



UNISCI Discussion Papers

REGIONAL APPROACHES TO PEACE OPERATIONS: THE EXPERIENCE OF ASIA¹

AUTOR²:

MELY CABALLERO-ANTHONY
Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS)
Singapore

FECHA:

Mayo de 2003

Against the current uncertainties in the international security environment and the kinds of conflicts we are witnessing today at various parts of the world, there has been renewed interest in regional efforts to secure peace. This short article looks at the regional approaches to peace operation within the context of the Asian experience.

At the outset, it must be stressed that Asia's experience and approaches to peace have to be seen against the broader perspective of what we understand to be "peace operations". If the definition of peace operations were to be confined essentially to the conventional notions of deployment of peacekeeping forces (either UN-led or NATO initiated operations) in times of crisis, then Asia's experience may be deemed irrelevant. However, if we were to expand peace operations to include various mechanisms and strategies by regional actors and institutions to work for peace within the broader framework of peace operations involving conflict prevention and peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace building, then the Asian experience may be worth telling. This caveat is significant if we are to have any meaningful discussion on differences in regional approaches as it allows us to locate the Asian experience within the multi-dimensional task of peace operations.

This article is divided into two parts. The first part provides a brief narrative of Asia's experience with peace operations by looking at the experience of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in their efforts at working toward peace and stability in the Asia Pacific region and to the extent possible, contrasts these against the European experience. The second part attempts to identify ways of enhancing cooperation between both the ASEAN and ARF and the UN, as well as between the European regional organizations and both ASEAN and the ARF.

1. Asia's experience: A Story of Regional Reconciliation, Norm-Building and Inclusive Regionalism

¹ This short article is based on the author's presentation at the Conference on *The UN, the EU, NATO and Other Regional Actors*, Centre de Conférences Internationales, Paris, France, 11-12 October 2002.

² Las opiniones expresadas en estos artículos son propias de sus autores. Estos artículos no reflejan necesariamente la opinión de UNISCI. The views expressed in these articles are those of the authors. These articles do not necessarily reflect the views of UNISCI



Describing the Asian experience requires one to have a clear understanding of the nature of the regional security arrangements/approaches found in Asia. Many scholars and observers have had their own versions of the Asian approaches to security but they essentially agree on the three major points:

- In the case of ASEAN, its general approach to peace was one of finding appropriate and acceptable mechanisms for regional reconciliation in a milieu, which was once characterised by intra-mural disputes. By creating ASEAN, the sub-regional states in Southeast Asia provided themselves with a stable structure of relations for managing and containing tensions between neighbouring states like Malaysia and Indonesia (that were embroiled in the Confrontation in 1963 over the formation of Malaya) and Malaysia and the Philippines (that disputed over the territory of Sabah). As reflected in the 35-year history of ASEAN, this process of regional reconciliation was extended beyond the boundaries of the original, non-communist states to include other states in the region regardless of their political orientation. Thus, ASEAN had, for all intents and purposes, become a diplomatic device for regional reconciliation, which in turn underpins regional peace and security. Unwittingly, the ultimate objective was to build a security community founded on the assumption that no member states would ever go to war with each other.
- The types mechanisms for regional reconciliation found in ASEAN had been geared for conflict prevention. These mechanisms referred to as the “ASEAN Way” of diplomacy and accommodation have been reinforced by the careful cultivation, socialisation and adherence to regional norms. These norms include: non-interference in internal affairs of states; respect for national sovereignty, non-use of force in the settlement of intra-regional disputes; and effective cooperation. These norms have been codified in ASEAN’s Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), which is the only indigenous regional diplomatic instrument providing a mechanism and processes for peace settlement of disputes.
- These mechanisms can therefore be categorised as low-key security approaches that promote trust and confidence-building through established habits of dialogue, observance of regional norms and building loose/informal institutions to support these process-oriented approaches to preventing regional conflicts.

