

ASEAN in the ARF: Identity and Norms Promotion by an Aspiring “Middle Power”?

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Introduction

The slow evolution of the ASEAN Regional Forum has, to a large extent, been determined by the normative preferences of ASEAN with regard to the norms, principles, structure, and mechanisms of the Forum. That ASEAN is able to steer the course of ARF's direction and development is primarily due to its central role in the Forum – a position that for now it is still unwilling to share with other participants, including the major powers. The proprietary position that ASEAN has reserved for itself within the ARF and the way that other participating countries have responded to it are rooted in their perceived roles in the emerging regional security regime. Specifically, ASEAN, as an aspiring middle power, sees the ARF as the main vehicle for promoting a regional order based on its norms and principles beyond the Southeast Asian context. For its part, Japan perceives the Forum as an important arena where it can play a diplomatic role in the region in the face of certain internal and external constraints to its desire to become a “normal” power. The United States, meanwhile, looks at the ARF as a complementary framework to its bilateral security arrangements in East Asia that allows it to play a major role in maintaining regional stability without overstressing its capabilities as a superpower in the post-Cold War era. This variation in the perceived roles of these actors has to some extent influenced their respective positions and policies concerning the ARF process as a whole. Indeed, it can be argued that, at a much deeper level, the slow evolution of the ARF has also been influenced by these actors' identities, their worldviews, and security strategies in the region.

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This paper examines the ASEAN's goals and objectives within the ARF, using the constructivist approach. Specifically, it looks into the role and identity of ASEAN in the ARF, and how ASEAN hopes to manage the relationship of the major powers (China, Japan, and the US) through the ARF. It also examines the importance of the ARF to the Philippines as far as promoting its security interests are concerned. The basic argument of this paper is that, from a constructivist perspective, the ARF matters because it is part of the collective strategy of a group of smaller states in the region in coping with the uncertain post-Cold War environment, primarily through the promotion its norms and principles in a larger context covering the East Asian region.

ASEAN in the ARF: An Aspiring Middle Power?

In the post-Cold War period, the ASEAN states were forced to deal with emerging security challenges in the region following the withdrawal of the US from its military bases in the Philippines and the downsizing of its forces in Northeast Asia. Although bilateral security alliances with the US and other Western powers remain intact, ASEAN member states realized that these are not adequate in managing the security environment in the region, particularly in their search for peaceful approaches in dealing with a number of security issues. By 1992, a consensus among ASEAN member states developed, particularly on the need to explore innovative approaches in addressing a number of their security concerns, such as the establishment of a regional security framework for engaging both their dialogue partners and other major powers such as China and Russia in a dialogue process. The creation of the ARF soon became the most important vehicle for ASEAN to promote its idea of a regional order based on its valued norms and principles.

ASEAN's Role and Identity in the ARF

The creation of the ARF is part of ASEAN's security strategy in promoting its norms and principles in the process of shaping the regional order of East Asia in the post-Cold

War period. This came about following the 1992 Singapore summit of ASEAN leaders when the group cleared the way for discussing political and security issues with its dialogue partners. Haacke (1998) had pointed out that the principal objective of ASEAN in the post-Cold War period was the establishment and promotion of "a regional order that, first, accommodates its members' diverse, if not partially incongruent, political and security interests and, second, reflects its own sense of political confidence." In order to pursue this goal, it was important for ASEAN to claim a central role in the creation of a "regional multilateralism" based on two important reasons. First, ASEAN did not see the major powers (China, Japan, and the US) as fit to define a new regional order because of their mutual antagonism (in the case of China-US and China-Japan), the lack of repentance for the past (in the case of Japan), and that a concert of major powers (China, Japan, Russia, and the US) was deemed unacceptable. Secondly, ASEAN members not only wanted to be treated on an equal footing with the regional powers but also asserted that the group's record in enhancing regional security strengthened its "credentials" for becoming "the primary driving force in establishing a new regional order" (Haacke 1998: 8).

For Haacke, the ARF is "multilateralism the ASEAN way," or what he calls the "ASEANization" of regional order in East Asia. He defined "ASEANization" as both the attainment of "milieu-goals" and a successful struggle for recognition of ASEAN by the major powers as an equal pole in the new security order of the region (Haacke 1998: 9). The first basically pertains to strengthening the national resilience of ASEAN members and reinforcing their political independence and policy autonomy through a set of traditional norms and principles of international society. This includes sovereignty, non-intervention, non-interference, and the peaceful settlement of conflict, which are all embodied in the ZOPFAN Declaration of ASEAN that represents the ideal regional order envisioned by ASEAN leaders for Southeast Asia. More importantly, ASEAN has attempted to extend its "diplomatic and security culture" to the rest of East Asia in order "to win

full recognition of its standing as a successful diplomatic community." This desire for recognition has far exceeded the wish for corporate prestige because ASEAN countries equally strive for recognition by outsiders in relation to members' respective "political identities." This has been reinforced by the impressive economic growth patterns of most ASEAN members in the 1980s and 1990s. For Haacke, drawing the regional powers into the institutional and normative frameworks proposed by ASEAN is the apparent yardstick by which the Association itself measures the true extent of recognition extended to it, both at the corporate and country levels (Haacke 1998: 9)).

The "ASEANization" of regional order in East Asia through the ARF is also part of the Association's security strategy for dealing with the uncertainties and challenges of the post-Cold War period, which are essentially external in nature. Considering that the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Meeting (PMC) does not include all the actors that maintain pivotal roles in the region, such as China and Russia, the creation of the ARF was "a logical outcome of ASEAN's move towards inclusiveness in security cooperation." The emphasis of the ARF is on a process in which the Forum is expected to provide the venue "where participating countries can voice their legitimate interests". At the same time, based on ASEAN experience, ASEAN states hope that constructive dialogue process will help "build trust and confidence and inculcate habits of cooperation and consultation" (Snitwongse 1995: 527). Thus, according to Garofano, the ARF process is essentially one of identity building. By concentrating on process, "dialogue should lead to socialization which, in turn, will lead to the dissipation of conflicts of interests" (Garofano 1999: 78).

