

# Understanding Drivers of Regional Security Ensures Safer Humanitarian Response Operations

*By Prof. Jessica Ear with contributions from Dr. Alex Vuving*

*Professor Jessica Ear presented a talk on drivers of regional security at the second session of the Humanitarian Civil-Military Regional Consultative Group meeting in Bangkok, Thailand on 11-12 October, 2016. A summary of her presentation follows.*

It is often cited that Asia-Pacific is the most disaster prone region in the world. Asia makes up 1/6 of the global land mass, yet the region typically experiences close to half of the world's disasters each year.<sup>1</sup> With this frequency of natural disasters, it is not surprising that the Asia-Pacific region is actively working to create more integrated and more efficient disaster response systems for civilian and military actors.

Disaster relief operations are often composed of civilian and military humanitarian personnel, working to assist their own national response or supporting other affected states. When undertaking disaster missions, civilian humanitarian responders undertake security and safety risks in the aftermath of disasters and long-existing in the affected country. A country's traditional and non-traditional threats have potential to disrupt efforts to effectively respond by placing responders in positions of danger.

To gain a better understanding of security drivers in the region, an examination of a state security interests is needed. National security interest of states can be better understood through the state's pursuit of nation building, territorial integrity and economic development. Nation states do not exist naturally; states must be created and maintained continually. First and foremost, states are motivated by the business of "state-making" or nation building. Most of what the state does is to build and cultivate political effectiveness through its institutions, to include the armed forces, and ideology of the state.

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<sup>1</sup> 44% in 2015, Center for the Research and Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED), <http://www.cred.be/>

# NATIONAL SECURITY INTERESTS



Understanding National Security Interests: Model Conceptualized by Dr. Alex Vuving<sup>2</sup>

Due to the territorial nature of the state, one of the core interests of the state is territorial integrity or the need to maintain security of its borders and claims to the benefits of its lands and seas. Furthermore, states cannot be viable without material resources. Material resources are a necessary condition for the undertaking of states activities and provisions of state personnel. Therefore, economic wealth and development are among the core national security interests of the state.

The security of States' territory and economic wealth are necessary to keep states in existence but it is insufficient to keep a state together. National cohesion through national identity and ideology, through its outward looking face --honor, provides the bond that holds a group together. Moreover, loyalty and allegiance to a group is made possible by a sense of identity and honor. Hence, national identity and honor, as depicted through international standing, are therefore among states' national security interest.

Why should these drivers of national security interests be important for disaster responders to understand? Operations or actions that may conflict with or undermine a

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<sup>2</sup> "Will Chinese Primacy Be Harmonious?" Dr. Alex Vuving, draft 2, 26 October 2012

state's national security interest can, not only jeopardize disaster response missions, but it can also create frictions and tensions to complicate and challenge the effectiveness and efficiencies of the collective response efforts. Currently in the Asia-Pacific region, national insecurities, arising from political transitions and compromises in territorial sovereignty can create a hyper-sensitive and sometimes precarious operating environment for responders.

The Asia-Pacific region is also heavily militarized, where state rivalries and historical triggers have contributed to potential flash points or areas where conflict can quickly escalate. Flash points, such as the threat of aggression from hostile states, territorial disputes in the East China Sea and South China Sea, long-standing tensions in the Taiwan Strait and contested areas along the India-China border and the region of Kashmir all have the potential to create complex crises and difficult environments for humanitarian response.

Furthermore in this region, rising nationalism in countries such as China and religious radical movements in southern Thailand, parts of Indonesia, Myanmar and southern Philippines create issues of personal safety for local populations and responders. Being aware of these traditional drivers of national security or insecurities can help mitigate conditions of personal threats and operational risks for responders.

Beyond traditional security threats, non-traditional security trends, such as the unequal economic development, industrialization and urbanization, further contribute to insecurities in the region. Growth of mega cities coupled by rapid and unplanned urbanization creates slums and unsafe living conditions. Currently 54% of the global population dwell in urban settings, by 2050 urban dwellers are expected to rise to 66%.<sup>3</sup> With bulges in mega cities, there is the likelihood of unequal economic development, which can create poverty gaps. As we've seen in history, the growing divide between the rich and poor can trigger social unrest and conflicts that has the potential to destabilize governments.

Furthermore, mega cities, especially those along the coast are vulnerable to climate related hazards to include rising sea-levels. Scientific forecasting indicates that the Asia-Pacific region will be impacted by the potential effects of climate destabilization. Global temperature rise and subsequent climate and environmental changes will strain food, water, and energy resources in this region. Scarcity of these resources presents the need for greater management and international cooperation to mitigate dangers of regional competition and conflict.

Lastly, trends demonstrate that combating transnational crimes such as trafficking of drugs, arms and people lessen exploitation and increase regional safety and security.

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<sup>3</sup> European Environmental Agency, <http://www.eea.europa.eu/>

With about 56% of trafficking in people occurring in the Asia-Pacific,<sup>4</sup> the region is very much a part of the transnational network and movements of illicit goods and people. As sources, transit and destination countries make progress to combat and reduce transnational crimes the region will experience less exploitation of its people and greater social and physical security.

As civilian humanitarian responders of disasters in the Asia-Pacific region, being informed of these drivers of traditional and non-traditional security improves relief operations' plans and preparations to ensure a safer response environment and enhance our ability to help and assist affected populations.

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<sup>4</sup> *Profits and Poverty: The Economics of Forced Labour* (Geneva, International Labour Office (ILO), 2014)