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Proposal to the ARF EEPG for the Creation of a Working Group on the Objectives and Ingredients of a Cooperative Security Order for the Asia-Pacific Region

Promoting peace and security through dialogue and cooperation in the Asia Pacific

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Chen Dongxiao and Paul Evans

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Rationale

Opinions differ on the likelihood or inevitability of a downward spiral in political security relations in the wider Asia Pacific region that could lead to armed conflict or a Cold War-like strategic rivalry. But few doubt that the region faces significant uncertainties and a host of traditional and non-traditional security issues that remain unresolved and menacing.

There is broad consensus on three points. First, the region is increasingly integrated economically through trade, finance, production, and movements of people, money and technology. This has benefited almost every country in the region and been an engine of global growth and shared prosperity. Second, the region is confronting a major power shift in which the capabilities and roles of China, India and other emerging players are increasing rapidly. Third, the region has spawned a variety of mechanisms for maintaining peace and security. These include bilateral alliances and more recently a myriad of multilateral institutions and processes. As valuable as they are, few believe they are now adequate for addressing much less managing specific conflicts or the dynamics of the power shift now in motion, or especially the wide agenda of Non-Traditional Security issues confronting the region.

The problem is not just building a better institutional architecture or addressing crises and points of tension one-by-one. It is coming to a common definition of what kind of security order is appropriate to the economic, social, and political reality of a diverse region at a time of major rebalancing between rising and established states.

We begin from the premise that a security order includes but is larger than the balance of material capabilities and power. It is not just about who is most powerful but about the principles, rules, norms and shared objectives that can provide stability and continued growth and prosperity. As Henry Kissinger recently observed, it is about the nature of just arrangements--goals, limits and methods that can only be cultivated, not imposed.

A variety of ideas or proposals are already in play about the right security order for the region, among them multiplex system, consociationalism, dynamic equilibrium, omni-directional equilibrium, G-2 condominium, Pax Americana, Pax Sinica, Pax Democratica, a concert of powers, a community of shared interests and responsibilities based on a New Security Concept and New Model of Major Power Relations, and a security community. Most of them build upon concepts including common, comprehensive, and cooperative security that have been developing in the region for more than two decades, UN principles, and specific agreements including the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation.

Some of these ideas have been widely circulated but not carefully compared or debated. And no compelling idea or proposal has emerged.

Proposal

The time is right for a focused and collective discussion about what kind of security order is both desirable and feasible. We believe that the EEPG has the best mix of individuals with the experience, informed thinking, credibility, and independence to be a creative venue for inclusive discussion and recommendations.

We are recommending that the EEPG create a working group to examine the rationale for and ingredients of a new security order for the region. Considering that the EEPG is a creature of the ARF, it will require formal ARF approval from senior officials and ministers. There is a precedent for such a working group, the effort led five years ago on Preventive Diplomacy co-chaired by Singapore and the United States.

The precise focus of the working group is to be determined but the possible areas include the following:

- How and in what areas must a new security order go beyond the concepts of cooperative and comprehensive security that have been the sign posts for regional cooperation and multilateral institution building for the past two decades?
- What is the most constructive way to connect the evolving system of bilateral alliances to the emerging system of multilateral and plurilateral institutions?
- In addition to expanding confidence building and transparency measures, what can be done to build empathy and trust? What additional measures for self-restraint, reassurance, and cooperation are needed? Does the ARF road map need to be redrawn?
- What elements of regional norms and international law need to be revisited or developed? For example, is the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation a sufficient basis or does it need revision? Can we build upon or formulate multilateral and bilateral rules of behavior to more effectively manage risks and crises and promote cooperation?
- What should be expected of the United States and China in particular? What kinds of mutual adjustment and partnership are needed?
- What is the role for middle powers and non-state actors including second track and civil society actors?

The working group would be co-chaired by EEPs from Canada, China and Malaysia. It would be open to EEPs interested in participating as well as outside experts selected by the co-chairs.

We are looking for support for the proposal at the 9th meeting of the EEP Group in Helsinki and subsequent approval by the ARF senior officials and ministers in due course. The working group would convene meetings and commission papers beginning in August 2015 upon approval by the ARF and offer a report including a set of recommendations to the EEPG in the first quarter of 2016. If accepted, these would then be conveyed to the ARF official track.

Financial support would be provided by the ARF Fund based on contributions from interested governments. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC is already committed to making an initial contribution through donations to the ARF Fund.