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## CALIBRATING THE DESIGN OF THE ASIA-PACIFIC SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

Regional Security Architecture in Transition and Ways Forward

by

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# Regional Security Architecture in Transition and Ways Forward

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## 1. Overview of regional security architecture in Asia – Pacific

Regional security architecture, in its narrowest sense, is about multilateral institutions in security field in the Asia-Pacific region, not including bilateral security arrangements between the US and its allies. In recent years, the regional security architecture in Asia Pacific region has been undergoing important changes. With many new issues and challenges, countries in and outside the region have to make deliberate calculations in the process of formulating policies for their own and regional security.

If ASEAN centrality is taken into account, two main types of forums or mechanisms are identified. The first is those led by ASEAN such as ASEAN+1, ASEAN+3, the East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN Defense Ministerial Meetings (ADMM/ADMM Plus), and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF) and so on, along with its legally binding tools such as the ASEAN Charter, the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), the Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (SEANWFZ) and non-binding tools such as the Declaration on the Code of Conduct among concerned parties on South China Sea (DOC).

The second type includes those where ASEAN plays a limited role to varying degrees such as the Asia-European Meeting (ASEM), the Forum for East Asia and Latin America Cooperation (FEALAC) as well as Mekong sub-region cooperation schemes (CLV, CLMV, ACMES, GMS, Japan-Mekong, U.S.-Mekong, etc.). Besides, there are some forums where ASEAN plays no roles at all such as the Shangri-La dialogue, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the six-party talks on the Korean peninsula, Northeast Asia Cooperation (between three countries China – Japan – South Korea).

If the concept of comprehensive security is taken into account, some more forums or mechanisms have to be named such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC), the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and many FTAs in the region. The following five mechanisms are among the keys to understand the regional security structure. They include:

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<sup>1</sup> This is a draft paper only and not suitable for official quotation. The viewpoint expressed in this paper is entirely of the author.

**+ ASEAN+1:** This is the primary mechanism for ASEAN to mobilize political support, resource assistance and experience sharing from partners for its security and development objectives. The first framework formed, first with Japan in 1973 (first Summit meeting in 1977), then with Australia (1974), New Zealand (1975), the US (1977), Canada (1977), EU (1977), the United Nations (1977), South Korea (1989), China (1991), Russia (1991) and India (1992). So far, ASEAN has established dialogue relations with nine countries, one regional organization (EU) and one international organization (UN). ASEAN also established various substantive partnerships at lower levels, (i.e. "Sectorial Dialogue Relations") with Pakistan, partnerships under different titles with a number of countries and regional organizations (such as Norway, ADB, SAARC, GCC, MERCOSUR, ECO, etc.).

Cooperation has been implemented in many areas, with financial support from partner countries and has recorded many important achievements. To date, ASEAN has strategic partnerships with China, Japan, South Korea, India and Australia; agreements to work towards strategic partnerships with the US and EU (currently comprehensive partnerships); reviewing the possibilities elevating relations with remaining partners including New Zealand, Russia, Canada and the UN (currently comprehensive partnerships).

**+ EAS:** Created in December 2005 by ten ASEAN countries and six partners, including China, Japan, South Korea, India, Australia and New Zealand. Russia and the US were invited to join in 2010. At the first EAS meeting, leaders from member countries signed the Joint Statement on EAS, which proposed main objectives, principles, areas of focus and modalities for EAS. Enshrined in the statement, EAS is a forum for leaders to engage in dialogues and promote cooperation on strategic issues of common concern in political-security and development cooperation; to support existing regional forums and contribute to the goal of building community in East Asia. EAS is designed to be an open and inclusive process where ASEAN maintains a leading role and convenes annually on the occasion of ASEAN Summit.

To date, EAS has yet to formulate any official mechanisms for implementing decisions made by leaders although it has held annual Foreign Minister/SOM meetings and a number of Ministerial meetings in six priority areas (energy, finance, education, disaster relief, disease and connectivity).

**+ ARF:** The earliest and most important regional forum, developing from its predecessor - the PMC mechanism - at Foreign Minister-level between ASEAN and dialogue partners, held in a session immediately after the annual ASEAN Ministers Meeting (AMM/PMC). Established in July 1994 with seventeen original member countries (currently 27 members) to foster dialogue and cooperation on political-security issues in Asia-Pacific among

diplomatic officials (Ministers, SOM and WG) with the participation of defense-security officials.

