As usual at the end of spring, diplomats, politicians, scholars and journalists gathered in the ballroom of Hilton Kuala Lumpur Hotel to discuss the most vital problems affecting countries situated around the Pacific Ocean. They were attending the 29th Asia Pacific Roundtable, a conference convened by the Malaysian Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) from 1st-3rd June 2015.

During the opening ceremony, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dato’ Sri Mohamad Najib Tun Abdul Razak, identified several themes which attracted the attention of participants and invited guests during the next two days. All these themes were focused around two main questions: development and security. The Prime Minister maintained that the future of the whole Pacific region depends on the continuation of the mutually advantageous co-operation between its nations. He stated that all regional and supra regional problems should be solved in a spirit of mutual respect and respect for international law. At the same time, the distinguished speaker stressed the necessity of observing of human rights as one of pillars of development. He said that although Asian countries had enjoyed enormous economic growth in the recent decade, it would be necessary to sustain this growth to enable further progress. The Prime Minister drew the listeners’ attention to problems which he saw as the main challenges in the years ahead: providing the young generation with opportunities for self-development and a dignified life, the successful implementation of innovations, and securing prosperity for particular people and whole nations. He also mentioned the need for women to be empowered as a component of the observance of human rights, and a better use of human resources.

A further part of the Malaysian leader’s keynote speech was dedicated to discussion of the widely understood problems of security. He reminded his audience that rejection of violence and extremism, in the same way as the previous rejection...
of terrorism, has become part of the Asian-Pacific heritage. He also underlined the fact that the greatest success of the whole region is the successful combination of development and prosperity. Currently, as the Prime Minister stressed, the greatest challenges were the dangers linked to the so-called non-traditional aspects of security. Therefore, he argued that efforts should be concentrated on the preservation of the natural environment, the reasonable use of natural resources (water, air and raw materials) and the general potential of individual countries as well as the prevention, as far as possible, of the consequences of natural disasters.

And, both the traditional and non-traditional aspects of Asia and the Asia-Pacific Rim security became the questions discussed most often by participants of the Kuala Lumpur conference. Panellists presenting their views during the opening plenary session, entitled *The Search for Security in the Asia-Pacific: Implications for Future Stability*, concentrated attention on the problem of the future balance of power between the main countries of the region and the part played by smaller actors, for example, members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), in any possible future geo-political and geo-strategic configurations. The first panelist, Prof. Kishore Mahbubani, Dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy of the National University of Singapore, maintained that all developments in relations between China and the United States are vitally important for ASEAN. But, he also stressed the importance of two other actors playing important roles in Asia: Russia and India. In this context, he queried the possibility of stating that the world, as perceived from the Asian-Pacific perspective, could be defined as quadripolar. He continued by saying that multipolarism was advantageous for ASEAN. In his opinion, it made the general situation easier for its member states, belonging as they do, to groups of middle and smaller countries. Mahbubani emphasised in this context that ASEAN had to coexist with China and India. Although the region as a whole could not be defined as strongly diversified (three actors: ASEAN and two great powers attempting to realize their ambitions and future political and economic aims), but, despite this and most importantly, peace is maintained in Southeast Asia, and in adjacent areas. In his opinion, this peace should be credited to the current generation of political leaders who for years have invested in peaceful development and coexistence. Therefore, today peace is accepted as obvious and taken for granted in this part of the world.

However, Mahbubani also noted that peace had to be constantly fostered and sustained by ongoing political investment from all leaders. This was why members of the ASEAN community should continue their efforts aiming at the continuation of peaceful development. He said that this
organization needed new political dynamism, which should enhance ASEAN’s position vis-à-vis China, India and other global great powers. He suggested it would be better to intensify efforts aimed at the improvement of ASEAN’s general efficiency than to assume the current situation, for example, of peace, will exist forever.

The second speaker, Mr. Vikram Singh, Vice President of the National Security and International Policy, Centre for America Progress commented that in the last few decades, Asian countries have experienced extraordinary development despite two financial crises (in 1997 and currently) which complicated their economic and social situation. Many people improved their personal status and forgot about poverty. China became a global great power, at least in the economic field. Discussing the future, Singh added that in 2030 ⅔ of all consumers would be Asians. Therefore, all great powers are already looking at Asia. However, the fact that both China and India are coping with huge problems cannot be ignored. They are trying to implement structural reforms and battle corruption. In addition, to cite one example, 300 million Indians have no access to electricity. On one hand this is a demanding challenge, but on the other hand it represents an enormous opportunity. Another factor Singh focused on was the issues faced by leaders of smaller but powerful countries like Japan, of both how to overcome current stagnation and provide new impulses for progress and development. At the same time, ASEAN member states attempt to discover how to manoeuvre among great powers, avoiding clashes with them. But regardless of individual country size and specific problems, all the aforementioned questions relate to the future and must be considered in terms of thinking about this perspective.

Singh also mentioned what he considers as contemporary Asia’s most important security problem. In his opinion, China is an aggressive country which tries to weaken its neighbours with every available means. For Japan, because of its proximity to China, questions connected with its defence policy and the maintenance of strong armed forces are the most vital. However, this country continues to experience problems related to its wartime history, and this provides difficulties for its security policy. Japan’s neighbours tend to blame the policy for allegedly awakening ghosts of its militarism and striving for hegemony in the 1930s and 1940s. India continues to experience problems in relation to nuclear powers (China and Pakistan, also the United States), and Indian leaders do not deny that, one day, their country could be involved in war with China. At the same time, the construction of South Korea’s security policy relates to the puzzle which has elements involving the complicated interdependencies between North Korea, China and the
USA. Finally, ASEAN countries consider how they can maintain their independent status among the competing great powers. All of these questions offer challenging threats which must be effectively defused if the Asia-Pacific region is to enjoy a prolonged period of peace and stability in the years ahead.

The last panellist in the first plenary session, Dr Ken Jimbo, Senior Fellow of the Tokyo Foundation, commented that the Asian security system created between 2000 and 2015 might be very different from the realities of international relations prevailing in 2030 or even earlier, in 2025. It is already necessary to take into consideration those new, previously unanticipated factors, such as the development of cyberspace and robotics which have begun to influence changes in the economic and political environment. He highlighted the asymmetric nature of the current Asian balance of power: one country – China – is much stronger than the majority of other states. In addition, Beijing is trying to create a China controlled denial system in order to preserve advantages in its relations with all smaller countries. Other states, as far as they are able, are also trying to operate denial policies particularly in their contacts with China. A good example of this self-defensive strategy is Japan's China denial policy which relies on Tokyo's alliance with the United States.

