The Asia-Pacific region and the new world order

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Introduction

The Asia-Pacific region is still in a process of transition to a new post-Cold War order. The main aim of this paper is to raise a number of questions about the implications of the disjuncture or dislocation between what constitutes Western visions of a "new world order" with those of the rest of the world and especially of states in the Asia-Pacific region.

On the one hand, Asia-Pacific states are in the process of reacting to Western visions of a new world order which is resulting in new regional tensions. On the other hand, Cold War security structures are still essentially intact and post-Cold War Asia-Pacific regional arrangements are internally conflictual and are relatively weak. However, with the current global security configuration consequent upon the new internationalist agenda and the spread of nuclear weapons, Western states need to sufficiently recognize Asia-Pacific regional interests and to more effectively accommodate these in new regional and global economic and security structures.

Visions of a new world order

From a Western perspective, there exist at least three interlocking visions of what constitutes the meaning and intent of a "new world order."

- First, for its originator, former US President George Bush, it embodied a vision of a world which enshrined the sanctity of sovereignty and the rule of law. From this perspective, Western interests were seen to be threatened by peripheral separatist groups, by states with scant regard for human rights and by "lawless" or "rogue states" – Iran, Iraq, Libya and North Korea. As has been pointed out, these "rogue states," although not constituting a cohesive category, were classified as such because of their alleged pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and missiles, their alleged support for terrorism, and the perceived threat that they pose to regional neighbours and to other states around the world (HOYT, 2000).

In addition, "failed states," such as Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, and Somalia, while being incapable of projecting power and asserting authority within their own territories, are also "troubling to world order" since they are or may become sources of instability, mass migration and terrorism (ROTBERG, 2002). In the 21st century, both "rogue states" and "failed states" have been portrayed by the West as being located outside of the "civilized" world in a way which echoes the Cold War good-versus-evil rhetoric of the conflict with the Soviet Union. This is also true of the US characterization of Iran, Iraq and North Korea as comprising an "axis of evil" based on a belief that these states are developing weapons of mass destruction. Such portrayals, which have become more focused as a result of the terrible events of "9-11" (CHOMSKY, 2001), help bolster the current US military doctrine of "pre-emption," which is essentially an offensive posture based on perceived threat.

- Second, it has also been argued that, for the first time in human history, the end of the Cold War signalled a new era in global politics which was both multicivilizational and multipolar and that conflicts in this new era would be essentially cul-

tural rather than ideological. The major cleavage in this new world order was seen to be between "the West and the rest" (HUNTINGTON, 1996), and some of the implications of this vision for the Asia-Pacific region are discussed later in this paper.

● Third, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War gave rise to a range of expectations about a "new world order" which also embodied the triumph of neoliberal capitalism in a new era of globalization. The only seeming arena of contestation in this vision centered on the ability of the various developed capitalist models – market-led (USA), state-led (Japan) or negotiated/consensual (Germany/Sweden) – to maximize state welfare (COATES, 1999). In any event, consequent upon the globalized economy, capitalist diversity was doomed (WEISS, 2000). Inevitably, it was felt that the demise of communism, homogenization and market interpenetration would assure stability and security.

The meaning and intent of the "new world order" were seen quite differently from a Third World perspective, however. From this viewpoint, it embodied four collectively distinctive characteristics:

– the United States as the only superpower,
– an increase in democratization,
– the growth of nationalism and,
– the onset of economic supranationalism.

In the Third World, these shifts have become associated with an increase in ethno-religious conflict, intra-state regionalism and multilateral intervention, all of which serve to threaten the viability of the nation-state, and, in some cases, resulting in "failed states" (MAINUDDIN, 1995).

These and other outcomes have caused an expected reaction embodied in the multifaceted "anti-globalization movement" designed to function as a counterbalance in the international system (GREEN and GRIFFITH, 2002). For some sections of civil society, resistance is seen to be necessary to the hegemony of the nation-state, to US unilateralism and to Western financial interests as well as to other negative outcomes of globalization, since they are regarded to be sources of instability rather than of order (RUMLEY, 1998). In such circumstances, for many states, both developed and developing, the term "new turbulence" might be viewed as being more relevant than that of a "new world order" (KOTHARI, 1997).

