Regional Efforts to Advance Democracy and Human Rights in Asia: APID, the PG20, and a Possible GGAIN[1]

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Mongolia is the 2011-13 chair of the Community of Democracies (CoD).[2] In August 2011, the presidents of Mongolia and the Republic of Korea (ROK) proposed an Asian Partnership Initiative for Democracy (APID). In Korea, in 2012, the idea was discussed at meetings held in the Asan Institute in February and at the Jeju Forum in June, and a follow-up meeting was planned for later in the year in Ulaanbaatar.

APID has already garnered some Asian support. In September 2012, for example, during his state visit to Mongolia, the president of Indonesia responded positively to his host's invitation to join APID.[3] In both Mongolia and South Korea, however, political uncertainties have slowed the momentum toward APID's realization. In 2012, the controversial arrest and subsequent trial of Mongolia's previous president shortly before parliamentary elections led observers to question the country's democratic credentials.[4] In South Korea, although legislative elections in 2012 were won by the ruling party, the implementation of APID has been put on hold pending the outcome of the presidential election in December.

The delay creates an opportunity for outside analysis and recommendation before final decisions about APID are made. The opportunity is not to list what needs to be done to implement existing plans. That would imply insider knowledge and require second-guessing what the two presidents had in mind. The pause is opportune because it offers a chance to list the main regional organizations that are already committed to democracy and human rights in Asia. That inventory can then be used by decision-makers in Ulaanbaatar and Seoul to avoid duplicating what is already being done, and to determine whether there is something that is not being done that APID could usefully do, or do in a better way, in productive synergy with existing entities and endeavors.

The list below is neither exhaustive nor definitive, and is limited to organizations of which I happen to be aware. But it covers most if not almost all of the explicitly *regional* outfits that, to varying extents and in different ways, specialize in the defense and/or promotion of democracy and/or human rights *in Asia*. These criteria are appropriate

insofar as APID would also be Asian, in its multi-country composition and its programmatic scope.[5]

A List of Regional Organizations for Democracy and Human Rights in Asia:

- Alliance for Reform and Democracy in Asia (ARDA)
- ASEAN Commission on Women and Children (ACWC)
- ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR)
- ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC)
- ASEAN Civil Society Conference / ASEAN People's Assembly (ACSC/APA)
- Asia Pacific Democracy Partnership (APDP)
- Asia Pacific Forum for National Human Rights (APF)
- Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)
- Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
- Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL)
- Asian NGO Network on National Human Rights Institutions (ANNI)
- Bali Democracy Forum (BDF)
- Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD)
- Global Movement of Moderates (GMM)
- Human Rights Resource Center for ASEAN (HRRCA)
- Institute for Peace and Democracy (IPD)
- Solidarity for Asian People's Advocacy (SAPA)
- Southeast Asia-US Partnership: Civil Societies Innovating Together (IKAT-US)
- South Asia Forum for Human Rights (SAFHR)
- World Forum for Democratization in Asia (WFDA)

It is not my intent, nor is there space here, to describe and discuss these twenty organizations. It is nonetheless striking how few of them are located in, or focused on, South Asia, despite India being a large and democratic country. Notable too is the absence of organizations resident in or specialized on Central Asia. The Pacific Islands

are also underrepresented, although that paucity may simply reflect their small size and number.

In what follows I will sketch three analytic dimensions along which these organizations could be compared: *effectiveness*, *mode*, and *complementarity*. The essay will end with some thoughts on *possibility*: the sort of Asian regional organization that might be worth innovating to extend or deepen the reach of democracy in Asia. A nascent APID whose terms of reference are still unclear usefully prompts this exercise without limiting it to what has already been decided.

For convenience, the twenty entities on the list can be imagined as forming an Asian-regional Political Group of 20, or PG20, in contrast to the global-financial Group of 20, or G20. Insofar as democracy and human rights are good things, one might also think of the PG20 as the Pretty Good 20. But that would prejudge their performance. One could then describe basic aspects of the PG20 such as age and size. Alongside these certainly germane dimensions, however, the aspects featured all too briefly here may be more helpful as guidelines to assessment and prescription.

