

Chapter 2

Developing East Asia's Security Architecture: An Australian perspective on ASEAN processes

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Prior to the 1990s, a tangible East Asian security architecture remained elusive. This was not for want of trying. Several ill-fated efforts were undertaken to establish regional groupings which, over time, provided the basis for a more substantial East Asian security architecture. These included the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO)—an eight member grouping established in 1955 that began to lose members and was finally dissolved in 1977, and both Maphilindo and the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA).¹ Likewise, in Northeast Asia, the Asian and Pacific Council (ASPAC)—a South Korean initiative established in 1966 and comprising nine member countries—struggled due to the diverging perceptions and interests of its membership, and finally collapsed in 1975.² Flowing from this legacy was the more successful sub-regional Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), founded in 1967 and expanded via several avenues, including a major security component, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). But even ASEAN's initial collaborative functions were essentially economic, political and cultural.

This paucity in regional security dialogue stands in stark contrast to the situation today where, according to one recent estimate, over 100 such channels now exist at the official (Track 1) level and in excess of 200 at the unofficial (Track 2) level.³ To be sure, this startling growth in regional security cooperation has been neither steady nor straightforward. The volume of such institutions and activities plummeted in the immediate aftermath of the 1997–98 Asian financial crisis, for instance, and temporarily lost the attention of policymakers in the process. Yet there can be little disputing the fact that regional security cooperation has since recovered well and, moreover, that the general trend in such activity across the decade and a half since the beginning of the 1990s has been an upward one. ASEAN, of course, has been one of the key drivers or 'architects' behind this trend. This chapter evaluates the effectiveness and the shortcomings of the most prominent ASEAN processes. It considers the outlook

for these, before concluding with an Australian perspective on their desirable future development.

Evaluating ASEAN processes

Before reflecting upon the effectiveness and shortcomings of ASEAN processes, it is necessary to firstly acknowledge that this evaluative task is an inevitably subjective one. As Amitav Acharya has observed:

Despite decades of intense debate, international relations theory provides no agreed and definitive way of assessing what constitutes 'success' and 'effectiveness' in regional organizations. Understanding the effects of Asian institutions on state behavior and regional order depends very much on the analytical lens used.⁴

By way of example, many if not most regional players will tend to assess regional security cooperation not in terms of its immediate *outcomes*, but rather as a *process* through which confidence is built, consensus reached and common regional understandings or 'norms' arrived at.

This issue of analytical subjectivity notwithstanding, it is, I think, possible to identify a number of areas where ASEAN processes have unequivocally fallen short. None of these processes, for instance, has proven able to respond effectively to the major crises that have erupted in East Asia during the past decade and a half—the North Korean nuclear crises of 1993–94 and today; the 1995–96 Taiwan Strait crisis; the 1997–98 Asian financial crisis; the crisis in East Timor of 1999; the 2003 Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) crisis or the 26 December 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. Partly as a result of the consensual style approach to decision-making which has emerged as the preferred *modus operandi* for most if not all of these processes, they have also tended to move rather slowly toward implementing their stated aims and objectives. In the case of the ARF, for instance, it has experienced real difficulties in moving from the confidence-building to preventive diplomacy phase in its evolution, contributing toward the perception that it is nothing more than a 'talk shop'.⁵

These criticisms notwithstanding—and even if one does not accept the proposition that dialogue and discussion are useful as ends in and of themselves⁶—there are areas where tangible benefits have accrued from the recent growth in East Asian security cooperation. First and foremost among these accomplishments, in my view, has been the engagement of China in the regional security architecture which has taken place since the mid-1990s. This process has succeeded in significantly dampening regional apprehensions regarding China's rise. At the same time, however, it is interesting to note that while a primary aim of engaging China through East Asian security cooperation was to 'socialise' it by exposing it to regional and global norms, Beijing has proven rather adept at 'socialising' many of the institutions to which it is a party. By

way of example, in the case of the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP)—the official Track 2 analogue of the ARF—China's deepening involvement has actually allowed it to shape the direction and outlook of this leading Track 2 institution, particularly in relation to the issue of Taiwan.