As planned, ARF will undergo three successive stages: Confidence Building Measures (CBM); Preventive Diplomacy (PD) and Conflict Resolution. To date, ARF is transitioning from CBMs to PD stage while still continuing to implement CBMs. Areas of dialogue and cooperation has consistently been expanded, including traditional and non-traditional security issues; increasingly evolving in terms of depth, substance as well as complexity and sensitivity.

+ **ADMM Plus:** First held in 2010 in Vietnam with ten ASEAN members and eight partner countries (EAS participants); convened every two years and supported by SOM and Working Group (WG) mechanisms in five areas: humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, maritime security, counter-terrorism, military medicine and peacekeeping operations. This is an expanded mechanism from the ASEAN Defense Minister Meeting (ADMM) to promote dialogue and cooperation between defense officials on regional security issues and reinforce ARF and other regional political-security cooperation processes.

+ **EAMF:** Established in 2012 and is an expansion of the ASEAN Maritime Forum with the participation of eighteen countries (ASEAN+8, similar to EAS) at SOM level and aims to enhance dialogue and cooperation in maritime issues, i.e. maritime security, combating piracy and armed robbery, maritime connectivity, marine resource management, etc. Though a newly created forum, it is designed for and highly expected to help the region deal effectively with emerging maritime issues in the Asia-Pacific.

Key feature of the current regional security architecture is of “multi-process, multi-layer and multi-sector”. This fact makes Asia-Pacific region unique when compared to the rest of the world and provides remarkable advantages, namely: (i) being consistent with the region's diversity and enabling the flexibility and adaptability in the context of rapid and complex changes in the regional and international landscape; (ii) drawing broad participation from many partners in and outside the region, including major powers, due to the relatively suitable working modalities; (iii) diverse areas of dialogue and cooperation (political-security, economic and development cooperation), generally in line with the concerns and interests of every country.

To date, there have been no single all-encompassing forum or mechanism in the Asia-Pacific region. The ASEAN-led forums/mechanisms offer many advantages, but also expose some weaknesses. EAS is a strategic forum and

received the highest level of attention from countries in and outside the region.

## **2. ASEAN's role and tools in the regional security architecture**

ASEAN is an open and outward-looking regional cooperative organization. Its external relations is an important area of activity and since 1973 external relations have grown rapidly with many important developments, successfully supporting ASEAN's security and development objectives. ASEAN cooperation is not limited to ten member countries and within Southeast Asia, but includes the Association's external relations and addressing security and development issues in the Asia-Pacific, primarily through ASEAN-led forums/mechanisms.

Currently, ASEAN plays a "driver's seat" role in the regional forums or mechanisms with the following functions: creating forums and hosting conferences and meetings at all levels, deciding the working agenda and priority fields/activities, actively proposing measures and initiatives to facilitate activities and so on. ASEAN-led mechanisms has laid a relatively sustainable foundation for a regional security architecture, which is quite unique and unprecedented in international relations:

*+ In terms of leadership:* A group of small and medium-sized countries take lead and build the shared "rules of the road", not by major powers as often seen in other regions.

*+ In terms of membership and geographical scope:* ASEAN-led mechanisms attract many countries from various regions to join, not limited solely by geography, but ultimately determined by the working agenda, and nature of activities, which focuses very much on issues in the Asia-Pacific region.

*+ In terms of activities:* ASEAN has created a web of regional forums whereby each has their own objectives and scope, although certain overlapping exists. They support and reinforce one another to certain extents with different ranks of participating officials. The level of institutionalization of each mechanism also varies from one another.

ASEAN always attaches importance to and stress the need to maintain its regional role as shown in various efforts, especially in the push for internal linkages and unity; creating favorable conditions for external partners to constructively take part in ASEAN-led regional processes with an aim to promote cooperation and connectivity, building mutual confidence and codes of conduct for peace, security and development in the region, including DOC/COC; operationalizing a number of "rapid-response" mechanisms such

as the ASEAN Troika, ARF Chair (including the Friends of the Chair group), Special ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting and TAC Supreme Council.

In 2007, ASEAN leaders agreed upon the following strategic guidelines when participating in cooperative forums in East Asia: (i) Prioritize the establishment of ASEAN Communities; (ii) Ensure ASEAN's centrality in the regional architecture; (iii) ASEAN will continue to be an open cooperative organization. In July 2009, ASEAN Foreign Ministers agreed to an action plan for maintaining and enhancing ASEAN's centrality, which mapped out concrete objectives and measures (28 measures in four categories: institutional building; resource mobilization; monitoring, report and response, and strategic directions). To date, the implementation of this action plan has not attained substantive results mainly because of the differences among ASEAN countries in national interests and complex strategic calculations in their relations with major powers.