Effectiveness

On the dependent variable, Freedom House has good news to report: "Over the past five years, the Asia-Pacific region has been the only [region in the world] to record steady gains in the majority of indicators [of "political rights" and "civil liberties"] that are measured by [Freedom House]."[6]

The hard-to-answer question is this: What (if any) proportional contribution to this happy outcome can be attributed to the activities of each "member" of the PG20? And by what exact and (one hopes) reproducible causal chain? Perhaps domestic, *intra*-national drivers and dynamics so dominated the achievement of these "steady gains" that the transnational efforts of the PG20 made little or no difference. And even if the PG20 can be given credit, some of its organizations undoubtedly deserve more of it than others. Which ones? How? Why?

If a comprehensively reliable assessment is too difficult or expensive to attempt, one could work backward from a specific result to its possible causes. One could, for instance, consider the steps toward political reform that have been undertaken in Myanmar (Burma) as the outcome to be explained. One could then turn to the PG20 and pick, say, the Bali Democracy Forum (BDF) for examination as a hypothetical contributor to Naypyidaw's liberalizing turn.

Annually since 2008, Asian leaders have gathered at the BDF to share and discuss their experiences with democracy. Featured topics have included "best practices" for democratic reform. The government of Myanmar has been invited to BDF meetings, and officials from Myanmar have taken part. Could their participation have encouraged them to open their country's once notoriously closed and stifled political economy?

The BDF's scholarly incarnation as the also-listed Institute for Peace and Democracy (IPD) is managed by Ketut Erawan. In November 2011, I asked him if he believed the Forum had made a difference in Myanmar. His thoughtful answer was "no, probably

not." One may commend him for not claiming credit where none was due. But was he too modest?

The BDF has emphasized process over performance, diplomatic discourse over actual democratization. To my knowledge, the Forum has shown no interest in trying rigorously to evaluate its own effectiveness. Its reluctance is understandable in view of the difficulty of the task. If such an assessment were undertaken, however, one might find that exposure to the speeches and especially the corridor conversations at BDF gatherings did facilitate, however marginally, the liberalizing steps that Myanmar's president Thein Sein has taken to date. One could also research the possibly reform-inducing role of the PG20-listed ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC).

And what of the future? My Stanford colleague Larry Diamond has written: "If there is going to be a big new lift to global democratic prospects in this decade, the region from which it will emanate is most likely to be East Asia … a region that has been strangely neglected in recent thinking about the near-term prospects for expansion of democracy."[7] If such a trend does develop, will the PG20 drive it, or merely applaud it? How can Diamond's "strange neglect" be overcome by creative thinking about regional initiatives to expand, protect, and improve democracy in the region? Are new organizations needed? Is an APID overdue?

And just what goals should such endeavors be designed to serve? The outright replacement of an autocratic regime? Or its reform? Among the PG20, toppling a tyrant is an aim too dangerous to warrant support. The ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus sharply criticized Than Shwe's dictatorship, but it advocated reform not revolution—and presciently so, as matters turned out. There is no room for a coup in a definition of democracy as "the peaceful and smooth transfer of power and change of government," to quote the listed Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD).[8] Judging the relative effectiveness of the PG20 would thus crucially require, case by case, clear and comparable understandings of processes of reform, including their catalysts and conditions, and of the contributions of hypothetically implicated actors.

The most common practice among the PG20 is not to lead or drive reform but to help it along by providing moral support, networking venues, process monitoring, and material resources to facilitate democratic change. Resourcing for reform includes preparing material, informational, and human assets on its behalf. One could approximate the causation or facilitation associated with education and training, for example, in surveys of the graduates of such programs regarding the extent to which they may have put those experiences to relevant use, and to what effect.

Mode

References to Tracks I, II, and III have become a staple of discourse on international relations. Originally applied to meetings, these terms now differentiate associations, agendas, and individuals as well. Events, organizations, plans, and people of a governmental character are on Track I. Summits, ministries, communiqués, and officials are respective examples. Their private-sector equivalents, respectively, occupy Track III. Business meetings, self-governing bodies, Ph.D. dissertations, and the self-employed, respectively, illustrate this set. Track II is a hybrid between the other two. Instances of this mixed genre include meetings where independent scholars interact with civil servants

who are on active duty but are supposed to speak frankly, having been asked to leave their official hats at the door; associations of a quasi-governmental character; studies by experts hired but not censored by the state; and retired diplomats who, even if their freedom to speak is no longer constrained, retain habits of discretion and deference to their former employers.

