

SHOULD ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM (ARF) RE-VISIT ITS CORE AREAS?

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Abstract

The ARF (ASEAN Regional Forum) projected three stages of its evolution, such as confidence-building, preventive diplomacy (PD), and “an approach to conflict”. The aim of this paper is to evaluate how far the ARF has gone beyond its first stage, as it is presumably hobbled by power-politics of big actors, lack of consensus in handling traditional security issues, and the presence of similar other security-related organizations in the region. That said, ARF’s outcome is impressive in sustaining confidence-building measures (CBM), and in fielding actionable projects in handling non-traditional security (NTS) issues, such as disaster management. Should not then The ARF devote more time and resource to NTS issues that will likely impact on traditional security in the long-run?

This paper suggests certain action-oriented projects; basically that The ARF may not further deepen or widen geopolitically. Hence, the ARF continues to work as a traditional confidence-builder.

Keywords: ASEAN, Asia-Pacific, geopolitics, NTS, confidence-building.

Introduction

ASEAN is a South-east Asian regional initiative meant to improve the socio-economic condition of its people through better integration, and, more importantly, through economic cooperation. As it stands today, community-building is its desired end-sate. The ASEAN Charter, articulated in the year 2007, is thus committed to establishing an ASEAN Community, comprising The ASEAN Politico-Security Community, The ASEAN Economic Community, and The ASEAN Socio-cultural Community. The Charter aims to build a more integrated community in such dimensions.

The Charter also tends to establish the legal personality of ASEAN. The Charter makes the organization a subject of international law, thus conferring on it the rights, privileges, and immunities as recognized by the international law. The Charter allows establishment of appropriate dispute settlement mechanisms, including arbitration, for disputes which concern the interpretation or application of the Charter and other ASEAN instruments (Villacorta, 2011).

To such direction, ASEAN has come a long way, since its inception in 1967, as its membership has increased, and its domain of activities has expanded. Nonetheless, intra-ASEAN relations are, at times, punctuated by tensions and rivalries. Tensions spiral surrounding issues such as human rights, democratization, drug and human-trafficking, fishing, and illegal migration, and also on inter-state relations rooted in history, such as between Thailand and Myanmar, and between Malaysia and Indonesia (Battala, 2010). Economic activities such as bilateral and multilateral free trade agreements, bilateral currency swap agreements, and socialization--apparently substantive areas of this organization--have made impressive progress. That said, ASEAN also subscribes to the principle of comprehensive security that obviously covers The NTS.

As a kind of security forum of ASEAN, The ARF, now consisting of 27 participants, was established for deliberating political and security issues in The Asia-Pacific.

The ARF creation was presumably triggered by two important changes in the region, such as withdrawal of US bases in the Philippines, and uncertainty of regional security amidst the rise of China. There was also a realization in the 1990s that ASEAN itself would not be able to handle the politico-security issues across entire Asia-Pacific. The region's two dominant powers—China and Japan-- are located in Northeast Asia; even critical flashpoints such as Taiwan, North Korea and The East China Sea are beyond ASEAN's spatial realm. The forward-deployed forces of The United States, the lone superpower or for so long the sole *hegemon* of the region, are concentrated in Northeast Asia. In such a setting, ASEAN was likely to become marginalized (Simon, 1998). The central aim of establishing The ARF was to sustain peace and prosperity in the region, by way of political and security dialogue. Thus, the creation of The ARF was a pragmatic alternative to handle security-related issues in the wider area.

While handling security-related issues, The ARF has to take into consideration the views of all its participants, and to satisfy the special needs and interests of ASEAN as an entity. It was clearly articulated by ARF Chairman statement in August 1995, that "A successful ARF requires the active, full and equal participation and cooperation of all participants. However, ASEAN undertakes the obligation to be

the primary driving force..... The ARF process shall move at a pace comfortable to all participants”. That said, such juxtaposing itself tends to be a constraint to ARF functionality. The latter part of the paper makes this argument in greater detail.

The ARF concept paper, prepared in 1995, aims to reach its goals in three stages: confidence-building, preventive diplomacy, and conflict resolution, through a gradual evolutionary process. However upon insistence by China, the last stage was later rephrased as “elaboration of approaches to conflict”. The last two stages may involve interfering in the internal affairs of a state or an infringement on state sovereignty. As such their application may be problematic. The ARF is far from developing such a clout and mandate in the near future to confront last two stages because of competing interests and orientations basically emanating from both the big powers and other security-related organizations in the region.