However, Leifer (1999a) sees the advent of the ARF in another light. He argues that the formation of the Forum "registered a recognition by ASEAN that it was not competent on its own to provide for regional security in a context in which Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia were subject to a strategic fusion." While recognizing that ASEAN was able

to assume a managerial role in the ARF, and had secured a novel diplomatic centrality within it, he points to the underlying insecurities of ASEAN and the risks involved in extending its model of "cooperative security" beyond its limited regional bounds. The formation of ASEAN, according to Leifer, was based on a need to cope with a changing distribution of power in the region, specifically the perceived "strategic retreat" of the United States¹ and the "strategic ascendancy" of the People's Republic of China (PRC). With these changes, he also contends that ASEAN assumed the risk that its collective identity could be diminished and "even subsumed within the wider enterprise." So far, this has not happened because it has been in the interest of China, along with Russia and India, to support the diplomatic centrality of ASEAN within the ARF, "as a way of promoting a greater multi-polarity defined with reference to the post-Cold War global standing of the United States." Even so, ASEAN's members have been quite conscious of the potential risk involved in engaging themselves within a geographically broader security framework that is subject to the influence of all the major regional powers² (Leifer 1999a: 34; see also Leifer 1995, 1996).

Two important factors seem to have worked in favor of ASEAN taking the central role in the ARF. First, there were no exclusive Northeast Asian efforts to create a sub-regional counterpart to ASEAN. According to Simon (1998), China was then wary of security multilateralism as a device "which could constrain its regional ambitions." At the same time, Japan was still perceived with suspicion by other Northeast Asian states because it remains "unrepentant for its World War II brutalities", while the two Koreas were focused on their Cold War stalemate at the 38th parallel. Thus, according to Simon, ASEAN was able to fill this vacuum by offering to create a new region-wide entity modeled on its process of consultation and dialogue. Secondly, in the mid-1990s, the situation was also ripe for the participation of China, Japan, and the US in a regional security framework, because a precedent had already been set with the inauguration of the APEC forum in 1989, which brought together most of

the Pacific rim countries to debate the merits of open trade. A counterpart security forum to APEC was the logical consequence of this development. Nonetheless, it was important that the three major powers must be convinced that security multilateralism was in their interests. Unlike its predecessor, the Clinton administration had no problem with creating a multilateral security forum because it viewed multilateral diplomacy as an instrument for spreading the cost of common security among its friends. It also did not believe that such a forum would undermine the US' traditional alliances. For Japan, the ARF served as an opportunity to "legitimize its voice in regional security affairs independent of the United States" even as it became the venue for security dialogue between Tokyo and Seoul in the same setting offered the US and China. Although China's participation in the ARF was a bit complicated initially due to its basic distrust of institutionalized multilateral security organizations, the ARF became acceptable in the end because "it insured that neither Tokyo nor Washington could dominate" (Simon 1998: 205-206).

The ARF as Dual-Track Security Strategy

The creation of the ARF can be seen as part of ASEAN's dual-track security strategy. As Ba (1997) pointed out, ASEAN has been divided with regard to what she termed as the "classic dilemma" of Third World coalitions: that is, between the desire for autonomy and the need for external security guarantees. According to her, each ASEAN member faces both ends of the dilemma, but it is mainly a question of which takes priority. ASEAN's desire for autonomy is best captured in the ZOPFAN ideal. However, the presence of foreign military bases in the region until the early 1990s reflected this reality. Moreover, the classic dilemma still remains, according to her, notwithstanding the collapse of the former Soviet Union and Vietnam's membership in ASEAN, especially with regard to the ambivalence of ASEAN members towards the US, its main security guarantor. Specifically, ASEAN sent contradictory signals to the US since the late 1980s. For instance, while asking the US to remain

the balancing power in the region in 1989, most ASEAN members raised no objection to the closing of the American bases in the Philippines. In 1989-1990, Indonesia and Malaysia criticized Singapore's offer of facilities to the US following the shutdown of American bases in the Philippines as inviting major power interference in the region. However, both later on offered similar facilities to Washington. In 1994, both Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur appeared to have changed their positions again on the issue of American presence in the region by supporting the decision of Bangkok to deny the request of the US to provide a floating base in the Gulf of Thailand. Between 1994-1995, the period saw the creation of the ARF, which was a mechanism to keep the US involved in the region, as well as the signing of the SEANWFZ treaty, which effectively limits the nuclear power capabilities of the US (Ba 1997: 650).

Despite these apparent contradictions, Ba argued that there has been a convergence of views within ASEAN on the changing role of the US in Southeast Asia. For one, with the closing of American military facilities in the Philippines, an important bone of contention and obstacle to the realization of ZOPFAN was removed. Subsequent ARF and ASEAN statements that support a "balancing role" for the United States were similarly precipitated by the decision to close the American bases in the Philippines. Notwithstanding this emerging ASEAN consensus about the continued, "positive value" of the American presence in Asia, there are still disagreements among its members over what that presence should entail. Limited military arrangements with the US, through visiting forces agreements with individual ASEAN members, appear to have become more acceptable in the short-term over playing host to permanent military bases. This primarily stems from a desire by many in ASEAN to redefine in more equal terms their relationship with the US. It is also in this context that the ARF was created, which Ba contends was an attempt to redefine old security relationships with the US where ASEAN tries to assert a more central role and resist the "patron-client" relationship of the past (Ba 1997: 652-653).

Simon (1995) looks at this dual-track strategy of ASEAN in the ARF from a more theoretical perspective. He pointed out that ASEAN's extension of security discussions outside its region through the PMCs and the ARF constitute "a new security architecture" for the region. Specifically, this framework is aimed at committing the parties to a conflict and external powers to search for peaceful settlements and mechanisms for conflict resolution, which are called confidence-building measures and reassurance in neo-liberal perspective. However, he acknowledges that this may not be sufficient. Hence, the maintenance of realist policies by ASEAN states becomes necessary as well. These include independent and minimally coordinated "arms build-up" (which for some ASEAN states are modernization programs); joint military exercises with major powers such as the United States; and maintenance of bilateral defense pacts and similar arrangements with other powers apart from the US, such as the Five Power Defense Arrangement. These efforts are aimed ostensibly to deter any latent or potential hostile power in the region, and to assist the ASEAN states in enhancing their indigenous military capabilities to achieve the same goal unaided.

Put another way, ASEAN is building through the ARF a framework based on neo-liberal components of security, which is an inclusive structure for all to "discuss their hopes and fears." If this structure is effective, it must be able to accommodate the divergent security concerns of its members. If the structure is undermined, however, there is still an "insurance policy" made up of two components, namely: 1) self-insurance through the build-up of indigenous military forces; and 2) continued reliance on an external guarantor – the United States. It may be that the latter's commitment may decline, while the former component improves over time. Thus, a combination of both neo-liberal and realist policies will help ensure a peaceful environment that is necessary for sustaining ASEAN's development (Simon 1995: 21).

