

ASEAN and the Changing Regional Order: The ARF, ADMM, and ADMM-Plus

Alice D. Ba

Professor of Political Science and International Relations, University of Delaware, United States

Introduction

Amongst the more notable developments in the construction of regional order in Asia has been the extension of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) processes beyond its original Southeast Asian purview, resulting in frameworks and cooperative platforms that are inclusive of not just Southeast Asian states but also larger states in a broader Asia. As prominent pieces of a larger and still evolving regional security architecture, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and, more recently, the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting (ADMM) and ASEAN Defense Ministers Plus (ADMM Plus), along with other frameworks in economic and other issue domains, additionally provide good illustrations of how ASEAN's small to middle powers have attempted to exercise voice and influence over an evolving regional order. As ASEAN passes its half-century mark, however, intensified geopolitical tensions and political challenges also test ASEAN frameworks and ASEAN states in old and new ways. This is to say nothing of the questions that have long followed the organisation and its processes as regards its strategic and instrumental efficacy.

This paper considers the following question: in what ways are the ARF, ADMM, and ADMM Plus both reflections of, and contributors to, Asia's changing regional order and security architecture? As elaborated below, debates and questions about Asia's regional institutions – what they look like; how they should work; what they should prioritise – are themselves manifestations of, even proxies for, larger debates about regional order; not just who should have pride of place, but also what should be its organising principles. Indeed, a focus on regional institutions is especially helpful in shedding light on the complexity and multidimensionality of regional order.

The rest of this paper proceeds as follows. Beginning first with a brief discussion of the geopolitical space from which ASEAN's regional institutions emerged, the paper considers the ARF and ADMM/ADMM Plus frameworks as platforms from which states and especially ASEAN states have negotiated the content and structure of regional order, as well as specific cooperative initiatives. In that the security institutions in question also emerged at distinctly geopolitical moments, they also each offer windows on larger geopolitical changes in train, changing regional expectations, and ASEAN's relationship to East Asia's still evolving regional order.

The ARF and ASEAN Centrality

The ARF, ADMM, and ADMM-Plus frameworks have all emerged in a post-Cold War space created by changing great power policies and realities. The three institutions, however, enter into different geopolitical and institutional moments in the ongoing construction of regional order in Asia. The ARF emerged in the immediate post-Cold War period – a time distinguished by heightened questions about a range of United States (US) commitments in Southeast Asia; a time when China's material capacities and its integration into existing regional security and economic networks were relatively limited; and a time when there existed no track record of regional institutions or security cooperation outside of ASEAN in East Asia. In contrast, the ADMM and ADMM-Plus frameworks were created 12 and 16 years later in a vastly different geopolitical and institutional setting characterised by the growing capacities of China, heightened economic and security interdependence amongst states, and also multiple, overlapping, and sometimes competing institutional frameworks and in which ASEAN is both more influential and more questioned as a regional actor.

As regards the underlying bases for regional order, the ARF may be considered the more significant moment and development. As the first of ASEAN's expanded cooperative frameworks and first official-level, track-one Asia-Pacific security dialogue, the ARF introduced to the East Asian security policy debate alternative cooperative security conceptualisations that would form the basis for a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to security. In particular, cooperative security extends security beyond conventional deterrence to issues of comprehensive and sustainable development in all fields, inclusive of domestic-developmental, external security, and interdependent nontraditional security arenas (Caballero-Anthony, 1995). Premised on principles of inclusivity, cooperative security also prioritises reassurance objectives and consequently gives greatest emphasis to mechanisms of dialogue, consensus, and confidence building over more task-oriented problem solving and more confrontational forms of security management.

Defined thusly, the cooperative security conceptualisations underlying the ARF are what also justifies a broadly inclusive membership. Just as important, cooperative security's inclusivity principle provides the basis for alternative organising hierarchies – in this specific case, a more influential, even leading, role for ASEAN's group of smaller powers. In other words, just as security conceptualisations defined as balance of power privileges the most conventionally capable (namely, the larger powers), cooperative security based on principles of inclusivity privileges those best able to facilitate a coming together of different states – or what some call 'convening power' (Stubbs, 2014). The ARF offered an early institutional expression of what is now commonly referred to as 'ASEAN centrality'.

