

## Report

### **“Asian Regional Security Cooperation in the context of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Situation and Response”**

On December 21, 2020, the *8th international round table of the Asia-Pacific Think Tank Forum* held at the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS) in virtual format. The topic of the forum was **“Asian Regional Security Cooperation in the context of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Situation and Response”**. The forum invited around 30 experts and scholars from Kazakhstan, Russia, India, South Korea, Iran, Malaysia, Uzbekistan, China and other CICA Member States and Observer States to participate. The forum was attended online by diplomats, scholars and researchers of CICA member states, as well as officials of the CICA Secretariat.

Chen Dongxiao, President of the SIIS, delivered an opening speech and presided over the meeting. At the opening ceremony of the conference, Zhang Hongjian, Counsellor of the Eurasian Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, Chi Fang, Deputy Executive Director of the CICA Secretariat, and Vladimir Norov, Secretary-General of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), delivered speeches. They, on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, the CICA Secretariat and the SCO Secretariat congratulated the SIIS with the successful organization of the conference, and commended the SIIS for its work in promoting the development of the CICA Think Tank Forum over the years, as well as expressed their views on regional security issues of Asian countries.

The discussion of the meeting was divided into two sections, focusing on the topics of “COVID-19 pandemic and regional non-traditional security challenges” and “promoting a new stage of regional security cooperation: the role of CICA”. Combined with their own practice, the scholars discussed in-depth the new security challenges encountered in the Asian region, the development of the world economy, the regional security order, the global order and the development of relations between great powers in the context of the current pandemic. At the same time, scholars from all over the world also put forward a lot of valuable views on the role of the CICA and other Asian regional security and economic cooperation mechanisms in the new global and regional situation. Yang Jiemian, Director of the Academic Committee of the SIIS, provided a comprehensive and in-depth summary of

the meeting. The main points of views of the participants are summarized below for readers.

Chen Dongxiao, President of the SIIS, believes that the global pandemic has made an important impact on regional security cooperation. Countries require finding a better balance between security and development, and need broader coordination and cooperation. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the regional cooperation process in Asia and other regions has gained new support, and the development of new mechanisms such as Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is of a great significance to the regional economic recovery. In the face of the challenges of global problems, Asian countries need to promote closer cooperation in the areas of epidemic prevention and control, economic recovery, poverty alleviation, climate change, green economy, sustainable development, dialogue among civilizations, and the CICA will play a greater role in this process.

Zhang Hongjian, Counsellor of the Eurasian Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, underlined that in 28 years since the establishment of CICA, the membership has gradually increased, the region of cooperation has expanded constantly, and the concept of development has kept pace with times. The CICA has become an important platform for Asian countries to enhance mutual trust, carry out dialogue and deepen cooperation. In September this year, the Special meeting of CICA Foreign Ministers was successfully held in virtual format. Wang Yi, State Councilor and Foreign Minister of China attended the meeting in order to exchange views on the international and regional situation in the backdrop of the COVID19 pandemic. The meeting reached a broad consensus to deepen the cooperation in various fields of CICA, and provided a new impetus to CICA to develop to next stage. Under the new situation, CICA has a greater responsibility in promoting multilateral cooperation and maintaining regional peace and development. CICA Member States should join together to enhance the spirit of common destiny and community, promote CICA cooperation and jointly build an Asia of mutual respect, mutual trust, security and stability, openness , tolerance, cooperation and innovation.

Chi Fang, Deputy Executive Director of the CICA Secretariat, believes that the Think Tank Forum is an important initiative within the CICA framework, and China has made great contributions to this. Since 2014, the SIIS has held 7 CICA Think Tank Forums; all of them have been a complete success and have achieved fruitful results. Each member state attaches a great importance to it

and supports this event; government officials, experts and scholars from all over the world actively participated, and each Think Tank Forum has reached a consensus to enhance the mutual cooperation and trust among member states within the CICA framework. At the recent CICA Senior Officials Committee Meeting, Member States reached a consensus that the CICA Think Tank Forum will be held regularly, which will provide new impetus to the further development of CICA. The CICA Secretariat will continue supporting and promoting the CICA Think Tanks forum and strive for more efficient intellectual support of the CICA development.

Vladimir Norov, Secretary-General of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), pointed out that the COVID-19 pandemic is not only a crisis in human health, but also an economic and social crisis. It shows us a state of interdependence and close ties among the nations of the world, and we must work together more closely to maintain our collective security. In order to achieve this goal, we need to make full use of existing international organizations, and the SCO will engage in open cooperation with CICA and all other regional international organizations, not only to control the spread of the pandemic and restore normal socio-economic order, but also to use these cooperation to combat the spread of drugs, cybersecurity and other broader issues. SCO has much to offer in many areas of regional security cooperation.

Heungkyu Kim, Director of the US-China Policy Institute at Asian University in South Korea, believes that developed countries seem helpless in the face of non-traditional security challenges such as the outbreak of the COVID19, but China has shown a strong ability to adapt. China has not only managed to contain the outbreak, but also became the only large economy to achieve positive growth in 2020. Countries need to understand and adapt the pace of China's rise. The Asian region needs a more stable multilateral security cooperation framework, and the wider coverage of the CICA mechanism can provide a good framework for regional security and help countries to jointly deal with non-traditional security issues, as well as the populism and unilateralism.

Srikanth Kondapalli, Director of the East Asian Research Center at the Institute of International Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University in India, believes that the COVID19 pandemic poses serious challenges for countries around the world, some countries are responding effectively and others are underperforming. To make matters worse, outbreak did not promote international cooperation in public health, but prompted the Trump administration to blame China on many occasions, even the World Health

Organization. The pandemic has had a great impact on the regional political and economic landscape, triggering military conflicts in many areas, and many non-traditional security issues are growing. The G-7 and many other international organizations have not promoted international cooperation in this field, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is working to promote the relevant cooperation process in the region, and CICA should also use its advantages to provide a platform for regional cooperation.