Further, although ASEAN processes have been somewhat ineffective in responding directly to regional crises, they have periodically served as useful venues for the discussion of highly sensitive or controversial issues that might otherwise not have been discussed, or as 'circuit-breakers' to stalled diplomatic relationships. The then US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, was able to meet with his North Korean counterpart on the sidelines of the 2004 ARF meeting, for example, which marked the first high-level contact between the United States and North Korea since former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's visit to Pyongyang in 2000. More recently, the Chinese and Japanese foreign ministers held a productive 20-minute meeting on the sidelines of the 2006 ARF, helping to alleviate somewhat a deepening rift in China-Japan relations. So, in sum, it seems fair to conclude that ASEAN processes have served as more than mere 'talks shops' and that they have produced some tangible successes, albeit highly qualified ones and often only at the margins.

Added to this, the very existence and continued evolution of ASEAN can itself be counted as a success. It is always important to consider counterfactual scenarios in international politics, and to contemplate what type of Southeast Asia might exist today were it not for the existence of ASEAN. It is certainly no small feat that a 'shooting war' amongst its members is today all but unthinkable. As Rodolfo Severino of the Singapore-based Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) recently put it:

The constant interaction and sense of common purpose among the Asean members have built mutual confidence and dissipated some of the mutual suspicion that is a legacy of past differences and an outgrowth of current disagreements. ... Partly through the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in South-east Asia and partly through its own practices, Asean has set regional norms for the peaceful relations among states—respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, the peaceful settlement of disputes, non-interference in the internal affairs of nations, decisions by consensus, equality of status, and so on.⁷

Where to from here?

So having canvassed the effectiveness and shortcomings of ASEAN processes, what is the future outlook for these mechanisms? The answer to this question will, in my view, be determined by the influence of at least three key factors.

First, the rapidly changing dynamics of the East Asian strategic environment will profoundly shape the future activities and, indeed, viability of ASEAN

processes. Security threats and challenges will influence the demand for regional security cooperation but, just as importantly, the strategic environment itself will also largely determine the areas in which progress is most and least viable. Non-traditional security issues such as infectious disease, terrorism, transnational crime, and disaster prevention/mitigation will be increasingly critical. In May 2006, for example, the inaugural ASEAN Defence Ministers meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, identified disaster relief cooperation as a priority issue upon which to focus its future work. Likewise, as part of its transition from confidence-building to practical cooperation, the ARF has been asked to adopt collaborative measures for addressing non-traditional security challenges, if only to demonstrate its continuing relevance in an increasingly crowded East Asian security architecture.⁸ Addressing these kinds of trans-border challenges is needed not only because they are becoming increasingly pressing and potentially affect the region as a whole, but also because they will often tend not to raise the same level of sensitivity (particularly in relation to such strongly partisan issues as sovereignty and non-intervention) as that generated by more traditional security issues.

Second, the sheer volume of regional institutions and the growing number of aspiring regional security 'architects' could well have significant implications for ASEAN processes. In a relatively short space of time, for instance, China has established itself as a leading regional architect. The United States has been slow to react, but also looks set to remain an influential player given its unprecedented military power and considerable economic weight in the region. India too has become an increasingly involved and accepted member of such leading mechanisms as the East Asia Summit (EAS). As India's economic and strategic weight continues to grow, its willingness and potential ability to further contribute towards influencing the shape and design of any East Asian security architecture will also increase in kind. The question remains, however, as to whether ASEAN can continue to exert the influence it has previously enjoyed in this increasingly crowded and competitive institutional environment. Moreover, questions also remain as to whether the associated upward trend in dialogue activity is even going to be sustainable over the longer term. To employ an analogy with which interdependence theorists in international relations would be well acquainted, is there potential for the East Asian security architecture to fall victim to an over-abundance of such institutions leading to the demise of a number of them?⁹ In other words, can there be such a thing as too much security interaction among the countries of any given region which yields greater density but insufficient commonality? If so, how much is too much and what are the policy implications of this?

Third, ASEAN processes will ultimately remain hostage to the fact that state-centric factors related to both interests and values will need to be faced and resolved if a successful security architecture is to be achieved in East Asia.

In this context, great power politics will arguably remain the most crucial determinant, and the future of the US-China relationship will be especially pivotal. Would the United States have been excluded from the EAS, for instance, and would Washington's recent (re)engagement with regional fora such as the ARF have occurred were the United States and China not potential strategic rivals? Likewise, the future of the China-Japan relationship will be critical in defining East Asian security architecture, as the inaugural EAS demonstrated all too vividly. How such rivalries can be modified or finessed sufficiently to cultivate a longer-term sense of 'community'—the tacit but widely understood vision underlying the need for a successful security architecture in this region—is not yet clear. Still, it is reasonable to conclude that such success will remain elusive if more traditional norms or means of securing state-centric interests triumph. The most basic challenge posited by the concept of 'security architecture' is how much its alleged proponents genuinely wish to fulfil this vision and to work collectively to overcome the challenges embodied in realising it.

