

Furthering Community Building: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES FOR THE ADMM-PLUS *

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The ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting (ADMM)-Plus serves as a venue for the defense ministers of ASEAN to interact with the defense ministers of ASEAN's eight dialogue partners (Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, Russia, South Korea and the US), thereby serving as a mechanism for security dialogue among the ministers. Defense ministers exchange views on regional and international defense and security issues. Beyond being a dialogue mechanism, the ADMM-Plus has become a platform for promoting practical cooperation among the defense ministries involved, particularly with the establishment of several Experts Working Groups (EWGs) on issues of common non-traditional security concerns. Deepening cooperation among the current members has also become a key thrust of the ADMM-Plus. But alongside these prospects for the ADMM-Plus, several challenges are worth noting. These include the possibility of overlap between the ADMM-Plus and a mechanism established earlier, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the ability of the ADMM-Plus to manage strategic competition among regional powers (i.e., US and China) and the feasibility of venturing into cooperation in the domain of traditional security issues. This article primarily delves into the concept, purpose and dynamics of the ADMM-Plus and discusses the author's views on the prospects and challenges of the latest ASEAN-led mechanism in the region.

Introduction

The Asia-Pacific has always been described as full of dynamism, perhaps borne out of the diversity of states in the region. Political set-ups vary. Levels of economic development differ. Military capabilities are asymmetric. And the socio-economic composition of societies is heterogeneous. It is in the Asia-Pacific where recognized major powers, rising powers and developing countries either find themselves located or induced to focus their attention.

* The views contained in this essay are strictly the author's personal opinion and do not reflect the official position of the Department of National Defense.

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Not only are states comprising the region diverse, the security challenges that abound in the Asia-Pacific are varied as well. Present are the range of so-called traditional issues such as territorial and maritime disputes, nuclear proliferation and non-traditional security concerns to include maritime security, natural disasters, transnational crimes, cyber security, and piracy to name just a few.

Amidst such diversity whether in terms of political systems, economic development, military capabilities and socio-cultural make-up or in regard to security challenges in the Asia-Pacific, one thing seems common. There is this web of numerous and interlocking regional institutions mostly centered on the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Interestingly, whether one talks of major power relations or addressing security challenges, everything seems to converge on ASEAN. Not only are the regional security concerns attempted to be addressed through ASEAN, major regional powers whether the established ones or the emerging players find themselves in ASEAN-led institutions.

The latest of the myriad of ASEAN-led institutions is the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting (ADMM)-Plus, the inaugural meeting of which was held in 2010, four years after its core, the ADMM was first convened in 2006. Indeed, it could rightfully be argued that if there are two words to describe the Asia-Pacific, they would be “diversity” and “ASEAN-centeredness” (although ASEAN would prefer to call it ASEAN Centrality). Such diversity and ASEAN-centeredness underpin the dynamism in the region.

The ADMM-Plus¹

In the community building efforts of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the defense track has been recognized as important so much so that a meeting of ASEAN’s defense ministers was seen as valuable and therefore needed to be institutionalized. Indeed, in the building of a political-security community, which is one of the three pillars in the envisioned ASEAN Community, cooperation among the defense ministries of the ASEAN states is necessary and a platform where the heads of these ministries could come together is useful. After

¹ Some of the text regarding the ADMM-Plus, specifically those with data prior to May 2011, were culled from Raymund Jose Quilop, “The ADMM Plus: Yet Another Layer in the Region’s Dense Security Architecture? - A Perspective from the Philippines” (Paper presented at the Asia-Pacific Roundtable organized by the Institute for Strategic and International Studies-Malaysia and held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 30 May-1 June 2011).

all, policy guidance emanate from the ministers. This is the premise behind the establishment of the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting (ADMM), with its first gathering taking place in 2006.

And it is worthy to note that the ADMM took the fastest route in expansion. Within a span of merely a little bit of more than 4 years and with just 4 meetings, the ADMM has expanded to include 8 of ASEAN's dialogue partners into what is now known as the ADMM-Plus. The positive thing about this fast pace of expansion is that the ASEAN defense ministers now has a mechanism for engaging their fellow defense ministers from ASEAN's dialogue partners. However, there are apprehensions that the deepening of cooperation among ASEAN's defense ministers themselves may have been relegated in the background as the broadening of ADMM's membership became the focus.

This may not necessarily be case. For one, the ADMM has had a three-year (2008-2010) work program approved in 2007. Among the projects undertaken which are meant to advance defense cooperation in ASEAN include (1) the use of military assets in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief and (2) cooperation on non-traditional security between ASEAN's defense establishments and civil society organizations.