Finnegan (1999) elaborates further on the relationship between multilateralism and bilateralism in regional security, which applies to Southeast and Northeast Asia in the context of the ARF. Specifically, he pointed out that multilateral security could be viewed as a supplement to, rather than a replacement for, bilateral and sub-regional cooperation. Multilateral mechanisms are primarily aimed at performing a confidence-building function, where policy makers of the region may believe that certain specific issues still has need to be worked out among concerned states. The multilateral framework thus provides a context for bilateral relationships, in particular assurances of how relations ought to be conducted. It may be also viewed as another channel of communication, especially in times when bilateral ties are strained. In effect, multilateralism serves as a facilitator of dialogue, rather than a means to settle bilateral dispute, but which may in turn facilitate solutions (Finnegan 1999: 88-89).

This supplementary role of multilateral security arrangement to bilateral security cooperation is best captured in the following quotes from some ASEAN and East Asian scholars and political elites in the region:

A Singaporean scholar noted that

[T]he ARF is likely to work [because] it embodies the converging security strategies of the United States, Japan, and ASEAN after the Cold War. Until recently, all three parties had been skeptical about the value of formal, multilateral security discussions. The United States felt that its bilateral ties with Japan, South Korea, Thailand, and the Philippines have helped maintain regional security and it was fearful that multilateral approaches might dilute the strength of these bilateral pacts. Yet, with the end of the Cold War, it has become obvious that the basis of those strong bilateral ties – American troops on Asian soil – would gradually weaken; as such, it made sense

to supplement existing bilateral agreements with a web of multilateral arrangements such as the ARF...[which will] allow the US to continue playing a major political-diplomatic role in the Asia-Pacific region even though the US will not get its way as often as in the past (Khong 1996:58-59).

Another Singaporean analyst echoed the same point:

[O]ne of the key ASEAN initiatives has been the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), [whose] publicly stated objective is to provide a forum for the discussion of regional security issues, thereby building confidence in the region through implementation of transparency measures...The unarticulated objective of the ARF is to ensure that the United States remains militarily engaged in the Asia-Pacific, and that China operates within a regional system, hopefully taking cognizance of the interests of other regional states (Da Cunha 1996:235).

A Malaysian armed forces official likewise underscored the importance of continued American presence in the region:

America's presence is certainly needed, at least to balance other powers with contrasting ideology in the region. America's presence is also needed to ensure that shipping lanes are always safe and not disturbed by suspicious powers. The power balance is needed in this region to ensure that other powers that have far-reaching ambitions in Southeast Asia will not find it easy to act against countries in the region (Acharya 1999: 140).

A former national security adviser in the Philippines also saw the ARF and bilateral security arrangements in the region as complementary:

By simply being in place, the [ARF] offered a convenient forum for major power dialogue at the end of the Cold War. Because ASEAN is non-threatening – it is seen as having no hidden agenda – and because their own relationships are still unstable, the great powers with interests in the Asia-Pacific are content to let ASEAN take the initiative on regional security problems. Thus ASEAN has become the hub of confidence-building activities and preventive diplomacy in the region.... Over the next 10-15 years, the ARF must take advantage of the wider stability imposed by the military superiority of the US and its allies to ease local instabilities (Almonte 1997: 81-82).

A Japanese scholar presented the utility of having both bilateral and multilateral security frameworks in the region in this manner:

The continuation of a bilateral alliance between Japan and the United States and the existence of a regional multilateral security forum may seem contradictory, but in fact the two are interdependent...The structure of the existing regional security mechanism places the United States at the hub of a wheel from which individual countries such as Japan, Australia, and Korea extend. It does not, however, connect the various US partners with each other. This lack of collectivity is disadvantageous for fostering a sense of security community within the Asia-Pacific region. To make up for this default, such multilateral security fora as the governmental ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the non-governmental Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) have been formed. In addition, a series of bilateral (and sometimes trilateral) security dialogues involving Japan are taking place more frequently in recent years than before (Watanabe 2000:71-72).

Two Korean scholars put it in much the same way, but with emphasis on the pragmatic dimension of having both bilateral and multilateral security approaches in the region:

While bilateral security arrangements remain largely intact today prudent thinkers in Asia view multilateralism as a valuable security supplement to prepare for a rainy day. Yet while signs of serious interest in multilateralism are visible throughout Asia, there is little consensus on what an effective Asian multilateral security regime would look like and how it would be shaped by the post-Cold War environment in the Asia Pacific.³

A former Korean ambassador to the US saw the existence of bilateral security arrangements as compensating for the absence of a regional multilateral security device:

Historically, the ARF represents a significant step forward, being the first regular gathering of regional states to discuss security issues... But the ARF is still in its infancy. ASEAN's low level of institutionalization is not a sign of special strength unique to Asian organizations. Instead, it reflects the sensible judgment of ASEAN leaders that, under the present circumstances, a more ambitious attempt would only expose the weakness of the political foundation on which the ARF by necessity rests... The lack of a regional multilateral device is, to some extent, compensated by bilateral security alliances, the most important of which are the US-Japan and US-South Korea alliances (Kim 1997:54-55).

Based on the foregoing discussion, it is apparent that there is a fundamental agreement among policy elites and scholars in the region about the complementary relationship between bilateralism and multilateralism in the security strategies of countries in East Asia. Specifically, those from ASEAN have underscored the importance of maintaining bilateral security arrangements as part of an "insurance

policy" that is supplemented by an "assurance framework" through the ARF. That both strategies are simultaneously pursued by states in the region stems mainly from a common recognition of the changed security environment where East Asian states have to contend with uncertainties and emerging security challenges in the post-Cold War period.

ASEAN's Security Agenda in the ARF

Since its creation in 1994, the ARF had become a major venue for ASEAN to pursue its security agenda in the larger context of the Asia Pacific region. There are at least three important agenda for ASEAN, namely, the promotion of ASEAN norms and principles in ARF, engaging China in regional security dialogue, and managing the stability of major power relations between China, Japan, and the US.