The United States, China, and Japan have much wider and deeper strategic goals—their expansionary interests are colliding-- in the region possibly more than The ARF can anticipate. As a case in point, The ARF would be rather helpless to make any substantive contribution to the North Korean issue, where even the Six-Party Talks find it difficult to tame the North Koreans. Similar is the *fait accompli* for Taiwan, and East and South China seas. All these are vexed geopolitical issues, directly related to hi-politics, where the stakes and interests of the *hegemons* and major powers are inextricably linked. So an obvious question may be raised: Can The ARF tackle dozens of issues or simmering and potential conflicts that involve sovereignty, territorial disputes, and even nuclear issues?

Arguably, apart from the flashpoints, a host of NTS challenges, such as human trafficking, natural and man-made disasters, cross-border and internal migration, climate change, drug-and-human trafficking, food security, gun running, cyber security, cross-border terrorism including in the maritime, insurgency, haze pollution, etc. may provide triggers for regional cooperation. When the challenges are common to all parties, then the imperatives are better appreciated. These challenges are, at times, more demanding and complex than generally understood traditional threats, and these may again greatly impact the traditional security in the long term. “By following the trends of the times and leveraging its own advantages, ARF should continue to focus on joining efforts in preventing and responding to non-traditional security (NTS) challenges” (ASEAN Regional Forum Annual Security Outlook, 2013- China). Seventy percent of all natural disasters battered The Asia-Pacific, costing the region US \$ 80 billion annually over the past ten years (Diplomacy –in –Action, 2014).

ASEAN unity and cooperation were missing during the search and rescue operations for Malaysian aircraft MH 370 in 2014. The search was conducted more on a one-on-one basis than a combined ASEAN effort. The ARF, on behalf of ASEAN, could have, at the least, set up a coordination cell in such multilateral search drive. Although individual ASEAN countries came forward in the search missions, there was no effort in tapping the ASEAN-Emergency Rapid Assessment Team (ASEAN-ERAT) (Hui, 2014).

Even ASEAN was slow in responding to the disaster-relief assistance to Myanmar when cyclone *Nargis* struck in 2008. The ASEAN foreign minister meeting took place almost two weeks – once media had sensationalized the issue– after the cyclone *Nargis* had hit. ASEAN is seemingly not that effective to tame Indonesia to contain the haze that annually pollutes the neighboring countries. Indonesia is yet to ratify the ASEAN Agreement on Trans-boundary Haze pollution. The ARF needs to revitalize its efforts for an effective, coordinated, and comprehensive disaster-relief, pacification, and rehabilitation programs that may be imperative to mitigate the damages wrought as a consequence to any natural disaster or other organized crimes, such as ethnic cleansing, drug, and human trafficking.

A proposition may, therefore, be formulated as such: While it may not be prudent for The ARF to go deeper to tackle geopolitically sensitive issues in the region, it may better handle NTS issues more enthusiastically. This does not necessarily imply that it will not continue to work as an effective confidence-builder. As a case in point, The ARF is a pioneer for addressing regional maritime security issues multilaterally. In the maritime domain, The ARF has established a number of dialogue mechanisms for maritime and naval CBMs (Sakhujia, 2015).

Questions may then be raised: Can The ARF competently manage varied, at times geopolitically sensitive, issues in this wider area? Should The ARF take up the NTS issues, which may also impinge on the regional stability and state security in the long run, more vigorously? Is the host of similar organizations in the region and in other parts of the world—having almost similar objectives— going to dwarf its existence or relevance?

The paper, finally, attempts to provide certain action-oriented suggestions that may add value to what already exists.

Content analysis is followed in preparing this paper. However, a comparative study is done, as a kind of case study, with few other similar security-related organizations, both in the region and in other parts of the world. The author's vast experience in handling NTS issues contributes to developing the argument of the paper.

The uniqueness of the paper is its attempt to suggest a re-orientation of the thrust-areas of The ARF. Such a re-orientation with a stronger institutional-framework may make this organization more mission-oriented, realistic, and people-centered.