Nevertheless, as Jimbo mentioned, Asia's political system has become increasingly diversified with many reference points also located beyond this continent (Australia was one example). On the other hand, it remains true that the United States continues to be the most important reference point for all Asia-Pacific countries, including those which desire to be global players in the future. In today's realities, co-operation in preventing the consequences of natural disasters, and in the field of emergency assistance are both important elements of political relations and military contacts between all countries of this region. This leads to the increased importance of ASEAN as a forum for constructive discussions about the aforementioned aspects of non-traditional security and related military affairs.

The speaker drew listeners' attention to an obvious, but uncomfortable fact that while all Asia-Pacific Rim countries have greatly expanded their armed forces, in China the scale of armament development has surpassed the activities of any Asian states. As a result, all other Asian countries are afraid of China's increasing military might and have tried to co-operate with each other to counterbalance advantages gained by the Chinese army. However, this co-operation has also created problems. For example, Japanese leaders have begun to perceive not only China, but also other countries as possible threats to their own country's security. On the other hand, it is evidence that the international arena of
the region has become diversified. Several players have tried to promote their own interests, this has led to many low intensity conflicts. Therefore, it can be predicted that the significance of local politico-military alliances and coalitions will continue to increase in the future.

During a short discussion, the audience in the Kuala Lumpur Hilton Hotel wanted, among others, clarification about detailed questions related to ASEAN: is ASEAN able to engage China positively in its own activities; could Indonesia become a central ASEAN country; how is ASEAN able to manage its own affairs given its position between USA, China and India; what about ASEAN’s internal problems (for example, the democratization of Myanmar)? Panelists, answering some of these questions, pointed to the significance of such countries as Vietnam and the Philippines, which are experienced in dealing with China in areas of regional networking and providing training in a variety of fields of common activities. In this context, they also noticed the importance of the USA, Japan and Australia. At the same time, speakers warned that ASEAN countries should not establish precedents in international relations which could be used later by China against them, and also against other Asian and extra Asian states. Finally, the audience was reminded that many problems complicated Asia’s political situation (for example, tense Pakistani-Indian relations or the potentially explosive situation in the Persian Gulf). Against this background ASEAN was an oasis of peace and prosperity. Therefore, USA and China were strongly interested in the maintenance of its stability.

After a short break, audience attention was fully focused on the participants of the second plenary session which was dedicated to the question of China’s New Strategic Initiatives. The first speaker was a Member of the Foreign Policy Advisory Group of China’s Ministry for Foreign Affairs, His Excellency Amb Zha Peixin. He presented the Chinese point of view regarding the current state of international relations in the Asia-Pacific region and the future of regional co-operation. The presenter maintained that the world had become more interdependent than ever before. This could result in the emergence of a global community of common destiny. He said that each country possessed its own politico-historical heritage which should be universally respected. However, existing differences of this kind should not hinder any activities and initiatives aimed at the creation of an international community of common destiny, this should be as inclusive as possible. China was open for co-operation with other countries and wanted to include as many partners as possible in the realisation of common projects in various fields. This speaker mentioned economic development and promoting the idea of the economic integration of Asia as of greatest importance. He also stressed
that China wanted no confrontation with any country.

Talking about the question of international relations, Amb Zha Peixin said that China sought a comprehensive system providing security to all countries desiring to participate in such a scheme. According to him, China did much to promote peace, but he did not specify any of these activities. He also expressed the opinion that implementing Chinese political and economic initiatives needed time, but regardless of existing obstacles China pushed forward with these objectives. Amb Zha Peixin also praised the political system prevailing in China as completely predictable and stable. As an example of the problems faced by his country, he pointed at the relatively strong nationalistic leanings in many segments of Chinese society. This factor made its relations with other states more difficult. However, he observed that in spite of that difficulty, China had developed contacts with the majority of countries in recent years. He added in this context that about 60 states had expressed their support for China’s New Security Initiatives. And, he said, countries which did not support them did not do so largely because their leaders did not understand China’s good will and positive intentions. The speaker defined Chinese initiatives in the field of the international security as especially important for ASEAN member states, calling for commitment to common efforts aimed at the implementation of Chinese ideas.

Ideas concerning those questions of international co-operation and security raised by the Chinese speaker were greeted by sceptical Indian opinions about China’s role internationally. These were expressed by Dr Madhu Bhalla, retired Professor of Chinese Studies at the Department of East Asian Studies of the University of Delhi, India. Although Dr Bhalla agreed that China’s initiatives (still unspecified) were important, she also noted that their consequences were not always positive. China had become an economic giant possessing and promoting a competing vision of Asia. But at the same time, in the field of security, China still perceived the United States as the most important reference point.

Bhalla also maintained that Chinese leaders would have to solve an obvious contradiction between their country’s economic expansion and their neighbours’ sense of security. If they are able to achieve this, China will gain greater legitimization of its own position in international relations. Historical preconditions determine the behaviour of China in its contacts with other countries. On one hand, Chinese leaders speak about the global community of common destiny, but on the other hand, their rhetoric concerning security issues is often aggressive. They speak – and probably think – in a manner which developed during the Cold War. They also perceive security issues as an obstacle undermining China’s economic development under-
stood, by them, as a form of expansion. This, argued Bhalla, created a serious problem: Did China want to be a regional and global leader or a country leading an expansionistic policy? Its leaders should find a reliable answer to this question and convince its neighbouring countries (Vietnam especially, but other ASEAN member states and Japan also had concerns) that China possessed no aggressive intentions.

The Indian speaker also commented that Chinese diplomats frequently referred to Asian security architecture and its inclusiveness, but at the same time, China did everything possible to push the United States and other non-Asian actors out of Asia. Chinese diplomacy effectively used numerous international forums to diminish the anxiety of their Asian partners who feared China's expansionism. On various occasions Chinese representatives spoke about peaceful coexistence. However, China tried, gradually and 'softly', to realize its goals and aiming for Chinese domination in Asia. Generally speaking, Chinese leaders desired to convert the Asia-Pacific Rim into a multipolar region, because they know that China is the strongest country from this area with the sole exception of the United States.