The ARF's cooperative security approach also offered a particular contrast to the more exclusive, oppositional approaches associated especially with US military alliances, which until the early 1990s offered the only set of arrangements responding to the broader purpose of 'regional security'. Given the inclusion of the US, the ARF by no means negated or replaced more conventional major power security contributions; but the ARF did represent an important first effort to diversify security options beyond the US, whose security role was itself viewed as insufficiently reliable and often deeply contentious.¹ More significantly, cooperative security contrasts with US alliance strategies in its most basic premise, which is that security is best gained not by working against others, but rather working **with** them. In this vein, ASEAN states' insistence on Chinese participation may be considered more significant than US participation, especially given emergent concerns about a rising China in post-Cold War East Asia. The concern for mutual security also offers additional justification for ASEAN's consensus-driven approach to regional security, though consensus mechanisms in the ARF also serve the additional purpose of institutionalising a regard for the interests of ASEAN's smaller states vis-à-vis larger ones.²

Thus, the inclusivity of the ARF – its distinctively omni-inclusive, multilateral engagement of all larger powers – and its justifying rationale for both the principles and mechanisms of ASEAN centrality remain its most stand-out features. But it is also these very features that today make the ARF the most contested of ASEAN's institutions. In particular, inclusion has made for a large and diverse set of actors and interests (now 27 members in all) that disagree about both the 'whats' and the 'hows' of regional security. Meanwhile, ASEAN centrality has been challenged by the constraints of consensus, as well as collective ASEAN's limited ability to move cooperation forward.

¹ See discussions in Capie (2004) and Bates et al. (2009).

² See, for example, discussions in Khong and Nesadurai (2007) and Wesley (2003).

As conceived, the ARF's institutionalisation of security cooperation was supposed to move through three stages – confidence building, preventive diplomacy, and elaboration of approaches to conflict. However, political, geopolitical, and practical-functional challenges, as well as intra-ASEAN hurdles, have stymied that progression since its start. Indeed, a common complaint is that the ARF seems permanently stuck between the ARF's identified first and second stages of security cooperation. Further, differences mean that the region's most contentious and potentially destabilising disputes may not be satisfactorily addressed within the forum. The South China Sea disputes and North Korea may be considered particular examples.

ASEAN's influence in the ARF has also meant that much of the critique about the ARF has come to focus on ASEAN itself – the appropriateness of its institutional practices, especially its non-binding, consensus-driven, non-confrontational approach to conflict management, and ASEAN's particular influence over the ARF's pace and agenda. That ASEAN's role should be contested is, by one argument, no surprise given the radicalness of ASEAN's claim to **equal** and even **central** standing vis-à-vis much larger powers in the articulation of strategic and political priorities, in the design of institutional frameworks, in setting the parameters of cooperation, and in being gatekeepers to who gets to play the regional game. Put another way, the ARF upsets the presumption that regional orders are created and best managed by great powers, as well as the assumption that great powers should have pride of place. This said, whatever the cause, the reality is that the ARF has been stymied by very real difficulties in moving states to a more mutually and commonly satisfactory plane of cooperation. ASEAN's own internal differences about both security priorities and approaches in the ARF additionally undermines ASEAN's claim to play a leading role, and gives extra credence to the critiques.

While the combined diversity and size of the ARF's membership likely would have challenged any institution of any form in moving states to a more concrete stage of security cooperation, the ARF's limitations in responding to pressing security challenges (both traditional and nontraditional) has also politicised ASEAN's role and processes in ways that are additionally counterproductive.³ In the case of the ARF, much of this politicisation came to be expressed in debates over 'preventive diplomacy', which was supposed to form the second stage of ARF cooperation. Such politicisation complicates the ability of some to recognise those instances in which the ARF has provided opportunities to deescalate crises (Emmers and Tan, 2011) as well as other concrete measures taken in response to terrorism, maritime security, and disaster relief.⁴

³ See, Ba (2011).

⁴ See, Haacke (2009) and Haacke and Morada (2011).