And during the 5th meeting of the ADMM held in Indonesia in May 2011, there was emphasis on further strengthening cooperation among ASEAN's defense ministries as another 3-year (2011-2013) work program was adopted along with two other projects namely (1) the establishment of ASEAN Peacekeeping Centers Network and (2) ASEAN Defense Industry Collaboration (ADIC).

And while only the concept paper on increasing the frequency of ADMM-Plus meetings resulted from the 6th ADMM in Cambodia in 2012, the 7th ADMM held in Brunei in May 2013 had the ministers adopting two more projects meant to advance ADMM cooperation: (1) an ASEAN defense interaction program and a framework for establishing logistics support.

The real challenge for the ADMM in relation to the ADMM-Plus is how to ensure that the ADMM, being the core of the ADMM-Plus, is able to maintain and promote ASEAN centrality. Currently, ASEAN centrality gets upheld more in terms of the process whereby the ADMM drives the ADMM-Plus. Agenda, concept papers and proposals, joint declarations and other issues such as admission of new members in the ADMM-Plus are first vetted, discussed and decided among the ASEAN countries at the ADMM track before these are presented and consequently examined with the Plus countries in the meetings of the ADSOM-Plus working group,

ADSOM-Plus and the ADMM-Plus itself. But beyond such procedural upholding of ASEAN centrality, the ADMM must ensure that it remains to be a driving force of the ADMM-Plus in substance.

Moving back to the ADMM-Plus, the idea of opening the ADMM process to the defense ministries of ASEAN's dialogue partners was immediately suggested at the inaugural ADMM in Malaysia in 2006. And so, the process of conceptualizing how the defense ministries of ASEAN's dialogue partners could come into the picture commenced.

A year later, the ADMM convening for the second time in Singapore in November 2007 declared to "deepen interactions and cooperation with ASEAN's friends and dialogue partners through the establishment of among others, the ADMM-Plus..."² Along side with this declaration was the adoption of the Concept Paper on the ADMM-Plus. In the said concept paper, the ministers noted that "cooperation between countries, both within ASEAN and with countries in the larger Asia-Pacific, is required to address ... challenges for the benefit of ASEAN countries" and acknowledged that "ASEAN countries are also keen to engage ASEAN in the area of defense and security".³

In the said concept paper, it is emphasized that the "purpose is to bring expertise, perspectives and resources from extra-regional countries to bear on shared security challenges".⁴ This would later on be further emphasized in the composition and configuration paper where it is explicitly stated that the 3rd criterion for membership in the ADMM-Plus is the "ability to work with the ADMM to build capacity so as to enhance regional security in a substantive manner."⁵ The third criterion for membership explicitly states that "the ADMM-Plus country must be able to bring expertise, perspectives and resources to bear on shared security challenges."⁶

Barely over a year from that meeting (1 year and 3 months to be exact), the Principles for Membership to the ADMM-Plus paper was approved by the ministers in the 3rd ADMM held in Thailand in February 2009. In this paper, the ASEAN defense ministers reiterated the principles for membership in the ADMM-Plus

² See Joint Declaration of the ASEAN Defense Ministers on Enhancing Regional Peace and Stability, Singapore, November 2007.

³ See ADMM Defense Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus): Concept Paper, paragraph 3.

⁴ See ADMM Defense Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus): Concept Paper, paragraph 3.

⁵ See The ASEAN Defense Minister's Meeting Plus: Configuration and Composition, paragraph 6.c.

⁶ See The ASEAN Defense Minister's Meeting Plus: Configuration and Composition, paragraph 6.c.

namely: (1) full dialogue partner status, (2) significant interactions and relations with ASEAN defense establishments, and (3) ability to work with the ADMM in building capacity.⁷

And again after just barely a year, two papers: one on the configuration and composition of the ADMM-Plus and another one on modalities and procedures of the ADMM-Plus were approved during the 4th ADMM held in Vietnam in May 2010.

In the configuration and composition paper, the ministers noted that among the various possible configurations (i.e. ADMM Plus 1, ADMM Plus 3 and ADMM Plus X), the ADMM Plus X would be the most effective and efficient. The Plus 1 set-up would result in numerous meetings which could lead to inefficiency while the Plus 3 option would be specific only to a particular sub-region in East Asia as it was in reference to the ASEAN Plus Three composed of ASEAN and China, Japan and South Korea. The ministers also came to a decision that there are 8 countries that best meet the criteria of being the Plus countries in the ADMM-Plus at that point in time. These are Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, Russia, South Korea and the US.

In the modalities and procedures paper, the ministers spelled out that the ADMM-Plus shall meet every three years with the Chairman of the ADMM also being the Chair of the ADMM-Plus. Like the ADMM, all activities of the ADMM-Plus would be reported to the ASEAN Summit through the ASEAN Politico-Security Council. In the intervening years, the ADMM-Plus working group headed by the ADSOM Chair shall meet and Experts Working Groups may be established to facilitate cooperative activities among defense and military establishments of the ADMM-Plus countries.

