

CSCAP MEMORANDUM NO. 33

Contributing to the ASEAN Regional Forum: Some Fresh Thinking, Reviewing the Origins



**A Memorandum from the Council for Security Cooperation
in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP)**

July 2019

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CONTRIBUTING TO THE ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM: SOME FRESH THINKING, REVIEWING THE ORIGINS

Introduction: Reviewing Origins

In 2018, the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) focused on the issue of “Contributing to the ASEAN Regional Forum”. The editor of CSCAP’s annual publication, the *CSCAP Regional Security Outlook*, commissioned a series of articles on the ARF. These articles were discussed first at CSCAP’s Steering Committee Meeting in Perth, Australia, on 30 November 2018 – and then at a special Retreat in Kuala Lumpur on 21 February 2019.

A number of the articles were critical of the progress of the ARF (see appendix below), but the Kuala Lumpur Retreat strongly affirmed the importance of the ARF for the region’s security. In doing so, the Retreat reviewed the origins of the Forum.

One view was that the ARF Concept Paper of 1995 had been overly optimistic – raising unrealistic expectations. The Paper stressed the aim of moving forward in three stages – from confidence building, to preventive diplomacy (PD), to conflict resolution. The expectation that the organization could move efficiently from confidence building to the more ambitious stages was influenced by the prevailing assumptions of the early 1990s – particularly that the world was experiencing not only a globalization of economies and communication, but also a convergence of political and social thought.

In retrospect, the early 1990s was an exceptional period and the expectations of that time now appear too ambitious.

As it has turned out, the task of building “trust and confidence” – including the identifying of norms capable of attracting widespread adherence, and the promotion of those norms, alongside patient multilateral deliberation on key security issues – has been complex and difficult. It is also far from complete. The fact that the ARF continues to focus on confidence building is an indication of the scale of the task, not of institutional failure. The accusation that the ARF is a “mere talk shop” ignores the fundamental importance of these deliberations – and, in addition, fails to recognize that the ARF, as the name conveys, is explicitly designed as a “forum”.

The Retreat’s Recommendations:

Although CSCAP is suggesting that the ARF should concentrate less on the three Stages (of the Concept Paper) – and continue to stress the so-called Stage 1 – we realize the ARF must also be prepared to address whatever urgent contingencies arise affecting the region’s security. We also recognize that some contingencies would see the effective conflation of confidence-building, preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution.

Keeping in mind the on-going function of confidence-building, a central challenge for CSCAP is how best to contribute to the Forum's work in this area – while still encouraging the ARF to move steadily in the direction of PD, following the many suggestions provided over the years by CSCAP among others.

The Kuala Lumpur Retreat made the following proposals to enhance CSCAP's contribution:

- More CSCAP activities should relate to the five priority areas of the ARF (nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament; HADR; maritime security; transnational crime; cyber security). PD can also be examined within this context
- CSCAP should look for opportunities to suggest new priority areas to the ARF
- Ensure that CSCAP continues to play a broker role – recruiting the best specialists to assist CSCAP to support ARF key activities
- Continue to harness CSCAP's leading assets (e.g. its diversity of member organizations, close relations with government, depth of expertise and experience)
- Offer to be an informal resource base for the ARF, recording and publicizing its key activities – and aiming to make CSCAP a reference point for incoming ARF Co-Chairs
- Be prepared to respond rapidly to ARF emergency needs, through forming short-term expert groups (outside normal CSCAP processes)
- Increase consultative meetings between the CSCAP and ARF leadership, including back-to-back meetings of CSCAP Study Groups and ARF ISMs when possible

The meeting also noted CSCAP's past recommendation to develop a clearer definition of the roles of the ARF, ADMM-Plus and EAS, and to urge closer coordination between these institutions. The need remains for the ARF to engage with the EAS and ADMM-Plus to develop a trio of linked and mutually-reinforcing ASEAN-led processes. Moving "at a pace comfortable to all" has also allowed for the slowest member to prevent progress.