At the ASEAN-17 Summit (October 2010), when ASEAN leaders decided to expand EAS to admit the US and Russia, an agreement was made regarding the promotion of a regional architecture based on multiple existing regional frameworks which are mutually supporting and reinforcing with ASEAN as the primary driving force.

Looking back to the past 48 years, ASEAN has been regarded as playing an increasingly important role in the region because ASEAN has (i) successfully established forums/frameworks to promote dialogue and cooperation in the region; (ii) helped promote cooperation and connectivity in East Asia: ASEAN connectivity and cooperation, linkages in East Asia through ASEAN+1, ASEAN+3 and EAS; (iii) become catalyst for the participation of major countries, as well as a balancer and honest broker for their interests in the region; (iv) promoted conflict management and prevention (via fostering mutual understanding and trust, building and sharing norms for conduct), but not yet conflict resolution; (v) successfully created a "collective bargaining position" in relations with outside partners – an important advantage for ASEAN.

As a political-economic entity with relative internal linkages and geo-political, geo-economic significance, ASEAN has an important role in East Asia and, in parts, in the Asia-Pacific region, especially within the existing regional forums. ASEAN has become an indispensable partner in the policies of external partners towards the region, especially major powers. On the one hand, external partners are attaching more importance to ASEAN and want to capitalize on the Association. These countries are more aware of the need to link together bilateral and multilateral aspects in policy planning and implementation vis-à-vis ASEAN and the region. On the other, some countries

outside the region always seek to intervene in ASEAN and play the "ASEAN card" whenever possible.

In maintaining its centrality in the regional security architecture, ASEAN has to resort to some legally binding and non-binding tools, namely:

+ *The ASEAN Charter*: Signed in 2007 and effective in 2008; is the legal foundation and institutional framework for ASEAN connectivity; outlines the basic goals, objectives and principles for ASEAN connectivity.

+ *Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC)*: Signed in 1976, it entails basic principles guiding relations among Southeast Asian countries and later was expanded to include ASEAN partners, forming legal basis for relations between ASEAN and partner countries. Currently, twenty-two ASEAN partner countries have signed the TAC.

+ *Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone treaty (SEANWFZ)*: Signed in 1995 and became effective in 1997 after ratification by all ten ASEAN members. The treaty was accompanied by a protocol so that states with nuclear weapons (the US, Great Britain, France, Russia and China) could co-commit to the regional principles. Currently, ASEAN is engaged in talks with five nuclear-weapon states to enable them to join the protocol.

+ *DOC/COC*: The Declaration on the Code of Conduct of concerned parties on South China Sea (DOC) was signed by the Foreign Ministers of ASEAN and China in November 2012. This is a non-binding tool for ASEAN, and seems to be not much effective since its inception. It took around 10 years for ASEAN and China to jointly produce the guidelines for its implementation. Since 2013, China has agreed and consulted with ASEAN on building the Code of Conduct (COC) concurrent with the implementation of DOC, but not much substantive progress has been recorded.

### **3. New issues and challenges to the regional security architecture**

In recent years, the Asia-Pacific's regional landscape has experienced significant changes. These changes are the result of many factors, including policies by and competition for influence among major powers, particularly the strategic competition between the US and China. Major powers are putting forth many initiatives in existing regional forums or proposals aimed at establishing new mechanisms and frameworks on political-security and economic arenas to supplement their respective regional policies. This situation is heavily impacting the strategic calculations and policy choices of each country in and outside the region, amplifying the desire to form a new regional order to effectively manage rapid and complex changes and is

complementary towards each country's calculations and interests. Notable policies and proposals in the region include:

+ **China:** Proposing many policies and initiatives, including the "New Asian Security" concept (May, 2014) with 04 principles (common security, comprehensive security, cooperative security, sustainable security). China has also outlined the "China-ASEAN 2+7 Cooperation Framework" initiative package that entails two guidelines and seven detailed proposals, two of which are important proposals already put forth prior: (i) Signing a treaty of good-neighborliness, friendship and cooperation (August 2013); (ii) Maritime cooperative partnership and the maritime Silk Road initiatives (November 2012).