Theoretical Argument and Framework

Dent (2008, p. 24) makes an emphatic statement, A “[r]egional security arrangement (such as [The] ARF) can bring greater stability and trust within a regional community, without which economic regionalism may be very difficult to achieve.” In the conceptualization of The ARF, ASEAN thought it prudent to bring together under one roof two giants –The United States and China. These two giants are, otherwise, apprehensive of regional multilateral security arrangements. Two *hegemons* i.e. The United States and China, have a kind of ‘love and hate’ relation, where hi-politics prevails, especially surrounding the flashpoints, and also in the race for leadership. It is natural for a pre-dominant power to challenge a rising power, especially in a state of transition. The ARF has been a tool that facilitated engaging and integrating— both The United States and China—in the regional order, and reduce the likelihood of The US playing the strategy of containment (Chanto, 2003, p.42). Emmers (2001) rightly argued, “It will be claimed that the ARF was conceived as an instrument for ensuring a continued U.S. involvement in East Asia, and for including the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in a rule-based arrangement to encourage it in the practice of good international behavior”. Their arguments may not hold good anymore. Michael Leifer’s contention is that the region lacks a stable balance-of-power that may not allow The ARF to work with some predictability. The ARF would remain ineffective if The ARF itself had to establish one such stable architecture (Acharya, 2009, p.207).

As history suggests, multilateral institutions act as tools to serve better the interests of powerful hegemonic countries. They are even utilized to spread changes in the nation’s strategic policies. Since the powerful states pursue their interests first and then attempt to check their rival countries interests, so the possibility of real cooperation for a multilateral institution is limited. Even when such intended cooperation is better institutionalized, the possibility of relative interests makes it difficult for the major powers to continue to cooperate. The ARF has not been consistent with the South China Sea disputes. Both neo-liberal and constructivist approaches to multilateral institutions do not provide adequate rationale. Two hegemonic states in the region participated passively when The ARF agenda was deemed to be outdated. They simply maintain a minimal role. The ARF, therefore, played different roles at different times, depending on the interaction and competition between The United States and China (Jhao and Chae, 2014, pp. 240-241 and 254). Vietnam views The ARF as a defensive enmeshment concept to reduce the likelihood of

Chinese aggression (Goh, 2005, pp.7-8). The overriding reality is: stronger nations go all-out for realizing their interests, especially vital ones.

ASEAN is not interested in confronting hi-politics, as a routine, let alone be considered as an alliance or a collective security arrangement. It can, however, be considered in the context of cooperative security. To cite an example, ASEAN is not capable of handling the Southern Thailand insurgency problem. ASEAN was rather helpless in restoring democracy in Myanmar, except for the issuing of statements or communiqué urging it to restore democracy. ASEAN has seemingly failed to restrain the Myanmar authorities in stopping to kill the unarmed civilian Rohingyas by other ethnic groups. Such an ethnic cleansing has given rise to inter-state migration sponsored by the infamous human-traffickers that have a vast network in both ASEAN and other neighboring countries.

In realist perspective, China's neighbors can at best ventilate their security concerns in such forums. For Japan, it is a good forum to raise security-related issues, independent of The United States. The United States wants to utilize The ARF so to raise and discuss security-related issues to which China may not be much interested. Again in a realist paradigm, The ARF failed to address any major flashpoint, such as North Korea or The South China Sea, while from a constructivist assumption, The ARF has a fairly credible past and room to grow (Whelan, 2012,pp. 21-22).

To reinforce another perspective, liberalists contend that The ARF or any such organization may be able to go beyond realism so to bring about cooperation. As a case in point, cooperative security can be activated through joint cooperative military actions, such as multi-national maritime patrols, search-and-rescue operations, cyber-security, and anti-piracy activities. Notwithstanding the fact that those may not be fully activated, due to overarching geopolitical compulsions, The ARF may be able to create mutual confidence through transparency and commitment (Simon, 1998). The ARF provides the functionalist hypothesis that states tend to cooperate when they are confronted with common issues, as highlighted in the introduction. This thesis also formulates that a state of anarchy is replaced by a state of cooperation.

Therefore, it follows that The ARF is more of an understanding or a trust of living in a peaceful surrounding than a binding security treaty or a geopolitical construct such as NATO, The SCO, or The AU. Thus said, in order to remain relevant and animated, such cooperation in the form of global and regional multilateral organizations has to deliver tangible outcomes. What The ARF can do is to contribute to creating a meeting ground of the two parties. The ARF has to appreciate, that by getting embroiled in the geopolitics of the region, it may lose its relevance as seemingly it

may not be able to contribute much to create such a meeting ground.

Friedberg's (2005) evaluation of the participation of the great powers in the security or integration process seems relevant here, that "[t]he growth of international institutions in Asia and the expansion of both U. S. and Chinese participation in them are drawing the United States and China into a thickening web of ties that liberal optimists believe will promote contact, communication and, over time, greater mutual understanding and even trust, or at the very least, a reduced likelihood of gross misperception."

