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The ADMM Plus: Yet Another Layer in the Region's Dense Security Architecture?
A Perspective from the Philippines

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**The ADMM Plus: Yet Another Layer in the Region's Dense Security Architecture?
(A Perspective from the Philippines)***

By Raymund Jose G. Quilop**

I have been asked by the organizers to speak on the ADMM-Plus and it is a privilege to share with the participants today my thoughts on the issue raised, specifically on the ADMM-Plus being yet another layer in this region's defense and security architecture. The points I shall share with you today are of course my own personal thoughts and should not in any way be taken to represent an official view of the Philippines' Department of National Defense. These thoughts are a product of my research interest on multilateralism in the Asia-Pacific specifically on the ASEAN and the ASEAN Regional Forum as well as my fortunate experience of having been part of the series of working meetings related to the ADMM-Plus.

The topic is interesting. I myself share the view that our region is filled with numerous multilateral mechanisms. As I have noted in other fora, there appears to be a proliferation of these mechanisms. Others say that we now have an alphabet soup of multilateral bodies in the region.

However, I would argue that while the ADMM-Plus may be an addition to the plethora of mechanisms we have in this region, it is not "yet another layer" as the title of this session has put it. It does not add to a layer but rather serves as mechanism of a separate but equally important track: the defense sectoral body.

Indeed, while the ADMM-Plus is indeed the newest addition to the numerous multilateral regional bodies, it is definitely something of value considering that it is intended to promote practical cooperation among defense establishments and militaries of regional states and the fact that it brings together the defense ministers of 18 Asia-Pacific countries.

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This is something which has been recognized within ASEAN itself, where in its community building efforts, the defense track has been recognized as important so much so that a meeting of ASEAN's defense chiefs was seen as valuable and therefore needed to be institutionalized. Indeed, in the building of a political-security community, which is one of the three pillars in the envisioned ASEAN Community, cooperation among the defense ministries of the ASEAN states is necessary and a platform where the heads of these ministries could come together is useful. After all, policy guidance emanate from the ministers. It is noteworthy to note that the first meeting of the ADMM was held here in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in May 2006.

Interestingly, the idea of opening the ADMM process to the defense ministries of ASEAN's dialogue partners was also immediately suggested. And so, the process of conceptualizing how the defense ministries of ASEAN's dialogue partners could come into the picture commenced. Amazingly, the following year (and not very typical of the ASEAN way), the concept paper on the ADMM-Plus was approved by the ASEAN defense ministers in their meeting during the 2nd ADMM held in November 2007 in Singapore. In the said concept paper, the ministers noted that "cooperation between countries, both within ASEAN and with countries in the larger Asia-Pacific, is required to address ... challenges for the benefit of ASEAN countries" and acknowledged that "ASEAN countries are also keen to engage ASEAN in the area of defense and security".¹

In the said concept paper, it is emphasized that the "purpose is to bring expertise, perspectives and resources from extra-regional countries to bear on shared security challenges".² This would later on be further emphasized in the composition and configuration paper where it is explicitly stated that the 3rd criterion for membership in the ADMM-Plus is the "ability to work with the ADMM to build capacity so as to enhance regional security in a substantive manner."³ The third criterion for membership explicitly states that "the ADMM-Plus country must be able to bring expertise, perspectives and resources to bear on shared security challenges."⁴

Barely over a year from that meeting (1 year and 3 months to be exact), the Principles for Membership to the ADMM-Plus paper was approved by the ministers in their 3rd ADMM held in February 2009 in Thailand. In this paper, the ASEAN defense ministers identified three

¹ See ADMM Defense Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus): Concept Paper, paragraph 3.

² See ADMM Defense Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus): Concept Paper, paragraph 3.

³ See The ASEAN Defense Minister's Meeting Plus: Configuration and Composition, paragraph 6.c.

⁴ See The ASEAN Defense Minister's Meeting Plus: Configuration and Composition, paragraph 6.c.

guiding principles for membership in the ADMM-Plus namely: (1) full dialogue partner status, (2) significant interactions and relations with ASEAN defense establishments, and (3) ability to work with the ADMM in building capacity.⁵

And again after just barely a year, two papers: one on the configuration and composition of the ADMM-Plus and another one on modalities and procedures of the ADMM-Plus were approved in the 4th ADMM held in Vietnam in May 2010.

