National Interest*, Australian Government Printing, 2003, Canberra, Chapter Three, p. 9.
- <sup>14</sup> B Buzan, *People, States and Fear*, Lynne Reiner, Colorado, 1991, p. 363.
- <sup>15</sup> Homer-Dixon, op. cit., p. 21. Homer-Dixon regards China as crucial, noting the high costs of misreading environmental management as the economy grows at 'breakneck speed' with unprecedented demands on China's leaders.
- <sup>16</sup> D Kingsbury, 'The Environment and Development', D Kingsbury, J Remnyi, J McKay & J Hunt, *Key Issues in Development*, Palgrave-McMillan, London, (due for publication in 2004). p. 1
- <sup>17</sup> T Dunne and B Schmidt, 'Realism', J Baylis and S Smith, *The Globalisation of World Politics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001, p. 142. The realist perspective of international relations considers the world as anarchical and states act to maximise their interests.
- <sup>18</sup> Dupont, op. cit., p. 3.
- <sup>19</sup> Kaplan, op. cit., p. 21.
- <sup>20</sup> Dauvergne, op. cit., p. 1.
- <sup>21</sup> Acharya, op. cit., p. 155.
- <sup>22</sup> ASEAN was established in Bangkok in 1967 by Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines. Brunei (1984), Vietnam (1995), Laos (1997), Cambodia (1998) and Myanmar (1999) have since joined, thus ASEAN now comprises ten South East Asian nations.
- <sup>23</sup> C Thayer, 'ASEAN: From Constructive Engagement to Flexible Intervention', *Harvard Asia Pacific Review*, Spring 1999, p. 2.
- <sup>24</sup> *The Mekong River*, Ockham's Razor, [www.abc.net.au/rn/science](http://www.abc.net.au/rn/science), 13 Aug 2003.
- <sup>25</sup> K Dokken, 'Environment, Security and Regionalism in the Asia Pacific: Is Environmental Security a Useful Concept?' *The Pacific Review*, Vol 14, No 4, 2001, p. 513.
- <sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p. 514.
- <sup>27</sup> Homer-Dixon, op. cit., p. 4.
- <sup>28</sup> The ARF's first meeting in 1994 brought together Foreign Ministers from Australia, Brunei, Canada, China, EU, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, New Zealand, PNG, Philippines, Korea, Russia, Singapore, Thailand, USA and Vietnam. Membership rose to 23 nations with subsequent inclusions of Cambodia, India, Burma, Mongolia and the DPRK.

<sup>29</sup> Acharya, op. cit., p. 156.

<sup>30</sup> P Leahy, 'A Land Force for the Future', *Australian Army Journal*, Vol 1, No 1, 2003, p. 25. The Three Block War describes merging modes of conflict for one force, where a pitched battle may occur while simultaneously peace operations and humanitarian aid is undertaken nearby.



## CHAPTER 2 ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY—A NEW SECURITY DIMENSION

### **New forms of security**

Contemporary environmental writers suggest that traditional—arguably narrow—views on security should be expanded, to reflect new challenges to nation states from emerging transnational issues.<sup>1</sup> Security is defined as being ‘untroubled by danger’; for national security purposes it is considered as ‘an action that threatens the inhabitants of a state or policy choices of a government’.<sup>2</sup> Security is synonymous with Westphalian concepts of state sovereignty, and resisting challenges from external military violence. In the post-Cold War period, these realist interpretations of security were contested, as cooperative, constructivist approaches to promote global peace and regional security gained favour. New threats too are now emerging in a ‘globalised, fragmenting world’.<sup>3</sup>

Perceptions that states are increasingly vulnerable to non-military threats—such as terrorism, weapons of mass destruction (WMD), environmental issues or transgression of borders—have seen ‘traditional views’ of security changing.<sup>4</sup> Emerging transnational threats challenge accepted realist views that external threats—often military related—are the prime concern of governments. These changing views emerged a decade ago as the Cold War ended. Buzan, for example, identified environmental security as a distinct issue from military, economic, societal and political security dimensions.<sup>5</sup> Questions emerge too regarding definitions of the environment, which is generally defined as the earth’s biosphere.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, environmental stress can be measured by the physical impact on the biosphere, or can include intangible national effects such as health or economic costs.<sup>7</sup>

Environmental security became a part of the international strategic studies lexicon in the 1980s.<sup>8</sup> Calls for a UN environmental agency emerged in 1988, followed by the 1989 Toronto Conference where national representatives discussed the implications of climate change. From that era, many founding principles emerged affirming environmental degradation as a new form of security. Principle Number 25, from the ‘Rio Declaration’ adopted at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, noted that ‘peace, development and environmental protection are independent and indivisible’.<sup>9</sup> In the same year, the UN Security Council and UN Secretary General made similar declarations noting ecological damage was a new risk to international stability.

International cooperation on environmental norms is being achieved, with the landmark Kyoto Protocols of 1997 underpinned by many years of coordination

from the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO). The Kyoto agreement committed 38 industrialised nations to reduce their omissions of those gases blamed for climate change. Each nation was to cut emissions by 5.2 per cent of their 1990 levels, while the US was to achieve 7 per cent.<sup>10</sup> Over 100 countries have since ratified the Kyoto protocols, but Australia and the US remain unwilling to do so. Low emission targets of around 5 per cent—far lower than recommended at earlier Earth Summits at Toronto in 1989 and Rio in 1992—are rejected by the US, who have placed national interests first, while also refuting generalisations that the US is the world's 'worst polluter'. The US and Australia have weakened UNEP and other international environmental agreements by placing national interests—such as potential economic downturns or lack of natural gas options—ahead of constructivist cooperation to ratify the Kyoto Protocols.<sup>11</sup> Further tensions are likely, as recent advice from the International Panel on Climate Control (IPCC) suggests greenhouse gases should be reduced immediately by 60–80 per cent to arrest global warming.<sup>12</sup> Recognising the urgency, many nations are proposing 'Son of Kyoto' to formalise reductions of emissions to even lower levels.

Amidst UN efforts to facilitate internationally recognised environmental norms, there is mixed success regarding multilateral environmental cooperation across East Asia. Although the ARF discusses environmental issues, it relies on a minimalist approach emphasising dialogue to address disagreements. The region has seen many disputes resolved following decolonisation, however, many writers still perceive post-Cold War Asia as 'ripe for rivalry', with increasingly disparate economic growth and military power, and historical animosities.<sup>13</sup> A decade after the Cold War's end, the region is now challenged by new transnational threats, such as environmental security, demanding 'improved inter-state cooperation in a diverse region'.<sup>14</sup>

The concept of environmental security is contested, and critics argue that the environment remains on the periphery of international relations. Despite significant international environmental forums—particularly the 1992 Rio Summit and 1997 Kyoto Protocols—little has changed.<sup>15</sup> Media attention during the Rio Summit activated interest and political debate, creating a scenario in the 1990s where many envisaged the environment would become central to political activity within and between states.<sup>16</sup> Arguably, this is not occurring, as domestic politics, national interests and 'political realities' overshadow environmental problems. Nevertheless, 'it is unconvincing to claim environmental issues are not imperilling the states and human survival, and at least aggravate interstate tensions'.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, while debate continues over new definitions of security, there is 'increasing public interest in the post-Cold War era in environmental damage and inequities in resource usage'.<sup>18</sup>

### **The influence of realism and liberalism on environmental security**

When analysing environmental security, the influences of realism and liberalism are evident, reflecting the general notion that for many issues the ‘pendulum of influence’ between realism and liberalism rests ‘between the ideals of the Berlin Wall collapse, and the realities of Hobbes’.<sup>19</sup> Many 1980s writers wrote of environmental security from a liberal standpoint, with optimistic post-Cold War hopes of improved interstate cooperation.<sup>20</sup> Although underpinning the writings of environmentalists these concepts, however, lacked general acceptance and policy responses from national governments. Critics note the widespread, generalised use of the term ‘environmental issues’, which varies from nation to culture to religion, creating mixed interpretations and policies.<sup>21</sup> Domestic and international agreement is difficult to achieve when each nation’s notions of justice and security vary. Differing environmental policies—between nations and regions—reinforces realist notions of disorder and anarchical forces that prevent international cooperation.

Realists consider the environment as ‘just another issue’ challenging nation states, like war or famine, with ‘no more likelihood of transcending the limitations of the states-system than other historical precedents’.<sup>22</sup> The absence of a world government, self-help for nation states, and the central role of the state as an actor means environmental security will not be adequately addressed in an anarchical international system.<sup>23</sup> Realists regard environmental reform as difficult, given the dominance of domestic politics in agendas pursued by governments. Large policy changes that adversely affect the electorate are risky national strategies that governments rarely adopt.<sup>24</sup> Environmentalists note the difficulties in obtaining US agreement at Kyoto on reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, as US national interests were paramount.<sup>25</sup> Realists arguably dominate the study of international relations, and do not see ‘low politics’ issues such as environmental security as ‘mainstream’.<sup>26</sup> Realism is described as ‘having laid the foundations for the foundations of the contemporary state system ... with consequences for Western thinking that is enduring’.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, much international relations’ theory is derived from ‘European experiences of the last four centuries, with periods of war, innovation and wealth, and Asia has never been a primary focus’.<sup>28</sup>

Realists argue that the study of environmental issues detracts attention from the real agenda of how states maximise power and use the threat of force, and the ‘advocates of specialists in marginal fields like the environment are labelled as wishful dreamers’.<sup>29</sup> The environment appears as just another issue in the long list of concerns that arise and are overwhelmed by traditional ‘high politics’. Realists argue that environmental issues will only be effectively dealt with by state actors, as occurs with most significant issues in an anarchical international

system, and multilateral solutions are rarely achievable in an international system characterised by disorder.

Contemporary realist writers, while understating notions of environmental security, acknowledge that future conflict and violence will arise from scarce resources, such as water, forests, agricultural land and fish.<sup>30</sup> Realists foresee that democracy may not survive environmental security challenges, as ‘hard regimes’ will emerge in nations with declining resource bases and a history of military strength, such as Indonesia. By claiming ‘democracy is problematic, scarcity is more certain,’<sup>31</sup> many argue democracy is not the panacea for environmental protection—echoing earlier realist notions by Hobbes that ‘enlightened despotism is preferable to democracy: the masses require protection from themselves’.<sup>32</sup>

When applying international relations theories to East Asia’s environmental context, a Western based realist outlook does not neatly reflect Asian responses to emerging transnational security issues like the environment. East Asia is diverse, with many developing nations, and the ‘ASEAN way’ emphasises non-interference in another nation’s affairs.<sup>33</sup> This enduring ASEAN—and ARF—principle is now challenged. In an increasingly globalised world political boundaries are less relevant, with complex transnational issues existing that are beyond the controls of many national governments. The territorial nation-state is being transformed by the ‘external influences of transnational networks linked by information technology’ and faces ‘internal challenges from stronger subnational ethnic communities’.<sup>34</sup>

Liberalist cooperation by nations to protect the environment has nevertheless been significant, with an increased recognition of international law and UN guidelines, although many conventions lack sufficient support.<sup>35</sup> Numerous UN Charters exist, such as the 1977 Environmental Modification Convention and the 1982 World Charter of Nature. These conventions prohibit damage to the environment that prejudices health or the survival of human beings.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, in 1997 the UN passed landmark principles for Shared International Waterways (including equitable water utilisation and obligations to share data). International cooperation over water is essential. Water scarcity may not directly cause interstate wars, but it has ‘insidious and indirect impacts that constrain economic development and can produce violence in societies’.<sup>37</sup> China has not ratified the UN Waterways Convention, arguably the most crucial international agreement on fresh water from rivers, which concerns nations downstream from China who share the Mekong River. UN conventions can thus be ineffective (when challenged), as there is neither ‘enforcement options nor any weight behind these agreements in international affairs’.<sup>38</sup>

### **Environmental issues as political drivers**

Modern statesmen use the subject of the environment more often and skilfully than in previous eras. Virtually all political parties claim to be environmentally aware, thus ‘much fadism and bandwagonism’ arises in environmental discussions.<sup>39</sup> In recent years ‘green issues’ have received widespread backing from middle classes in Western societies, but remain less influential in developing nations. Studies also indicate that despite increased environmental awareness, few voters place environmental considerations at the forefront, further demonstrating that the environment remains on the periphery of political systems.<sup>40</sup>

A ‘business as usual’ approach to the environment by governments is perceived by many, based on a ‘neo-liberal economic emphasis on commerce and banking’.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, parties are not divided on environmental lines and many mainstream parties offer identical environmental alternatives, with democratic elections largely contested over economic issues.<sup>42</sup> The immediate concern of governments is to ‘meet today’s food requirements, rather than the long-term alteration of cultivation policies’.<sup>43</sup> Environmentalists lament the generalised use of the term ‘sustainability’, which begs the unanswerable question as to whether humanity will survive, or thrive, as populations grow.<sup>44</sup> Environmental debate too can be ill informed, as few lobby groups or firms have the resources or expertise to challenge government environmental assessments, while often there is a lack of technical agreement or ‘evidence so overwhelming that all scientists and experts will share the same solutions’.<sup>45</sup>

Recognition of environmental security is frequently put on the ‘backburner’, particularly in times of war, when ‘high politics’ dominates. In the first Gulf War environmental and health concerns were lesser issues, with extensive use of depleted uranium munitions by coalition forces, while burning of oilfields by Iraqi forces led to adverse post war health issues and much environmental damage.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, because environmental concerns are long-term issues, they do not coincide with relatively short election cycles, thus political systems are not conducive to quick resolution of environment problems. Environmental reform invariably means a sacrifice in standards of living, often compromising economic growth—the measure of success for Western nations.<sup>47</sup> Many poorer nations believe (justifiably) that most environmental damage is caused by richer nations.<sup>48</sup> Because Western norms for common environmental standards are applied internationally, an imperialist tone is perceived by developing nations who have emerged from decolonisation processes. International resolutions to correct environmental degradation thus occurs on an uneven footing, particularly across the diverse East Asian region.

