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VOLUME 13, NUMBER 4, JULY 2002

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# NBR ANALYSIS

**Managing Security Challenges in Southeast Asia**  
*Essays by Sheldon W. Simon*

**The ASEAN Regional Forum Views the Councils  
for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific:  
How Track II Assists Track I**

**Southeast Asia and the U.S. War on Terrorism**

 **NBR** THE NATIONAL BUREAU OF ASIAN RESEARCH

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The Henry M. Jackson Foundation contributes funding to the *NBR Analysis* series.

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This is the fifty-ninth *NBR Analysis*.

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Printed in the United States of America.

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## Foreword

The differences and lingering suspicions among the states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) make cooperative approaches to security in the region difficult. Faced with a myriad of destabilizing factors, including economic difficulties, indigenous radical Muslim groups, communal violence, and drug and arms trafficking, the Southeast Asian states must find effective ways to manage security concerns. In the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States, Southeast Asia has become a “second front” in the war on terrorism, and multilateral coordination among the ASEAN states, and throughout the Asia Pacific more broadly, will be essential to maintaining peace and stability in the region. In this issue of the *NBR Analysis*, Sheldon W. Simon, professor of political science at Arizona State University and director of NBR’s Southeast Asia Program, explores the official and unofficial efforts among the ASEAN states to address security challenges in the region.

In his first article, Dr. Simon examines Track II diplomacy and the relationship between the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the Councils for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP). Emerging from the alliances of the Cold War, the ARF and CSCAP, the ARF’s Track II counterpart, were created to encourage transparency and confidence-building on nonmilitary security matters, such as transnational crime, environmental hazards, and illegal migration, and to develop links among the Southeast Asian states and the countries of Northeast Asia and the United States. Although China and the United States were initially wary of joining such multilateral security dialogues for fear of compromising national sovereignty and traditional bilateral ties, the ARF has grown into the world’s most complicated security forum and CSCAP constitutes the broadest Track II security organization in the world.

Because the CSCAP delegations are future-oriented and less involved in immediate security concerns, Dr. Simon argues, their work is often considered of lower priority by government officials who are more concerned with protecting sovereignty than “solving international problems through cooperative security.” Nevertheless, in interviews conducted with leaders of ASEAN states, Dr. Simon discovered that government officials were remarkably positive about interactions with CSCAP delegations and spoke favorably about CSCAP’s ability to allay suspicions among neighbors, assist preventive diplomacy by thinking ahead of the ARF, and suggest new ways of conceptualizing and resolving regional security issues. Dr. Simon concludes that if the ARF and CSCAP are to continue as (or, as some would argue, become) significant organizations in managing Asian security, all the members must accept that

Asia's future is integrated among the subregions of the Northeast, Southeast, and South, modify the noninterference norm, and adopt consensus-based decision-making.

In his second article, Dr. Simon addresses Southeast Asia's response to the war on terrorism, including the prospects for multilateral cooperation. Most regional leaders condemn the September 11 attacks on the United States, but, due to their politically significant domestic Muslim populations, they caution that Washington not target Islam generally. At the same time, several regional leaders are seizing upon terrorism to weaken opposition groups challenging their regimes. According to Dr. Simon, the region's terrorist groups are primarily indigenous and do not currently have the ability or resources to extend their operations beyond Southeast Asia, much less into the United States. Of particular concern, however, are the explicit and implicit ties to Al Qaeda that have developed throughout Southeast Asia and the cross-border communication among radical terrorist cells. A large number of Southeast Asian Muslims have trained under hard-line Islamic teachers in Pakistan and Afghanistan. In addition, Al Qaeda members have made regular visits to Southeast Asia—particularly Indonesia—over the past decade and have probably developed financial ties with radical Islamic groups in the region. To date, however, most Muslim militancy in Southeast Asia is focused on local issues.

Dr. Simon identifies multilateral cooperation as the key to disrupting the ties among the region's terrorist cells and, over the longer term, changing the political, social, and economic conditions that breed terrorists in the region. Although ASEAN has made modest moves toward regional anti-terrorist cooperation, most efforts have taken place on a bilateral basis—especially with the United States. For now, U.S. military presence in the region is welcome for the enhanced security it brings, and also for the accompanying economic assistance and infrastructure development. Moreover, the United States is enhancing collaborative security in the region through initiatives like the *Cobra Gold* joint military exercises involving Thailand, Singapore, and the United States, with observers from China and other countries.

We are very grateful to the United States Institute of Peace and the W. Alton Jones Foundation for their support of a two-year project on Track II approaches to security cooperation, which allowed research and writing of the first essay. An earlier version of the second essay was presented at the National Defense University Pacific Symposium in February 2002.

