

LESSENING THE DESIRE FOR WAR :

The ASEAN Regional Forum and Making of Asia Pacific Security

David Dickens

Working Paper 11/98

Synopsis

What role will the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) play in the management of regional order in the Asia-Pacific? Security analysts cannot agree. Realists argue that the ARF can provide a helpful point of diplomatic contact for the region's major powers. Ultimately regional security depends on the balance of power provided by those large powers. Liberals challenge this nostrum. What is needed is a mechanism to attenuate the destabilising by products of balancing practices such as alliances, arms races and coercion. The role of the ARF is suited to defusing the by-products of these balancing practices. This debate, this paper argues, is limited. Stability depends on states reducing both the opportunity to use force and the desire to use force. A balance of power can contribute to the first but is inherently incapable of creating the second. It is argued here that the role of the ARF is more than simply as an adjunct to balancing practices. Instead the ARF should be seen as one part of wider impulses toward lessening the desire for war in the region.

Centre for Strategic Studies
Victoria University of Wellington
1998

© David Dickens
ISSN 1173-5473

About the Writer

Dr David Dickens is Deputy Director of the Centre for Strategic Studies (CSS:NZ) at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

Acknowledgments

My thanks to Bryan Couchman, Goh Siew Sin, Bryce Harland, Stuart McMillian, Terence O'Brien, Andrew Renton-Green, Jim Rolfe, and Frank Wilson for their kind assistance and advice.

Introduction

Will the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) play a significant role in the management of regional order in the Asia-Pacific? Security analysts cannot agree. At best the ARF may complement the regional balance of power, argue realists such as Michael Leifer. The ARF can provide a "helpful" point of diplomatic contact and dialogue for the "region's major powers on which the prospects for stability and order depend". The ARF helps institutionalise security dialogue among the region's most significant powers. It has allowed China, the United States and Japan to engage with each other. Ultimately the ARF's capacity to play a role in managing regional order is limited by structural problems according to Leifer. The ARF's viability depends on the "prior existence" of a stable balance of power. Ironically though it is "not really in a position to create it".¹

This interpretation is contested by liberals such as Yuen Foong Khong who argue that the realist preoccupation with balance of power privileges "enmity over amity".² Conflict is more likely from those engaged in the elusive search for equilibrium who employ balance of power practices, such as "alliances, arms races, military confrontations, and coercion". What the region needs are cooperative "ways and means to attenuate these destabilising factors". In contrast to Leifer, Khong argues that ARF is less a valuable adjunct, and more an equal, to the workings of the region's balance of power. Instead Khong argues the ARF should be viewed as a multilateral "mechanism for defusing the conflictual by-products of power balancing practices".³

The Region Before ARF

Leifer or Khong represent the two broad schools of interpretation on the significance of the ARF. Which school of thought is right? Perhaps the best place to start is at the beginning. What did regional order look like at the time the ARF was formed in 1994? Realists rightly draw attention to the way in which great power politics dominated regional order in the period leading to the formation of the ARF. China's power was growing rapidly. A rivalry between China and the United States was emerging. China was asserting territorial claims to parts of the South China Sea. Japan's long term ambitions were unclear. The United States, regional policy makers worried, may have been contemplating further military withdrawal. Tensions on the Korean Peninsula were deepening.

Regional multilateral machinery before the arrival of the ARF was underdeveloped. There were no regional security mechanisms to defuse the conflicting by-products of great power rivalry. The Asia Pacific Economic Council (APEC) was the only genuinely inclusive regional multilateral instrument that existed before the formation of the ARF. APEC though had only taken its current form in 1993. Economic cooperation provided APEC with its core focus.

Security multilateralism was confined to two sub-regional organisations, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)⁴ and to the South Pacific Forum (SPF).⁵ Only the ASEAN post Ministerial Dialogue process could claim a near representative regional spread of membership. Yet it did not function as a multilateral institution. Instead senior officials from each ASEAN dialogue partner and the ASEAN states met separately.

ASEAN, and the SPF, while both prepared to tackle security issues had until 1994 confined their attention to sub-regional problems. Security was such a sensitive issue that it was only "explicitly" placed on the ASEAN agenda at the Fourth ASEAN Summit held in Singapore in January 1992. Nonetheless the founding purpose of ASEAN was driven by security concerns (especially the potential for border disputes between participants⁶) even if left unstated.

While ASEAN could not alter great power rivalry it was able to moderate and largely avert intra-ASEAN power rivalry. ASEAN did work to diffuse, as Khong would say, the conflictual by-products of power balancing practices. The founding members of ASEAN sought from the outset to reduce each member state's desire to use force against another in the late 1960s and early 1970s. ASEAN then became an instrument of membership solidarity against Vietnam 1975. Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia provided the main focus of ASEAN security related multilateralism until the late 1980s. ASEAN members agreed to mutually respect each others independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity and not to interfere in each others affairs. Equally members agreed to mediate the peaceful resolution of inter-ASEAN disputes. These norms were codified in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation.