Closing her speech, Bhalla said Indian politicians were convinced that thoughts about Asian leadership should refer to the ideals of the late 1940s when leaders of newly born Asian states believed brotherly relations between them would secure the independence of the whole continent in their contacts with the rest of the world. Therefore, they supported many of China's proposed initiatives in the international arena. But, they had reservations related to China's goals in its foreign and security policies, because they realized that the Chinese were willing to say to representatives of other Asian countries what they wanted to hear. At the same time, China was pushing towards the realization of its dangerous hegemonic ambitions, this meant its unrestricted regional domination. Therefore, as Bhalla stated, China's activities should be carefully monitored by the international community, although cooperation with China should be developed in as many fields as possible.

The last speaker of the second plenary session was Prof Aileen S.P. Baviera from the Asian Center of the University of the Philippines in Diliman. She presented views on Chinese politics in the Asia-Pacific region as seen from her country’s perspective. Baviera discussed several questions which were important in the context of Chinese foreign policy. She believed that the Asia-Pacific Rim was not the exclusive area of China's political and economic activities. True that China invested in ASEAN, and its assertiveness was related to increased promotion of Chinese interests in this region (the speaker referred here to maritime issues and territorial claims raised by China). However, China's ambitions seemed to
reach further. In 2021, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) will celebrate its one hundredth birthday and, until then, the Chinese leadership might try to define and clearly demonstrate their country’s goals in international politics. According to Baviera, they desired, above all, that China would reach the position of global superpower no. 1, because it possessed economic interests in all continents (that is, its economic interests were global). This conclusion resulted explicitly from statements made by Chinese leaders during the recent Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 2012.

In addition, China would do its best to develop its internal consumption, obtain new markets for its products, and upgrade its infrastructure and logistics. These measures would provide China with greater welfare as well as funds for increasing its military capacities (initially its navy, needed to protect its maritime interests; China planned, for example to develop an extensive program of nuclear submarine construction). All these activities result from the conviction of China’s leadership, and shared by many average people, that China has experienced many humiliations during the last one hundred years and, now, it was time for the country to regain the appropriate international position lost in previous centuries.

China has signed so many trade agreements with other countries in recent years because its leaders treat these as indispensable momentum for economic development and expansion. Thus, China has become the greatest participant of international bilateral economic agreements. But, this should not lead to the conclusion that China is an easy partner. On the contrary, it is an assertive actor doing everything it can to reach own goals. This tendency, according to Baviera, will continue and strengthen. At the same time Beijing skilfully applies soft diplomacy – a variety of partnerships, international forums, initiatives in the fields of science and protection of natural environment, etc. – to reduce the sceptical attitude of potential enemies. The Chinese also used coercive diplomacy, and they have means to exert pressure on such countries as Vietnam, the Philippines and even Malaysia. China skilfully blends its soft and hard power towards reaching its goal which seems to be unrestricted domination in East and Southeast Asia.

The speaker acknowledged Chinese strategic initiatives as interesting, containing many positive elements, and worth considering. However, she also warned, as had Dr Bhalla, that Chinese activities in the international arena should be closely monitored, because the Chinese leadership’s strategic goal is the promotion of its own interests at any price, and clearly at the expense of other countries.

After the third plenary session’s final speaker several important questions were raised during question time. For example,
one Chinese guest asked about the current state of affairs on the Indian-Chinese border area. He noted that during the last 50 years it had basically been a peaceful border, so he was unable to understand why the Indians still maintained that it was a troublesome area. He also raised a question about relations between China and Philippines, asking why Manila made a maritime agreement with Indonesia, but when it came to China, the Philippines preferred to resolve their problematic issues by suing China before the International Court? An American participant in the 29th Asia-Pacific Round Table asked about the future of Chinese-American relations, and about conflict between China and Vietnam involving division of the exclusive economic zones of both countries as well as the sea shelf in South Asia Sea which was so rich in natural resources. Another question which arose during discussion concerned Amb. Zha Peixin's statement that China would explain the contents of the Chinese strategic initiatives to any leaders of foreign countries who did not understand them. The audience was interested in how this would be done.

Answering the question about the lack of dialogue between China and Philippines aiming at the resolution of mutual disputes concerning maritime issues, Prof Baviera stressed that no direct talks between these two countries were ever scheduled, and, as a smaller partner, the Philippines was unable to bring China to the negotiating table. Dr Bhalla's explanation about the state of affairs relating to Indian-Chinese border area problems, clarified that although the maintenance of peace along the common frontier for several decades had been a great success, it was necessary to go further and remove the still existing reasons for territorial disputes between these Asian great powers. These reasons result in constant mistrust in relationships between Beijing and New Delhi. She also called for ‘doing something’ with the Tibetan issue. The Chinese maintained this was China's internal affair. However, India possessed a long border with Tibet automatically converted a Tibetan issue into an international affair. Finally, the Indian speaker reminded the audience about the maritime security concerns which resulted in another set of problems in relations between China and its Asian neighbours. So, summing up, she said that there were many difficult questions which could not be neglected, and that it was in the interest of both China and the whole of Asia to find positive solutions.

During this short discussion replying to statements from his Indian and Philippine counterparts, Amb Zha Peixin said that China possessed many historical arguments which provided reasons for the variety of Chinese perspectives in disputes with its Asian neighbours. He also maintained that both India and the Philippines, as well as other countries, should not forget that China is the second
largest trading nation in the world and, therefore, should not present themselves as defending freedom of navigation against the alleged striving for domination demonstrated by China in seas surrounding the Asian continent. Finally, Amb Zha Peixin stated that vital Chinese economic and political interests required maintenance of the freedom of navigation. China was therefore ready to support its protection, although not without putting forward conditions aimed at securing its own position.