It must be clarified that in this paper, it was stated that it is the ADSOM Chair who will head the ADSOM-Plus working group. This was premised on the idea that with the additional 8 working group leaders from the major and bigger powers of the Asia-Pacific, a higher level official in the person of the ADSOM Chair would have to chair the ADSOM-Plus working group, which would have been otherwise chaired by the ADSOM-Plus working group leader.

This set-up, however, would be changed in the attachment paper to the modalities and procedures paper which was approved in the ADMM Retreat held on 11 October 2010 prior to the ADMM-Plus meeting the following day (12 October 2010). In that attachment paper, it was clarified that the ADSOM-Plus working group shall be chaired by the ADSOM Working Group chair and the ADSOM-Plus shall

⁷ See ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus: Principles for Membership, paragraph 6.

be chaired by the ADSOM Chair. This was meant to ensure that the ADMM-Plus reflected the support structures of the ADMM namely the ADSOM and the ADSOM working group.

With the concept of bringing in ASEAN's dialogue partners' defense ministers being approved as early as 2007 and together with principles for membership, configuration and composition as well as modalities and procedures of the ADMM-Plus being available, the ADMM-Plus was launched and its first meeting was held in Vietnam in October 2010. Amazingly indeed, within merely 4 years, the ADMM has expanded to an ADMM-Plus.

In the first ADMM-Plus Joint Declaration, the 18 defense ministers agreed to establish Experts Working Groups (EWGs) on five areas of common concern: maritime security, humanitarian assistance/disaster response, peacekeeping operations, military medicine and counter-terrorism. Chaired by an ASEAN and a non-ASEAN country, the EWGs were meant to ensure that practical cooperation would be pursued and undertaken.

On a side note, the Plus countries initially had the perception that the inaugural ADMM-Plus meeting would actually decide which country would be chairing which EWG. This, however, was not the case. The 1st ADMM-Plus merely had an initial indication which country would want to chair an EWG. The following countries volunteered to co-chair the following working groups: Malaysia and Australia for maritime security, Vietnam and China for HA/DR, Philippines and New Zealand for peacekeeping operations, Singapore and Japan for military medicine, and Indonesia and the US for counter-terrorism.

The ministers in that inaugural ADMM-Plus meeting gave explicit instructions for the ADSOM-Plus to establish the EWGs. Work about this immediately commenced with an initial meeting of the ADSOM-Plus working group for this purpose being convened by Vietnam in December 2010 before the start of Indonesia's chairmanship the following year. In that meeting, it became clear and definite that the countries which initially volunteered to chair the various EWGs would indeed be co-chairing the working groups.

This was followed by a meeting of the ADSOM-Plus working group in Surabaya, Indonesia in February 2011 where the concept paper on the establishment of the EWGs was refined and finalized along with a presentation and discussion of their respective work plans. These were then finalized in the ADSOM-Plus working group meeting held in Yogyakarta, Indonesia in April 2011 and are now annexes to the concept paper on the ADMM-Plus Expert Working Groups.

When the ADSOM-Plus met in Yogyakarta, Indonesia in April 2011, the five experts working groups were formally established. The Concept Paper on the Establishment of the EWGs provides that the co-chairs will serve for a minimum of two years and a maximum of three years.⁸ The 5th ADMM held in Jakarta, Indonesia in May 2011 acknowledged the establishments of the working groups.

Then in the ADMM in Brunei in May 2013, the ASEAN defense ministers adopted a Concept Paper on the Transition of the ADMM-Plus Experts' Working Group Co-Chairmanship which provides the modalities for identifying and having new co-chairs for each of the EWGs. In anticipation of the end of the watch of the current co-chairs in early 2014 on the assumption that all the current co-chairs serve for 3 years (2011-2014), a new set of co-chairs had to be determined when the ADMM-Plus met in August 2013. Members with none or fewest co-chairmanships are given priority thereby ensuring that all members eventually get the opportunity to co-chair a working group.

The following countries have volunteered to co-chair the following current working groups: Brunei and New Zealand for maritime security, Laos and Japan for HA/DR, Cambodia and South Korea for peacekeeping operations, Thailand and Russia for military medicine, and Singapore and Australia for counter-terrorism. A new and the sixth working group (on humanitarian mine action), the establishment of which was likewise approved in the 2013 ADMM in Brunei, will be co-chaired by Vietnam and India.

Meanwhile, the ADMM-Plus would be meeting more frequently after the Brunei meeting in August 2013. Originally, the ADMM-Plus was to meet only once every three years.⁹ But in the ADMM Retreat in 2011 in Indonesia, the ASEAN ministers took note of the possibility of increasing the frequency of the ADMM-Plus meetings from once every three years to once every two years. It was argued that this would enable the ADMM-Plus to more frequently take stock and examine the progress of cooperation among the 18 countries and would provide the ministers with more opportunity to exchange views on issues of common concern.

