The ASEAN Regional Forum and the Challenges of Managing Asia-Pacific Security

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Abstract

The formation of the ASEAN Regional Forum in 1994 was intended to broaden the Asia-Pacific region ASEAN's approach to cooperative security amid the emerging uncertainties in the region. With the end of the Cold War and the impending withdrawal of the United States from Southeast Asia, states in the region saw a need for a wider regional organization which could promote international peace and security while engaging the regional powers, in particular China and Japan, in a security dialogue. Almost nine years on, the ARF as a loose consultative organization for security dialogue and cooperation is still evolving. This essay seeks to examine the development of the ARF and assess its role as a mechanism for multilateral security cooperation. It will be argued that while the ARF is making slow and measured progress, the forum remains an important mechanism for managing regional security in the Asia-Pacific region.

Introduction

The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) continues to attract global attention as a desirable mechanism for discussion of multilateral security issues in the post-Cold War era. The diversity of its membership and broad geographical span makes it a unique and attractive multilateral security organization amid the emerging uncertainties of the post-Cold War era. The ARF, in this era of renewed interest in regionalism and means of promoting peace and security that brings together all the major powers of the much older regional organization, Asian Nations (ASEAN)³, the forum is evolving into a dynamic organization with a growing awareness among its members of the potential of developing into a dynamic forum for security dialogue and cooperation. The first part of this essay will trace the rationale for the formation of the ARF and will examine the development and activity of the forum over the last nine years. And the third section of this essay will argue that while the ARF is still a loose consultative organization as a mechanism for ensuring stability in East Asia, the forum remains an important mechanism for managing regional security in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Origin of the ARF

The ASEAN Regional Forum emerged in the Asia-Pacific region following the breakdown of the more predictable United States and Soviet Union alliances and emerging regional powers, China and Japan, in the new era of the post-Cold War scenario in the Asia-Pacific region following the events of 11 September 2001. The ASEAN states have been concerned with the emergence of China and Japan as regional powers and the need to engage these regional powers in discussions on regional security. As the former Director of the Malaysian Institute for Strategic and International Studies (MASISI), C. Severino, has noted:

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Looking East

South is the land of the east and the east and the land of India and South and the land of the east and South Asia. As I study the land of South Asia, I learn about the many religions and cultures of South Asia. South Asia's culture is influenced by ancient cultures and religions.

We need immediate help. We need it now. South East Asia is a country that is affected by ancient times and the ancient time continuum.