Appendix:

Commentary – negative and positive – on the ARF included in articles written for the CSCAP Regional Security Outlook 2019

- There needs to be better coordination between the ARF and other ASEAN processes
- The ARF is often seen as irrelevant to the handling of regional challenges
- The ARF tends to ignore contentious issues
- The ARF seems to be losing its way and should stick to the ambition to transition to preventive diplomacy, and not move into non-traditional security issues.
- The ARF should, in connecting with key regional issues, employ its potential preventive diplomacy capacities, even if only as a facilitator
- The ARF is unlikely ever to be a primary problem solver in the Asia Pacific; it has a “long-held aversion to a more activist or interventionist” role
- The ARF was right in 2009 to speak of becoming an “action-oriented mechanism”
- The ARF has helped India’s attempts to “Look East”
- The ARF has played a key role in multilateralising defence concerns in the region
- The ARF has a broader array of member states than any other regional security forum (with 75 percent of world GDP)
- The ARF is still the “best platform to moderate the behaviour of the two major powers”
- The ARF serves as “a fulcrum for all Indo-Pacific countries, and some beyond, to interact with each other to avoid conflicts”
- The newer ASEAN mechanisms – ADMM-Plus and the EAS – “were made possible by the earlier confidence-building work” of the ARF

CSCAP Retreat on the Future of ASEAN Regional Forum

21-22 February 2019

Grand Millennium Kuala Lumpur

List of Participants

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ABOUT CSCAP

CSCAP is a non-governmental (second track) process for dialogue on security issues in the Asia Pacific. Membership in CSCAP is on an institutional basis and consists of Member Committees. Current membership comprises Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, the EU, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, New Zealand, the Philippines, Russia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and the United States of America.

The functions of CSCAP are as follows:

- a. to provide an informal mechanism by which political and security issues can be discussed by scholars, officials, and others in their private capacities
- b. to encourage the participants of such individuals from countries and territories in the Asia Pacific on the basis of the principle of inclusiveness
- c. to organize various working groups to address security issues and challenges facing the region
- d. to provide policy recommendations to various intergovernmental bodies on political-security issues
- e. to convene regional and international meetings and other cooperative activities for the purpose of discussing political-security issues
- f. to establish linkages with institutions and organizations in other parts of the world to exchange information, insights and experiences in the area of regional political-security cooperation
- g. to produce and disseminate publications relevant to the other purposes of the organisation

Further information on CSCAP can be obtained from the CSCAP website at www.cscap.org or by contacting the CSCAP Secretariat:

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CSCAP Memoranda

CSCAP Memoranda are the outcome of the work of Study Group approved by the Steering Committee and submitted for consideration by the ASEAN Regional Forum and other bodies.

CSCAP Memorandum No. 32 - Enhancing Contributions from Asia-Pacific Countries to UN Peacekeeping Operations

Author: CSCAP Study Group on Enhancing Contributions from Asia-Pacific Countries to UNPKO

Date: March 2018

CSCAP Memorandum No. 31 - Enhancing Marine Environment Protection in the Asia-Pacific Region

Author: CSCAP Study Group on Maritime Environmental Protection

Date: March 2018

CSCAP Memorandum No. 30 - Preventive Diplomacy: Promoting Prospects for Mediation and Peaceful Settlement of Disputes in the Asia Pacific Region

Author: CSCAP Study Group on Preventive Diplomacy

Date: December 2017

CSCAP Memorandum No. 29 - Harmonisation of Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue (SAR)

Author: CSCAP Study Group on Harmonisation of Aeronautical and Maritime SAR (SG HAMSAR)

Date: July 2017

CSCAP Memorandum No. 28 - Energy Security in the Asia Pacific Region

Author: CSCAP Study Group on Energy Security

Date: June 2016

CSCAP Memorandum No. 27 - Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1540

Author: CSCAP Study Group on Countering the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Asia Pacific

Date: April 2015

CSCAP Memorandum No. 26 - Towards Effective Regional Security Architecture for the Asia Pacific

Author: CSCAP Study Group on Regional Security Architecture

Date: June 2014

CSCAP Memorandum No. 25 - Maritime CBMs, Trust and Managing Incidents at Sea

Author: CSCAP Study Group on Principles for Good Order at Sea

Date: June 2014

CSCAP Memorandum No. 24 - Safety and Security of Vital Undersea Communications Infrastructure