There is much substance in Friedberg's statement, but Rozman (2012) argues little differently, in ways such as that China is "not succeeding in establishing social networks conducive to regionalism," and its strategic divergence is exacerbating differences, rather than contributing to cooperation. China may leave The ARF — this may be true to any other actor—if its vital national interests are not well-served. He further argues there is going to be a stand-off between Sino-centric and trans-Pacific ideals, with ASEAN-led cautious steps navigating between them.

There is a contradiction between China and the United States in identifying the core areas of The ARF. China stresses more The NTS while The United States stresses traditional security issues (Shixin, 2013, and *Diplomacy in Action*, 2013). The paper identifies this contradiction, and based on this, the paper makes a formulation. The paper also identifies the overlapping areas in the realms of geopolitics and NTS issues. This leads to the thesis that a more legalistic approach to The ARF *modus operandi* may be counter-productive as the core national interests may deflect the decision-making of the actors. Cooperation is contingent upon how much elbow room is allowed for national interests (Heller, 2005).

Having said so, cooperation can also be generated by appreciating geopolitics from another perspective. We can say that two streams of geopolitics are operating here: One stream pushes the nation-states to cooperate, and the other pushes to compete (Mahbubani, 2013, p.146). The ARF is definitely poised to push the nation-states to cooperate, and may not be to the desired level of expectations. Functionalist approaches posit that Asia's regional security cooperation—as part of multilateral diplomacy—has moved beyond dialogue to practical collaboration on NTS issues (Tan, 2013).

NTS issues are substantive, and these issues, at times, may even go to the extent of making a small state dysfunctional. NTS issues have serious trans-boundary implications as well. ARF members can forge cooperation on NTS and peace-keeping operations (ASEAN Regional Forum Annual Security Outlook, 2013—

Indonesia). This paper suggests that The ARF re-orient itself more to that direction, so to remain relevant and dynamic in the region.

Relevance and Activities of The ARF in the Regional Setting

From CBMs, ARF was expected to reach to the stage of PD. It seems that The ARF is faltering because there are ambiguities or disagreements in defining what PD is all about. Some authors define PD as a threatening form of cooperative security; it may, therefore, impinge on national sovereignty. Morada (2010, p.34) sees the factors that inhibit PD from kicking off in The ARF: rift between states “who see the importance of implementing a number of security cooperation agreements.... and those that remain reluctant, uncomfortable, and fearful of ‘losing’ a part of their sovereignty.” ASEAN members are reluctant to share their leadership role with non-ASEAN members in the Forum. It would, therefore, rather be difficult to reach to a level of conflict-resolution

Be that as it may, ASEAN took the initiative, as already indicated, to establish The ARF, The EAS, and ASEAN+3, which can play a critical role in preserving peace and security in Southeast Asia, and in East Asia. They can do so in areas such as maritime security in the Malacca Straits, a nuclear-free Zone in Southeast Asia, and a confidence-building initiative in East Asia. Both The ARF and The EAS can help to develop dependability of action between ASEAN and its external partners (Pakpahan, 2012). Such organizations in this wide area may complement each other’s efforts on NTS issues. Some kind of coordination mechanism may, however, be necessary.

NTS issues such as counter-terrorism, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, maritime security, military medicine, and peacekeeping, are the areas where ADMM-Plus members can also cooperate (Tan, 2013). On the side-lines of ADMM-Plus in October 2010, both China and Japan agreed to set up a liaison system for maritime conflicts, seemingly to obviate collision of Japanese and Chinese ships (Teo, 2012). Over and above this, The EAS also covers both traditional and NTS issues, particularly in areas such as maritime security, transnational crimes, terrorism, piracy, and also non-proliferation and disarmament (Sebastian, 2011).

More importantly,

The United states sees logic to regional security discussions now taking place in ARF and ADMM+ eventually setting the agenda for the region’s leaders when they meet at the EAS Summit. The United States wants to ensure that the EAS is a substantive meeting where leaders can engage directly, discuss vital issues of the day, and build relationships and mutual confidence (Bower and Santosa, 2011).

The ARF may be seen as a preparatory meeting to feed the ideas to The EAS (Bower and Arbis, 2013). The EAS, a kind of smart American geopolitical move, is now branded as a game changer, basically to obviate the influence of China. There is an apprehension that ASEAN's role may get knobbly if and when The EAS transforms into The Asia-Pacific Community (Sebastian, 2011). In a similar vein, The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), apart from economic objectives, has a "broader strategy to re-engage with the region and to contain China's influence" (Capling and Ravenhill, 2011). Both can dwarf China's activism in regional security organizations.