The Treaty of Amity and Cooperation also set in place norms to moderate great-power rivalry within the ASEAN region. The ground rules for great power involvement in ASEAN affairs were established. ASEAN served as a mechanism that could diffuse the conflictual by-products of power balancing practices within the area covered by the Association. As Khong points out ASEAN was able to codify "norms and procedures that were already in use" in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation and in other declarations.⁷ This approach to the management of great power relations was until the early 1990s essentially inward looking. ASEAN sought to engage great powers on ASEAN terms rather than to project ASEAN norms further afield.⁸ ASEAN's achievement was to create a sub-regional security architecture for its members bound by common norms.

Within the SPF work on security focused mainly on resource and environmental issues such as over fishing and fisheries surveillance. As with ASEAN the Forum managing to provide the foundations for cooperative relations between member states. The character of relations between Form members was quite different than for ASEAN. There were fewer tensions and disputes among founding members. Constructive relations were generally the norm when the Forum was created.

Unlike the member states of ASEAN, Forum participants did not need to unify to cope with the by-products of great power rivalry. The Forum had to deal with power relations that were quite markedly different from those within ASEAN. South Pacific security concerns were, and still are, comprehensive first and foremost. France was the only major power with a presence in the South Pacific. The French colonial possessions in New Caledonia and French Polynesia though created security problems that ASEAN did not have to consider, namely decolonisation issues and nuclear testing. The Forum had some success in working with France on the first set of issues but little on the latter. Forum members united in condemnation of French testing of nuclear weapons were unable to prevent its resumption on numerous occasions.⁹

Before the formation of ARF, the discussion of Asia-Pacific security issues in a regional multilateral context was relatively rare. The exception was the annual ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference with its Dialogue Partners. Here nine to ten multilateral meetings between ASEAN and Dialogue Partners covering a variety of issues were held, as well as separate bilateral meetings between ASEAN and individual states.

In the period leading to the creation of the ARF multilateral regional security machinery was too undeveloped to moderate great power behaviour in the region. Rising China-United States rivalry in the mid 1990s was testimony enough to this. While multilateral security organisations existed in South East Asia (ASEAN) and the South Pacific (SPF) there was no equivalent organisation covering the span of the Asia-Pacific.

The realist interpretation that security multilateralism was incapable of ordering regional relations, in the period leading to the formation of the ARF, is well placed.

But how relevant then was the balance of power to the maintenance of regional order in the period leading to the formation of the ARF? How does the Leifer's contention that balance of power practices were, and still are, deeply ingrained in regional behaviour measure up? That most states in the region followed balance of power practices in some form is evidence enough of the widespread appeal of this approach to security management. Indeed there has been very little change in the balancing practices of regional states since the end of the Cold War.

China is of the view that peace in East Asia is "dependent on the balance of power".¹⁰ China's concern is that preponderant powers have in the past encroached, partitioned and manipulated it. Hence Beijing's desire for a strong state and modern armed forces to balance against this possibility.¹¹ India balances against potential Chinese predominance.¹² Russia also balances (without much success thanks to the disintegration of its economy and the severe limitations of its armed forces) against the prospect of NATO in the West or China, Japan and the United States in the East, translating predominance into encroachment. Despite their differences, China, Russia and India each called for a multipolar distribution of power in the region. These proposals while voiced separately reflected the shared assumption that power should be distributed more evenly among states to prevent predominance by any one state. All three states shared a realist mode of analysis, sought the symmetrical distribution of power, and strived for equilibrium.

The idea that regional equilibrium is maintained through balance underpins the United States view that its military presence provides the bedrock for stability in East Asia. This presence is designed to prevent another nation from filling the strategic vacuum that would be created by its withdrawal.¹³ United States security treaties with Japan and South Korea provide the basis for its specific commitments designed to offset military imbalances against either state. These treaties demonstrate ingrained realist thinking in Washington, Tokyo and Seoul. All three sought equilibrium.

Some ASEAN states and Vietnam engaged in balancing practices against Chinese predominance in the early 1990s. Their motivation stimulated by Beijing's aggressive claims (underpinned by low level military force) to the Spratly Islands in the early 1990s.¹⁴ ASEAN states encouraged the United States to remain militarily committed to the region to maintain balance during this period -- a view echoed by Australia and New Zealand.

While ASEAN states disclaim balancing in public statements they have engaged in these practices themselves. From 1975 military preparedness (aside from that directed to counter insurgency duties) was directed against possible Vietnamese predominance. Despite their common reading of the external threat to ASEAN, member states were careful to avoid creating military alliances with each other.¹⁵

In the period leading to the ARF balancing behaviour was practiced by most states in the region. However the form of balancing behaviour practiced did not conform to a common or unified model. Numerous balances of power traversed the region. Lacking structural unity these balances of power in practice could not moderate the growing rivalry between China and the United States.

From this brief survey five general observations can be suggested about balance of power practice in the Asia-Pacific in the early 1990s. First, balance of power practiced in the Asia-Pacific in the early 1990s was (and still is) relatively unsophisticated. The Asia-Pacific lacked, for instance, the machinery to formally regulate the behaviour of balancing states. Second, most balancing was not directed against specific threats. Third, there was no regional consensus on what form power relationships between states in the Asia-Pacific should take. Fourth, the balance of power as

practiced by large states could not moderate growing tensions between China and the United States. Fifth, smaller as well as larger powers participated in balancing behaviour.