Desirable future development—An Australian perspective

Aside from a complete collapse of the East Asian security order (brought about, for example, by a catastrophic breakdown in China-US or China-Japan relations), the 'nightmare scenario' for Australia in the face of these developments is that it could become marginalised altogether from the region, or at least from its more influential and important institutions. The most likely avenue through which this could happen would be Australia's exclusion from organisations built on a burgeoning 'East Asian' identity. Australia's participation in the 2004 ASEAN Plus Three (APT) meeting and its membership of the EAS have gone some way toward assuaging these fears. That said, Australia is far from being a key player in either of these mechanisms. Residual apprehensions remain, with the jury still out on how far these emergent processes will go in advancing the potentially powerful notion of an East Asian Community.

It is important to bear in mind here that, at least in its relations with the East Asian region, Australia sees itself as a deeply vulnerable and insecure nation. In his classic 1979 book *The frightened country*, the former head of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs, Alan Renouf, describes Australia as a country that literally lives in fear of its own neighbourhood. It is therefore, in Renouf's view, a country that is unable to see the opportunities in the Asian region clearly and one that also exhibits a strong penchant for seeking out a 'great and powerful friend' to compensate for its perceived strategic insecurities.¹⁰ First it was Britain in the period up until the Second World War; then the United States through the post-war period and up until the present day. Further complicating this innate sense of insecurity, the late Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington

has described Australia as a 'torn country', a society divided over whether or not it belongs to Asia.¹¹ In his terms

the lucky country will be a permanently torn country, both the 'branch office of empire', which [the former Australian Prime Minister] Paul Keating decried, and the 'new white trash of Asia', which Lee Kuan Yew contemptuously termed it.¹²

Through its favoured 'exclusivist' approach towards East Asian security architecture, China has inadvertently reinforced Australia's sense of isolation and vulnerability. This was most evident in the run up to the inaugural EAS, when Beijing reportedly preferred a gathering limited to APT members and did not actively support Australia's attendance.¹³ Similar concern has been expressed in relation to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), which also excludes Australia, but whose members and observers represent half of the world's population. Antipodean anxiety is even mirrored at the Track 2 level, where recent initiatives such as the Network of East Asian Think Tanks (NEAT) are regarded by some as a (Chinese-led) challenge to more established processes in which Australia is already a key player, such as CSCAP.¹⁴

Canberra has responded to these dilemmas by continuing to engage with those processes through which the powerful idea of a distinctly East Asian Community appears most likely to materialise—namely APT and the EAS—even while conceding that Australia is unlikely to become a particularly influential or integral member of such groupings. At the same time, however, Canberra has indirectly balanced against the prospect of a more exclusive East Asian Community by throwing its weight behind competing mechanisms that exhibit a more inclusive communal ethos. Less than two months before the inaugural EAS in December 2005 (and against the backdrop of Australian euphoria at having been included in this fledgling mechanism), the then Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, described APEC as 'undeniably the most important international meeting with which Australia is associated'.¹⁵ Subsequently, Howard pledged his support to a Japanese initiative to establish a free trade zone comprising of 16 Asia-Pacific nations.¹⁶ Simultaneously, Australia has supported initiatives comprising of those countries traditionally regarded as regional 'outsiders'—namely the United States, Japan and India—who potentially have the most to lose from any realisation of the East Asian Community ideal. Australian support for US-led multilateral mechanisms with a regional focus, such as the controversial Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) and the Ministerial-level Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD) involving the United States, Japan, Australia (and potentially India), could be interpreted as a form of indirect balancing or 'insurance' against the prospect of its institutional marginalisation from the region. Indeed, so too can the March 2007 Australian security agreement with Japan.¹⁷