Summing up, Amb Zha Peixin insisted that the sincerity of proposed Chinese initiatives in the international arena should not be doubted by anyone. He reminded his listeners that Chinese ideas concerning the development of infrastructure in Asia or the creation of a common Asian bank were put forward not only for China’s sake, but for all countries which might be interested in participating in such projects. History, as he stated, would show who was right regarding the future of Asia and what kind of activities were righteous. China, concluded Amb Zha Peixin, had time and could wait for history’s objective verdict. However, it seemed that the Chinese speaker’s final remarks, reflected a somewhat ambivalent meaning, or perhaps could be even understood as some kind of a veiled threat; it did not convince those gathered in the Hilton Kuala Lumpur Hotel and they received his claims with obvious reserve.

The third plenary session, entitled ASEAN Beyond 2015: What Does it Mean to be a Community?, was an occasion for presenting opinions about possible responses to challenges not only faced currently by the community of Southeast Asian nations, but also those they will cope with in the near future. First of three panellists, Dr N. Hassan Wirajuda, Co-founder of The Indonesia School of Government and Public Policy & former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, recalled the uneasy end of the 1990s, when the financial crisis of 1997 devastated the economies of all Southeast Asian countries. This crisis proved, argued Dr Wirajuda, that ASEAN member states were interconnected and interdependent. He also pointed out that this experience should be a lesson helping to design the future of Southeast Asia, a region in which all countries had similar experiences in the last three decades. The Indonesian guest stated out that ASEAN should be a rules based community, rules regulating activities relating to many aspects of life. However, in his opinion, it was rather difficult to say that ASEAN was anything more than merely a group of countries wanting to create a functional economic community in the future. He predicted that without unexpected obstacles appearing, this relatively limited goal could be realized sometime around the year 2030.

The second speaker, Prof Carolina G. Hernandez, Founding President and
Vice Chair of the Institute of Strategic and Development Studies (ISDS), Philippines agreed with Dr Wirajuda’s views. She added that it would be desirable to identify some common goals going beyond economic affairs, and uniting all ASEAN member states. Therefore, she suggested working out an ASEAN-Charter. Such a document could represent fundamental future thinking about ASEAN as a real community. Prof Hernandez hoped that the ASEAN-Charter would develop as an impulse leading to the definition of common goals connecting the countries of Southeast Asia, as well as common activities aimed at the resolution of vital problems for the whole region. She maintained that her suggestion resulted from dreams that ASEAN, during the next decades could play, at least, the role of a middle sized actor in international relations.

The last presenter in the third plenary session was Dr Thitinan Pongsudhirak, Director of the Institute of Security and International Studies (ISIS) and a member of the Faculty of Political Studies of the Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. He spoke about the external factors which should enforce the unity of ASEAN member states in the future. According to him, ASEAN is vitally interested in the maintenance of good relations with countries such as Australia, China, India, New Zealand, Russia and USA, i.e. with all powers (Asian and non-Asian) which play a significant role in Asia and the Asia-Pacific Rim. If ASEAN wanted to be treated as a partner by them, unity was imperative. In recent years, ASEAN had already faced major challenges such as migration, and the continuation of its member states’ economic development. Finding appropriate solutions for these problems would be more difficult if Southeast Asian countries could not unify their potential and abilities. Dr Thitinan predicted that while ASEAN would never be as tightly integrated as, for example, the European Union, its member nations should care about common infrastructure, economic enterprise, and the definition of common goals which would provide the community with a the common sense of its existence.

The most important question put forward repeatedly during the Q & A session concerned reasons which have hitherto hindered the process of ASEAN’s real unification. In was predictable that panelists were unable to answer this clearly. Nevertheless, they agreed that, in some sense, ASEAN member states are the worst enemies of South East Asia’s integration. They pointed out, in this context, that particular interest as well as a variety of objective differences dividing the ten community members resulted in the absence of sufficiently strong political support for efforts aimed at the strengthening of links between them. Their leaders still preferred to think in term of egoistic national interest, and were unable to design an ASEAN future perceived as a functional regional
community connected by common goals in a variety of fields. Therefore, ASEAN remained a predominately unfulfilled project waiting for more thorough realization.

The fourth and final plenary session of the second day of the 29th Asia-Pacific Round Table was entitled *The Maritime Domain: Strengthening Stability, Promoting Confidence*. It was dedicated to problems of maritime security in Southeast Asia. Dr Rizal Sukma, Executive Director of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Indonesia presented his opinion that in the past, the ocean was perceived as a public good. Recently, this point of view had changed and, currently, the sea was recognized as a strategic good, one domain of responsibility for sovereign states. He also maintained that the prosperity of all Southeast Asia depended on the way the countries of the region used the ocean in the near future. One of the most difficult problems, although not an exclusive one, was the question of China’s attempt to dominate in the South Asia Sea. As Dr Sukma stated, nationalism was on the rise around the globe, also resulting in a number of territorial disputes in the Asia-Pacific region. Therefore it was necessary to appreciate the serious political efforts being undertaken in Southeast Asia to overcome problems existing in bilateral contact between particular countries in this part of the world. Above all, these aimed to prevent military incidents (not exclusively between ASEAN members and China, for example, but also between smaller ASEAN countries).

However, it was still necessary to develop a detailed code of conduct which could be adopted in case of an outbreak of a critical situation. In this context, as a positive example of efforts undertaken in common by Southeast Asian countries and China, the speaker mentioned the results of the meeting of the 11th ASEAN-China Joint Working Group on the Implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct (DOC) of Parties in the South China Sea. This was convened on the Indonesian island of Bali on 24–25 June 2014. Its objective was to maintain and promote dialogue and consultations between ASEAN Member States and China in furthering the effective implementation of practical cooperative projects under the DOC framework and ensuring substantive progress in the discussions of the Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea. This was mandated by senior officials at the 7th ASEAN-China Senior Officials Meeting on the Implementation of the DOC held in Suzhou, China in September 2013. The meeting in Bali exchanged views on various issues such as basic principles/commonalities on the COC including measures and/or mechanisms that would provide value-adding to the DOC to enhance greater trust and confidence among ASEAN member States and China. In addition, various other common study and working groups were created to oversee naval developments. In conclusion,
Dr Sukma said that in today’s international relations oceans have become the objects of a ‘zero-sum-game’, i.e. states observed each other’s naval activities, did everything they could to avoid the domination of one country or a group of countries connected by common interests and, as a result, tried to maintain and preserve the naval balance of power.

