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CALIBRATING THE DESIGN OF THE ASIA-PACIFIC SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

Calibrating Regional Security Architecture

by

Prof Dr Anthony MILNER

Tun Hussein Onn Chair in International Studies
Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia

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Calibrating regional security architecture

Anthony Milner

I approach the questions listed in this session as an Australian historian, and also speak on the basis of having been involved in the **2014 CSCAP initiative** to enhance the security architecture of this region. In my view, the CSCAP Memorandum – which highlighted the leadership potential of the East Asia Summit, and argued a case based on a cross-regional consensus - made sense, not only because of what it tried to do, but also because of what it did not try to do. Let me explain – and in doing so make some general observations about the task of upgrading security architecture in Asia and the Asia Pacific. In particular, there are a number of critical distinctions that ought to be made if we are to be able to formulate proposals for recalibration that have some chance of gaining traction.

- 1) First, **the need for effective regional security institutions** is obvious, and appears to be becoming more urgent. We face real challenges that require cooperation between states – functional tasks in such areas as counter-terrorism, nuclear proliferation, conventional arms proliferation, territorial disputes, maritime relations, transnational crime, irregular migration, disaster management, search and rescue, and energy securityⁱ – and, of course, the immense challenge of the world-changing geo-strategic shift that is at present underway. Many concrete tasks are being dealt with in the current existing regional institutions – in the ADMM-Plus and so forth – but sometimes the officials involved see an urgent practical need for greater inter-institutional coordination. One example concerns rules and procedures to avert incidents at sea – and, as Bilahari Kausikan has argued recently, the “main risk” today is not a “war by somebody’s design, but conflicts by accidents.” These rules need to apply not just to naval ships, but also to vessels under the control of other arms of government. In the case of China and Japan, their Coast Guards clearly have to be incorporated in these deliberations. The problem here, however, is that ADMM-Plus is a specifically Defence organization with no brief to coordinate beyond Defence ministries. To take a further issue, in the case of counter-terrorism initiatives these obviously need to reach beyond the province of Defence ministries if they are to address the social and/or religious drivers of violent extremism. When we turn to inter-state rivalries, whether they are intra-ASEAN – as in the Thailand-Cambodia confrontation of recent times – or contest between major external powers, these are unlikely to be managed solely by Defence or even Foreign Ministers. Such issues almost certainly need to engage heads of government – in the context either of ASEAN or the East Asia Summit (or perhaps the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation, APEC). What is clear from the above is that the functionalist

needs for calibrating the region's security architecture are of vital importance. The 2014 CSCAP Memorandum sought to address these needs.

- 2) In considering the calibrating of the region's security institutions some analysts treat the problems with current arrangements – complex, messy as they may appear to be – as the product of **faulty design**, and this is not helpful. These arrangements are better understood as institutional initiatives that responded to specific historical, geostrategic contexts – contexts that were themselves complex and messy –and were shaped by established traditions of thinking about regional relations. Correspondingly, any new attempt to calibrate current institutions also needs to take account of **regional realities**. It may be easy, for instance, to formulate an institutional structure for the region more elegant than current arrangements – but we must ask whether implementing that structure could exacerbate the inter-state tensions that it is designed to moderate.
- 3) To be context-blind in analysing security architecture, it should be said, contradicts the very idea of 'architecture'. In fact, much current analysis – with its reference to 'intelligent design', 'interlocking mechanisms', 'functionally-distinct mechanisms', and 'efficacy indicators' - seems to take not an architectural but rather an engineering approach. **The architect**, compared with **the engineer**, tends to prefer a more holistic, grounded approach – with a sensitivity to environmental and sociological context. Thinking in engineering terms – rather than from a genuinely architectural point of view - encourages an issues-based, problem-solving, functionalist approach to regional institutions. Given the scale of the security challenges facing the Asian region there is merit in such an engineering approach. Nevertheless, it does sharpen the risk of downplaying context – including the specific values and aspirations operating in the relevant, regional societies.
- 4) The idea of a '**regional community**' is one areawhere would-be calibrators need to pay attention to regional thinking. Former Australian Prime Minister Rudd would have benefited from doing so when he made an attempt to institute a new regional institution in 2008. It is useful to review his proposal because it is being put forward again, though in somewhat modified form. In advocating an Asia Pacific Community (APC) over 2008-2010, Rudd (and his officials) argued the case almost entirely in functionalist terms –stressing that the APC would “engage in the full spectrum of dialogue, cooperation and action on economic and political matters and future challenges to security”. One reason why Rudd's initiative failed to gain support among Asian countries was a divergence in approach to region building. An important distinction needs to be made here between **functionalist and identity regionalism**. While the first approach to region building stresses functional or practical dimensions, pointing to the advantages of regional cooperation in security, economic and other areas, the second emphasises the promotion of a sense of community, of 'we-ness'. The identity approach is influential in the Asian region. An Australian National University research project on the 'languages of security' in the

