



Preventive Diplomacy in the Asia Pacific: Challenges and Prospects for the ASEAN Regional Forum*

RAYMUND JOSE G. QUILOP

Introduction

The question of why states cooperate with each other is one challenging problem in the study of international relations. Why do states cooperate in a world characterized by anarchy (i.e. a world without a supranational government commanding obedience from states and enforcing international law)? One plausible explanation provided by the neoliberals is the opportunity to pursue certain interests even if cooperation with other states could mean assisting them to pursue their own interests. But beyond pursuing common interests, states may also cooperate to avoid certain things or what are called issues of common aversion.

In the Asia Pacific, the common interest of promoting regional peace and stability as well as the common aversion of experiencing a power vacuum in the region may have encouraged the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the other Asia Pacific states to cooperate and establish the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).

But in order for the ARF to be effective in promoting regional peace and stability, it must start to promote preventive diplomacy measures beyond the confidence-building measures it is currently promoting, so

* This essay is based on a lecture delivered at the College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City on January 30, 2003. A great part of the said lecture, except for some updates, was based on/excerpted from the author's monograph entitled *Institution Building in the Asia Pacific: The ARF Experience* (Quezon City: Office of Strategic and Special Studies, Armed Forces of the Philippines, 2002).

ARF observers point out. This is particularly important considering that there abound numerous potential sources of conflict in the Asia Pacific.

As conceived in the 1995 Concept Paper prepared by ASEAN, the ARF is envisioned to evolve along three stages, namely the promotion of confidence building measures, promotion of preventive diplomacy measures, and elaboration of approaches to conflict. While ASEAN points out that the ARF should not be seen as evolving along these stages in a sequential manner, others think otherwise. Furthermore, the ability of the ARF to move to a so-called preventive diplomacy stage is now being used as a yardstick for assessing its effectiveness and progress.

For example, a network of think-tanks in the ASEAN region, namely the ASEAN-Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS), presented a "Memorandum on the Future of the ASEAN Regional Forum" to the Senior Officials of ASEAN when these officials held a retreat in Brunei in March 2002. This memorandum contained recommendations on the future development of the ARF, with a great number of such recommendations pertaining to the ARF's evolution towards a preventive diplomacy stage. Similarly, the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific or CSCAP (Quilop 1998, 2)¹ through the initiative of the Singapore National Committee prepared a paper entitled "The ARF into the 21st Century" which also contains suggestions on how the ARF could move forward, particularly towards the stage of preventive diplomacy. This paper has been noted by the ARF foreign ministers in their Chairman's Statement at the 9th ASEAN Regional Forum meeting in July 2002.

At this point, the ARF is still focused on the promotion of confidence building measures, although it has already adopted a working definition and principles of preventive diplomacy. However, it must be noted that confidence-building measures may also be considered as preventive diplomacy measures because they also contribute towards the prevention of conflict among parties. It was also argued at the ARF Seminar on Preventive Diplomacy held in Seoul, Korea in May 1995 that "the ARF could make a tangible contribution to preventive efforts in the region via

the promotion of confidence building measures that participant governments are in a position to implement". Thus, while the ARF is generally seen to evolve along the three stages of development outlined above with preventive diplomacy being undertaken after the promotion of confidence building measures, it is also widely acknowledged that CBMs and preventive diplomacy overlap. It is therefore not pragmatic for the ARF to wait for confidence building measures to be exhausted before it starts promoting preventive diplomacy measures.

The ARF: Its Establishment and Formation

Prior to the ARF's establishment, proposals to this effect have been put forward by Senator Gareth Evans, the Australian Foreign Minister and Joe Clark, the Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs. Curiously, while these proposals were initially positively responded to, they did not prosper for several reasons. First, because these proposals were viewed as following the model of the Conference for Security Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) now the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), it was felt that the model was far too elaborate and structured for the Asia-Pacific region. Second, it was also felt that it was difficult to transport a model from one region to another. Third, the CSCE at that time could not pride itself of a notable achievement. In fact, it was not able to do anything as Yugoslavia fell to pieces in the early 1990s. Fourth, there was an aversion to Western-type proposals as the ASEAN states felt that it could be a "prelude to further interference, if not domination" by Western countries (Sukontasap, 1998).

In June 1991, the ASEAN-Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS)² submitted to ASEAN a memorandum titled "A Time for Initiative: Proposals for Consideration at the Fourth ASEAN Summit". ASEAN-ISIS proposed that the ASEAN Summit in Singapore in 1992 lay the groundwork for an Asia Pacific Political Dialogue (Hernandez, 1995). It advocated that ASEAN plays a central role in the dialogue mechanism that will be established, either as a creative initiator

or an active participant or both. It was also suggested that the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference (ASEAN-PMC) be turned into an ASEAN-PMC Plus where states invited by the ASEAN Ministers' Meeting as guests or observers take part in the discussions on regional security (Wanandi, 1996).

Meanwhile, between the period when ASEAN-ISIS came up with this memorandum and the Summit of 1992, Taro Nakayama, the Japanese Foreign Minister suggested during the ASEAN-PMC meeting in Kuala Lumpur in July 1991 that the PMC be made a venue for addressing regional peace and security (Sukontasap, 1998). However, his suggestion fell on deaf ears, the idea "having come from a ranking official of a major regional power whose foreign policy motives remain suspect in the minds of many of its neighbors" (Hernandez, 1995).

In 1992 during the fourth ASEAN Summit in Singapore, ASEAN decided to use the PMC meeting as a mechanism for promoting political and security dialogues with its dialogue partners. In 1993, during the Annual Ministerial Meeting (AMM) in Singapore, ASEAN finally announced its plan to launch the ARF (Sukontasap, 135). The specifics of the ARF "reflect the main arguments of the ASEAN-ISIS proposal for this initiative" (Hernandez, 1995). The first meeting of the ARF was held in Bangkok in July 1994.