As has been argued, government dependence on global financial markets coupled with increasing economic interdependence have collectively produced the conditions for financial crisis (CASTELLS, 1997, p. 252). In the Asia-Pacific region, the extent of democratization, the nature of adjustment to globalization and economic liberalization and the changing nature of near-neighbor relations have collectively contributed to differential state visions of a "new world order" (BAYARKHUU, 1999). It has been suggested by some regional commentators, for example, that the 1997 currency crisis was as a result of the actions of Western financial speculators as part of a new kind of Western colonialism (RUMLEY, 1998). Elsewhere in the region, it is abundantly clear that globalization is not geographically all-encompassing, since some regional spaces – North Korea, parts of China, and most of Burma, for example – are excluded, and many groups of people – women and children, many indigenous groups, and the poor – are marginalized (OLDS et al., 1999). A range of other state-specific geopolitical outcomes has followed the end of the Cold War. For *India*, for example, the end of the Cold War is closely associated with its look east towards Southeast Asia. In turn, this new process has resulted in new geopolitical challenges which impinge on relations with other regional states (KANJILAL, 1998). All Asia-Pacific states are in the process of reconstructing their own vision of order and, in the process, are still involved in a reassessment of Cold War arrangements, regional relationships and grand strategies.

Geopolitical structure and change

One Western geopolitical portrayal of the structure of the Asia-Pacific region at the end of the Cold War was that it comprised three first order powers (China, Japan and Russia), a number of actual and emergent second order powers (including Australia, India and Indonesia) and several "gateway states" (including Western Australia), all of which were located within five geostrategic regions (COHEN, 1991):

- East Asia
- Heartland
- Offshore Asia and Oceania
- South Asia
- Southeast Asia.

Of course, such structures are never static, yet, in basic realist terms, while Russia is currently a declining great power and China and Japan are rising great powers, apart from the few second order states, the remainder of the Asia-Pacific comprises many "lesser states" (that is, Third World states) which are unlikely to be of strategic importance for the foreseeable future (CATLEY, 2001, p.151). New states, when they emerge (such as East Timor), are likely to be small and remain economically and politically weak. What may be important, however, from the viewpoint of regional and global stability is the extent to which those rising and existing/declining powers are able to reach some consensus on the nature of "international order" to maximize the prospects for a peaceful transition (FOONG KHONG, 2001).

In the decade both before and after the end of the Cold War period, a plethora of literature served to portray the Asia-Pacific as the coming global economic heartland based around its economic growth and potential economic power (for example, ABEGGLEN, 1994; THOMPSON, 1998). To some, the 21st century as the "Pacific Century" was taken for granted (for example, COTTON, 1988; BORTHWICK, 1992). However, even before the Japanese economic downturn and the onset of the Asian economic crisis, some commentators were raising questions about the efficacy of this particular regional characterization. One writer concluded that a Pacific Century cannot simply be Asian; that it needs to be based on more than just economic growth; that it will not occur without the close involvement of the United States, and that there continue to exist a number of difficult intra-regional problems which have yet to be resolved. In short, the original concept of a Pacific Century is as much a myth as it is a reality (ABRAMOWITZ, 1993; FOOT and WALTER, 1999). Others thus prefer to talk of a "global century" rather than a "Pacific Century" (LINGLE, 1996).

From a cultural perspective and following Huntington, the Asia-Pacific region is replete with Asian "civilizational core states," including China and Japan, as well as a number of representatives from Western civilization, including Australia and New Zealand (HUNTINGTON, 1996, p. 135). In short, the Asia-Pacific is a vast multicivilizational region, and thus, according to the Huntington hypothesis, the potential for ongoing conflict and a lack of community of interest is quite considerable (fig. 1).

