

Of the other states in the region, Japan and the two Koreas were of greatest significance. In the case of Japan, much depended upon what happened with Japanese-American security relations. If those relations soured and Japan began to feel increasingly isolated, it might very well develop a significantly expanded military capability despite current domestic ambivalence. Developments in North Korea and in China could also precipitate a significant adjustment in Japanese policy. Russia was not seen to be a major consideration within the region due to its vast internal problems. Overall, it could be expected that most defence budgets in the region would grow, including large amounts for capital improvements. Nevertheless, because so many deployed systems were nearing the ends of their service lives, there would likely be limits on the wide-scale acquisition of increasingly sophisticated systems. This would restrict the number of new systems deployed in the region.

In the related discussion, participants focused on the unique characteristics of security relations in the North-East Asian security environment. These conditions were very different compared with CSCE Europe and this made European-style analysis and solutions potentially suspect. The reasons for many states arming in the region were either idiosyncratic or tied to a complex multiple set of potential bilateral threats that bore no resemblance to the traditional bipolar relationship that had structured relations in the West for so long. These complexities made at least some participants wonder just how confidence building, for instance, could work in the region. To the extent that arms control efforts could help, there was some sentiment for the UN Arms Registry approach. However, this and other transparency-related approaches were seen to be rather blunt instruments, ones that would disadvantage the weak. The existing register was also thought to be poorly suited to maritime forces although that could be changed.

The fact that most states in the region had a maritime focus made the development of security management solutions more difficult. Many states felt that they had legitimate concerns, especially with respect to major regional sea lanes of communication, that required action now. Maritime forces have been the object of relatively little analytic and policy attention as far as arms control and related approaches are concerned. This made it more difficult to develop or apply region-specific solutions.

Most participants agreed that there was relatively little prospect of conflict in the near-term within the region and that the bigger concern was the mid-term. The obvious exception to this assessment was the ever-present danger of conflict on the Korean peninsula and, to a lesser extent, in the area of the Spratly Islands. A major confounding consideration noted by several participants was the fact that most regional states could easily see each of its neighbours as a potential adversary, creating a very complex set of multiple dyadic security relations. The future configuration of North-East Asian power relations was difficult to predict and this could only encourage states in the region to engage in worst-case thinking when considering acquisition options.