### **Linking environmental issues and conflict**

Environmental security and resource degradation are often assumed to be causes of conflict. A ‘neat link’ does not exist, and a more accepted opinion is that environmental factors interact with traditional security issues to cause tension, increasing the prospects of conflict.<sup>49</sup> Whether conflict over access to natural resources and associated environmental damage is more likely in the future is conjecture, although it is evident the environmental problems across East Asia are becoming more prevalent and will be acute by the end of the century. Many analysts argue that causal connections between transnational security issues and conflict do exist, and lament the lack of case study research on this subject in East Asia, despite it accounting for one third of the world’s population and having many diverse, developing states. Dupont maintains that there is ‘little doubt there is a common threat ... that must lead to a paradigm shift in security thinking’.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, Homer-Dixon, wrote on environmental security issues immediately after the Cold War, and was one of the first analysts to argue that future conflicts will arise from severe resource scarcity—such as less water, land, forests and fish for ‘a vastly changing world demanding more from a finite resource base’.<sup>51</sup> He argued that environmental stress covers a vast array of problems, and can be linked to major conflict, or may be a minor player in regional disputes. Regardless of contested links between environmental problems and the causes of conflict, Homer-Dixon stressed that environmental pressures ‘ratchet up’ the level of stress between nations.<sup>52</sup>

Homer-Dixon’s pioneering environmental work analyses resource scarcity problems in poorer countries. While noting specific problems like greenhouse warming, stratospheric ozone depletion, acid precipitation, deforestation, land degradation, polluted and scarce water, and excessive fishing, he emphasises their collective potential, and the causal links between environmental scarcity, social stresses and subsequent conflict. He concludes that these ‘stresses’ already lead to widespread intrastate conflict, especially in developing provinces in Indonesia, and violence will worsen as resource scarcity becomes acute.<sup>53</sup> Environmental agencies are more vocal in their concerns, claiming 25 per cent of modern wars are fought in developing countries over natural resources, killing five million people and displacing 17 million worldwide in the last decade.<sup>54</sup> Throughout East Asia many resource tensions exist, with escalation and conflict possible, especially when combined with ethnic identity or other second order influences. Developing regional nations facing worsening resource scarcity will thus be under increasing pressure to maintain democratic societies, with potential social disruptions in the future as governments struggle to arrest worsening environmental damage.

## **Conclusion**

There is growing acceptance of the links between environmental damage and unsustainable resource usage, which cause consequent tensions within and between states that can lead to conflict. The environment has emerged as a security issue much like traditional threats for nation states. Earlier, liberalist viewpoints ‘underpinned’ much environmental writing in the post-Cold War period that recognised environmental security as a separate entity, and emphasised greater international cooperation to address transnational environmental concerns. This differs from classic realist views of security which emphasise state-based power and national resources to offset anarchical forces.

Realists have dominated international security studies, and as a consequence the environment has arguably remained on ‘the periphery of international relations’, yet the environment is frequently seen as a ‘driver’ in contemporary political dialogue. Environmental problems transcend borders, and cannot be resolved by traditional realist security approaches alone that emphasise nation states. Multilateral cooperation is essential to fix common, shared problems. The declining environmental situation is shared by nations of East Asia, as the true state of the region’s environment damage emerges. When the combined potential of many individual environmental problems is assessed—particularly water, air and land—the environment presents as a significant common future security dilemma for the diverse, developing nations of East Asia.

## NOTES

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- <sup>8</sup> Elliott, *op. cit.*, p. 191. Elliott notes that USSR Foreign Minister led the 1988 call for the raising of the UN Environmental Conference.
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- <sup>10</sup> *Anger at US Climate Retreat*, [www.news.bbc.co.uk](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk), 29 March 2001.
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- <sup>26</sup> Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 32.
- <sup>27</sup> Dupont, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
- <sup>28</sup> Kang, *op. cit.*, p. 57.
- <sup>29</sup> Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 41.
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- <sup>50</sup> Dupont, op. cit., p. 11.
- <sup>51</sup> Homer-Dixon, op. cit., p. 104.
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## CHAPTER 3 EAST ASIA'S ENVIRONMENTAL SITUATION

### **A region in environmental decline**

The 17th century philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, reputedly suggested that ‘even if human beings are nobler than apes, they are nevertheless governed by biology and the environment’.<sup>1</sup> Today, many residents of East Asia live under permanent grey clouds of smog, while coral reefs in the region are bleached white from warmer waters and disease flourishing from climate change. These two displays of environmental damage, evident now in the region, typify deteriorating natural resources that will ‘govern’ the future existence of East Asians. While these environmental concerns will be examined separately, collectively they form a disturbing grouping demanding urgent regional environmental cooperation. The issue is thus not ‘whether there is a link between the environment and regional stability, but rather when, where and how environmental problems and resource usage will affect the region’.<sup>2</sup>

The worldwide phenomenon of global warming and climate change will be significant for East Asia. The growing evidence—now widely accepted—is that global temperatures are rising. Scientists predict a rise in sea levels of 90 cm by 2100, as temperatures over the same period rise by up to 9 degrees celsius, and many areas of the world will become wetter.<sup>3</sup> A scientific yardstick—that a ‘1cm sea rise equates to a 1m loss of land on many coastlines’—would see several regional cities under threat within two centuries, displacing residents of the very areas now becoming more urbanised. Other environmental problems anticipated across East Asia include a doubling of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) by 2050, combining with temperature increases to cause more floods, droughts and food scarcity.<sup>4</sup> Many of these issues—like air and water quality—already affect East Asian nations, with intra-state tensions likely to increase in a deteriorating global environmental context.

The region was recently described as ‘increasingly dirtier, less ecologically diverse and more environmentally vulnerable’.<sup>5</sup> Increasing demands on natural resources are attributable to the rising per capita growth of energy consumption, with exponential population growth in some countries. East Asian nations are now characterised by unsustainable economic growth, urbanisation, increasing consumption, growing energy and resource demands, and inequities between rich and poor.<sup>6</sup> Increased regional environmental degradation stems from unsustainable development, varying from individuals seeking daily subsistence to national longer-term economic growth aspirations, amidst Asia’s significant industrialisation in recent decades and the wide-ranging influences of globalisation. Environmental scarcity is therefore becoming a reality across the region, and developing countries will be less able to adapt to severe scarcity.<sup>7</sup> Rather than being the problem of any one nation, the environment is a common problem typifying emerging transnational issues.<sup>8</sup>

Resource politics in the East Asian region is typified by unresolved maritime boundary disputes, after the 1982 Law of the Sea that expanded national interests through Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) that are difficult to police. Several military skirmishes have occurred in the past, such as on the Spratly Islands. Analysts note the growing uncertainty over maritime resources, amidst the precedent of national governments deploying military forces to islands in the South China Sea and occasional confrontation. Further regional disputes are highly likely, as the South China Sea is an integral eco-system for many surrounding states.<sup>9</sup> Similar transnational disputes include water sharing between Singapore and Malaysia, water conditions for six downstream nations as China constructs dams on the Mekong River, and polluted air across East Asia—all unresolved problems that require cooperative multilateral solutions. The rising costs of corrective environmental measures amidst increased energy consumption are recognised, with pressure on governments to comply with international norms and preserve resources for the future. The Indonesian forest fires became a ‘turning point’, with recognition of the importance of environmental issues in East Asia, although changes to unsustainable logging practices have not progressed sufficiently.

### **The Indonesian forest fires**

The 1997 Indonesian forest fires remain a stark example of the dangers of deforestation and reckless logging.<sup>10</sup> Described by the Head of the UN Environment Program (UNEP) as ‘catastrophic’, the fires were fundamentally an act of humanity and linked to enhancing Indonesia’s expanding palm-oil industry, earning over US\$1 billion annually and in competition with Malaysia for a lucrative world market.<sup>11</sup> Despite President Suharto’s claims that the extensive fires were a natural phenomenon, relentless logging had left the countryside susceptible to fire. Some fires were almost certainly lit by corrupt companies clearing land to establish new palm oil, rubber and industrial wood plantations.<sup>12</sup> Amidst a dry El Nino year, with precipitation only 30 per cent of the usual level, the fires spread quickly and caused a significant regional smoke haze.<sup>13</sup>

The Indonesian fires numbered in the thousands, and burnt throughout 17 national parks and many areas of old-growth forests. Approximately 1.7 million hectares of forest was burnt.<sup>14</sup> The smoke haze quickly engulfed Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei. The Philippines and Thailand were also affected on occasions. The haze in Kuala Lumpur lasted four weeks, combining with normal city smog to become a permanent irritant. Burning of large areas of peat added greatly to global warming, emitting CO<sub>2</sub> comparable to annual emissions of Western Europe’s power stations and cars.<sup>15</sup> An estimated 200,000 people sought medical treatment from pollution across Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia,

while at least 20 million people were affected by living under the smog.<sup>16</sup> Malaysia reported a threefold increase in respiratory disease and a 14 per cent decrease in childrens' lung functions.<sup>17</sup> In Sarawak, a State of Emergency was declared by Malaysia's Prime Minister, lasting ten days.<sup>18</sup> Economic costs from the haze totalled around US\$5 billion across ASEAN nations, as tourism plummeted while schools and government offices closed.<sup>19</sup> A high political cost was paid by Indonesian leaders, forced to apologise to ASEAN neighbours after initially blaming the El Nino factors.<sup>20</sup>

A key factor behind the fires was extensive deforestation in Indonesia, leaving dry, open areas susceptible to fires. Unsustainable logging across Indonesia dates to the 1960s, when forests covered 82 per cent of Indonesia's 190 million hectares of land. This decreased to 53 per cent coverage by the 1990s, with one million hectares being cleared annually.<sup>21</sup> Poor government controls—and corrupt officials—saw questionable uses of timber fees and royalties. A reforestation fund, containing several trillion rupiah, was diverted to other non-timber industries. Government incentives for clearing land are poorly controlled, meaning many companies clear land that should be managed on a more sustainable basis.<sup>22</sup>

Throughout Indonesia fires remain the cheapest, fastest method of clearing land.<sup>23</sup> Indonesia banned this practice in 1995, but fires continued with no companies prosecuted in 1995–96. Over those years many corrupt loggers and plantation owners in Indonesia retained close links to senior officials. The Suharto family allegedly maintained several interests in logging industries, and enforcement of corrupt companies was undermined by weak institutional capacity.<sup>24</sup> Influential business owners in turn blamed non-governmental organisations with communist connections.<sup>25</sup> Singaporean satellite photos revealed fires began on large landholdings, described as 'the business conglomerates with connections to the Suharto family ... with Suharto unwilling to enforce laws restricting land clearance and forest management'.<sup>26</sup>

A feature of the 1997 fires was unchecked underground coal burning, which continues in Indonesia and is common across East Asia. Exposed coal seams still burn from the 1997–98 fires, aggravated by further land clearance by fire. Indonesia is progressively resolving the problem; however, underground coal fires continue yet receive minor attention.<sup>27</sup> Similar underground coal fires occur in China, with estimates that CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from East Asia's underground coal fires are comparable with annual US motor vehicle emissions.<sup>28</sup>

International trade sets the conditions for Indonesian forest mismanagement. Japan accounts for 60 per cent of Indonesia's timber exports. Japanese

government policies and subsidies result in low domestic prices for wood that encourages wasteful tendencies. Critics argue Malaysia should ‘crack down on massive cross border trade in illegally-felled Indonesian timber’.<sup>29</sup> Powerful domestic and international forces drive Indonesian forest mismanagement, while the Indonesian reaction to the 1997 forest fires has been described as ‘inept and indecisive’.<sup>30</sup> Fires continue, and multilateral dialogue is not changing unsustainable Indonesian palm industry practices that demand more timber.

