

(Non-paper)

Summary:
The research of ‘Improving the ARF-EEPs System’
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*The following does not reflect the official position of the ROK government.

The ARF-EEPs (Experts-Eminent Persons) system is an outcome of the ARF participants’ concerned efforts to create a “knowledge community” on security and political issues in the Asia-Pacific region. A knowledge community refers to a “network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area.” Following this line of logic, the ARF-EEPs system aims at providing ‘non-binding’ professional views or recommendations to the ARF leadership on security and political affairs.

The blueprint for ARF-EEPs emerged at the 7th ARF Senior Officials’ Meeting in May 2000 where the ARF members agreed to proceed with collating nominations of EEPs for the Resister on a voluntary basis for submission. The ARF’s such effort gained significant momentum when the Guidelines for the Operation of the ARF EEPs were adopted at the 11th ARF Ministerial Meeting in 2004. The activities and findings/results that the EEPs produce, the Guidelines say, should be reported in writing to the ARF Chair which will share them with all ARF participants. The ROK Foreign Ministry hosted its first meeting in Jeju, in June 2006, and afterwards, eight rounds of EEPs meeting have been held.

The EEPs system has achieved several goals stated in the Guidelines. First of all, it has offered an array of professional views or recommendations on issues of relevance, notably confidence building, preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution. ARF-EEPs have also proven to be useful in facilitating an exchange of views among themselves as well as building a group of informed observers with access to the Foreign Ministries of the ARF members. The EEPs system has fostered a lively Track 1.5 community that adds another layer of architecture for constructive regional security cooperation. Finally, they have helped shed light on the need for more movement in the area of preventive diplomacy and provide a useful list of steps the ARF should take in this direction.

Nevertheless, several weaknesses and limitations can be identified as in the following:

- Current ARF-EEPs lack literally “eminent” persons who have prestige and political clout, and who gain access to diplomats in high profiles and to national leaders. Accordingly, the recommendations from EEPs have tended not to be well respected. Also it is of note that some ARF participants continue to send serving officials or uninformed and inexperienced EEPs, damaging the integrity and usefulness of the Track 1.5 diplomacy. Along with this, failure to recruit new EEPs has hindered the influx of fresh policy ideas and insights.

- The EEP system has not been quite capable of generating innovative knowledge on major issues such as confidence building, preventive diplomacy, and conflict resolution. Moreover, it has been short of developing new research agenda (e.g., regional arms race, conflicting claims over maritime territorial issues, nuclear proliferation) that can be useful for ARF leadership and members. Efforts to share and diffuse new knowledge on security affairs on the global, regional, and national level have been lacking too. No serious mass media exposure and public outreach have been undertaken.

- Impact of EEPs-generated recommendations on the ARF participants have generally been rather negligible. The ARF leadership is rotated every year and the policy recommendations to the leadership are non-binding. Under this circumstance, national leaders of the ARF tend to pay cursory attention to the recommendations or to simply quash them.

- Another weakness in the current ARF-EEP system is the absence of effective networking among EEPs. As a group which meets only once a year and has no life between meetings, EEPs still lack a forum in which they can discuss major issues in open-ended manner and share the outcomes from the discussions.

- Finally, a growing overlap between ARF-EEPs and similar institutions such as ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM)s, Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has become another source of concern. Since all these organizations are designed as an inter-governmental forum for enhancing regional security cooperation, the problem of role overlap or confusion may arise.

Several ways can be envisaged for enhancing the utility and effectiveness of ARF-EEPs.

- The ARF needs to revamp the current EEPs-selection process. Recruitment of 'eminent' persons with political clout, injection of new breed of experts, phasing-out of incumbent government officials, and term-limits to existing EEPs seem essential steps toward this direction.

- ARF-EEP's capability of undertaking in-depth research on major concerns of ARF such as confidence building, preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution as well as other security and political issues of common concern needs to be further strengthened. Helping EEPs share and diffuse their knowledge globally, regionally, and nationally is another way through which the ARF can improve the current ARF EEP system.

- Designing a mechanism through which the ARF participants will live up to the EEP-generated recommendations should also be considered seriously. Without such mechanism, the recommendations would be of limited impact, eventually undercutting the raison d'etre of ARF-EEPs. A systematic integration of ARF-EEPs into the overall ARF leadership seems logical in this regard.

- Most ideal would be to set up an independent secretariat for ARF-EEPs within the ARF unit. If it is not feasible, however, the ARF should consider building a cyber hub in which they can list their own works, exchange their ideas, share research outcomes, and disseminate them in an open-ended manner. Financial and human resource commitment is crucial to this effort.

- Finally, as a way of avoiding the role overlap with ADMMs, CICA and SCO, the ARF-EEPs system may consider proposing a joint forum with them.

