

ARF EEPs Informal Working Group Meeting Summary of Discussions

1. The informal working group meeting of the ARF Experts and Eminent Persons (EEPs) was held in Singapore on 29 February 2016. The meeting was co-chaired by Ambassador Barry Desker, EEP from Singapore and Professor Paul Dibb, EEP from Australia. The meeting was attended by EEPs and designated representatives from Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Canada, China, the European Union, Indonesia, Japan, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Viet Nam and the United States. Representatives from the ASEAN Secretariat also attended the meeting. The objective of the meeting was to determine the role and future trajectory of the EEPs in the ARF process.

2. The main discussion points during the meeting were as follows:
 - a. The EEPs recalled the decisions of the ARF Ministers at the 22nd ARF in Kuala Lumpur in August 2015, particularly as stipulated in paragraphs 37 and 38 of the Chairman's Statement of the 22nd ARF regarding the role of the EEPs in support of the ARF process;
 - b. Whether the ARF is losing its relevance in the regional security architecture with the rise of the EAS and the ADMM-Plus;
 - c. The inclusion of not only experts but also some eminent persons to the EEPs to increase the EEPs' traction in doing their work;
 - d. The involvement and/or recruitment of younger experts into the EEPs to further enrich the discussions;
 - e. The role of the EEPs as a reservoir of expertise to be drawn upon as required as originally outlined in the Terms of Reference (TOR) of the ARF EEPs;
 - f. Taking the opportunity of its 10th anniversary, the ARF EEPs could prepare a paper on the review of the TOR of the ARF EEPs and prepare the list of initiatives that the EEPs would like to submit for the consideration of ARF Ministers;
 - g. Whether EEPs should continue to discuss broad, strategic issues or on more focused, actionable issues; and
 - h. The EEPs should come up with a short list of security challenges in the region to be used as a starting point for discussions in the next meeting of the ARF EEPs.

3. The EEPs expressed concern that their recommendations are usually only noted by the ARF Track 1 without any follow-up. Some suggested that the EEPs should be more proactive in suggesting what they can do instead of waiting for the ARF to task the EEPs; others emphasised that EEPs are considered the "think-tank" of the ARF and therefore it is up to the ARF whether to implement the EEPs' recommendations. It was suggested that, instead of the EEPs proposing recommendations which would not be supported by the ARF, the EEPs should come up with concrete proposals that are acceptable and implementable by the ARF Track 1. It was also emphasised that the EEPs should avoid overwhelming the Track 1 with too many recommendations and also avoid recommendations on overly sensitive issues, on which no progress would likely be possible at the Track 1 level.

4. On a related note, the breakout groups that started in the 8th ARF EEPs Meeting in Kuala Lumpur have been a useful and innovative approach to discussing regional hotspots; however, the recommendations and proposals coming from these groups have

often been too ambitious and/or sensitive to be considered by the ARF Track I. The EEPs should consider focusing on smaller, “bite-sized” issues which are more actionable and easier to follow up. For example, in the case of the breakout group on maritime security in East Asia, since maritime security is a very broad definition it can be difficult to pinpoint specific issues from which concrete proposals can be derived. The EEPs discussed the issues of marine environment degradation and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing as possible ideas for future activities. Some EEPs also suggested that the topics of discussion could be expanded to include issues affecting South Asia considering that some ARF participants are from that region, although others felt that the current regional coverage was appropriate.

5. Some EEPs highlighted the fact that the EEPs have moved beyond its original mandate as a passive reservoir of expertise and cited the examples of the convening of the annual ARF EEPs meeting as well as the observer mission to Timor-Leste during the 2012 parliamentary elections. The EEPs felt that the time was right to review and revise the TOR of the ARF EEPs to reflect this fact. Furthermore, the EEPs also suggested that the current Register of ARF EEPs should be streamlined in order to highlight the EEPs’ individual expertise and eminence instead of a broad compilation of CVs.

6. In general, the EEPs supported the idea of involving young experts and future leaders to observe the ARF EEPs Meeting. However, the modalities for the participation of the young experts and future leaders need to be further discussed.

7. The EEPs discussed the lack of resources required to implement their ideas and proposals. Some EEPs underlined the fact that since the EEPs were designated by their respective governments, their resources still come from the government and therefore it is crucial to secure support for ideas and proposals from the ARF Track 1. The EEPs noted the suggestion for flag-bearers or champions on specific recommendations or proposals where the EEPs can inform and influence the policymakers in their respective governments in order to obtain greater buy-in. For example, the EEPs could come up with a concept paper for a meeting/workshop/seminar to be championed by interested ARF participants. The EEPs supported this “bottom-up” approach as a way to ensure buy-in from Track 1.

8. On the issue of the ARF’s relevance in the current regional security architecture, after the ADMM-Plus and the EAS were established some thought that this might see the diminishing influence of the ARF considering that the ADMM-Plus has more resources and that the EAS has a higher-level forum. However, interest in the ARF has not appeared to decrease based on the number of activities being conducted in each inter-sessional year. While the EEPs agree that the ARF is here to stay, it was suggested that ASEAN should define the relationship of these different mechanisms more clearly in the framework of ASEAN Centrality. On specific issues, some EEPs observed that the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF) has become the more appropriate venue to discuss maritime-related issues instead of the ARF since it has broader scope.

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