

Prague, August 13, 2008

Why Convene An Asia-Pacific Security Conference in Prague?

The convergence of the dramatic increases in global energy and food prices, the deepening international credit crunch and the Russian military invasion of Georgia serve as the backdrop for the Prague Security Studies Institute's (PSSI) annual conference entitled "Asia-Pacific Security Challenges: Implications for Europe and the Atlantic Alliance". As the title of the conference indicates, it is our objective to address current and emerging Asia security challenges from a NATO and EU perspective. PSSI is persuaded that a thorough debate on these issues should occur before the Czech Republic assumes the EU Presidency in January 2009.

China's delicate balancing act between permitting more openness (spurred, in part, by responses to the Sichuan earthquake) and firm Communist Party control (on display at the 2008 Olympics) is becoming increasingly complicated. The large losses being incurred by average Chinese investors in the country's underdeveloped capital markets, and popular demands for swift remedial action, are likewise testing Beijing's ability to maintain historically high economic growth rates.

The rise of India and Russia as regional powers and the growing security risks represented by politically frail Pakistan and Afghanistan add another layer of complexity to the Asian equation. By nearly any measure, North Korea, South Korea and Taiwan are presently "in play" politically as well as from a security perspective. Additional concerns include the implications of a nuclearized North Korea, expanded Sino-Russian military cooperation, the soaring energy appetites of China and India, economic and environmental reverses and the growing volatility of the popular mood. These are among the challenges facing most Asian governments as they seek to navigate these largely uncharted waters. In this new global alignment, Europe, the US and Asia could make common cause in key areas and possibly expand future policy options through intensified communication.

This sampling of issues also now occupies considerable executive time in the Foreign, Economic, Finance and Defense Ministries of Western capitals and are among the many reasons why a session in Prague "to compare notes" between Europe, the US and Asia is definitely in order. One of the main purposes of this year's conference is to help stimulate more such exchanges, identify opportunities to strengthen existing geopolitical and security-oriented cooperation and develop a "watch list" of those issues that could begin to reel out of control due to this new international dynamic.

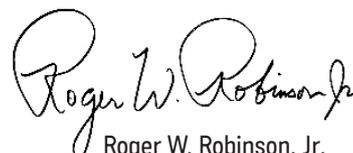
For too long, Europe has tended to view Asia through a predominantly economic and commercial lens. The security portfolio for East Asia has been largely bequeathed to the United States, Japan and other regional allies. Asian multilateral institutions and other deliberative bodies only periodically take into account European economic and political preferences and priorities, with certain notable exceptions such as the human rights abuses and political repression in Tibet, Burma and Sudan, as well as environmental and energy-related concerns.

It is with these types of challenges in mind that PSSI has invited distinguished statesmen, as well as experts in these fields from Asia, Europe and the US to share their findings and recommendations with other conference participants. The topics treated will include: the nexus between key regional economic and security issues; the security outlook for the region; the rise of South Asia as a pivotal global theater; the ballistic missile threat facing East Asia and the search for an optimal missile defense architecture; the evolving North Korean nuclear crisis; the escalating energy demands of China and India and the implications for global energy security and a report card on regional democracy and respect for human rights.

As in the past, it is our hope that these proceedings will help illuminate and enrich the debate over these and other security concerns and ultimately produce concrete, creative policy options for consideration by regional, as well as Atlantic Alliance, leaders.



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