The ADSOM working group and the ADSOM subsequently worked on this matter and in the ADMM meeting in May 2012 in Cambodia, the Concept Paper on the Review of Frequency of ADMM-Plus Meetings was adopted. Hence, after the 2nd ADMM-Plus in Brunei in August 2013, the ADMM-Plus would then be convening

⁸ See ADMM Defense Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus): Establishing an Experts Working Group – Concept Paper, paragraph 11.

⁹ See ADMM Defense Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus): Modalities and Procedures, paragraph 5.

once every two years, with the 3rd ADMM-Plus slated to be held in Malaysia in 2015.

Prospects for the ADMM-Plus

While the ADMM-Plus is indeed the newest addition to the numerous multilateral regional bodies in the region, value is found in the fact that it brings together the defense ministers of 18 Asia-Pacific countries (the ASEAN defense ministers and 8 dialogue partners namely Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, Russia, South Korea, the US). This enables the 18 defense ministers not only to interact with each other but more importantly to exchange views on regional security issues and developments.

There may be perceptions from the outside that security issues that are sensitive are not discussed at the ADMM-Plus considering that ASEAN, known for putting sensitive issues under the rug is the driving force behind the ADMM-Plus, with observers pointing out the sensitive issues to include the West Philippine Sea/South China Sea issue was not tabled as an agenda of the 1st ADMM-Plus.¹⁰ Contrary to such perceptions, the ministers did discuss security issues, including the sensitive ones such as the West Philippine Sea/South China Sea, under the agenda item “Exchange of Views on Regional and International Defense and Security Issues.”

Secondly and the greater prospect for the ADMM-Plus is in regard to promoting practical cooperation, something which has been clearly enunciated both during the discussions at the levels of the ADSOM working group and ADSOM prior to the convening of the ADMM-Plus. In fact, the promotion of practical cooperation is specified as one of the agenda items of the ADMM-Plus. The modalities and procedures paper for the ADMM-Plus which was approved by the ADMM in its May 2010 meeting explicitly states: “... the ADMM shall determine the areas and levels of interaction with defense establishments of extra-regional countries, with a particular focus on practical cooperation”.¹¹

The idea behind the establishment of experts working groups is exactly to promote practical cooperation and to ensure that the momentum for such gets sustained. And this is also exactly the reason why each of the EWGs had to submit

¹⁰ This point was raised during the Session on “The ADMM-Plus: Yet Another Layer in the Region’s Defense Security Architecture?” of the Asia-Pacific Roundtable organized by the Institute for Strategic and International Studies-Malaysia and held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 30 May-1 June 2011.

¹¹ See ADMM Defense Ministers’ Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus): Modalities and Procedures, paragraph 11.

individual three-year work plan (for 2011-2013) which became integral annexes to the concept paper on the establishment of experts working groups approved in 2011.

True to the thrust of promoting practical cooperation, each of the EWGs went on to organize various activities to include meetings, seminars and workshops on issues within their respective functional areas of concern, with at least one activity for each of the working groups during the remaining months of 2011. For 2012, an average of two activities for each EWG were undertaken. For 2013, a humanitarian assistance/disaster relief and military medicine exercise was jointly spearheaded by the EWGs on HA/DR and military medicine. It was hosted by Brunei and held in June 2013. A field training exercise on maritime security cooperation and a counter-terrorism exercise were held in Australia and Indonesia respectively in September 2013.

For the EWG on peacekeeping operations co-chaired by the Philippines and New Zealand, four activities have so far been conducted. These include the legal seminar on peacekeeping operations held in New Zealand in November 2011, the peacekeeping regional capabilities workshop hosted by the Philippines in June 2012, the operational challenges of peacekeeping co-organized with the International Committee of the Red Cross and hosted by Indonesia in November 2012 and a force generation workshop held in New Zealand in April 2013. The working group is currently preparing for a Table Top Exercise on peacekeeping operations to be hosted by the Philippines in early 2014.

The third prospect for the ADMM-Plus is the prevailing sense of the need to further deepen cooperation among members of the ADMM-Plus before broadening its membership. In 2012 and barely two years after the ADMM-Plus first convened in 2010, other partners of ASEAN, particularly Canada, conveyed its intention to be part of the ADMM-Plus.

Canada, notwithstanding its being a full dialogue partner of ASEAN was not one of the initial Plus countries of the ADMM-Plus given its nascent interactions and relations with ASEAN defense establishments at the time the ADMM-Plus was being conceptualized. It could be recalled that one of the three principles for membership is significant interactions and relations with ASEAN defense establishments.

