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**ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM (ARF) / COUNCIL FOR SECURITY COOPERATION
IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC (CSCAP)**

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Introduction

The world entered 21st Century seeing an increase in non-traditional security threats emanating from religious and ethnic conflicts, terrorism, infectious diseases and environmental degradation. The Asia-Pacific region has not been spared and in recent years, we have witnessed an increase in tensions in the region. The region is confronted by a wide range of non-traditional security threats with cross-border implications such as piracy, terrorism, smuggling and human trafficking, infectious diseases such as SARS and avian flu. Tensions between states particularly in Northeast Asia is also on the rise. Have the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP) been able to respond to these security challenges? And what roles have these two institutions / networks played in contributing towards security cooperation in the Asia-Pacific.

ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)

The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), driven in large part by ASEAN, was adopted in 1993 and the first ARF meeting was convened in 1994 to provide a platform for political and security dialogue in the Asia-Pacific region. From an initial membership of 18, ARF has grown to 26 members and include the 10 ASEAN member states, China, Japan, South Korea, North Korea, Aust, NZ, US, Canada, EU, Russia, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, Timor Leste, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The ASEAN-ISIS network has been credited for pushing the ASEAN governments towards establishing the ARF, the first official institution for consultation on security affairs in the Asia-Pacific region.

The highest decision-making body for ARF is the annual ministerial meeting held annually in the ASEAN Chair country since 1994. Decision-making is through dialogue, consultation and consensus.

The ARF when conceived in 1994 was intended to evolve gradually through three stages:

- Stage 1: Promotion of Confidence-Building Measures (CBM)
- Stage 2: Development of Preventive Diplomacy (PD) Mechanisms
- Stage 3: Development of Conflict-Resolution Mechanisms

Today, ARF remains essentially at the first stage of confidence building, evolving at a “pace comfortable to members on the basis of consensus” – rather similar to the ASEAN approach. However, it has at least progress beyond mere dialogue to more substantive discussions on sensitive issues of common concern in the region.

The Concept and Principles of Preventive Diplomacy were adopted at the ARF Meeting since 2001. This provides a general consensus of how preventive diplomacy should be interpreted in the ARF context, which includes to “help prevent disputes and conflicts from arising between states that potentially pose a threat to regional peace and stability.”

Following from this meeting and in response to the changes in the regional and global security environment challenged by non-traditional security threats such as international terrorism, pandemic diseases, environmental hazard, maritime piracy, the ARF has recently developed some modest structures and capacities towards preventive diplomacy. Institutional steps such as strengthening the ARF chair, the

development of a Register of Eminent and Expert Persons (EEP) and establishment of an ARF unit within the ASEAN Secretariat have been taken. Another recent institutional development was to enable the so-called “Friends of the Chair” to assist the ARF Chair in dealing with international situations affecting peace and security in the region. The ARF Chair is held by a ASEAN member state and rotated annually amongst the ASEAN members according to alphabetical order of the countries. Another improvement in the ARF is the inclusion of defence ministry officials and military personnel in the ARF meetings and the Inter-sessional Groups (ISG).

The enhancement of the role of the ARF Chair, the Register of Experts & Eminent Persons (EEPs) and the assignment of ASEAN Secretariat (with the establishment of an ARF Unit) to assist the ARF Chair are seen as positive developments that could help ARF move to the next stage of Preventive Diplomacy.

However, neither the ARF EEP nor the enhanced role of the ARF Chair have yet to become fully defined in their functions and operational. The EEPs have not yet been formally activated, beyond sporadic invitations to senior officials meetings with their respective governments when the subject is relevant to preventive diplomacy. The first step to look at how to operationalise the EEP has just been taken with a meeting in Cheju Island in Korea on 29-30 June 2006.

The 1st Plenary Meeting of ARF EEPs brought together more than 30 EEPs with officials and other observers to discuss the regional security situation, assessed the performance of the ARF and discussed its future direction. The EEPs present concluded that though the ARF has made some progress in strengthening security dialogue and cooperation in the Asia-Pacific, it lacks institutional structure and cohesion among members to respond effectively to regional security concerns and challenges. Two categories of changes – institutional and substantive – were needed to move the ARF forward. Institutional issues include enhancing the role of the Chair, re-examining the leadership structure, strengthening relations with other multilateral and regional organizations. Substantive issues include moving concretely toward preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution, emphasizing so-called soft security issues such as natural disaster management and energy security.

The EEPs also made the following recommendations on their possible roles in the ARF process :

- Commission the EEPs as a vision group for the ARF to propose innovative ideas on the future development of the ARF, including proposals for institution-innovation and capacity-building
- Integrate the EEPs into the ARF mechanism and have them play an advisory role at the ARF meetings, as well as utilized selected EEP individuals, as envisaged in the EEP Guidelines, more actively in fact-finding missions, as special envoys, etc.
- Mobilise the EEP resources to deliberate on salient regional security issues such as the NEA security dilemma and disarmament
- Conduct desk-top and scenario-based planning exercises for the ARF on subjects such as terrorism, maritime security, disaster management, etc
- Distinguish the role and functions of the EEPs from those of Track I and Track II

- Hold EEP meetings at regular intervals to discuss recommendations concerning pragmatic measures in ARF areas of focus in confidence building and preventive diplomacy
- Appoint a liaison officer or secretary to maintain contact among the EEPs
- Establish a section in the ARF website to publicise the works of the EEPs and exchange information.

