

Unchecked and opaque militaries threatening Asian stability

Transparency International warns that unchecked military power in Asia is a threat to regional stability.

Several Asian powers are at high risk of corruption posing a threat to stability in the region according to a new Government Defence Index from Transparency International.

Six of the seventeen states assessed in the index receive either E or F grade, representing either a “very high” or “critical” risk of defence corruption. Japan was awarded a B indicating that defence institutions are transparent and subject to effective oversight.

Katherine Dixon, Programme Director Transparency International Defence and Security, said:

“In the context of recent changes to Japan’s constitution, the Government needs to convince critics that self-defence forces will contribute positively to international peace and security.

“Demonstrating that Japan’s defence institutions operate with integrity and high levels of accountability and transparency is an important step toward achieving this.”

The region has some of the most rapidly growing defence budgets in the world, with the 17 countries studied in this report spending approximately \$432.7 billion on military expenditure in 2014, or 24.5 % of global military spending.

But much of this spending remains highly secretive. Oversight of defence budgets, essential to holding military elites to account, is often minimal.

Dixon added:

“Asia is home to some of the most rapidly expanding military capabilities in the world, but it’s not just the size of budgets that matters.

In a highly populated region, with overlapping territorial claims and rising defence spending, stability depends on establishing clear standards for the way military power is governed, based on accountability to citizens and basic transparency.

This is what being a responsible power in the 21st Century should mean.”

Across the region, New Zealand, Australia, Taiwan, Japan and Singapore top the index with strong institutional controls over military spending and policy. South Korea, where the Government has taken a strong public stand against defence corruption, also scored ahead of the regional average.

In contrast, China accounts for around 30% of the world’s most secretive spending. In theory, defence policy is supervised by the National People’s Congress, but the US congress receives more information about Chinese military capability and defence budget.

Singapore emerges as the ASEAN leader, with firm foundations in Malaysia, Philippines and Indonesia. But there are notable gaps. In several ASEAN countries the behaviour of the military stands in stark contrast to the organisation’s professed values. In Myanmar, the abuse of power by the military is contributing to the loss of government legitimacy and fuelling civil unrest.

<<<EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.01 (GMT)
4th NOVEMBER 2015>>>

Results:

| Country | Risk banding |
|-------------|--------------|
| New Zealand | A |
| Australia | B |
| Taiwan | B |
| Japan | B |
| Singapore | B |
| South Korea | C |
| India | D |
| Malaysia | D |
| Philippines | D |
| Indonesia | D |
| Bangladesh | D |
| China | E |
| Thailand | E |
| Pakistan | E |
| Sri Lanka | E |
| Cambodia | F |
| Myanmar | F |

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Notes to editors:

The Government Defence Anti-Corruption Index (GI) assesses the existence and effectiveness of institutional and informal controls to manage the risk of corruption in defence and security institutions and of their enforcement. Transparency International's team of experts draws together evidence from a wide variety of sources and interviewees across 77 indicators to provide the government with a detailed assessment of the integrity of their defence institutions.

The 2015 Asia-Pacific report publishes the country risk rankings derived from this data and examines the trends across the region.

The report follows the Middle East and North Africa report published on 29th October 2015.

Forthcoming reports based on the 2015 index will be released on Africa, NATO, the G20, and fragile states.