Senior Colonel Zhou Bo, Director of the Centre for International Cooperation at the Chinese Ministry of National Defence, presented the Chinese point of view on problems of maritime security. At the beginning of his talk he drew the audience’s attention to the fact that nowadays ca. 90% of goods were transported by ship. Therefore China, as the second largest trading country in the world, should be defined as the maritime nation which tried to protect its economic interests through the protection of its maritime domain. Col Zhou Bo reminded the audience that 80% of all seas belonged to particular countries’ exclusive economic zones. This led to numerous maritime territorial disputes. The Asia-Pacific region had also been the scene for this kind of dispute. China, trying to protect its own economic interest, had quarrelled with the Philippines and Japan, Japan with Russia and South Korea, South Korea with North Korea, and, within ASEAN, Malaysia with Singapore and Indonesia, to mention only a few examples. Col Zhou Bo stated that thanks to the constructive and peaceful attitude taken by Beijing, almost 90% of all territorial disputes between China and other countries were resolved peacefully (meaning that China was able to negotiate agreement with all its neighbours with the exception of India and Bhutan). Regarding maritime affairs, China supported the principle of the freedom of navigation as the basic principle of international maritime law. The Chinese speaker explained that his country was trying to peacefully resolve all problems in relation to other states. As proof of China’s peaceful attitude towards its neighbours, he presented a Chinese initiative aimed at the establishment (from 2016) of a ‘hot line’ enabling leaders of China and ASEAN member states to quickly resolve military incidents resulting from territorial disputes existing between them.

Referring to relations between China and the United States, Col Zhou Bo admitted that although they were not problem free (in this context, he mentioned questions of the naval balance of power in the Pacific as well as differences between Beijing and Washington over issues of protecting the natural environment and fisheries), but both great powers had already learnt how to resolve or avoid major conflicts in their relations. They also co-operated with each other in all fields where this co-operation was possible, evidence of their maturity and responsibility.

Col Zhou Bo also stressed the significance of the presence of Chinese warships
abroad. He mentioned in this context that, in 2009, China had sent six warships to the Gulf of Aden near Somalia in order to strengthen the international naval forces protecting cargo ships against the acts of piracy often committed in this area. According to the speaker, this mission made history, because for the first time Chinese warships operated far from China’s coast. It was also evidence that China was not selfish or overassertive, but that it actively supported activities of the international community aimed at protecting freedom of navigation.

The third presenter, Dr Vijay Sahuja, Director of the Indian National Maritime Foundation, spoke about the significance of naval forces in Southeast Asia. Introducing the audience to this topic, the expert enumerated six main reasons why countries from this region needed their navies and invested in their development. They were: demonstrating sovereignty, protecting national territory, controlling the exclusive economic zones and the execution of jurisdiction in their areas, responding to asymmetric threats (for example piracy), sending warships on various missions to remote parts of the world and, finally, participating in Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations and Search and Rescue (SAR) missions.

In a further section of his talk, Dr Sahuja discussed regional naval trends. He noted that all Southeast Asian countries observed each other’s navy development, bought new warships and invested huge sums in the creation of their own shipbuilding industries. As he stated, since 2004, the expenditure of Southeast Asian countries for the construction and purchase of new warships had increased by 147%. The speaker then mentioned several new infrastructural investments which were increasing the shipbuilding abilities of particular countries (for example, a new shipyard constructed by Malaysia in one of its main naval bases in Lumut, and a new dock launched in Myanmar).

However, the most impressive part of Dr Sahuja’s presentation concerned the increased number of submarines in the possession of Southeast Asian countries. Recently, almost all Southeast Asian navies had increased the number of their submarines treating these as a weapon to deter possible enemies. Vietnam purchased six submarines from Russia (the last two are due in 2016), Indonesia contracted the construction of two submarines in South Korea, as part of Indonesia’s Defence Strategic Plan 2024 which called for a fleet of ten submarines. Singapore also plans to add two new German built submarines to four Swedish made boats it already possesses. Several years ago, the Malaysian Navy bought two French built submarines. Thailand and Myanmar also contemplated purchasing diesel-electric submarines. Summarising, Dr Sahuja stated that, according to expert navy forecasts, about
130 diesel-electric submarines will be present in Southeast Asian waters by the year 2020. This will significantly contribute to the increased possibility of naval incidents in such important waterways as the Malacca Straits, or maritime routes leading through the South China Sea.

The speaker then observed that the navies of all Asian countries had also improved their capabilities through acquiring expeditionary and amphibious platforms. Although these naval acquisition trends were partly defensive, they were also more offensive, resulting in the expansion of areas of operation of particular navies (including fleets of the two Asian great powers, India and China) and diversification of their mission roles. They had been converted into truly three dimensional forces capable of operating above, on and below water, ready to participate in advanced military competition between states, and above all, in boundary disputes.

Dr Sahuja claimed that, today, all Asian countries (big and small) involved themselves in the naval arms race. If one state bought some new warships or weapon system to improve its naval capabilities, other countries would do the same almost immediately. On one hand, this precluded the domination of a single actor in the seas surrounding Asia, but on the other hand, it led to heightened tension resulting from the increasing number of warships of different classes in a relatively small area (evidence about the growing number of submarines belonging to Southeast Asian navies has already been discussed). The Indian expert said that the 21st century had witnessed the rediscovery of maritime power. At the same time, as he complained, Southeast Asia had created too many international bodies for the prevention of naval incidents, and this has resulted in the excessive complication of the region’s system of security.

Questions put forward during the discussion concentrated on two matters: Chinese participation in negotiations over territorial disputes with its neighbours, and the protection of maritime natural resources which are intensively exploited by the fishing industries of all Southeast Asian countries. Answering the question concerning China’s preference to seek resolution of territorial disputes in bilateral negotiations, an approach giving China an obvious advantage due to its demographic, economic and military might, Col Zhou Bo said that although it was the truth, China also participated in multilateral talks which should provide the whole Southeast Asian region with general security arrangements. He was also asked about China’s attitude towards the naval armaments of ASEAN member states. He recognized this as more of a manifestation of their excessive ambitions and exaggerated national pride than resulting from any real need to defend their national interests. All speakers
agreed that naval armaments should be regulated by some rules. However, they also admitted that working out such rules would probably be impossible, because the countries participating in the Asian arms race had contradictory interests.

