

The ASEAN Regional Forum: Pathways to Progress

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The end of the Cold War altered the configuration of international relations in the Asia-Pacific region. This new environment presented historic opportunities for the relaxation of tensions in the region through multilateral consultations, confidence building, and eventually the prevention of conflicts. Hence, at the 1992 Singapore Summit, the ASEAN Leaders set the momentum for a scenario developed by “ASEAN shall move towards a higher plane of political and economic cooperation to secure regional peace and prosperity.” And according to the aftermath agreement made by the 26th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting and Post-Ministerial Conference in Singapore on 23-25 July 1993, the inaugural meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) was eventually held in Bangkok on 25 July 1994.

The objectives of the ARF are outlined in the First ARF Chairman's Statement (1994) and the 27th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (1994), namely: (1) To foster constructive dialogue and consultation on political and security issues of common interest and concern, (2) To make significant contributions to efforts towards confidence-building and preventive diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region. (3) To become an effective consultative Asia-Pacific Forum for promoting open dialogue on political and security cooperation in the region. In this context, ASEAN should work with its ARF partners to bring about a more predictable and constructive pattern of relations in the Asia Pacific.

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Part I. Record of ARF in addressing comprehensive security challenges

Despite the great diversity and gaps existing among the ASEAN member states, the ARF has attained a record of achievements that have contributed to the maintenance of peace, security and cooperation in the Asian-Pacific region. This record can be revisited from various aspects.

- 1. Shaping the Regional Architecture.** The ARF has become a useful venue and a major platform for nowadays Asian-Pacific multilateral and bilateral dialogues and consultations since 1994. It is indeed the only formal and official mechanism for foreign ministers to meet routinely and annually, with more and more defense and security officers involved in recent years. Regarding this, the ARF is the cradle for regional integration and multilateral cooperation, which has helped to nurture the willingness for dialogues and cooperation in a wide range of security issues in the multilateral settings. As we see, the habits of dialogues and consultation have also been cultivated, while the Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) being promoted by ARF through exchanges of information related to defense policies and publication of defense white papers, etc. To a larger sense, the 10+1\10+3 and 10+6(EAS) nowadays are all benefited from the ARF.
- 2. Contribution to East Asian Ideological Dynamics.** The ARF used to be the biggest donor for “ASEAN Way”---- the important and fundamental principles for East Asia cooperation and Asian-Pacific region. These principles now sound so familiar to us, however, they are not so when the ARF was first made. Due to ARF’s constant advocacy, these values now have been widely recognized by most the countries in the region, i.e. the principle for decision-making by consensus, non-interference with the domestic affairs, equality for each member state, respect for the members’ sovereignty, management for an incremental progress and moving forward at a pace comfortable to all the others...etc. Regarding this, the ARF has released a number of concept papers, statements and

reports, which have intensified the ASEAN ideological momentum. If we look back all its way, we shall say that the ARF used to be a very innovative mechanism and beneficial one to nowadays East Asia and Pacific in the past decade. Though there are different interpretations, there are common explanations for the composition of ASEAN Way:

- Soft Institutionalization. This suggests no inclination of the establishment of a super-power institution of high centralism, but rather a system of loose linkages among diversified culture and civilizations, with no transfer of sovereignty but rather the opposite, the tendency of intensifying the sovereignty mixed with regionalism.
- Inclusiveness. In its evolution from a pre-mature one to a mature one, the ARF does not intend to set strict political criteria or access standards on a potential member state, but rather to integrate and absorb every country with different context of culture and civilization.
- Consensus. The ARF applies no vote and veto provisions in terms of critical resolutions on major policy makings, nor does it set up any institution of compulsory resolution on the disputed issues. On dealing with the disputed issues, it would rather apply to a method of patient consultation and peaceful dialogues.
- Peaceful settlement of disputes. This principle was confirmed in the 1967 Statement in Bangkok, 1971 Statement in Kuala Lumpur and 1976 ASEAN Treat of Amity and Cooperation.
- Non- interference in the internal affaires of members states. This comply with the obligations of no impetuous scold on the others, no refuge or support or aid to the entities or personnel that engage in the activities against another member state, no usage of the political institutions of a country as a tool or precondition during a negotiation.