The above characteristics essentially define ASEAN’s approach(es) to peace and security in the region. As a result, Asia’s brand of regionalism when compared with that of Europe is mostly founded on “soft” institutionalisation which has been aptly defined by a noted Asian scholar, Amitav Acharya³, as “bureaucratic minimalism, preference for consensus over majority voting, and avoidance of legalistic and binding commitments”.

These were the same approaches that ASEAN embodied when it helped to establish the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1994. The creation of the ARF may be seen as ASEAN’s attempt to extend its processes of conflict avoidance writ large to the Asia Pacific region. Hence, the processes of regional reconciliation that was earlier confined to ASEAN was

³ Among the works of Amitav Acharya that looks at the nature of institutionalisation in ASEAN, see “Realism, Institutionalism and the Asian Economic Crisis”, *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 21, no.1, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies), 1999.



expanded to become “inclusive regionalism” with the formation of the ARF. Currently, we have in the ARF a 23-member grouping comprising like-minded and non-like minded states across the vast expanse of the Asia Pacific. The ARF has also as its members all the major powers in the international system—the US, China, Russia, Japan, India and the European Union.

Since the regional approaches to conflict prevention are process-oriented, there are no alliance arrangements among the Asian states, unlike in Europe. In fact, the Asian security lexicon does not include collective and common security. Instead, comprehensive and cooperative security dominates the discourse both in ASEAN and the ARF. ASEAN has emphasised the comprehensive nature of security in promoting political and economic cooperation in the region. Within the context of the ARF, the objective of cooperative security was seen “as replacing the Cold War security structure (characterised by bilateral military) with a multilateral process and framework...geared towards reassurance rather than deterrence”.⁴ More importantly, cooperation security has been translated to be all about the principle of inclusiveness, promotion of habits of dialogue and multilateral cooperation among state and non-state actors.

It may be useful to add at this point that these informal approaches also characterised the other types of regional institutions that emerged before and after the ARF such as the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in 1989, the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in 1995 and the ASEAN + 3 (APT) in 1997.

1.1.The scorecard

The real question is the extent that ASEAN and the ARF have been effective in maintaining peace and security in the region? The scorecard of these institutions presents a mixed picture and largely depends on the kinds of benchmark used to assess their effectiveness.

As far as ASEAN is concerned, most analysts would agree that it has played a critical role in decreasing the probability of war between its members. The ASEAN Way has helped build confidence, increased trust and has even created a nascent sense of identity or ASEAN solidarity among its members. But while ASEAN has been relatively successful in managing inter-state conflicts, its experience in intra-state conflict has been chequered. The difficulties that ASEAN faced at the height of the East Timor conflict exposed the shortcomings of an organization whose mandate was limited to managing inter-state disputes. These difficulties were compounded with the fact that the East Timor crisis happened when most ASEAN states were still reeling from the devastating impact of the Asian financial crisis of 1997-98.

The results are even more inconclusive with regard to the ARF. Since its establishment eight years ago, the work of the ARF has been set to evolve in three broad stages, namely the promotion of confidence building, development of preventive diplomacy and elaboration of approaches to conflicts. So far, even its fiercest critics would agree that as a multilateral forum for discussion of security, the ARF has had moderate success in confidence building in the region. Member states have recognised the importance of the ARF as a vehicle for airing their own security perceptions. Some analysts in fact credit the socialisation through the ARF

⁴ David Dewitt, “Common, Comprehensive and Cooperative Security”, *Pacific Review*, Vol.7, no.1 (1994), p.285.



of engendering a more positive attitude of states that were initially suspicious towards multilateralism.

On the other hand, other critics dismiss the ARF as nothing more than a talk-shop. Its inability to respond to the crisis in East Timor has been seen as a litmus test of its inadequacy as a regional institution to act in times of crisis or prevent crisis from happening.