The third and the last day of the conference began with its sixth plenary session entitled *New Security Frontiers: the Resource Nexus Challenge*. This was dedicated to problems connected with dramatic increases in resource use across the whole Asia-Pacific region, and discussed by a panel of three experts. The first of them, Professor Dr Brahma Chellaney, Professor of Strategic Studies at the Centre for Policy Research, India, reminded his audience that in today’s world access to natural resources and water has become the most important challenge for Asian countries. Asia’s dramatic economic growth has resulted not only in an increase of wealth, but also in various environmental problems. As an example, Dr Chellaney pointed out the changes to climate caused by the development of industry which threatened the destruction of the Tibetan Plateau’s ecosystem, the biggest deposit of fresh and unfrozen water in the world.

Dr Chellaney maintained that access to water and mineral oils had become the biggest problem for Asian economies. In particular, obtaining fresh water was difficult because of its high cost. He predicted that access to fresh water sources would become one of the most important causes of international conflicts in the future. In addition, he noted that the majority of Asian rivers ran through several, often poor countries which experienced problems in the efficient management of these inland waterways. In this context, Dr Chellaney referred to the example of Mekong and Cambodia and raised several unanswered questions: who supervised this river in Cambodia, what about the Mekong’s ecology in this country, and who was responsible for the poor quality of its waters?

The speaker also used another striking example of Asian countries’ increasing problems in accessing natural resources. He explained the activities of South Korean authorities who were encouraging the country’s food producers to move their factories to Africa (for example, Sudan or Madagascar). The Seoul government calculated that it was better to pay higher prices for food produced overseas than to use South Korean water and other resources, and then struggle with pollution of the natural environment caused by food production.

In concluding his presentation, the Indian expert enumerated several problems which Asia had faced recently. He spoke about the increasing general consumption of energy (Asia is now the major importer of energy carriers like oil and gas), which has also resulted in ecological threats like climate change and pollution. Dr Chellaney again reminded his listeners
about river issues (problems connected with river management and ecology), stressing that although they were initially important for river countries, all rivers reached the sea, and maritime issues were important to everybody. He also spoke about China controlling Tibet, and not wanting to share Tibetan water resources with other countries; this created political problems. He added that conflicts in this field would be unavoidable unless China became convinced that it should participate in international institutions which supervised water distribution.

After a short break, the seventh plenary session of the 29th Asia-Pacific Round Table was convened. It was dedicated to The Geopolitics of Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) in the Asia Pacific, a question attracting special attention in Asian countries interested in maximizing their economic growth. The first speaker was Ambassador Yoshiji Nogami, President of the Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA) and the former Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan, who explained his country’s position towards negotiations on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). This is the proposed agreement on trade liberalisation involving twelve countries: Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the United States and Vietnam. Amb Nogami maintained that the TPP could not be considered as an exclusively economic treaty. Its geopolitical significance will be even more important. Explaining his point, he observed that the TPP, if signed, will influence other negotiations on similar agreements positively, especially talks between the United States and Japan, or ASEAN and the European Union.

Amb Nogami said that by 2020, thanks to TPP participation, Japan would gain ca. 105 billion US Dollars, and the United States ca. 77 billion. At the same time, China which did not participate in these negotiations would probably lose about 35 billion US Dollars. China, the speaker predicted, would potentially encounter serious problems in further development. Therefore, the TPP was as important for China as for those countries participating in the negotiations. As a result, in the not too distant future, Beijing would become increasingly interested in making agreements on trade liberalization between China and TPP countries.

The geostrategic value of the TPP combined with the large problem of China’s non-participation in the current negotiations were again stressed when Amb Nogami was speaking about the importance of this agreement for the United States. According to him, from the American perspective, the TPP was perceived as more than a trade agreement, it was also seen as a treaty setting rules in international economic relations. Therefore, what American President Barack Obama, was quoted as saying in
Amb Nogami, the President of Japan, hoped that China would make an agreement with the TPP countries, and that China would also become involved in setting rules for the outside world (i.e. not only for Asia).

The Japanese speaker noted that other Pacific states had also been non-participants in TPP negotiations, mentioning South Korea, Taiwan and some Latin American countries. However, this could change when these negotiations were concluded and all interested countries would be able to decide about joining the TPP. Their adherence to the agreement would represent an important step in making the TPP a close link connecting the economies of almost all states located around the Pacific Ocean.

At the end of his talk, Amb Nogami also discussed the significance of the TPP for his own country, Japan. He stated that today’s Japan would be forced to implement many important economic changes. Japanese agriculture, for example, stood at the crossroad and it will be necessary to reform it in order to maintain efficiency and competitiveness. This question is of such great importance to Japan that Prime Minister Shinzō Abe specifically referred to it during his speech to the US Congress in July 2014. The need for reform also included the financial structure of investment in various branches of the Japanese economy – this would have to be improved or modified if Japan wanted to maintain the international competitiveness of its industries. In Amb Nogami’s opinion, the proximity of finalising the TPP had encouraged the start of serious deliberations about these major problems in Japan. So it was possible to say that the TPP (finally signed on October 6, 2015, after long, but ultimately successful negotiations) had already had a strong impact on Japan’s economic life. He also added that politicians, economists and scholars all over the world had already started to study the impact of the TPP on other economic agreements being currently negotiated, for example, the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership treaty between the United States and the European Union. In summary, they were beginning to consider what the post-TPP world would look like.

The next speaker, Dr Il Houng Lee, President of the Korea Institute for International Economic Policy (KIEP) from Seoul, focused listener attention on the question of future Regional Economic Integration Architecture in the Asia-Pacific region. He maintained that Asian countries could expect the American economy to experience a period of stable growth. At the same time, he predicted that European countries would fight economic stagnation during next 10 years. Talking about ASEAN, Dr Lee stressed that this region would not be free from problems. The most important of them would be income inequalities. However, this would also be
a difficult phenomenon globally. Other disturbances would be caused by issues connected with other problems already recognised all over the world. They were: job creation, the aging of societies and the imbalance of local currencies. In Dr Lee’s opinion, the question of the aging of societies was particularly challenging. It would soon force the governments of ASEAN member states of ASEAN, but also South Korea and other Asian countries, to think about saving a proportion of public money in order to possess appropriate funds for covering future expenditure connected with providing health care for the increasing number of senior citizens. Therefore, the speaker expected that within decades, India would need to become the world’s greatest saving country.

