

## ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM AS A COOPERATIVE SECURITY MECHANISM

## РЕГІОНАЛЬНИЙ ФОРУМ АСЕАН ЯК МЕХАНІЗМ КООПЕРАТИВНОЇ БЕЗПЕКИ

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**Abstract.** *The article explores the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) as a pivotal cooperative security framework in Asia-Pacific. Cooperative security, characterized by multilateralism, inclusiveness, transparency, and consensus-building, underpins the ARF's functioning. The study delves into the ARF's establishment during the post-Cold War era, highlighting ASEAN's political and diplomatic gains, which fostered trust among major powers and regional actors.*

*The authors analyse the ARF's development, noting its primary focus on confidence-building measures, reflecting the principles of non-interference and consensus inherent in ASEAN's norms. Key findings indicate that while the ARF has made strides in enhancing regional security dialogue, it remains constrained by its slow-moving approach to preventive diplomacy and the lack of coercive mechanisms. The Forum's ability to address traditional security challenges, such as the North Korean nuclear threat and the South China Sea dispute, is limited. Therefore, the ARF focuses on addressing non-traditional security issues, including counterterrorism and disaster mitigation.*

*The findings show that ARF's role encompasses extending ASEAN's cooperative security norms to the broader Asia-Pacific region, promoting transparency and fostering a collaborative security environment by means of confidence-building measures. The article posits that while ASEAN's leadership in the ARF is more an outcome of regional circumstances than deliberate strategy, the ASEAN Regional Forum remains an important mechanism for security cooperation in Asia-Pacific.*

**Keywords.** *Cooperative security, ASEAN, ASEAN Regional Forum, Asia-Pacific, confidence-building measures, preventive diplomacy.*

**Анотація.** *У статті досліджується Регіональний форум АСЕАН (АРФ) як ключовий механізм кооперативної безпеки в Азійсько-Тихоокеанському регіоні. Кооперативна безпека, що характеризується мультилатералізмом, інклюзивністю, прозорістю та досягненням консенсусу, лежить в основі функціонування АРФ. Дослідження заглиблюється в історію створення АРФ в епоху після холодної війни, висвітлюючи політичні та дипломатичні*

досягнення АСЕАН, які сприяли зміцненню довіри між великими державами та регіональними гравцями.

Автори аналізують розвиток АРФ, відзначаючи його основний фокус на заходах зміцнення довіри, що відображає принципи невтручання та консенсусу, притаманні нормам АСЕАН. Основні висновки вказують на те, що, хоча АРФ досягнув певних успіхів у розширенні регіонального діалогу з питань безпеки, його діяльність все ще обмежується повільним підходом до превентивної дипломатії та відсутністю механізмів примусу. Спроможність Форуму вирішувати традиційні проблеми безпеки, такі як ядерна загроза з боку Північної Кореї і суперечки навколо Південно-Китайського моря, є обмеженою. Тому АРФ фокусується на вирішенні нетрадиційних питань безпеки, включно з боротьбою проти тероризму і пом'якшення наслідків стихійних лих.

Висновки показують, що роль АРФ полягає в поширенні норм кооперативної безпеки АСЕАН на ширший Азійсько-Тихоокеанський регіон, сприянні прозорості та просуванні безпекового середовища, заснованого на співробітництві, за допомогою заходів зміцнення довіри. У статті стверджується, що хоча лідерство АСЕАН в АРФ є скоріше результатом регіональних обставин, ніж цілеспрямованої стратегії, Регіональний форум АСЕАН залишається важливим механізмом співпраці у сфері безпеки в Азійсько-Тихоокеанському регіоні.

**Ключові слова.** Кооперативна безпека, АСЕАН, Регіональний Форум АСЕАН Азійсько-Тихоокеанський Регіон, заходи зміцнення довіри, превентивна дипломатія.