Asia Pacific has suggested that even the Asian-language terms relating to 'region' and 'regional community' tend to convey a sense of organic, cultural or historical unity. In proposing an Asia Pacific Community – and not merely, for instance, a new Leaders' Meeting – Rudd came up against these Asian expectations regarding what a 'regional community' implied, and yet (in the style of the engineer not the architect) he continued to focus primarily on the proposal's functionalist advantages.

- 5) The second problem Rudd faced arose from his highlighting of '**Asia Pacific**'. – and this preference too has continuing relevance today. In terms of community-building, in the Asian region the concept of the 'Asia Pacific' possesses far less emotive substance than the idea of '**East Asia**' or '**Asia**'. The 'Asia Pacific' concept is a more recent development; it covers an immensely diverse region, and tends to convey a sense of United States leadership. In the early 1990s the prominent Malaysian foreign-policy thinker, Ghazali Shafie, described APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation) as possessing no sense of "togetherness" – and being rather "some kind of foreign guided jamboree with an imperialistic odour", with members possessing "different visions and paradigms". His condemnation was colourful but it captured a widespread suspicion of the 'Asia-Pacific' project in the Asian region. By contrast, a century and more ago the idea of a specifically 'Asian' identity was being developed with enthusiasm, particularly in India and Japan, and partly in the context of the struggle against Western imperialism. Despite the defeat of the Japanese 'Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere' in 1945, two years later Nehru brought Asian leaders together in New Delhi in the Asian Relations Conference. The Cold War and the Sino-Indian War of 1962 were obstacles to a wider Asian unity, but Southeast Asian leaders took up region building with determination. In the 1940s Burmese leader Aung San contemplated a Southeast Asian 'entity' and felt it might one day be brought into a 'bigger union with the participation of other parts of Asia as well.' In Malaya in the 1950s Tunku Abdul Rahman spoke of 'linking between nations within our ethnological and geographical group', and proposed a South East Asia Friendship and Economic Treaty (SEAFET). In 1967 ASEAN was launched – and over the last decade and a half this organization has been playing the role in a wider Asian regionalism (in particular, the ASEAN Plus Three process) which Aung San had anticipated. This is no time to present a detailed argument – and some may well disagree strongly with me – but my impression is that Asian regionalism is gaining momentum, and the prospects for Asia-Pacific regionalism are discouraging.
- 6) Certainly, when we examine the current official documentation relating to security regionalism, the ASEAN/East Asian/Asian projects are given priority. The phrase "**community building**" (so central to identity regionalism) is used first with reference to ASEAN, but we also encounter "East Asian community building" – for instance, in the Kuala Lumpur Declaration of 2005, and the Chairman's Statement of the 16th ASEAN Plus Three (APT) Summit of October 2013 (in Brunei). In the current official overview of "ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation" it is pointed out that the APT

countries gave a commitment to “deepening and broadening the APT process is expected to serve as a “main vehicle towards the long-term goal of building an East Asian community”. It needs to be emphasised here that it is not the East Asia Summit (EAS) that is designated for this purpose. The repeated, official purpose of the EAS is to be “a Leaders-led Forum for strategic dialogue and cooperation on political, security, economic and social issues of common regional concern” (to cite the Chairman’s Statement of the November 2014 Summit). When EAS official documents (and also those of ADMM-Plus) do refer to ‘community building’ it is my impression that it is with specific reference to community building in ASEAN (as in the 2013 Chairman’s Statement) or “the East Asia region” (as in the Ha Noi Declaration of 2010). There seems to be no suggestion that the whole range of countries engaged in the EAS could be forged into a ‘community’.