These distinctions are useful not only as a way of sorting the PG20 by type, but also because of the questions that the tracks imply. As the Track I governments of Mongolia and South Korea contemplate launching an Asian Partnership Initiative for Democracy, should they design it to fit their customary—diplomatic—mode? Should it be sponsored by ruling institutions and limited mainly if not entirely to officially funded, accredited, and constrained delegations? Or should APID borrow from Tracks II and III, by inviting unofficial participants as well as official ones, loosening constraints on the latter, and seeking both private- and public-sector support?

Track I itself can be disaggregated in various ways, including by official function: Let Track I-A stand for *attendance*, when the participants in an entity's event are governments, officials, or officially approved. Let Track I-B indicate *backing*, when one, two, or more governments fund the entity in question wholly or mainly by, or through, themselves. So far as I can tell, only four of the PG20 entities satisfy both of these criteria: the ASEAN Commission on Women and Children (ACWC), the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), the Asia Pacific Democracy Partnership (APDP), and the BDF. And the APDP is a zombie—not dead, but not alive either. APDP lacks even a website—minimal proof of associational sentience in this century.

It is remarkable that the Track I designation should apply to only four of the 20 Asian regional democracy and human rights entities listed above. At its core, systemic democracy within a given country must be governmental in nature. Yet 16 of the 20 entities are either mixed types or in the private sector—operating, respectively, on Tracks II and III. Noteworthy too is the fact that of the four Track I entities, three are Southeast Asian initiatives.

Does this mean there is room for a new, Asia-wide, official, Track I organization that would enlist governments in efforts to promote, improve, or defend democracy and/or human rights in Asia? Should there be one for a region other than Southeast Asia, which is already overrepresented on Track I? Should that region be Northeast Asia? Should there be one for South Asia, one for Central Asia, and one for the Pacific Island nations, underrepresented as these regions are among the PG20?

Participants in the Inter-Regional Dialogue on Democracy, launched on Track I in 2011,[9] include the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which includes Central Asia, does not take part. An APID would have difficulty establishing a presence in Central Asia. In that region, every country save one is, by Freedom House standards, "Not Free," and the exception, Kyrgyzstan, is only "Partly Free." But westernmost Mongolia is a mere 40 kilometers from easternmost Kazakhstan, and Central Asia remains an unfilled niche in the infrastructure of democracy promotion by regional organizations in Asia.

It is easy to say that these regions should be covered by an Asia-wide organization on Track I. But how broad should the footprint of such an association be? Should it focus on its own Northeast or East Asian neighborhood? Should it invite all or nearly all of the governments of Asia to come to together for joint activities in pursuit of democracy and the protection of human rights? Or should the invitation list be limited to governments that are already democratic? As for the entity's agenda, should it emphasize democracy more, human rights more, or both in equal measure?

Would the activities of such an innovation—an APID or something else—compete with what the Bali Democracy Forum is already doing? The APDP did not succeed in part because it was developed in Washington while Jakarta was planning the BDF. Indonesian coolness toward the APDP helped stunt its growth. Competition need not be a bad thing. But avoiding the APDP's fate argues for thinking about how a new creation might be designed to complement rather than to rival the BDF. The Indonesian president's willingness to join an APID is encouraging in this context, but the issue of redundancy versus complementarity will need to be resolved.

Complementarity

The accumulation of bilateral free trade agreements across Asia and across the Pacific is often lamented as a "noodle bowl" whose favoritisms, inconsistencies, and transaction costs (including onerous rules of origin) thwart progress toward freer trade on a global scale. Does such a critique apply as well to the overlaps among the PG20 as impeding the furtherance of democracy worldwide?

Complexity, duplication, and side arrangements may well be suboptimal, even regressive, in the *economic* contexts of bilateral versus regional or global arrangements for freer trade. But those sins could be virtues when it comes to promoting democracy and human rights. A bowl of twenty noodles that cradles Asia clear from the Bosporus to the Bering—strait to strait—is hardly full. Compared with the plethora of detailed agreements on cross-border trade and investment, international pacts to promote democracy and human rights are notably few in number and non-binding in nature. Increasing the redundancy of international efforts to promote political reform by innovating additions to the PG20 could be a good thing if it helps to limit the setback represented by the decline or failure of any existing initiative.

