Event Summary: Keynote Address

William Pope, Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Department of State.

On September 22, 2004, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace hosted a symposium on the U.S.-led war on terrorism in Asia and its effects on the grand strategies of the region’s major powers. Among the panelists were many of the contributors to the National Bureau of Asian Research’s latest book Strategic Asia 2004-05: Confronting Terrorism in the Pursuit of Power. The keynote address was given by Mr. William Pope, the current Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism at the Department of State. In his speech, Mr. Pope outlined past progress, present strategy, and future challenges in U.S. counterterrorism policy in Asia.

The basic tenets of U.S. counterterrorism policy can be found in a framework document titled “The National Strategy for Combating Terrorism.” According to Mr. Pope, the U.S. war on terrorism is guided by a 4D strategy: Defeat terrorists and their organizations through direct and indirect use of diplomatic, financial and military power; Deny sponsorship, sanctuary, and support to terrorists by supporting states that oppose terrorism and punishing those that harbor terrorists; Diminish the underlying conditions that terrorists seek to exploit by winning the war of ideas and partnering with the international community to prevent the emergence of terrorism in weak states; Defend U.S. citizens at home and abroad.

Since September 11th, U.S. counterterrorism efforts in Asia have been focused on Al Qaeda. Mr. Pope contended that the U.S. has made substantial progress in isolating Al Qaeda’s leadership and disrupting its financial support. Yet, Mr. Pope warned that Al Qaeda remains resilient and may be attempting to create a global jihadist network. Moreover, Sunni Islamic movements, such as Jemaah Islamiyah, have increased in size and capacity. While Mr. Pope rejected the idea of a monolithic terrorist threat, he said that his department had detected cooperation between various terrorist groups and plans to attack soft targets, such as commercial shipping, in the region.

According to Mr. Pope, the U.S. is responding to these threats through a combination of military and diplomatic efforts. The U.S. has sought to enhance the counterterrorism capabilities of countries in the region, while also working with countries and international groups to diminish the underlying conditions - notably poverty, corruption, and lack of political opportunities – that breed terrorism. For example, the Bush Administration’s Millennium Challenge Account will increase development assistance by 50% over the next three years. Mr. Pope added that the U.S. engages in public diplomacy initiatives aimed at encouraging and supporting moderate Islamic leaders.

Prepared by Michael Beckley, Junior Fellow