This survey supports Leifer's view that the balance of power underpins regional ordering. But the survey also suggests that regional balancing practices have many variants lacking an overarching ordering mechanism. There is in a sense many balances of power, and many regional orders, in the Asia-Pacific.

At the same time the findings of this brief survey do not suggest that regional balancing practices are a major source of conflict as has been suggested by liberals. Khong for instance, exaggerates when he claims that the "path to equilibrium in the Asia-Pacific may be paved with conflict". Specific military balancing directed against a threat in the Asia-Pacific was in the early 1990s, and still is, the exception rather than the norm. Korea at that time was the focus for most threat based balancing and that balancing may well have prevented conflict. Regional states acquired modern arms on a large scale - perhaps as a consequence of the realist quest for equilibrium. Yet few states ever used these arms.

ASEAN Writ Large

Against this backdrop of many imperfectly functioning balances of power, and undeveloped regional security multilateralism, ASEAN sought to moderate relations between large powers through the creation of a multilateral institution. Both Khong and Leifer concur that ASEAN's own explanations for its motivations demonstrated a strong commitment to liberal institutionalist values. The Chairman's Opening Statement, for instance, emphasised that the ARF would be dedicated to "dialogues and consultations" that would "anticipate and resolve" security problems that may have a "region-wide impact".¹⁶ Not only ASEAN advocated this liberal prescription. Hay observes that the establishment of the ARF represented a wider "convergence of views" among regional states in the early 1990s that security dialogue mechanisms were needed in the Asia-Pacific in the early post Cold War period.¹⁷ Japan suggested a regional multilateral dialogue structure. Canada and Australia had mooted the establishment of an overarching regional security structure modeled on the European Council for Security Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) model of cooperative security.¹⁸ The United States was interested in encouraging dialogue between Japan and South Korea that at that time hardly existed at the bilateral level. China wanted to allay regional concerns about its future intentions.

Only ASEAN possessed the credibility to create a genuinely multilateral institution that had at that time any real chance of attracting broad regional participation. It is doubtful that either China or the United States would have joined a multilateral institution initiated by the other. East Asian states had objected to the Australian and Canadian proposals to transfer European models of security cooperation to an Asian context on the grounds that the region's circumstances called for specially tailored responses. While most states concurred that something had to be done, no others were willing to put forward practical proposals.

Leifer argues convincingly that the Association's members "conceived of the ARF as an ASEAN writ large" that would extend into North East Asia and the Pacific "the understandings and practices" that had guided the "relatively successful workings of the Association". Structurally the ARF is an outgrowth of the ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference with Dialogue Partners. The ARF is guided by ASEAN approach to security management. The ASEAN states address security issues and disputes through consultation and dialogue rather than through conventional collective security arrangements and formal mechanisms for settling disputes.¹⁹ This approach is pragmatic, gradual and collegial. Cooperation is constructed by consensus and compromise brokered at times through third party mediation. Emphasis is placed on building comfort levels. Process is personalised. Success is

measured in terms of the quality of the atmospherics between the political leadership of Association states. The better the atmospherics the more the prospects of avoiding conflict. Given this approach ASEAN has seen little need to institutionalise. This style had been successful in reducing bilateral tensions within ASEAN, so much so that the risk of direct war between participating states had been reduced to the lowest levels ever.

ASEAN's design for the ARF -- to foster "political and security cooperation in Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific" to "bring about a more predictable and constructive pattern of relations in the Asia-Pacific"²⁰ -- emphasised the importance of improving the atmospherics of regional relations. ASEAN did not seek to challenge or supplant existing balance of power structures, or bilateral relationships. Indeed ASEAN sought to promote from the outset:

*The continuing presence of the United States, as well as stable relationships among the United States, Japan, and China and other states in the region.*²¹

This extract from the Chairman's Closing Statement to the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conferences Senior Officials Meeting Singapore, 20-21 May 1993 illustrates ASEAN's recognition of the importance of a balance of power underpinned by the United States to the maintenance of regional stability. Leifer rightly contends that this statement shows that ultimately the ARF depended on the prior existence of a stable balance of power that it was not in a position to create.

What realists such as Leifer do not concede though is that the ARF statement also showed that ASEAN recognised that great power balance was not functioning smoothly. Rising friction between the United States and China showed that the search for equilibrium using traditional balancing practices (such as alliances, military commitment and bilateral negotiation) alone was proving elusive. ASEAN wanted to do something to defuse growing tensions. At the same time, as Leifer shows, ASEAN did not reject or seek to supplant balancing practices. They recognised that the rising power of China had to be lived with. ASEAN wanted the Americans forward to offset Chinese power. ASEAN also wanted the United States to be more tolerant of China. If America and China could live together and cooperate the ASEAN goal of equilibrium could be achieved. They wanted the balance of power to work properly. From this perspective, the evidence suggests that the ASEAN proposal to create the ARF represented an initiative to complement balancing practices that were not functioning smoothly. Policy makers sought realist objectives using liberal means. ASEAN did not seek to create a new balance of power or a new regional security architecture.