### **Population growth and urbanisation**

The 20th century witnessed an unprecedented growth in the world’s population, resulting in far denser populations, bigger cities and ‘people movement’ across borders. The world’s population is expected to rise to between 9 and 10 billion by 2050.<sup>31</sup> While population growth in itself seldom causes conflict, critics note that ‘demographic changes can exacerbate tensions when combined with resource scarcity and ethnic differences, and can ultimately contribute to armed conflicts’.<sup>32</sup> All East Asian populations—except Singapore—are growing quickly and contain some of the world’s largest cities. Urbanisation is increasing, causing environmental degradation through pressure on natural resources and living space.<sup>33</sup> Many nations experiencing population growth are poorer developing nations from East Asia with immature democracies and acute resource scarcity, creating a climate for future conflict.<sup>34</sup> Concern arises over the population and economic growth of China. An economically stronger China could add to regional stability, or China could exercise territorial and ideological ambitions. Cooperation from China will be vital if multilateral solutions to environmental challenges are to succeed across the region.<sup>35</sup>

There are over two billion inhabitants in East Asia.<sup>36</sup> Eight of the world’s most populous cities (over 10 million inhabitants) are in the region, with China alone having fourteen cities over 750,000 by 2015. Large-scale population movements are occurring in China and elsewhere in the region, as people move to the coasts and cities, breaking down traditional village systems.<sup>37</sup> Urban crowding is a global concern, with half of the world’s population already urbanised in 2000, compared to 17 per cent in 1950.<sup>38</sup> Indonesia and the Philippines are the most populated ASEAN nations. By 2050, Indonesia is expected to grow from 212 to 312 million people, while the Philippines will grow from 76 to 128 million residents.<sup>39</sup> Effects of population density are rarely examined, demographers simply estimate that by 2015 Jakarta will reach 17.3 million inhabitants, and Manila 14.8 million residents.<sup>40</sup>

East Asia’s population growth and urbanisation already causes regional water shortages, lack of arable land, deforestation and over fishing.<sup>41</sup> Like many nations and regions, East Asia has no agreed population plan or studies to suggest a

sustainable population target. Across the region, industrialisation has resulted in a decline in rural populations, as cities swell. Shared property in traditional villages is increasingly privatised, leaving less opportunity for poorer subsistence lifestyles to continue. While populations rise and societal structures evolve from agrarian to industrialised systems, technology is not resolving dilemmas over shortages of essential requirements like water, food and energy throughout the region. This will be exacerbated as the ‘third wave’ in human history of high technology ‘informational networks’ arguably adds to the growing gap between developing and developed nations.<sup>42</sup>

Population growth threatens regional stability, combining with urbanisation to exacerbate resource scarcities and environmental degradation, leading to interstate instability and regional tensions.<sup>43</sup> Comparatively, overpopulation adversely affects environmental standards more in developing nations, rather than wealthy states, aggravating problems for governments with difficulties managing their people, such as China and Indonesia.<sup>44</sup> Controversial transmigration policies to redistribute Indonesia’s population across remote districts causes significant ethnic tension, while water scarcity in China causes mass relocations as new dams are built.<sup>45</sup> Many newly urbanised areas face the threat of rising sea levels, making further transmigration—and refugees—likely by the end of the century.

### **Regional deforestation**

Urbanisation and population increases inevitably result in higher agricultural and housing demands, thus regional forests are disappearing at an alarming rate. The growing per capita timber demand is significant, with forest products (from paper to industrial round wood) increasingly demanded regardless of environmental concerns.<sup>46</sup> Over half of the world’s old growth forests were cleared by 2000.<sup>47</sup> Deforestation also impacts on biodiversity; causing flooding, droughts, soil erosion, loss of agricultural land and reduced water quality.<sup>48</sup> Major floods in China are aggravated by deforestation, and losses of topsoil, salination, raised riverbeds and contaminated water supplies become secondary results.<sup>49</sup> In 1998, 200 million Chinese people were affected by flooding, with 3,000 deaths and four million homes damaged. Chinese reforestation programs are urgently underway combined with modern warning systems.<sup>50</sup>

South East Asian deforestation is estimated at over half of all original forests, with forest clearance most acute in Thailand (with most tropical forests cleared), and the Philippines (where forests covered 80 per cent of the land in 1900, but now total 20 per cent).<sup>51</sup> Cambodia has seen much logging, with corrupt officialdom, and recent claims the nation could be deforested within five years. Indonesia is arguably the worst in ASEAN, as there is up to 50 per cent more

logging undertaken annually than can currently be sustained, with marginal improvement since the Suharto years.<sup>52</sup> Biodiversity losses are typified by Indonesia's deforestation of mangrove areas, destroying many breeding grounds for fish and costing an estimated US\$14 billion per year.<sup>53</sup>

Across East Asia, much pressure remains on governments to cease illegal logging from old growth forests. Critics note 'the stakes are high and reform is unlikely'.<sup>54</sup> Illegal logging in Indonesia remains a highly organised crime worth up to US\$20 million per year, which in Central Kalimantan includes kidnapping and bribery to destroy protected forests.<sup>55</sup> Indonesia and Malaysia both received timber export incomes of around US\$3.5 billion in 1998, with continued pressure to maintain earnings. Japan and China seek timber imports, and are less inclined to exercise certifications concerning timber types.<sup>56</sup> ASEAN nations have not collectively exercised Article 12 of the Kyoto Protocols to compensate economic losses of reduced timber industry products, by accumulating Clean Development Mechanisms (CDMs)—also known as 'sinks' or 'greenhouse credits'. More of East Asia's forests, described as the 'lungs of the earth' are lost daily, with no multilateral action to use compensation options of the Kyoto Protocols effectively.<sup>57</sup>

### **Sharing water**

Water resources are unevenly distributed across East Asia, with demand increasing as populations grow. Water scarcity is described as 'the most under-appreciated global environmental challenge of our time'.<sup>58</sup> By 2025, many nations will face extreme water shortages, leading to 'poverty, shortened lives and misery'.<sup>59</sup> Throughout East Asia, safe drinking water is purchased as a packaged commodity, otherwise water is consumed 'from the tap' at significant risk to humans. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that one billion people worldwide are without safe drinking water.<sup>60</sup> Increased tensions across East Asia over water availability and supply systems are inevitable,<sup>61</sup> with water usage increasing markedly throughout the region, yet supplies are degraded by unsustainable practices from urbanisation and overpopulation. The domestic impact for governments of social tension through water shortages is acknowledged, while interstate interdependence is magnified by impending water shortages across East Asia.<sup>62</sup> Sharing water already causes tensions between ASEAN neighbours, with water potentially an instrument of conflict.<sup>63</sup> Futurists note that untapped underground aquifers, containing enormous amounts of pure water crossing international boundaries, raise the prospect of 'water wars' as populations rise and the demand increases.<sup>64</sup>

History is replete with examples of disputes over fresh water supplies, extending thousands of years in the cases of the Nile, Ganges or Jordan—each shared by

two or more nations, which developed into issues of ‘high politics’.<sup>65</sup> Conflict over water has included intentional attacks on water systems in war, or cutting of supplies—though conflict over water is usually entwined with other issues, rather than the sole cause of conflict. Tensions arise over secondary impacts of irrigation systems, hydroelectric facilities or flood control measures; and will be aggravated by the unknown water behaviour from greenhouse gas effects. Higher world temperatures will cause increased evaporation, dramatic droughts and floods, amidst increased water usage from growing populations. For East Asia, increased rains and monsoons are anticipated, although hydrology studies are constrained by uncertainty over the magnitude of climatic changes, while data on water is classified by many regional governments.<sup>66</sup>

Tensions between Singapore and Malaysia are typical of historical disputes where water is shared across international boundaries. Singapore buys around half of its raw water from Malaysia. Singapore is accused by Malaysia of ‘enjoying high standards of living and being the richest ASEAN country, yet quibbling over the water price’.<sup>67</sup> Typifying many cooperative international treaties over water, Malaysia has promised that the Singaporean need for water will never be jeopardised, yet recently stated that raw water can only be supplied until 2061, when treated water will be offered for sale.<sup>68</sup> The water-stricken Malaysian province of Johor is forced to buy back treated water from Singapore at high prices, and Singapore is allegedly delaying land releases for laying new pipes for alternate water supplies to Johor.<sup>69</sup>

Shared water can also be a catalyst for cooperative frameworks. Policies reducing freshwater disputes have been successful outside the region in the Jordan River basin, and demonstrated in the Mekong River Basin with cooperation from six ASEAN nations sharing the river. The 1997 Convention on the Non-Navigational Uses of Shared International Watercourses provided principles for resolving water conflicts that have proved successful across 260 internationally shared river basins.<sup>70</sup> China was one of three countries, however, who did not sign the Convention. The Mekong River Commission has resolved disputes and enhanced cooperation—although ‘upstream’ China has refused to be involved and maintains its right to preserve future Mekong water supplies for development in Southern China.<sup>71</sup>

Sharing the Mekong’s resources is arguably the worst environmental dilemma facing ASEAN nations. One of Asia’s largest rivers (and the world’s 12th longest river) stretching 4,500 kilometres over six countries, the Mekong is translated as the ‘Mother of the Waters’. The Mekong breeds fish for many inhabitants along the river, with 1200 species providing 60 per cent of the protein for Cambodians.<sup>72</sup> Fish catches are markedly lower due to silt deposits from

deforestation, and the effects of fertilisers. The course of the Mekong runs for approximately half its length through China. China has built two new dams near Manwan, with plans for two further dams upstream by 2010.<sup>73</sup> While China claims this will ‘even the Mekong’s flow’, there is much concern over future fish stocks and salt deposits for countries downstream relying on the river’s natural flushing processes. Little regional reaction is evident to the changing nature of the Mekong, as ASEAN nations like Vietnam and Cambodia try not to offend China.<sup>74</sup> There is no evidence that this issue has been raised at ASEAN or ARF meetings, yet the Mekong’s future receives growing Western media coverage.

### **Maritime tensions**

Many East Asian cities are located on coastlines. Urbanisation leads to deforested coastlines (and lost mangroves) that increasingly suffer from industrial and human waste washed into estuaries and coastal waterways. While scientists argue over levels of sea contamination, there are frequent ‘red tides’ in East Asia with significant levels of red algae that kill sea-life.<sup>75</sup> By 1985, it was estimated that one third of ASEAN coastal waters were contaminated with high levels of cadmium, mercury and other heavy metals.<sup>76</sup> Approximately one billion Chinese rely on fish as the main source of protein, and East Asia is more reliant on the maintenance of sea stocks than any other region. Yet traditional fishing stocks are severely depleted from overfishing. The situation in the South China Sea is acute, while other problem areas for fishing and polluted waterways include the Gulf of Thailand, Jakarta and Manila Bays, Mekong Delta and the Spratlys. The Gulf of Thailand is constantly a source of regional friction due to illegal Thai fishing aggravating neighbours.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, increased maritime traffic on shipping routes has led to rising pollution in the South China Seas, particularly from oil exploration and sea traffic in the Straits of Malacca.<sup>78</sup>

A lack of national and multilateral controls has led to coalitions of commercial operators keen to work with governments, industries and conservation groups to eliminate illegal fishing. Illegal and unregulated fishing (IUU) is increasing, and NGOs are endeavouring to coordinate monitoring and enforcement on the high seas. An example is the Coalition of Legal Toothfish Operators (COLTO) protecting the Patagonian Toothfish industry and ecosystems, and preventing illegal fishing in Southern Oceans, notably near Australia.<sup>79</sup>

### **Energy scarcity**

Future regional energy scarcity is anticipated given East Asia’s economic expansion and degraded resources. Growing per capita demands on energy consumption are evident across East Asia. While the Asian financial crisis slowed economic growth, it has not changed Asia’s ongoing future energy needs.<sup>80</sup> Increases of up to 10 per cent average annual growth in energy consumption

are anticipated in ASEAN nations, particularly Malaysia.<sup>81</sup> Peak usage for fossil fuels like oil and gas production is now estimated to be 2008, rather than 2025 as predicted earlier, with new fields or alternate sources urgently sought before the ‘beginnings of the end of oil’.<sup>82</sup>

Natural resources in traditional areas of the South China Sea cannot meet growing regional needs, and uncertainty over supplies could aggravate longstanding maritime disputes. The Spratly Islands are typical, with resources—particularly oil and gas—attractive to all parties. Several countries remain in gridlocked dispute following the recognition of EEZs, with overlapping claims on untapped sea resources. The need for oil is significant for China, with aggressive oil exploration activities causing tensions with ASEAN nations. By 2020 Asia (including China and India) will use 40 per cent more oil than North America, hence China’s economic rise will be a significant determinant of East Asia’s future energy situation.<sup>83</sup> Nuclear energy use remains sensitive, as the risk of accidental radioactive discharges from nuclear power reactors remains. It is also predicted that nuclear power cannot meet the world’s future energy demands.<sup>84</sup> Safe waste disposal remains an issue, particularly as consumption of nuclear energy increases, which limits future energy options of regional governments.