3. Approaches for CBMs, PD and Conflict Management. In 1995, at the 2nd ARF, the member states set the three stages for, namely the Confidence Building

Measures (CBMs), Preventive Diplomacy(PD) and conflict resolution(or conflict management). On 9-11 September 1997, the ARF held the Conference on Preventive Diplomacy, Singapore. Since then, The ARF has been working out with Annual Report of the Co-Chair of the Inter-sessional Support Group(ISG) on Confidence Building Measures(1997-2007) and Preventive Diplomacy (2005-2007). The CBMs undertaken by the ARF are:

- Cooperation on non-proliferation and arms control.
 - Publication of the documents on security policies;
 - Release of the defense white papers;
 - Participation in the UNRCA and submission of the relevant reports;
 - Sharing information of military exercises.
 - Arms control negotiations;
 - Training courses and exchanges of defense officers;
 - Visit to the military facilities and observations to the exercises;
 - Cooperation for International peace-keeping Missions.
- Significantly, the CBM measures have contributed to China and ASEAN's mutual understandings and confidence with each other over their disputed areas in the South China Sea, and as the good result of it, China and ASEAN signed the Declaration of Conduct in South China Sea (DOC) in 2002, which paved the milestone for regional security.

Specifically, the Conferences for national security policies have made much progress. Under China's initiative, the 1st ARF Security Policy Conference was held in Beijing, China, 4-6 November 2004. The 2nd ARF Security Policy Conference was held in Vientiane, Lao PDR, 19 May 2005. The 3rd ARF Security Policy Conference, Karambunai, Sabah, Malaysia, 18 May 2006. And the 4th ARF Security Policy Conference was held in Manila, Philippines, 24 May 2007.

And since 2000 , the defense policies became no longer the intransparent, as now they are public and transparent in the form of Security Outlook Yearbook.

Besides, the Dialogues for Defense Officials also sound its way. The 1st ARF Defence Officials' Dialogue was held in Karambunai, Sabah, Malaysia, 17 May 2006;the 2nd ARF Defense Officials' Dialogue was held in Batam, Indonesia, 1 November 2006;and the 3rd ARF Defense Officials' Dialogue was held in Helsinki, Finland, 28 March 2007.

4. Efforts for dealing with non-traditional security issues: The ARF has made great progress from mainly focusing on traditional security threats to non-traditional ones. Upon its establishment in 1994, the ARF only deal with 6 fields and areas. However, nowadays ARF has expanded to a larger range of fields and areas, addressing the comprehensive security issues concerning both traditional and non-traditional security challenges. Up date, the ARF covers more than 8 issues as followings:

- Watch out for energy and economic security. ARF released its Co-Chairs' Summary Report of the ARF Seminar on Energy Security, Brussels, Belgium, 5-6 October 2006; Co-Chairs' Summary Report of the ARF Export Licensing Experts Meeting, Singapore, 16-18 November 2005; ARF Statement on Measures Against Terrorist Financing, Bandar Seri Begawan, 30 July 2002.
- Enhancement for Anti-terrorism , transnational crime and narcotics. ARF released its Co-Chairs' Summary Report of the 5th ARF ISM on Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime, Manila, Philippines, 24 May 2007; ARF Statement on Promoting a People-Centered Approach to Counter-Terrorism, adopted in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 28 July 2006; Co-Chairs' Summary Report of the 4th ARF ISM on Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime,Beijing, China, 26-28 April 2006;
- Cooperation for Anti-piracy and Maritime Security. ARF released its Co-Chairs' Summary Report of the ARF Maritime Security Shore Exercise, Singapore, 22-23

January 2007; Co-Chairs' Summary Report of ARF Workshop on Capacity Building of Maritime Security, Tokyo, Japan, 19-20 December 2005.