ARF Process and Structure

Before the performance of this innovative experiment using liberal means to achieve realist ends can be assessed, an overview of the institutional background, structures and processes, of the ARF is needed

The realist belief that power shapes the behaviour of states creates a deep suspicion of the utility of multilateral institutions. Realists tend to assume that relations between states can only be undertaken through bilateral relationships. The diplomatic behaviour of states in the region confirms this realist observation -- with one important exception. ASEAN states manage relations bilaterally with most states. But as well ASEAN states are deeply committed to intensive multilateral diplomatic relationships with each other. Indeed ASEAN states conduct intensive diplomatic discourse with each other both bilaterally and multilaterally. It was this pragmatic liberal approach to multilateralism that ASEAN sought to develop as the model for the ARF.

Since 1994 the ARF has developed, following the ASEAN model, a minimally institutionalised structure. The ARF proper, a meeting of Foreign Ministers comes together annually in July/August, and coincides with the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference (PMC). The Chairmanship of the ARF, is controlled by ASEAN, and revolves in line with the annual Chairmanship of ASEAN. The ARF is supported by the ARF Senior Officials Meeting (ARF SOM) which meets annually in May.

The ARF operates on two levels. The top layer, or Track One, consists of informal meetings among foreign ministers. The meetings include frank, and sometimes fearless, exchanges on prevailing regional security issues. Dialogue has included exchanges of national perspectives on security as well as sensitive issues. Accompanying the formal dialogue (and informal discussions in the corridor) are rounds of dinners, drinks, games of golf, and karaoke, that help fashion personal relationships among participants. In this regard the ARF is unique. Madeleine Albright, for instance, who needed convincing that attendance at the 1996 ARF would be profitable, is understood to have returned to the United States “intrigued” by her experience.²²

Senior officials attend intersessional meetings devoted to the formal work program directed by the ARF. The blueprint for the future work of the ARF is spelt out in the *ARF Concept Paper* approved 1995. The *ARF Concept Paper* sets out a three stage “gradual evolutionary” approach to “preserve and enhance” security and prosperity in the region. Stage one is focused on the development of confidence building measures (CBMs), the second progresses to preventive diplomacy, and the third culminates in the development of mechanisms for conflict resolution. The *ARF Concept Paper* works from the general assumption that the development of cooperation should precede from a firm foundation bound by consensus. Work starts on the relatively easiest issues (work on notification of military exercises has proved relatively contentious). Once parties reach agreement work then precedes to the next and more difficult stage.

At the second level, or Track Two, the ARF sponsors meetings that draw together officials working in their own capacities, specialists and academics to informally work through the implications of possible future agenda items. These Track Two level meetings have addressed issues related to regional confidence and trust building, peacekeeping, regional principles of security and stability, and non-proliferation. Most of the development work on preventive diplomacy is carried out at ARF Track Two level and in the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP). CSCAP is related to the ARF although a formal relationship has yet to be institutionalised. CSCAP membership is more inclusive than the ARF (North Korea is a member and non-government Taiwanese academics and specialists may attend working groups in their own capacity) and its work more ambitious. CSCAP working groups examine comprehensive and cooperative security, CBMs, maritime cooperation, North Pacific security issues, and transnational crime. Participation in the ARF Track Two and CSCAP overlaps.

The ASEAN Regional Forum In Action

How then has this experiment that seeks realist ends using liberal means performed? Under ASEAN leadership, the ARF has succeeded in creating an open and frank forum for the discussion of regional security issues. The ARF helps defuse tensions between members and improves regional atmospherics. The ARF brings together annually the foreign ministers and senior officials from the region's leading states (with the exception of the NORTH KOREA and Taiwan) to discuss security issues. Topics raised for discussion in the ARF cover the full agenda of contemporary security concerns. Security issues related to Cambodia, South China Sea, Korean Peninsula, the continued presence of the United States military in the region, human rights in Myanmar, the expansion of ASEAN, the United States-Japan security alliance, China-United States relations, four party talks, the possible use of the ARF to engage North Korea into the region, the implications of newly developed

CBMs, landmines, nuclear non-proliferation, nuclear tests in South Asia, and the relationship between CBMs and preventive diplomacy have all been discussed.

The ARF played a role in defusing the conflictual by products of power balancing practices between China and the United States. The ARF meeting in Brunei, for instance, provided the setting for dialogue between the United States and China in the period following the Taiwan Straits incident in 1996. At this meeting China's Foreign Minister Qian Qichen and the United States Secretary of State Warren Christopher held a bilateral meeting on the fringes of the Forum. The Brunei Meeting was preceded by "several conciliatory gestures" from Beijing that were consistent with the multilateral non-confrontational approach pursued by ASEAN. These gestures included a commitment from China to discuss the South China Sea disputes in a multilateral forum, to use the UN Law of the Sea (which it had yet to ratify), and to shelve all further development of structures in the South China Sea.²³ These examples illustrate how the ARF²⁴ played a role in the restoration of regional great power equilibrium. Here the ARF provided a venue for leading decision makers of two great powers in conflict, if not moderate their own behaviour, then at least to create the atmospherics that would allow the resumption of normalised bilateral diplomatic discourse. This interrelated process led to the moderation of conflict between China and the United States.