The ARF is an official forum where the ten ASEAN states (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam), their dialogue partners (Australia, Canada, China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, European Union, India, Japan, Mongolia, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Russia, and the US), and Papua New Guinea as an observer discuss security and political issues. The foreign ministers of the participant countries attend the annual meeting of the Forum usually in July or August of each year. A senior officials meeting called the ARF-SOM, held annually in May, supports the ARF. In a particular year, various inter-sessional activities, namely the meetings of the Inter-sessional Support Group (ISG) on Confidence Building Measures; and Inter-sessional Meeting (ISM) on Disaster Relief, on Search

and Rescue Cooperation, and on Peacekeeping Operations are held in between ARF-SOMs. The ISGs and ISMs are co-chaired by an ASEAN and non-ASEAN participant and their recommendations are presented and reviewed during the ARF-SOM.

ASEAN has taken the initiative to establish the ARF because among other reasons it realized that Southeast Asian security and that of the wider Asia-Pacific region have become inextricably linked (Soesastro 5: 1997). Consequently, ASEAN took it upon itself to lead the ARF primarily because it is the initiator of the ARF and is seen as the only actor credible enough to lead. Moreover, it is the only party which all the great powers in the region would yield leadership to for now.

In addition, members of ASEAN at the time the ARF was established (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand) were seen as having a shared interest in a regional security mechanism for dealing with political and security issues in the post-Cold War period and possibly playing a leading role in shaping the security processes in the wider Asia-Pacific region (Hassan, 1997). It has been observed that ASEAN states see the ARF as a “constructive multilateral framework” where ASEAN can lead the discussion of political and security issues (interview, Hourn). In addition, the impressive progress of the various ASEAN economies in the early 1990s and in the internal security situation of the ASEAN members gave them the confidence to make ASEAN play a role outside the confines of Southeast Asia (interview, Baviera).

They also shared a common interest of dealing with other regional powers. The rising tension between the US and China indicated that peace through traditional balance of forces was not functioning smoothly and there was a need for new mechanisms (interview, Harris). While ASEAN was able to use the mechanism of the ASEAN-PMC to discuss political, security and economic issues with its dialogue partners, a mechanism that involved China and Russia, which were not full dialogue partners at that time, and one that goes beyond bilateral dialogues provided by the ASEAN-PMC had to be devised.

ASEAN states also realized that “the trick is to get the big powers involved” in regional security mechanisms (interview, Harris). ASEAN states, being small powers, realized that they can better deal with the bigger ones if they were all participants in a cooperative mechanism. ASEAN’s initiation of the ARF that encouraged the participation of the great powers is an innovation in ASEAN’s approach. ASEAN previously adopted an insulationist approach by equi-distancing itself from great powers to avoid great power rivalry in Southeast Asia, something which was evident in ASEAN’s conceptualization of the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN). Through the ARF, however, ASEAN adopted an inclusionary approach of constructively engaging the great powers (Goh, 1997).

How does the ARF enable the ASEAN states to deal with regional powers? It “allows small and medium powers a significant voice in regional security affairs and inhibits the major powers from dominating the regional security agenda” (Hassan, 1997). The participation of the big powers puts a moderating influence on them, particularly China and Japan which are sources of anxiety among other regional states in the same way that Indonesia’s participation in ASEAN has moderated and transformed it from “a potential threat to a benign elder brother” among the ASEAN states (Almonte, 1997).

The ASEAN states also had an aversion to the possible emergence of a power vacuum in the region, which may be avoided if the US were encouraged to remain engaged in the region (interviews, Ball, Cossa, Kwa; Garrett and Glaser, 1994). A mechanism that could keep the US strategically involved in regional affairs, therefore, had to be devised. But it had to be a forum and not a military alliance since the threats to the region’s security do not come from a particular enemy. The ARF, by providing a venue for the participation of the US in regional security dialogue, would encourage it to remain engaged in the Asia-Pacific.

The other Asia-Pacific states participate in the ARF perhaps because they shared the ASEAN states interest in and need to deal with the uncertainty in the regional security environment, which stems from the

following: the future foreign policy and security posture of regional powers such as China, Japan, and India; the presence of potential flashpoints in the region such as the South China Sea disputes, the China-Taiwan issue, the reunification of the Korean peninsula; and the presence of non-traditional security concerns, such as transnational criminality and environmental problems (interview, Ball). Furthermore, because issues that contribute to regional uncertainty need to be worked on collectively, a multilateral approach rather than bilateral or unilateral approaches is considered as more appropriate (interview, Bunbongkarn).

Together with ASEAN states, the other Asia-Pacific states also had an aversion to a possible emergence of a power vacuum in the region and the concomitant assertion of military capabilities by other regional states. A power vacuum or its consequences to the region's security could be addressed through the ARF, so it was believed. This may be avoided by providing a mechanism by which the US is kept involved in the region on the one hand. The ARF could also serve as a mechanism for the participant states to collectively mitigate the consequences that could be created by a withdrawal of US forces from the region, something which was apparent at that time, with the downsizing of US forces in the region.

Preventive Diplomacy: Concept and Principles

The concept of preventive diplomacy suggests pro-active rather than reactive responses to international crises. While the United Nations, as declared in its Charter, had the goal of taking "effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to peace", and has undertaken various actions that can be considered as constituting preventive diplomacy, it was only in the 1960s when the first and consistent usage of the term arose (Acharya, 1999). This was mainly attributed to then UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold who argued that the goal of preventive diplomacy was "to keep local conflicts from being entangled in superpower rivalry" (Tay and Talib, 1997). According to Hammarskjold, the twin objectives of preventive diplomacy were to keep "newly arising

conflicts outside of bloc differences and in the case of conflict on the margin of, or inside the sphere of bloc differences... to bring such conflicts out of this sphere through solutions...[aimed at]... their strict localization” (Cordier and Foote, 1975). Preventive diplomacy then included the following instruments: hotlines, risk-reduction centers, and transparency measures. These instruments were intended to help recognize and fill any power vacuum in order to prevent the US or the Soviet Union from taking actions that can escalate conflicts and lead to nuclear confrontation (Acharya, 1999).

