

# Shangri-La Dialogue: Notes for UPSC International Relations

The Shangri-La Dialogue (SLD) is an inter-governmental security forum held annually by an independent think tank, the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). It is attended by defense ministers, permanent heads of ministries and military chiefs of 28 Asia-Pacific states. The topic is of importance for the UPSC IAS Examinations as they are part of the International Relations segment of the exam.

## **Background of the Shangri-La Dialogue**

The forum gets its name from the Shangri-La Hotel in Singapore where it has been held since 2002.

The Shangri-La Dialogue was conceived by the current IISS Director-General and Chief Executive Sir John Chipman in 2001 in response to the clear need for a forum where the Asia Pacific defence ministers could engage in dialogue aimed at building confidence and fostering practical security cooperation.

Initially the SLD was modelled after the Munich Conference on Security Policy but with greater ambition - to create a Track One organization that "defence ministers needed if they were to have any chance at all of meeting multilaterally in a transregional format". Invitations were essentially focused on the members of the ASEAN Regional Forum in order to serve as a true regional security institution. Singapore was chosen as the location for the initial conference and with the Shangri-La Hotel as the venue. Chipman approached Singapore President S.R. Nathan in February 2001 proposed the idea and Nathan offered to provide IDSS support until the IISS could run the conference independently.

## **Format of the Shangri-La Dialogue**

Each summit begins with a keynote address, usually given by a prominent figure. Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in 2009, the President of the Republic of Korea Lee Myung-Bak in 2010, and Malaysian Prime Minister Dato' Sri Najib Tun Razak in 2011 respectively delivered the opening speech. Five plenary sessions are held across the remaining two days of the summit where all participants are expected to be present. These on-record sessions are usually led by a minister only and the press are invited to report on them. By 2006, plenary speaking slots were allocated only to ministers from a delegation.

While largely unknown, the Shangri-La Dialogues provide an annual venue for ministers, CHODs, and top defence officials to network and expand their defence diplomacy in private, both bilaterally and multilaterally. Rooms are reserved for the meetings to take place during

breaks. A government delegation might typically arrange 15-20 such encounters, lasting half an hour each, over the course of the summit. Singapore's defence minister usually also hosts multilateral private lunches.

## **India and the Shangri-La Dialogue**

In his keynote address on May 31st during the 2019 forum, Prime Minister Narendra Modi called the India-China relations as layered, and said he firmly believed that Asia and the world will have a “better future if India and China work together with trust and confidence, keeping in mind each other’s interests”. Prime Minister Modi was the first Indian prime minister to speak at the SLD since its inaugural edition in 2002.

According to IISS official website, since its launch in 2002, the Dialogue has become a venue for proposing and advancing initiatives on important security issues. This is especially true with India using the venue to safeguard its interest especially in the face of China's continued support to arch-rival Pakistan, be it through economic assistance such as the One-Belt One-Road initiative, or by stalling UNSC resolutions regarding Pakistan's terror state-funded activities. These actions in the past have made India wary of attending the forums, but with PM Modi's recent overtures may have changed the scenario for the time being.