

Summary of the Ninth Meeting of the CICA Think Tank Forum

On December 28-29, 2021, under the guidance of the Secretariat of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, with the strong support of CICA think tank partners, Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS) hosted the Ninth Meeting of the CICA Think Tank Forum (CICA TTF) themed "A New Beginning for Rebuilding Mutual Trust in the Post-Pandemic Era: Trends and Missions." The meeting invited more than 30 representatives from think tanks and official institutions of 14 countries including Azerbaijan, Egypt, Pakistan, Russia, Kazakhstan, India, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Turkey, Vietnam, Jordan, Israel and China to discuss how to promote rebuilding of mutual trust and common development among CICA countries through a combination of online and offline means.

Ambassador Kairat Sarybay, Executive Director of the CICA Secretariat, and Xiao Qinghua, Chinese Ambassador, attended the meeting and delivered keynote speeches respectively. Vladimir Norov, Secretary-General of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), congratulated on the successful convening of the meeting via video. In addition, the SIIS released the keynote report of the forum - *Rebuilding Mutual Trust in a Period of Turbulence and Changes: New Vision of the CICA Think Tank Forum*, which received warm responses from TTF members.

The CICA TTF mechanism was established in March 2014. In the following 7 years, under the leadership of the SIIS, the CICA TTF has been held for 8 consecutive years in the form of roundtable meeting, producing many research reports and chairman statements around the development of the CICA, and exerting an extensive influence among CICA member states. With joint efforts of all parties and consent of all CICA member states, the CICA TTF has officially become a permanent institution under the CICA mechanism

since 2021, and the SIIS has been appointed as the first chair unit of CICA TTF after the upgrading. This makes the Ninth CICA Think Tank Forum particularly important because it serves as a link between the past and future.

During the meeting, the participating experts and scholars conducted in-depth discussions on the topics of “realistic security challenges faced by CICA countries in the post-epidemic era,” “security cooperation among CICA countries in the digital era,” and “the role of think tanks in CICA countries in promoting the transformation and upgrading of the CICA.” The views of scholars from various countries are summarized as follows:

Realistic Security Challenges Faced by CICA Countries

Scholars at the meeting generally believe that the security challenges faced by CICA countries are becoming more and more complicated, which is manifested in the fact that old security issues haven't been resolved, while new security challenges keep emerging. Against the special backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, various historical grievances, including realistic contradictions, appear in various forms. Regional security issues have become increasingly diversified and fragmented, posing new problems for regional security governance.

First, the COVID-19 pandemic and derivative risks. Since 2020, the once-in-a-century COVID-19 pandemic has raged in the world, and public health security has become the most urgent challenge facing CICA countries. The pandemic has not only claimed the health and lives of many people in CICA countries, but also exerted serious impacts on economic security, political security and social security. Economic turbulence caused by the pandemic and prevention measures amid the pandemic can easily bring various contradictions and frictions. Besides, the rising unemployed rate, aggravation of poverty, and severe social divisions can also lead to turmoil. There has been great controversy over the prevention and control of

COVID-19, especially vaccine distribution, and rumors about the pandemic. So far, the pandemic continues to impact mankind, and CICA countries still need to grapple with direct and indirect security challenges brought by the pandemic in the long run.

Second, the shadow of strategic competition brought by the Cold War mentality. It is been 30 years since the end of the Cold War, but the Cold War mentality still persists. Some countries still try to maintain their so-called leadership or vested interests by looking for enemies, rivals and competitors. For example, the United States and some of its allies still regard China and Russia as their main security threats. They call this rivalry as the debate between democracy and autocracy to cover up their true strategic intentions. Moreover, powers outside the region use regional security issues as an opportunity to get involved in Asian affairs, deliberately provoking conflicts among some Asian countries, and causing continuous flare-up of many security issues.

