

CHAPTER VIII

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ASEAN Security Arrangement and Regional Cooperation

One of the unique agreement often cited as a potential model worth emulating in the Asia-Pacific region is Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). The proposal for a mechanism modeled after the CSCE was articulated by the Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans in March 1990 when he called for the establishment of a Conference on Security and Cooperation in Asia (CSCA).

The proposal for a CSCA was not well received in Southeast Asia. Dr. Bilveer Singh argues that there are great dangers in emulating the European model because of the differences in circumstances and environment. Furthermore, he added that within Southeast Asia, the emphasis has been on the modification and expansion of existing forums and mechanisms rather than the development of something new. Thus, proposals for a CSCE-type body for Asia have not been well received. Dr. Bilveer Singh argues that "ASEAN sees itself as the most important Confidence Security Building Measures (CSBM) in the region, at least in Southeast Asia and does not wish to see it undermined."¹

¹Jason D. Lewis, "Southeast Asia - Preparing for a New World Order," The Washington Quarterly, (Winter 1993): 190.

ASEAN leaders argued that the Asia-Pacific was too complex and diverse a region for CSCE-type arrangements. Moreover, if regional and external players were to direct their attention and resources to creating an Asia-Pacific security forum, it might lead ASEAN to "lose its identity." A related concern of ASEAN was that a CSCE-type grouping could be used by western members to press ASEAN on the contentious issue of human rights, which had been a central theme of the CSCE process. ASEAN would clearly and strongly reject any pressure from its Western dialogue partners on human rights or environmental issues as part of their existing consultative agenda.

While rejecting a formal CSCE-type institution, ASEAN members were more receptive to the use of looser and more consultative mechanisms for promoting an exchange of views within the region on security issues. ASEAN could already boast of such fora: the annual meetings between ASEAN foreign ministers and their counterparts from countries which were given the status of official "dialogue partners" -- the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conferences. The ASEAN-PMC, held since 1978, follows the annual meeting of ASEAN Foreign Ministers (AMM), hosted by each ASEAN member in rotation and which itself would be the forum for security consultations among the ASEAN members. As such,

the ASEAN-PMC framework offered several advantages as forum for a dialogue on security within the Asia-Pacific region. First, ASEAN would have a controlling influence over the agenda of discussions, and would not risk being sidelined as might be the case with any institution. Second, the ASEAN-PMC would enable ASEAN to pursue a more "inclusive" approach to security in the context of the growing security concerns and the developments affecting the role of major Asia-Pacific powers such as the U.S., Russia, China and Japan.

The ASEAN-PMC currently remains one of the most appropriate bases for addressing the regional peace and security issues and providing a forum for such necessary communication. The PMC has been dealing with political and security issues for years and is a well-established and credible process. The security dialogue which has already begun through the ASEAN-PMC offers a forum for the members of the region to deal with the issues in a manner that minimizes potential for misunderstandings. The future participation of other states in the ASEAN-PMC, such as China and Russia, would further enhance the process of building mutual re-assurance in the region.

Non-governmental and quasi-governmental fora should also meet to discuss security issues on a parallel basis with the work of the ASEAN-PMC. This will afford further flexibility and breadth to the regional dialogue.

It appears that multilateral approaches within the region offer the most important non-military means and measures to address the "comprehensive" security issues facing the Asia-Pacific. Initiatives could be expanded to cover social, cultural, environmental and educational issues as well. Precisely, how existing regional approaches to security will evolve and how new approaches will be accommodated should remain matters of discussion.

ASEAN acquired a more ovate security dimension in 1976 with the Treaty on Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (Bali Treaty), which set out principles of mutual respect for the independence and sovereignty of all nations, non-interference in the internal affairs of one another, and settlement of disputes by peaceful means. With the end of Cold War, and the diminished U.S. security presence in the region, ASEAN members have concluded that there should be greater cooperation within the organization on security matters. This process is being pursued through ASEAN Ministerial Meetings, Post-Ministerial Conference

(PMC) discussions with dialogue partners, and several levels of "second track" diplomacy.

The ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference (PMC) is being used as the forum for an institutionalized security dialogue. Key regional states that are not currently members of the ASEAN-PMC, such as the PRC, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and Vietnam, would be involved in the PMC as members only after a consensus is reached among the current members on their participation. Another option for a security framework involves initiating a separate regional security dialogue that would follow the ASEAN-PMC and immediately involve countries not already members of that body. This option is referred to as ASEAN PMC-plus, or post-PMC.

An ASEAN-sponsored resolution adopted by the General Assembly identified the Bali Treaty as consistent with the Secretary-General's call in "An Agenda for Peace" for a closer relationship between the UN and the regional organizations. In July 1993, it was agreed at the ASEAN-PMC to inaugurate , as an important new vehicle for dialogue and cooperation on security matters, an "ASEAN Regional Forum" - including not only the ASEAN six and

their existing regional dialogue partners (Australia, the EC, New Zealand, Japan, Korea, the United States and Canada), but also Russia, China, Vietnam, Laos and Papua New Guinea.

The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which will take place in Bangkok in July 1994 is described as a special diplomatic instrument which is believed to be a high key event with low key expectations. The ARF is an instrument to allow a frank exchange of views and not a discussion of contentious bilateral issues.

Singapore's Foreign Minister S. Jayakumar said that "the ARF aimed to promote consultation and build a regional sense of community, which would help to manage the strains and tensions that come with rapid growth and change."²

The July's security discussions will be held against the backdrop of a change in the power balance in the Asia-Pacific region, with the old bipolar world having been replaced by a polycentric one.

²"Modest beginning expected in first meeting in July," The Straits Times, March 16, 1994.

Through dialogues with its partners, ASEAN has been able to bring most of the countries in the region into one form of participation or another. It is well positioned now to engage the region in political and security dialogue.

The establishment of regional dialogue would allow countries in the region that normally play a rather limited role in political and security affairs the opportunity to participate more fully in shaping the region's future. Japan, of course, comes to mind as a country that wants to play a more prominent role, yet lacks a regionally acceptable forum in which to do so. The PRC is also seen as trying to assert itself more in the region.

Japan is very supportive of a regional dialogue based on the ASEAN-PMC and has an interest in being involved in a regional structure in the future. An isolated Japan would be dangerous to the stability of the region. Likewise, since the PRC has asked to become a dialogue partner of ASEAN, it can be inferred that its leaders endorse an ASEAN-PMC dialogue. The PRC's participation in a regional structure will be vital in the long run for peace and stability in the region.