### **The world’s most polluted region**

While regional pollution typifies global wide problems, there are particular concerns across East Asia as the quest for economic growth jeopardises sustainable development. Asia is described as having ‘the worst rivers, while air quality has also deteriorated markedly since the 1970s’.<sup>85</sup> East Asia has nine of the world’s 15 most polluted cities (dust and soot levels), and six of the worst 15 cities for sulphur dioxide levels.<sup>86</sup> Government responses are sporadic, despite World Bank estimates that pollution costs are climbing. In China environmental costs are estimated at 8 per cent of GDP annually.<sup>87</sup> Malaysia has suffered from smog for many years, yet aborted a Clean Air Act. The air in Hong Kong remains poor; while across East Asia there are estimates that cars—and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions—will double over the next decade.<sup>88</sup> Unchecked underground coal fires in China and Indonesia produce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions described as ‘a global catastrophe’.<sup>89</sup>

South Korea’s air is arguably the worst in the region, typifying the high methane concentrations across East Asia (particularly China) causing global warming. China’s industrial emissions are significant, and will continue given China’s huge coal deposits. China will be the source of over half of the world’s greenhouse emissions by 2010, and will lead the world’s CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2025.<sup>90</sup> The quality of the air throughout the region is also tipped to worsen, as ozone—which occurs naturally but is a pollutant if excessive—will increase if climates become hotter through global warming.<sup>91</sup>

Toxic waste is an increasing global environmental degradation problem manifesting itself in many forms. Most typical are salination, hazardous industrial waste, pesticides and fertilisers. The effects of toxins vary. While difficult to remove, they result in significant land infertility and waterways denuded of life. Degradation is above world average in many ASEAN nations, who are claimed to be ‘more likely to turn a blind eye to toxins and their effects on the environment’.<sup>92</sup> Regional tensions have arisen over toxic waste such as the 1998 dispute between Taiwan and Cambodia. Taiwan was forced to accept back a contaminated mercury waste load illegally imported into Cambodia and mysteriously dumped at an external waste site, later traced and returned to Taiwan.<sup>93</sup>

### **Technological solutions**

Projects—often bizarre—are proceeding that could alter many current energy usage practices. These innovations are mostly projects from Western based developed countries. Preventative measures, such as Singapore’s satellites to chart ASEAN fires, or Dutch help to monitor China’s underground coal fires, already exist.<sup>94</sup> New energy projects include collecting solar power in orbit, and using space-based lenses on satellites to harvest solar power.<sup>95</sup> Global wind power has tripled since 1998, and is the world’s fastest growing energy source.<sup>96</sup> Cheap gasification processes turn wood into fuel for electricity, providing cleaner air in remote parts of the world, while hydrogen may replace fossil fuels in new experimental cars from Toyota and Chrysler by 2010.<sup>97</sup>

Soybean oil can replace petroleum based fuels, and is non-flammable, unlike jet fuels. Chicken feathers are being substituted for insulation fibre and filters, rather than traditional wood pulp based products.<sup>98</sup> Water desalination is increasingly utilised in the Middle East, but remains relatively expensive for developing countries.<sup>99</sup> Three US companies are undertaking CO<sub>2</sub> ‘sequestration’ projects, trapping and storing CO<sub>2</sub> gases before they enter the atmosphere. Proposed CO<sub>2</sub> storage sites are attracting controversy, as potential dumps include the ocean floor and Asia.<sup>100</sup> The examples typify a lag in environmental technology in developing nations, thus the interests of developed nations dominate, as leaders of the information age drive reforms to global environmental problems.<sup>101</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Many of the environmental issues prevalent in East Asia are individually significant causes for concern, and when treating the environment as a ‘package’ their combined detrimental potential is alarming. East Asian environmental problems already play an increasingly important part in international politics, and cause disputes now that could ultimately lead to conflict in a more populated and resource scarce future region.<sup>102</sup> For ASEAN and the ARF, there are significant

emerging environmental tensions to be managed. The Indonesian fires of 1997 caused a haze that angered ASEAN neighbours, while Singapore and Malaysia continually haggle over water. Six nations share water from the Mekong River, which is threatened by China's new dams, while China has a significant internal water scarcity problem. China and neighbours argue over resources in the South China Sea, already leading to military clashes in the Spratly Islands. There is increasing pressure on ASEAN and the ARF to take control of the environmental decline in the region, and to demand better environmental management and cooperation from all member states, who in turn must also support multilateral and international forums that are crucial in solving complex transnational issues.<sup>103</sup>

## NOTES

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- <sup>22</sup> *Indonesia: Natural Resources and Law Enforcement*, [www.crisisweb.org/projects](http://www.crisisweb.org/projects), p. 2, Crisisweb staff claim Indonesia's natural resources are utilised in an unsustainable manner, particularly timber mining and fishing. Often corrupt government representatives protect illegal industry practices.
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## CHAPTER 4 RESOLVING EAST ASIAN ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES THROUGH MULTILATERALISM

### **The need for multilateral environmental solutions**

A lack of timely international cooperation to arrest the growing gap between exponential rises in regional energy demands and the globe's finite resources, is lamented by environmental analysts. In short, it is said 'one planet, one experiment, no backup, no control'.<sup>1</sup> Throughout East Asia, emerging non-traditional transnational security threats—such as terrorism, weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and the environment—are new security 'experiments' badly needing cooperative 'controls' from nations acting in unison. Multilateral cooperation in ASEAN and the ARF is improving, but there is 'a long way to go' before the East Asian region makes common policy agendas, or formulates regional initiatives that incorporate environmental and resource issues.<sup>2</sup> Traditional multilateralism too may be unable to arrest East Asia's growing environmental decline.

As the region's lone security forum, the ARF is seen by many as the institution best placed to address regional environmental issues. From the outset, the ARF deemed important the concept of comprehensive regional security. But full cooperation has never been achieved and a minimalist approach—based on the 'ASEAN way'—characterises the ARF. Recent cooperative responses to regional terrorism incidents are significant, and show that the region's security architecture can be enhanced as nations embrace a new common threat. The environment, however, has not been addressed by the ARF as a significant regional threat, with 'new ARF challenges subsumed under old approaches' to traditional security.<sup>3</sup> Addressing environmental challenges with a traditional realist 'lens' of state conflict is now 'arguably inadequate in understanding regional security, and the ARF must adapt to new challenges'.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, many UN agencies coordinate regional environmental issues, but are often unsuccessful and reliant on multilateral cooperation. Water management is the foray of ten UN commissions with overlapping jurisdictions, while the 1997 Convention for Non-Navigational International Watercourses—where China is not a signatory—requires regional support if UN guidelines are to be effective.<sup>5</sup> Future East Asian multilateral and international environmental cooperation will be underpinned by regional interdependence. East Asian interdependence is typified in the South China Sea where sea resources are shared, or the use of the Mekong River resources by six nations over the length of its course. Multilateral links become vital when Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) overlap, with shared hazards and resources across national borders requiring regional cooperation.<sup>6</sup>

### **The emergence of the ARF**

The ARF began as a unique attempt at Asian multilateralism in 1994, enhancing security cooperation in the Asia–Pacific region in the post-Cold War era. To date, the region’s security architecture has been a ‘piecemeal’ affair, typified by the fact that the ARF’s *alma mater*, ASEAN, operated from 1967 without any collective security arrangements until the ARF’s creation.<sup>7</sup> Many nations, particularly ASEAN members, recognised the post-Cold War need for structured regional security dialogue. International agreement was reached in 1993 for periodic regional multilateral security meetings, including adoption of administrative processes from ASEAN.<sup>8</sup> This was undertaken through the ARF—a new forum without ‘rigid institutions or concrete objectives.’<sup>9</sup>

Despite consensus on the forum’s rationale, the ARF faces difficulties because it is a combination of lesser states, relying on the backing of major powers like the USA, China and Japan.<sup>10</sup> The ARF also operates informally, described as ‘just an extension of the relatively loose arrangements of ASEAN’, leading to regional solutions considered inadequate by outsiders.<sup>11</sup> Yet there are no regional multilateral security alternatives, hence the ARF’s value lies in its very existence. In the decade following its creation, the ARF enhanced regional security in South East Asia, but has far less influence in North East Asia, and security ‘flashpoints’ like the Korean Peninsula, Taiwan and the South China Sea are problems beyond the ARF’s current influence.<sup>12</sup> To become more influential, the ARF must reform, and responses to emerging transnational security issues—such as the environment and terrorism—may be the catalysts.<sup>13</sup>

### **The evolving East Asian security architecture**

Creating a stable regional security architecture has proved difficult. One critic unkindly noted that ASEAN’s ‘greatest claim to fame is that it continues to exist at all in a region with little history of successful institutionalised cooperation’.<sup>14</sup> The region’s unstable past is noteworthy, and reinforces the ARF’s value. In the post-1945 era, regional disorder was continuous. Decolonisation unsettled most of South East Asia, where some of the world’s poorest countries existed in a climate where conflict was endemic.<sup>15</sup> ASEAN’s formation in 1967 was a major step forward, providing founding members with a forum for confidence building, and establishing unprovocative administrative processes—the ‘ASEAN way’—inherited by the ARF.<sup>16</sup>

ASEAN’s declaration of the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) in 1971 was the region’s first instance of a collective security voice. A weakness, however, was that no specific program of ZOPFAN implementation was ever developed and no tangible outcomes were achieved from its creation. ZOPFAN has been described as an externalisation process, with regional members developing a common positioning of their relations with non-members.<sup>17</sup>

This was underpinned by perceptions of a common external threat during the Cold War, with communism the main driver of ASEAN. Issues such as the environment were, in this period, not well articulated nor perceived as serious security threats like traditional military and economic security challenges.

During the Cold War, ‘power politics’ focused on traditional military security, dominating a constrained East Asian security architecture, as US bilateral alliances with many Asian nations offset the Soviet influence.<sup>18</sup> The region had no formalised multilateral mechanism for discussing security issues, as ASEAN adopted an exclusively ‘political approach’ to regional security through limited dialogue.<sup>19</sup> After the Cold War, calls for a regional security forum met with mixed results. Initial proposals for European style forums were rejected, until ASEAN provided a model that suited major powers, leaving ASEAN to assume ownership of the ARF as ‘interlocutor’.<sup>20</sup> The US preserve five ongoing bilateral alliances—from the 1951 ‘San Francisco system’ resisting communism—that provide reassurance in a changing region.<sup>21</sup> These bilateral links emphasise traditional security concerns, and are adapting to new threats like terrorism, but are not yet adequately addressing environmental issues. ASEAN’s central administrative role in the ARF evolved naturally, given strategic convenience and ASEAN’s successes at the time (boosted by their ‘tiger economies’). ASEAN thus became a pivotal force within the ARF, with ASEAN norms pervading to ensure major powers did not dominate ARF proceedings.<sup>22</sup>

The ARF’s cautious conception reflects a regional security architecture evolving incrementally, attempting multilateralism but so far not invoking any collective commitment that guarantees stability. The region has previously attempted multilateral security pacts, although these did not address environmental security issues. Within South East Asia, the Five Power Defence Agreement (FPDA) continues<sup>23</sup>—whereas two post-1945 US initiatives for security in the Asia–Pacific region failed. The Manila Pact of 1954, and the supporting SEATO Treaty of 1955, were both relatively unsuccessful.<sup>24</sup> By comparison, Europe is endowed with many forums that helped after the Cold War, such as NATO’s role in the Balkans.<sup>25</sup> The diverse Asia–Pacific—a developing region—is comparatively ‘underinstitutionalised’, hence the ARF’s significance as the region’s sole multilateral security forum.<sup>26</sup>

### **The ARF—combining realism and constructivism**

Having initially developed as an experimental regional security undertaking, the ARF’s strength has been to establish regular dialogue and consensus by embracing ASEAN’s constructivist cultures, founded on economic cooperation.<sup>27</sup> Earlier, ASEAN’s largest member (Indonesia) advocated equality for all members—establishing a constructivist precedent for the ARF whereby success

in proceedings is shared and no state achieves overt dominance.<sup>28</sup> Yet the ARF demonstrates an increasingly realist dimension to regional security, using mutual strength to voice a regional view, amidst an underlying suspicion that anarchical forces lurk in the region (as experienced with the economic crisis, East Timor violence and terrorism).<sup>29</sup>