In the configuration and composition paper, the ministers noted that among the various possible configuration (i.e. ADMM Plus 1, ADMM Plus 3 and ADMM Plus X), the ADMM Plus X configuration would be the most effective and efficient. The Plus 1 configuration would result in numerous meetings which could lead to inefficiency while the Plus 3 configuration would be specific only to a particular sub-region in East Asia as the plus 3 configuration was in reference to the ASEAN Plus Three composition comprising of ASEAN Plus the three Northeast Asian states of China, Japan and South Korea. The ministers also came to a decision that at that point in time, there are 8 countries that best meet the criteria of being the Plus countries in the ADMM-Plus namely Australia, China, India, New Zealand, Russia, South Korea and the US.

In the modalities and procedures paper, the ministers spelled out that the ADMM-Plus shall meet every three years with the Chairman of the ADMM also being the Chair of the ADMM-Plus. Like the ADMM, all activities of the ADMM-Plus would be reported to the ASEAN Summit through the ASEAN Politico-Security Council. In the intervening years, the ADMM-Plus working group headed by the ADSOM Chair shall meet and Experts Working Groups may be established to facilitate cooperative activities among defense and military establishments of the ADMM-Plus countries.

It must be emphasized that in this paper, it is the ADSOM Chair who will head the ADSOM-Plus working group. This was premised on the idea that with the additional 8 working group leaders from the major and bigger powers of the Asia-Pacific, the ADSOM Plus working group would have to be chaired by the ADSOM chair (one level higher). This set-up, however, would be changed in the attachment paper to the modalities and procedures paper which was approved in the ADMM Retreat held on 11 October 2011 prior to the ADMM-Plus meeting which was held in 12 October 2011. In that attachment paper, it was clarified that the ADSOM-Plus working group shall be chaired by the ADSOM Working Group chair and the ADSOM-Plus shall be chaired by the ADSOM Chair. This was meant to ensure that the ADMM-Plus

⁵ See ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus: Principles for Membership, paragraph 6.

reflected the support structures of the ADMM namely the ADSOM and the ADSOM working group.

With the concept of bringing in ASEAN's dialogue partners' defense ministers being approved as early as 2007 and together with principles for membership, configuration and composition as well as modalities and procedures of the ADMM-Plus being available, the ADMM-Plus was launched and its first meeting held in October 2010 in Ha Noi, Vietnam.

It is therefore worthy to note that the ADMM, as I previously mentioned, took the fastest route in its expansion. Within a span of merely a little bit of more than 4 years and with just 4 meetings, the ADMM has expanded to include 8 of ASEAN's dialogue partners into what is now popularly known as ADMM-Plus. The positive thing about this fast pace of expansion is that the ASEAN defense ministers now has a mechanism for engaging their fellow defense ministers from ASEAN's dialogue partners. However, there are apprehensions that the deepening of cooperation among ASEAN's defense ministers appear to have been relegated in the background as the broadening of ADMM's membership took center stage.

This, however, may not necessarily be case. For one, the ADMM has had a three-year (2008-2010) work program approved in 2007. And in the latest meeting (the 5th ADMM) held in Jakarta, Indonesia just this month, there was emphasis on further strengthening cooperation among ASEAN's defense ministries as can be seen in the adoption of another 3-year (2011-2013) work program, and two concept papers: one on the establishment of ASEAN Peacekeeping Centers network and another one on the ASEAN Defense Industry Collaboration. Of course, the ministers in that ADMM meeting also gave their nod on the establishment of the 5 Experts Working Groups (EWGs) of the ADMM-Plus, which were previously approved by the ADSOM held in Yogyakarta, Indonesia in April of this year.⁶

With the launching of the ADMM-Plus, a key issue that has come to the fore is the matter of how the ADMM-Plus would interface with the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), specifically the Defense Officials Dialogue (DOD) within the ARF. Both government officials and analysts have alluded to the possibility of overlap between the two bodies, thus bringing to the fore the need to delineate the roles and functions of these two mechanisms.