In the 2013 ADMM held in Brunei, the ASEAN defense ministers endorsed the ADSOM's recommendation "not to accept Canada's application at this time stressing the need for the ADMM-Plus to consolidate and build on its initial success".¹² It must be stressed though that the door is not forever closed to Canada and

¹² See Report on the 7th ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting, paragraph 11.

other interested parties. Canada, for its part, has declared that it intends to intensify its defense engagement with Southeast Asian countries in order to meet the second criteria of membership for the ADMM-Plus.¹³

Challenges for the ADMM-Plus

With the launching of the ADMM-Plus, a key issue that has come to the fore is the matter of how the ADMM-Plus would interface with the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). With the possibility of overlap between the two bodies, the need to delineate the roles and functions of these two mechanisms came to light.

In a discussion paper on creating synergies between the ARF and the ADMM-Plus prepared by Thailand then in anticipation of the inaugural ADMM-Plus, it was pointed out that “it may be useful for the ARF to continue to focus on key policy issues” such as those pertaining to “regional security challenges, trends in non-proliferation and disarmament, counter-terrorism and the regional security architecture”. The ADMM-Plus, the Thai paper argued, “could focus on more specialized defense issues [where] defense agencies have a more direct role” such as “defense policies and modernization of defense forces as well as regional trends which affect these policies”.¹⁴

Acknowledging that the ARF has progressed in “developing policy frameworks for cooperation”, the paper argued that the ADMM-Plus “could focus on operational aspects of dealing with non-traditional security challenges ... such as developing defense capacities for dealing with humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR)”.

The same paper suggested that the ARF would remain to have the strategic objective of developing preventive diplomacy measures and ultimately elaborating approaches to conflict while the ADMM-Plus could “provide a forum to undertake further discussions on issues such as defense industries and welfare of defense personnel”.

A month prior to the 1st ADMM-Plus meeting, the Tokyo Defense Forum organized by Japan’s Ministry of Defense, which was held in September 2010 and

¹³ Remarks of The Honorable Peter MacKay, Minister of National Defense at the Asia-Security Summit (Shangri-la Dialogue) organized by the Institute for International and Strategic Studies (IISS) and held in Singapore on 31 May-2 June 2013. While this point is not contained in the text of the remarks found in the IISS website, this point was made by the minister.

¹⁴ See Discussion Paper: Creating Synergies between the ARF and the ADMM-Plus.

attended by mid-level officials from Japan and ASEAN countries' defense ministries, had the same issue being discussed. In that forum, emphasized was the idea of having the ARF focus on policy issues considering that the ADMM-Plus purports to focus on practical cooperation.

Similarly, in the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting held in Surabaya, Indonesia in March 2011, the issue of creating synergy between the ARF and the ADMM-Plus was an agenda item. In that meeting, there emerged a view that the ARF could focus on broad strategic and policy issues while the ADMM-Plus could focus on the more operational aspects of cooperation among defense and military establishments.

This issue was also intensively discussed in the April 2011 meeting of the ARF's Defense Officials Dialogue (DOD) held in Sydney, Australia such that the ARF indeed would concentrate on policy related issues and the ADMM-Plus would zero-in on practical cooperation. Other participants however noted that the agenda of the ADMM-Plus should not unnecessarily be limited so much so that it is constrained or forced to deal only with practical cooperation. The ADMM-Plus, by the very essence that it brings together the defense ministers of 18 Asia-Pacific states, is also a useful security dialogue mechanism. With this issue being anticipated to remain at the center of discussions in the immediate future, the participants in that meeting agreed that this item remain be included in the agenda of future DOD meetings.

And in the 18th ARF held in Indonesia in 2011, the foreign ministers stressed the "importance of achieving ideal synergy with the ADMM-Plus". While there is recognition that the two regional bodies, both dealing with security should pursue their respective mandates, it must be stressed that "greater functional coordination" is called for so as to avoid "unnecessary duplication of activities".

Some of the proposals being considered include cross-reporting between the ARF and ADMM-Plus, joint meetings between the ARF's Intersessional Meetings and the ADMM-Plus EWGs, closer coordination with and through the ASEAN Secretariat, and strengthening of coordination between ARF and ADMM-Plus representatives at the national level.¹⁵

Meanwhile, there is a need to rationalize the meetings held within the ambit of the ARF. Held thrice a year is the DOD, which provides a venue for working level defense officials of the ARF participants to discuss issues. With the regularity of meetings of the ADSOM-Plus working group and the ADSOM-Plus, it may be

¹⁵ These proposals are contained in the non-paper "Improving Synergies between the ARF and ADMM-Plus" which was presented for consideration during the ADSOM meeting held in Brunei on April 2-4, 2013.

pragmatic to reduce the number of meetings of the DOD. In the same way, the ASEAN Security Policy Conference (ASPC) which involves the defense vice-ministers of ARF participating states could be done away with considering that the ADSOM-Plus now regularly meets as well.