- 7) In the official documents it is recognized that certain forms of ‘functional cooperation’ can assist community building, and here it is significant that such cooperative activity is focused in ASEAN or, more broadly, the APT. Apart from finance and monetary cooperation – in particular the Chiang Mai Initiative – there is a formidable range of initiatives, deliberation and action in the APT, including in the security area. Some officials involved report that the level of country commitment – especially Northeast Asian commitment - to APT processes exceeds the commitment to the ‘functional cooperation’ that has developed in the EAS, and that in many cases the APT cooperation is simply more developed. Reading official documents, the language of EAS Statements is relatively passive: the Summit ‘welcomes’, ‘appreciates’, ‘notes’, ‘commends’ and ‘recognizes’ – and sometimes ‘discusses’ and ‘underlines’. In the APT documents, the stress is on ‘implementation’ and ‘work plan’ - including the APT ‘Cooperation Work Plan (2013-2017)’, adopted in 2013.
- 8) Having made this observation, the fact remains that the EAS has instituted a number of “priority areas” for functional cooperation – including Disaster Management and Pandemic Diseases, and seems also to be moving into other areas. Although community building is not a designated objective for the EAS, it is nevertheless the case that participation in this priority cooperation offers the opportunity for such countries as Australia and the United States to engage more deeply in the region.
- 9) With respect to the specific aim of community building in identity regionalism, some analysts will be inclined to see this as peripheral in terms of real security measures. In fact, in numerous ASEAN policy **statements community building is treated as being of fundamental importance in the quest for regional security** – and this needs to be understood by anyone wishing to approach the calibration of regional institutions from a genuinely architectural perspective. When the Malaysian government, for instance, makes statements – as it has over the last year - about promoting a “sense of community” in ASEAN, stressing the ASEAN 2015 objective of promoting a “People-Centred ASEAN” – a community involvement that reaches beyond elites to “all sectors of society” – it is invoking a long-standing approach to

international affairs, including security relations. Creating “an ASEAN identity”, so it is said, will “strengthen the resilience of ASEAN as it deals with others”. It is not just a way of moderating security relations between Southeast Asian states – but also a strategy for building the capacity to deal with Northeast Asia and the wider world. Back at the time of the founding of ASEAN, TunRazak – father of Malaysia’s current Prime Minister - stressed that “we cannot survive for long as independent but isolated peoples”, so must “act together” and “prove we belong to a family of Southeast Asian nations”.

- 10) The stress on relationship building and shared norms that is so important in community building is also highlighted in thinking about security relations with the wider world. The Malaysian Defence Minister recently insisted that “international cooperation” is about “people-to-people relations, bonding, trust and finding a common interest of comfort zone with honesty and integrity”. Similarly, last year the Permanent Secretary of the Thai Foreign Ministry prioritized “shared rules and norms” in the task of handling the “geo-political trends” which threaten the region’s stability. It is important to highlight the serious role of ‘rules and norms’ in regional security thinking, partly because some analysis of the region’s security institutions is disdainful of this tendency. The somewhat muscular dismissal of the ‘talk-shop’ dimension of the region’s present security institutions – especially on the part of Western analysts – can be counter-productive in that it is disrespectful of Asian priorities, and also ignores the world-breaking failure of Western diplomacy over the last century.
- 11) A consideration of these different **distinctions – functionalist regionalism/identity regionalism; architectural approach/engineering approach; Asia Pacific/ Asia** – is relevant to a great deal of current analysis of Asian and Asia-Pacific security institutions, but it may be particularly timely because the idea of an Asia Pacific Community is being proposed again.ⁱⁱ In a report released recently, former Prime Minister Rudd – now working with a team at the Asia Society in New York – is generous in praising the EAS as an important regional initiative but then goes on – in his words – to call for it to be “transform[ed]” into “an APC”. He defines such an APC as “a more comprehensive, pan-regional institution capable of cultivating the habits and practices of political, security and economic cooperation”. As will be clear from the discussion above, this Asia Society proposal is likely to face strong regional opposition – not unlike that met by the original APC. It wishes to turn the EAS into a ‘community’, when many in the region see community building as an APT not EAS activity. It invokes the ‘Asia-Pacific’ ideal at a time when ‘East Asia’ and ‘Asia’ are more potent concepts. Rather than assisting to strengthen the EAS, the new Asia Society proposal runs the risk of creating suspicion regarding the Summit – highlighting it as a rival to Asian regionalist endeavours.
- 12) The **CSCAP security institution proposals**, by contrast, were intended to be sensitive to Asian region perspectives – based as these proposals were on lengthy

