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The Asia-Pacific Chapter of the International Society for Military Ethics

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In 1979, a group of military officers with a particular interest in professional ethics convened at the Hastings Center in New York, just across the Hudson River from the United States Military Academy.[1] The delegation decided to host a conference the following year, at the Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama. At this latter meeting, the Joint Services Commission on Professional Ethics (JSCOPE) was created. Annual meetings were held on the east coast of the United States for almost twenty-five years, principally at the National Defense University. In 2005, the group renamed to the International Society for Military Ethics (ISME), partially to remove confusion as to whether there was a government mandate for the project. The annual meetings moved to San Diego starting in 2008, where they were held for several years. More recently, they have been held at the University of Notre Dame (Indiana), as well as several east-coast locations. ISME has now found a new home at Case Western Reserve University (Ohio), where it will be based indefinitely.

In 2011, the first regional chapter of ISME was formed, EURO-ISME; the inaugural event was held at the École Militaire in Paris.[2] In years since, EURO-ISME has hosted major conferences in various European countries, including the United Kingdom (2012), Netherlands (2013), Germany (2014), Serbia (2015), Norway (2016) and Belgium (2017), with Spain slated as the next host (2018). EURO-ISME recognized that there would be distinctive issues pertaining to European stakeholders – i.e. ones not necessarily captured by a group based in North America – and also recognized the merits of having a more locally-based group of participants for whom transatlantic travel might not be feasible. And so that group constitutes the first – and very successful – regional ISME chapter.

It was in this vein that APAC-ISME was conceived in 2015. With the support of both ISME and EURO-ISME, APAC-ISME incorporated in Canberra, Australia. Generous funding was provided by Fondation Charles Léopold Mayer pour le Progrès de l'Homme to launch the initiative, as well as to send delegations to ISME and EURO-ISME meetings. In addition to the Executive Board – the authors of this short essay – Assistant Directors with geographic foci were appointed: Jennifer Ang (Singapore

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Institute of Management) for Southeast Asia; Ned Dobos (Australian Defence Force Academy) for Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands; and Shunzo Majima (Hokkaido University) for Northeast Asia. Jamie Cullen (Centre for Defence Leadership Studies, Australia) was additionally appointed as an Assistant Director for Military Engagement. The inaugural conference is scheduled for November, 2017 in Canberra, Australia, with events in Asia to follow in the coming years.

The APAC region covers a diverse range of people – from technologically advanced regions like Japan, Republic of Korea and Hong Kong, to agrarian and indigenous groups in Papua New Guinea, China and Micronesia. According to the UN, as of 2017, the APAC region is home to over 4.5 billion people – close to 60% of the world's population.[3] The region has unique histories with both colonizers and colonized peoples, internal migrants and long settled diaspora. The facts of military and security practice are also wide and varied, some countries having militaries but no police force, others having police but no militaries. Moreover, the relations between these security organs and citizens are equally wide and varied.

Fiji, for example, has had a series of coup d'états led by the military since 1987. Military ethics challenges also span issues like nuclear proliferation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the rise of tensions in the South China Sea stemming from issues of military engagement in maritime control, to the persistent challenge of terrorism – militants linked to so-called Islamic State seized control of parts of the city Marawai on Mindanao island in the south Philippines in mid-2017. The APAC region also faces significant emerging "non-traditional" military challenges, including waves of regional immigration leading to localized political instability and tension, rapid economic growth coupled with social upheavals, and the reality of climate change. These are global problems but the traditional values and cultural practices within the Asia-Pacific will inevitably create military and institutional responses unique to the region.

This uniqueness means that the APAC region warrants its own emphasis with regards to military ethics, distinct from the North American and European approaches. Recognition of this particularity means that although the values and concepts that form the foundation of military ethics are shared with North American and European military ethics, they find a different and unique set of expressions in the APAC region. We think that a comparative military ethics can and should reflect on those foundational concepts and values. Taking a view of military ethics from an APAC perspective allows stakeholders to rethink and critically assess military ethics more generally. In this way, a distinctly APAC focus should contribute to a better understanding of military practice in the region and contribute to theoretical advances in the discipline of military ethics as a whole.

For more information, please see APAC-ISME's website: http://www.apacisme.org/.

Notes

1. More information regarding ISME can be found at http://isme.tamu.edu/General/hist.html (accessed July 19, 2017).

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2. More information regarding EURO-ISME can be found at http://www.euroisme.eu/the-society/ (accessed July 19, 2017).
3. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. Available at http://www.unescap.org/ (accessed July 23, 2017).

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