In a discussion paper on creating synergies between the ARF and the ADMM-Plus prepared by Thailand then in anticipation of the inaugural meeting of the ADMM-Plus, it was pointed out that "it may be useful for the ARF to continue to focus on key policy issues" such as

⁶ According to an attachment paper to the modalities and procedures paper approved by the ministers in the 4th ADMM (May 2010 Ha Noi Meeting), it is the ADSOM which will approve the establishment of the so-called EWGs

those pertaining to “regional security challenges, trends in non-proliferation and disarmament, counter-terrorism and the regional security architecture”. The ADMM-Plus, the Thai paper, argued “could focus on more specialized defense issues [where] defense agencies have a more direct role” such as “defense policies and modernization of defense forces as well as regional trends which affect these policies”.⁷

In that same discussion paper, it was observed that the ARF has progressed in “developing policy frameworks for cooperation” and therefore the ADMM-Plus “could focus on operational aspects of dealing with non-traditional security challenges ... such as developing defense capacities for dealing with humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR).

The same paper suggests that the ARF would remain to have the strategic objective of developing preventive diplomacy measures and ultimately elaborating approaches to conflict while the ADMM-Plus could “provide a forum to undertake further discussions on issues such as defense industries and welfare of defense personnel”.

A month prior to the ADMM-Plus meeting, in the Tokyo Defense Forum organized by Japan’s Ministry of Defense, held in September 2010 and attended by mid-level officials from Japan and ASEAN countries’ defense ministries, this issue was one of the topics discussed. In that forum, the idea of having the ARF focus on policy issues considering that the ADMM-Plus purports to focus on practical cooperation was emphasized.

Similarly, in the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting held in March 2011 in Surabaya, Indonesia, the issue of creating synergy between the ARF and the ADMM-Plus was an agenda item. In that meeting, there emerged a view that the ARF could focus on broad strategic and policy issues while the ADMM Plus could focus on the more operational aspects of cooperation among defense and military establishments.

This issue was also intensively discussed in the April 2011 ARF DOD held in Sydney, Australia such that the ARF indeed would concentrate on policy related issues and the ADMM-Plus would zero-in on practical cooperation. Other participants however noted that the agenda of the ADMM-Plus should not unnecessarily be limited so much so that it is constrained or forced to deal only with practical cooperation. The ADMM-Plus, by the very essence that it brings together the defense ministers of 18 Asia-Pacific states, is also a useful security dialogue mechanism. With this issue being anticipated to remain at the center of discussions in the immediate future, the participants in that meeting actually agreed that this item remain to be included as an agenda in future DOD meetings.

⁷ See Discussion Paper: Creating Synergies between the ARF and the ADMM-Plus.

Indeed, there is the possibility of overlap between the ARF and the ADMM-Plus, after all both, as in the case of the other mechanisms in the Asia-Pacific, deal with security issues, specifically how to address the numerous security challenges confronting the region. What is usually alluded in the foreign affairs circle is the observation that the areas of cooperation identified by the ADMM-Plus (with the exception of military medicine) namely HADR, maritime security, counter-terrorism and peacekeeping operations are areas which the ARF has been working on and notable progress have been made. In addition to this obvious case of overlap is the fact that while the ADMM-Plus purports to emphasize practical cooperation, it is also a security dialogue mechanism. In fact, exchange of views on regional security issues has been explicitly spelled out as one of the main agenda items of future ADMM-Plus meetings in the modalities and procedures paper.⁸

Similarly, the ARF, while it is primarily a security dialogue mechanism has also undertaken practical initiatives such as the ARF Voluntary Demonstration of Response (ARF VDR) co-hosted by the Philippines and the US and held in Manila, Philippines in May 2009 and the ARF Disaster Relief Exercise (ARF DiRex) co-hosted by Indonesia and Japan and held in Manado, Indonesia in March 2011. Other practical activities are also being planned within the ARF framework. And if all the workshops and seminars organized within the ARF are considered as form of practical cooperation among its participants, then it could rightfully be argued that the ARF has and will continue to promote practical cooperation.

As pointed out by the Singaporean delegation in the Sydney 2011 DOD, these overlaps are not necessarily bad. Given the reality that both mechanisms now exist and that the ADMM-Plus has already been launched and is expected to run its due course, I would argue that it would actually be more productive to focus on examining how the ARF and ADMM-Plus could complement each other given their respective strengths.

