

THE 9TH MEETING OF THE ARF EXPERTS AND EMINENT PERSONS

12-13 March 2015
Helsinki, Finland

Implementing the ARF Vision Statement 2020



 **ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM** 

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

IMPLEMENTING THE ARF VISION STATEMENT 2020

BARRY DESKER

In 2009, the Foreign Ministers of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) adopted the ARF Vision Statement which charted the Vision for the ARF by 2020. In 2010, the Hanoi Plan of Action was adopted to implement this Vision Statement. The ARF Experts and Eminent Persons Group (ARF EEPs) should prepare a paper on implementation of the ARF Vision Statement which could move the process forward. The following note presents some ideas for the consideration of the EEPs and is intended to stimulate a discussion and additional or alternative ideas.

In the ARF, cooperative activities are undertaken under the four pillars of cooperation, namely disaster relief, counter-terrorism and transnational crime, non-proliferation and disarmament, and maritime security. As the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meetings (ADMM) Plus process is also working on disaster relief, counter-terrorism and transnational crime and maritime security while APEC is also engaged in discussions of issues such as counter-terrorism, maritime security, supply chain security, energy and environmental wellbeing which it claims are trade-related, the ARF should coordinate with the ADMM Plus process and APEC to minimise overlaps. There is also a risk of further overlaps as these issues are also being tackled by the East Asian Summit. The ARF EEPs could help by presenting an approach which could provide a distinctive role for the ARF in our implementation paper as well as outlining a programme of action which minimises the risk of overlaps.

The ARF should also develop ideas for an appropriate security order for the Asia-Pacific in the 21st century. [A more detailed discussion of this issue will be undertaken in the ARF EEPs consideration of a paper by Canada and China].

Four proposals on ARF organisational issues:

- (1) As far as confidence and security building and preventive diplomacy are concerned, the ARF needs to transform itself into a problem-solving institution. The ARF should initiate concrete and practical activities and programmes which would strengthen cooperative security in the Asia-Pacific instead of continuing as a forum exchanging views and perspectives. While attempting to develop common understandings and agreed positions

on regional security issues among member countries, the ARF should add substance to the forms of cooperation. Meetings at the Inter-Sessional Group (ISG) level, for instance, should focus on critical themes and particular issues. Thematic discussions will set the agenda for regional security cooperation. This initiative could not be promoted effectively unless conflict resolution mechanisms are developed. The ARF needs to consider various ways to resolve conflicts impacting security and prosperity of the region. Issues like how to implement the enhanced role of the ARF Chair, and how to deploy the Experts / Eminent Persons (EEPs) should be on the table of discussion. Ultimately, the resilience of the ARF will be strengthened if it goes beyond an exchange-of-views forum towards a problem-solving system.

- (2) Whilst the ARF meetings should be held in an ASEAN country, the Co-Chair of the ARF discussions can be a non-ASEAN member or an external ARF member. This initiative will extend one of the existing principles. Meetings of the ISG are being co-chaired by an external member. The effect will be not only to lock in the participation of external powers but to give them a bigger stake in the ARF process as well. Ensuring the continued involvement of external powers, especially the United States and China, is vital to peace and security of the region, even if their leaderships and foreign policies may turn unpredictable as a consequence of domestic politics and electoral campaigns.
- (3) The establishment of an ARF Secretariat is necessary. Any strategy to energise the ARF requires the setting up of a dedicated secretariat. In fact, a first step has already been taken, with the establishment of an ARF Unit within the ASEAN Secretariat to assist the Chairman. The ARF Unit, among others, services ARF meetings, updates the ARF Register of Confidence Building Measures, while serving as a repository of ARF documents. As the ARF embarks on concrete cooperation in Asia Pacific, it is essential to get an autonomous secretariat staffed by officials from its member states that could handle security issues impacting the region.
- (4) Such a Secretariat should be co-located with the APEC Secretariat. Co-location with the APEC Secretariat will encourage an increasingly symbiotic relationship between these two key institutions for cooperative regional security and regional economic integration. As part of the process of committing the external ARF members to the ARF process, the Secretariat can be chaired alternately by an ASEAN and a non-ASEAN member on one-year terms. The precedent established for APEC can be followed in that the incoming Secretary General would serve as Deputy Secretary General in the preceding year. Alternatively, there could be a two year term with the post of Secretary General held by an ASEAN national and the Deputy Secretary General coming from a non- ASEAN member.