Promotion of ASEAN Norms and Principles in the ARF

The primary agenda of ASEAN in the ARF is the promotion of its "ASEAN way" in dealing with regional security issues. Specifically, ASEAN's norms and principles have become the bedrock of the ARF process over the last six years since its creation in 1994. That the ARF is made up of participants with divergent worldviews and security interests is not in itself an obstacle to the promotion of ASEAN norms and principles in the Forum. The challenge is how ASEAN will be able to engage purposively non-ASEAN members of ARF in the conceptualization and crystallization of the meaning of cooperative security in the region. This is important, according to one Singaporean military official (Goh 1997) in order to "guide a sharper definition of the role of the ARF and to muster a collective commitment for mutually beneficial security cooperation." In this context, the ARF is in itself a socialization process because the participants are engaged in finding a common acceptable basis of security cooperation, which can be reinforced with the adoption by the ARF of ASEAN norms and modalities that pertain to cooperative security. These include: 1) a

consensus-based diplomacy, grounded in the principles of mutual accommodation and reciprocity; 2) a policy approach driven by incrementalism; 3) a habit of consultation and dialogue based on flexibility and informality; and 4) an operational style that stresses conflict avoidance. These norms and modalities, which had facilitated "comfort-building" and "assurance-strengthening" during the formative stage of ASEAN, can have a similar positive effect within the ARF if applied conscientiously while it is still in its infancy (Goh 1997: 26).

There is no doubt that ASEAN has been quite successful in promoting its norms and principles within ARF, based on the endorsement by other non-ASEAN participants in the Forum of its Treaty of Amity and Cooperation. Specifically, accession to the Treaty was made a prerequisite for becoming a participant in the ARF, while ASEAN's consensus approach to decision making and informality in agenda setting within the Forum have also become acceptable practices. In fact, one scholar (Acharya 1997) pointed out that the "ASEAN way" had become the basis of an evolving "Asia-Pacific way" in the context of the ARF and even APEC. This growing acceptance of its norms and principles had in effect allowed ASEAN to enhance its new security managerial role in the region, one that has evolved "from securing a benign environment at the sub-regional level through ZOPFAN to one presently of facilitating the evolution of a new regional order" in the Asia Pacific. Moreover, it had also increased ASEAN's stakes in the ARF inasmuch as it is the one that is in the best position to guard these stakes due of its demonstrative record of having attained relative peace and stability in the most diverse sub-region in the Asia Pacific (Goh 1997: 23).

The "ASEAN (or Asian) Way" is not only about norms and principles but also about how things are done. In the context of approaches to security, the "Asian way" is said to have the following common denominators: 1) an emphasis on Asian solutions to Asian problems, best approached through bilateralism rather than multilateralism; 2) the

centrality of state sovereignty as reflected in the generally resolute commitment to non-interference in each other's affairs; 3) informal incrementalism with the implication of longer policy time perspectives; and 4) consensus-building through constructive and non-conflictual dialogues, based on a recognition of differences of values, norms, and practices among states.⁴ It is thus basically an "operational code" that indicates the modal pattern of how Asian states conduct their diplomacy and how they will resolve their policy differences. In the context of the ARF, the Asian way will not only decide the pace of how the Forum will evolve, but also the form and substance of security proposals that emanate from it (Goh 1997: 27-28).

Some Western scholars, however, question the idea of a distinct "ASEAN" or "Asian" way. One of them (Higgott 1995) was even outright dismissive of the concept. Another scholar (Evans 2000) argued that the "ASEANization" thesis on the current phase of Asia Pacific multilateralism could be overdrawn. Specifically, Evans pointed out that: First, the ASEAN approach is "neither as consistent nor as static as it first appears." ASEAN has occasionally used formal and binding treaties (e.g. Treaty of Amity and Cooperation and the SEANWFZ Treaty) despite its preference for informality. Moreover, ASEAN has also championed exclusive regional processes, such as the EAEC, ASEM and its track-two companion, the CAEC, which exclude North Americans even in observer and associate member status. Secondly, while some non-ASEAN participants in the ARF and CSCAP, and even in APEC, are respectful and supportive of ASEAN's leading role in these forums, they are not necessarily in agreement with ASEAN with regard to the pace and direction of these institutions. Evans even pointed out that in ARF "the security cooperation vocabulary has been borrowed from elsewhere though, to be sure, substantially modified as it has filtered through regional discussions." Most significantly, he stressed that a number of ideas about the role of international organizations in promoting peace "have come from foreign ministries and research institutes connected to European and North American-style

multilateralism." Evans, therefore, thinks that although the working style and distinctive vocabulary in ARF and CSCAP are still evolving, it is best to characterize them as reflecting a "hybrid" of both ASEAN and Western approaches (Evans 2000: 158-159).

From a theoretical perspective, Acharya summed up the importance of understanding the "ASEAN Way" in the context of an emerging brand of multilateralism in the Asia Pacific in this manner:

To understand the emergence of multilateral institutions in the region, one needs to look beyond the material interests and rationalist utility-maximizing behavior of regional actors. The emergence of Asia-Pacific multilateral institutions is not just interest-driven, but identity-driven. The dialogue and institution-building processes involving ideas (both indigenous and imported), regional cultural norms, and the quest for a collective regional identity have played a crucial role in promoting the concept and practice of multilateralism. The "ASEAN Way", despite its practical limitations, has been a useful symbol for regional policy makers to advance their process of socialization. It has helped to define the *character* of regional institutions, helping us to understand not only why multilateralism is emerging in the Asia-Pacific right now, but more importantly, which type of multilateralism is emerging and will prove viable in the end (Acharya 1997: 343).

Notwithstanding a number of serious objections to the idea of a distinct ASEAN approach to multilateralism, it is apparent from the foregoing discussion that ASEAN from the very beginning has been quite conscious of promoting its norms and principles in the ARF process. There is no doubt that the creation of the ARF, at least from the perspective of ASEAN states, is also identity-driven even as they were also motivated by material realities in the search for a multilateral security framework for the region. Indeed,

the "ASEAN Way" has acquired some significant practical value for ASEAN in the context of engaging other countries in the region, most notably China, in the process of security dialogue. ASEAN members view this socialization process in the ARF in different ways, depending on the nature of their respective relationship with other participating states in the Forum. However, engaging China has been one of the main preoccupations of ASEAN since the creation of ARF in 1994.

Engaging China in Regional Security Dialogue: The South China Sea Dispute

China has become the main focus of attention in the Asia Pacific region since the end of the Cold War due to its tremendous economic growth and its ongoing program of military modernization. Many countries in the region, particularly in Southeast Asia, see China as an emerging power whose rapid economic growth since the 1980s has made it a formidable regional military power. This prospect of the PRC becoming a regional military power has become a major security concern for ASEAN in the face of unresolved territorial disputes in the South China Sea as well as the apparent lack of transparency on the part of China with regard to its defense policies and expenditures. Moreover, ASEAN countries are also greatly concerned about the implications to regional security of China's policy towards Taiwan, North Korea, as well as the stability of its relations with Japan and the US. There is also a need to transform the nature of ASEAN-China relations where both sides may pursue "deeper engagement" in order to manage their relations. Thus, engaging China in the process of multilateral security dialogue is also part of ASEAN's agenda in the ARF (Wanandi 1996:117).