While the end of super power rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union as the Cold War ended appears to have rendered Hammarskjold’s conceptualization of preventive diplomacy less relevant, the concept was given a broader meaning by the previous UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros Gali when he published his *Agenda for Peace* in 1992. In this book, he conceptualized preventive diplomacy as “action to prevent disputes from arising between the parties, to prevent existing disputes from escalating into conflicts and to limit the spread of the latter when they occur” (Ghali, 1992).

Since then, academics, security analysts, and even government officials in their private capacities have attempted to refine the concept and identify possible tools of preventive diplomacy particularly as it applies to the Asia-Pacific region. Various conferences and workshops were organized for this purpose. These include the ARF - sponsored seminars on preventive diplomacy held in Seoul, Korea (May 1995); in Paris, France (November 1996); and in Singapore (September 1997). In addition are the CSCAP-sponsored workshops on preventive diplomacy held in Singapore (October 1996); in Bangkok (February 1999); in Singapore (April 2000); and in Hanoi, Vietnam (April 2002).

In the February 1999 Workshop on Preventive Diplomacy sponsored by CSCAP through the support of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), the participants developed a working definition and a statement of principles of preventive diplomacy.³ This definition including the

principles were eventually adopted by the foreign ministers of the ARF participants in their meeting in Hanoi, Vietnam in July 2001.

According to the paper on *Concept and Principles of Preventive Diplomacy* adopted by the ministers of the ARF participant-states, preventive diplomacy is

consensual diplomatic and political action taken by sovereign states with the consent of all directly involved parties: to help prevent disputes and conflicts from arising between states that could potentially pose a threat to regional peace and stability; to help prevent such disputes and conflicts from escalating into armed confrontation; and to help minimize the impact of such disputes and conflicts on the region.

The document further states that preventive diplomacy could be viewed “along a time-line in keeping with the objectives to prevent disputes/conflicts between states from emerging, ... escalating into armed confrontation, and ... spreading.”

According to the said document, the following are the principles of preventive diplomacy. “It is about diplomacy. It is non-coercive. It should be timely. It requires trust and confidence. It operates on the basis of consultation and consensus. It is voluntary. It applies to conflicts between and among states. It is conducted in accordance with universally recognized basic principles of international law and inter-state relations embodied, inter alia, in the UN Charter, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation” which include “respect for sovereign equality, territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of a State.” These principles with the exception of the last one were the principles developed by the participants in the 1999 CSCAP Workshop on Preventive Diplomacy held in Thailand.

In the said document, the ministers acknowledged that “[a]greement on the definition and ... common understanding of the concept of

preventive diplomacy and the principles governing the practice of preventive diplomacy would be useful for further progress on the development of preventive diplomacy within the ARF.”

However, it is important to note that the definition and principles of preventive diplomacy adopted in the said ARF meeting are merely a working definition and principles, and therefore not yet THE definition and principles of preventive diplomacy. The Chairman’s Statement clearly states this by specifying that “[t]he ministers agreed to adopt the preventive diplomacy Paper as a snapshot of the state on current discussion on preventive diplomacy in the ARF and that ISG would continue to discuss preventive diplomacy in the next inter-sessional year and focus on those issues when there remain divergence of views.”

What is also striking, even in such a working definition of preventive diplomacy, is the principle of “consent of all directly involved parties”. As one observer of the ARF process notes, “this caveat could preclude a significant number of potentially destructive conflicts from even being considered (Cossa, 2002).” Yet, the same observer admits that this caveat “appears to be an essential precondition within an East Asian context, given the ARF’s reliance on consensus decision-making and continuing concerns among its members over interference in one another’s internal affairs”.

Preventive diplomacy measures can be classified as (1) pre-crisis or peacetime measures and (2) crisis-time measures. Pre-crisis or peacetime measures are undertaken before the onset of a conflict. These include confidence building measures (CBMs), institution-building, norm-building, early warning, and preventive humanitarian action (Acharya, 1997; Tay, 1997).

Broadly, CBMs include “both formal and informal measures, whether unilateral, bilateral or multilateral that address, prevent or resolve uncertainties among states, including both military and political elements” (Cossa, 1996). In a more narrow sense, CBMs can be seen as “attempts to make clear to concerned states, through the use of a variety of measures, the true nature of potentially threatening military activities” (Macintosh,

1990). CBMs aim to provide “reassurance by reducing uncertainties and by constraining opportunities for exerting pressure through military activity” (Pederson and Weeks, 1995). They contribute to the reduction of misperception and suspicion and thereby help lessen the probability of armed confrontation (Djiwandono, 1996).

CBMs are considered as preventive diplomacy measures even while they have also played a key role in promoting regional security. In the case of the ARF, it is generally acknowledged that there is a great deal of overlap between CBMs and preventive diplomacy. Among the four proposals of preventive diplomacy measures that the ARF could undertake, all have elements of CBMs and preventive diplomacy. These proposals include: (1) enhancement of ARF Chair’s role, (2) creation of a Register of Experts/Eminent Persons Group, (3) publication of an Annual Security Outlook, and (4) provision of voluntary background briefings.⁴

Institution building pertains to “formal or informal ways of organizing attention, expertise and resources in pursuit of a common set of interests or objectives” (Acharya, 1997). While scholars generally consider institution building as a preventive diplomacy measure, it is also instructive to note that institutions, on the other hand, promote or undertake preventive diplomacy measures. This is so because “institutions develop principles of conduct, generate regularized consultations and build trust” and “constrain unilateral preferences and actions of actors and promote cooperation” in the long run (Acharya).

Related to institution building is norm-building, which refers to “inducing rule-governed behavior” among actors involved, particularly encouraging parties to a dispute to refrain from actions that may worsen the situation and instead seek for the peaceful resolution of issues. It is a key aspect of institution building (Acharya).

Early warning involves “monitoring of developments in political, military, ecological and other areas (such as natural disasters, refugee flows, threat of famine and the spread of disease) that may, unless mitigated, lead to outbreak of violence or major humanitarian disasters” (Acharya).

Preventive humanitarian action is primarily concerned “with preventing and managing the humanitarian costs of political conflicts” and “the political and humanitarian consequences of naturally occurring phenomena” (Acharya).