Moreover, the fact that ‘significant instances’ of preventive diplomacy have taken place in other forums similarly governed by ASEAN-style institutional practices (Emmers and Tan, 2011) suggests that the politicisation of the process in the ARF may also overly focus the critiques on ASEAN and its modes of security management. As discussed below, this is not to say that ASEAN and ASEAN-styled institutionalism do not face some real practical challenges. It is only to say that politicisation has complicated the ability of many to be more analytical about where the problems of cooperation lie in the ARF, as well as the ability to be more precise in identifying the kinds of problems that may be more or less suited for ASEAN-styled institutionalism.

From the ARF to the ADMM and ADMM-Plus

Practically, the challenges of security cooperation under the ARF framework has left a range of conventional and nontraditional security challenges insufficiently addressed. Growing dissatisfaction with the ARF process has led frustrated states like the US, Japan, and Australia to pursue and investigate alternative frameworks and policy options. For these states, the increased capacity and initiative displayed by China on both economic and maritime fronts with the turn of the 21st century only adds to the incentives to push alternative proposals that are both more exclusive in their participation and more major power-centric in their preoccupations.

The ADMM and ADMM-Plus frameworks, which respectively held their first meetings in 2006 and 2010, offer responses to some of the political and functional deficiencies above. Backed especially by Indonesia, which has pushed for greater intra-ASEAN security collaboration in areas like peacekeeping in the interest of regional autonomy, the ADMM is explicitly tied to ASEAN’s pursuit of an ASEAN Political–Security Community. The ADMM-Plus, in particular, may also be viewed as reflective of heightened questions about the insufficiency of ASEAN and the ARF in responding to both the challenges of major power uncertainty and pressing nontraditional security challenges.

The ADMM and ADMM-Plus display important shifts in focus and approach that are reflective of the particular geopolitical and institutional moments from which they emerged. For example, both the ADMM and ADMM-Plus appear to mark a more focused, task-oriented approach to security cooperation beyond confidence building, albeit with a focus on nontraditional security challenges. In the ADMM, defence ministers have pursued cooperation in defence industry and logistics cooperation, military medicine, military readiness, humanitarian and disaster relief (HADR), as well as the development of intra-ASEAN crisis emergency communications links, a peacekeeping network, and measures to reduce tensions in the South China Sea.

The more focused cooperative agenda was also evidenced in the five priority areas identified by the ADMM-Plus at its start – maritime security, counter-terrorism, humanitarian assistance and disaster management, peacekeeping operations, and military medicine.

HADR has been a particular area of growing cooperation in both the ADMM and ADMM-Plus. Under the ADMM, states have also conducted scenario-based tabletop exercises, and a heli-evacuation simulation, and at least two ASEAN Militaries HADR exercises (AHX) involving over 100 personnel from ASEAN militaries. A number of ASEAN-initiated exercises have also taken place under the ADMM-Plus, including a 2013 ADMM-Plus HADR/Military Medicine Exercise and a 2016 ADMM-Plus Maritime and a Counter-Terrorism Exercise, the latter of which was the largest ADMM-Plus exercise to date. Both exercises involved over 3,000 personnel, participation by military and other specialised teams, and considerable assets, including, ships and aircraft, from the 18 states.⁵ In 2013 and 2014, states also participated in an ADMM-Plus Maritime Security Field Training Exercise and Table-Top Exercises under the ADMM-Plus Experts' Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations and Logistics Support frameworks.

Additionally indicative of the more practical/operational, as opposed to diplomatic-relational, approach to security cooperation has been the participation of defence ministers and defence officials, not foreign ministers. While the involvement of defence officials did not begin with the ADMM and ADMM-Plus (see discussion below), these two frameworks did institutionalise their involvement in ways that go beyond their informal and more ad hoc involvement in the ARF. In contrast to the ARF, defence ministers are able to engage each other directly rather than being subordinated to the agendas set by the foreign ministries. The involvement of defence officials, which is not isolated to the ADMM frameworks, may also be viewed as part of a larger trend or progression in the development of a new track of defence diplomacy in ASEAN and between ASEAN and external partners. The ADMM also provides the umbrella framework for other regular military-to-military meetings between ASEAN defence chiefs, heads of the different military branches, and heads of intelligence. The ADMM-Plus' turn to Expert Groups, as opposed to the more informal and looser Inter-Sessional Support Groups of the ARF, can also be viewed as similarly indicative of the heightened attention to the more operational aspects of cooperation beyond diplomatic dialogue.