Indeed, there is the possibility of overlap between the ARF and the ADMM-Plus. After all, as in the case of the other mechanisms in the Asia-Pacific, both the ARF and the ADMM-Plus deal with security issues, specifically how to address the numerous security challenges confronting the region. What is usually alluded in the foreign affairs circle is the observation that the areas of cooperation identified by the ADMM-Plus (with the exception of military medicine) namely HA/DR, maritime security, counter-terrorism and peacekeeping operations are also areas which the ARF has been working on and notable progress have been made.

In addition to this obvious case of overlap is the fact that while the ADMM-Plus emphasizes practical cooperation, it is also a security dialogue mechanism. In fact, exchange of views on regional security issues has been explicitly spelled out as one of the main agenda items of ADMM-Plus meetings in the modalities and procedures paper.¹⁶

Similarly, while the ARF is primarily a security dialogue mechanism, it has also undertaken practical initiatives such as the ARF Voluntary Demonstration of Response (ARF VDR) co-hosted by the Philippines and the US and held in Manila, Philippines in May 2009 and the ARF Disaster Relief Exercise (ARF DiRex) co-hosted by Indonesia and Japan and held in Manado, Indonesia in March 2011. Other practical activities are also being planned within the ARF framework. And if all the workshops and seminars organized within the ARF are considered as practical cooperation among its participants, then it could rightfully be argued that the ARF has and will continue to promote practical cooperation.

These overlaps are not necessarily bad. Given the reality that both mechanisms now exist and that the ADMM-Plus has already been launched and is expected to run its due course, it would actually be more productive to focus on examining how the ARF and ADMM-Plus could complement each other given their respective strengths.

The ARF has the advantage of having been there for almost two decades, serving as an important platform for examining security challenges and exchanging views on how to deal with those issues. True enough, the ARF has been criticized for being a talk shop. But isn't that what it was meant to be in the first place? It is a

¹⁶ See The ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus): Modalities and Procedures, paragraph 12.

forum, after all. By providing a venue whereby participant states come together and exchange notes on various issues, it has definitely made a substantive contribution in building confidence among the states involved. It may not have progressed and evolved as observers have suggested; it may not have moved from merely promoting confidence building measures to undertaking preventive diplomacy measures as analysts would have wanted; and it may be impossible for it to really substantively undertake conflict resolution as many have desired. But it could not be denied that it has made a contribution in promoting regional peace and stability; slow as may be case but a contribution nonetheless.

The ADMM-Plus for its part brings with it the optimism that it is possible after all to bring defense ministers to sit together in one formal gathering for them to discuss security issues and provide policy guidance to their respective defense and military forces thereby ensuring that their militaries which have had their own respective meetings are appropriately provided with policy guidance.¹⁷ The ADMM-Plus has also generated an enthusiasm that beyond dialogues and consultations, undertaking practical cooperation is important and necessary if security issues were to be dealt with effectively. It also brings with it the momentum of pursuing practical cooperation, what with the establishment of the five expert working groups. And as was previously mentioned, a sixth EWG (on humanitarian mine action) has recently been added.

The ARF has the advantage of bringing together a greater number of participants with 27 participating states with both foreign ministry officials in the ARF itself and defense officials in the DOD. The ADMM-Plus has the advantage of bringing together a smaller number but more specialized group of officials, those from the ministries of defense, in the ADSOM-Plus working group and ADSOM-Plus levels. As noted in the composition and configuration paper, the Plus 8 configuration would enable “the ADMM-Plus [to] ... find a good balance between effectiveness and legitimacy”. To be effective, “the ADMM-Plus should be small enough to be nimble and responsive to security challenges facing the region”.¹⁸ For legitimacy, “it should be large enough to include the key stakeholders and to represent the interest of the region”. What should not be forgotten is the usefulness of the ADMM-Plus in bringing together the defense ministers themselves.

¹⁷ It must be noted that in the case of the ADMM, various meetings among ASEAN defense forces have been organized and have been taking place even before the ADMM came into being. These include the ASEAN Chiefs of Defense Informal Meeting, the ASEAN Chiefs of Army Multilateral Meeting, the ASEAN Navy Interaction, now called ASEAN Navy Chiefs Meeting, the ASEAN Air Force Chiefs Conference, and the ASEAN Military Intelligence Informal Meeting.

¹⁸ See The ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus): Configuration and Composition, paragraph 7.