Preventive diplomacy measures during the onset of a conflict or crisis would include fact-finding missions, goodwill missions, good offices of a third party or mediation, and crisis management (Acharya).

Fact-finding refers to the reliable and timely collection and analysis of information regarding a potential conflict situation. Although fact-finding is related to early warning discussed previously and may be undertaken during peace-time, it is usually specific to a given crisis situation. In order to be effective, it must be “comprehensive, covering domestic, regional and global aspects of a conflict and investigating the social, economic, strategic and political factors underlying it” (Acharya).

Goodwill missions and good offices are closely related. The former refers to a “visit by an envoy to express concern of the regional or international community” while the latter refers to the presence of a neutral third party that facilitates “negotiation between disputing parties” or manages the crisis between the parties if it is given a mediation role (Tay, 1997).

Crisis management attempts to reduce the “immediate possibility of violent action in a conflict situation and may require measures such as reconciliation, mediation, and arbitration that would help” defuse tensions between or among the parties involved” (Acharya).

Moving Towards the Preventive Diplomacy Stage

The quest to have the ARF move towards a preventive diplomacy stage impinges on several challenges that must be addressed. First, the ARF participants could not yet come to consensus whether the ARF at this point of its evolution should attempt to move towards the “stage” of promoting preventive diplomacy measures. Several participants have reservations that

the practice of preventive diplomacy by the ARF would pave the way for it or the other participants to intervene in their internal affairs.

Second, the hesitance of some participants for the ARF to move to the promotion of preventive diplomacy could be partly a consequence of the seeming asymmetry between the ARF's membership and its geographical footprint. "While membership extends to states that stand outside Asia, only issues within the ARF's geographical area or 'footprint' are its proper concern.". The number of states that might exercise preventive diplomacy is larger than those over which preventive diplomacy may be undertaken (Tay, 1999). For example, ARF participants in North America or Europe may suggest that preventive diplomacy be undertaken over a border dispute between two Asian states but the reverse is beyond the focus of the Forum.

Third, the ARF participants are also still to arrive at a consensus regarding how to define preventive diplomacy as well as identify its principles. As previously pointed out, while the foreign ministers of the ARF participants have adopted a paper on the *Concept and Principles of Preventive Diplomacy* in their Hanoi meeting in July 2001, the Chairman's statement implies that such definition and principles are merely working definitions.

Fourth, some of the principles of preventive diplomacy, which the ministers considered in the latest ARF meeting, appear to be in conflict with the practice of preventive diplomacy. For example, the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of a state, if adopted as a principle of preventive diplomacy, would limit the capacity of the ARF to undertake preventive diplomacy. With this principle, the ARF would find it difficult to address issues considered as domestic affairs of states even if these issues cause conflict and instability in the region. Furthermore, preventive diplomacy being voluntary in the sense that it is only employed at the request of the parties concerned or with their consent would mean that measures undertaken by the ARF that are supposedly preventive in nature become mere reactive responses simply because the Forum cannot act without the request or consent of the parties involved.⁵

Fifth, moving to the so-called preventive diplomacy stage even while continuing to promote confidence building measures, necessitates developing the ARF's institutional capacity to do so. This brings forth two important areas for consideration by the ARF itself as well as the individual participants. The first pertains to the continued viability of the ASEAN Way being adopted and practiced in the ARF which is more diverse. The second relates to the structures pertinent to the ARF.

Rethinking the ASEAN Way in the ARF ⁶

It is important to recall that institutions develop their own ways of going about their affairs and managing issues that confront them. The factors that account for their establishment help explain the type of cooperation that emerges from the states involved. ASEAN, for example, given the Cold War context and the factors that led to its founding has developed a set of principles, norms, and decision-making procedures that have become the *modus operandi* of the Association particularly for its original six members. This same kind of multilateralism is now being practiced in the ARF as the Forum's own *modus operandi* even if the ARF has developed in a different context and emerged from a set of factors different from those that led to the establishment of ASEAN.

The so-called ASEAN Way has been *de facto* adopted in the ARF possibly resulting from the fact that it was ASEAN which initiated the ARF and holds exclusively the chairmanship of the Forum, primarily because ASEAN was and remains to be the only accepted interlocutor among the participants. However, some observe that while the features of the ASEAN Way may have allowed the ARF process to take off, these same features may have to be rethought if the ARF process is going to be sustained. The so-called ASEAN Way, as it is, may not suffice or may not be appropriate for the ARF that involves more diverse states. As Acharya argues, there may be a need for the ARF to develop from the so-called "ASEAN Way" its own "Asia-Pacific Way" with the leaders and policy makers of the participants considering the development of a unique identity for the ARF (Acharya, 1997).

Foremost among the many features of the ASEAN Way is the practice of dialogues and consultations to arrive at a consensus, which is seen in ASEAN as “an amalgamation of the most acceptable views of each and every member” in order to establish what is broadly supported (Acharya, 1997). Dialogues and consultations towards consensus can “bring a meeting of minds”, foster a willingness to understand diverse positions, cultivate patience and perseverance, constrain some states from unduly exercising influence or coercion over the others, and allow smaller states to articulate their position (Mutalib, 1997). Thus, dialogues can increase the “incidence of cooperation” because they can alter preferences, create a feeling of shared identity, encourage norms, or facilitate promising behavior (Caporaso, 1993).

However, the search for consensus makes things overly tedious as the process involves “a myriad list of new positions, proposals, and initiatives on a single issue being floated for extensive consultations ... to ensure ... consensus” (Caballero-Anthony, 1998). It therefore means moving at the speed of the slowest common denominator and therefore possibly making the process “hostage to the imperatives of national interest” as each participant-state has a *de facto* veto (Acharya, 1999).

In this regard, suggestions to adopt a majority rule decision-making approach have been made. However, a more pragmatic approach could be the so-called “coalition of the willing” moving away from consensus. As Tay aptly puts it,

...there is an increased need to emphasize the legitimacy of some [participant] states to pioneer new initiatives and/or proceed at a faster pace than others. This is necessary given the divergence among [ARF participants] in their capacity and their inclinations. These “coalitions of the willing” should not be a source of disagreement in [the ARF] provided that the general direction of such initiatives is welcome and the coalitions remain open [for] all to join (Tay, 2000).