Dato’ Steven Wong, Deputy Chief Executive of the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia, the final speaker in the seventh plenary session, discussed the significance of Free Trade Agreements (FTA) signed by many countries as bilateral and multilateral treaties. He pointed out that they were both complementary and competitive agreements. As he said, it depended on the contracting countries whether the FTAs they signed were more competitive or more complementary. He added that in today’s world it was increasingly difficult to sign any FTA, because governments jealously protect their own countries’ trade interests, and were concerned that FTAs could be detrimental to their national economic interest.

On the other hand, Dato’ Wong remarked that governments were put under pressure to involve themselves in negotiating FTAs. This was because they felt that avoiding participation in this type of agreements could lead to job losses or, for example, a fall in the profits of companies engaged in foreign trade. In a sense, all countries needed to become pragmatic and attempt, regardless of their self-protective position, to sign new or join already existing FTAs and EPAs. The speaker suggested that Asian and, especially ASEAN countries, should not always exclusively look for potential partners in the Asia-Pacific region, but also explore opportunities in other regions and continents. He maintained that this approach would help to diversify the direction of their trade contacts as well as contribute towards improving both the international economic climate, and world-wide political relations.

The eighth plenary session (Surveying the Southeast Asian Political Terrain) was an occasion for discussing the internal problems of Southeast Asian countries. These problems need to be seen as belonging to the non-traditional threats which provide security dangers. The first presenter, Assoc. Professor Simon Tay, Chairman of the Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA) and Faculty of Law of the National University of Sin-
gapore, enumerated several such menaces. Speaking about the increasing nationalism within Southeast Asian political elites, Prof Tay stressed that this phenomenon also possessed two faces: economic and political. Although nationalism as an ideology helped to construct national pride and identity, it also became a tool of exclusion or stigmatization of those who did not belong to the dominant national or ethnic majority in the political life of any given country. Listeners at Prof Tay’s talk understood that he was indirectly criticizing the overwhelming domination of the Javanese political elite over the Indonesian archipelago, or the domination of the Muslim Malay political elite in the multi-ethnic and multi-religious Malaysia.

Prof Tay considered that the domestic politics of Southeast Asian countries exerted triple, and sometimes internally contradictory effects on ASEAN. On one hand, increasing nationalism made international relations in the region more complex. But at the same time, the political leaders’ concentration on internal problems distracted them from questions of foreign policy. Furthermore, when priority was given to domestic affairs such as: political reforms (democratization), and economic as well as social transformation (improvement of the economic competitiveness, creation of new jobs, and increasing credit accessibility) this made ASEAN countries more reliable and desirable political and trading partners in the region and beyond.

During the ninth plenary session of the conference, entitled *Calibrating the Design of the Asia-Pacific Security Architecture*, speakers discussed important Asian traditional and non-traditional security issues. Dr Zhang Zhixin, Research Fellow at the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS), also stressed the significance of empathy in contacts between Asian countries. However, he also emphasised the importance of inclusiveness in their cooperation as a further factor enhancing international security in the Asia-Pacific region. He even called this a precondition of peaceful coexistence for countries possessing sometimes contradictory economic and political interests. In this context, the speaker mentioned that the gaps he viewed as existing in Chinese-American relations which should be removed. This would help to enhance mutual trust between these two great powers.

Dr Zhang also championed broadly inclusive international co-operation in the Asia-Pacific region which should embrace all (traditional and non-traditional) security aspects. According to him, this would result in stronger links between countries situated in this vast area, and in the better, i.e. more effective, management of different types of crises which emerge from time to time. He admitted that China, due to its size and potential, was changing the dynamics of Asian politics, and that this
could be perceived as striving for expansion or domination. But at the same time, he praised his country’s involvement in multilateral cooperation in various fields. He also expressed strong disapproval for any forms of interventionism in international relations, above all the use of power and warned against undertaking any hasty and/or thoughtless activities which could destroy the region’s current balance of power (‘no intervention, no use of power, no hurry’).

The third presenter, Dr Tran Viet Thai, Deputy Director-General and Director of the Institute for Foreign and Strategic Studies at the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam, was less optimistic than the previous speaker. He stated that in his opinion, there was no architecture of security currently existing in the Asia-Pacific region, because the dynamics and variability of the area’s international relations made the situation relatively unstable and, to some extent, unpredictable. He said that the Asia-Pacific region was at a critical moment in its history. Although he expected that a new order or new balance of power would be borne in the near future, it was too early to him to predict any details.

The last session of the Kuala Lumpur 29th Asia-Pacific Roundtable, Radicalisation Redux: Bigger, Badder, Bolder?, concerned the problem of terrorism and the radicalisation of extremist political groups. This new, non-traditional security challenge was discussed by Dr Iftekhar Chowdhury, Principal Research Fellow of the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) at the University of Singapore, the former Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, Mr Noor Huda Ismail, the founder of the Institute for International Peace Building, Indonesia, and Dato’ Saifuddin Abdullah, Chief Executive Officer of the Global Movements of Moderates (GMM) and Chairman of the Youth Academy, Malaysia. All three experts agreed that recent years have witnessed an increase in the power and popularity of many radical groups. While the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is probably the best known, the spread of political radicalisation is clearly visible globally. Therefore they speculated about the source of this dangerous phenomenon.

They suggested the one of the most important reasons is absence of empathy from both governments and organisations representing civil society towards the often valid demands from poor and/or excluded citizen groups. The lack of understanding pushes these groups towards radicalisation and terrorism. The speakers argued that states should do more than fight against terrorist organisation activities, they should also concentrate on the removal of the reasons which encouraged these actions, i.e. poverty, social inequalities, the lack of future perspectives (particularly dangerous for the younger generation), and the depression associated with social alienation. If governments and civil society, where this was strong enough, were
unable to deal with these factors, even the use of the most severe measures against terrorism and extremism would not help, and the number of these organisations would only increase. In other words, the presenters argued that the war against terrorism could not be won on the battlefield, but must be pursued through education, engaged social policy and improving the standard of living of the poorest strata of society, providing their members with a sense of dignity and the chance of a better future.