Author: CSCAP Experts Group on Vital Undersea Communications Infrastructure, a sub-group of the Study Group on Principles of Good Order at Sea
Date: May 2014

CSCAP Memorandum No.23 - Enhancing Water Security in the Asia Pacific
Author: CSCAP Study Group on Water Resources Security
Date: January 2014

CSCAP Memorandum No.22 - Non-proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction
Author: CSCAP Study Group on Countering the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Asia Pacific
Date: September 2012

CSCAP Memorandum No.21 - Implications of Naval Enhancement in the Asia Pacific
Author: CSCAP Study Group on Naval Enhancement in the Asia Pacific
Date: August 2012

CSCAP Memorandum No.20 - Ensuring a Safer Cyber Security Environment
Author: CSCAP Study Group on Cyber Security
Date: May 2012

CSCAP Memorandum No.19 - Reduction and Elimination of Nuclear Weapons
Author: CSCAP Study Group on Countering the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Asia Pacific
Date: February 2012

CSCAP Memorandum No.18 - Implementing the Responsibility to Protect (R2P)
Author: CSCAP Study Group on Responsibility to Protect
Date: September 2011

CSCAP Memorandum No.17 - Promoting the Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy
Author: CSCAP Study Group on Countering the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Asia Pacific
Date: June 2011

CSCAP Memorandum No.16 - Safety and Security of Offshore Oil and Gas Installations
Author: CSCAP Study Group on the Safety and Security of Offshore Oil and Gas Installations
Date: January 2011

CSCAP Memorandum No.15 - The Security Implications of Climate Change
Author: CSCAP Study Group on Security Implications of Climate Change
Date: June 2010

CSCAP Memorandum No.14 - Guidelines for Managing Trade of Strategic Goods
Author: CSCAP Export Controls Experts Group (XCXG) a sub-group of the Study Group on Countering the Proliferation of WMD in the Asia Pacific
Date: March 2009

CSCAP Memorandum No.13 - Guidelines for Maritime Cooperation in Enclosed and Semi-enclosed Seas and Similar Sea Areas of the Asia Pacific
Author: CSCAP Study Group on Facilitating Maritime Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific
Date: 2 June 2008

CSCAP Memorandum No.12 - Maritime Knowledge and Awareness: Basic Foundations of Maritime Security
Author: CSCAP Study Group on Facilitating Maritime Security Awareness in the Asia Pacific
Date: December 2007

CSCAP Memorandum No.11 - Human Trafficking
Author: CSCAP Study Group on Human Trafficking
Date: June 2007

CSCAP Memorandum No.10 - Enhancing Efforts to Address the Factors Driving International Terrorism
Author: CSCAP Study Group on Enhancing the Effectiveness of the Campaign Against International Terrorism
Date: December 2005

CSCAP Memorandum No.9 - Trafficking of Firearms in the Asia Pacific Region
Author:
Date May 2004

CSCAP Memorandum No.8 - The Weakest Link? Seaborne Trade and the Maritime Regime in the Asia Pacific
Author: CSCAP Memorandum with the support of members of the Pacific Economic Cooperation (PECC) Network
Date: April 2004

CSCAP Memorandum No.7 - The Relationship Between Terrorism and Transnational Crime
Author: CSCAP Working Group on Transnational Crime
Date: July 2003

CSCAP Memorandum No. 6 - The Practice of the Law of the Sea in the Asia Pacific
Author: CSCAP Working Group on Maritime Cooperation
Date: December 2002

CSCAP Memorandum No.5 - Cooperation for Law and Order at Sea
Author: CSCAP Working Group on Maritime Cooperation
Date: February 2001

CSCAP Memorandum No.4 - Guidelines for Regional Maritime Cooperation
Author: CSCAP Working Group on Maritime Cooperation
Date: December 1997

CSCAP Memorandum No.3 - The Concepts of Comprehensive Security and Cooperative Security
Author: CSCAP Working Group on Comprehensive and Cooperative Security
Date: December 1995

CSCAP Memorandum No.2 - Asia Pacific Confidence and Security-Building Measures
Author: CSCAP Working Group on Confidence and Security Building Measures
Date: June 1995

CSCAP Memorandum No.1 - The Security of The Asia Pacific Region
Author: CSCAP
Date: April 1994