The routine work of the ARF at the officials level (in which the duties of the chair of intersessional meetings are shared between an ASEAN and Non-ASEAN participant) encourages cooperation. In cases where the states concerned still share major unresolved differences, the opportunity to collaborate at the routine level provided by the ARF assumes an importance out of proportion to significance of the event being staged. Cooperation between China and the Philippines, whose gunboats had clashed on South China Seas in 1996, in co-hosting the Intersessional Group on CBMs in Beijing in March 1997 is an example.

The ARF has made good progress in encouraging confidence building (stage one of the *ARF Concept Paper*). The ARF plenary sessions and intersessional meetings are in themselves CBMs and provide leading regional security makers the opportunity to develop personal comfort levels and to deepen relationships. Work has focussed on the policy implications of implementing CBMs in the Asia-Pacific, and technical level meetings covering the practical aspects of search and rescue cooperation, peacekeeping, disaster relief, and demining techniques. While the concept of CBMs are not unique to the Asia-Pacific, or to ASEAN, the ARF has played an important role as a catalyst for the development of CBMs attuned to regional circumstances and to the building of the political support needed for their successful implementation in the region.

The ARF agreed to move towards developing practical forms of preventive diplomacy in 1997, while continuing to deliberately defer work on conflict resolution mechanisms. Attempts within the ARF to progress this issue have met with little success. China and Indonesia in particular are chary. Both seek to preserve the principle of 'non-interference' without change even though preventative diplomacy as mooted in ARF would only happen in practice with the willing involvement of all parties. Aside from this sensitivity proposals to develop preventive diplomacy within the ARF have to grapple with a fundamental problem. As Simon Tay points out membership of the ARF extends to states beyond Asia yet "only issues within the ARF's geographical area or 'footprint' are its proper concern". Consequently the:

group of states who might potentially exercise preventive diplomacy is larger than those over whom preventive diplomacy may be exercised. For example, an ARF member in North America or Europe may call for preventive diplomacy to be exercised over a border dispute between two states in Asia. The reverse, however, is beyond the ARF's focus.

This asymmetry, as Simon Tay suggests, "while perhaps unavoidable tends to undercut the general level of trust among differently placed members". Those ARF members within the 'footprint' may feel "their security interests are more likely to be open to inspection and attention".²⁵

However despite these undercurrents ASEAN may decide to push on and implement preventative diplomacy, for instance to deal with security problems in Cambodia or Myanmar in the future. ASEAN demonstrated on the issue of India's membership of the Forum that it is willing to put its own interests first and act without consulting non-ASEAN members. Should ASEAN decide that preventative diplomacy should be implemented, especially to address immediate security concerns in South East Asian context, then it may simply act.

Tay provides an important explanation of why progress within the ARF is 'gradual' and 'evolutionary' to use words favoured by the *ARF Concept Paper*. But, is this emphasis on progress at a "gradual evolutionary" pace a convenient euphemism for inaction? The ARF, as with ASEAN, has been criticised by both commentators and participants for its "talk shop" like qualities. Perhaps these critics are right. The ARF may only realistically be capable of working as a "talk shop". Nonetheless this regional "talk shop" role is important. It does help reduce tensions and helps build understanding. This is where the ARF has been most successful. Perhaps this "talk shop" role ought to be the focus for the further development of the ARF. If this route were taken the ARF could provide a forum to expose larger numbers of defence and foreign affairs officials to a wider range of national views on security issues in the region. Such a process would raise awareness and tolerance of competing and contrasting interpretations. Decision makers better informed may be more tolerant and understanding of other national views when developing new policy.

However the *ARF Concept Paper* (agreed to by all participants at the 1995 ARF Plenary) did say that it "would be unwise for a young and fragile process" to tackle all the challenges to the security of the Asia-Pacific simultaneously.²⁶ This emphasis on a "gradual evolutionary" approach reflects the ASEAN judgement that work should first "concentrate on enhancing, the trust and confidence amongst participants" to "foster a regional environment conducive to maintaining the peace and prosperity of the region". Such a judgement reflects the underlying reality that the diverse collection of states belonging to the ARF are unlikely to quickly reach consensus on complex security issues. In a sense the value of the ARF is its capacity to draw together in one place the representatives of most regional states to discuss security issues. Nonetheless the incapacity of the ARF to progress work from confidence building to preventive diplomacy is a cause of frustration for officials from some western states -- especially the United States and Australia and to a lesser extent from New Zealand and Canada, and the European Union. However, this disappointment seems to be confined to officials. Foreign ministers themselves do not seem to be especially worried by this lack of progress. This may explain why the proceedings of the ARF do not appear to be threatened by the continuing prospect of the work program progressing slowly in the direction of conflict resolution.