One could go on challenging facts to either defend both the ASEAN and the ARF or point to several issues that could have been done to make both organizations better equipped to handle crises. However, what this discussion has brought out is the very fact that both organisations do not have the capacity nor the institutional wherewithal—not to mention the political will—to respond to crisis needing concerted action, particularly if this requires some form of military intervention. The East Timor experience presents the extent that ASEAN can go to “intervene” in what is considered as an intra-state conflict involving its member state. And if compared to European organizations like NATO, neither ASEAN nor the ARF has the peacekeeping forces that can be rapidly deployed.

This does not mean however that nothing can be done to enhance cooperation between and among the regional actors in the partnership for peace. I shall now turn to explore the possibilities for task-sharing arrangements between the UN and the regional actors in Asia.

2.Exploring Opportunities for Meaningful Partnership

Many analysts and scholars have argued for a more pro-active ASEAN and ARF in order to have meaningful partnership with the UN. Thus, the issues I have chosen to highlight below are not necessarily new. Nonetheless, it merits reiterating some of what I consider to be practical issues for the purpose of our discussion today.

I shall divide these into two themes. One is on enhancing cooperation between the UN and ASEAN and the ARF by building on their institutional strengths. The other is on enhancing cooperation by improving the institutional capabilities of the ASEAN and ARF, as well as by learning from the experiences of other organisations.

2.1.Enhancing Cooperation by Building on Institutional Strengths

It must be recognised that in spite of limited institutional resources, ASEAN and the ARF have, over the years, built up a solid capital of goodwill and peaceful inter-state relations in the region both at the bilateral and multilateral levels. On the institutional level, both ASEAN and the ARF have also generated a number of other institutions—albeit loose and informally structured. These reservoirs of extensive networks extend from the Track I to Track II and even Track III levels. These networks are reinforced by regularised habits of dialogue which are found in the huge number of meetings that take place in and out of the region. These do not even include the extensive political, economic and security cooperation that are taking place within the framework ASEAN and ARF. These are the institutional strengths of ASEAN and ARF and can be valuable assets that a universal institution like the UN can tap in the efforts toward world peace. How and what are the ways to do this?



- ***Strengthening intra-ASEAN and intra-ARF cooperation***

It is important to highlight the need to strengthen interstate cooperation within ASEAN and the ARF before any inter-agency cooperation can take place. Within ASEAN, the inter-governmental cooperation on security issues such as transnational crime and terrorism has been improving. In the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attack, there is an ASEAN accord/agreement among the ASEAN states of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Cambodia to step up cooperation in fighting transnational problems (which include, among others, illegal trafficking of drugs, trafficking of small arms and illegal migration) and sharing of intelligence operations in fighting terrorism. ASEAN has also signed an anti-terrorism accord with the United States. Within the ARF framework, cooperation has also been stepped-up in this regard. An inter-sessional group to study terrorism has been established.

- ***Building formal linkages with the United Nations***

With the numerous dialogue mechanisms that are already in place, it is ironic that ASEAN is the only major regional organization without observer status at the UN. In fact, Secretary General Kofi Annan at the ASEAN-UN Summit in Bangkok in February 2000 lamented the fact that both ASEAN-UN “have found little to say to each other on peace and security at the time when new forms of security challenges are presenting themselves”.⁵ As far as the ARF is concerned, it has already initiated contacts with the United Nations. But more can be done by both ASEAN and the ARF. ASEAN and the ARF could, for example, institutionalise regular meetings or courtesy calls on the Secretary-General. In turn, the Secretary-General and members of his staff may be invited to participate in annual ASEAN/ARF Ministerial Meeting and to the extent practicable, to the important series of Inter-sessional meetings (ISM) on peacekeeping operations, CBMs, disaster relief and search and rescue meetings.

There is much to be gained by exchanging information and sharing of experiences between the UN and ASEAN and ARF in the areas of conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding. More specifically, both ASEAN and the ARF could benefit from the training that the UN offers in early warning and preventive measures.