**Introduction.** The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) stands as a cornerstone in the architecture of cooperative security mechanisms within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). This article examines the ARF's pivotal role in fostering regional security in the Asia-Pacific through cooperative security approach. Cooperative security in this context emphasizes multilateralism, inclusiveness, transparency, and the use of consensus-building and consultations.

The establishment of the ARF in the early 1990s marked a significant shift in regional security dynamics, emerging from ASEAN's enhanced diplomatic credibility and trustworthiness among global powers and regional states. The period of geopolitical transition allowed ASEAN to position itself as a neutral and effective organizer of regional security cooperation.

It is highlighted that the ARF's has a significant focus on promoting confidence-building measures among its participants. These measures include high-level consultative fora, exchange of information and positions towards various regional security topics, and providing security outlooks aimed at enhancing mutual understanding and reducing regional tensions. However, the ARF's progress beyond the initial stage of confidence-building measures to more proactive forms of preventive diplomacy has been notably slow, primarily due to the inherent principles of non-interference and consensus that govern its operations.

While the ARF faces challenges in evolving beyond its current stage, it remains an essential platform for dialogue and cooperation in the Asia-Pacific. The Forum's emphasis on transparency, multilateralism, and gradual progress reflects ASEAN's broader approach to regional security, promoting a stable and cooperative environment amidst a diverse and often heterogeneous geopolitical landscape.

The **purpose of the article** is to study the formation and development of the ASEAN Regional Forum as a mechanism for security cooperation, as well as to determine its key characteristics and limitations by overviewing founding and conceptual documents related to ARF.

**Literature review.** ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) have received a lot of attention from foreign and domestic researchers. Among the recognized experts are J. Haacke, R. Emmers, N.M. Morada, R. Sukma, R. Severino. At the same time, a number of Ukrainian scholars, including Y. Barshchevskiy, S. Averyanov, O. Kravchuk, I. Krupenia, O. Kovtun and others are engaged in the study of ASEAN Regional Forum and its security role in the Asia-Pacific. It is worth highlighting the works of R. Emmers "Cooperative Security and the Balance of Power in ASEAN and the ARF" as well as J. Haacke's "Cooperative Security in the Asia-Pacific: The ASEAN Regional Forum" which give profound understanding of security environment before and during the establishment of ARF and its development over the years. Other relevant works by Ukrainian researchers include, S.

Averyanov's study "ASEAN Security Activities in Southeast Asia" (Averyanov, 2021) makes an overview of ASEAN-led multilateral mechanisms, including ASEAN Regional Forum as one of the most impactful on dealing with Southeast and Asia-Pacific security and political issues. The topic of ASEAN cooperative mechanisms, in particular the ASEAN Regional Forum, is also covered in the article by O. Kovtun and T. Dovhai "ASEAN in World Politics" (Kovtun & Dovhai, 2014), where the formation and progress of the ASEAN cooperative mechanism is analyzed.

**Main research results.** The ASEAN Regional Forum (hereinafter referred to as the ARF) is one of the leading cooperative security mechanisms of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Cooperative security is defined as a concept that focuses on agreed norms of behavior, including within institutions that function despite the heterogeneity of participants. Cooperative security is based on the principles of multilateralism, inclusiveness, transparency, and the use of consultation and consensus mechanisms. At the same time, ASEAN's cooperative security regime includes codes of conduct and agreements between the Association's member states and its partners, including the establishment of joint security platforms for dialogue, such as the ARF (Haake, 2010).