The policy of engagement basically refers to "the use of non-coercive means to ameliorate the non-status quo elements of a rising major power's behavior," with the goal of ensuring that this growing power is used "in a manner that is consistent with peaceful change in regional and global

orders." Engagement encompasses any attempt to socialize a dissatisfied power into acceptance of the established order, and may be distinguished from other policies by its means: i.e., it relies on rewards rather than threats of punishment in order to influence the target's behavior. The primary goal of an engagement policy is "to minimize conflict and avoid war without compromising the integrity of an existing international order." Other important goals include: 1) enabling status quo powers "to gain a clearer picture of the real (as opposed to the declared) intentions and ambitions of the rising, dissatisfied power"; 2) to buy time in order to "rearm and gain allies in case the rising power cannot be satisfied and war becomes necessary"; and 3) to "break up dangerous combinations or to prevent them from occurring in the first place" (Schweller 1999: 16).

Within ASEAN, the policy of engagement with China at the bilateral and regional levels has taken on different meanings and importance. In the case of Indonesia, Liefer argues that China is not perceived "as an imminent security threat in Jakarta, but is viewed as casting a growing shadow which has begun to encroach on the periphery of Indonesia's archipelagic and strategic bounds." In the short term, the policy of engagement "as a way of trying to encourage China in cooperative practice," has served the economic and security interests of the country and has not been deemed to be politically costly. In the context of the ARF, one compelling argument in favor of this policy was not only the participation of China in a multilateral structure of dialogue with the potential for influencing its behavior, but also because the participation of the US would encourage its sustained post-Cold War interest in the region, which is an important factor for regional balance of power. It was primarily for this reason that Indonesia was disposed to accommodate the idea of extending the cooperative security arrangements beyond the ambit of Southeast Asia "because [it] would incorporate a balance of power factor with China in mind" (Leifer 1999b: 105). Even so, China's participation in the ARF is considered an important factor as far as the long-term viability of the ARF is concerned. An Indonesian

security expert (Wanandi 1996) has pointed out that China's participation in the ARF is in fact the most critical "because it is [an] emerging great power, previously isolated in the area, and still has to prove its willingness to become a responsible regional power" (Wanandi 1996: 121).

On the South China Sea dispute, Indonesia has been at the forefront of the ongoing informal, non-governmental dialogue on the management of disputes in the area since the early 1990s. The Indonesian-sponsored "Workshops on Managing Potential Conflicts in the South China Sea" have been among the most active meetings aimed at finding approaches to the settlement of the dispute in the area.⁵ (See Table 1.) Despite its desire to broker a resolution to the conflict in the area, its maritime boundaries overlap with those claimed by Vietnam, which remain unsettled (Chung 2000). While basically not a party to the Spratlys dispute, Indonesia is has also been concerned about China's claims to the entire South China Sea. Specifically, China's U-shaped line on its map demarcating its claim to the area cuts through the Indonesian claimed waters to the north of the Natuna Islands, which includes the massive Natuna gas fields development area. However, it appears that Jakarta has sought and received assurances from Beijing that it has no dispute with Indonesia in the area (JIR 2000).

Table 1
Indonesian-Sponsored Workshops on the South China Sea, 1990-1997

First Workshop	1990, January 22-24	Bali, Indonesia
Second Workshop	1991, July 15-18	Bandung, Indonesia
Third Workshop	1992, June 28-July 2	Yogyakarta, Indonesia
Fourth Workshop	1993, August 23-25	Surabaya, Indonesia
Fifth Workshop	1994, October 26-28	Bukittinggi, Indonesia
Sixth Workshop	1995, October 9-13	Balikpapan, Indonesia
Seventh Workshop	1996, December 14-17	Batam, Indonesia
Eighth Workshop	1997, December 2-6	Puncak, Indonesia

Source: Chung (2000: 292)

Malaysia basically shares Indonesia's perspective on the utility of engaging China in regional security dialogue. However, it sees this engagement policy primarily as a "socialization process" where China takes part in consultations under the framework of the ARF, particularly in areas of transparency and confidence-building measures. Malaysian leaders, nonetheless, do not foresee the ARF as being capable of altering China's interests in the near to medium-term. Through the ARF, Malaysia also hopes to convey to Beijing the high diplomatic costs of any use of force in the South China Sea, which includes the risk of regional political isolation that China is quite keen to avoid. At the same time, Kuala Lumpur wants the US to steer a middle course between withdrawal and unilateralism in order to create a favorable atmosphere for multilateralism in the region. Specifically, it does not want the US to be needlessly provocative of China, nor should the Americans allow the Chinese to miscalculate the risks involved if Beijing's actions threaten regional stability. Malaysia also thinks that ASEAN can play a moderating role in the US-China rivalry inasmuch as it believes that neither American nor Chinese dominance in the region is desirable. Specifically, a dominant China is a threat to Malaysian security, while American dominance would result in more interference in domestic affairs of small countries, particularly in the areas of human rights and democracy (Acharya 1999: 141-143).

With regard to the South China Sea dispute, Malaysia's concern over China's intentions in the area appeared to have peaked in 1995 following the Mischief Reef incident between the Philippines and China. At the time, Kuala Lumpur stood with ASEAN in expressing its collective concern over Chinese "expansionism" in the area. However, by November 1998, following another incident between China and the Philippines over Mischief Reef, Kuala Lumpur rejected the Philippines' request for the issue to be included in the ARF. Specifically, Malaysian officials insisted that the matter be discussed at the bilateral level, which basically echoed the Chinese position on the matter. Malaysia also opposed a regional code of conduct in the South China

Sea being drafted by the Philippines and Vietnam, leading some observers in ASEAN to speculate that China and Malaysia must have had a special agreement on the Spratlys dispute (Liow 2000: 686-688).