From Beijing's perspective, however, such initiatives can easily be interpreted as reflecting Australian support for a US (and possibly Japanese)-led campaign to constrain, if not completely contain, China's burgeoning regional influence. To be fair, there is some basis to this perception, given the existence of a small, yet relatively influential, anti-China lobby within Australia.¹⁸ By and large, however, it is important to recognise that Australian views of China, and specifically its (re)emergence, are generally very different from those held in the United States and Japan. Of the three, Canberra is clearly the most sanguine on this issue. For Australia, China's rise is seen as nothing short of an economic blessing. Canberra has come out consistently with statements such as that issued at the beginning of 2006 by the then Australian Ambassador to the United States, Dennis Richardson, suggesting that 'the question for Australia is not whether China's growth is innately good or bad; Australia made up its mind long ago that it was a good thing. China's growth is unambiguously good for Asia and the United States'.¹⁹ In relation to the issue of China's growing military capabilities, senior Australian officials are on record as describing 'China's expanding military expenditure as a process of modernisation, not destabilisation'.²⁰ Even with regard to human rights issues, Howard publicly stated in July 2005 that the China-Australia relationship was 'mature enough' to ride through 'temporary arguments' in this area and that he remain[ed] 'unashamed' in developing Australia's relations with China.²¹

Yet perceptions often matter most in international politics. To an extent that has yet to be fully appreciated, the analysis contained in this section suggests that competing approaches to order-building in East Asia have the potential to create serious tensions in this blossoming China-Australia relationship. From Canberra's perspective, Beijing's apparent preference for a more exclusive regional architecture has exacerbated Australia's longstanding vulnerability—to borrow from a former Australian Prime Minister, Paul Keating,—as 'the odd man out' in Asia.²² For Beijing, equally, the strategy that Canberra has adopted to 'insure' against its possible regional marginalisation has been (mis)construed as signifying support for a containment of China that would ultimately not be in Australia's best interests. In the final analysis, therefore, because of the potential threat they pose to China-Australia ties, finding ways to allay these concerns will constitute an important task for the future sustainability of the Australia-China bilateral relationship more generally.

So what can be done? For Australia, greater attention clearly needs to be given to the 'packaging' or presentational aspects of its indirect balancing approach. The diplomacy surrounding the March 2007 announcement of the Australia-Japan security declaration and suggestions by Howard that this arrangement might evolve into a formal security treaty appear to have been largely targeted at an Australian domestic audience. Yet this is certainly not how

they were read in Beijing. Greater transparency from Canberra in such instances would certainly not go amiss. Australia could also consider what scope there might be to lobby for the inclusion of China as an observer in some of the more exclusive arrangements to which Australia is a party, such as the TSD. Likewise, Beijing in return might be willing to consider some of the benefits of seeking Australian involvement in some of the more exclusive processes to which it is a party, working from the assumption that Canberra views a rising China very differently from Washington and Tokyo.

As Japan changes its international personality and seeks a greater degree of regional autonomy, and as ASEAN begins to question its own medium-to-longer term capacity to remain in the driver's seat of regional architecture-building, might there also be merit in developing a Trilateral Security (as opposed to Strategic) Dialogue between China, Japan and Australia? Despite the recent thawing which appears to be occurring in China-Japan ties—as epitomised by Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's short but highly successful April 2007 visit to Tokyo—the extraordinarily deep societal and historical tensions between these two countries cannot be underestimated. Issues of energy security also appear inevitable to complicate the China-Japan relationship in the years ahead, while (as the two historical great powers of East Asia) both countries have much at stake—and potentially much over which to disagree—in seeking to refine and then implement the notion of an East Asian Community. Not least because China and Japan are Australia's leading trading partners, the prospect of spiraling tensions between them is of genuine concern to Canberra. To the extent that a new trilateral mechanism involving Beijing, Canberra and Tokyo could serve to avoid, alleviate or at the very least manage these tensions in the China-Japan relationship, it would be most welcome.

In theory at least, all of this should become more straightforward for Australia under the Rudd Government. Kevin Rudd is a mandarin speaker with a strong interest in China and in Asia-Pacific multilateralism. That said, the difficulties associated with executing a genuine and comprehensive process of China-Australia engagement should never be under-estimated. While the depth of Australia's economic engagement with China can hardly be called into question, its engagement at other levels remains relatively shallow and under-developed. Engagement, of course, is a multi-layered, multi-dimensional process that also encompasses a wide spectrum of people-to-people contacts and personal linkages. Yet, in many respects, Australia and China remain very different societies: we speak a different language, our cultures are diametrically opposed, and our values are often in conflict. Trying to develop the same level of trust and intimacy that currently exists in the Australia-US relationship is therefore likely to be a long-term project, and one that will almost certainly encounter a good deal more trials and tribulations than has thus far been acknowledged in either Beijing or Canberra. Developing a sounder understanding