⁵ See, Singapore Ministry of Defence, 'Fact Sheet: 10 Years of ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting: Significance and Milestones'. (https://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/nr/2016/may/24may16_nr/24may16_fs.html), 24 May 2016.

Lastly, the ADMM-Plus's much smaller membership (18 versus the ARF's 27) seems additionally indicative of a shift towards a more 'nimble'⁶ and focused approach to security cooperation in the vein that many of ASEAN's critics have argued for. Taken together, these trends, to quote See Seng Tan, make the ADMM and ADMM-Plus frameworks more 'work shop' than 'talk shop',⁷ especially when compared with the ARF.

As suggested, the shifts above respond to some growing practical and political pressures on ASEAN. At the same time, other practical and institutional developments have also helped to consolidate the general direction of changes found in the ADMM and ADMM-Plus. Practically, the period in which both ADMM frameworks emerged was punctuated by a number of high-profile nontraditional security challenges, including the 2002 and 2003 terrorist attacks in Indonesia, the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the 2013 Super Typhoon Haiyan, other natural disasters, and an uptick in piracy attacks in the early 2000s in the area of the Malacca Strait. Maritime tensions associated with China's expanded activity in the South China Sea have also heightened interest in security frameworks that might better respond to the region's security challenges. Institutionally, the emergence of frameworks that mirrored the ADMM-Plus in its membership and its more focused cooperative agenda also had mutually reinforcing effects. Most notably, in 2010, the same year of the ADMM-Plus' first meeting, Washington joined the East Asia Summit framework as part of its heightened strategic and institutional engagement of Southeast Asia (i.e. the 'pivot/rebalance to Asia' policies under former US President Obama). With US (and Russian) participation, EAS membership mirrored the membership of the ADMM-Plus; it also made the EAS much more of a strategic forum. The 2010 creation of the ASEAN Maritime Forum was followed 2 years later by the creation of an Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF), which similarly shared the same, more limited ASEAN Plus Eight membership. By one argument, the ASEAN Plus Eight trend found in the ADMM-Plus offers a potential Goldilocks formula – small enough that member differences might be more contained, but also big enough to make up for ASEAN's logistical and material deficiencies.

In short, three related shifts in regional security cooperation have been associated with the ADMM and ADMM-Plus. The first is a 'functional turn' (Ba, 2014) – that is, security cooperation's expanded attention beyond diplomatic dialogue and towards more practical, task-oriented frameworks, agendas, and exercises. The second is a shift away from what might be characterised as the extreme inclusiveness of the ARF to a smaller, more focused membership. And finally, third, the ADMM and ADMM-Plus illustrate the

⁶ See Additional Protocol to the Concept Papers on the Establishment of an ADMM and the ADMM-Plus, adopted at the 8th ADMM, Nay Pyi Taw, 20 May 2014.

⁷ See Tan (2011).

expanded and more regularised direct involvement of technicians (e.g. defence ministers and technical experts, as opposed to diplomats) in security cooperation frameworks.

To the extent that these shifts offer contrasts to the ARF, it may be tempting to view recent security cooperative frameworks and the ADMM-Plus, in particular, in tension with ASEAN-styled institutionalism. Countering that conclusion, however, are the ADMM-Plus's ASEAN-centric modalities, as well as both ADMM frameworks' continued commitment to confidence-building processes. Also, the shifts associated with the ADMM and ADMM-Plus likely would not have been possible without the ARF. It was, for example, the ARF that offered important initial opportunities for defence ministers to take part in a regional security framework as early as 1996 – albeit on a voluntary and ad hoc basis – and from there, that high-level defence officials moved to regularise their participation under, first, the ARF Defense Officials' Dialogue, then, the ARF Security Policy Conference (ASPC), and now, the ADMM and ADMM-Plus. Similarly, in the area of HADR, which has been such a focus of the ADMM and ADMM-Plus frameworks, the ARF provided an important opportunity for early cooperation. For example, in 2009 – 2 years before the first AHX and 4 years before the first ADMM-Plus HADR/Military Medicine Exercise – the initiation of the biennial ASEAN Regional Forum Disaster Relief Exercise (ARF DiREx) offered civilian and military actors from 27 countries a regularised opportunity to synergise and synchronise civil-military relief efforts.

