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Security Nexus Perspectives

THE VALUE OF THOUGHT LEADERSHIP IN A WORLD IN CRISIS

By Dr. Deon Canyon *

Security professionals find themselves in increasingly more complex decision-making environments in which trust is more difficult to establish and maintain, and in which people demand higher quality and performance. Having the type of guidance provided by thought leaders is essential for them to get ahead of challenges, to achieve a competitive advantage, and to be more relevant to the real-world.

As a thought leader, the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies (DKI APCSS) generates genuine, current and relevant insights, and earns attention by publicly presenting knowledge that has a real, meaningful and enduring impact on its stakeholders, partners and alumni throughout the Indo-Pacific. Its subject matter experts (SMEs) focus on the most important questions in the minds of security practitioners and provide the most relevant and well-considered approaches and answers in the most appropriate formats. The SMEs sustain long-term efforts and are diligent in keeping themselves abreast of security affairs in their focus areas. Their approach, content and messaging is well-regarded because they do their best to incorporate regional perspectives, present unbiased and impartial information, and remain just and fair in their analyses.

Many years of meaningful regional engagements, supported by insight and analysis have enabled DKI APCSS to develop methods of understanding complex security challenges, employ multiple-perspective approaches and build enduring relationships between regional players – even adversarial ones. DKI APCSS's service-oriented approach to their stakeholders and their exemplary principles of non-attribution, mutual respect, transparency and inclusion have created an inspirational foundation that gives more meaning to its actions. They are a thought leader because they have carved out a soft-power niche for themselves and are recognized as the go-to organization for security cooperation in the region.

Executives and decision-makers who manage national and transboundary security issues have limited time and many competing interests vie for their attention. Despite this, most indicate that they dedicate the

* Dr. Deon Canyon is a professor at the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies (DKI APCSS) in Honolulu, USA. The views expressed in this article are the author's alone, and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the DKI APCSS or the United States Government.

necessary time required to review guidance from reliable and trusted sources. However, they note that identifying sources that meet their needs is not easy. Making this more difficult is the digital environment, which is over-crowded with websites containing variations of similar content mass-produced by non-specialist contractors and disinformation promulgated by nefarious actors.

DKI APCSS counters this confusion with a powerful reputation and thousands of meaningful connections with powerful security professionals and government officials throughout the world. It sets itself apart from generic content providers, and maintains and develops its position as the vanguard of cutting-edge knowledge and relationships in the security cooperation sector.

In these trying times of more frequent global crises, maintaining their value as a thought leader requires them to continue to sustain and grow the following areas.

- Stakeholder confidence in their mission, activities and outputs
- Stakeholder engagement in their activities
- Relevance to security practitioners throughout the region
- Practice of their guiding principles
- Courage to raise and discuss potentially contentious and controversial topics¹

Succeeding in this endeavor requires the adoption of several well-known best-practices in thought leadership.² Initially, SMEs need to pay adequate attention to acquiring credible and reliable information from their contacts and networks throughout the region. This information must be analyzed to generate meaningful, enriching, high-quality and provocative knowledge and insights that stimulate critical thinking and impact executive decisions. These insights and knowledge need to be conveyed in well-crafted, compelling and engaging frames along with inspiring storylines to attract and maintain interest. Finally, these nuggets and narratives require dissemination via well-designed platforms³ that bring them to life, so that they can have a real impact on all stakeholders.

In any world, everyone knows that the important content you produce only has value if you can get it under the noses of people who matter.⁴ The more that you succeed in this endeavor, the stronger your brand becomes and on and on it goes in a reinforcing, repeating loop. The role of thought leadership in achieving this cannot be underestimated.⁵ It rides on the steed of trustworthiness with the banner of truthfulness as it bestows confidence, authority, clarity, and perspective on every endeavor. DKI APCSS's brand is very well recognized throughout the Indo-Pacific, which is a signal that it is among the best at what it does. But in this rapidly changing world, DKI APCSS knows that it needs to continue to evolve to retain relevance and value.

The views expressed in these articles are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of DKI APCSS, the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, the U.S. Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.
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