Third, the effect of the Afghan issue. After the United States withdrew troops from Afghanistan, Afghanistan's political situation underwent drastic changes, exerting complex impacts on regional security. On the one hand, the refugee crisis and humanitarian crisis caused by the internal conflict in Afghanistan will affect neighboring countries. On the other hand, with the change of the Afghan regime, new trends of extremism, terrorism and separatist activities in the Eurasian inland areas are likely to emerge, posing potential threats to the entire region.

Fourth, non-traditional security threats continue to grow. In the CICA region, various types of non-traditional security issues have been intensifying under the catalysis of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as deterioration of ecological environment, uneven distribution of water resources, global warming and derivative effects, drug smuggling, transnational organized crime, cybersecurity, data security, social security and energy security. Industrial and supply chain security, as a derivative of economic security, is playing an increasingly important role. The scope of non-traditional security

issues is constantly expanding and their influence keeps increasing.

In addition, border conflicts, domestic political crises, and other issues left over from history in the CICA region still pose security threats to CICA countries. The outlook for security in the CICA region.

New Opportunities for Security Cooperation among CICA Countries

The new era has brought complex security challenges, but at the same time provided new opportunities for the CICA to play the role of a multilateral mechanism and make new process in security cooperation. Scholars at the meeting propose that the CICA mechanism can play its role in the following aspects:

First, the CICA can play an important role in deepening anti-pandemic cooperation. As the virus keeps mutating, CICA countries will still face huge pressure on pandemic containment, but many of them don't have sufficient governance capacity in public health security. As an important regional coordination mechanism, the CICA should take active actions to play a role in strengthening vaccine production and reasonable distribution, preparation and use of anti-pandemic materials, and technical cooperation in public health, so as to protect the health and safety of people in CICA countries. Vaccine should become a global public product. Countries should fully implement the spirit of science, carry out extensive anti-pandemic cooperation, maintain economic development and social stability, ensure people's well-being, and jointly tide over the COVID-19 pandemic.

Second, CICA countries should seize the important opportunity brought by vigorous development of digital technology and strengthen cooperation in the fields of digital economy and digital security. Currently, a new round of scientific and technological revolution is in full swing across the world, and digital economy has become an important part of economic development in the era of globalization and informationization. However, since many CICA

countries have weak links in digital infrastructure construction, international cooperation is an inevitable choice. Meanwhile, in order to maintain their competitive advantages, some developed countries often take measures to build technical barriers, trying to interfere with developing countries' efforts to benefit from new technologies by participating in globalization. So, in order to smoothly integrate into the technological globalization and board the express train of digital economy development, developing countries and CICA countries should work together to bridge the digital divide continuously, reject narrow techno-nationalism, and strengthen cooperation in interconnectivity, digital economy, data security and other relevant fields. The CICA can play a key role in the process of multilateral cooperation.

Third, CICA countries should adhere to the principle of multilateralism and tackle global and regional security challenges with a spirit of cooperation. Faced with emerging security challenges amid the pandemic, the international community needs multilateralism, fairness and justice more than ever. CICA member states should uphold multilateralism based on the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, abandon the Cold War mentality and the concept of zero-sum game, firmly safeguard the international system with United Nations at its core, and vigorously promote the common values of mankind, including peace, development, fairness, justice, democracy and freedom. They should always adhere to the spirit of cooperation and consultation in handling regional security affairs to ensure that the goals of security, stability and development will be achieved.

The raging COVID-19 pandemic is another testament that human society is a community with a shared future. All countries, all ethnic groups, and all people are in the same boat. No country is an island, nor can it achieve security on its own. All countries in the world should strengthen cooperation to jointly address security challenges in various forms. As the most extensive multilateral security cooperation platform in Asia, the CICA can play a more important role in the process of security cooperation in the new era.