Among ASEAN member countries, the Philippines in recent years has taken a more adamant position in dealing with China, even though it also supports the process of multilateral dialogue under the framework of the ARF. This stems primarily from the unresolved territorial dispute between China and the Philippines since the military build-up by the former on Mischief Reef in 1995. In fact, since 1995, the Philippines has been the most unrelenting of all ASEAN members in its stance to include the Spratlys and the South China Sea dispute in the ARF agenda, despite strong objections from Beijing.⁶ The Philippines' willingness to accept the failure of ASEAN's "constructive engagement" policy towards China is best captured in the following statement from a Philippine scholar:

Constructive engagement remains an important policy objective, but it must take place within the parameters that the political document on ASEAN-China relations establishes. The ARF must also pursue similar goals on a region-wide basis. In addition, ASEAN must prepare for the possibility that constructive engagement may fail. This rationale underlies the varying forms of security cooperation that ASEAN countries maintain with the United States and other countries that are able to deter China from behavior that destabilizes the region. China must be made to understand that if constructive engagement does not produce positive results, its neighbors have no alternative but to pursue their interests more aggressively (Hernandez 2000: 125).

For the Philippines, the territorial dispute with China over the Spratlys highlighted its vulnerabilities to external threats, especially after the US military bases closed down in 1992. In February 1995, then President Fidel V. Ramos signed the

Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Modernization Act, which came at the most opportune time – close upon the discovery of a Chinese military buildup on Mischief Reef. The law called for the implementation of the AFP modernization program over a period of fifteen years and provided a ceiling of 50 billion pesos for the first five years, beginning in 1996. Its provisions indicate the order of priority in terms of developing the capabilities of the AFP – namely, naval, air, and ground defense. However, given the country's weak external defense, the Ramos government had to rely primarily on diplomatic pressure against China on the Spratlys issue. The main strategy was to undertake a series of diplomatic offensives, bringing international opinion to bear against Chinese actions in the Spratlys. Both bilateral and multilateral approaches (the latter primarily through ASEAN) were pursued (Morada and Collier 1998). Apart from undertaking a modernization program for its armed forces, the Philippines had also signed a visiting forces agreement (VFA) with the US in January 1998, which was ratified by the Philippine Senate in May 1999. The VFA is perceived by many in the Philippines as providing some kind of a psychological assurance that the US is prepared to play a stabilizing role in the region (Lamb 1999). Moreover, the Philippines is open to the possibility of forging closer regional military ties with US allies in the region, such as conducting joint multilateral military exercises with Australia, Singapore, Thailand, and the US on an annual basis, despite strong objections from China (Nazareno 2001).

Singapore adopted a three-pronged approach in engaging China. The first prong is economic engagement that focuses on economic incentives that allows the PRC to prosper and develop a stake in the "existing rules of the game". It is assumed that, with Beijing playing under these rules, China will have strong disincentives against undermining these rules through conflict and war. Thus, Singapore supports the integration of China into the regional and global economy. The second prong of Singapore's policy is political engagement, which views China less as an adversary and more "as an important, legitimate player in the Asia Pacific and whose participation and cooperation in regional initiatives are to be welcomed." Both the economic

and political approaches hope to facilitate the creation of a China that takes the "rules of the [interstate] game" seriously and conforms to contemporary norms of international behavior. The third prong, which is a fallback position, is the modernization of Singapore's armed forces and augmenting its military capabilities. This third prong, however, is aimed more at coping with the strategic uncertainty in the region than towards an emerging China. It also recognizes that Singapore's defense posture is not sufficient to act as a deterrent to China, and may move more in the direction of augmenting the US-Japan security alliance with the rest of ASEAN (Khong 1999: 110-111).

With regard to the South China Sea conflict, Singapore's position is one that clearly makes a distinction between the ownership and development aspects of the claims, on the one hand, and the international dimension of the issue, on the other. Specifically, Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew had said that the issue of sovereignty and development of the area must be left to the claimant states, but the freedom of navigation in the area must be resolved in the interest of international transportation. Thus, the country takes some solace from China's repeated assurance to the international community that it still supports the principle of freedom of navigation in the area. It is also for this reason that Singapore was not primarily concerned about China's build-up on Mischief Reef in 1995, and its response to the incident was muted (Singh 1995).⁷

Among ASEAN countries so far, Thailand has the closest relations with China. The two countries had formed a strategic alliance during the 1980s in the context of the Cambodian conflict. This strategic alliance had resulted in closer military ties between the two countries, which continues to this day. Following the political resolution of the issue, Sino-Thai relations improved further in the 1990s, particularly in the economic sphere (Chinwanno 1995). The South China Sea issue does not in any way affect Thailand's relations with China bilaterally, given that it is not a claimant state. However, Bangkok had supported the collective ASEAN position vis-à-vis China on the South China Sea issue, particularly in terms of pushing for a regional code of

conduct based on the principles of ASEAN's 1992 Manila Declaration on the South China Sea.⁸

In recent years, Bangkok's concern about China's growing influence in the region has a lot to do with Thailand's neighbor, Myanmar (Burma). Specifically, Thailand and Myanmar have been at loggerheads for sometime over their common border along Doi Lang area, which has been a stronghold of drug warlords whose heroin refineries and laboratories have flourished with the knowledge of military officers on both sides of the border. The United Wa State Army, which is an ethnic-narcotics guerrilla force loyal to the Myanmar military junta, has been reported to be getting its military supplies and training from China. Moreover, the Chinese were said to have persuaded the ethnic Wa, the most powerful and most militant of the hillside tribes, to move their people, their army, and their drug laboratories from the Myanmar-China border in the north to Myanmar's border with Thailand at Doi Lang in the south. It has also been reported that Beijing supplied the Wa with sophisticated weapons and money in exchange for its help in constructing a network of roads through Myanmar from China. The road system would give Beijing access to seaports and naval bases on the Myanmar coast, access the Chinese have coveted for years (Schmetzer 2001).

Vietnam's relations with China have improved tremendously since 1991, particularly in the economic sphere,⁹ after it had embarked on a foreign policy strategy of "making friends with all countries" and "diversifying foreign relations". Hanoi normalized relations with Beijing in that year,¹⁰ followed by Vietnam joining ASEAN and normalizing relations with the US four years later. In recent years, the more conservative leaders of the ruling Vietnamese Communist Party had turned to China as a model for sustaining its ideological hold on the country while undertaking a number of fundamental market-oriented economic reforms in Vietnam (Thayer 1990: 186-187). In December 1999, the two countries signed a land border agreement and, in December 2000, a sea border agreement in the Tonkin Gulf. While these agreements may have partly resolved their long-standing animosity on territorial disputes,

the South China Sea issue is still a major irritant between China and Vietnam. Specifically, while reluctantly agreeing with ASEAN to draw up a regional code of conduct in the South China Sea, China rejected Vietnam's demand to include the Paracels in the application of such code (Hung 2000: 105). Just like the Philippines, Vietnam has been pushing for a regional code of conduct on the South China Sea in which all claimant states, including China, would agree to abide by.¹¹

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that, within ASEAN, there are variations in the perspective of its members on how to engage China in regional security dialogue. More importantly, individual ASEAN states are able to make a clear distinction between their respective bilateral ties with China and their collective ties with the emerging regional power. Undoubtedly, there is a consensus within ASEAN that China has a vital role to play in maintaining regional peace and stability, but at the same time there is also a tacit recognition that there is no guarantee that this engagement policy will work effectively and all the time. Notwithstanding Malaysia's current position on the South China Sea issue, most countries in ASEAN support the need to have a regional code of conduct that will govern the behavior of claimant states in the area, and the inclusion of the issue in the agenda of the ARF.