Realist policies are also evident in the behaviour of the ARF's members. While the ARF discourages the forming of alliances, regional nations continue modernising through arms procurements.<sup>30</sup> Nations are unwilling to rely on the ARF for collective security, but will support multilateral defence cooperation, particularly to placate China.<sup>31</sup> The ARF's wide membership (23 states) is also considered a realist response to perceptions that an emerging China will ultimately dominate the Asian region.<sup>32</sup> A combination of constructivism and realism thus underpins the ARF, aptly described as 'an anarchy of friends, containing a wide variety of member states, maintaining strength from collective cooperation'.<sup>33</sup> Many claim too that Asian states are not balancing the rising power of China, instead they are 'bandwaggoning'.<sup>34</sup>

### **The effectiveness of the ARF**

Critics claim the ARF is not a sufficiently powerful voice to promote regional security, and the 'ASEAN way' encourages a 'talk shop' that does not yield timely, tangible outcomes.<sup>35</sup> Yet the 'ASEAN way' is also a strength, which works for ASEAN, and melded international agreement when forming the ARF by accommodating the interests of major powers.<sup>36</sup> Initially, China wanted to avoid Western countries dominating the forum, whereas the US sought faster reforms in the region.<sup>37</sup> The 'ASEAN way' sits uncomfortably with many in the West, with slow ARF progress criticised,<sup>38</sup> leading to descriptions of the ARF's 'proprietary role' in managing regional order.<sup>39</sup> Others claim the 'ASEAN way' helps preserve the ARF, but also constrains its future development.<sup>40</sup>

The 1997 Indonesian forest fires became a 'turning point' that challenged the 'ASEAN way' and principles of non-interference, as tensions between ASEAN neighbours became evident. The 'Singapore Straits', using satellite images, openly reported that the fires were 'started deliberately to clear land on plantations and small farms'.<sup>41</sup> President Suharto, however, continued to blame El Nino conditions for the fires, while Indonesian Government moves to suspend logging permits for offending companies did not cease their operations. Efforts to address the forest fires through the ASEAN network were disappointing, however, there is now an expectation from the haze controversy that regional environmental issues need to be better managed, including compromises on the doctrine of non-interference.<sup>42</sup> Yet six years later, there are few tangible changes to regional environmental practices following the haze crisis. Similarly, the

Mekong River's future—the next environmental test for ASEAN and the ARF—is 'handled cautiously by downstream ASEAN nations even though it will require intense future regional management'.<sup>43</sup>

ASEAN Environment Ministers enacted a Regional Haze Action Plan in 1997, implemented by 1999, to help member nations cooperate on fire fighting. This included shared data on health effects, a review of land use policies, and a strengthened role for ASEAN governments in detecting, monitoring and reacting to forest fires.<sup>44</sup> While the Haze Action Plan was useful, this ASEAN response typified minimalist solutions based on a pace agreed by all parties, and 'lacks punch'. Stronger multilateral approaches to environmental challenges are occurring elsewhere in the world. Following the Kyoto Conference, which set emission targets for all nations, the European Union (EU) set regional targets limiting future temperature increases to two degrees to reduce greenhouse gases. Neither ASEAN or the ARF has addressed the question of regional greenhouse emissions, yet these international conventions rely on timely national and regional cooperation.<sup>45</sup>

Similar environmental progress through the ARF is unlikely due to the 'ASEAN way', with fixed principles to respect state sovereignty, stressing non-interference and 'no use of force' in resolving regional disputes. The ARF's initial aims of confidence building, preventative diplomacy and conflict resolution were consequently restricted to regional dialogue by this non-interference principle.<sup>46</sup> Regional tensions do exist, with several ongoing boundary disputes—affecting resources and environmental issues—between ARF members, yet South East Asia remains relatively calm.<sup>47</sup> ASEAN's 'community approach' to regional relations has led to internal confidence building,<sup>48</sup> avoiding explicit Western norms for cooperative security.<sup>49</sup> This ASEAN cooperation, however, does not extend to North East Asia. Ongoing tensions in Taiwan, the South China Sea and Korean Peninsular demonstrate the ARF's limited influence when confronting complex East Asian disputes, involving 'great powers'. The ARF was not established, however, to resolve major disputes, and should not be judged by such wide-ranging criteria. Nevertheless, the ARF—as the sole regional security forum—must increasingly address East Asian environmental issues.

### **How might the ARF develop?**

Notwithstanding the ARF's progress, changes to the forum are essential. An ASEAN security community exists,<sup>50</sup> however, multilateral security is not easily extended to the entire East Asian region. The ARF could be more influential in promoting wider regional multilateralism, if strengthened by structural changes. The ARF currently represents an ASEAN view.<sup>51</sup> By transferring the interlocutor role, and becoming the East Asian—not ASEAN—Regional Forum,

wider representation may be achieved, facilitating a stable distribution of power between the US, China and Japan—the ‘big three’ in the region. Internal changes to the ARF include creating a Secretariat, absorbing the recent Shangri La forum of Defence Ministers<sup>52</sup> and strengthening the Track I and Track II linkages from The Council for Security Cooperation in Asia Pacific (CSCAP).<sup>53</sup> The ARF must move from a minimalist framework of dialogue, and fully embrace regional preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution.<sup>54</sup>

The ARF must also complement existing bilateral agreements. US bilateral alliances in Asia from the Cold War provide regional reassurance, and US antipathy towards multilateralism did not thaw until the Clinton administration.<sup>55</sup> Realists speculate that China is supporting multilateralism—via the ARF—to weaken these US bilateral spokes.<sup>56</sup> The ARF must assist relations between China and the US, now the common interest in restraining Soviet assertiveness has gone.<sup>57</sup> Engaging China is likely to be one of the ARF’s greatest future contributions.<sup>58</sup> Amidst impressive economic development, China’s nationalism and assertiveness was demonstrated soon after the ARF’s formation, when China reaffirmed claims to islands in the South China Sea, effectively extending its jurisdiction into South East Asia.<sup>59</sup> While initially wary of the ARF, China has become an active participant, making positive appraisals of the ARF.<sup>60</sup> China’s recent sponsorship of ‘Six Party Talks’ to defuse the North Korean threat, and involvement in ‘ASEAN + 3’ discussions, demonstrates growing interest in multilateralism.

Although the ARF cannot significantly influence North East Asian security,<sup>61</sup> the ARF does discuss threats in Taiwan and North Korea, the War on Terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism. Similarly, emerging non-military security issues—such as illegal migration, the environment, piracy, drug trafficking and health—are reviewed by the ARF.<sup>62</sup> These emerging threats cross the boundaries of nation states, so multilateral cooperation and continual backing from the major powers is essential. The development of the ARF is hinged on adapting the ASEAN model to these non-traditional threats, yet ‘old geopolitics’ is not obsolete either.<sup>63</sup>

If the ARF cannot adapt, it may well remain trapped between a ‘balance of power’ realist stance involving great powers shaping North East Asia, with a contrasting constructivist multilateral approach to security issues for ASEAN.<sup>64</sup> Defenders of the ARF ‘status quo’ point out that the ARF was never designed to address specific security issues prevalent in North East Asia. Instead, the ARF relies on a cooperative security approach, accomplishing goals over the last decade by moving forward at a pace comfortable to all participants.<sup>65</sup> On environmental issues, CSCAP has led the way in regional multilateral

discussions, expanding their notion of security from a pure military dimension into environmental security. This must be applied across the region as an organising principle—particularly in ASEAN and the ARF—to encourage ‘sustainable development across all fields through cooperative means’.<sup>66</sup>

The ARF could also build on successful recent initiatives between Australia and Indonesia over maritime boundaries and terrorism. Effective police cooperation on terrorism has attracted international praise following combined action to detect and prosecute perpetrators of the Bali bombings.<sup>67</sup> Similar bilateral policing actions could be expanded to help solve Indonesia’s illegal deforestation, amidst claims that international cooperation is the best mechanism to protect ASEAN forests.<sup>68</sup> Terrorism, WMD and the environment may be the catalysts for ARF reforms, otherwise the ARF risks being marginalised as APEC or the Shangri-La Dialogue address security issues.

The ARF also needs to better represent East Asia’s collective interests following the Kyoto Protocols. Under the Kyoto agreement, Clean Development Mechanisms (CDMs) allow developing countries to receive compensation and pass ‘greenhouse credits’ or ‘sinks’ to industrialised nations (mostly Western nations) who invest in developing countries. There has been little ARF promotion of these provisions that could compensate a reduced regional timber industry (particularly in Indonesia) ensuring Asian forests—the ‘lungs of the earth’—are not prematurely cleared.<sup>69</sup> By contrast, the EU has ‘held to ransom’ many nations by collapsing post-Kyoto environmental talks.<sup>70</sup> The EU’s multilateral stance successfully blocked widespread use of CDMs by Western nations, ensuring all participants meet reduced national CO<sub>2</sub> emissions without ‘tradeoffs’. Developing nations lose from this disagreement as they cannot secure compensation and investments by trading ‘sinks’ to reform problem industries. ASEAN nations are trying to reduce timber quotas but need compensation to make structural industry adjustments. The region’s case for CDMs has not been adequately represented by ASEAN or the ARF in international forums.

ASEAN and the ARF could also work more with non-state actors, such as NGOs and multinationals. A ‘third wave of knowledge’ is arguably moving the world forward from a second wave industrial age—increasing the decline of nation states and rise of non-state actors and multinationals.<sup>71</sup> The ARF could better engage the many technologically advanced environmental agencies available to improve waste management and enhance environmental improvements in the region. Fishing practices could also be improved by multilateral cooperation with agencies like COLTO who monitor illegal fishing, while advice could be sought from water management experts in the USA who are radically changing recycling techniques and water management practises.<sup>72</sup> The ARF must therefore

be proactive, and move beyond a minimalist approach to arrest East Asia's environmental decline.

### **Conclusion**

The ARF remains the only self-professed multilateral organisation in the region dealing with security issues, and its value lies in its very existence—the lone forum facilitating structured regional security dialogue that is best placed to tackle environmental issues in East Asia. For the ARF to progress it must complement bilateral arrangements, maintaining US support, as well as Japan and the increasingly powerful China. The emergence of China will significantly effect the ARF. The 'Six Party Talks' and 'ASEAN + 3' linkages demonstrate China is embracing multilateralism, while the US often defies international norms like the Kyoto Protocol. The US also encouraged APEC to link trade and security to counter terrorist threats, challenging the ARF's pre-eminence as the region's main security forum.<sup>73</sup>

The ARF relies on security mechanisms that emphasise incremental building of trust and dialogue. The ARF must move from this minimalist position.<sup>74</sup> Slow, non-binding agreements established the ARF in the 'early days', but the forum is now perceived as a 'talk shop'. Despite informal and under-institutionalised approaches, the ARF does exhibit resilience in a diverse region, and a growing permanence that constrains ASEAN participants. Ideally, the ARF should further develop as a voice for East Asia—not just ASEAN—by embracing robust structural changes. International police cooperation following the Bali bombings shows regional solutions are achievable, and transnational threats may be the catalysts for ARF change. As Kyoto and other UN norms pervade the globe, the collective voice of East Asia—representing two billion people—must be better harnessed by the ARF for shared environmental solutions.