- Making Efforts for Disaster Relief. ASEAN released its Co-Chairs' Summary Report of the ARF ISM on Disaster Relief, Qingdao, China, 18-20 September 2006; ARF Statement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response, adopted in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 28 July 2006; Co-Chairs' Summary Report of the 5th ARF Inter-Sessional Meeting on Disaster Relief, Bandung, Indonesia, 30 November-2 December 2005; Co-Chairmen's Summary Report of the Fourth ASEAN Regional Forum Inter-Sessional Meeting on Disaster Relief, Ha Noi, 4-6 May 2000.
- Maintaining Cyber security. ASEAN released its Co-Chairs' Summary Report of the ARF Workshop on Cyber Security, New Delhi, India, 6-8 September 2006; ARF Statement on Cooperation on Fighting Cyber Attack and Terrorist Misuse of Cyber Space, adopted in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia 28 July 2006; Co-Chairs' Summary Report of the 2nd ARF Seminar on Cyber Terrorism, Cebu City, Philippines, 3-5 October 2005; Co-Chairs' Report Summary of the ASEAN Regional Forum Seminar on Cyber Terrorism, Jeju Island, Republic of Korea, 13-15 October 2004.
- Promotion of Inter-Civilization Dialogues. The ARF released its Statement on Promotion of Inter-Civilization Dialogue, adopted in Manila, The Philippines, 2 August 2007.

5. Coordination for Track I and Track II. The ARF is pushing forward and carrying on variety of activities both in Track One and Track Two, which accumulates a rich expertise for inter-governmental and non-intergovernmental communications. (Here is the List of ARF's Track I Activities and Track II Activities with a great deal of achievements have been made). Today, the ARF is providing a more effective network for between officials and experts, the diplomats and the defense officers, the governments and the civilians.

- Meeting of Heads of Defense Colleges and Institutions. In 1998, the ARF established the first Heads of Defence Universities/Colleges/Institutions Meeting(HDUCIM). And the 10th ARF Heads of Defense

Universities/Colleges/Institutions Meeting(HDUCIM) was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 4-7 September 2006.

- Workshops for various topics. ARF has set up Workshop on “Evolving Changes in the Security Perceptions of the ARF Countries”, Ulaanbataar, Mongolia, 21-22 June 2005; ARF Workshop on Civil Military Operations was held in Makati City, Philippines, 12-13 September 2005; ISM on disaster relief 1995-1999, ISM on peace-keeping 1995-1997, ISM on search and rescue 1995-1997, ISG on CBMs 1995.
- Enhancement of track II system. In 2000 , the ARF established a Txpert and Eminent persons’ Group(EEG) , so as to request for their suggestions when necessary.The ARF released its Co-Chairs' Summary Report of the Second ARF Expert and Eminent Persons(EEPs), Manila, Philippines, 5-6 February 2007;Co-Chairs' Summary Report of the First Plenary Meeting of ARF Experts/Eminent Persons, Jeju Island, ROK, 29-30 June 2006.

II. How can ASEAN improve its performance as the driver of ARF?

Since the foundation of the ARF, the ASEAN has been widely recognized as the leading role in conducting ARF, which highlights its identity and prestige:

- ASEAN is the inventor for the institution. ASEAN’s innovation makes it possible for the ARF to act as the only official mechanism for multilateral security dialogues that make a new landscape for Asia-Pacific region.
- ASEAN is the maker of the rule of the games. The ASEAN Way has been widely recognized and come into force of the principles for regional cooperation.
- ASEAN is the heart-felt Middleman. The ASEAN countries collectively have been playing as a neutral middle power and linking bridge among big powers, the east and west, the Islam world and the west, which is valuable for mutual understanding s among the regional countries.

However, there are still many doubts on ASEAN's role. First, some of the members still have doubts on ASEAN's leading role or Driver's Seat in regional dialogues. But most of us don't think so because practically and theoretically, ASEAN can not be replaced by any other power due to the diversity and disputes in the region.

We know that there are also the claims that "the ARF is not applicable". They argue that "the ARF can hardly make significant impact on major issues in this region". In fact, this presumption is not all the correct. Because the ARF Ministers Meeting does cover the issues, and the ARF has made a new institution for North Asian countries to make special dialogues in ARF.