A second feature of the ASEAN Way that needs to be re-examined is the shelving of controversial issues so that the states involved can cooperate on less contentious issues or compartmentalizing issues so that only non-contentious aspects of sensitive issues are discussed (Kurus, 1995). This ensures that progress in other areas where cooperation may be pursued is not impeded. "By not confronting the problem head-on and instead diverting it so that it does not stand in the way of broader cooperation, and by allowing time to pass, the intensity of a conflict/problem diminishes and its importance is reduced" (Caballero-Anthony, 1998). This may also create enough goodwill among those involved that may encourage "restrained political and military behaviour," primarily by building confidence and enhancing the comfort level among parties (Acharya, 1999).

However, non-discussion of sensitive issues can also keep the process from moving forward and can be perceived as excuses for doing nothing. For example, considering that preventive diplomacy measures are often times exercised in relation to sensitive issues, how could the ARF undertake preventive diplomacy if sensitive issues are merely shelved from discussion so as not to destroy the harmony among the participants. Such harmony, however, is seen as merely superficial if ARF participants keep on shelving controversial issues. Consequently, there arose perceptions that officials of ASEAN members and possibly of ARF participants are more predisposed to maintain and project a façade of solidarity rather than discuss contentious issues.

Finally, the principle of non-interference or non-intervention in the internal affairs of other states, something that is held sacred in ASEAN, may need to be re-examined if the ARF is going to move towards the stage of preventive diplomacy. In the practice of preventive diplomacy, it becomes "difficult and unrealistic to insist that the principle of non-intervention in the domestic affairs of other states be sustained if domestic instability in one country spills beyond its borders and undermines the security of its neighbors", possibly creating bigger conflicts (Hernandez, 1998).

In fact, one key challenge as the ARF moves towards the practice of preventive diplomacy is how to convince the participants that it is not going to be used by the other ARF participants to “intervene” in the internal affairs of other participants, contrary to what other participants perceive. Consequently, these states continue to have reservations regarding the ARF taking a more proactive role in promoting preventive diplomacy measures.

Re-engineering the ARF Structure

The ARF’s attempt to undertake preventive diplomacy measures could become more effective if such measures are underpinned by institutional infrastructure.

Summits for the ARF

The foreign ministers of the ARF participants meet annually in the annual meeting of the ARF, which is preceded by a senior officials meeting (ARF-SOM) as well as various meetings during the inter-sessional year. However, it may be more appropriate to institutionalize a formal annual Heads of States/Governments’ meetings as working meetings, similar to the practice in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).

An Enhanced Role for the ARF Chair

In the Asian context where things tend to be leader-driven, leaders play a major role in the effectiveness of institutions. In the case of the ARF, therefore, there is a need to further enhance the role of the ARF Chair.

The ARF has already approved an enhanced role for the ARF chair, particularly with regard to his liaison role with external partners for exchanging information. In their July 2001 Hanoi meeting, the ministers of the ARF participants acknowledged that the role of the ARF Chair includes “encouraging exchange of information and highlighting issues

that can impact on regional security for consideration by the ARF by serving as a conduit for information sharing in between ARF meetings.” They also acknowledged that the ARF Chair could serve as a “focal point for consultations among ARF members.” The ARF Chair, with the consent of states involved may also “convene an *ad hoc* meeting of all members at an appropriate level” (Chairman’s Statement 2001).

The ASEAN-ISIS “Memorandum on the Future of the ARF” acknowledges that the ability of the ARF to “respond more quickly and effectively can be significantly improved by enhancing the role of the Chair.” In addition, the document also spells out several tasks, which the ARF Chair could undertake in an enhanced capacity. These would include providing “periodic up-dates (sic) of regional security situation,” early warning and “periodic report on the progress of work in the ARF and its subordinate bodies, as well as consulting regularly with participants, facilitating “discussions on potential areas of cooperation, and strengthening “liaison with other organizations such as the UN and OSCE.”

In the meeting of the ISG on CBMs in Hanoi last April 2002, the ISG participants “felt that the ARF Chair could play a more active role in such areas as liaising and sharing information and experiences with the UN, other international organizations and Track 2 organizations, providing updates on the regional security situation, facilitating discussions on potential areas of cooperation in ARF and managing the Register of Experts/Eminent Persons (EEPs) (Chairman’s Summary Report ARF-ISG on CBMs 2001-02).

Enhancing the role of the ARF Chair, however, impinges on the issues of ASEAN sharing the chairmanship with the non-ASEAN participants in the ARF. In its enhanced role, the ARF Chair needs the greater assistance of the other ARF participants. In this regard, the ARF could also “adopt the UN practice of having states with interest and influence on a particular issue serve as ‘friends of the chair’” (ASEAN-ISIS Memo No. 5).

Greater Role for Defense Officials

In addition to the Chair playing a greater role in the ARF, defense and security officials should also be given a bigger role in the ARF process. It is true that defense officials are actively involved in the various inter-sessional activities as well as in the Senior Officials Meetings of the ARF. However, in the annual ARF meeting, the foreign ministers have the primary role. Although defense officials could also participate, they appear to have a *de facto* secondary status in spite of the ARF being a forum for regional security dialogue, which is their primary concern.

Thus, would it not be proper that defense officials, whose primary concerns are security issues be given a greater role in the over-all ARF process, both at the level of Senior Officials Meeting and the annual meeting of the ARF? In this regard, the proposal to finally institute a defense or security meeting among the ARF participants is timely and appropriate. The regular luncheon meeting among defense officials in the past is no longer sufficient. Instead, a separate meeting of defense officials properly called ARF-Defense Officials Meeting (ARF-DOM) could be more useful. In addition, defense ministers should finally be allowed to sit side by side with their foreign ministry counterparts in the yearly meeting of the ARF. This would pave the way for a sense of "equality" between the foreign ministers and defense ministers of the ARF members.