Australia's influence on regional environmental issues and multilateral forums is also crucial. Many ASEAN leaders maintain Australia is not part of Asia, noting Australia's support for the US. Australia's challenge is to tailor defence and foreign policies that enhance regional cooperation (as an ARF member), while ensuring that national interests (including ANZUS) are maintained. Significantly, Australia will not ratify the Kyoto Protocol, weakening any regional environmental initiatives. Without ARF collective security options, Australia must support regional initiatives while seeking defence self-reliance, and preserve ANZUS. The ADF must also be structured to take account of emerging transnational threats like the environment, yet traditional geo-politics and conventional forces remain relevant. Environmental security will demand new ADF capabilities, with increased costs or reductions in existing capabilities, to enhance stability in a region that is not yet cooperating sufficiently to arrest environmental decline.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> H Tibbs, *The Future Global Context: Storm Warning or Reason For Hope?* Synthesys Strategic Consulting, [www.pssm.ssc.govt.nz](http://www.pssm.ssc.govt.nz), p. 11.
- <sup>2</sup> P Gleick, *Water and International Security*, Pacific Institute, 25 August 2003, [www.pacinst.org](http://www.pacinst.org).
- <sup>3</sup> L Elliott, 'Securitisising the Environment: Unravelling Environmental Security in Asia Pacific', in B. Vaughn, *The Unravelling of Island Asia*, Praeger, London, 2002, p. 192.
- <sup>4</sup> *ibid*, 193.
- <sup>5</sup> Gleick, *Water and International Security*, op. cit. p. 4
- <sup>6</sup> K Dokken, 'Environment, Security and Regionalism in the Asia-Pacific: is Environmental Security a Useful Concept?', *The Pacific Review*, Vol 14, No 4, 2001, p. 509.
- <sup>7</sup> ASEAN was partly born from a fear of communism, amidst much regional decolonisation.
- <sup>8</sup> M Ortuoste, *Reviewing the ARF and its Role in Southeast Asian Security*, Centre Occasional Paper, Asia Pacific Centre for Security Studies, Honolulu, February 2000, p. 1.
- <sup>9</sup> R Sukma, 'ASEAN and the ASEAN Regional Forum: Should the Driver Be Replaced?', *The Indonesian Quarterly*, Vol XXVII, 1999, No 3, p. 325. Sukma describes the 'modest' ARF start, albeit with 18 founding members including the US, China and European Union (EU).
- <sup>10</sup> J Funston, 'Challenges Facing ASEAN in a More Complex Age', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol 21, No 2, August 1999, p. 205.
- <sup>11</sup> M Wesley, 'The Asian Crisis and the Adequacy of Regional Solutions', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol 21, No 1, April 1999, p. 55. Wesley notes the economic crisis highlighted the inadequacy of regional solutions, with no ARF meetings to address the East Timor crisis or the regional smoke haze.
- <sup>12</sup> R Foot, 'China in the ASEAN Regional Forum', *Asian Survey*, Vol XXXVIII, No 5, May 1998, p. 428.
- <sup>13</sup> N Baker, 'Restructuring Foreign and Defence Policy: Strategic Uncertainty and the Asia-Pacific Middle Powers', in A McGraw and C Brooks, *Asia-Pacific in the New World Order*, Routledge, New York, 1998, p. 189. Baker notes the post-Cold War strategic uncertainty, with new security perceptions from emerging transnational threats such as illegal migration, drug trafficking and AIDS.
- <sup>14</sup> M Beeson, 'ASEAN + 3 – Australia', *The Diplomat*, Vol 1, No1, April–May 2002, p. 24.
- <sup>15</sup> In the 1960s, South East Asia saw war in Vietnam, conflict in Malaysia (Konfrontasi), Brunei, the Philippines (clashes with Malaysia over Sabah) and internal disorder in Indonesia. The Cold War period in the Asia-Pacific region was hardly 'cold' as millions died from conflict after 1945.
- <sup>16</sup> M Leifer, *The ASEAN Regional Forum*, Adelphi Paper 302, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996, p. 1.
- <sup>17</sup> Dokken op. cit., p. 510.
- <sup>18</sup> D Kang, 'Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks', *International Security*, Spring 2003, Vol 27, No 4, p. 61.
- <sup>19</sup> Leifer, op. cit., p. 4
- <sup>20</sup> Sukma, op. cit., p. 239. Sukma notes that Australian and Canadian proposals in 1990 for a regional forum modelled on the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) were rejected by the US because it threatened bilateral arrangements. By contrast, the ASEAN proposal in 1993 for the ARF was accepted as an initiative from lesser nations that major powers had no reasons to oppose.
- <sup>21</sup> M Lankowski, 'America's Alliances in a Changing World', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol 57, No 1, 2003, p. 113. The US bilateral agreements with Japan, South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines and Australia during the Cold War, and a relationship with Singapore, remain extant.
- <sup>22</sup> S Sheldon (ed.), *The Many Faces of Asian Security*, Rowman and Littlefield, Oxford, 2001, p. 1. Sheldon claims US-centred bilateral relations in the region are inadequate in coping with non-traditional security threats.

<sup>23</sup> M Malik, 'Security in the Asia-Pacific, From Bilateralism to Multilateralism', in A Baginda and A Bergin (eds), *Asia-Pacific's Security Dilemma*, ASEAN Press, London, 1998, p. 169. The FPDA, a legacy of *Konfrontasi*, includes the UK, Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand and Brunei. Formed in 1971, it has recently developed the Integrated Area Defence System (IADS) with combined surveillance cooperation between maritime and air forces of contributing nations.

<sup>24</sup> The Manila pact included the US, UK, France, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand and the Philippines. It was a line of containment along the 17th Parallel, protecting Vietnam against further Communist territorial advance. SEATO (same members) was ultimately disbanded in 1977.

<sup>25</sup> The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), European Union (EU), CSCE and G7 are typical of these European forums, with US involvement in NATO making comparison with the ARF difficult.

<sup>26</sup> M Chalmers, *Confidence Building in South East Asia*, Westview Press, Bradford, 1996, p. 25.

<sup>27</sup> Funston, op. cit., p. 205. See also J Baylis and S Smith, *The Globalisation of World Politics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001, p. 244. Smith maintains that constructivism—akin to liberal institutionalism—sees states overcoming international anarchy by self-help and institutions.

<sup>28</sup> Chalmers, op. cit., p. 22. Chalmers notes that Indonesia's population is one third greater than all other ASEAN members combined, and eight times greater than the combined populations of Singapore and Malaysia, yet the equality principle in ASEAN remains regardless of comparative national strengths.

<sup>29</sup> T Dunne and B Schmidt, 'Realism', in J Baylis and S Smith, op. cit., p. 142. The realist perspective of international relations considers the world as anarchical and states act to maximise their interests.

<sup>30</sup> Leifer, op. cit., p. 54.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Foot, op. cit., p. 429. Pakistan is likely to join the ARF in the future.

<sup>33</sup> S Sheldon, 'Security Prospects in South East Asia: Collaborative Efforts and the ASEAN Regional Forum', *The Pacific Review*, Vol 11, No 2, 1998, p. 195.

<sup>34</sup> Kang, op. cit., p. 58.

<sup>35</sup> Ortuoste, op. cit., p. 1. Ortuoste claims the ARF was never intended to be a collective defence organisation, rather it is a multilateral venue for discussions and preventative diplomacy at best.

<sup>36</sup> Lankowski, op. cit., p. 118. Lankowski describes China as the 'patient regional competitor' of the US.

<sup>37</sup> Sukma, op. cit., p. 239.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, p. 1. Japan and South Korea are also critics of the 'ASEAN way'.

<sup>39</sup> Leifer, op. cit., p. 10. Leifer—a neo-realist—emphasises the ARF's lack of power in an anarchical region.

<sup>40</sup> R Cook, *Security in the Post Cold War Asia Pacific*, Australian Defence College, Monograph Series, No 2, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2003, p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> P Dauvergne, 'The Political Economy of Indonesia's 1997 Forest Fires', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol 52, No 1, 1998, p. 17.

<sup>42</sup> A Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia*, Routledge, London, 2001, p. 156.

<sup>43</sup> *The Mekong River*, Ockham's Razor, www.abc.net.au/rn/science, 13 Aug 2003.

<sup>44</sup> Dauvergne, op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>45</sup> M Horstman, 'Feeling the Heat', *ABC On-Line Health Matters Forum*, www.abc.net.au/health/regions/feature/climate, 15 May 2003.

<sup>46</sup> Malik, op. cit., p. 169.

<sup>47</sup> Chalmers, op. cit., p. 22. The Malacca Straits typifies simmering tensions between Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore over transit rights. Land borders too are managed the 'ASEAN way'.

<sup>48</sup> Leifer op. cit. p. 1. This ASEAN 'family' concept and high degree of informality is partially due to the leadership continuity between Mahatir, Suharto and Lee Kuan Yew; who

were leaders for long periods and instrumental in the formation of ASEAN, and disliked Western influences.

<sup>49</sup> Cook, op. cit., p. 2. A Western construct underpins the ARF; especially balances of power between nation states, which is inadequate in dealing with newly created Southeast Asian nations.

<sup>50</sup> Garofano, op. cit., p. 503.

<sup>51</sup> Foot, op. cit., p. 425.

<sup>52</sup> www.abc.net.au, Asia Pacific Defence Ministers Discuss Security, 2 June 2002. The Shangri-La Dialogue is growing in momentum as a new dimension to the security architecture in the Asia-Pacific region. See also www.minister.defence.gov.au for Minister Hill's praise for the Shangri-La Dialogue, with US support also evident in the AS-US Joint Communiqué.

<sup>53</sup> D Ball, *The ARF into the 21st Century*, Attachment to Correspondence from CSCAP to the ARF Chairman, 29 May 2002, p. 2. Ball, as CSCAP Co-Chair, recommends Track II discussions in CSCAP are fully linked to the ARF (Track I).

<sup>54</sup> ibid.

<sup>55</sup> The region changed at that time with the end of leases to US forces in the Philippines, forcing US bases to Japan, mitigated to an extent by greater use of Singapore's facilities. Russia also withdrew forces from Camran Bay, while Vietnamese forces withdrew from Cambodia.

<sup>56</sup> R Lim, 'The ASEAN Regional Forum: Building on Sand', *Contemporary South East Asia*, Vol 20, No 2, August 1998, p. 116.

<sup>57</sup> Foot, op. cit., p. 428. The US is the only superpower able to project global power.

<sup>58</sup> ibid, p. 426.

<sup>59</sup> Cook, op. cit., p. 6. Cook notes past tensions between China and the US. China impounded a US aircraft after a mid air collision in April 2001, amidst recent US decisions to continue arms sales and offer theatre missile defence (TMD) to Taiwan. There are recent signs of a more pragmatic Chinese leadership; embracing regional cooperation, confronting the SARS crisis and backing down on Hong Kong security changes during 2003.

<sup>60</sup> Foot, op. cit., p. 427.

<sup>61</sup> Leifer, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>62</sup> Cook, op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>63</sup> Lankowski, op. cit., p. 123.

<sup>64</sup> Cook, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>65</sup> Foot, op. cit., p. 427. See also Sukma, op. cit., p. 244, who supports retention of the ARF status quo.

<sup>66</sup> A Dupont, *East Asia Imperilled*, Cambridge Press, Melbourne, 2001, p. 10.

<sup>67</sup> *Australia's National Security: A Defence Update*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, February 2003, p. 20.

<sup>68</sup> 'The Timber Mafia', *Four Corners*, www.abc.net.au, 29 July 2002.

<sup>69</sup> P Sari, 'The World is (Not) Green Enough', *Inside Indonesia*, April June 2000, p. 23.

<sup>70</sup> A Kirby, *Europe Blamed for Climate Stalemate*, www.news.bbc.co.uk, 13 February 2001.

<sup>71</sup> A Toffler, *The Third Wave*, Pan, London, p. 451.

<sup>72</sup> Waste Management Expos held annually in the USA encourage better practices and avoid law suits from poor environmental practices (see www.wasteexpo.com). In Australia, each state has a branch of the national Waste Management Association to encourage structural and cultural environmental changes (see www.wmaaa.asn.au).

<sup>73</sup> www.theaustralian.news.com, *Bush Pushes APEC Leaders on Terror*, 20 October 2003.

At the recent Bangkok meeting, the US pushed the 21 member APEC forum to link security and economics, a significant shift in APEC's 14 year history, with Malaysia opposed to the change.

<sup>74</sup> www.jakartapost, 29 July 2003. Recent ASEAN criticism of Myanmar over the treatment of Aung San Suu Kyi has seen the 'non-interference principle' broken on three occasions; with specific criticisms by Dr Mahathir and agreements at ASEAN meetings at Bali and Hanoi—all stressing that Myanmar's authorities should respect human rights and release Aung San Suu Kyi immediately.