Some other complaints are related to the ASEAN Way. They argue that "the ARF looks more like a Talk Show or Talk Shop with so many meetings, negotiations, discussions and consultations that seem to be never ended, yet there are little chances for the actual measures, legal constraints and immediate actions to be implemented". Further, they argue that they need such a forum---high efficiency, fast responds and immediate actions. In concrete, they hope the ARF can do something without the consensus among all the member states, that the measures they adopted should be compulsory to one another or even mandatory to impose a sanction on a member state. However, this concept is a mistake. Different from the Europe, a much operational ARF may not be so helpful to the regional security. Because, first, the regional countries don't want to join such an organization at all as their culture and interests are so diversified; second, the loose organization of ASEAN Way can play as an insurance note for all the countries. It becomes a kind of soft cohesion on every member of the ARF, that a member state should not offend the consensus excessively, or its image and prestige will be at stake. Generally speaking, the ASEAN Way is a kind of self-enforcing effect, which focuses on what we should do, but not on what we should not do.

III. Prospect and Pathway for the ARF

1. What concrete CBM, PD and conflict management initiatives should be undertaken?

Aware of the Implications of the institution, we may still need to follow in improving the ARF in the near future:

- Persistence to its consensus principle, sovereignty first, equality of member states and non-interference in the domestic affairs.
- Never lose our patience. A gradual progress is always on the track than a fast transition.
- Enhancement of CBMs is still critical for current stage of PD. Confidence is the basis for PD, and we shall never ignore the CBMs throughout the process of ARF. We should still enhance our cooperation on non-proliferation, arms control and international peace-keeping., as well as the dialogues of security policies and publications of defense white papers.

2. What issues and areas in Asia-Pacific merit priority attention?

We should pay more attentions to non-traditional security issues, including the discussions on regional hotspots, watch out for energy and economic security, cooperation for Anti-piracy and Maritime Security, Joint Efforts for Disaster Relief, Maintaining Cyber security, and Promotion of Inter-Civilization Dialogues.

Meanwhile, the ARF should evade from giving the impression of intervening in any member state's political and domestic affairs. In terms of this, the DPRK Nuclear issue and Myanmar issue should go on to be ruled out from the mainstream of the disputes. However, track II discussions on the relevant issues of DPRK Nuclear issue and Myanmar issue can be made in order to enhance mutual understandings as well as the collection of constructive suggestions raised from the experts, academicians, think tankers and researchers' circle.

3. Is the current geographical footprint of ARF relevant to the scope of the Forum's security concerns?

After 14 years of development, the ARF has expanded to 27 member states up to the year 2007. According to the ARF definition, a new participant of the ARF should be admitted only if it can be demonstrated that it has an impact on the peace and security of the "geographical footprint" of key ARF activities, i.e. Northeast and Southeast Asia as well as Oceania.

As far as we can see, we may need a gradual expansion of ARF, which means efforts must be made to control the number of participants to a manageable level to ensure the effectiveness of the ARF.

Regarding the application procedure of the membership, we may need more consultation. All applications for participation should be submitted to the Chairman of the ARF, who shall make full consultation with all the other ARF participants at the SOM and ascertain whether a consensus exists for the access of the new participant. Actual decisions on participation should be then approved by the Ministers.

4. How can the ARF be rendered more effectively?

Actually, some people complain the ARF of its inefficiency simply because their high expectations. We may need to build up more to the effectiveness of this platform.

- The ARF security policy conference should be promoted from the deputy defense ministers' level to the defense ministers' level as soon as possible. Due to the fast growth of the Shangri-la Dialogue (SLD or a.k.a. Asia Security Conference) and the ASEAN Defense Ministers Conference, the ARF should consider to establish the ARF Defense Ministers Meeting based on the ASEAN Defense Ministers Conference as soon as possible. We think an ARF Defense Ministers' Meeting

will be much constructive and effective than the SLD, because the latter is much informal with not a single piece of joint statement being released.

- The chair state of the ARF needs more mandates and duties. At the beginning, a chair state simply had two responsibilities: to host two sessions known as the ARF Ministerial Meeting and the Senior Official's Meeting (SOM). Now and then it should have more duties on bringing forth some of the top agendas and making suggestions on specific issues, such as anti-terrorism and disaster relief.
- Engagement in the insightful researches on PD. We should be aware that the PD should be applied to all the peaceful means such as diplomacy, negotiation, research, arbitration and mediation. It should be non-constraints, as military operation and use of force being excluded; it should be before-handed and timing; it should be based on neutrality, equity and fairness; it should be consistent to the consensus and totally voluntary; it should be applied to the affairs between states.
- Although the third stage of conflict management is still a far vision for the ARF, it is also under way of studies.