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# **The ASEAN Regional Forum Views the Councils for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific: How Track II Assists Track I**

*Sheldon W. Simon*

The development of a limited Asian security community based upon the political framework of ASEAN dates from the end of the Cold War. With the Asian Regional Forum (ARF) and the subsequent creation of Councils for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP), two fora now exist to further security transparency, build confidence, and address such common regional problems as drug and arms trafficking, communal violence, and maritime piracy. Both organizations, however, have focused on reassurance and transparency at the expense of preventive diplomacy and the real gains resulting from transnational cooperation. As a non-governmental advisory group, CSCAP enhances the intergovernmental ties between ARF states and augments the diplomatic resources available to ARF. Yet it is not clear the extent to which ARF member states are able to reconcile consensus-based decision-making and the doctrine of noninterference with the region's changing strategic, economic, and political environment.

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Multilateral security organizations abound in international politics. They range from the highly institutionalized with political and military structures on one extreme (NATO) to those with important political authority but no military capabilities (the UN Security Council) to those whose role is confined to discussing mutual security concerns without necessarily resolving them (the ASEAN Regional Forum). NATO and the UN Security Council are examples of security organizations designed to respond directly to security threats—the former to its members, the latter to global peace. They have the authority to invoke the use of force. The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) is a different creature entirely. Neither an alliance such as NATO nor a collective security body such as the UN Security Council, the ARF may best be described as an elaborate exercise in confidence building among states that must get along to prosper but that have a history of mutual suspicion and, in some cases, hostilities.<sup>1</sup>

The ARF emerged from ASEAN in the 1990s. The end of the Cold War left the Asia Pacific searching for a new organizing principle for security.<sup>2</sup> While traditional alliances remained, including bilateral treaties with the United States and the Five Power Defense Arrangement—a multilateral agreement among Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, and Singapore—these seemed inadequate to deal with security matters of a nonmilitary nature such as transnational crime, environmental hazards, and illegal population movements.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, “traditional” security issues persisted in the form of unresolved territorial disputes, divided states, nuclear weapons proliferation, and conflicting maritime jurisdictions resulting from the 1982 UN Law of the Sea, which have been addressed in discussions but not resolved.

Some kind of cooperative security enterprise linking the region to its major partners in Northeast Asia and North America was needed to fill the gap. Through the 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, ASEAN members had already pledged among themselves to resolve intra-ASEAN disputes peacefully (or postpone their resolution). Underlying the vision of a larger security order was the hope that the treaty’s peaceful resolution commitment could be extended to other states. This practice would constitute a kind of minimal diffuse reciprocity.

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<sup>1</sup> While a number of articles and books have been written about the ARF and its annual meetings well documented, the classic study of the Forum’s structure, successes, and failures remains Michael Leifer’s *The ASEAN Regional Forum: Extending ASEAN’s Model of Regional Security* (London: International Institute of Strategic Studies, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Maria Consuelo C. Ortuoste, “The Establishment of the ASEAN Regional Forum,” paper presented to the *Multilateral Institutions in Asia Seminar*, Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, Honolulu, July 14, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> This new security agenda is explored in Sheldon W. Simon, ed., *The Many Faces of Asian Security*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001.

That is, while ASEAN would not expect outsiders automatically to come to members' aid in times of crisis or leap to their defense if attacked, at least outside countries could be asked to renounce the use of force in settling any conflicts they might have with the Association's members. The unstated object of these concerns, of course, is China—the only “extraregional” state with territorial claims in Southeast Asia.<sup>4</sup> This is essentially a realist vision of the ARF. If successful, it would encourage the People's Republic of China (PRC) to explain and clarify its security policy and planning. China's neighbors, through the ARF, could then respond with their concerns about the PRC's policy in hopes of modifying it and thus enhancing regional stability. In exchange for PRC transparency, other ARF members would reciprocate. For Beijing, the payoff would not primarily be access to ASEAN defense plans but rather to those of other members such as Japan and the United States.

Liberal theorists hope that the ARF can go beyond realism to shape cooperation. If the ARF can devise joint cooperative military actions such as multinational maritime patrols, search and rescue operations, antipiracy activities, and oceanic environment monitoring, then cooperative security can be launched. To date, however, these hopes remain for the most part unrealized. Nevertheless, the transparency measures that have begun are a first step in the liberal direction insofar as they help to create mutual confidence.

The ARF's origins can be traced to a realization in the early 1990s that ASEAN by itself would be unable to dominate political-security discussions across the entire Asia Pacific rim. The region's two indigenous great powers—Japan and China—are in Northeast Asia. The two remaining potential conflict flashpoints—Korea and Taiwan—are also outside ASEAN's spatial realm. Moreover, the United States, as the sole remaining superpower, concentrates its forward-deployed Asian forces in Northeast Asia. In the post-Cold War era, therefore, Southeast Asia feared that it would once again become marginalized in Asia Pacific regional security.

Fortunately for ASEAN, however, no exclusive Northeast Asian efforts were made to create a subregional counterpart to ASEAN. China remained wary of security multilateralism as a device to constrain its regional ambitions. Japan was still viewed with suspicion by the rest of Northeast Asia as unrepentant for its World War II brutalities, and the Koreans were understandably focused on their forty-year military stalemate at the 38th parallel. In effect, ASEAN

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<sup>4</sup> Curiously, Southeast Asian states do not mention Taiwan in their concerns about China's claims to the Spratly Islands, even though China's and Taiwan's claims are exactly the same.