



**FOREIGN
AFFAIRS AND
TRADE**

International Security Division

ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)

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www.dfat.gov.au/globalissues

Introduction to the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)

Established in 1994, the ARF draws together 23 countries which have an impact on, or are involved in the security of the Asia-Pacific region. Complementing the central role played by bilateral security links in maintaining regional stability, the ARF provides a setting in which members can discuss regional security issues of concern, and implements a busy program of confidence building activities.

The premise on which the ARF is built is that dialogue and consensus decision making can produce a qualitative improvement in political relationships along the lines

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of the ASEAN experience, so that bilateral and multilateral problems may become easier to manage. Members have found that the ARF plays a useful role, including by helping to develop a sense of shared strategic and security interests, and in engaging the major powers in dialogue.

At recent discussions, members have been willing to exchange views on internal matters with wider security implications.

Activities

ARF Meetings are held at Foreign Minister level, annually in July, in conjunction with the ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference.

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“First track” (officials’) meetings are held through the inter-sessional year, two of which consider regional confidence-building measures (CBMs). The officials’ meetings have increasingly involved defence officials from ARF countries. Occasionally, the ARF also sponsors “second track” (non-official) seminars and workshops on regional security issues, which involve academics and officials in their personal capacities. Topics of recent seminars have included disaster management, transparency in the transfer of conventional weapons, and humanitarian law.

Members, which include the countries of South-East and North-East Asia, Russia, Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Canada, the United States, India and the EU, have agreed on a three-stage evolution for the ARF, developing from confidence building to preventive diplomacy and, in the longer-term, to conflict resolution.

Issues

Regional security topics discussed at recent ARF meetings include progress toward finalising the Code of Conduct on the South China Sea; East Timor; Burma, including the human rights situation there; the Korean Peninsula; developments in the South Pacific and missile defence.

Discussions on a number of salient arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation themes indicated a growing awareness among

members of their importance to regional security. Voluntary briefings on defence policy by members increase transparency and build confidence.

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Two meetings of an ARF Experts' Group Meeting on Transnational Crime have been held. The Group has focused on piracy, illegal immigration and small arms. Australia has been particularly active within the experts' group in promoting initiatives to combat the threat posed to the region by the illicit trafficking in small arms.

Recent developments

The entry of North Korea into the ARF in 2000 was a significant outcome, of which Australia was strongly supportive. North Korea's

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membership will engage it more closely in regional security affairs and hopefully will prove a solid step towards reduction of the region's security concerns, particularly with regard to missiles and weapons of mass destruction. Australia also supports the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organisation (KEDO), which supplies heavy fuel oil and is building light water reactors in return for North Korea implementing a freeze on its nuclear program.

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The ARF is seeking to progress from a confidence building to a preventive diplomacy phase. A leading challenge for the ARF is the complexity of devising preventive diplomacy mechanisms that put timeliness ahead of, or at least on a par with, the strong preference that several members have for consensus and extensive consultations.

See: www.dfat.gov.au/arf/index.html

Enhancing Australia's security

A core goal of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) is to enhance Australia's security in the region and promote global security. International Security Division (ISD) works with other areas of DFAT, other government agencies, Australia's network of diplomatic missions overseas and with international organisations to:

- advocate Australian strategic interests through co-operation with allies and friends, and through closer regional dialogue;
- combat proliferation of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction;
- ensure transfers of nuclear material and technology are for peaceful purposes only;
- pursue nuclear and conventional arms control and disarmament initiatives.

International Security Division organisational structure

FIRST ASSISTANT SECRETARY

ARMS CONTROL & DISARMAMENT BRANCH

Chemical & Biological Disarmament Section

Conventional & Nuclear Disarmament Section

NUCLEAR POLICY BRANCH

Non-Proliferation Policy Section

Nuclear Trade and Security Section

STRATEGIC POLICY & INTELLIGENCE BRANCH

Asia Pacific Security Section

Defence & Intelligence Policy Section

Open Source Collection Unit