The Asia-Pacific is also said to contain at least one "cleft country" (Malaysia) – that is, a state in which "large groups belong to different civilizations"; and, at least one "torn country" (Australia) – that is, a state which "has a predominant culture which places it in one civilization but its leaders want to shift it to another civilization" (HUNTINGTON, 1996, pp. 137-139). Following Huntington, all attempts at cultural-geographical relocation have failed, and, from this cultural deterministic ahistorical perspective, inter-civilizational bilateral relations and regionalism in the Asia-Pacific as a whole are destined to fail. In short, according to this representation, it seems that Asian and Western values cannot be reconciled and thus intra-Asia-Pacific relations will inevitably be conflictual. Furthermore, Asia-Pacific

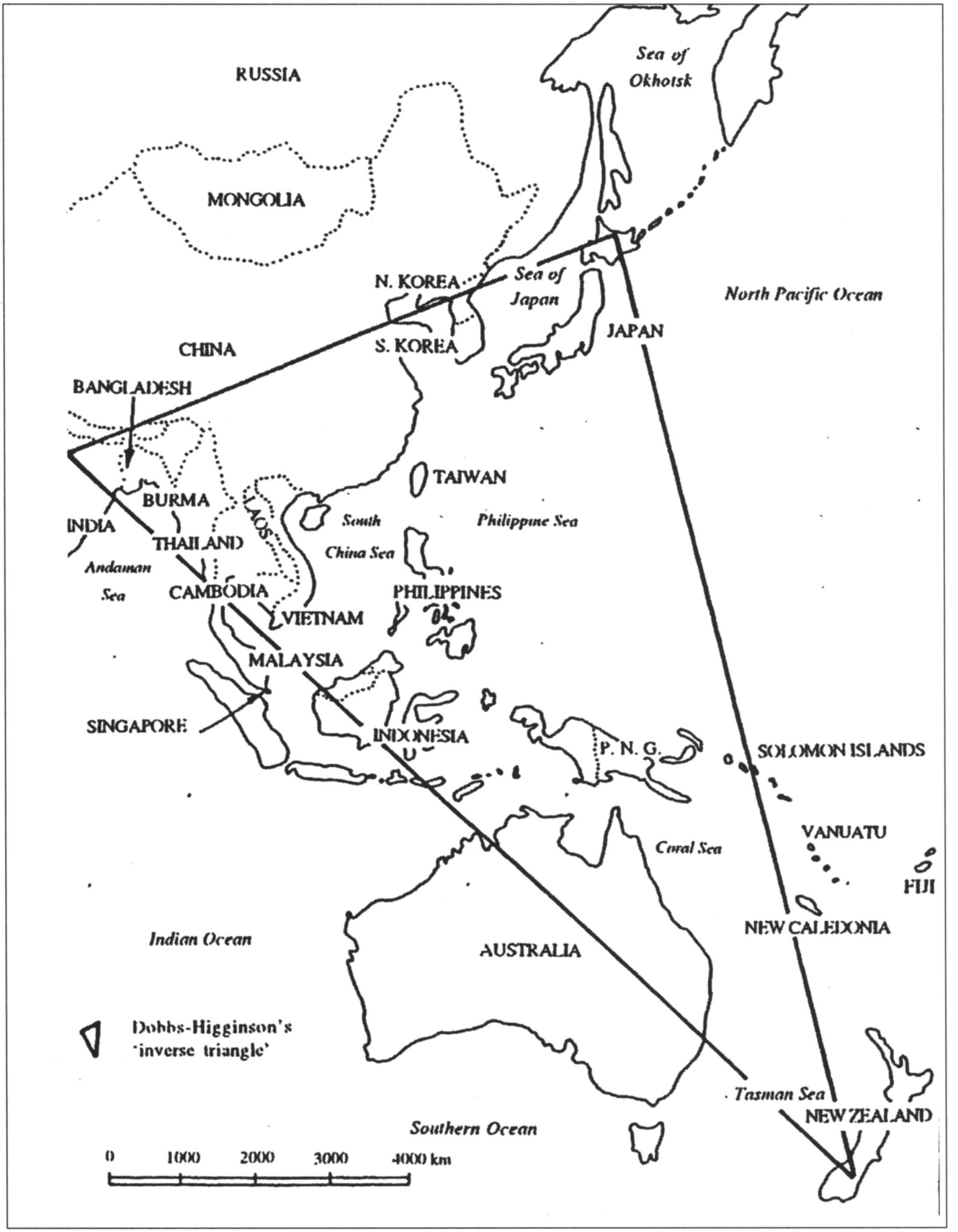

Fig. 1: The Asia-Pacific Region and Dobbs-Higginson's "inverse triangle." (*Source:* Rumley et al., 1996).

civilizations will be in conflict with others around the world, and especially with the West.

If the Huntington hypothesis is to be taken seriously, therefore, it raises a host of fundamental issues associated with global and regional stability and security and mechanisms for the management of conflict. In this regard, identifying the precise source of global and regional instability and conflict becomes a critical test of the hypothesis. However, one commentator, among the many who have criticized the Huntington hypothesis, has suggested that the main source of global conflict is more likely to be a "clash of fundamentalisms," especially between Islamic fundamentalism and "the mother of all fundamentalisms: American imperialism" (ALI, 2002, p. 281).

Asia-Pacific security threats and conflict management

Following from what has been discussed above, traditional security threats from Asia-Pacific states to Western interests have been seen to include one "rogue state," North Korea, plus the non-Western civilizational states of China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Russia and the Buddhist Asia-Pacific states. In short, the vast majority of the population of Asia-Pacific states is seen by Huntington as a security threat to Western interests. Although from a practical policy perspective this notion is absurd, it nonetheless lends weight to a continued US regional military presence. It is argued that this continued regional presence, especially in Japan and South Korea, is necessary both to safeguard US interests and to save the region from itself, given its inherently conflictual structure and its apparent unwillingness or inability to resolve intra-regional conflicts.

There are at least three sides to this issue.