Potential

The ARF contributes to the smooth functioning of the regional balance of power. Could it play a more significant role in managing regional order? Khong's assertion that the ARF should complement the conflictual by-products of the regional balance of power is remarkably similar to Leifer's assessment that the ARF can at best complement balance. It is a useful mechanism for defusing some destabilising consequences of balancing behaviour. Equally the realist observation that the ARF is "incapable of creating" a balance of power is sound. The ARF is unable to "contribute to a viable balance or distribution of power within the Asia-Pacific" as it does not, and cannot, possess hard instruments of power. Nor does it appear likely that the members of the ARF would agree to it being transformed into an instrument to underpin the regional security

architecture. Leifer's observation that it is unlikely that any "state would be willing to rely for its security on the Forum's ministrations alone" would probably meet agreement with most regional policy makers.

Yet the ASEAN architects of the ARF never conceived that this institution would serve as their states principal instrument of defence or that it would supplant the role of a regional balance of power.²⁷ What the ASEAN states appeared to have in mind for the ARF was a role in improving the atmospherics in relationships between states. ARF performance when measured against this more modest measure is substantial.

Perhaps the theoretical realist approach to thinking about the ARF in terms of how it may be able to shape a regional balance of power is too narrow. The arch realist and practitioner Henry Kissinger reminds us that the formation of stability requires states to reduce both "the opportunities for using force" and "the desire to use force".²⁸ A balance of power can contribute to the first goal but is inherently incapable of creating the second. Kissinger's insight suggests that regional order is constructed through balancing practices and the desire of states not to use force. The ARF is not in a position to create either. While the dynamics underpinning the general desire of regional states to use direct force are beyond the scope of this paper, it is fair to say that the region is more peaceful than at any time this century. This relative peace would not be possible unless states were reluctant to use force to achieve national goals (except in self defence).

What the ARF does do is provide one avenue for representatives of regional states to work through common security concerns peacefully. The ARF process itself contributes to the building of this peace. The ARF provides a setting for decision makers to establish personal relationships (whether between potential antagonist, the unfamiliar or older friends). This process helps construct trust. Most importantly the intense collegiality of the ARF helps prevent the build up of fear and distrust of other decision makers intentions. In this sense the ARF contributes to the shape of regional order – a point generally acknowledged by both realists and liberals.

From this perspective the ARF may be seen as not so much as an adjunct to the balance of power but as an instrument that helps reduce the desire of states to use force. It is only one part of this complex process that is the outcome of the fusion of domestic considerations, economic interests, webs of relationships among states in the region, and habit. But the ARF plays an especially important role because it institutionalises linkages between ministers of foreign affairs and senior officials who are responsible for the security of their own states.

The successful functioning of the ARF depends on regional balances of power. In turn smoothly functioning balances of power depends on the desire of states not to use force. The ARF is not in a position to create equilibrium. Yet the region's balances of power lack any form of formal self regulating institutional mechanism. By default the ARF provides a venue for discussions between the elites responsible for balancing. But the ARF is not a formal mechanism for regulating the behavior of these elites. Nor is the ARF an alternative to balancing practices – for few if any states in the region seek this role for the ARF or are willing to forgo balancing practices.

Structurally the ARF may be best suited to defusing friction, and to building cooperation and understanding between the political elites responsible for managing their states security behaviour. The ARF currently ensures that the foreign ministers and officials of regional states (with the exceptional of North Korea and Taiwan) who may contemplate the use of force in their relations with another state will have to answer to their regional peers annually. The ARF provides a strong incentive for influential individuals not to breach regional norms of behaviour. It helps build norms

of good behaviour and cooperation. The ARF also functions to keep people talking routinely, and provides a network of linkages that can establish dialogue in a crisis.

Challenges

Despite the ARF's potential it faces several short term challenges. The principal challenges are the: economic crisis in East Asia; the exclusion of North Korea and Taiwan from membership; concerns about performance; and rival cooperative security proposals.

The most important challenge faced by the ARF is the economic crisis in Asia. It is possible that reductions in government spending may result in cut backs in funding for participation at ARF meetings and intersessional groups. More seriously this economic crisis challenges the traditionally defined focus of security preferred by the ARF to date. Yet full attendance at the Fifth ASEAN Forum held in Manila on 27 July 1998 suggests that regional states will continue to take the ARF seriously. While the size of delegations is reducing so far there are no indications that states will withdraw from the ARF process because of financial pressures. The institution itself, in the Chairman's Statement from the Fifth ARF, has responded to the economic crisis through the recognition of a more comprehensive approach to security. Full participation at the 1998 ARF suggests that states will want to hold onto sound political-military security relationships when regional economy relationships are turbulent and uncertain.

The exclusion of membership of North Korea and Taiwan represents a weakness in the ARF. North Korea and Taiwan are party to two of the most serious points of tension in the region. It is unlikely that the ARF would have the credibility to advance initiatives that address either conflict without participation of representatives of North Korea and Taiwan. The prospects of advancing the role of the ARF in dealing with either conflict in the future are brighter in the case of Korea than Taiwan. North Korea has tabled a bid for membership of the Forum.

The ARF process contributes indirectly to the defusing of tensions related to Taiwan and Korea at a regional level through its role in building tolerance and understanding of other regional states views on these issues. The ARF's 'peer review' function also provides incentives for the moderation of aggressive behaviour of states participating in the Forum's activities with interests in either conflict.