The ARF's benefits are presumably limited for The United States. So it thinks that The ARF is a "low-stakes institution" (Goh, 2004). What can be prescribed is: ASEAN may take the lead in substance, putting forward collective ideas for addressing the issues confronting these groups, while again, ASEAN should steer the forum towards The NTS such as disaster management, contagious diseases, environmental pollution, drug and human trafficking, and other transnational crimes. In the Myanmar cyclone case, *Nargis* reinforced the relevance of ASEAN when Myanmar accepted un-coordinated assistance from ASEAN member-states, with no repsonsibility (Thuzar, 2011). ASEAN worked as a broker and a bridge between Myanmar and the community.

The ARF has made considerable progress in The NTS, especially in disaster management preparedness. The ARF conducted its first ever live field exercise on disaster relief operation in the Philippines in May 2009. Indonesia co-hosted the second ARF field exercise with Japan (ASEAN Regional Forum Disaster Relief Exercise) on disaster relief along with Japan in March 2011. The exercise aimed to enhance "coordination and cooperation among humanitarian actors/ disaster relief stakeholders, including civil and military agencies, in multilateral disaster relief operations in the Asia-Pacific region" (ASEAN Regional Forum- Annual Security Outlook, 2011- Indonesia). Malaysia and China co-hosted an exercise in Malaysia in May 2015 with the aim to test civil-military coordination. The ARF adoption of the Statement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (DMER) is a milestone declaration. This was followed by the adoption of The ARF General Guidelines on Disaster Relief Cooperation. Draft ARF Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Operating Procedures (HADR SOP) and standby arrangements are also being developed.

Over and above The NTS, diplomatic negotiations at the behest of The ARF have brought China, as part of a soft balancing strategy, to the negotiating table so to attempt to settle scores in the South China Sea. In the sixteenth meeting of The ARF held in Thailand in July 2009, all participating members hailed the successful signing of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea of 2002

(DOC) as a milestone document between ASEAN and China. But the irony is that it is not legally binding.

The Declaration is believed to be effective in building mutual trust and confidence among the claimants in South China Sea. All parties look forward to the conclusion of a Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea. This may be problematic and time-consuming as China is now insisting on one-on-one handling of the issue. China is likely to dilly-dally the signing of legally-binding CoC as it sees no reason to restrict its freedom of action in the South China Sea (Storey, 2014). The moot point is: China has been reluctant to discuss the individual claims in the South China Sea in the ARF forum. So ARF's relevance is somewhat getting marginalized here.

Alternatively, The United States prefers ASEAN centrality. The ARF may not be able to make much of a dent since The United States has also become involved in claiming uninterrupted navigation and unimpeded commerce in The South China Sea, thus giving rise to hi-politics (Karim, 2014). It can, nonetheless, keep on raising the issue and facilitate deliberation to reach, at least, any short-term measures. It went to China's favor as ASEAN failed to issue the customary Joint-communiqué after the 2012 ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM) in Cambodia. This reflected a wedge in the ASEAN group.

I argue for that ARF relevance in the regional context is limited primarily to The NTS and, in some mode, in CBM. Now, The ARF may be contextualized at the international setting where geopolitical contexts, however, may be different. But there are definite lessons to learn.

International Context

It would be pertinent here to look at the activities of similar such organizations operating beyond the region. A comparative analysis puts The ARF in the right perspective to correctly align or orient its objectives, and to appreciate its limitations. On matters of security, human rights, democracy, and The NTS, a comparison may be worthwhile. An analysis may bring home the point that The ARF may not, understandably, be able to handle wider and more complex objectives as being pursued by The African Union (AU), The SCO, and The OSCE. This is, in fact, the central argument of the paper.

Political upheavals and democratic reforms in Asia and Africa have proceeded at a dramatic pace over the course of the past year. Thus regional organizations such as AU and ASEAN are expected to be the primary

actors managing responses when violence or conflict erupts (Ng, Lotze and Stensland, 2012).