These suggested measures, in particular the holding of a separate meeting for defense officials of ARF members and providing them the opportunity to sit along side their foreign ministry counterparts in the annual ARF meeting, are simple measures to make the ARF truly a forum for security dialogue. More importantly, these measures could also help revitalize the ARF and assist it in moving forward towards the stage of promoting preventive diplomacy measures.

The ministers of the ARF participants have acknowledged this. In the last ARF meeting, they "emphasized the importance of the active participation of defense and military officials as well as the engagement

of other security officials in the ARF process” (Chairman’s Statement 8th ARF 2002). They also “welcomed the initiative to create more opportunities for these officials to interact as they are essential to the confidence building process in the ARF and have proven to be constructive and useful in the exchange of views on issues of common interest”.

An ISG on Preventive Diplomacy

The Inter-sessional Support Group on Confidence Building Measures (ISG on CBMs) proved useful for the ARF in promoting confidence among its participants. Thus, an ISG on Preventive Diplomacy may also prove useful for the ARF as it prepares itself in promoting and eventually undertaking preventive diplomacy measures. This group could examine “how preventive diplomacy could be undertaken in both non-traditional/non-conventional as well as conventional areas of security.” (ASEAN-ISIS Memo No. 5)

An ARF Secretariat

After being convened for the past nine years without a formal secretariat, it may be necessary at this stage for the ARF to develop and have a separate secretariat or a secretary-general to support the activities of the ARF between the ministerial meetings held each year.

As an initial step, an ARF Unit could be “constituted within the ASEAN Secretariat” with resources and expertise being drawn from the non-ASEAN participants as well to give them a stake in such a structure (ASEAN-ISIS Memo No. 5). An unpublished CSCAP paper on “The ARF into the 21st Century”, however, suggests a separate secretariat although located initially with the ASEAN Secretariat.

The CSCAP paper also suggests, as an alternative, a “virtual secretariat that leverages on information and communications technology to enable coordination of ARF plans and decisions to be effected via cyberspace.” The paper also suggests that the secretariat be chaired

alternately by ASEAN and non-ASEAN participants and APEC's practice of having the incoming secretary general serve as deputy secretary general in the preceding year be adopted in the ARF secretariat.

An Early Warning System

As preventive diplomacy is supposed to be pro-active and timely, the concept of "early warning" becomes an integral component of preventive diplomacy. An early warning mechanism, however, hinges on the availability of information which could be provided by citizens of participant states and which policy makers could use at a relatively early stage in making crucial decisions. In this context, individual citizens of states could serve as useful sources of information regarding the situation on the ground. If citizens are provided with appropriate means of communicating with their governments, information coming from them could prove useful for their governments and even for the ARF.

Likewise, political leaders also play an important role in the development of a regional early warning system. They themselves could identify areas and issues where conflict may probably arise in the immediate future and thus undertake the necessary steps to prevent military conflict from arising.

In this context, useful are the annual ARF meetings attended by the foreign ministers as well as the various inter-sessional meetings attended by mid-level bureaucrats that are held in between the annual ARF meetings. Besides, political leaders and policy makers of states are the ones who make decisions whether to act or not on certain information that are made available to them. However, political leaders have the tendency to refrain from acting in spite of early warning indicators provided to them. Either they hope that "the problem will just go away on its own", are "reluctant to act for fear of appearing to be alarmist or naïve to their critics," or are simply "preoccupied with so many proven crises that they find it difficult to focus on brewing crises" (Montville, 2001).

Thus, it would be useful for the ARF to establish a Regional Risk Reduction Center (RRRC) which could “effectively gather information and provide analysis to map out danger points and assess [the possibility of conflict] before a crisis results” (Tay, 1997). With the warning provided by the Center, political leaders could avoid appearing alarmist to their critics. The warning coming from the RRRC could also pressure political leaders into giving the needed attention to brewing crises.

In the meantime, however, it may be useful to establish a system of self reporting, where ARF participants report their “own perception of existing or potential security concern” (Cossa, 2002). In this regard, useful are the annual security outlooks which ARF participants prepare. It is good to note that a third volume of such outlooks has been compiled by the ARF Chair in the latest ARF meeting of July 2002. The volume remains to be a compilation without any form of editing being done by the ARF Chair. Nonetheless, the ministers themselves acknowledged that the outlooks “represented an important contribution in promoting transparency and confidence among ARF participants” (Chairman’s Statement 9th ARF).

Beyond the annual security outlooks but short of a RRRC, an ARF Information and Research Center that would “collect, collate, and disseminate” reports and “serve as focal point for handling requests for additional information” would also be useful (Cossa, 2002).

A Role for Experts and Eminent Persons

Experts and eminent persons could also play a useful role in assisting the ARF in its practice of preventive diplomacy, particularly in institutionalizing an early warning system. Experts on security issues and areas of conflict abound in the region. These experts have specialized in examining these issues and are thus valuable sources of information that could enable states and the ARF to identify areas where conflicts are brewing. They could, therefore, provide advice to the ARF and their respective states, conduct fact-finding missions on behalf of the ARF, and

play a more “far-reaching early warning role by drawing attention” to regional security problems (Chairman’s Statement, Workshop on Preventive Diplomacy 2000). Their expertise therefore needs to be harnessed, primarily by institutionalizing their links with their governments and possibly the ARF.

The ARF through its ISG on CBMs has been seriously considering the creation of a Register of Experts/Eminent Persons Group. Finally, in the ARF meeting in July 2001, the ministers adopted a *Terms of Reference for a Register of Experts/Eminent Persons (EEPs)* (Chairman’s Statement Annex C, 8th ARF, 2001). In this document, the ministers acknowledged that the group of EEPs could provide professional although non-binding pieces of advice and conduct in-depth studies regarding regional security issues. They can also serve as resource persons in ARF meetings regarding issues of their expertise. The activation of the EEPs for the above-mentioned tasks may be proposed either by the ARF Chair or any ARF participant and subsequently undertaken if there are no objections from any other participant.