In order to understand the peculiarities of the ASEAN Regional Forum, it is necessary to consider in more detail the establishment and development of this cooperative security mechanism. The post-Cold War security environment was characterized by favorable circumstances for the ASEAN. Firstly, international disapproval of Vietnam's aggressive actions in Cambodia by ASEAN as a collective actor led to the fact that this organization received political and diplomatic dividends in the form of trust from the international community – both major powers like the United States and China, and other Asian states, such as Laos, Japan or the Republic of Korea. This helped to play the role of an acceptable organizer of security cooperation in the Asia-Pacific, as previous attempts had failed due to the high level of distrust between potential participants. Similar initiatives were also presented separately in July 1990 at the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference by Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans (1988-1996) and Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs Joe Clark (1984-1991). They proposed the creation of an Asia-Pacific Conference on Security and Cooperation, but such an initiative was not supported by the United States, which saw it as a potential weakening of its bilateral security arrangements in the Asia-Pacific, and by China, which was unwilling to participate in multilateral initiatives because of their potential pro-Western orientation (Emmers, 2003). This is explained by G. Harding's theoretical work on the correlation between the level of distrust and the establishment of cooperative security. If the level of distrust is too high, then the introduction of a cooperative security regime is impossible at the stage of planning or direct implementation (Harding, 1994). Thus, the above-mentioned political and diplomatic dividends of ASEAN have contributed to the development of a sufficient level of trust on the part of heterogeneous actors in the Asia-Pacific region to start discussions on the establishment of a platform on security issues.

Secondly, the creation of the ARF was facilitated by ASEAN's role as a "regional leader", which stems from its political and diplomatic dividends. Thus, according to Robert Yates, this role of the Association is characterized by the intra-regional neutrality of the South Asian Association and ASEAN's positioning as a successful manager of the Southeast Asian security order. At the same time, the main function of the Association in this role is diplomatic leadership, while others are inclusive engagement and norm-setting (Yates, 2019). Therefore, it may be stated that ASEAN is acceptable in the broader context of the Asia-Pacific by extra-regional actors, primarily Asian states, since the Association's leadership in creating and maintaining a platform for discussing security issues would not imply a clear pro-Western or pro-Chinese orientation, and would be based on soft regionalism, when the level of institutionalization is minimized, which was observed in ASEAN until the late 1990s. As Amitav Acharya argues, ASEAN's own norms and institutional style provided a ready-made basis on which the ARF could be built (Emmers, 2003).

However, according to J. Haake, N.M. Morada and R. Sukma, the acceptability of ASEAN as a center for creating a platform for discussing security issues was not deliberate, but by default, i.e. in the absence of other acceptable initiatives that would be suitable for the heterogeneous composition of the Asia-Pacific security environment. Thus, the inability of the great powers of the Asia-Pacific to form a series of security arrangements among themselves, the lack of alternative mechanisms for

responding to the new post-Cold War security environment in the Asia-Pacific, and the need to ensure that the platform for discussing security issues does not turn into an arena for competition for the primacy of the great powers of the region created favorable preconditions for establishing ASEAN's leadership in building such a platform for security dialogue. However, these preconditions, according to R. Sukma, give grounds to consider ASEAN not so much the "primary driving force" in the ARF as an accidental leader (Haacke, 2010).

ASEAN's first steps to develop a platform for discussing security issues in the Asia-Pacific began in 1991 with the idea of using the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference as a forum for regional security dialogue at the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting. This initiative was reaffirmed at the ASEAN summit in Singapore in January 1992, which led to a discussion of regional security at the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference in July 1992 in Manila. The initiative to broaden the discussion of security issues took place in May 1993 in Singapore, where the first Senior Officials Meeting of the Association's Post-Ministerial Conference decided to invite the foreign ministers of China, Russia, Vietnam, Laos and Papua New Guinea to the upcoming special session. Afterwards, on July 25, 1993, it was decided to establish the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the first working session of which was to be held in 1994 in Bangkok (Emmers, 2003).