## CHAPTER 5 IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE STRATEGY

### **Australia's evolving defence strategy**

The changing security architecture, and emerging transnational threats like the environment, require ongoing reviews of Australia's defence strategy. The region's security focus currently emphasises terrorism and weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Within a decade, less well-recognised implications of East Asia's environmental problems and diminishing resources will become a significant longer term driver across the region, especially if environmental solutions are not forthcoming. Contemporary environmental tensions abound, requiring Australian responses. Australian vessels recently apprehended foreign vessels illegally fishing for Patagonian Toothfish in Australian territorial waters. By October 2003, over 100 illegal Indonesian fishing boats had been apprehended in Australia's northern waters, after significant illegal immigration in recent years.<sup>1</sup> The environment is already described as a driver of Australia's security—the problem for governments being 'when and where resource-related conflicts are most likely to arise', rather than debate over 'whether environmental concerns contribute to instability and conflict'.<sup>2</sup>

The environment is not the only driver of Australian defence planning over the next decade, rather it is one of many emerging transnational threats warranting revised defence strategies. Terrorism and WMD currently rank as the main threat, arguably overestimated by media and politicians amidst a climate of fear in Western nations following 'Bali' and '9-11'.<sup>3</sup> Terrorism and WMD, possibly temporary threats, overshadow the significant long-term environmental security dilemmas for the region. Consideration of new regional security threats coincides with a unique period in the history of Australia's defence strategies. A national debate over whether to maintain the Defence of Australia (DOA) construct, or a more expeditionary focus, continues. A mixed strategy arguably drives the revised Defence Capability Plan (DCP), an expensive refit of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) which had been postponed and is now arguably unaffordable. The costly option of replacing many obsolescent conventional ADF capabilities was recently considered by Federal Cabinet, with a compromise decision resulting. Defence expenditure will not rise from the record low of 1.9 per cent of GDP,<sup>4</sup> and new projects will be phased in gradually, while some current capabilities will be cut earlier.<sup>5</sup> The decision is significant, as force structures and capital equipment developed today for the ADF remain in place for decades once implemented. Hard decisions by Federal Cabinet to reprioritise existing capabilities significantly change the ADF, and a continuing DOA construct remains as official Federal Government policy.<sup>6</sup>

Environmental issues and other transnational threats have not previously been significant influences on Australian defence strategy. The DOA policy, based on defending Australia's sea and air gap from low level threats, dominated Australian defence strategy from 1987 onwards and underpins the 2000 Defence White Paper. DOA replaced earlier doctrines of 'Forward Defence' that saw the ADF deployed offshore during the Vietnam era, resisting the spread of communism during the Cold War. DOA concepts remained unchallenged until recent years, as offshore peacekeeping missions were increasingly undertaken by the ADF. Successful but uncontested ADF peace operations in East Timor highlighted disturbing shortfalls, particularly in logistics, tactical and strategic mobility, and personnel shortages in land forces. These weaknesses were linked to Australia's low defence spending, and inappropriate ADF structures and capabilities, from DOA concepts.

Unparalleled terrorist incidents, and wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, also challenged the relevance of DOA strategies and the extant Defence White Paper. The White Paper is now perceived as 'obsolete'.<sup>7</sup> Recent ADF tasks in the new millennium also questioned DOA concepts, although subtle similarities to Dobb's 'low level incursions' were evident. Such ADF tasks included intercepting and detaining illegal refugees, and assisting to prevent increased regional crime such as smuggling and a surge in illegal fishing, all requiring increased cooperation with Australian Federal Police (AFP) and Customs authorities. Further criticism of the DOA construct arose from the recent Iraq War. While ADF naval and air contributions were integrated into the 'Coalition of the Willing', the contribution of land forces was restricted to Special Forces, as Australia's aging mechanised forces were unsuitable for modern land warfare.

In 2003, a Defence Update was issued, noting that 'the strategic environment is being shaped by terrorism and WMD, and continued regional instability, requiring a rebalancing of the ADF'.<sup>8</sup> Defence Minister Hill referred to the globalisation of security, amidst frequent ADF deployments overseas, suggesting the ADF must embrace unorthodox tasks, such as intercepting illegal immigrants and protecting Australia's EEZ with increased surveillance and intelligence gathering. Many new tasks for the ADF in the draft Defence Update were allegedly twice rebuffed by Federal Cabinet, with the 2000 White Paper principles of DOA—underpinning funding and conventional forces—remaining as current government policy.<sup>9</sup>

Uncertainty is a dilemma for national governments reviewing defence strategy, modernising forces and adapting to new security challenges. A future world could be characterised by a decline in national sovereignty, an increasing need for humanitarian aid, failed states and new transnational threats like

the environment. The ADF's current tasks reflect this expanding spectrum of conflict. At present, the ADF is assisting in warlike operations as a US Coalition ally in Iraq, while undertaking UN peacekeeping in East Timor and humanitarian aid tasks in Solomons Islands, with Australia described as a 'metropolitan policeman'.<sup>10</sup> DOA tasks appear less relevant as conventional attacks on Australia appear unimaginable, although incursions to secure scarce resources are increasing, and further illegal immigration from displaced persons is anticipated as environmental decline in the region worsens.

### **Designing the future ADF**

Amidst the DOA strategy, the ADF maintains a warfighting base to prepare forces for contingencies across the spectrum of conflict. The ADF interpreted the 2000 White Paper as moving towards more offshore operations and 'expeditionary warfare', unlike the 'low level' contingencies from DOA concepts prescribed by Professor Dobb that underpinned the 1987 White Paper, and subsequent defence policies.<sup>11</sup> After '9-11' and 'Bali', the region's new security environment was acknowledged in the Defence Update that focused on terrorism.<sup>12</sup> The government took steps to improve domestic security—including structural changes within the ADF to raise counter-terrorism and incident response units. But in a move that affirmed much of Australia's traditional strategies on defence, the Defence Update concluded the principles set out in the earlier 2000 White Paper remain sound.

A rebalancing of capability and expenditure was alluded to in the Defence Update to increase the ADF's 'readiness, mobility, interoperability, and with a reduced emphasis on capabilities of less importance'.<sup>13</sup> The Defence Update briefly mentions emerging transnational environmental problems, such as people smuggling and illegal fishing that are 'new security challenges'.<sup>14</sup> No specific changes to ADF structures or capabilities are recommended, instead a short comment notes the 'continued need for the ADF to conduct operations in support of civilian agencies to protect Australia's borders and economic interests, such as people smuggling and illegal fishing'.<sup>15</sup>

Previous DOA policies, emphasising a maritime policy of defending Australia's sea and air gap (described as a modern 'Fortress Australia' policy) demanded priority to air and naval interception forces. Land forces were eroded and equipment purchases postponed as DOA maritime concepts dominated defence spending.<sup>16</sup> Dated 'concentric circles' around Australia, from Dobb's DOA construct, are now questioned in a globalised world of transnational threats. Advocates of the primacy of DOA are 'now criticised, as the ADF was structured for such priorities, yet Australia faced no credible threat'.<sup>17</sup> Conversely, the ADF successfully undertook many 'expeditionary' peacekeeping tasks in the

DOA era and maintained a relatively strong suite of capabilities—including submarines, frigates and strike aircraft—that aided regional stability. Yet increasing transnational threats could see the ‘concentric circle’ DOA argument again favoured, as environmental scarcity causes more incursions on Australia’s EEZ from regional neighbours—possibly facing governance problems—unable to control corrupt or desperate elements seeking scarce resources. A balanced Australian defence strategy, combining DOA and expeditionary strategies, is therefore needed to protect Australia’s interests and territories, in ‘a borderless world where security challenges transcend nation states’.<sup>18</sup> An ‘either/or’ Australian defence strategy is recommended for Australia, rather than an ‘antipodean Maginot Line’ akin to the DOA thesis.<sup>19</sup>

While terrorism is the current prime security concern for Australia, environmental decline could cause more significant, long-term security dilemmas in the decades ahead. Australia will attract more refugees, as regional nations with large urbanised coastal cities bear the brunt of climate change. The predicted one metre rise in sea levels from global warming could displace 18 million people in China, or 3 million Indonesians, within two centuries. Many displaced persons could demand sanctuary in Australia, as the phenomenon of global warming is ironically mainly caused by Western nations, yet poor countries are threatened.<sup>20</sup> Piracy could also increase as resource shortages and environmental degradation force over-populated or displaced persons to turn to crime. Piracy is already a significant maritime threat in ASEAN waters. Daily attacks occur on vessels from Indonesian smugglers in the Straits of Malacca, and nearby Australian waters are seen as traditional maritime ‘homelands’ under utilised by the relatively small Australian population. Many foreign vessels pay undisclosed ransoms to appease pirates, with hostage taking frequent.<sup>21</sup> International waters in East Asia are already busy, thus maritime criminal activity and displaced persons could foreseeably increase closer to a cleaner, well-resourced Australia. Increased surveillance and maritime patrols of Australia’s EEZ appears essential, amidst contemporary calls for a Coastguard and greater regional engagement. Intelligence sharing and interoperability with regional neighbours should improve; currently the emphasis is on aligning ADF equipment and doctrine with the US.<sup>22</sup>

### **The changing nature of conflict**

Many have attempted to predict the changing nature of conflict, to determine how the ADF should be structured and equipped for the future. The ADF already undertakes multiple challenges across the spectrum of conflict, from warfighting to humanitarian aid tasks. Analysts refer to an ‘arc of instability’ north of Australia, suggesting the ADF should be structured for operations in this littoral environment.<sup>23</sup> While environmental security is an emerging normative concept

that will underpin future regional disputes over scarce shared resources, there is uncertainty over how this will manifest itself in future ADF structures and capabilities.

Environmental changes could see future conflicts waged in an increasingly urbanised world, with ethnic diasporas and the manipulation of natural resources as the sources of conflict.<sup>24</sup> Larger cities also mean an increased likelihood of fighting in urban terrain, where conventional military hardware can be unsuited to urban conflict, as found by the Russians in their clumsy capture of Grozny in 1994–95.<sup>25</sup> Others describe a ‘Mad Max’ future scenario, where the ‘three block war’ concept favoured by US forces could see the ADF operating concurrently in battle, peace operations and humanitarian aid—all in one area of operations.<sup>26</sup> Increasingly better intelligence gathering platforms are critical in urban environments, such as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) and sensor suites emerging on nanotechnology, which can monitor environmental transgressions such as illegal fishing. Non-lethal weaponry, recognising uncontested civilians in urban areas is also crucial during peace enforcement operations or for managing displaced persons.

Many foresee the intelligence industry becoming more powerful in national response options to transnational threats in the future, while Special Forces (SF) appear to be a ‘military growth industry’.<sup>27</sup> Kaplan notes ‘in a world where borders are dissolving, and bad guys conceal bombs in pockets or steal millions with computers, the intelligence business is set for a golden age’.<sup>28</sup> Increased requirements for intelligence gathering after the Cold War were not anticipated, but in a globalised world there is evidence that ‘never before has intelligence been so extensive, institutionalised and prized’.<sup>29</sup> The recent Iraq conflict validated ‘netro-centric warfare’, linking ‘sensors with shooters’ to quickly process masses of information. The Iraq War also demonstrated the overwhelming military power of the US, as warfare is increasingly digitised in the information age, and Australia’s alliance relationship with the US is advantageous in maintaining a position of influence in the East Asian region.<sup>30</sup>

The US leads the way in a process of ‘transformation’ changing the nature of conflict. Many writers describe a transition from ‘industrial age armies with tanks and jets, to corporate style forces in urban settings, which rely on human and electronic intelligence’.<sup>31</sup> European forces have moved from larger conscript armies to smaller professional forces based on territorial defence and expeditionary forces, maintained at higher states of readiness. France and Britain are examples of leaner, technologically advanced, deployable forces capable of operating in multinational coalitions and undertaking diverse operations across the spectrum of conflict.<sup>32</sup> Aging populations, low fertility rates and high

costs of advanced procurements indicate significant ADF personnel growth is unlikely, unless there is mobilisation for a major crisis.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, the threat of terrorists, criminals, and increases in climatic catastrophes suggest that ‘mobile military forces with good interoperability with police, special forces, NGOs and emergence organisations are desirable in the future’.<sup>34</sup>

### **The Defence Capability Plan (DCP)**

Significant domestic debate in Australia over the capabilities required by the ADF reached a climax recently as Federal Cabinet reviewed the expensive DCP. Years of low defence spending meant the cost of replacing existing capabilities is enormous. The government’s tougher stance on national security, while also modernising the ADF, is arguably unaffordable. Emerging transnational threats are diverse, demanding an agile, versatile ADF that may differ from old models. The Federal Government had previously approved expensive new conventional ADF capabilities such as air warfare destroyers, joint strike fighters (JSF) and Airborne Early Warning and Control aircraft (AEWC). Despite significant costs, many of these decisions of recent years were taken with neither minimal fanfare nor any apparent changes from DOA strategies.

Minister Hill recently supported Army’s bid for a significant ‘shake-up’ to undertake coalition operations, including the controversial replacement of the 1970s Leopard tank fleet to ‘harden the Army’ for mid intensity conflict. The decision reflects a traditional security outlook, based on conventional warfighting structures. The tank replacement had been delayed for years as it did not fit the DOA construct. With projected equipment costs unsustainable under current DCP budgets, calls to reduce the JSF purchase or withdraw aging F-111 strike fighters from service intensified amidst speculation that Australia’s defence strategy is confused, and the DCP too ambitious. Yet the DCP review neither heralded an increase in national defence spending nor changed planned projects. Cost pressures were offset to later DCP projects, and savings are planned from the early decommissioning of F-111 strike aircraft and frigates, even though the spectrum of conflict has widened and new security challenges are accepted.