As a case in point, The African Union (AU) has coverage in its action plans, such as to achieve peace and security in Africa, and to promote democratic institutions, good governance, and human rights. Unlike The ARF, The AU is mandated to intervene in a Member State with respect to grave circumstances, namely war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity. “The AU is the world’s only regional or international organization that explicitly recognizes the right to intervene in a member state on humanitarian and human rights grounds” (Hanson, 2009). That said, The AU faces formidable challenges in meeting its mandate, as the African security environment is mostly volatile and restive. It is rather handicapped to tackle many complex inter-ethnic and inter-religious issues that are seemingly destroying the very fabric of many nation-states of Africa.

While facing such challenges, The UN Security Council generally comes to its support. The AU deployed its first peace-keeping force in May 2003 in Burundi. It also deployed peacekeepers in Darfur, Sudan, in 2003. The AU deployed 7,000 peacekeepers in Darfur, and ultimately merged with The U.N. mission in October 2007. On bidding from The AU, The UN Security Council imposed an arms embargo and other sanctions on Eritrea in December 2009.

Presently, The AU troops, along with others, are fighting terrorists in Somalia, and so far, they have achieved considerable success. That said, The AU needs a post mortem as far as its responses to Arab Spring and Cote d’Ivoire are concerned. AU ability and its response to crisis areas need introspection for the future functioning of this organization. The African Commission of Human and People’s Rights (ACHRR) condemned human rights violations in Libya. However, The AU blithely ignored those.

Despite that the AU has a Peace and Security Council (PSC)—The ARF is far from such institutionalization, and it may not need such an institutionalization and mandate—whose responsibilities include prevention, management and resolution of conflicts, post-conflict peace building, and developing common defence policies. It has power to authorize peace support missions, to impose sanctions in case of unconstitutional change of government, and can take initiatives and actions it deems appropriate when there is a potential or actual conflict scenario. The AU can make decisions by consensus or by two-third majority, which is not the case with The ARF.

The AU is also hobbled by the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of a member-country, which may not be to the extent of that of The ARF. ASEAN

or The ARF have seemingly failed to do anything substantive to contain the recent human rights issue in Myanmar. .

Considering another such organization, The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was basically established as a confidence-building body to resolve border problems. Its stature started increasing especially in 2005 when it called upon Washington to set a timeline so to withdraw its military bases in Central Asia. Its activities further expanded to include increased military cooperation, better intelligence sharing, and updated counterterrorism drills. Experts believe that Russia and China, by utilizing SCO mechanisms, would like to curb U.S. access to the region's vast energy supplies. Compared to other regional institutions, The SCO has made great progress in institutionalizing security cooperation.

Quite contrary to The ARF, The SCO has practically turned out to be a geopolitical entity *per se*. It has also made full-scale involvement of its armed forces, apparently to tackle terrorism—The ARF seemingly may not be effective to the extent of involving the armed forces—infighting terrorism in the wider Asia-Pacific region. The SCO serves as China's Central Asian diplomatic channel to help contain East Turkistan activity (Huasheng, 2013). The SCO is more comprehensive than The ARF. In 1994, The SCO set up a Regional Anti-terrorist Structure (RATs), so to share intelligence on cross-border Islamic terrorist activities. This handles Islamic terrorism, Afghanistan, drug trafficking, trade liberalization, etc. (Cabestan, 2013). Taking a cue from The SCO, The ARF may at least be better suited to coordinate intelligence-sharing, especially on terrorism and trans-national crimes.

To cite another organization in context, The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has mandate in areas such as arms control, human rights, freedom of press, and election monitoring. It also deals with military transparency and cooperation. That said, The ARF has presumably made laudable progress in military transparency, as its member-states publish yearly white papers on defence.

The OSCE is an ad hoc institution under The UN that handles issues such as early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management, and post-conflict rehabilitation. The OSCE has an Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), established in 1991, so to take care of election monitoring, human rights, democracy promotion, rule of law, and more. The ODIHR has observed over 150 elections and referendums since 1995. The OSCE is credited to help restore democracy in Russia and Eastern Europe. The OSCE has independent institutional resources, as well as necessary staff, so to monitor and organize different events and missions. The OSCE is now monitoring the troubled areas in East Ukraine, bordering Russia. The

ARF, however, for the first time, facilitated an election observation for the Timor-Lesta general election in July 2012.

The ARF has to follow certain norms and rules which may not be applicable with respect to The AU or others. While handling security-related issues, The ARF has to take into consideration the views of all its participants and to satisfy the special needs and interests of ASEAN as an entity. In the process, non-ASEAN members tend to get marginalized. The ARF has ostensibly seemingly become handicapped from taking an ‘out of box’, bold, and imaginative decision. Thus said, The ASEAN Charter does not rule out voting among the leaders if they choose to do so. However, on the whole, ASEAN prefers consensus to voting.