From the above, it is not clear if indeed the roles of EEPs would make any significant difference to ARF usefulness, and help ARF develop the capacity to go beyond confidence building to preventive diplomacy. The ARF's record in coping with traditional security concerns such as territorial disputes and competitive arms buildup is modest at best. In the late 1990s, with the emergence of new security agenda such as the regional haze, the aftermath of the Asian Financial crisis, there was better appreciation of the need for multinational approaches to these new security issues which impact several countries simultaneously. The ARF's new security agenda has been informed by deliberations and studies from its Track II counterpart, the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP).

Yet, since the ARF has not come to any agreement or commitment to clear principles to which it would adhere to in tackling any of these new security issues, be it environmental disaster, refugee problems, or insurgency problems, it is not clear if ARF can truly become involved in preventive diplomacy, and conflict resolution.

Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP)

Track II processes in the Asia-Pacific first developed in the field of economic cooperation under the auspices of the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC) in 1980. At ASEAN level, the ASEAN-ISIS network established in 1984 has been instrumental in spearheading discussions on security and strategic issues and pushing for stronger cooperation within ASEAN. ASEAN-ISIS has also been instrumental in the establishment of a wider Asia-Pacific network – the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP) – for the purpose of providing a structured process for regional confidence-building and security cooperation among countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

CSCAP established in 1993 comprised the 5 founding members of ASEAN-ISIS, and the Strategic & Defence Studies Center (SDSC) at the ANU, the University of Toronto-York Joint Center for Asia-Pacific Studies in Canada, the Japan Institute for International Affairs, the Seoul Forum for International Affairs and the Pacific Forum-CSIS in Honolulu. CSCAP has stretched its Track II diplomacy more extensively than ASEAN-ISIS and is underpinned by a Pacific Economic Cooperation Council style national committee in each member state that is tripartite in composition, in PECC this include scholars/academics, business people and government officials, and in the case of CSCAP, scholars/academics, military personnel and government officials.

The national committee for CSCAP are fine exemplars of Track II security diplomacy whose mission is to prepare studies on security, and act as an intellectual source for the governmental Track I counterparts in the ARF. The national CSCAP also provide a test of propositions drawn from the epistemic community, and provide a mechanism for linkage and mutual support between Track II and official regional security cooperation process.

In line with the comprehensive security concept eschewed by ASEAN, CSCAP have been busily addressing many non-conventional security threats - from environmental problems, to transnational crimes to maritime security.

Track II dialogues such as CSCAP helped enhanced the consciousness of decision-makers on the broad range of policy issues in the Asia-Pacific. CSCAP also provides continuity and are a stabilizing factor in countries with clientalist political culture such as Philippines where when governments come and go, the upper echelons of the bureaucracy are also reshuffled and moved.

According to Desmond Ball and Brendon Taylor (2006), CSCAP has contributed to security dialogue and cooperation in the following ways:

1. It served as a useful source of expert advice, particularly useful for relatively new emerging issues or longer term issue areas, upon which government agencies have rarely had the time or resources to develop quickly a substantial base of expertise.
2. It also served as a “laboratory of sorts” where new ideas could be generated and tested. Often the ideas in question have been simply too sensitive or controversial to be discussed at Track I level. CSCAP’ role in assisting the ARF to develop a working definition of “preventive diplomacy” has been cited as an example of this useful ideational function.
3. Track II processes have periodically offered an alternative diplomatic route when progress at the first track has stalled or become deadlocked.
4. Finally, it has been posited that Track II processes have also performed a range of broader “socializing” functions and norms setting. At the very least, track II processes such as CSCAP provided an opportunity for potential adversaries to meet and get to know one another where otherwise they might not have been able to.

The works of CSCAP has definitely been recognized by the ARF, and over the years, interaction between Track I and Track II has been enhanced, in which CSCAP working groups have been encouraged to submit the outcomes of their deliberations on key issues affecting regional security to the ARF Chair. However, in a recent Concept Paper on Enhancing Ties between Track I and Track II in the ARF, and between the ARF and other Regional and International Security Organisations, a disturbing undertone. While on the one hand, ARF wants to include Track II experts in national delegations to ARF CBMs, the co-chairs of the CBMs have to make every effort to ensure that such experts do not raise sensitive issues. Also there might be a shift of ARF’s attention from CSCAP to the EEPs as the paper also recommended that the ARF “will consider the EEPs as its major Track II resources for studying possible links/overlaps between Track II recommendations and those of Track I activities ...”.

The position espoused in the latest Concept paper on enhancing ties between Track I and Track II in the ARF could be seen as a step backward as CSCAP’s value lies in

thinking ahead of the ARF and this means sensitive issues and questions need to be raised.

Conclusion

If ARF and CSCAP are to continue to be of relevance in security regionalism in the Asia-Pacific, the following need to be addressed:

The ARF needs to move from an exchange of views to problem solving and concrete cooperation. A thematic approach which leads to more focused exchange of views and building up of an agenda for cooperation in specific areas such as transnational crimes, counter-terrorism, etc, would be useful.

The ARF need to be further institutionalized for preventive diplomacy. It should consider innovations such as “good offices” role for a troika of the past, present and next Chair of the ARF in seeking to prevent or resolve conflicts. An ARF Secretariat building on the current ARF Unit should be considered.

Finally, the ARF and CSCAP should consider the “n minus 1” approach to decisions which provides a way around the unanimity principle. If most members agree on a policy recommendation, then that recommendation should be adopted. Those members with reservations can choose to abstain without blocking the whole process.

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