The first meeting in the ARF format took place on July 25, 1994 in the Thai capital with the participation of 18 states, namely at that time six ASEAN member states: Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand; seven dialogue partners of the Association - Australia, Canada, the EU, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea and the United States; ASEAN's consultative partners - China and Russia; and observers of the Association - Laos, Papua New Guinea and Vietnam. The meeting resulted in a statement by the presiding state (The First ASEAN Regional Forum Bangkok, 1994), from which the following should be highlighted. Firstly, the ARF is defined as a high-level consultative forum that will allow the above mentioned countries to promote the habit of constructive dialogue and consultations on political and security issues of common interest and concern. This demonstrates the relevance of the concept of cooperative security in the Asia-Pacific, especially with regard to dialogue and consultation as elements of confidence-building measures and improving the climate of international relations in the Asia-Pacific region. Secondly, the document suggests that security in the Asia-Pacific will be built on the principles of comprehensiveness, indivisibility, etc. to develop a more constructive model of relations, which also meets the principles of cooperative security. Third, all participants of the ARF agreed that the 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) would serve as a code of conduct that regulates relations between states and would be a unique tool for confidence-building measures, preventive diplomacy, and political and security cooperation (The First ASEAN Regional Forum Bangkok, 1994).

The second ARF meeting took place on August 1, 1995 in Bandar Seri Bagawan, Brunei, the results of which are contained in the statement of the chairman (The Second ASEAN Regional Forum Bandar Seri Begawan, 1995). It noted the development of constructive cooperative relations between the Forum's participants, which Cambodia joined; increased transparency and the desire to address security issues in a spirit of mutual respect, equality and cooperation, which indicates the positive role of the ARF as a cooperative security mechanism for the Asia-Pacific. In addition, this document for the first time refers to ASEAN as the "driving force" of the ARF. For example, the ARF meetings were to be held in the context of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting and Post-Ministerial Conference, and the rules of procedure would be based on the norms and practices of the Association - decisions would be made by consensus after thorough and extensive consultations. This provision can be interpreted as ASEAN's leading role in developing and implementing the format and form of the ARF, with the corresponding extrapolation of its internal norms to cooperation with other actors in the Asia-Pacific.

Moreover, the greatest achievement of the second meeting of the Forum was the development of the ARF Concept Paper, which identified three stages of its evolution: the first is the promotion of confidence-building measures; the second is the development of mechanisms for preventive diplomacy; and the third is the development of mechanisms for conflict resolution. At the same time, the Concept Paper itself states that the ARF is at the first stage, which can be developed on the basis of two complementary approaches. The first represents the confidence-building measures used by

ASEAN since its establishment - consultations and consensus building, as well as the principles of good neighborliness contained in the 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in the Southeast Asia. The second approach is the implementation of concrete confidence-building measures, such as promoting greater transparency through voluntary participation in military exercises of ARF participants as an observer or the publication of defense white papers, or a longer-term measure for practical implementation, such as the exchange of information and experience on maritime search and rescue, counter-piracy or drug trafficking. (The Second ASEAN Regional Forum Bandar Seri Begawan, 1995).

It is also worth noting that the ARF Concept Paper contained a provision that the Forum would develop at a pace convenient for all participants, based on the principle of moving not “too fast for those who want to go slow and not too slow for those who want to go fast” (The Second ASEAN Regional Forum Bandar Seri Begawan, 1995, p. 16). While this principle reflects an attempt to inclusion of the ARF process, it also lays the groundwork for too slow progress in moving to the next stage of cooperation among participants and the functioning of the ARF itself.

The third meeting in the ARF format was held on July 23, 1996 in Jakarta. The discussion resulted in Indonesia's statement on the Forum's decisions, the main one being the development of membership criteria. New participants were admitted by consensus, but it was noted that all ASEAN member states automatically became participants of the Forum (The Third ASEAN Regional Forum Jakarta, 1996), which indicates the special status of the Association in the ARF and its main driving force in the organizational process within the mechanism. Proof of this is India's accession to the Forum, which was not approved by the United States and Japan because of the desire to deepen the cooperative mechanism rather than expand it (Emmers, 2003). However, in the case of an increase in the number of participants, the leading and decisive role remains with ASEAN as the ARF manager.