The DCP review did not adequately recognise that the ADF increasingly responds to illegal refugees and incursions on Australian fishing grounds, in conjunction with AFP and Customs authorities. A decline in the regional environmental situation is likely to demand increasing Australian maritime surveillance and protection of an enormous area, given the EEZs embracing Australia’s extensive coastline, offshore islands and Antarctica. Debate continues over the merits of a coastguard, but lobby groups fear that Australia is too small to support another law enforcement agency.<sup>35</sup> The Federal Opposition maintains that Australia’s 37,000 km coastline is inadequately patrolled and risks from

smugglers, illegal immigrants and illegal fishing are increasing. The ALP's policy includes proposals to purchase three new offshore patrol boats, coastguard volunteers and an improved border intelligence effort (with links to established intelligence agencies).<sup>36</sup> Costs are estimated at \$612 million over four years, with the issue dividing the usual bipartisan defence stance in Australian politics as the Federal Government intends to retain current RAN and Coastwatch structures (and budget levels) to monitor Australia's borders.<sup>37</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The changing security architecture, and emerging transnational threats like the environment, requires reviews of Australia's defence strategy. Collective security through the ARF is unlikely, with Australia maintaining defence self-reliance, notwithstanding the ANZUS alliance. Current defence policies reflect a DOA construct, amidst many offshore ADF peacekeeping operations. Future security scenarios for Australia will demand stronger protection of maritime boundaries and offshore natural resources, requiring increased surveillance and intelligence gathering. The ADF will also require conventional forces that can deploy quickly to assist in resolving regional tensions across the arc of instability, and are interoperable with regional neighbours and the US. Uncertainty inevitably means procuring expensive capabilities that endure for decades is always controversial, and the ADF must maintain a warfighting basis to provide timely response options across the widening spectrum of conflict. Such requirements, however, are potentially more costly for Australia, requiring increased defence spending, or capability cuts by Federal Cabinet to fund the expensive DCP, to thereby manage conventional security risks and emerging transnational threats.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> *Triple Figures Reached in Fight Against Illegal Fishing*, Media Release from the Federal Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation, Canberra, 8 October 2003. In 2002 a total of 111 vessels were apprehended in Australia's northern waters, with 104 seized during 2003 by 8 October.
- <sup>2</sup> P Gleick, 'Water and Conflict', *International Security*, Vol 18, No 1, Summer 1993, p. 83.
- <sup>3</sup> WMD is arguably non-existent in the ASEAN region, as there are no nuclear nations, and terrorist bombs are home-made devices rather than sophisticated nuclear, chemical or biological weapons.
- <sup>4</sup> The US currently spends 3.5% of GDP on defence, and now spends more annually on defence than all other nations combined.
- <sup>5</sup> P Dibb, *Defence Policy Down to Howard*, [www.theaustralian.news.com](http://www.theaustralian.news.com), 10 November 2003. Dibb claims that the DOA strategy remains extant, while ADF budget problems continue, partly offset by early decommissioning of F-111 strike aircraft and two FFG frigates.
- <sup>6</sup> Many analysts see Australia following the controversial path of New Zealand, with dramatic capability cuts, if spending on defence is not significantly increased.
- <sup>7</sup> *The Defence Matrix* [www.thebulletin.features/stories/](http://www.thebulletin.features/stories/), 29 May 2003, p. 1.
- <sup>8</sup> *Australia's National Security: A Defence Update*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, February 2003, p. 8.
- <sup>9</sup> *Defence Matrix*, op. cit., p. 4.
- <sup>10</sup> P Kelly, *Unresolved Dilemmas in the Age of Intervention*, [www.theaustralian.news.com.au](http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au), 7 August 2003.
- <sup>11</sup> P Leahy, 'A Land Force for the Future', *Australian Army Journal*, Vol 1, No 1, 2003, p. 21.
- <sup>12</sup> Defence Update, op. cit., p. 8.
- <sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p. 6.
- <sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 18.
- <sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, p. 19.
- <sup>16</sup> Leahy, op. cit., p. 23.
- <sup>17</sup> D Moore, 'Please, Let Us Reject This Dangerous Defence Strategy', *The Age*, 6 December 2002, p. 1.
- <sup>18</sup> Leahy, op. cit., p. 20.
- <sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p. 24.
- <sup>20</sup> M Horstman, 'Feeling the Heat', *ABC On-Line Health Matters Forum*, [www.abc.net.au/health](http://www.abc.net.au/health), 15 May 2003.
- <sup>21</sup> 'Pirates Identified as Indonesians', *The Straits Times*, [www.straitstimes.asia1.com](http://www.straitstimes.asia1.com), 19 August 2003.
- <sup>22</sup> A 1990s scheme for all ADF officers to become fluent in an Asian language was abandoned after three years.
- <sup>23</sup> Leahy, op. cit., p. 19.
- <sup>24</sup> B Nichiporuk, *The Security Dynamics of Demographic Factors*, Summary, Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, [www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1088](http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1088), p. 4.
- <sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 5.
- <sup>26</sup> Leahy, op. cit., p. 24.
- <sup>27</sup> R Kaplan, *The Coming of Anarchy*, Random House, New York, 2000, p. 107.
- <sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, 110.
- <sup>29</sup> M Herman, *Intelligence Services in the Information Age*, Cass, London, 2001, p. ix.
- <sup>30</sup> *Defence Matrix*, op. cit., p. 1.
- <sup>31</sup> Kaplan, op. cit., p. 107.
- <sup>32</sup> Nichiporuk, op. cit., p. 5.
- <sup>33</sup> *Intergenerational Report 2002-03*, 2002-03 Budget Paper No 5, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2003, Appendix A.
- <sup>34</sup> Kaplan, op. cit., p. 106.
- <sup>35</sup> 'Mixed Reception to Labour's Coastguard Policy', *AM*, [www.abc.net.au/am](http://www.abc.net.au/am), 27 November 2002.

<sup>36</sup> Australian Labour Party, *An Australian Coastguard*, Media Statement—27 November 2002, [www.alp.org.au/media](http://www.alp.org.au/media)

<sup>37</sup> Dick Adams, Federal Member for Lyons, Media Release, *Labor's Coastguard—Protecting Our Borders*, 27 November 2002, [www.dickadams.vision.net.au/coastguard](http://www.dickadams.vision.net.au/coastguard).



## CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

### **The future East Asian security situation**

Environmental security is already shaping the evolving East Asian security architecture. Scientific environmental research—now largely accepted—indicates humanity will over-extend the globe’s resources or cause irrevocable environmental damage if current practices continue. The region’s environmental ‘report card’ is increasingly poor, and can only be arrested through significantly improved multilateral cooperation over the next decade. While environmental security is recognised as a serious transnational issue that is a ‘world-wide problem on the rise’, East Asia has particular concerns as a developing region that is diverse and heavily populated. Environmental degradation is one of several emerging transnational issues challenging East Asia’s multilateral forums. The forum most likely to respond is the ARF. Although ASEAN and the ARF are maturing, the success of such forums to date has been mixed, particularly in North East Asia where an emerging China is crucial in maintaining stability with Taiwan, the Korean Peninsula, and in the South China Sea.

Accurate evidence of regional environmental damage and resource degradation is not easily available. Such data is also not always accepted, as it often overlaps national boundaries and interests. Scientific evaluation of environmental issues is also disputed, with constant disagreement in East Asia over the veracity of issues like water usage, deforestation, depleted fishing stocks and pollution.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, analysts increasingly accept resource availability is a security issue, much like any traditional threat. The collective potential for disputes and conflict—from environmental degradation and increased resource usage—has not been widely acknowledged to date by regional governments or the ARF, and unsustainable resource usage continues amidst renewed Asian economic growth.

Improved multilateral cooperation over shared resources challenges realist security notions that traditionally linked resources with national power and dominance. Traditionalists argue that non-military security issues (like the environment) have no place in the study of conflict.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, many argue over whether environmental security ‘fits in’ with traditional models of international relations study. Yet environmental awareness is increasing, and environmental security has emerged as a normative concept since the 1980s, even if environmental concerns are not sufficiently recognised within national security policies by modern governments.<sup>3</sup>

Realists argue that emerging transnational issues like the environment typify anarchical forces testing the power balance between nation states, whereas episodes of idealistic cooperation and liberalism are temporary aberrations for

mankind.<sup>4</sup> Important environmental security concepts emerging in the 1990s coincided with catastrophic events like the Indonesian forest fires, which are seen as ‘turning points’ demonstrating links between environmental degradation and conflict. Homer-Dixon separated environmental security from traditional forms of security, claiming environmental decline should be treated as a threat, which can be a cause of conflict or can escalate existing tensions.

Environmental problems in East Asia are significant; much is now documented indicating environmental damage and resource availability makes current human development unsustainable. A decline in water, air and arable land already causes regional tension, as evidenced after the Indonesian forest fires and smoke haze. The residents of Bangkok, Beijing, Tokyo and Jakarta wake daily to grey polluted skies; rarely does the sun shine through smog across most of East Asia. New problems include shared water on the Mekong, depleted fishing in the South China Sea, or regional deforestation. These issues are not adequately addressed by nations or the ARF, amidst claims that environmental decline is universally understated, being overwhelmed by domestic politics and international differences. Less important issues dominate public discussion, and the environment does not generate sufficient political force, remaining ‘on the periphery of international relations studies’.<sup>5</sup> Environmental problems will affect East Asian security in future decades as resources become more acute in a more populous developing region, consuming more per capita than ever before. Democracies too could be threatened, as governance becomes more difficult.

Intra-mural tensions caused by environmental issues—such as the Indonesian smoke haze—are changing both ASEAN and the ARF. Both forums need to move beyond non-interference principles to solve new transnational issues, and move towards flexible engagement, and ‘the building of a security community could see ASEAN reinvent itself’.<sup>6</sup> Longstanding regional principles of non-interference, and the ‘ASEAN way’, maintain the status quo of traditional multilateral relationships.<sup>7</sup> A robustness within the ARF defies critics who maintain there are no effective multilateral mechanisms capable of resolving future East Asian transnational security issues, such as environmental problems, but the ARF is also seen as a ‘talk shop’. By developing a ‘one South East Asia’ concept the ten nations of ASEAN too could use environmental issues to push cooperative ventures and move ‘decisively away from their identity as sovereign based actors’.<sup>8</sup> Conversely, factionalism over environmental issues, and uneven development and resource usage, could damage ASEAN and the ARF irrevocably. Recent US initiatives linking APEC’s trade agenda with regional security threatens the ARF. As the region’s lone security forum, the ARF must tackle emerging transnational threats, as a new common bond and a catalyst for reform.

### **Australia's future roles in the region**

The changing regional security architecture, and emerging transnational threats like the environment, requires ongoing reviews of Australia's defence strategy. Resource scarcity will require increased protection of Australia's maritime EEZ boundaries and offshore natural resources, through enhanced surveillance and intelligence gathering. The ADF will still require conventional forces that can deploy quickly to assist in resolving regional tensions and are more interoperable with regional neighbours. As a near ASEAN neighbour and ARF member, Australia has an interest in enhancing regional stability through a modern, well-equipped ADF adapting to a changing regional security architecture. Regional cooperation could include improved surveillance and intelligence sharing, such as achieved in bilateral policing operations after the Bali bombings.

Australia must support the enhanced central role of the ARF, as the main forum to facilitate regional discussion on security issues. The UN will also require improved Australian support. Despite significant damage to the UN during the Iraq conflict from international division, environmental issues still require international cooperation to arrest common problems that cross national boundaries. Australia has a significant 'good citizen' role to fulfil in this regard. Cooperation to arrest environmental decline, and sustain the future region's peoples at current living standards will be underpinned by Australian defence and foreign policies that encourage multilateral forums.

Amidst changing threats and the lack of collective regional security agreements, Australia seeks defence self-reliance, and continues to balance a DOA construct with support to offshore UN and coalition military operations. Debate over appropriate defence policies and funding continue to be 'played out' in the DCP review, with obsolescent kit being replaced and new capabilities mooted, including a coastguard. A modern, well-equipped ADF that can react to conventional threats, and new transnational issues, will aid stability in a diverse and ecologically challenged region. For Australia's future security the 'insurance policy' of maintaining the ADF as a conventional, well-equipped force may soon become more expensive than 1.9 per cent of GDP, but in an uncertain globalised world of diminishing useable resources and environmental degradation, a higher premium may be a good investment.

## NOTES

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<sup>2</sup> A Dupont, *East Asia Imperilled*, Cambridge Press, Melbourne, 2001, p. xi.

<sup>3</sup> L Elliott, 'Securitising the Environment: Unravelling Environmental Security in Asia Pacific', in B Vaughn, *The Unravelling of Island Asia*, Praeger, London, 2002, p. 191.

<sup>4</sup> R Kaplan, *The Coming of Anarchy*, Random House, New York, 2000, p. xii.

<sup>5</sup> S Smith, 'Environment on the Periphery of International Relations', *Environmental Politics*, Vol 2, No 4, 1993, p. 44.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> A Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia*, Routledge, London, 2001, p. 156.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 203.

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