

2002 CONCEPT PAPER ON DEFENCE DIALOGUE WITHIN THE ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM

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INTRODUCTION

1. The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) has made much progress since its inception in 1994. The comfort level among ARF members has increased and many confidence building measures have been implemented. There is general consensus that confidence building remains the main thrust of the whole ARF process, and that it is impossible to move the ARF forward without a high degree of mutual trust and understanding among ARF participants.
2. The involvement of defence officials in the ARF has contributed to confidence building within the ARF and added depth to the process. At the 5th ASEAN Regional Forum, ARF Ministers "recognised that defence and military officials had a constructive contribution to the work and activities of the ARF and encouraged greater interaction and networking among these officials in the ARF". Over the past few years, defence officials have been progressively included in ARF Ministerial, SOM and inter-sessional meetings. The interactions among defence officials during these meetings have helped to build up rapport among ARF defence establishments.
3. To further strengthen confidence building within the ARF, it would be useful to create more opportunities for defence officials to interact and exchange their views on issues of common interest. This will serve to sustain the interest of defence establishments within the ARF and to reinforce the bonds of trust and understanding among its members.

ARF DEFENCE DIALOGUE

4. The proposed informal defence officials' dialogue builds upon the existing defence officials' lunches, where an afternoon session could be set aside for the exchange of views on issues of common interests. Currently, lunches for defence officials are organised at ARF meetings. The defence officials welcome these informal lunches as they provide valuable opportunities to exchange views among themselves. The defence lunches should continue to be a feature of the ARF ISG on CBMs meetings. However, the exchange of views is often constrained by the lack of time during lunch. Besides, there is much scope to discuss issues of common professional interest at these sessions. Hence, it could be worthwhile to augment the defence officials' lunch with an informal defence dialogue within the ARF.

OBJECTIVES

5. The primary objectives of an ARF defence dialogue are as follows:
 - a. To promote understanding and confidence building among ARF defence establishments.
 - b. To promote networking among ARF defence officials.

- c. To allow defence officials an opportunity to discuss various issues of common interest.

PRINCIPLES & MODALITIES OF AN ARF DEFENCE DIALOGUE

- 6. The development of an ARF defence dialogue should take into account the following principles:
 - a. The dialogue should be an integral part of the ARF process and should aim to add value and complement the ARF process. ARF defence officials should also continue to participate in existing ARF Ministerial, SOM and inter-sessional meetings.
 - b. The programme of the dialogue need not be rigid or structured.
 - c. The dialogue should, as far as possible, not duplicate the work of foreign affairs officials under the current ARF process.
 - d. The agenda for the dialogue will be determined by consensus and developed at a pace comfortable to all members.
 - e. The discussions at the dialogue are informal and non-binding.
- 7. The proposed modalities for an ARF defence dialogue are as follows:
 - a. The dialogue will be co-chaired by the current co-chairs of the ISG on CBMs.
 - b. Co-chairs of the dialogue may wish to circulate an indicative programme so that exchanges and discussions would be more constructive.
 - c. The exact timing of the dialogue would be left flexible to the co-chairs but it should not coincide with an important session of the ARF ISG plenary.
 - d. Defence representatives (preferably at Director level) and/or military representatives (preferably Lieutenant-Colonel level and above) from each ARF country, who are attending the ARF ISG meeting, will be invited to the dialogue.
 - e. A formal statement is not mandatory for incorporation into the ARF ISG Co-Chairs' report to allow for a more frank and free flowing exchange of views. The Co-Chairmen of the dialogue can brief the ISG on CBMs on the discussions, as per the current arrangement for the Defence Officials' Lunch.
- 8. As a start, defence officials could consider the following issues for discussion:
 - a. Exchanges on defence and security policy.
 - b. Professional issues e.g. impact of the revolution of military affairs on militaries.
 - c. Confidence building measures, including defence exchanges, networking and cooperation to support ARF co-operation in the various areas e.g. transnational crime, disaster relief.

- d. Updates on related activities outside the ARF process. (For instance, ARF defence officials can update one another on the outcome of defence conferences and seminars held outside the ARF process, or inform one another on forthcoming military courses that ARF defence establishments can participate in.)

CONCLUSION

9. An ARF defence dialogue will further strengthen confidence building within the ARF by providing a meaningful platform for ARF defence establishments to exchange views. Such a dialogue will contribute towards the aim of the ARF to enhance dialogue and consultation on regional political and security issues to preserve regional peace and security.