This said and whatever the cause, the ARF's geopolitical and practical limits, including the politicisation of ARF processes/mechanisms, remain not just relevant to the debate but also a complication in the effective management of regional security. For those dissatisfied with the ARF process, the question is whether the ARF's moment has passed and whether it enjoys sufficient satisfaction amongst its most important extra-regional stakeholders to sustain its relevance. The challenge is intensified by the diversity of interests that constitute ASEAN's extra-regional audience. As more capable actors, extra-regional partners also have greater options beyond ASEAN.

Meanwhile, the ADMM-Plus is also not without its challenges or concerns. In addition to the divergent interests of ASEAN's extra-regional audience, those within ASEAN also harbour great concern that ASEAN's role and centrality might be more easily eclipsed or weakened in frameworks like the ADMM-Plus where the emphasis on military and logistical capacity, as well as the smaller size of the forum, gives larger states greater significance. Efforts to substantiate ASEAN centrality through the ADMM-Plus' design and mandate offer some ways to respond to that concern. This includes some design features also characteristic of the ARF – for example, as in the ARF, the ADMM-Plus 'modalities' remain ASEAN-centric in affirmation of ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation and consensus principles; both ADMM processes are similarly

supported by an ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting, as well as an ASEAN Chair (the ARF has co-chairs; the ADMM-Plus a single ASEAN chair).

The ARF and its subsequent politics, however, also means that ASEAN has more of a vested interest in ASEAN centrality than it did in 1994, when the ARF was first created. This can be seen, for example, in ASEAN's 2007 Charter, which explicitly prioritised the need for ASEAN to 'maintain the centrality and proactive role of ASEAN as the primary driving force in its relations and cooperation with its external partners'.⁸ It can also be seen in ASEAN's two-pronged approach to the ADMM-Plus where priority is assigned to the acceleration of ASEAN integration while intensifying ASEAN's external relations. For example, the ADMM-Plus mandate and its principles for membership make even more explicit the priority given to ASEAN. Thus, to be an ADMM-Plus member, it is not enough to be an ASEAN dialogue partner or observer as in the ARF; a state must also have already significant interactions with ASEAN defence establishments, as well as a demonstrated capacity and will to assist ASEAN states in national and regional capacity building in the realms of defence and security.⁹

This two-pronged approach is given additional illustration by the relative frequency of ADMM to ADMM-Plus meetings (the ADMM meets annually; the ADMM-Plus initially met only every three years and now since 2013, every two). Similarly, within the new defence diplomacy track, intra-ASEAN defence and security interactions, compared with other defence exchanges, have been the most intense (Gindarsah, 2016: 16). Yet another illustration of ASEAN's two-pronged approach can be found in the fact that ASEAN states have conducted a number of exercises/initiatives as the ADMM first, before conducting the same exercises under the ADMM-Plus, thus allowing ASEAN states to work together before joining the wider group in cooperation.

Looking Ahead

ASEAN's contributions through the ARF and ADMM/ADMM-Plus frameworks can be viewed in more expansive and more modest terms. Viewed expansively, ASEAN security institutions have helped normalise the ideal of regional security cooperation – inclusive of both rising and status quo powers, and both small and large powers – as a needed addition to more exclusive, major power-centric options, even if states may still disagree about what constitutes the most appropriate regional

⁸ See Charter of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 20 November 2007.

⁹ See ADMM-Plus Concept Paper, 14 November 2007; Concept Paper on ADMM-Plus: Configuration and Composition 2010; and Concept Paper on ADMM-Plus: Modalities and Procedures 2010.

framework. Viewed more modestly, ASEAN's security frameworks offer states important opportunities to experiment and familiarise themselves with different kinds of cooperation, thus expanding the repertoire of available resources and policy options available to them. In both these ways, the Asian security architecture is, as a result, today more multi-layered than it was 20–25 years ago. The value of ASEAN's frameworks to regional security lies not just in their addition of an institutional dimension to regional order – the 'missing link in regional security in Asia' (Fuchs and Harding, 2016) – but also in its potential to regionalise otherwise bilateral, exclusive security practices under common regional frameworks.