deliberations among all the country representatives in the organization – and to focus sharply and efficiently on the concrete problem of coordination. CSCAP approached matters in an architectural rather than engineering manner, paying careful attention to context. CSCAP did not talk of creating a new, elegant institution or of turning the EAS into a ‘community’. It did not advocate Asia-Pacific unity as an alternative to East Asian or Asian unity – though it did speak of promoting as a “long-term goal” a “stable regional community in the Asia Pacific”. The CSCAP proposals did not question the central role of ASEAN in this community-building – nor did they argue against the strong regional commitment to community building as a security as well as economic strategy. CSCAP did not seek specifically to move functional cooperation away from other institutions – the APT, the ADMM-Plus and so forth. What the CSCAP proposals did do was focus on the EAS’s mission as a “Leaders-led Forum” for “strategic dialogue and cooperation” (as spelt out in the EAS chairman’s statement of 2013). The proposals accepted the complexity of current institutional arrangements, but also recognized the urgent need for coordination – and suggested that as a Leaders’ forum, the EAS was ideally suited to provide “strategic direction” for the region’s security architecture. To this end, CSCAP recommended longer EAS meetings, the establishing of an EAS secretariat and the implementation of arrangements that might give non-ASEAN member countries a greater sense of ownership of the EAS process. Perhaps the most powerful aspect of the CSCAP proposals – the aspect that gives them authority - is that they were based on a consensus involving all countries participating in the organization.

- 13) Today we are seeing signs of the strengthening of the EAS, including through an official ‘High Level Task Force’. Although not attributing a community-building function to the EAS, there have nevertheless been moves that go well beyond the original informal discussion of the first five years or so (2005-2010). Regular Foreign Minister and Finance Minister meetings have been added to the Leaders’ Summit, and Ministers in other areas are also organizing meetings. Senior Officials meetings are proliferating. EAS discussions clearly involve suggestions of issues and possible initiatives in the security area. The Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum – which first met in 2012 and is a Track 1.5 body - was initiated at least partly in response to a request from the EAS for a dialogue of EAS countries to address maritime challenges. It is also clear that the EAS leaders have been deliberating “measures, including those of follow-up and coordination within the EAS ... to further enhance the effective implementation of the EAS decisions”.
- 14) **In conclusion**, the observation should be made that although the building of regional security architecture is an important strategy for managing dangerous security issues, it is not the only strategy for doing so. I am also warning here that architecture politics could actually damage regional relations. Taking what I suggest is a genuinely ‘architectural’ rather than ‘engineering’ approach to calibration, our best option today might be to support ASEAN’s ‘driver’s-seat’ role – recognizing that

ASEAN has a better track record than many when it comes to region building and achieving positive inter-state relations, and will bring valuable experience to the task of promoting order across the wider Asia Pacific. It is wise – and time-saving – to be patient with the current complexity of Asian/Asia-Pacific security institutions, which should be understood as a result not of bad design, but of the dynamics of a highly complex region undergoing transformative change. This said, there are obvious and urgent advantages in achieving greater coordination of the region’s security bodies, and it made sense for CSCAP to make this specific objective its priority - and to take up the demanding task of achieving a cross-Asia Pacific consensus to support its proposed calibration. Some commentators on the security issues of this region might prefer a more robust or comprehensive response to the challenge of calibration; but such a response is likely to be counterproductive. It is also just possible that in promoting regional security, ASEAN - with its stress on ‘community building’ and ‘shared rules and norms’ - has something to teach, as well as learn from, the wider world.

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ⁱSee the report of AusCSCAP’s 33rd meeting, Brisbane, 2010, by Brendan Taylor

ⁱⁱThe Honorable Kevin Rudd, ‘U.S.-China 21: the future of U.S.-China Relations under Xi Jinping’, (Asia Society Policy Institute, 2015)