The ARF participants will nominate EEPs, after obtaining their consent. Each participant can nominate up to five persons to be included in the register but may nominate only its own nationals. No ARF participant can veto the nominees of other participants.

Eminent persons could also serve as special representatives who can build trust in the skill and impartiality of the ARF in its practice of preventive diplomacy such as offering good offices and mediation before the onset of conflict or after conflict has erupted in order to prevent escalation of the conflict. In the last ARF meeting (July 2002), an ARF Register of Experts/Eminent Persons (EEPs) was compiled by the ARF Chair and was circulated to ARF participants.

A Role for Track 2 /Non-governmental Organizations (NGO’s)

Experts in the region themselves have established their own think tanks and other non-governmental organizations as well as networks of

these research institutes. Notable examples are the ASEAN-ISIS group and CSCAP. As Track 2 institutions, they “push the envelope” by examining issues which governments may perceive as sensitive and thus hesitate to discuss at the official level.

In the practice of preventive diplomacy, the collaboration between government and Track 2 organizations is important. Their collaboration could “begin to ease the difficulties for governments by analyzing both proximate and root causes of a conflict and then developing intervention strategies that could address the factors that generate the threat in the first place” (Montville, 2001).

In this context, while track two lies outside the ambit of Track 1 institutions like the ARF, the linkage between Track 2 and Track 1 is important in the effective practice of preventive diplomacy by the ARF. For example, there have been proposals to institutionalize the linkage between the ARF and CSCAP such as the ARF inviting the co-chairs of CSCAP to sit as observers in the annual ARF meeting and similarly CSCAP inviting the ARF Chair to attend the semi-annual Steering Committee meetings of CSCAP.

In the meantime, CSCAP, particularly its working group on Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBMs), has adopted the practice of holding meetings immediately prior to or after the meetings of the ARF’s ISG on CBMs. This is to provide an opportunity for the ISG participants to participate in the CSCAP working group meetings or workshops.

An intermediate step, however, would be to have a formal meeting between Senior Officials of the ARF and the co-chairs of CSCAP working groups namely on CSBMs, Maritime Cooperation, Comprehensive and Cooperative Security, North Pacific Cooperation, and Transnational Crimes. This is already being practiced in ASEAN, with the Senior Officials of ASEAN having a formal dialogue with the heads of ASEAN-ISIS, although occasionally.

Conclusion

The common interest of promoting regional peace and stability as well as the common aversion of experiencing a power vacuum in the region may have encouraged the members of ASEAN and the other Asia Pacific states to establish the ARF. But in order for the ARF to be effective in promoting regional peace and stability, it must move on to its next stage of development – the promotion of preventive diplomacy measures, in line with what has been conceived in the 1995 ARF Concept Paper prepared by ASEAN.

While ASEAN may point out that the ARF should not be seen as evolving along these stages in a sequential manner, others think otherwise. Furthermore, the ability of the ARF to move to a so-called preventive diplomacy stage is being used as a yardstick for assessing the effectiveness and progress of the Forum. Thus, there is an emerging view particularly from policy makers of regional states and security analysts that it is time for the ARF to move forward towards promoting preventive diplomacy measures, even while it continues to promote confidence building measures.

The quest to have the ARF move towards a preventive diplomacy stage impinges on several challenges that must be addressed. There is no consensus yet whether the ARF should move to a “preventive diplomacy stage” because of the apprehension by some participant-states that its practice could pave the way for other states to interfere in their internal affairs. This could also result from the seeming asymmetry between the ARF’s membership and its geographical footprint, with the number of states exercising preventive diplomacy being larger than those over which preventive diplomacy may be undertaken. A consensus on how to define preventive diplomacy as well as its principles is yet to be arrived at while some of the principles being considered would limit the capacity of the ARF to undertake preventive diplomacy measures.

Finally, as stated earlier moving to the so-called preventive diplomacy stage even while continuing to promote confidence-building measures

necessitates developing the ARF's institutional capacity to do so. Institutional capacity building concerns two major issues, with the first one pertaining to the continued viability of the ASEAN Way being adopted and practiced in a more diverse forum that is the ARF, and the second relating to the structures available to the ARF.

It appears that while the ASEAN Way may have been instrumental in allowing the ARF process to take off, it may not be sufficient in sustaining it. Thus, the ARF may need to develop its own "Asia-Pacific Way" that considers the greater number and diversity of states involved in the Forum. Furthermore, there appears to be an urgent need to strengthen the institutional capacity of the ARF through the establishment of certain structures that could assist it as it prepares to promote and undertake preventive diplomacy measures.

Notes

- 1 CSCAP is a non-governmental organization established for the promotion of security dialogue and cooperation among regional countries and territories. It provides an informal mechanism by which scholars and government officials in their private capacities discuss political and security issues.
- 2 ASEAN-ISIS is a grouping of non-governmental research institutes in ASEAN originally composed of the following: Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Jakarta, Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia, Institute for Strategic and Development Studies, Inc. (ISDS) Philippines, Institute of Security and International Studies (ISIS) Thailand, and Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA). It now includes Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP), Laotian Institute of Foreign Affairs, and Institute of International Relations (IIR) of Vietnam.
- 3 According to this workshop, preventive diplomacy as a general rule is "consensual diplomatic and political action with the aim of preventing severe disputes and conflicts from arising between states which pose a serious threat to regional peace and stability; preventing such disputes and conflicts from escalating into armed confrontation; and limiting the intensity of violence and humanitarian problems resulting from such conflicts and preventing them from spreading geographically". The following are the principles of preventive diplomacy. First, it is about diplomacy. It relies upon "diplomatic and peaceful methods/tools such as persuasion, negotiation, enquiry, mediation, and conciliation". Second, it is voluntary. Preventive diplomacy measures should only be employed "at the request of the parties concerned or with their consent". Third, it is a non-coercive activity.