About 80% of the experts who addressed the audience at the Kuala Lumpur Hilton Hotel in the first days of June 2015 came from Asian countries. Thus it could be said that the Asian security problems discussed during the 29th Asia-Pacific Roundtable were mainly considered from the Asian perspective. So, what is the image of today’s Asia as seen through the eyes of Asian scholars and politicians? How do they perceive the threats and challenges, but also Asia’s future? The contents of interrelated presentations suggest that Asia some time ago moved into an interesting but also a dangerous and probably crucial period of its history. Further growth of Asian economies following more than two decades of impressive development, remains unclear. Smaller countries (for example, ASEAN member states) as well as Asian great powers (China and India) and Japan (at this point belonging to neither group), are coping with many difficult questions such as: insufficient access to natural resources, and the need to implement structural reforms in either their political or economic life, or in both areas. It is also impossible to overlook issues in international relations which result from territorial disputes with neighbouring countries. Similarly, the oppression of national minorities and the complications resulting from social inequality both provide reasons for social, political and religious radicalism and extremism. It is significant that all these problems belong simultaneously to spheres of both domestic and foreign policy, a relationship which increases the difficulties associated with addressing them accurately and finding appropriate solutions.

In relation to traditional security issues, the most important question seems to be the rivalry between the great powers for continental, but (in the longer term) global domination which also affects the smaller Asian actors in the international arena. Chinese leaders seem intent on realizing their dream about creating China’s hegemony in Asia. However, when Chinese politicians discuss the creation of the (China led) community of common destiny in Asia, their words are inevitably received elsewhere in Asia with reserve, or even fear. The language closely resembles those slogans coined in Tokyo during the late 1930s and the early 1940s – ‘Building East Asia’ or creating the ‘Greater East Asia Co Prosperity Sphere’ – and recalls Japan’s
excuses for expansion. China's increasing assertiveness in promoting its own economic and political interests, as well as Beijing’s preference to settle disputes with other countries (despite repeatedly given assurances) in bilateral negotiations rather than through multilateral agreements, has strengthened Asian fears and suspicions regarding its real intentions and plans. Today, many countries are convinced that China is an aggressive state at least striving for regional domination at the expense of its Asiatic neighbours.

On the other hand, Asian leaders recognise that it will be impossible to develop any stable model of political and economic relations which excludes China. Therefore, they are not contemplating the construction of any truly anti-Chinese collation, but more about counterbalancing China's overwhelming advantage over all other present actors (excluding India and the United States) in the Asian or Asian-Pacific international arena. This is the reason which might, for example, help pave the way for the real integration of ASEAN (at the moment ASEAN exists as an organization of states which are willing to participate in any future process of integration). Discussions — and hopes expressed by many countries' representatives, including the President of the United States — about China's possible adherence to the Trans-Pacific Partnership also emerge from the same preconditions. The view that China should not be isolated but fully involved in cooperating with other Asia-Pacific region countries in as many areas as possible, seemed to be universally expressed during the Kuala Lumpur conference. However, it is a matter of equal and universal concern about whether Chinese leaders merely treat international cooperation as a tactical element of a broader strategy allowing China to occupy its desired hegemonic position initially in Asia, and later the world. Opinions expressed by many (including Chinese) experts during the 29th Asia-Pacific Roundtable left few illusions about such concerns.

Stronger nationalistic tendencies contribute to more difficult situations for particular countries. The unconditional defence of national interests in addition to the dogmatic understanding of territorial integrity, national pride and dignity can strain relations between those states which should logically cooperate in order to improve their chances of dealing with threats which endanger them all (the number of disputes/animosities existing between ASEAN member states is so long that enthusiasm for the integration of these ten states could seem overwhelmed by the current level of disagreement). On the other hand, the nationalist rhetoric of leaders of the region's great powers (particularly China, but neither India nor Japan so intent on maintaining its status, are free of this self-imposed burden) can lead to perceptions from their smaller neighbours
that they are sometimes more dangerous or aggressive than they really are. In addition, nationalism can lead to an uncontrollable arms race. For poorer countries, this path exhausts the limited resources which could be used more appropriately.

However, for the Asian giants, the position is not much better. Their resources and finances are equally consumed by their commitment to the increasingly sophisticated military technology needed to maintain the status of regional, supra regional or world great power (especially in terms of potential rivals). And the Asiatic obsession regarding losing – or saving face as well as the fear that Asian and extra Asian competitors could utilise the situation and gain advantage which would need watchful rebalancing, and certainly not neglect, means that military expenditure cannot easily be limited. The Chinese President Chin Xi Jinping relatively recent declaration about a decrease in People’s Liberation Army soldier numbers (announced at the beginning of September 2015 by the Chinese leader) should therefore not be misunderstood. It is probably too pessimistic to argue that in the second decade of the 21st century, Asia resembles Europe of one hundred years earlier. Perhaps Asian military and diplomatic machinery need not become the machinery of destruction in the phrase used by Henry Kissinger in his famous book, Diplomacy. However, to focus on just one example discussed in Kuala Lumpur by Indian expert Dr Vijay Singh – the one referring to the growth in the number of conventional submarines in South East Asian waters – this scenario forces the consideration of both optimistic and pessimistic outcomes. And it raises concerns about whether political and military leaders of large and small Asian countries are leading in the most appropriate directions.

Today’s situation in Asia is clearly difficult. Most governments simultaneously juggle whole sets of domestic and international issues. The combination of economic, environmental, military, social and territorial problems has become increasingly complicated. Appropriate management of all these variables not only requires skill and knowledge across many fields, but above all good will, empathy and readiness for constant dialogue with many different partners (governments, NGO’s, political and social movements reflecting different levels of radicalism, representatives of ethnic and religious minorities, and international organisations etc.), and actors playing roles at very different levels of Asian politics. The opinions expressed by the experts invited to speak in Kuala Lumpur seem to show their conviction that awareness of this necessity exists already. However, it remains unknown whether and when this awareness will become sufficiently diffused among those important policy makers who decide about applying the principles and priorities of interdependent politics now and in the near future.