ASEAN's insistence on retaining the central diplomatic role in the ARF is a cause of friction with the Forum. ASEAN's insistence on playing a pivotal role in the ARF may, as Leafier observes, generate frustration among North East Asian and Pacific participants.²⁹ However this irritation seems to be offset by a pragmatic acceptance that only ASEAN has the credibility to hold together the ARF. This irritation does not seem to have limited participation or effected process.

The ARF's "talk shop" qualities are open to criticism. But perhaps it is the ARF's capacity to host regular dialogue is the central strength of this institution. It is these qualities that has allowed the ARF to assist the defusing of conflicts once they develop, and provide the setting for deeper understanding between parties, and the opportunity to develop tolerance of different perspectives. In each of these ways the prospects of conflict are reduced, and the possibility of constructive security relations between states is developed. The fact that the foreign ministers of the majority of regional states attend the ARF provides the Forum with its foundation of credibility. In a sense moving from confidence building to conflict resolution is not that important in itself. What is important is that foreign ministers and officials actually talk to each other to instill, as the statement issued by the Chairman of the Fifth ASEAN Regional Forum Meeting in Manila on 27 July 1998, "a high sense of collective commitment to regional peace and stability". Such a mechanism helps reduce the desire of states to use force.³⁰

Rival regional multilateral proposals to the ARF have the potential to undermine the relevance of the Forum. However most of the alternatives to the ARF face severe limitations themselves. One suggestion is that APEC should be expanded to handle security dialogue in addition to its role in fostering economic cooperation. APEC has the advantage that it is more inclusive than the ARF (Taiwan for instance is a member of APEC but not ARF). APEC also attracts participation at the head of government level rather than at the foreign minister level. APEC already provides a forum for political leaders to discuss what ever is on their mind, including security issues. However, the institution is principally devoted to the development of economic cooperation. There is no political consensus that its role should change. APEC is also likely to be distracted in the short term by the Asian economic crisis. APEC then will most probably continue to compliment rather than supplant the security focus of the ARF.

Proposals to create exclusive multilateral gatherings of North Asian states have been put forward both in theory and practice. Susan Shirk, for instance, has proposed a North Pacific Concert of Powers made up of the United States, China, Japan and Russia.³¹ This idea off an exclusive Concert of large states has several drawbacks. Smaller states will be concerned that they have no voice in a process that may shape their future. States that have not been consulted on decisions are unlikely to back them. Such a process also feeds discontent and suspicion. The excluded may well ask if they will be the target of the malicious intentions of a exclusive club of powerful states. In this sense exclusive multilateral arrangements undermine their very purpose and can prove destabilising. There are other limitations relating to such a proposal. China is unlikely to join a concert of powers because of its aversion to alliances. China may also feel isolated in an exclusive North Pacific multilateral setting, especially one championed by the United States. In addition proposals of this sort exclude participation from other parts of the region, including South East Asia, Australasia, South Asia as well as an important actors in the North Pacific including the Korea's and Canada.

Washington's preference for Four Party Talks (among the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea, Republic of Korea, China, the United States) to deal with security matters relating to the Korean Peninsula represents a challenge to the relevance of the ARF. The Four Party Talks have managed to include North Korea in their ambit whereas the ARF has not. The Talks directly address issues relating to the region's most potent flashpoint with the leading relevant states. However with progress at the Four Party Talks moving slowly it is doubtful that they will draw much attention and energy away from the ARF.

Conclusion

Liberal reassessments of the value of the ARF are overstated. The ARF is more an adjunct, than an equal, to the region's balance of power. But the region's balance of power is not as well formed and effective as realists tend to assume. There is no single regional balance of power. Instead there are multiple balances. Regional equilibrium rests on messy foundations. The ARF plays an role in defusing the conflictual by-products of power balancing practices. But ARF multilateralism is not a rival to the balance of power or its alternative.

The other side of the regional balancing coin is not the ARF but the desire of almost all regional decision makers not to use force as an instrument of statecraft. Violence is not a preferred instrument of foreign policy conduct in the region. One reason why this is now so is due to the ARF. The ARF played a role in diffusing tension between regional states following the Taiwan Straits incident and Spratly Crisis. The ARF provides an institutional mechanism that helps embed the habit of cooperation in the region. The ARF functions to improve the regional atmospherics among policy

makers. But the ARF is not itself responsible for the evident reluctance of most states in the region to use force.

The idea of the ARF draws on liberal traditions yet its primary goals were realist. The ASEAN architects (with regional blessing) sought to encourage the United States to remain forward in the region and to improve relations between United States, Japan and China and other states in the region. The ARF has contributed to the achievement of each of these goals.

The value of the ARF should not be exaggerated. It does not provide an alternative to balancing practices, and cannot create the basis of an alternative regional security architecture. What the ARF can do is provide a conduit for regional policy makers to understand better each others intentions. For this reason alone the ARF's future deserves to be assured.

END NOTES

¹Michael Leifer *The ASEAN Regional Forum*, Adelphi Paper 302, London, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1996. p 58-59.