Therefore, the first three meetings in the ARF format laid the foundation for the Forum's functioning, outlined the vector of its progress, criteria for expansion, and identified priority topics for security discussions, including non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, territorial disputes in the South China Sea, and the Korean issue - establishing inter-Korean dialogue and the problem of nuclear energy development by North Korea (The Third ASEAN Regional Forum Jakarta, 1996).

As for the progress of the ASEAN Regional Forum, it is worth noting that this mechanism is still at the first stage of its evolution, i.e., the promotion of confidence-building measures. This is due to a number of reasons. First, the principle of progress that is convenient for all as a fundamental principle in the implementation of the ARF's activities makes it impossible to develop quickly, as evidenced by the long process of consensus development towards an acceptable concept of preventive diplomacy. For example, within the framework of the ARF, it took 10 years between the development of the concept and principles of preventive diplomacy (2001) and the framework action plan (2011). Secondly, the ARF document on the concept and principles of preventive diplomacy of July 25, 2001, states that it does not provide for legal obligations, but serves as a common perspective for the Forum's functioning, which also slows down the pace of possible transition to the stage of preventive diplomacy. Nevertheless, this document contains a definition of preventive diplomacy agreed upon by all ARF participants as “consensual diplomatic and political action taken by sovereign states with the consent of all directly involved parties to help prevent disputes and conflicts from arising between States that could potentially pose a threat to regional peace and stability; to help prevent such disputes and conflicts from escalating into armed confrontation; and to help minimise the impact of such disputes and conflicts on the regio” (ASEAN Regional Forum Concept and Principles of Preventive Diplomacy, 2001, p. 2).

Secondly, the ARF Preventive Diplomacy Work Plan of June 10, 2011 states that one of the principles of prevention will be consultation and consensus building, which again potentially slows down both the transition to the stage of preventive diplomacy and the use of a specific preventive measure, such as sending an observer or fact-finding mission (ASEAN Regional Forum Preventive Diplomacy Work Plan, 2011). In addition, the ARF Concept Paper on Moving Towards Preventive Diplomacy of July 2, 2013 specifies the guiding principles of prevention on which the Forum's activities will be based – trust building, consultations, consensus, voluntary nature, absence of coercion and non-interference in the internal affairs of the ARF participants (ASEAN Regional Forum

Concept Paper on Moving Towards Preventive Diplomacy, 2013). The latter directly refers to the fundamental principle of ASEAN, which makes it impossible to take coercive actions against a possible violator of the Association's norms. Thus, ASEAN's internal restrictions have also been extrapolated to the ARF, which suggests that preventive measures within the Forum can only be developed and applied when the Association itself begins to use specific preventive measures within Southeast Asia.

It should also be emphasized that the ARF's Concept Paper on Moving Towards Preventive Diplomacy specifies the stage of preventive diplomacy itself by identifying three phases: the first - training, information exchange and understanding of preventive diplomacy practices and measures by the Forum participants; the second - research and development of ARF's own preventive tools; the third - research of the possibilities of applying preventive diplomacy in practice. (ASEAN Regional Forum Concept Paper on Moving Towards Preventive Diplomacy, 2013).

In general, it should be noted that although the ARF participants are at the first stage of promoting confidence-building measures, the Forum's activities show elements of the primary phase of preventive diplomacy, as defined in the 2013 Concept Paper. First and foremost, it is the publication of the ARF Annual Security Outlook which contains the views of each ARF's participant on its vision of the security environment in the Asia-Pacific, the main security challenges in the region, an explanation of its national security and defense policy, contributions to regional security and its role in the ASEAN Regional Forum. These materials have been published exclusively within the framework of the ARF since 2005, and before that, in 1997-2005, they were sponsored by the Japan Center for International Exchange under the title "Asia Pacific Security Outlook" (Asia Pacific Security Outlook, 2021). Thus, the ARF Annual Security Outlook became a constructive confidence-building measure that promoted transparency and exchange of security information among ARF actors, contributing to the strengthening of the ASEAN cooperative security in the region. In addition, the logic of the 2013 Concept Paper on Moving Towards Preventive Diplomacy suggests that these outlooks are a transitory measure that lies between confidence-building efforts and the first phase of preventive diplomacy - learning, exchange and mutual understanding among the Forum's participants. That is, this is evidence that confidence-building measures, as defined in the aforementioned 2013 Concept, continue to be the basis for the ARF functioning (ASEAN Regional Forum Concept Paper on Moving Towards Preventive Diplomacy, 2013), which expands the ASEAN cooperative security to Asia-Pacific.