With regard to peacekeeping and peacebuilding, experience has shown that ASEAN and ARF countries have the potential to contribute more to UN operations, regardless of some obvious limitations. Although ASEAN and the ARF have a long way to go before adopting something similar to NATO-type mechanisms, individual member countries have been volunteering troops to UN peacekeeping operations and this should be encouraged.

ASEAN and the ARF could also offer to undertake some preventive action tasks such as conducting fact-finding missions and some kind of early warning indicators. This task suits the ARF, which has just established the ARF Register of Experts/Eminent Persons (EEPs) and is currently discussing the enhanced role of the ARF Chairman. The EEPs for example could provide “rapid reaction advice” and conduct in-depth studies on regional security issues. The

⁵“ Strengthening ASEAN-United Nations Partnership”, Remarks by Secretary-General of the United Nations at the ASEAN-UN Summit (Bangkok, 12 February 2000).



Brahimi Report on UN Peace Operations⁶ has emphasized the contribution of regional expertise, thus ARF's Register of EEPs persons and even those from Track II and non-governmental organizations should be made available to the UN. Since ASEAN and the ARF already have a pool of experts who can offer valuable contribution to the work on confidence-building and preventive diplomacy, this can strengthen the UN's early warning and conflict prevention capacities.

- ***Forging working relationships between regional organizations and other regional organizations***

ASEAN has links with UN agencies and related bodies such as the ESCAP and the UNDP, while the ASEAN Regional Forum has already made formal contacts with the Organizations of American States (OAS) and the Organisation of Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). However, the aim must go beyond building contacts. Opportunities must also be sought in finding common areas to work together, particularly in conflict prevention and preventive diplomacy. ASEAN and the ARF could look at the best practices found in the experience of OSCE and vice-versa. While cognizant of the differences in regional context, certain experiences and practices found in the OSCE and other regional organizations could be very useful guides in the region's efforts at preventing, managing and resolving conflicts. Moreover, experience sharing in best practices can provide important indicators in tracking stages of conflict and on what tools to use and when. (This will be discussed in more detail below). Thus, a specific recommendation could be that within the ASEAN and the ARF, there should be "units" or "desks" created to liaise and develop joint training and practices with partner organizations like the OSCE.

2.2. Enhancing Cooperation by Improving the Institutional Capabilities of ASEAN and the ARF

In crafting strategies to improve the institutional capabilities of ASEAN and ARF, it is tempting to aim high and yet difficult to seek a balance between what is desirable and possible, between the desired ends and available means. Within this context, both ASEAN and the ARF could act on the suggestions that have been offered. I shall highlight some of the most important ones:

- ***Building linkages with Track II institutions***

Within ASEAN, the ASEAN-Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS) have been one of the pioneering track-II bodies that have made its mark in Southeast Asia by the kind of work it has done in supporting political and security cooperation in the region. Through their workshops/conferences, academic researches and policy outputs, and their own networking activities, ASEAN-ISIS has built up valuable expertise, and had in fact been responsible in pushing for a more enhanced Post Ministerial Meeting within ASEAN which germinated into the idea of establishing a multilateral security forum, now known as the ARF.

⁶ See Report on the Panel on UN Peace Operations, 21 August 2002; also available online at http://www.un.org/peace/reports/peace_operations/report.htm.



On the broader region, the Council for Security and Cooperation in the Asia Pacific Region (CSCAP), in which ASEAN-ISIS is a core group member, has made some significant contribution in providing an informal mechanism by which political and security dialogue can be discussed by scholars, officials and others in their private capacities. CSCAP has produced important policy inputs. One of its latest policy outputs is a review of the progress and prospects of the ARF. Under the initiative of CSCAP's Singapore National Committee, a working paper on "*The ARF into the 21st Century*" examined ways to move the ARF forward, particularly towards pushing the preventive diplomacy agenda.

As Track 2 institutions, they are known to push the envelope forward by examining issues, which governments may perceive as sensitive. The collaboration and linkages between Track 2 institutions and by ASEAN and the ARF is therefore important in conflict prevention in the region.