+ **US:** Carrying out the "rebalancing" strategy since 2009, which give priorities on strengthening bilateral relations with its allies and enhancing ties with regional partners; at the same time, attaching more importance to existing regional multilateral forums/institutions (particularly EAS and TPP), supporting ASEAN's leading and guiding role in the region.

+ **Japan:** Proactively adjusting its foreign and defense policies, laying out five new principles for Japanese diplomacy and expanding their application to Japan-ASEAN relations (protecting freedom, ensuring that the seas are regulated by laws, pursuing an open and connected economy, cultural and youth exchanges) and three-point principle on maritime issues (adherence to international law, non-use or threat of force, settlement of disputes through peaceful means).

+ **Russia:** Introducing the "Framework statement on strengthening security cooperation in Asia-Pacific" (November 2012) and promoting the signing of an agreement on principles for relations between countries along with concrete measures to deal with security challenges in the Asia-Pacific.

+ **India:** Shifting from "Look East" policy to "Act East" policy (2014); proposing to build an Asia-Pacific security architecture centered around dialogue (October 2013) with seven key principles, a majority of which are basic principles in international relations and affirming ASEAN's leading role. India also takes high regard of the role of EAS in ensuring regional security.

The above-mentioned developments in the region have heavily impacted ASEAN, spawning new challenges to the value of existing ASEAN-led regional forums as well as ASEAN's role in tackling those challenges. Along with the process of strengthening intra-group connectivity as well as promoting internal unity, at present, ASEAN is having to consider ways to ensure its



centrality in the regional architecture taking shape for the sake of the Association and its members' security and development interests.

+ *On contents for dialogue and areas of cooperation:* In EAS, the US, along with some others like Japan and Australia, wants to focus more on political-security matters while China currently wants to direct EAS to development cooperation. Others like Russia, India and New Zealand wants to promote both political-security and development cooperation. These differences sometimes make EAS less substantive, boring and not easy to be reconciled.

In ARF, US and other Western countries want to bring CBM's to substance and, at the same time, quickly going ahead with PD meanwhile, China and some other countries are reluctant to move too quickly. ASEAN basically does not want to progress too quickly but nevertheless needs progress, even in carrying out preventive diplomacy.

In ASEAN+1, ASEAN partners are trying to promote equality in mutual cooperation and their areas of concern, but make less commitments on resource assistance to ASEAN.

+ *On linkages among forums and implementation of agreements:* Currently, the biggest issue is the incoherence among EAS, ARF, ADMM Plus and EAMF (although all participants in EAS, ARF, ADMM Plus are ASEAN+8 members; ARF includes ASEAN+8 and 9 other countries). The overlapping in membership, issues for discussions and so on did exist. EAS and ASEAN+3 also lack linkages. Moreover, in the long-term, how should ASEAN+3 develop given that EAS will progress forcefully and become more influential while China no longer attaches the same importance to ASEAN+3 as before? How should ASEAN+1 frameworks be linked to ASEAN+3, EAS, ARF, ADMM Plus and EAMF? Countries have begun preliminary discussions on this issue but not yet come up with any concrete proposals for actions.

+ *On the institutionalization of forums:* The US and Western countries want to push for the institutionalization of forums such as EAS, ARF and ADMM Plus while ASEAN fears of losing its leading role in this process.

+ *On membership:* Another emerging issue is that some partners, especially EU and Canada, is lobbying hard for joining EAS and ADMM Plus. How to deal with these requests while maintaining the EAS and ADMM Plus substantive is a big and open question so far.

+ *On ASEAN's centrality:* Partner countries, especially major powers, all affirm their support for ASEAN's leading role in public forums but in reality, always seek to aggrandize their influence upon ASEAN. ASEAN consistently work to

maintain and exert its leading role but has to confront numerous challenges due to shortfalls in the level of unity and limited resources as well as enforcement capability.

*+ On ASEAN's legal mechanisms and tools:* Although concerned parties have joined TAC, SEANWFZ, DOC and other legally-binding agreements, in practice, the implementation is slow and outcomes have been limited. The fact is that even though ASEAN is capable of seating in the driver's seat, its law enforcement capability is limited. The differences in national interests and their own strategic calculations are among the biggest hindrances for these tools to be effective and fully observed. In some instances, countries explain the "rules of the road" that has been signed very differently to benefit themselves. Some partners, especially major powers, do not want to be restrained by ASEAN's tools.