More contentiously, ASEAN principles of inclusive and cooperative security expand questions of regional order beyond 'balance of power' and 'regional stability'. In offering alternative bases on which cooperative relations and communities of interest are formed, they have provided the justification for ASEAN centrality, as well as upset the usual hierarchy between larger and smaller powers. However, for the reasons already highlighted, the ability of ASEAN states to maintain their position of ASEAN centrality – in not just name but also practical, political, and geopolitical relevance – remains an outstanding question as a result of interacting geopolitical, practical-security, and also intra-ASEAN hurdles and challenges. Consequently, while the official institutional architecture continues to display clear features indicative of ASEAN's influence over matters of institutional design, membership, and security content, ASEAN frameworks are also persistently challenged by alternative cooperative proposals, informal work-arounds, the threat of inattention by key participants, and major power conflict.

The addition of the ADMM and ADMM-Plus frameworks – especially, their institutionalisation of a defence ministers track involving more technical-operational cooperation between a more focused group of states – partly responds to understood challenges and the frustrations of particular extra-regional partners like the US, Australia, and Japan, as well as ASEAN states seeking a more immediately impactful ASEAN response to security challenges. However, today's extra-regional challenge is also simultaneously altered and intensified by geopolitical changes. In contrast to the more permissive conditions of great power uncertainty that defined the early 1990s when the ARF first emerged, today's context is defined by heightened great power competition, of which the intensification of maritime tensions between the US and China since 2009 has been its most prominent manifestation. Moreover, as many note, the nontraditional security focus of ADMM/ADMM-Plus frameworks limit their ability to respond to what are essentially conventional security challenges. In fact, the contentiousness of conventional security issues is partly responsible for the nontraditional security focus of ADMM frameworks. Additional constraints are imposed by ASEAN states' general commitment to non-confrontational and non-interventionist approaches to the region's

security challenges. Consequently, even on questions of nontraditional security, ASEAN's limited to non-existent response to some recent humanitarian disasters point to questions about ASEAN's willingness to transcend longstanding sovereignty norms in the interest of operational readiness and responsiveness.

The South China Sea, in particular, has come to embody the complex set of constraints and challenges faced by ASEAN and its claims to ASEAN centrality in the management of regional security. Not only has the South China Sea underscored the limits of ASEAN's influence vis-à-vis individual great powers and in moderating the tensions between them, but the South China Sea disputes have also greatly taxed both intra-ASEAN unity and its reputation – both important foundations for ASEAN's convening power and claims to institutional centrality. Similarly, the 2015 ADMM-Plus meeting, which failed to issue a joint declaration, demonstrated ASEAN's limitations in containing the damage caused by major power differences despite intra-ASEAN unanimity as to how to proceed.

Thus, it is important to be clear-eyed about what ASEAN can and cannot do in response to outstanding regional security challenges. For example, resolution of major power conflicts is beyond the capacities of ASEAN frameworks. In this vein, the contentiousness of conventional security challenges and major power questions also justifies the continued focus placed on both nontraditional security and capacity building in ASEAN. Also, nontraditional security challenges remain amongst the more important concerns in Southeast Asia. Efforts at cooperation and capacity building in this realm can also spill over into more conventional realms. This includes questions of logistical maneuverability, as well as military-to-military, interagency, and civil-military cooperation and communication. Meanwhile, capacity building offers a way to direct major power engagement and competitive inclinations towards ASEAN priorities – though this should be done with thought and care. For example, more might still be done to harmonise both national capacity building efforts of individual states and the identified ASEAN priorities and initiatives pursued under the different security frameworks (e.g. ARF, ADMM, ADMM-Plus). Such efforts would serve both the practical interest in security management, including improved ASEAN responsiveness, and ASEAN's political/geopolitical interest in ASEAN centrality.

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