The ARF has the advantage of having been there for almost two decades, serving as an important venue and platform whereby its participants examine security challenges and exchange views on how to deal with those issues. True enough, the ARF has been criticized for being a talk shop. But isn't that what it was meant to be in the first place? It is a forum, after all. By providing a venue whereby participant states come together and exchange notes on various issues, it has definitely made a substantive contribution in building confidence among the states involved. It may not have progressed and evolved as observers have suggested; it may not have moved from merely promoting confidence building measures to undertaking preventive

⁸ See The ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus): Modalities and Procedures, paragraph 12.

diplomacy measures as analysts would have wanted; and it may be impossible for it to really substantively undertake conflict resolution as we have all desired. But it could not be denied that it has made a contribution in promoting regional peace and stability; slow as may be case but a contribution nonetheless.

The ADMM-Plus for its part brings with it the optimism that it is possible after all to bring defense ministers to sit together in one formal gathering for them to discuss security issues and provide policy guidance to their respective defense and military forces ensuring that their militaries which have had their own respective meetings are appropriately provided with policy guidance.⁹ The ADMM-Plus has also generated an enthusiasm that beyond dialogues and consultations, undertaking practical cooperation is important and necessary if security issues were to be dealt with effectively. It also brings with it the seeming assurance that practical cooperation will be pursued, what with the establishment of the five EWGs on humanitarian assistance and disaster response, maritime security, counter-terrorism, peacekeeping operations and military medicine.

The ARF has the advantage of bringing together a greater number of participants with 27 participating states with both foreign ministry officials in the ARF itself and defense officials in the DOD. The ADMM-Plus has the advantage of bringing together a smaller number but more specialized group of officials, those from the ministries of defense, in the ADSOM Plus working group and ADSOM Plus levels. As noted in the composition and configuration paper, the Plus 8 configuration would enable “the ADMM-Plus [to] ... find a good balance between effectiveness and legitimacy”. To be effective, “the ADMM-Plus should be small enough to be nimble and responsive to security challenges facing the region”. For legitimacy, “it should be large enough to include the key stakeholders and to represent the interest of the region”¹⁰. What should not be forgotten is the usefulness of the ADMM-Plus in bringing together the defense ministers themselves.

One impetus for the emergence of the ADMM and subsequently the ADMM-Plus is the seeming need to have a mechanism whereby defense ministers themselves come together and sit as a group. The absence of such a mechanism within the ARF framework could actually been one of the inducing factors for the eventual emergence of the ADMM and the ADMM-Plus. In fact, at the start of the previous decade, at a time when the ARF was nearing its one decade

⁹ It must be noted that in the case of the ADMM, various meetings among ASEAN defense establishments have been organized and been taking place even before the ADMM came into being. These, for example, include the ASEAN Chiefs of “Defense Informal Meeting, the ASEAN Chiefs of Army Multilateral Meeting, the ASEAN Navy Interaction, the ASEAN Air Force Chiefs Conference and the ASEAN Military Intelligence Informal Meeting.

¹⁰ See The ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus): Configuration and Composition, paragraph 7.

anniversary, there have been observations that it may be useful and worthwhile for the ARF to include the defense ministers of ARF participant states. Way back in 2000, for example, I have noted in a research monograph on the ARF that defense ministers should be allowed to sit side by side with their foreign ministry counterparts in the yearly meeting of the ARF. This would pave the way for a sense of “equality” between the foreign ministers and defense ministers of the ARF members. Providing the defense ministers with the opportunity to sit alongside their foreign ministry counterparts in the annual ARF meeting would make the ARF truly a forum for security dialogue.¹¹

Given the reality of overlap between the ARF and the ADMM-Plus and in the search for means to ensure that they complement each other, one suggestion that could prove useful is the necessity of rationalizing the meetings being held within the ambit of the ARF. To date, the DOD is held twice a year. With the regularity of meetings of the ADSOM-Plus working groups and the ADSOM-Plus, it may be pragmatic to reduce the number of meetings of the DOD. Relatedly, with the ADSOM Plus now in place, the ASEAN Security Policy Conference which involves the defense vice-ministers of ARF participating states could be done away with.

On a side note before I end, the value of the ADMM-Plus as an addition to the plethora of multilateral mechanisms in the region could be seen in terms of the overall value of regional institutions which do not only provide channels of communications and thus help improve the quality of information being shared but de facto create certain standards with which actions of states could be evaluated.¹² More importantly, institutions “prescribe behavioural roles, constrain [certain] activity and [help] shape expectations”.¹³

And indeed, the ADMM-Plus has not only shaped expectations of the participating states but also of the entire region. It could not be denied that a lot is expected of the ADMM-Plus, particularly in its ability to promote practical cooperation among the defense institutions of ASEAN and the Plus countries. Those involved in the ADMM-Plus process, at least the present group, are conscious of this expectation and are committed in ensuring that the ADMM-Plus make progress in promoting practical cooperation. This is the idea behind establishing the experts working groups.