Ahmad Ghazali Bin Abu Hassan, an Adviser to the National Patriot Association of Malaysia, pointed out that recovery of economies during the pandemic is a challenge for every regional country to face. Economic security is an important component of non-traditional security. Economic recovery, cooperation around the world and coordination need to be promoted in an all-round way by governments. First, we now have to devote sufficient funds and energy to study the economic recovery problems; second, we need to maintain the stability of national currencies and exchange rates, which is a particularly important issue. Similar regional cooperation stabilization mechanisms should be established at the regional level; and RCEP, ASEAN and CICA are good mechanisms that should play their due roles so that more countries in the region can participate. There are many possibilities for cooperation under the CICA framework, but economic recovery is the most significant opportunity.

Qiang Xiaoyun, Director of the Russia- Central Asian Research Center of the SIIS, believes that the collective identity of the CICA Conference has entered into a critical period as CICA countries have entered to profound political and economic transformation phase. The issue of how to catch up with the pace of economic globalization and the new scientific and technological revolution has become an urgent for CICA Member States to think about. With good regional representation, respect for the diversity of Asian countries and taking into account the security concerns of all Member States, CICA can provide a new problem-solving framework and a new path for security cooperation in the region. In the context of the pandemic, we can effectively strengthen our collective identity through cooperation in all aspects. The CICA platform can be used to strengthen cooperation in the field of Health and epidemic prevention, strengthen the construction of health infrastructure, to stimulate and promote the economic recovery of the country and the region, and promote the process of cooperation in other areas.

Yerzhan Saltybayev, Director of the Institute of World Economy and Politics of the Foundation of the First President of Kazakhstan, believes that

the pandemic has hit the world economy like never before, regional conflicts have become more serious using the pandemic, and there is a lack of multilateral security mechanisms like the OSCE in Asia. CICA is very important in this regard. After more than 20 years of establishment, CICA's foundational construction is over and now CICA has entered into the second stage of development. We need to organize efforts to discuss the specific security and developmental issues of Member States, expand the areas of cooperation, and conduct a good analysis of the agenda and priorities of cooperation so that it can adapt to the latest changes in the world. It is expected to be established a strong framework of cooperation based on common interests in the Asian continent.

Viktor Larin, Vice Chairman of the Far East branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, believes that the pandemic has had a huge impact on the world and poses a threat to all countries, both politically and economically. In fact, this should serve as an opportunity for broader cooperation among societies to fight the pandemic and promote cooperation throughout the world. However, the United States has not shown enough spirit of cooperation, and even continues to promote strategic competition in this regard, Asian countries should seize this opportunity and rely on a broader process of regional cooperation to promote the expansion of the interests of humanity as a whole. Promoting economic development initiatives such as the "Belt and Road", "Eurasian Economic Union" and "Bright Road", and enhancing the capacity of countries on regional cooperation and specific governance issues through honest dialogue, can lead us to an integrated Asia.

Ali Akbar Jowkar, a researcher at the Iranian Institute of Political and International Studies, believes that over the past 30 years, countries in the Asian region have established a number of regional cooperation organizations and developed their own characteristics, which have played an important and positive role in Asian security. The unilateralist foreign policy implemented by the United States in the Trump era has seriously interfered with multilateral cooperation in various fields around the world. However, in the face of the changing international environment, coupled with the impact of the pandemic, Asian countries need to strengthen internal cooperation. Long-term, institutionalized multilateral cooperation can create a stable platform for regional cooperation, and the CICA is an important part of it. Under the current circumstances, regional multilateral organizations should give full play to the capacity of their member states, reduce differences on key issues

through cross-border cooperation within the mechanism, and strive to better solve non-traditional security challenges and respond to global crises.

Feng Shaolei, Director of the Russian Research Center of East China Normal University, pointed out that the current development of Asia is facing three aspects of the imbalance; the first imbalance is between security and economy. The process of multilateral cooperation in the economic field in Asia continues to accelerate, and new multilateral economic and trade mechanisms such as Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) continue to form, but the changes in the security field are relatively slow. The second imbalance is between history and reality. Over the past 50 years, the contrast of security forces in Asia has been largely stable, with no major geopolitical changes, but now some new geopolitical combinations are emerging. The third imbalance is between ideas and behavior. An important historical experience of the end of the Cold War is the development of relations beyond ideology. Asian countries are generally reluctant to fall into such confrontational conflicts. However, in reality, Western countries are still willing to divide the world with ideological words, which is neither compatible with complex reality nor conducive to the stability and harmony of the world.

Yang Jiemian, Director of the Academic Committee of SIIS, pointed out that in the context of the COVID19 pandemic, the global situation presents the following four main characteristics: first, the pandemic has brought a serious test to the public health, economic and political situation in all countries of the world, the global scale, traditional and non-traditional security situation is not optimistic. Second, regional economic cooperation is showing growth, but in the area of regional security cooperation, the existing supply is far from meeting the needs of countries for security cooperation. Thirdly, the CICA Member States have a responsibility to maintain peace and promote regional security. They need to actively engage in dialogue and cooperation with extraterritorial powers, the major powers within the CICA framework as well as to actively and flexibly promote mechanism-building and carry out broader collaboration among international organizations. Fourthly, CICA countries should continue to expand the scope of mutual cooperation and confidence-building measures in response to various security threats, and translate some forward-looking ideas into tangible results. All in all, the achievement of all these goals is difficult and requires the common political will and courage of Asian countries to act.