It must be recognized though that one impetus for the emergence of the ADMM and subsequently the ADMM-Plus perhaps is the need to have a mechanism whereby defense ministers themselves come together and sit as a group. The absence of such a mechanism within the ARF framework could have actually been one of the inducing factors for the eventual emergence of the ADMM and the ADMM-Plus.¹⁹ In fact, at the start of the previous decade, at a time when the ARF was nearing its one decade anniversary, there have been observations that it may be useful and worthwhile for the ARF to include the defense ministers of ARF participant states. Way back in 2000, for example, it has been noted that defense ministers should be allowed to sit side by side with their foreign ministry counterparts in the yearly meeting of the ARF. This would pave the way for a sense of “equality” between the foreign ministers and defense ministers of the ARF members. Providing the defense ministers with the opportunity to sit alongside their foreign ministry counterparts in the annual ARF meeting would make the ARF truly a forum for security dialogue.²⁰

The second challenge for the ADMM-Plus is whether it could be a platform for mitigating or managing the strategic rivalry between two of the Plus countries. This is another question that begs to be answered. Never has the seeming competition between two regional powers, the US and China, the first described as an established regional power and the second considered as a rising regional power, been more observed today than in recent years. Beyond their respective pronouncements that cooperation among regional states, with themselves included, is most important, it could not be denied that rivalry between these two major powers manifests itself in various ways.

The US maintains that its network of alliances with regional states to include Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, Australia and New Zealand underpinned regional stability in the post-World War II Asia-Pacific landscape thereby enabling regional states to focus and pursue economic development. China argues that its less than 10% average growth rate for the past two decades has driven regional prosperity.

Washington believes that the US alliance network needs to be revitalized to ensure that it remains relevant in the current regional environment. Along this line, it has taken steps to enhance its network of alliances. Deepening its engagement with

¹⁹ See Raymund Jose G. Quilop, “The ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM): Towards Building A Security Community in Southeast Asia”, ASEAN Monthly Commentary Volume 8/2011 (August 2011), p. 7.

²⁰ Raymund Jose G. Quilop, Institution Building in the Asia-Pacific: The ARF Experience (Quezon City, Philippines: Office of Strategic and Special Studies, Armed Forces of the Philippines, [2000]), p. 41.

its regional allies is one. Broadening the issues to include non-traditional security matters where the US and its allies cooperate is another. On the other hand, Beijing consistently argues that the structures of the Cold War period should be done away with, perhaps in direct allusion to the US alliance system which was established during the early years of the Cold War.

Meanwhile, as China tries to deepen its economic ties either through trade or direct investments and financial assistance to regional states as well as political engagement with regional bodies such as ASEAN, the US is keen on making its presence felt in ASEAN-led institutions to include the East Asia Summit (EAS), ARF and the ADMM-Plus as well as through its policy of rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific.

The US claims that it has always been a resident power in the Asia-Pacific and has never left the region notwithstanding its previous pre-occupation in other parts of the globe. China argues that Asia-Pacific matters are better left for Asia-Pacific states to address. And while Washington emphasizes that containment of China has never been a US foreign policy, Beijing insists that US actions in the region are meant to contain China.

On the other hand, notwithstanding Chinese declaration that freedom of navigation, specifically in the sea west of the Philippines and south of China, would not be compromised, the US is deeply concerned with Chinese growing assertiveness in the area thereby casting doubts as to whether foreign ships would continue to navigate freely in those waters.

Related to the matter of being a platform for managing or mitigating the strategic competition between the US and China is how to avoid a situation where the ADMM-Plus itself becomes another platform for the two regional powers to compete strategically with one another.

On the part of China, it has been able to engage the defense ministers of ASEAN collectively through the series of informal meetings between China's defense minister and the ADMM at the sidelines of ADMM meetings. Commencing at the 2011 ADMM during Indonesia's chairmanship, a second meeting of such nature took place the following year during Cambodia's chairmanship. China's defense minister made an official visit to Cambodia at a time when the ADMM was being convened. An informal meeting between China's defense minister and the ASEAN defense ministers then ensued. During the most recent ADMM in Brunei in May 2013, the defense minister of China who was in Brunei for an official visit at the time the ADMM was meeting, once more had an informal meeting with the defense

ministers of ASEAN. De facto, this practice could rightfully be considered as an ADMM Plus One meeting, except that the meetings were informal. More recently, the US defense minister put forth the idea of inviting the ASEAN defense ministers for an informal meeting in the US.

While it is “important for ASEAN to enhance cooperation with China and the US, as [they] play important roles ... in the region”, the situation previously discussed is de facto an ADMM Plus One configuration. How then would such a set-up relate with the current modality of the ADMM-Plus which is an ADMM Plus Eight.