Managing Major Power Relations: China, Japan, and the US

ASEAN's third important security objective in the ARF is managing the triangular relationship among the major powers China, Japan, and the US whose strategic interests in East Asia undoubtedly overlap. Most ASEAN countries recognize that an important factor in the continued peace and stability of the region will depend largely on the maintenance of a stable relationship among these three powers. This is particularly true in the case of Northeast Asia's stability, which has to a great degree been a function of the bilateral relationships of these actors. Since the end of the Cold War, and because of ASEAN's adoption of an export-led growth strategy and its support for the

maintenance of an open global trade regime, the integration of Southeast Asia with Northeast Asia had become inevitable. ASEAN had become increasingly aware that instability in Northeast Asia could have an impact in both the economic and political stability of Southeast Asia (Snitwongse 1995: 525). Thus, any multilateral approach to security in the East Asian region will necessitate that the triangular relationship between Beijing, Tokyo, and Washington be at its core (Finnegan 1999: 94).

ASEAN's interest in balancing the relationship between these major powers has been determined primarily by its perception of their changing roles and potential capabilities in the future. More specifically, with the perceived relative decline of the US, some doubts have been expressed in ASEAN circles about the reliability and capability of America to guarantee security in the region. Along with this perception, there are also fears within ASEAN about the future role of other powers. China and Japan are foremost in the security calculations of ASEAN largely because of their relative economic and military potential. Specifically, China's ambivalence with regard to its long-term intentions in the region, coupled with its growing economy and military capability are sources of concern for ASEAN. On the other hand, ASEAN members have been concerned about the potential of Japan to acquire a more independent military role, which could come about if there is a rift in its military alliance with the US, or an American military draw down that could motivate Tokyo to pursue a more independent defense policy (Snitwongse 1995: 524-525).

Convincing the three major powers to participate in a regional multilateral security framework was a challenging task for ASEAN in the formative years of the ARF. Although the impetus was ripe for their participation in such a regional framework because of the precedent set by their membership in APEC since 1989, these powers still had to be convinced that security multilateralism was in their interests. For one, the first Bush administration at the time opposed the idea because it was afraid that such a forum would undermine its bilateral security alliance in the region. This changed however when the Clinton administration took over because

it viewed multilateralism as an instrument for sharing the burden of common security among US allies in the region. For its part, China was then suspicious of any institutionalized multilateral security organizations, especially those patterned after Western models. It was also wary of attempts to probe into its defense doctrine and order of battle, even as it was also concerned about an Asian security organization that might be involved in the Taiwan issue. ASEAN did not have any problems with Japan in this regard because Tokyo viewed the ARF as providing an opportunity for it to legitimize its voice on matters pertaining to regional security issues independent of Washington. The Forum also served as an important venue for South Korean-Japan security dialogue in the same context offered the US and China (Simon 1998: 205-206).

In the context of Northeast Asian security, Finnegan (1999) argued that there are three reasons for China, Japan, and the US to pursue trilateral cooperation in the context of a multilateral security framework. First, all three powers share a common interest in maintaining good bilateral relations primarily because of the mutual sensitivity of their relationships. Second, they are also desirous of regional stability and have a common interest in promoting regional cooperation. Lastly, all three share mutual interests in avoiding nuclear proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the region. At the same time, however, Finnegan noted that there are significant divisive issues among them. Specifically, there are wide gaps in their perceptions about each other's foreign policy objectives. For instance, China sees in American talk of regional stability and engagement a doublespeak for regional hegemony. Conversely, Tokyo and Washington see a China threat despite Beijing's portrayal of its ultimate goal of sustained stability and economic development. With regard to Japan's desire to become a "normal" power, China perceives it as an attempt to on the part of the Japanese to expand its sphere of influence, shed its post-war constraints, and regain its former military status in the region. These gaps in perceptions among these major powers are also complicated by important differences in their political and economic systems, as well as the real and

perceived conflicts of security interests in the region (Finnegan 1999: 95-96).

Given the nature and dynamics of China-Japan-US relations, the ARF essentially provides a venue for strategic interactions among these major powers through what Peou (1999) calls "institutional threat-balancing", which is better than a hostile military alliance aimed at containment for peace. This does not mean, however, that participants in the ARF treat each other as complete equals; instead, interactive leadership is still the rule of the day and is likely to continue. For Peou, the idea of strategic interaction and interactive leadership makes sense from a constructivist perspective (he used the term "constructive realism") because it simply means that, although the international system remains anarchical, major power relations remain at the core of multilateralism but they do not behave like "bullies" vis-à-vis smaller powers. Based on this premise, he defines "interactive leadership" as referring to the interaction among major powers "to help stabilize the anarchical environment, rather than a kind of hegemonic leadership solely interested in controlling world affairs for their own benefit and at the expense of others." According to him, the pursuit of security through "strategic interaction" can make the international security system less prone to war (Peou 1999: 44).

The Philippines in the ARF: Norms and Dialogue as Instruments for Managing External Conflict

As one of the founding members of ASEAN and the ARF, the Philippines has put so much faith in the importance of international norms in managing external conflicts with other countries in the region. This is so because through the promotion of ASEAN's norms and the dialogue process within the ARF, another layer of security is added to its self-help strategy that allows it to manage its external environment even as the state continues to face a number of armed challenges from within. For now, the ARF serves as a useful diplomatic arena where the Philippines can muster international support for its legitimate security concerns vis-

à-vis major powers like China on unresolved territorial disputes such as those in the South China Sea. Moreover, it sees the ARF as an important avenue for socializing other actors to accept ASEAN's norms and principles as the bases for their international behavior and for managing inter-state conflicts in the region. From a pragmatic perspective, this strategy also allows the Philippine state to concentrate on the more urgent task of dealing with internal security concerns, such as nation-building and economic development, as well as in modernizing its armed forces and reorienting its capabilities towards external defense. Over the long-term, the value of the ARF for the Philippines is two-fold: 1) the promotion of ASEAN norms by small states will hopefully acquire legitimacy over traditional balance-of-power approach to security; and 2) major powers, particularly China, will abide by those norms and principles as the bases for managing conflicts with other states in the region. This is not to say, however, that all is well as far as the Philippines' external environment is concerned. Only that the ARF dialogue process serves a useful purpose in promoting its immediate and long-term security interests because it allows the Philippine state to utilize the normative approach in managing its external environment even as it also attempts to build up its external defense capabilities.