Failure can also be instructive. If an APID is in the works, and its terms of reference are being drafted, those terms could benefit from an analysis of the reasons why the APDP did not succeed. Was it mainly because it was too closely identified with a non-Asian power, namely, the United States? An initiative by Mongolia and the ROK would avoid that problem. Or were there other reasons—reasons worth keeping in mind when planning an APID?

The George W. Bush administration meant to root the APDP in a "core group" of nine Asian or Pacific countries: Australia, Canada, India, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, the Philippines, South Korea, and the United States. The idea was "to develop an informal coalition of democratic states to support democracy promotion in the Asia-Pacific region."[10] The notion of such a core group was understandable; Washington knew that a unilaterally American scheme would be dead on arrival. But the array of nine countries

distinguished a democratic "us" from an undemocratic "them" that was considered invidious and potentially threatening by the excluded governments, and it garnered criticism inside the "us" countries as well.

The Bali Democracy Forum reversed this approach. The BDF is not a partnership; it is a forum. That more innocuous status has reduced suspicion and enhanced acceptance. The BDF has no members, only participants. Authoritarian governments are welcome to attend. The rationale for inviting them lies in the hope that repeated exposure to democratic discourse will soften their aversion to reform and whet their appetite for it. There is no core group; the Indonesian government is wholly in charge. Jakarta can get away with this bit of friendly unilateralism. Washington could not. The one-government-decides model may be a less than democratic way to promote democracy, but it does avoid the depressing effect of lowest-common-denominator consensus.

Clearly the "P"—the partnership—in APID would need to be carefully defined. A minilateral approach might seem desirable, something between a nine-country core and a one-country chair. But a stable us-not-them partnership amounting to a bloc of already-democratic states could trigger suspicion and resentment. A two-country chair comprising Mongolia and South Korea would likely raise fewer objections. Viewed in light of the PG20, such a dual-leadership organization would also appear to be unique—an experiment not duplicated on that list.

The locations and historical experiences of Mongolia and South Korea have equipped each of these states with at least this shared comparative advantage as regards democracy and human rights: knowing how to cultivate freedom and accountability on the doorstep of large, peremptory, and potentially hostile neighbors. Just as post-Suharto Indonesia is a lesson (of sorts) in how to be democratic and Muslim at the same time, so one might single out democratic Mongolia and South Korea as sources of insight into how to remain democratic despite having despots for neighbors.

Or is that suggestion naïve? Why would the relevant democratic governments risk antagonizing China and Russia by sharing lessons on ways to survive being caged with a dragon and a bear? Informal conversations along such lines could of course take place, but a public, Track I forum for that purpose seems completely out of the question. To that extent, in a specifically Sino-Russian context, an APID reconceived on Track II might make more sense. Or the issue of Chinese and Russian participation could be left open and contingent on how APID develops and how Beijing and Moscow react.

In any event, an arrangement by already democratic states meant to help them manage their proximity to Russia would have to be a European undertaking, not an Asian one. In 2011, of the 14 countries that share land borders with Russia, seven were "Free" by Freedom House standards, but six of these seven were European. The seventh and sole Asian state is Mongolia.[11]

The more relevant concern for a multilaterally or minilaterally Asian (rather than Eurasian) organization would be China. Like Russia, China also abuts 14 countries on land, but 13 of them are located wholly in Asia and some two-thirds of the fourteenth (Russia) lies east of the Urals. In 2011, of these 14 neighbors of China, only two were "Free" (India and Mongolia); four were "Partly Free" (Bhutan, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, and

Pakistan); and eight were "Not Free" (Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Laos, Myanmar, North Korea, Russia, Tajikistan, and Vietnam).[12] South Korea is not adjacent to China on land, but of course the Korean Peninsula is, and only 190 kilometers of the Yellow Sea separate the Shandong Peninsula from South Korea.

If an APID does take shape on Track I, its founders will have to choose between purity and possibility: to preserve the new organization's democratic character by excluding China; or to include China, BDF- style, hoping that it can, inside APID, be cooperatively induced to become more democratic.

Possibility

An APID does not yet exist. The train has not yet left the station. If the train does run, it will run all or most of the time on Track I. But the details of its construction, locomotion, staffing, and destinations are still to be determined.