As previously mentioned, when the configuration of the ADMM-Plus was being discussed, it was clear that the ASEAN defense ministers need to engage the defense ministers of ASEAN’s dialogue partners as a collective. An ADMM Plus One configuration, where the ADMM engages the eight dialogue partners individually would have not have been efficient; hence the decision to adopt the ADMM Plus X formulation where X would refer to eight dialogue partners as a collective.

The third challenge for the ADMM-Plus as it evolves is whether it would remain to confine itself on dealing with non-traditional security issues, specifically promoting practical cooperation on these issues or would there be at least attempts to venture into the domain of traditional security issues.

Non-traditional security issues definitely are less contentious and less sensitive, thereby making them the focus of the ADMM-Plus has been a big factor in getting defense ministers to sit together and convene in a meeting. To have done otherwise may have discouraged the other Plus countries from sending their defense ministers to the inaugural ADMM-Plus.

Confining practical cooperation to non-traditional issues may be productive in the short term but to continue limiting ADMM-Plus cooperation within the confines of the less sensitive non-traditional issues could be counter-productive over the long term. The non-inclusion of the sphere of traditional security in ADMM-Plus cooperation could lead to questions as to whether the ADMM-Plus has successfully built confidence among its members so much so that they would be willing to venture into the more sensitive domain of traditional security cooperation.

Including traditional security cooperation, however, would indeed be difficult for several reasons. For one, the question arises as to what are the modalities of practical cooperation regarding traditional security concerns. For another, cooperation on traditional security matters could be interpreted as having the ADMM-Plus moving

towards collective security, something which the ASEAN members themselves have reservations given ASEAN's view that security cooperation within its ambit should preclude activities that are traditional security in nature as these are the focus of an alliance type of organization, something which ASEAN is definitely not.

Some Concluding Thoughts

Overall, the value of the ADMM-Plus as an addition to the plethora of multilateral mechanisms in the region could be seen in terms of the overall value of regional institutions which do not only provide channels of communications and thus help improve the quality of information being shared but de facto create certain standards with which actions of states could be evaluated.²¹ More importantly, institutions “prescribe behavioral roles, constrain [certain] activity and [help] shape expectations”.²²

And indeed, the ADMM-Plus has not only shaped expectations of the participating states but also of the entire region. It could not be denied that a lot is expected of the ADMM-Plus, particularly in its ability to promote practical cooperation among the defense institutions of ASEAN and the Plus countries. Those involved in the ADMM-Plus process, at least the present group, are conscious of this expectation and are committed in ensuring that the ADMM-Plus makes progress in promoting practical cooperation. This is the idea behind establishing the experts working groups.

One thing going for the ADMM-Plus is that the Plus countries have been enthusiastic about getting involved as manifested not only by their attendance or participation in the inaugural ADMM-Plus meeting but also in co-chairing the EWGs of the ADMM-Plus.

Another thing going for the ADMM-Plus is the fact that compared to the ARF which has a relatively more “ambitious” three-stage trajectory of progress (from building of confidence to promotion of preventive diplomacy measures to elaboration of approaches to conflict), the ADMM-Plus has a more modest thrust: to promote practical cooperation. Defense ministries do not also have the burden of

²¹ See Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 244-45.

²² Robert O. Keohane, “Multilateralism: An Agenda for Research,” *International Journal* (Autumn 1990): 731 as cited in John Gerard Ruggie, “Multilateralism: The Anatomy of an Institution,” in Helen Milner and John Gerard Ruggie (eds.), *Multilateralism Matters* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 10.

resolving conflicts but the conduct of practical cooperation between and among them could actually help build confidence and reduce the likelihood of conflict, which is the essence of preventive diplomacy.

Given the expectations and the enthusiasm, the ADMM-Plus therefore is faced with the tremendous challenge and burden in proving that the momentum for practical cooperation is sustained and is actually undertaken. The context characterized by uncertainty and seeming lack of trust and confidence among regional states may help explain why the ARF had to move at the pace and way it proceeded, prioritizing the building of confidence among its participants at the expense of not having progressed quickly towards the preventive diplomacy stage. The ADMM-Plus emerged out from a context where confidence among states is assumed to be already in place after the many years of confidence building having been undertaken within the framework of the ARF, leaving no reason why practical cooperation could not be pursued.

The ADMM-Plus compared to other regional mechanisms has relatively a shorter period of time to show that it is making headway. Notwithstanding the two other challenges namely the ability of the ADMM-Plus to manage major power relations and the matter of venturing into traditional security cooperation, an evaluation of the ADMM-Plus would have to be primarily in regard of its ability to promote practical cooperation as this has been its stated purpose. In fact, the idea of practical cooperation has become almost synonymous with the word ADMM-Plus.

Otherwise, the confidence on the ADMM-Plus' ability to foster practical cooperation may slowly wane and worse, the ADMM-Plus would simply become another one of the numerous meetings in the region where officials meet and discuss issues.

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