¹¹ Raymund Jose G. Quilop, *Institution Building in the Asia-Pacific: The ARF Experience* (Quezon City, Philippines: Office of Strategic and Special Studies, Armed Forces of the Philippines, [2000]), p. 41.

¹² See Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 244-45.

¹³ Robert O. Keohane, “Multilateralism: An Agenda for Research,” *International Journal* (Autumn 1990): 731 as cited in John Gerard Ruggie, “Multilateralism: The Anatomy of an Institution,” in Helen Milner and John Gerard Ruggie (eds.), *Multilateralism Matters* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 10.

One thing going for the ADMM-Plus is that the Plus countries have been enthusiastic about getting involved as manifested not only by their attendance or participation in the inaugural ADMM-Plus meeting but also in co-chairing the five EWGs of the ADMM-Plus. Their enthusiasm has become evident with their perception that the inaugural ADMM-Plus meeting would actually decide on which country would be chairing which EWG. This, however, was not the case. The 1st ADMM-Plus meeting merely had an initial indication of which country would want to chair an EWG.

The ministers in that inaugural ADMM-Plus meeting nonetheless gave explicit instructions for the ADSOM-Plus to establish such working groups. And after the ADMM-Plus meeting, work immediately commenced regarding the EWGs. An initial meeting of the ADSOM Plus working group for this purpose was hosted by Vietnam in December 2010 to start the process shortly before it turned over ASEAN chairmanship to Indonesia. In that meeting, it became clear and definite that the EWG on humanitarian assistance and disaster response will be co-chaired by Vietnam and China, maritime security by Malaysia and Australia, counter-terrorism by Indonesia and the US, peacekeeping operations by the Philippines and New Zealand and military medicine by Singapore and Japan.

This was followed by a meeting of the ADSOM Plus working group in Surabaya, Indonesia in late February of this year where the concept paper on the establishment of the EWG was refined and finalized and the specific work plans of the five EWGs were presented and discussed. These work plans were finalized in the ADSOM Plus working group meeting held in Yogyakarta, Indonesia in April 2011 and are now annexes to the concept paper on the ADMM-Plus Expert Working Groups. The ADSOM Plus meeting that followed immediately finally approved the establishment of the said experts working groups, something which was subsequently acknowledged in the 5th ADMM held in Jakarta this month.

Another thing going for the ADMM-Plus is the fact that compared to the ARF which has a relatively more “ambitious” three-stage trajectory of progress (from building of confidence to promotion of preventive diplomacy measures to elaboration of approaches to conflict), the ADMM-Plus has a more modest thrust: to promote practical cooperation. Defense ministries do not also have the burden of resolving conflicts but the conduct of practical cooperation between and among them could actually help build confidence and reduce the likelihood of conflict, which is the essence of preventive diplomacy.

Given the expectations and the enthusiasm, the ADMM Plus therefore is faced with the tremendous challenge and burden in proving that the momentum for practical cooperation is

sustained and is actually undertaken. The context characterized by uncertainty and seeming lack of trust and confidence among regional states may help explain why the ARF had to move at the pace and way it proceeded, prioritizing the building of confidence among its members at the expense of not having progressed quickly towards the preventive diplomacy stage. The ADMM-Plus emerged out from a context where confidence among states is assumed to be already in place after the many years of confidence building having been undertaken within the framework of the ARF, leaving no reason why practical cooperation could not be pursued.

The ADMM-Plus compared to other regional mechanisms has relatively a shorter period of time to show that it is making headway. It is almost certain that the ADMM-Plus progress would have to be assessed in time for second ADMM Plus meeting in 2013. Indeed, the ADMM-Plus would be evaluated in terms of its ability to promote practical cooperation as the idea of practical cooperation has become almost synonymous with the word ADMM-Plus.

Otherwise, the confidence on the ADMM-Plus' ability to foster practical cooperation may slowly wane and worse, the ADMM-Plus would simply become another one of the numerous mechanisms in the region where officials meet and discuss issues. That is the challenge in store for the ADMM-Plus.