

Draft only

THE REGIONAL SECURITY ARCHITECTURE: IDENTIFYING WEAKNESSES AND REFORM

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Introduction

1. Meaning of security – comprehensive: so-called traditional as well as non-traditional security, including external threat, international terrorism, piracy, transnational security, environmental security, pandemics, etc. Emphasis on external dimension, not the purely domestic.
2. Regional architecture to address above security challenges are a potpourri of track one and track two institutions and processes dedicated to security wholly or partly: pan-regional (ARF, APEC), sub-regional (ASEAN, PIF, APT, EAS, SCO), bilateral cooperative arrangements covering security matters (bilateral joint commissions Malaysia/Indonesia, former General Border Committees), military alliances both bilateral as well as involving more than two countries, issue-specific arrangements like Six Party Talks, etc. In other words more like the understanding in Dr Wilkins' paper when he quotes Tow and Taylor – over 100 Track 1 and over 200 Track 2.
3. Each institution or process may cover different geographical areas within the Asia Pacific region, deal with different security challenges, and undertake different functions (confidence-building, defence, transnational crime).
4. We will of course be concerned in practical terms with the more important ones having significant bearing upon security management.

Weaknesses and reform

There are many weaknesses and there is much room for improvement as well as reform. But I am only going to dwell on one important aspect. This is a fundamental

contradiction in the present regional architecture between a contraption suited for the geostrategic past and a device attuned for the present. The contraption suited for the past is exclusive military alliances. The device attuned for the present is inclusive institutions and processes that promote cooperative security.

Exclusive military alliances are for an age when security is a zero sum proposition, where security is divisible and discreet, and it needs to be assured by the formation of alliances against each other to redress power imbalances or to perpetuate dominance where necessary. This kind of geostrategic situation exists when the economic well-being of nations is generally disaggregated and not interdependent, when the production processes of a country's economic goods are generally situated within its own borders, and when nations do not depend very much upon trading with one another and investing in each other for their economic needs and prosperity. Under such circumstances invading neighbouring countries to annex territory and build empires, or to seize resources or spread secular or religious ideology does not incur as much damage to one's own national interests. Under these circumstances the prospect of strong nations finding war a feasible option is greater, and the need to form military alliances higher. In such conditions the norms of peace and cooperation are also weaker. This kind of circumstances prevailed until the Second World War and perhaps for a while after that. Under such circumstances a peace imposed by a dominant state, such as Pax Americana, or a peace arising from a balance of alliances, was desirable. And let me add, Pax Americana, however brief it could be as historical epochs go, is one of the best things that happened to this region after the Indochina wars were over. Other paxes could conceivably have been much worse.

The geostrategic landscape of the Asia Pacific region of the 21st century however, is very different, and the transformation is getting stronger literally by the year. Driven by the forces of economic and technological globalisation, national economies are becoming much less discreet and much more interdependent. Indeed through gathering regional integration economies are becoming significantly more regional than national. Production processes are spread over several countries, companies are going regional and global, and there is an explosion in intra-regional and international trade and

investment flows. The present financial and economic crisis is driving home this point in a rather brutal fashion. Every economy has a powerful vested interest in the recovery of other economies, especially of the major ones and of our critical trading and investment partners. We particularly want the United States, Japan and China to do well. Our economic well-being, and therefore our well-being in other spheres as well, is becoming common and inseparable. So is our security, except in the exceptional though important case of North Korea, which by its own volition as well as external sanctions, remains estranged from the outside economy.

The geostrategic situation in the region is also marked by the military dominance of the United States and its allies and strategic partners, namely Japan, Australia and South Korea, not to mention the others. This despite the growing military capability of China, now as well as in the foreseeable future.

In this kind of geostrategic situation, I believe the region should lend much greater importance and weight to inclusive and cooperative processes for fostering common peace and shared security than on exclusive military alliances or on deepening and expanding them further. I see the existing military alliances as an important and even constructive part of the regional security architecture. In my view they should remain. But they can no longer be regarded as the most critical part of the evolving regional architecture. The hub and spokes no longer occupy centre-stage, even for the United States. Nor need military alliances be strengthened and expanded in the way that is being done now, that is in an exclusive fashion. Instead they should be deliberately expanded in an inclusive manner to include countries like China, initially perhaps in a more diluted mode, but eventually as a welcome, trusted and full partner.

The geostrategic situation that is prevailing in this region and the kind of comprehensive security challenges that confront us require an essentially inclusive, cooperative and non-military response. Our security is common. It is not zero sum. If we work together, it can be even more than positive sum. It can be cumulative sum. The most critical security challenges confronting the region are not military in nature but economic, human, environmental, energy and criminal.

We therefore need to invest more in the inclusive cooperative, processes like ASEAN, the ARF, the APT and the EAS, and to improve their performance and efficacy. The United States should consider becoming a part of the EAS and cooperative instruments like the inclusive Treaty of Amity and Cooperation.

I believe that guided by leaders like Barack Hussein Obama, Wen Jiabao, Taro Aso and Liu Chao-shiuan, the Asia Pacific region is ripe for a security architecture that rests even more on inclusive, cooperative and pacific foundations than on exclusive, confrontational postures, coalitions and security arrangements.