- ***Engaging civil society (Track III)***

If track-II bodies are the epistemic communities that we can count on, the participation of track III or members of the civil society in any peace operations is crucial. Civil society groups can complement the efforts of the UN and regional organizations through their own work in peace-building activities such as civic education programmes, training, research and human rights advocacy. More importantly, they are well placed to serve as conduits between local actors and the UN and ASEAN and ARF in conflict prevention. There should therefore be a need for a vertical dialogue between the UN and ASEAN/ARF with people's organizations and NGOs as track III.

In the region, there has not been much contact between local actors and ASEAN nor the ARF. Unlike in EU which provides for a structured representation of civil society in its various activities, and even in Southern Africa's SADC which provides for an NGO division in its Secretariat, there is none in ASEAN nor in the ARF. However, there is some progress between Track II engaging with Track III in ASEAN. Through the initiative of ASEAN-ISIS, the ASEAN People's Assembly was started in 2000, the first time ever when representatives from a wide array of civil society groups in the region were brought together to dialogue with Track II. The second APA was held in September 2002.

- ***Pushing the preventive diplomacy agenda***

It is in this area where progress should now take place if ASEAN and the ARF want to remain relevant in a rapidly changing regional environment. It is also in this area where the experience of the OSCE can be most instructive for ASEAN and particularly the ARF. Both organizations could learn from the OSCE's experience in the following areas:

1. Providing for appropriate institutional resources to coordinate activities, gather information and possess analytical capabilities to process information and data. ASEAN has the minimum of institutional structures while the ARF virtually has none.
2. Developing fact-finding and good offices mission to promote conflict prevention and crisis management. ASEAN has introduced the ASEAN Troika to enable ASEAN to



address emerging regional political and security issues that could lead to crisis situations. But, the Troika is only constituted as an ad hoc body and is impeded by the stipulation that it should refrain from addressing issues that constitute the internal affairs of ASEAN member countries. The ARF has yet to make progress on even the role of the ARF Chair.

3. Establishing an OSCE-type Conflict Prevention Centre to deal with conflict prevention and reduction. The ARF could consider establishing a similar institution that can institutionalise activities such as fact-finding and early warning.
4. Formulating a set of norms beyond the established regional set of norms to ensure the security of minority populations while discouraging secessionist aspirations.

These issues are now being studied extensively in the region. The Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS) of the Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, for example, has just published monograph on, “A New Agenda for the ASEAN Regional Forum”.⁷ The monograph examined comprehensive options to push the ARF agenda forward, particularly on the work on preventive diplomacy. In fact, some of the recommendations by IDSS included adopting certain preventive diplomacy mechanisms, which are found in the OSCE. These included, among others: the establishment of an ARF Secretariat; setting up of a Risk Reduction Centre (RRC), and promoting enhance defence participation at ARF meetings (so far ARF meetings have been attended mostly by the Foreign Ministers of ARF member states). These recommendations have already been officially forwarded to ARF for their consideration.

Work on preventive diplomacy in the region has been bogged down by controversy and suspicion by some countries that this could lead to interference in internal affairs. Nonetheless, there has been an appreciation that progress must take place and a change in political mindset should also happen, otherwise there will only be heightened uncertainty in the region and both ASEAN and the ARF risk losing their relevance.

In conclusion, while one could not discount the contributions that ASEAN and the ARF have made in working for peace and stability in the region, the impetus to do more cannot be understated. The current practice of adopting informal, “soft” approaches at the expense of early conflict prevention can be counter-productive. Since there seems to a disjunct between regional preferences and the emerging changes in global norms, ASEAN and the ARF’s approaches of regional reconciliation, norm-building and inclusive regionalism must now give way to some form on intrusive regionalism for meaningful peace processes to take place.

⁷ See “A New Agenda for the ASEAN Regional Forum”, IDSS Monograph No.4, Singapore: Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, 2002.