Envisaged Path for the Transformation and Upgrading of the CICA

After in-depth discussion, the participating experts put forward the following opinions on the transformation and upgrading of the CICA:

Firstly, fully learning from existing experience. It's necessary to learn from the experience of various successful regional security cooperation mechanisms, fully cooperate with other influential international organizations, and pay full attention to the special conditions of different regions in Asia, so as to ensure that the upgraded international organization can meet the actual needs of Asian security agenda. For example, CICA countries should study the experience and lessons of security organizations in Europe, and think about the core task and sequence in building this type of organizations in Asia. At the same time, they should also pay close attention to the SCO, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and other international organizations currently active in Asia, explore the particularity of building international organizations in Asia, and draw on the effective principles and practices of these organizations.

In addition, when promoting the transformation and upgrading of the CICA, it's necessary to carry out closer cooperation with global international organizations, especially promoting interaction and cooperation with the United Nations. Since any global change will have a far-reaching impact on the security and development of Asia, in the process of interacting and cooperating with these international organizations, the CICA can make the voice of Asia better heard, enhancing its own soft power. In the process of cooperation, CICA countries need to continuously improve mutual trust, step up cooperation on security issues, resolve deep-rooted security issues in Asia, and do a better job in withstanding external risks.

Secondly, it's necessary to adhere to the basic principles of openness, transparency and voluntariness in the transformation and upgrading of the CICA, and take a steady pace in the process. Scholars at the meeting fully

realize that given the current complex security environment in Asia, the transformation and development of the CICA will be a long process with many twists and turns. When promoting mechanism building, transformation and development of the CICA, it's necessary to maintain information transparency and sharing to avoid unnecessary disputes. The transformation and upgrading should be open to all CICA member states and take into account their security interests and concerns. In short, the transformation and development of the CICA mechanism can be carried out at a proper and steady pace, but need to ensure that all CICA countries move forward together.

Thirdly, advanced theoretical guidance and reasonable structural design will be used to achieve the goal of transforming and upgrading the CICA. Since the CICA is a diversified organization, in order to transform and upgrade the mechanism, it's necessary for all member states to reach a consensus and guide actions with the security concept that meets the requirements of the times. The new security concept proposed by President Xi Jinping at the CICA Summit in Shanghai is very important for forming such consensus. It has become the common goal of the member states to take coordinated actions in various fields, carry out practical cooperation, establish partnerships based on trust under the common concept, and finally turn these contents into regulations and documents.

Meanwhile, the CICA also needs to advance mechanism building according to the new goals. The most important task is that the CICA Secretariat should improve its functions, especially highlight the executive function. It should take a leading role in designing innovative solutions for the transformation and upgrading process, which can not only make the entire organization more institutionalized and realize institutional innovation, but also convert the idea of transforming and upgrading the CICA into a reality.

Finally, it's necessary to make full use of the CICA TTF to provide intellectual support for the transformation and development of the CICA. The establishment of international mechanisms such as the CICA Think Tank Forum within the CICA framework plays a significant role in facilitating lasting

stability and transformation of the CICA mechanism. Sufficient interaction and dialogue between intellectual elites of CICA countries can provide important support for CICA countries to update security concepts and build specific cooperation mechanisms. The CICA TTF should continue to expand its influence, attract more experts to participate in discussions on regional security issues, especially emerging non-traditional security issues, and conduct more regular and frequent exchanges. Meanwhile, it's also necessary to try to establish a partner network involving multiple stakeholders, strengthen cooperation between the think tank forum and the public and private sectors, and embrace new concepts and ideas with an open and diverse mind.

The CICA TTF should establish a more extensive academic cooperation mechanism to strengthen people-to-people exchanges between CICA countries and build more friendly, cooperative relations on the one hand, and turn the discussion contents into research results and specific plans for the reference of the CICA on the other hand. In addition, the CICA TTF also needs to establish a youth exchange mechanism to provide opportunities of training and exchanges for young elites, so that future leaders of CICA countries can communicate with each other, and the development vision and mission of the CICA can be passed on to the next generation. Nowadays, many young people prefer communication via social media, so the CICA TTF can communicate and interact with the younger generation through various social platforms, release performance achievements and information on a regular basis, and communicate with people through these social platforms. We hope that young people will actively participate in the development of the CICA.