If APID is housed inside, or closely affiliated with, the Track I Community of Democracies, its founders will have opted for purity over possibility. In 2012, the overthrow of democracy in Mali caused the suspension of that country's membership in the CoD. A CoD-conforming APID could not invite China to join. But that would not preclude an APID initiative that would borrow from but also complement the BDF.

Such an effort might be called the Good Governance for Asia Initiative or GGAIN—pronounced, of course, "gain." It would focus not on liberal democracy and human rights as such, but on issues of governance—governance carefully defined to include institutional accountability and the rule of law, judicial independence and integrity, administrative reforms against corruption, consultative ways of safeguarding the environment, fairness and efficacy in resolving land issues involving eminent domain, and other subjects relevant both to socioeconomic performance and to democratic values and procedures.

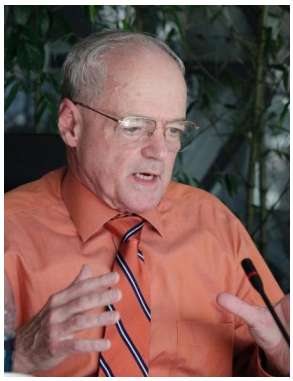
The purpose of these discourses, and of the recommendations they might yield, would not be didactic but would focus on sharing and learning "best practices" along BDF lines, but with less rhetoric and more detail. Each country delegation would be further encouraged to bring along an actual—ideally, a current, not yet solved—policy problem to share with other participants, who would offer feedback and brainstorm solutions in specialized breakout sessions or separate workshops.

Its distinctive agenda and methods, along with its Asian composition, would differentiate GGAIN from the broader agenda and increasingly global make-up of the BDF. Depending on their interest in taking part, governments would be invited to do so, but non-governmental organizations with expertise on specific issues related to good governance—poverty alleviation, disaster management, energy usage, educational reform, population policy, environmental protection—would also be asked to attend and share their experiences and views. If and as the initiative grew, spin-off projects could be undertaken in any mode, including the all-private Track III.

The experiment might fail. China might refuse to come. Some governments might deny having any problems to share, or submit problems of a trivial or merely technical nature. Initial gatherings could be small. But if they were seen as usefully introspective and

constructive in practical terms, they could gain—or GGAIN—legitimacy as a win-win experience. If that happened, the experiment could evolve into an Asian-led way of owning and encouraging both socioeconomic and political reform—not as abstractly desirable, but on practical grounds, based on the need for accountable institutions to respond flexibly and creatively to a challenging world.

* The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.



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[1] Some of the ideas herein were conveyed to a conference, "Strengthening Democracy in Asia: New Strategies for Regional Partnerships," hosted in Seoul on 14 February 2012 by the Asan Institute for Policy Studies in cooperation with the National Endowment for Democracy.

[2] On the Community of Democracies, see http://www.community-democracies.org/.

[3] "Joint Statement between Mongolia and In donesia," http://www.infomongolia.com/ct/ci/4898.

[4] Doug Schoen, "Mongolia's Democracy Continues to Be in Question," August 13, 2012, http://www.forbes.com/sites/dougschoen/2012/08/13/mongolias-democracy-continues-to-be-in-question/.

[5] Although the list excludes entities that are global in composition or scope, such as Amnesty International, the Community of Democracies, and Human Rights Watch, many of the organizations that do appear rely on support from outside Asia. IKAT-US is an obvious case in point.

[6] Arch Puddington, "The Arab Uprisings and Their Global Repercussions," *Freedom in the World 2012*, 5-6, http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2012.

[7] "The Coming Wave," *Journal of Democracy* 23, no. 1 (January 2012): 5.

[8] "Asia in Transition," http://www.cald.org/site/about.php?i=Asia_in_Transition.

[9] Inter-Regional Democracy Resource Centre, http://www.idea.int/democracydialog/.

[10] "US/Asia: Democracy Partnership Scheme," *The New York Times*, May 31, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/31/news/31liht-oxan.0531.5943343.html?_r=0.

[11] Freedom House, "Table of Independent Countries," *Freedom in the World 2012*, http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2012.

[12] Freedom House, "Table," *Freedom in the World 2012*. When it is published, *Freedom in the World 2013* will likely upgrade Myanmar's "Not Free" rating for 2012 and may improve Mongolia's numerical score.