- The first is that the US military presence is necessary for the good of the region in order to function as a kind of regional stabilizer.
- Second, a US presence is essential for the development of what has been referred to as a "New Pacific Order," designed primarily as an organizing tool for the enhancement of US economic interests in the region by facilitating access to Asia-Pacific economies within a stable security context (DE CASTRO, 1994).
- A third is that the US military presence is unnecessary, since, not only has there been a fundamental change in the security environment, but that, in addition, its existence constitutes a regional security threat.

From this viewpoint, since the combination of power contestation and economic dynamism is particularly evident in Northeast Asia (INOGUCHI and STILLMAN, 1997), and since that region consumes more than 75 percent of the Asia-Pacific regional defence budget (RUMLEY, 2001, p. 35), then the existence of a significant US military presence fuels a "quasi-shatterbelt" context. Those who support this view would more likely advocate a "voice of Asia" security model in which Japan can begin to disengage from the West and where Asia-Pacific security is guaranteed by increased intra-regional cooperation and through regionally-based security mechanisms (MAHATIR and ISHIHARA, 1995).

Intra-regional Asia-Pacific tensions and conflicts cannot be denied, and perceived traditional security threats to Western interests are well-known and have often been rehearsed (for example, CAMILLERI, 2000). China figures prominently in many Western analyses of such threats (for example, DIBB, 1996), and, to some commentators, the Sino-US relationship is seen to be the most problematical of all of the great power relations in the Asia-Pacific region (KLINTWORTH, 2001). During its construction of the new world order, US policy towards China has shifted from Cold War "containment" to post-Cold War "engagement" but has wavered towards "constrainment" (that is, to engage China in such a way that any "unwanted behavior" is constrained – SEGAL, 1999, p. 35) and, in the "war against terrorism" has even resumed some of the characteristics of a "de facto containment" (KELLY, 2002). From a Chinese perspective, considerable importance is attached to maintaining constructive relations with major powers (YANG, 2001). Furthermore, as has also been argued, stability in the Asia-Pacific region is as much in China's interests as it is in neighboring states and thus China is unlikely to pose a regional threat in the short-to-medium term (KLINTWORTH, 1998). Partnership, rather than rivalry with Japan, for example, is thus a more likely future scenario for China, despite the existence of deep-seated mutual suspicions (LI, 1999).

