

The benefits of the asean regional forum politics essay

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The successful evolution of Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) has provided the impetus to create a regional security framework. Asian countries, unlike the Europe, which has multilateral and multilayered security government institutions such as the NATO and the EU, it had no multilateral security framework during the cold war[1]. After the cold war also Asian countries do not share a common threat, which is a prerequisite for creating a NATO-like institutions. On the contrary, they are mutually suspicious of the military intentions of other states within the region. Rather than striving to establish some form of collective defence-based institution, countries in the region have chose to create a looser form of regional security institution, which materialized as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1994.[2]

The ARF has emerged to be a leading forum for the discussion of regional security and hoped to promote confidence in the region by engaging all the Great Powers such as United States, Russia, European Union, Japan, India and People Republic of China (PRC). United States for instance, interested and attracted to the ARF for its bilateral security arrangements and somehow gave way to the interest in multilateral cooperation much encouraged due to Soviet Union separation.[3]It is somehow make the PRC curious and suspicious of the multilateral undertaking, and felt that it could not be able to remain outside of the extensive multilateral structure.[4]The ARF being said as the ASEAN's " strongest card' for enggaging PRC due to the issues of the South China Sea.[5]

THE ARF'S ORIGIN

The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) is a formal, official, multilateral dialogue in Asia Pacific region. It was established during the Twenty-Sixth ASEAN Ministerial Meeting and Post Ministerial Conference, which were held in Singapore on 23-25 July 1993. The chairman statement issued at the end of The inaugural meeting of the ARF in Bangkok on 25 July 1994, uncensored the commitment of the participating nations to foster the habit of constructive dialogue and consultation on political/security issues of common interest and concern in order to make significant efforts towards confidence building and security cooperation in the Asia Pacific region.[6]

Aim of the ARF is to facilitate discussion among member states on regional and political matters as well to develop cooperative measures which may contributes to the maintenance of peace and stability and the avoidance of conflict.[7]

The ASEAN Regional Forum objectives namely to foster constructive dialogue and consultation on political and security issues of common interest and concern and the second objectives is to make significant contributions to efforts towards confidence-building and preventive diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region.[8]The ARF's way of approach shall be somehow, evolutionary, and it is divided into three stages. It would be unwise for a new, young and fragile process like the ARF to handle all these challenges simultaneously. In stage I, the ARF will promote confidence-building measures (CBM). In the second stage, ARF will do the development of preventive diplomacy mechanisms and in the third stage the ARF will do the development of conflict-resolution mechanisms.

In July 2007, ARF consisted of 27 participants. The current participants in the ARF are all the ASEAN members, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, The People's Republic of China, the European Union, India, Japan, North Korea, South Korea, Mongolia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Russia, Timor Leste, United States and Sri Lanka. Taiwan has been excluded.[9]

THE BENEFITS FOR THE PARTICIPATING STATES

The ARF hoped to promote confidence in the region, as well as engaging the Great Powers in a constructive and positive manner, resulting in an increased discussion of both intra-regional and extra-regional issues.[10]

a. ARF TO ASEAN

The usefulness of the ARF as a venue for multilateral and bilateral dialogue and consultations and the establishment of effective principles for dialogue and cooperation, featuring decision-making by consensus, non-interference, incremental progress and moving at a pace comfortable to all especially to ASEAN members. It is also to ensure peace, security and stability in ASEAN region. Manage to survive among the Great Powers, developed ' esprit de corps' among ASEAN members and helping ASEAN members to settle and discussing matters in multilateral setting.

b. ARF TO THE SUPER POWERS

The ARF has become the most relevant dialogue to the super powers. For the United States, it was an opportunity for them to assert views as a super power in the region, be able to keep track on PRC influence in the region and

at the same time monitor security trends in Asia Pacific region. The important part was for the United States to remain as a 'protector' in SEA countries in terms of their military capabilities. For the PRC, the benefits they will get is to remain relevant in Spratly Islands issues discussions and at the same time able to expand PRC economic market by ensuring security in SEA (important trade route). PRC thought that by joining the ARF, it will somehow reduce the tension between ASEAN countries in South China Sea dispute. As for Russia, India and Japan, they will remain important in the region by participating in the event that organized by the ARF.

THE SUCCESS OF ARF

The ARF process allows small and middle powers a significant voice in major regional security affairs and bars the major powers from dominating and dictating the security agenda. The very fact that these states can now come together on a common platform for the resolution and discussion of security issues is an achievement. Moreover, the ARF has succeeded in bringing to the forefront various issues related to the security concerns in the region which poses challenges to the security outlook. Several issues have touched notably on non-traditional security issues and cross-border security issues such as terrorism, trafficking in persons, smuggling, global climatic change and its impact on human and societal security, food and energy security. Other issues briefly touched on are the situation in North Korea, Iran, Afghanistan and the territorial claims in the South China Sea.

The ARF has contained the potential of the threat from China and provided a deterrent against the possible future emergence of militarism from Japan. It

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has also usefully engaged the US and Russia in a multilateral forum. Within the ARF, all the other member states can keep a watchful eye on the development and ambitions of the four major powers-US, Russia, China, Japan -in the Asia Pacific region . In this respect, the ARF constitutes the key mechanism for maintaining peace and security in this vast region. The opportunity for discussing security issues of the Asia-Pacific region at the only multilateral security forum has been equally useful. It enabled the member states to have exchanges in an open and frank manner thus contributing to a better ' comfort level' among them.

CONCLUSION

The end of the cold war led to the quest for newer forms of security arrangements and multilateralism such as the formation of ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Although the ARF was dismissed as a mere ' talking shop' by some realists when created, It is worth noting that the ARF has tackled some very hard and sensitive issues in recent meetings and even a very sensitive subject have been taken up in the ARF.