Military action, use of force, and other coercive practices are outside its scope. Fourth, it requires trust and confidence. All involved parties must see facilitators or mediators in a dispute as trustworthy and as impartial honest brokers. Fifth, it rests on international law. Any preventive diplomacy action should be in accordance with the basic principles of international law such as sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of a state, and upholding of sovereign equality and territorial integrity of states. Sixth, it requires timeliness. It is supposed to be preventive rather than reactive or curative. It is most effectively employed at an early stage of a dispute or crisis. See "Chairmen's Summary, Workshop on Preventive Diplomacy" organized by CSCAP's Working Group on Confidence and Security Building Measures, US Institute of Peace and CSCAP-Thailand, February 28-March 2, 1999, Bangkok, Thailand. (Unpublished)

- 4 The following discussion is based on the author's notes taken during the Workshop on Preventive Diplomacy organized by the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific and the United States Institute of Peace held in Singapore on April 2-5, 2000.
- 5 This is one of the points raised during the Meeting of the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) Working Group on Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBMs) held in Washington DC, USA on October 29 to 31, 2001.
- 6 This section draws heavily from the author's article entitled "ASEAN Multilateralism and the ARF: Prospects and Challenges," *Philippine Political Science Journal* Vol 21 No 44 (2000): 127-158.:

References

- Acharya, Amitav. "Preventive Diplomacy: Background and Application to the Asia-Pacific Region." *The Next Stage*. Eds. Desmond Ball and Amitav Acharya. Canberra: Strategic and Defense Studies Centre, 1999.
- Almonte, Jose T. "ASEAN-10: Challenges and Implications." *ASEAN-ISIS Monitor*, Jul.-Sept. 1997.
- Caballero-Anthony, Mely, "Mechanisms of Dispute Settlement: The ASEAN Experience." *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 20:1, April 1998.
- Caporaso, James A. "International Relations Theory and Multilateralism: The Search for Foundations." *Multilateralism Matters*. Eds. Helen Milner and John Gerard Ruggie. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.
- Cossa, Ralph A. "Promoting Preventive Diplomacy in the Asia Pacific Region." *Preventive Diplomacy: Charting a Course for the ASEAN Regional Forum* (A Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBMs) International Working Group Report. Jul. 2002.
- Cossa, Ralph A. "Asia-Pacific Confidence and Security Building Measures." *The Emerging Regional Security Architecture in the Asia-Pacific Region*. Ed. Thangam Ramnath. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Institute for Strategic and International Studies, 1996.
- Djiwandono, Soedjati J. "Confidence-Building Measures and Preventive Diplomacy: A Southeast Asian Perspective." *CSCAP Newsletter*, Oct. 1996.
- Ghali, Boutros-Boutros. *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-keeping*. New York: United Nations, 1992.
- Hassan, Mohamed Jawhar. "ASEAN and ARF." *ASEAN-ISIS Monitor*, Oct.-Dec. 1997.
- Hernandez, Carolina G. "The Future Role of ASEAN: A View from an ASEAN-ISIS Member." Paper based on a draft presentation prepared for the "Workshop on East Asia at a Crossroads: Challenges for ASEAN" organized by the Institute of International Relations, Hanoi, Sept. 24-25, 1998.

- Kurus, Bilson. "The ASEAN Triad: National Interest, Consensus-Seeking, and Economic Cooperation." *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 16: 4, March 1995.
- Macintosh, James. *Confidence-Building: Its Contribution to Peacekeeping*. Toronto: York Center for International and Strategic Studies, 1992 as cited in Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Canada, *The ASEAN Regional Forum: Confidence Building*, 1997.
- Montville, Joseph V. "Strategic Planning in Preventive Diplomacy." Paper presented at the Meeting of the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) Working Group on Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBMs), Washington DC, USA, Oct. 29 to 31, 2001.
- Mutalib, Hussin. "At Thirty, ASEAN Looks to Challenges in the New Millennium." *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 19:1. June 1997.
- Pederson, Susan M. and Stanley Weeks. "A Survey of Confidence and Security Building Measures." *Asia-Pacific Confidence and Security Building Measures*. Ed. Ralph A. Cossa. Washington, D.C.: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1995.
- Soesastro, Hadi. "ASEAN in Asia-Pacific." *AUS-CSCAP Newsletter Number 5*, Oct. 1997 . <http://www.coombs.anu.edu.au/Depts/RSPAS/AUSCSCAP/Auscnews5.html>
- Seng, Goh Teck. *ASEAN and the Post-Cold War Regional Order: Beyond ZOPFAN to the ARF (ADSC Working Paper)*. Canberra: Australian Defense Studies Centre, 1997.
- Sukontasap, Darmp. "The ASEAN Regional Forum: An Asia-Pacific Model for Multilateral Security Cooperation." *Perspectives of Regional Security Cooperation in Asia-Pacific: Learning from Europe or Developing Indigenous Models?* Eds. Joachim Krause and Frank Umbach. Bonn, Germany: Europa Union Verlag, 1998.
- Tay, Simon SC. *Preventive Diplomacy and the ASEAN Regional Forum: Principles and Possibilities*. Singapore: Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies, 1997.

- Quilop, Raymund. "ASEAN Multilateralism and the ARF: Prospects and Challenges." *Philippine Political Science Journal* 21: 44, 2000, 127-158.
- Wanandi, Jusuf. "The Future of the ARF and CSCAP in the Regional Security Architecture." *Managing Security and Peace in the Asia-Pacific*. Eds. Bunn Nagara and Cheah Siew Ean. Malaysia: Institute for Strategic and International Studies, 1996.

Interviews

- Ball, Desmond. Professor, Strategic and Defense Studies Center, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, December 18, 1998.
- Baviera, Aileen. Executive-Director, Philippine-China Development Resource Center (PDRC), Manila, Philippines, January 25, 1999.
- Bunbongkarn, Suchit. Chairman of the Board, Institute of Security and International Studies, Chulalongkorn University, February 13, 1999.
- Cossa, Ralph. Executive Director, US Pacific Forum/Center for Strategic and International Studies. December 19, 1998.
- Guan, Kwa Chong. Vice-Chairman, Singapore Institute of International Affairs, February 28, 1999.
- Harris, Stuart. Professor and Convenor, Northeast Asia Program, Department of International Relations, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, December 13, 1998.
- Hourn, Kao Kim. Executive Director, Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace, February 14, 1999.