Apart from the end of the Cold War, one of the most important global geostrategic shifts of the latter part of the 20th century was the beginning of the "second nuclear age," which arguably began in 1974 (BRACKEN, 2000, p. 109). The Asia-Pacific region not only has two of the "official nuclear powers" – China and Russia – but it now also has two of the "declared" nuclear powers – India and Pakistan. This shift has fundamental implications for the balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region and raises important questions about the precise role and location of US armed forces in the region. It also raises some difficult questions about the potential implication of other regional states, such as Australia, in the operationalization of any US National Missile Defence (NMD) system.

In the Asia-Pacific region, the management of these and other actual and potential regional conflicts effectively remains in the hands of a series of Western military alliances, especially the US-Japan security alliance, ANZUS and the Five Powers Defence Agreement (FPDA), all of which are guaranteed by extra-regional powers. Indeed, as one commentator has put it, the basic structure of the Cold War still remains in the Asia-Pacific region since the general relaxation of tensions evident from the late 1980s more closely resembles that of the 1970s European détente – that is, a recognition of a Cold War status quo – rather than the actual end of the Cold War (HARA, 1999).

The only region-wide security forum, the fledgling ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), although not confined solely to Asia-Pacific states, has led to an increasing commitment to confidence-building measures (CATLEY, 2001, p. 150). While conceived as a mechanism for maintaining continued US regional security involvement, it is also seen by China as an instrument to facilitate Asia-Pacific multipolarity and thus as a counter to US hegemony (EMMERS, 2001). However, as has been pointed out, there is a need for the ARF to move from being just a consultative forum to begin to address difficult regional issues if it is to remain relevant (GAROFANO, 1999; NAIDU, 2000).

Globalization and regionalism

Economic regionalism is a very conspicuous component of the new world order, and opportunities afforded by the end of the Cold War have resulted in a significant increase in intra-regional institutionalization in the Asia-Pacific (WANANDI, 2000). Regionalism can perform a range of potential functions for states, not the least of which is that it can be used as a form of resistance to globalization. Regionalism, of course, is contested both in theory and in practice, and, since it is constructed and not "natural," then competing views are likely to exist in terms of its membership and functions (RUMLEY, 2000).

The current Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) organization of 21 states was inaugurated in Australia in 1989 and comprised an initial group of 12 members. This initiative occurred more than 20 years after Japanese Prime Minister Takeo Miki launched the "Asia-Pacific policy" (TERADA, 1998). The original conception of APEC was that it was to be a West Pacific grouping, but pressure from the United States ensured

North American membership and subsequent great power additions and, by 1997, it had been transformed into a Pacific Rim grouping and thus had become effectively "deregionalized." As a result, among other things, APEC thereafter provided a forum at which competing visions of the new world order in the wider *Pacific* region could be disseminated (BERGER, 1998).

To some extent, APEC's deregionalization has facilitated a general level of contestation regarding its goals, with member states being essentially split into at least two groups – those with a "neo-liberal" orientation to APEC goals and those possessing an "Asian" orientation (GALLANT and STUBBS, 1997). This situation has caused some commentators to refer to this regional arrangement as "APEC adrift" (RAVENHILL, 2001, pp. 186-222). Others who are more critical imply that one of the causes of the drift is due to the use of regional institutions such as APEC by the United States to pursue its neoliberal Pacific Rim economic agenda in the form of an "exploitative hegemony" (JOHNSON, 2000). This, in turn, has become associated with the revival of an Asian regionalism concept.

