



# The Disarmament Bulletin

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## Asia Pacific Security: The Dawn of Multilateralism?



P/MO photo

Prime Minister Jean Chrétien with US President Bill Clinton and Chinese President Jiang Zemin at the APEC Summit in Seattle last November. The Summit — the first APEC gathering at the head of state or government level — is one of a series of developments exemplifying the growth of multilateralism in Asia Pacific.

The "news" portions of North American news reports tend to turn to Europe — mainly Bosnia — and the "trade and business" portions to Asia Pacific. This is rather misleading. While Asia Pacific's importance to the global — and Canadian — economy has grown by leaps and bounds since the early 1980s, there is more to the region than dollars. Asia Pacific is filled with long-standing animosities, competing territorial claims, ethnic tensions and resource rivalries. While some conflicts have wound down, as in Cambodia, others still pose a high risk to peace, as in Korea and India-Pakistan. Partly as a consequence, the region has failed to parallel the global downward trend in military spending and arms acquisition, and is the focus of most current worries about

nuclear weapon and ballistic missile proliferation. The Cold War in Asia Pacific was conducted through a set of bilateral relationships. The resulting absence of European-style alliances has left the region with few building blocks to reorient itself in the post-Cold War environment. Only recently have Asia Pacific countries come to recognize the merits of discussing security concerns multilaterally and of working together to prevent and resolve conflicts. Canada played a key role in changing regional perceptions with its launch in 1990 of the North Pacific Cooperative Security Dialogue (NPCSD). Through the NPCSD, academics and officials from North Pacific countries (Canada, the US, Russia, China, Japan and the two Koreas) met during the course of six workshops and conferences to discuss various aspects of cooperative security in the region. Having achieved its objective of fostering dialogue, the NPCSD process was formally concluded last year.

Multilateralism in Asia Pacific is poised to enter a new phase with the remarkable decision, reached by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations last summer, to create a forum for region-wide discussion of security issues. This issue of the *Bulletin* looks at where the ASEAN Re-

### Regional states increasingly see the merits of working together to prevent and resolve conflict.

gional Forum might lead and explores how Canada, with important political, economic, social and environmental interests in Asia Pacific, is continuing to promote security in the region. ■

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