of our respective priorities and perceptions in the realm of Asia-Pacific multilateralism therefore represents a relatively innocuous yet important way to begin that process in earnest.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ John S. Duffield, 'Asia-Pacific Security Institutions in Comparative Perspective', in G. John Ikenberry and Michael Mastanduno (eds), *International Relations Theory and the Asia-Pacific*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2003, p. 248. Also see Charles E. Morrison and Astri Suhrke, *Strategies of Survival: the Foreign Policy Dilemmas of Smaller Asian States*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1978; and Leszek Buszynski, *SEATO, The Failure of an Alliance Strategy*, Singapore University Press, Singapore, 1983.
- ² See C.W. Braddick, 'Japan, Australia and the ASPAC: the rise and fall of an Asia-Pacific cooperative security framework', in Brad Williams and Andrew Newman (eds), *Japan, Australia and Asia-Pacific Security*, Routledge, London, 2006, pp. 30–46.
- ³ See Japan Center for International Exchange, *Towards Community Building in East Asia, Dialogue and Research Monitor Overview Report, 2005*, available at <<http://www.jcie.or.jp/drm>>, accessed 5 May 2008.
- ⁴ Amitav Acharya, 'Regional Institutions and Asian Security Order: Norms, Power, and Prospects for Peaceful Change', in Muthiah Alagappa (ed.), *Asian Security Order: Instrumental and Normative Features*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2003, p. 228.
- ⁵ See, for example, Paul Dibb, 'A New Defence Policy for a New Strategic Era?', in Clive Williams and Brendan Taylor (eds), *Countering Terror: New Directions Post '911'*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence no. 147, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, The Australian National University, Canberra, 2003, p. 64.
- ⁶ See, for example, Anthony Milner, *Region, Security and the Return of History*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2003.
- ⁷ Rodolfo C. Severino, 'Asean in need of stronger cohesion', *Straits Times*, 9 December 2006.
- ⁸ Barry Desker, 'Is the ARF obsolete? Three steps to avoid irrelevance', *PacNet*, no. 37A, Pacific Forum CSIS, 27 July 2006.
- ⁹ This point is raised by John Garofano, 'Power, Institutions and the ASEAN Regional Forum', *Asian Survey*, vol. 52, no. 3, May/June 2002, p. 506. The transmission belt problem has been discussed extensively by Robert Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, 2nd edition, Little and Brown, Boston, 2002.
- ¹⁰ Alan Renouf, *The frightened country*, MacMillan, Melbourne, 1979.
- ¹¹ Samuel P. Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilizations?', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 72, no. 3, Summer 1993, p. 42.
- ¹² Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1995, p. 153.
- ¹³ See Patrick Walters, 'Beijing plays spoiler on Asia summit', *Australian*, 6 April 2005, p. 2.
- ¹⁴ For further reading, see Brendan Taylor, Anthony Milner and Desmond Ball, *Track 2 Diplomacy in Asia: Australian and New Zealand Engagement*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence no. 164, The Australian National University, Canberra, 2006, p. 68.
- ¹⁵ Prime Minister the Hon. John Howard MP, 'Address to the APEC Australian Business Forum Dinner', Sheraton on the Park, Sydney, 21 October, 2005.
- ¹⁶ Emma-Kate Symons, 'PM eyes regional trading bloc plan', *Australian*, 16 January 2007, p. 1.
- ¹⁷ For further reading, see Brendan Taylor, 'The Australia-Japan Security Agreement: Between a Rock and a Hard Place?', *PacNet*, no 13, Pacific Forum, CSIS, Honolulu, 19 March 2007.
- ¹⁸ See, for example, Paul Dibb, 'Don't get too close to Beijing', *Australian*, 2 August 2005, p. 12.
- ¹⁹ Geoff Elliott, 'Stay cool on China, Ambassador tells US', *Australian*, 30 January 2006, p. 1.
- ²⁰ Cited in Dibb, 'Don't get too close to Beijing', *Australian*, 2 August 2005, p. 12.
- ²¹ Transcript of the Prime Minister The Hon. John Howard MP, Joint Press Conference with The President of the United States of America George W. Bush, The White House, Washington, DC, 19 July 2005.

²² Cited in Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, p. 152.