Suggested Action-oriented Ways Forward

The following paragraphs list the direction and orientation that The ARF may contemplate undertaking substantial contributions to the region’s overall security architecture. It is perhaps time to revisit the limiting norms of the ASEAN Charter, especially its consensus-based decision-making (Hernandez, 2015). Suggestions here are basically intended to add value to that which already exists.

The ARF may concentrate more on its independent institution building, expanding its resources, and capacity building. It may not totally disassociate itself from ASEAN. Nonetheless, it should make efforts to upgrade its own stature. It may thus consider having its own secretariat.

The ARF may continue to re-invigorate its CBMs by encouraging dialogue, cooperation, communication, linkages between track I and track II diplomacies, norm-building, streamlining procedures, etc. That said, for confidence-building, member-nations of The ARF may be aware of various sensitive historical-socio-cultural factors of the region. The ARF needs to concentrate more on capacity-building of its officials who can better contribute to CBMs (Ern, 2011).

It may take all its members on board to create effective mechanism so to tackle areas such as disaster management, maritime security, anti-piracy, anti-narcotics, counter-terrorism, climate change, etc. The United States proposal to formulate a legal framework, such as The Rapid Disaster Response Agreement (RDR) for rapid deployment of foreign assistance during the post-disaster period, may be given due consideration. A nucleus of inter-governmental command, control, and monitoring cell—comprising military personnel, civil bureaucrats and technocrats, media, NGOs, volunteers, etc., may be established under the aegis of The ARF. The ARF needs to better coordinate all the phases of disaster management: pre-

disaster, during disaster, and post-disaster rehabilitation programs. Monitoring and coordinating all the phases, in a web, is critical for the successful completion of the rehabilitation program. Again, The U.S. proposal to establish an ARF Transnational Threat Information Sharing Center (ATTIC) deserves consideration for the shared goal of creating a drug-free ASEAN (Diplomacy in Action, 2013). It may be noted that Japan, along with ARF partners, are “implementing anti-drug measures based on the United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances and other drug related treaties” (ARF Annual Security Outlook, 2013- Japan).

With the expected rise in air traffic, especially as the Open Skies Agreement is becoming operational within the ASEAN region by the end of 2015, there will be an imperative for better coordination in Search-and-Rescue (SAR) Operation. The MH 370 incident renders creating a coordinating center for SAR operations (Henrick and Ho, 2014) expedient. The ARF needs to play its due pioneering role.

For cyber-security, The ARF or ASEAN may consider the feasibility of carving out a “No- Use- Zone” by agreeing not to use advanced cyber capabilities in the region. It can, to start with, occur between ASEAN members, and subsequently between ASEAN members and other countries. The ARF may consider establishing joint working groups with The EU and The EAS. Cyber-security presupposes confidence-building that may facilitate transparency, cooperation, and improved capacity, necessary to reduce the risk of future conflict (cyber-attack) (Diplomacy in action, 2014). The ARF initiative to include cyber security, a serious looming threat, and nuclear non-proliferation in its agenda, are steps in a positive direction.

The ARF may further activate training on complex peace support, and counter-terrorism operations involving civilian, police, and military personnel. Interoperability of such complex operations involving varieties of countries, equipment, and personnel, is a great challenge. The ARF adopted, in its 12th Ministerial meeting in July 2005, a number of counter measures against terrorism that may encompass financing of terrorism, increasing border controls against cross-border movements of terrorists, and the sharing of intelligence. For capacity building on counter-terrorism in Southeast Asia, Japan has provided support in various fields, such as immigration control, aviation security, maritime and port security, and law enforcement (ASEAN Regional Forum Annual Security Outlook, 2013 -Japan). Relevant courses and training, such as cyber terrorism, terrorism financing, youth and terrorism, and prevention and rehabilitation etc., are also imparted in the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Counter-terrorism (SEARCCT), in collaboration with partners such as The United States, The United Kingdom, The European Union, and Russia. The United States is committed to

build awareness, and to share intelligence with ARF countries on Radiological Terrorism (Diplomacy in Action, 2013). The ARF may also undertake development and production of common training literature, covering regional realities, to deal with terrorism in all its dimensions and manifestations.