Summary and Conclusion

ASEAN's security agenda in the ARF have been shaped by the Association's collective identity and role as an emerging "middle power" in the region. Specifically, its goal of "ASEANizing" the East Asian regional order through the ARF stems from its desire to have its norms, principles, and mechanisms in resolving security issues gain wider acceptance and become the bases of how countries in the Asia Pacific, including the major powers, ought to behave and interact with each other. ASEAN hopes to achieve this goal not only through the process of dialogue among small countries vis-à-vis the major powers, but also through the strategic interaction of the major powers amongst themselves. This is not to say, however, that ASEAN sees the

dialogue process as replacing self-help and bilateral alliances in the long run. Only that, through the ARF, tensions that may lead to serious conflict and war, may be averted or prevented. To some extent, the logic of promoting ASEAN's norms and principles through the ARF is precisely to avoid *realpolitik* from being the first option in dealing with conflicts in the region. Even then, the success of the ARF will ultimately depend on whether the major powers will abide by international and regional norms and principles in the conduct of their foreign and security policies. For now, the ARF process must be given its chance to evolve and search its own form. ❖

Notes:

¹ For an elaborate discussion of this perception, see Smith (1997) and Wortzel (1996).

² Buszynski (1998), for example, pointed to a number of pressures on the ARF, not only concerning its structure but ASEAN's role and function in the Forum. He argued that with the persistence of ARF's inadequacies in dealing with broader regional security issues, pressure will continue to increase particularly from non-ASEAN participants to develop alternative dialogue structures which would better be able to handle security concerns such as the Taiwan Straits, the Korean Peninsula. For him, the dilemma for ASEAN is that an appropriate dialogue body for these issues would be an Asia-Pacific forum that would focus on Northeast Asia and which would allow the major actors, such as the US, Japan, and South Korea, to shape the agenda. This would then relegate ASEAN to the sidelines. See Buszynski 1998.

³ Young Whan Khil and Kongdan Oh as quoted from Evans (1996: 207).

⁴ These are observations of Michael Haas and Desmond Ball, as synthesized by Goh (1997: 27).

⁵ Indonesian Ambassador Hashim Djalal, who headed the Jakarta-sponsored Track II workshops on the South China Sea, enumerated a number of important achievements of these meetings. This include: 1) increased awareness of the of the problems of the South China Sea and willingness of participants in the workshop to promote cooperation and dialogue; 2) the continued activities of the workshop for the past 10 years, despite limited resources, have been encouraging; 3) non-claimant states in the South China Sea region, particularly those who are part of the ARF, have given increased attention, even informally, towards the issue; 4) some aspects of the South China Sea issue, in

particular the creation of a code of conduct, are now being taken up more formally in ASEAN, the ARF, and the ASEAN-China dialogue; 5) the workshops have also contributed to the bilateral negotiations between claimant states that resulted in bilateral codes of conduct, such as those between China –Philippines and Philippines-Vietnam; and 6) it established the only forum available on the South China Sea where all interested parties in the area could participate. Accordingly, some important lessons learned from these series of workshops are: 1) bigger countries in the region have to be conscious of their views of their neighbors and take steps to ensure that they are not perceived to be dominating or bullying their smaller neighbors; 2) attempts should be made to broaden the participation in cooperative programs and to deepen the areas of cooperation,, while at the same time promoting the growth of regional states; and 3) more emphasis should be placed on regional and common interests and on the benefits to a state that accrue from the pursuit of regional interests, and that countries of the region should learn to pursue their interests within the context of regional harmony. See Djalal (2001: 101-102).

⁶ For elaborate discussions and analysis of Philippine perspectives about China and the South China Sea dispute, see Gacis Jr. (1995), Filler (1995), Morada (1995), Morada and Collier (1998), and San Pablo-Baviera (1998).

⁷ Lee was quoted in May 1995 as saying, "China's Mischief Reef incursion can be explained in the following manner: like a big dog going up against a tree, lifting his leg to mark the tree so that smaller dogs will know that a big dog has been there, and to take note of that. It's not aggressive in itself. You have seen big dogs and little dogs. It's a little one-upmanship." (as quoted from Singh 1995: 57). For a Singaporean perspective on China's historic claim in the SCS, see Zou (2001). A more comprehensive discussion on China and the South China Sea dialogues was presented in a book written by a Singaporean scholar (Lee 1999).

⁸ An interesting view from Thailand about the issues surrounding the call for a SCS regional code of conduct among claimant states is contained in an article by Thai foreign ministry official, Kriangsak Kittichaisaree. Specifically, he argued that the stability in the SCS is likely to suffer from continuing contending views on whether there is a need for a code of conduct in the area and what its substance should be. For him, the rules and principles constituting the content of such a code already exist and their existence has been repeatedly acknowledged by all claimant states in many occasions. He also stressed that the process of consolidating the substance of that code in a single document is not a sine qua non of its implementation and may come at a later stage. Instead, the SCS countries should not focus on the modes of implementation of the substance of the code. See Kittichaisaree (2001: 145). For additional Thai perspectives on the South China Sea issue, see Chinwanno (1995) and Tuvayanond (1995).

⁹ Bilateral trade between the two communist states had increased, from US\$1 billion in 1998 to US\$1.5 billion in 1999, and was expected to increase further to US\$2 billion by 2000. See Hung (2000).

¹⁰ The major turning point in Sino-Vietnamese relations was the secret summit meeting in Chengdu in September 1990 (which was officially revealed in 1999) that was followed by formal normalization in November 1991. In the same month, Party Secretary-General Do Muoi and President Vo Van Kiet made an official visit to China upon the invitation of China's General-Secretary Jiang Zheming and Prime Minister Li Peng, during which the two countries issued a joint statement calling on both to develop good-neighborly and friendly relations. See Gu and Womack (2000).

¹¹ For elaborate discussions of Vietnamese views on the South China Sea issue, see Binh (1995) and Thao (2001).

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