²Yuen Foong Khong "ASEAN and the Southeast Asian Security Complex" in David Lake and Patrick Morgan (ed) *Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World*, University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997. p 319.

³Yuen Foong Khong "Review article: Making bricks without straw in the Asia Pacific?", *The Pacific Review*, Vol 10, No 2, 1997. p 296

⁴ASEAN membership in early 1994 consisted of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

⁵South Pacific Forum members are Australia, Fiji, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu and Western Samoa. France is an observer to the Forum.

⁶Intra-ASEAN border disputes included: (a) Indonesian claims to Pulau Sipadan and Pulau Ligitan occupied by Malaysia (b) Philippine claims to Sabah occupied by Malaysia (c) Malaysian claims to Rulau Batu Puteh occupied by Singapore. William Perry, *East Asia Strategy Report*, Washington, Department of Defence (nd C 1993) p 19

⁷Yuen Foong Khong "ASEAN and the Southeast Asia Security Complex" p 332-333

⁸*Chairman's Opening Statement ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conferences Senior Officials Meeting Singapore, 20-21 May 1993.*

⁹Roderic Alley "Regional Ordering in the South Pacific", in *Pacific Focus*, Vol XI No 1 1996 France ended its last round of nuclear testing before signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in response to pressure from European states influenced by domestic opinion.

¹⁰You Ji *Coping with the End of post-Cold War: China's Foreign Policy in the 1990s*. Paper prepared for the 11th New Zealand Asian Studies Conference, Auckland University, 1995. p 3.

¹¹David Shambaugh. "Growing Strong: China's Challenge to Asian Security" *Survival*, Vol 36, No 2, 1994. p46. China's Defence policy gives first priority to "Consolidate national defence, to resist aggression. To defend national sovereignty over its territorial land, air and sea as well as maritime rights and interests". Excerpt from *China's Defence Policy* presentation given by Lt Gen Xiong, Deputy Chief of General Staff, PLA at Victoria University of Wellington, on 7 May 1996.

¹²David Dickens *More Than Bombs And Border Tension: India and Regional Security*, CSS Working Paper 8/97, Wellington, Centre for Strategic Studies: New Zealand, 1997.

¹³William Perry, *East Asia Strategy Report*, Washington, Department of Defence, 1995. p 9. See also text of Secretary of Defence Cohen Speech to Chinese Academy of Sciences, in *USIA Washington File*. p 53. Dr Kurt Campbell, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Asian and Pacific Affairs, is even more blunt. He has said that in the absence of a "sophisticated security architecture that maintains peace and stability, the most important deterrent of peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region has been and continues to be the presence of large and substantial U.S. forces". quote from an interview with Kurt Campbell "Ensuring Security In The Asia-Pacific Region", in *U.S. Foreign Policy Agenda*, Vol 3, No 1, USIA, 1998.

¹⁴It is very difficult to assess the precise motivations driving threat assessments and military acquisitions in South East Asian states because of the paucity of publicly available information on these issues.

¹⁵The Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) are an arrangement rather than an alliance and its members (Malaysia, Singapore, New Zealand, Australia and Britain) exercise activities are not now directed against any threat from an ASEAN state.

¹⁶*Chairman's Opening Statement ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conferences Senior Officials Meeting*, Singapore, 20-21 May 1993

¹⁷Simon Hay *ASEAN's Regional Security Dialogue Process: From Expectation To Reality?* Wellington, unpublished manuscript, 1996, p 9

¹⁸*ibid* p 10-11

¹⁹Michael Leifer *The ASEAN Regional Forum* pp 14, 25

²⁰*Joint Communiqué of the 27th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, Bangkok, 22-23 July 1994*

²¹*Chairman's statement 1993* quoted in Michael Leifer *The ASEAN Regional Forum* p 24

²²Interview State Department official, Washington, October 1996.

²³Simon Hay *ASEAN Regional Security Dialogue Process* p 23

²⁴APEC also played a role in diffusing tensions between China and the United States. Private meetings were held on the margins of the 1996 APEC Meeting between the Presidents of China and the United States.

²⁵Simon Tay *Preventive Diplomacy And The ASEAN Regional Forum: Principles And Possibilities*, ARF Track Two Conference On Preventive Diplomacy, Singapore September 1997. p27-28

²⁶*The ASEAN Regional Forum: A Concept Paper*, 18 March 1995

²⁷Michael Leifer *The ASEAN Regional Forum* pp 57, 58 and 59

²⁸Henry Kissinger *Diplomacy*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1994. p 77 and 79 Kissinger envisaged that agreement on a shared set of values (and preferably a shared sense of justice) would provide a moral equilibrium that would reduce the desire of states to use force.

²⁹Michael Leifer *The ASEAN Regional Forum* p 59

³⁰Statement of the Chairman of the Fifth Regional Forum Manila 27 July 1998

³¹Susan Shirk "Asia-Pacific Regional Security: Balance of Power or Concert of Powers?" in David Lake and Patrick Morgan (ed) *Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World*, University Park, Pennsylvania University Press, 1997. p 260-270.