

The Contribution of Track Two Dialogue towards Crisis Prevention¹

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The emergence of many think tanks and security-related track two processes in the Asia-Pacific during the last two decades has given rise to speculation about their contribution to the peaceful resolution of disputes and the search for strategies to address the manifold nontraditional security threats caused by globalization and growing interdependencies. After placing track two dialogues in a basically institutionalist theoretical framework, the article briefly sketches the genesis and development of track two processes since the early 1980s. It then goes on to argue that security-related track two processes represent an innovative response to the region's security problems and helped to shape an Asian security identity. However, track two dialogues are far from being a panacea. They are plagued by a number of flaws such as their great proximity to government, lack of independence, a traditional, state-centric approach to international relations which is strongly informed by the realist paradigm and a certain degree of exclusiveness.

1 Introduction

Globalization, economic liberalization, and the concomitant growing interdependence have given rise to the emergence of new actors in international relations. International organizations and regimes as well as transnational actors such as multinational corporations and internationally organized NGOs are not only numerically proliferating as empirical evidence suggests (Kaiser 1969; Shanks et al. 1996), but also factually playing an increasingly prominent role in international politics. So visible have they become that liberal institutionalists see them seriously challenging the nation state as the main actor in international relations (Keohane/Nye 1989; Czempiel 1999). Accordingly, these new actors have ceased to be considered merely as dependent variables of international relations. There is growing recognition that they are well able to influence international relations as an independent variable.

Think tanks are part of this new set of transnational actors. While they have been a well known phenomenon in the United States already for a long time, they began to mushroom in Asia in the 1980s. Their rise went hand in hand with East and South-east Asia's period of unprecedented rapid economic growth prior to the Asian Crisis. In many instances, the emergence of Asian think tanks was a product of moderniza-

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