#### **4. Some feasible ways forward**

Given the current state of the regional security architecture as mentioned above, in the next 10 to 15 years, it is unlikely that there will be a completely new or sweeping institution in place of the current regional security architecture. It is also unlikely that any proposal can fundamentally and substantially change the existing regional forums/mechanisms. Therefore, the big issue now is how to successfully build a stable regional architecture based on existing forums/mechanisms but renovated to better match the shared aspirations and interests of the majority of countries, especially major powers and ASEAN, and also meet the demands of changed context. These are difficult, complex and long-term issues mainly due to differences in the perspectives and interests of the parties concerned, including within ASEAN, between ASEAN and its partners as well as between external partners.

The greatest challenge to the existing regional mechanisms (ASEAN+3, EAS, ARF, ADMM Plus, EAMF) is different interests among countries as well as overlapping and lack of linkages and support for one another. Therefore, the quality and efficiency of activities have been limited, particularly in observance or implementation of agreements. Generally, countries want improvements to increase effectiveness and better fit their interests but disagree on detailed objectives and modalities. The following options may be feasible for improving the regional security architecture:

*+ Step-by-step institutionalization of EAS:* EAS is of top concern of many countries in and outside the region. In the short-term, diplomatic SOM should be designated as an official mechanism to prepare for EAS Summits. Ministerial-level meeting should not be summoned in the lead up to Summits, thus reducing burdens to Foreign Ministers and avoid some overlapping. In

the longer-term, the establishment of three ministerial-level mechanisms in three key areas (political-security, economic and socio-cultural) should be seriously considered for the purpose of implementing decisions made by high-level leaders while still maintaining EAS as a forum for leaders to discuss strategic issues and promote strategic trust and cooperation in a number of key areas and maintain EAS's basic working principles, ASEAN's leading role.

This measure would partially meet the demand of many partners on institutionalizing EAS to increase efficiency, prevent the creation of many ministerial-level mechanisms on development cooperation but still ensure the EAS's nature and ASEAN's centrality.

*+ Enhancing linkages among forums:* The possibility of gradually expanding ADMM Plus membership to admit other members of ARF should not be considered at this moment, but could be taken seriously later on. APSC (ARF Security and Policy Conference) should be eliminated eventually, but DOD (closed meeting for defense officials within the ARF framework) should be retained. Some kinds of "rapid response mechanism" need to be set up within EAS and ADMM Plus to respond to newly emerging security issue in the region.

Within the current context, EAMF is becoming an important forum and should be invested more and should become an inter-agency forum for diplomats, naval officials, coast guards officials to exchange viewpoints on substantive maritime issues. Or EAMF could be transformed into a working group on maritime issues directly reporting to the EAS Ministerial meeting on political-security cooperation. It would also be good for the whole region if some kind of maritime monitoring mechanism, at any level, is developed.

This method would help strengthen and better link ARF and ADMM Plus – two most important Ministerial-level forums on political-security cooperation that increases coordination between diplomatic and defense officials, while still ensuring the role of ASEAN+8 countries.

*+ Improving the working agenda and the forums' modalities:*

- **ASEAN+1:** It is important to focus on strengthening cooperation between ASEAN and each partner in ASEAN's priority areas and where the partner has a comparative edge; avoiding any overlapping, i.e., issues already raised at other forums like ASEAN+3, EAS and ARF. Capacity building assistance for ASEAN continues to be emphasized.

- **ASEAN+3:** Narrowing down the scope of discussed issues, at the same time, continuing to substantiate economic-financial cooperation and connectivity in East Asia. Security issues can be moved to other mechanisms.

- **EAS:** Focusing discussions more on strategic and political-security issues and promoting development cooperation, but only in areas that have been carefully selected and limited.

- **ARF and ADMM Plus:** Strengthen substantive implementation of CBM's and promote PD measures. Better linkages between these two mechanisms should be underlined.

Many of these proposed schemes are not new at all and have been suggested by some countries and largely unopposed. However, in reality, problems lie in the process of their implementation. ASEAN needs to have stronger political will and better enforcement capability in carrying out these measures.

To conclude, the regional security architecture in Asia-Pacific region is in its critical transitional period. The regional and international landscape is changing quickly, creating new issues and challenges to ASEAN and its multiple existing mechanisms. ASEAN needs better flexibility and capability in order to maintain its centrality in regional architecture. Reforms are necessary but need to be balanced and harmonized with the interests and demands of external major powers. Priorities should be given to EAS, ADMM Plus, and EAMF. Both legally binding and non-binding tools need to be strengthened. Implementation and capacity building for ASEAN should be emphasized.