

## TRACK-II OR SECOND TRACK CHANNELS

Second track channels are meetings and dialogues sponsored by non-governmental organizations (usually think-tanks) that bear explicitly and directly on policy-relevant issues. The second track process has two main characteristics. First, the think-tanks involved are, in most cases, closely linked to their respective national governments, and rely on government funding for their academic and policy-relevant activities. Second, all these meetings allow, indeed encourage, participation by government officials along-side academics and other non-official actors, although officials usually participate in their private capacity. Although these officials seldom venture beyond the position of their respective governments, the principle of "private capacity" enables governments to test new ideas without making binding commitments and, if necessary, to backtrack on positions.

In recent years, there has been a substantial increase in the involvement of non-governmental organizations in the regional security debate in the Asia Pacific region. In Southeast Asia, the ASEAN Institutes for Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS) played a pioneering role in promoting CBMs. While the ASEAN-ISIS played a key role in pushing ASEAN in the direction of a formal process of security dialogue,<sup>13</sup> the Council on Security Cooperation in Asia Pacific (CSCAP) has begun providing similar inputs into the ARF.<sup>14</sup>

Illustrative of the role of second track actors in the regional security debate is a 1993 report by ASEAN-ISIS which called for measures ranging from national defence white papers, a Southeast Asian arms register, greater regional cooperation in arms purchases, exchange of intelligence information, mutual invitation to observe force manoeuvres, notification of forthcoming military exercises, exchange of information and comparison of estimates of military strengths, establishment of a procedure for crisis management based on the provisions of ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation and the launching of a "Security of Southeast Asia Symposium Programme" for facilitating contacts among senior and middle level officers in the region.<sup>15</sup> Soon after its inception, the CSCAP established a Working Group on CBMs. After holding its meetings in October 1994 and May 1995, the working group recommended that ARF members should promote greater transparency in military doctrine, capabilities and intentions through military-to-military contacts, exchange programmes, intelligence exchange, prior notification of exercises, inviting military observers to exercises and greater openness regarding defence planning, procurement and defence budgets, including through the publication of defence white papers or policy papers. It also advocated the creation of a Asia Pacific arms register.

Track-II channels have already made a major contribution to the advancement of CBMs in the Asia Pacific region. They have proven to be more pro-active, more open to new ideas and suggestions than strictly inter-governmental channels. They have served as a testing ground for ideas which are too sensitive to be placed on the inter-governmental agenda. More important, they have shown a remarkable ability to refine and tailor concepts and ideas to suit the local security environment. In this sense, apart from generating new