Given the character of globalization, it is unsurprising that first order states would generally prefer bilateralism over regionalism. In the past, the United States, in particular, has tended to stress economic and security bilateralism at the expense of economic and security regionalism. This is also due in part to the geopolitics of land-based USA regionalism compared with Europe or the "near neighbor" regionalism in the case of Japan. However, the geopolitics of 20th century global bilateralism may well be in the process of giving way to 21st century US unilateralism. For "APEC-pessimists" (for example, DOBBS-HIGGINSON, 1993, p. 389; BERGER, 1999; JOHNSON 2000, p. 209), the combination of all of the above factors could engender the emergence of a tripartite global geopolitical/geoeconomic order in the 21st century (TAYLOR, 1993, p. 55; BERGSTEN, 2000).

For the Asia-Pacific, such a regional grouping is most likely to be made up of ASEAN + 3 (China, Japan and South Korea). It is arguable as to whether some states, such as Australia, for example, could be seen to be "natural" members of any of the three global pan-regions (O'LOUGHLIN and VAN DER WUSTEN, 1990; RAVENHILL, 1998, p. 147). In short, it is possible that the new Asia-Pacific economic regionalism of the 21st century could exclude all Western states which would then have to rely on bilateral economic arrangements with the three groups.

Conclusion: Towards a new Asia-Pacific order

The Asia-Pacific region is still in the process of transition to a new post-Cold War order. For the future, there are likely to be at least four critical issues which have the potential to enable the region to become more stable and much more internally cohesive.

- First, it has been suggested that the growth of new technologically armed states and their peaceful assimilation into the global community is a central challenge of the 21st century. While the "old order" is still run by a "Western club," its rules will have to change to better reflect the interests of a large part of the world located primarily in the Asia-Pacific region (BRACKEN, 2000, pp. 168-170). As a result, Asia-Pacific regional great powers will have to be entrusted with guaranteeing their own regional security. Clearly, the transition from Western domination to Asia-Pacific security regionalism will require very careful planning and analysis on behalf of all regional and extra-regional participants.
- Second, for the past 30 years, partly as a result of globalization, and more especially as a consequence of the end of the Cold War period, there has been an increasing concern with "non-traditional" sources of security associated with the debate over the relevance of the realist model of security. As a result, there has emerged a new internationalization agenda central to which are many non-military issues. These would include, for example, economic security, human development, aids, drug trafficking, water security, energy security, food security, environmental security, human rights, illegal immigration, transnational crime and refugees, in addition to concerns over terrorism, weapons of mass destruction and the second nuclear age (DUPONT, 2001). The determination by regional states to effectively deal with these "non-traditional" sources of security is likely to enhance the nature and strength of inter-state relations and thus help overcome traditional regional sources of insecurity.
- Third, the nature and structure of Asia-Pacific economic regionalism needs to be dominated by regional states incorporating regional values and recognizing the equality of states. This means confining its membership to the Western Pacific, not only to ensure that each of these states obtains a regional voice, but that the region then also becomes an effective counterweight to the economic power of the EU and NAFTA. This would take APEC back towards its original regional conception.
- Fourth, it has also been argued that civil society will likely be a primary location for political struggle and political change during the 21st century (for example, SCHECTER, 2000). Such struggles will be an outcome of the refusal by social movements to accept the taken-for-granted communication boundaries of established systems of domination such as states and because such groups will also offer resistance in opposition to neoliberal globalization (ROUTLEDGE, 2000). On the other hand, while another common assumption of the emergence of a global civil society is that new political organizations structurally converge around a common global agenda, in reality it seems that the convergence of world views is highly fragmentary (HEINS, 2000). However, as has been recently argued, *regional* opportunities currently exist within the Asia-Pacific for "second track" actors to make an important contribution to regional security (BALL, 2001). Other areas of concern, such as environmental security and many other non-traditional security threats such as those noted above, might well form the basis of an increasingly strong civil relationship among Asia-Pacific people in the future.

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