The ARF may continue to encourage the participants to be more transparent in matters related to national defence. Voluntary contribution by The ARF participants to the *ASEAN Regional Forum Annual Security Outlook* is a positive, transparent initiative, to which even the smaller and less developed countries actively contribute. Transparency in other areas of defence, such as arms procurement and development, and conducting joint exercises, especially maritime and anti-piracy, and counter-terrorism in line with the drills conducted by The SCO, may also be ensured. Notification of any impending military exercises – which The ARF may coordinate—may be communicated to all stakeholders. Hotlines may be established between the political and military leaders of the region. To accomplish this effectively, The ARF may consider creating a small military-diplomat staff cell. Military diplomacy may further contribute to confidence-building between the militaries of various orientations and backgrounds.

Transnational environmental issues, such as Southeast Asian haze and Northeast Asian yellow dust, health issues such as bird flu, anthrax, malaria, or other common diseases, could be underscored as part of The ARF's actionable projects. Singapore and other affected neighbors, alongside Indonesia, which is presumably culpable for trans-boundary pollution, may consider innovative and pragmatic approaches to fight the haze issue (Ewing, 2013). The ARF may look into the need for provision of resources, so to address the root causes of haze in high-risk areas such as Riau and Sumatra in Indonesia. The ARF may also coordinate sharing information on zero-burning techniques, fire-fighting improvements, peat-land management, and more effective air quality monitoring. Reducing Emissions for Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+), a mechanism that offers capital incentives for maintaining forest and the services thereof, may contribute to haze-reduction strategies. The ARF may organize such support, as may be available from Singapore, Malaysia, and Brunei, to the affected countries such as Indonesia. The ARF Inter-sessional Meeting (ISM) on *Counter-terrorism and Transnational Crime* identified wildlife crime as transnational crime in its 2013 meeting. The ARF can seek support from The United States to tackle this issue (Diplomacy in Action, 2013).

The ARF, for intelligence-sharing and capacity-building, may further strengthen its ties with other regional and international organizations. It is heartening to note that The ARF has already developed links with The OSCE and The SCO. Such cooperation can be useful, at least, in areas of counter terrorism. A linkage may be

created between APEC and ARF, to be utilized as part of a cooperative strategy, so to engage both The United States and China. Australia may help in creating such linkage.

Importantly, The ARF may further expand its involvement with The UN and other international organizations that can greatly complement its efforts towards NTS issues. It is already engaged with many UN bodies, such as The UNHCR, The WHO, The UNDP, The IMO, and The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). The ICAO conducted a workshop with The ARF on the consequences of a major terrorist attack. Such interaction and cooperation may be deepened and widened further.

Apart from high technology and military hardware, The ARF is considering soft approaches, so to strike at the root causes of terrorism. It is suggested that civil society groups, media, and educational institutions, may be activated and brought together for a common goal. Involvement of community and religious leaders for Inter-faith- dialogue (IFD) and Inter-community- dialogue (ICD) is also being considered. Indonesian The *ASEAN Regional Forum Annual Security Outlook 2013* has suggested applying a people-centric approach to counter terrorism, promotion of inter-civilizational dialogue, and intelligence sharing. Soft power is more effective in countering radicalization through the application of strategies such as rehabilitation, reintegration, and counter-radicalization. A special ARF task force, aimed at assessing soft-strategies and exchange of intelligence on trans-national terrorism, may be created. The ARF may consider forming a joint intelligence commission primarily to exchange intelligence on terrorism and trans-national crime. Establishment of rehabilitation centers for surrendered terrorists may also be undertaken by The ARF. The UN, The US, and other countries, can provide technical support for such ventures.

Concluding Remarks

ARF achievements, in certain distinct fields, are praiseworthy and commendable, notwithstanding those not in core geopolitical areas. The ARF must consolidate the gains it has so far made, and may, if pertinent, re-direct its core areas. Its objectives may be kept limited, but if those are realized in letter and spirit, it will contribute immensely in creating an environment of peace and tranquillity, and above all, assist to create an impulse so to resolve the outstanding issues amicably. It may continue with soft regionalism so to tame high politics. The ARF is relevant in the regional contexts, although geo- politics tends to haunt this region. However, its relevance and comparison become problematic in the international context. Such

problematic contexts render it all the more convincing to the proposition that The ARF may tilt more towards The NTS, along with confidence-building.

Tackling disasters and transnational crimes, especially terrorism, may also be viewed as a great service to this region of the world. Even its apparently limited and nuanced activities, otherwise having wider ramifications, would suffice as a *raison d'etre* for its existence and relevance.

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