In addition to the limitations on the implementation of preventive diplomacy, the ARF has certain restrictions on the "primary driving force" of ASEAN, which, according to R. Sukma, is more of an "accidental leader." Thus, from the very beginning of its functioning, China influenced the formation of statements by the ARF presidency, and the inclusion of maritime security and counterterrorism cooperation on the agenda of the Forum was due to the Association's adaptation to the security interests of the great powers, primarily the United States. Similar adaptations also included the removal of the discussion of Indo-Pakistani bilateral relations within the framework of the ARF to please India or the exclusion of the Taiwan issue from the Forum's agenda in accordance with China's position (Haacke, 2010).

The biggest limitation of the ARF in terms of not reaching the stage of preventive diplomacy is the inability to effectively influence or resolve security challenges in the Asia-Pacific, such as the North Korea nuclear threat, the South China Sea dispute or the Taiwan issue. The absence of a sanctions mechanism within the ASEAN itself, and the principle of consensus and non-interference in internal affairs make it impossible for the ARF to take any action.

However, the ARF can serve as an initial platform for negotiations, as can be seen in the case of North Korea, which has been a participant of the ASEAN Regional Forum since 2000. Thus, the ARF served as an incentive to promote dialogue between the United States and North Korea at the 7th meeting of the ARF participants in Thailand, where US Secretary of State Madeline Albright (1997-2001) and North Korean Foreign Minister Paek Nam-Sun (1998-2007) met and held talks, which was then the highest level of US-North Korean interactions since the Korean War of 1950-1953 (Emmers, 2003). That is why the ARF is best suited to serve as a platform for improving the climate between its participants, as evidenced by the dominance of confidence-building measures as the main instruments of this ASEAN mechanism.

Furthermore, the above-mentioned inability of the ARF to address security issues such as the conflict in the Korean Peninsula, North Korean nuclear program, or the Taiwan issue, which should be attributed to the traditional, hard security sphere, is compensated by a significant focus on non-traditional security issues that have dominated the ARF since the beginning of the 21st century and are still most actively considered within the Forum, especially in the areas of counterterrorism, disaster mitigation as well as information and communication technologies.

**Conclusions.** The ASEAN Regional Forum acts as the Association's cooperative mechanism in the Asia-Pacific, primarily through the transfer of the Association's internal norms from the Southeast Asia to the wider Asia-Pacific region. This concerns both the principles of interstate relations, which are mainly based on the 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia and the use of the same organizational and administrative practices, such as consensus decision-making and information exchange through the ASEAN Secretariat, since the ARF does not have its own. In addition, the role of ASEAN as the "primary driving force" of the Forum is justified in terms of the form of cooperation within the ARF, but the Association does not always play a decisive role in terms of the content of cooperation.

In addition, the ARF is at the initial stage of its evolution - the promotion of confidence-building measures - because the Forum has the same limitations as ASEAN: the consolidation of the fundamental principle of non-interference in internal affairs and the lack of mechanisms to influence possible violations of its norms. Moreover, the process of the ARF's progress, acceptable to all, from the very beginning of the Forum's functioning, laid the foundation for a slow progress towards preventive diplomacy, but served as the basis for the ARF's acceptability as a cooperative security mechanism in the Asia-Pacific, encompassing heterogeneous actors in the region. In general, the ASEAN Regional Forum is based on confidence-building measures designed to improve the climate of regional relations between states, promoting greater transparency, proactivity and multilateralism in the Asia-Pacific.

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