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2017 ADMM and ADMM-Plus: Challenges for Philippine Defense Diplomacy

Mico A Galang

Introduction

At the opening of the 2016 Shangri-La Dialogue, Dr. John Chipman, Director-General of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), underscored that “*regional institutions, including the ASEAN [D]efense [M]inisters [M]eeting [ADMM] and ADMM Plus, have been born. Inspiring astute defense diplomacy will be [an] enduring goal.*”¹ Indeed, since the end of the Cold War, there has been a flurry of defense diplomacy initiatives not just in the region but worldwide as well.² In the Asia Pacific, ASEAN, as the driver of multilateralism in the region, continues to lead defense diplomacy. This policy brief aims to discuss the challenges faced by the Philippines, as 2017 ASEAN Chair, in hosting the ADMM and the ADMM-Plus, two key regional defense diplomacy platforms. In particular, this article seeks to answer the following questions: (1) What is defense diplomacy and its limits and constraints?; (2) How does ASEAN practice security cooperation through defense diplomacy?; and, (3) What are the challenges faced by the Philippines, as the ASEAN chair for 2017, with respect to defense diplomacy in the region?

This policy brief argues that the ADMM and ADMM-Plus, as defense diplomacy platforms, have severe limitations with respect to the promotion of defense and security. Specifically, the platforms are faced with strategic challenges, including the emerging power shifts in the Asia Pacific and the seeming deficit of functional cooperation initiatives to spillover into traditional security concerns. Operationally, the two platforms are confronted with the need to delineate their specific roles vis-à-vis other regional platforms of cooperation, and the deficit of review mechanisms for evaluating their progress. Recognizing these constraints, this article concludes by identifying policy considerations, which may serve as inputs to the planning process of the Philippines as it hosts the ADMM and ADMM-Plus in 2017.

Defense Diplomacy and International Cooperation

In their seminal work, Bhubhindar Singh and See Seng Tan noted that “the phrase *defense diplomacy* was regarded an oxymoron for a long time.”³ Such an argument was largely valid because the defense establishment, in

Cooperative endeavor among states has limits and constraints as a result of anarchy that continues to underpin the international system.

particular the military, wields the state’s coercive force. Diplomacy, on the other hand, has largely been the preserve of the nation’s foreign ministry, the primary function of which is the peaceful management or resolution of disputes.

The post-Cold War era saw an expansion of the role of the military as a result of the evolution of security challenges. In turn, this development led to an increase of contacts among defense (civilian and military) officials, which eventually led to defense diplomatic initiatives.⁴ It must be noted that there is no universally accepted definition of “defense diplomacy.”⁵ For purposes of discussion, however, this paper adopts the broad conceptualization of defense diplomacy outlined in the pioneering work of Andrew Cottey and Anthony Forster, who defined the term as the “peacetime cooperative use of armed forces and related infrastructure (primarily defense ministries) as a tool of foreign and security policy.”⁶ Aside from the contacts between defense officials, there is also a host of other activities under defense diplomacy such as military exercises and drafting and implementing of defense cooperation agreements.⁷ Moreover, defense diplomacy can either be conducted through bilateral or multilateral channels.

Clearly, such an understanding of defense diplomacy, especially on the multilateral level, is well within the cooperative endeavor of states as postulated by the liberal-institutional theory of international relations (IR). As Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye argued: “[I]n a world of multiple issues imperfectly linked, [wherein] coalitions are formed transnationally and transgovernmentally, the

potential role of international institutions in political bargaining is greatly increased.”⁸

However, cooperation among states, as construed by the liberal theory of IR, has severe limitations. In his critique of the theory, Joseph Grieco argued that liberalism, its neoliberal variant in particular, appears to have an incomplete conception of anarchy, which is the ordering principle of the international system.⁹ In particular, anarchy is not simply the absence of a world government, as neoliberals argue, but rather the dearth of an “*overarching authority to prevent others from using violence, or the threat of violence, to destroy or enslave them.*”¹⁰ In this context, states alone are primarily responsible for their own survival in the international environment. Evidently, it is difficult for states to cooperate on traditional security concerns, which are mainly concerned with threats to the survival of the state, as opposed to non-traditional security and less contentious issues.¹¹

ASEAN Defense Diplomacy: A Functional Approach?

Security cooperation, through defense diplomacy, among ASEAN member-states has been embodied in the Vientiane Action Programme (VAP), which called for the establishment of the ADMM. Founded in 2006, the ADMM has, among others, the objective of “*promot[ing] regional peace and stability through dialogue and cooperation in defense and security.*”¹² The following year, the ADMM agreed to expand itself in order to include ASEAN’s eight dialogue partners: Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, Russia, South Korea, and the United States. This led to the creation of the ADMM-Plus, which first convened in 2010. Among others, the ADMM-Plus seeks to “*enhance regional peace and stability through cooperation in defense and security.*”¹³

Based on the initiatives of the two platforms, there is a strong indication that the ADMM and the ADMM-Plus are pursuing a functional approach in defense and security cooperation. Functional Cooperation Theory, a variant of liberal-institutional theory, postulates that “*it would contribute to world peace by creating ever-expanding islands of practical cooperation, eventually spilling over into the controversy-laden fields.*”¹⁴ During the 2nd ADMM in November 2007, the ministers noted that “ADMM is to facilitate the interactions between the defense and military officials of ASEAN [m]ember [c]ountries and develop practical cooperation among them in the field of defense and security.”¹⁵ Moreover, during the 4th ADMM in May 2010, the ASEAN defense ministers stressed that, with respect to the ADMM-Plus, “*the ADMM shall determine the areas and levels of interaction with defence establishments of extra-regional countries, with a particular focus on practical cooperation.*”¹⁶ Hence, the ADMM and ADMM-Plus has focused cooperation on maritime security, counter terrorism, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), peacekeeping operations, military medicine, and humanitarian mine action, among others.

2017 ASEAN Chair’s Defense Diplomacy Challenges

Notwithstanding the achievements of the ADMM and the ADMM-Plus on cooperation on these issues, the two platforms are not without of serious challenges that may affect its significance and relevance to the region. With respect to the promotion of defense and security cooperation in the region, the two platforms are faced with strategic and operational challenges.

Strategic Challenges

The foremost strategic challenge facing the ADMM and the ADMM-Plus platforms is the dynamics in the geopolitical environment of the region itself—the emerging power shifts in the Asia Pacific. The rise of China has ushered in a period of a grand chessboard game with the United States—the status quo power—for dominance in the Asia-Pacific region. This power transition, in turn, has added a great power rivalry dimension to the key geostrategic hotspots in the region, one of which is the South China Sea (SCS).

In a nutshell, the emerging power shifts in the Asia Pacific, as manifested in the SCS disputes, challenge ASEAN Centrality and thus ASEAN and ASEAN-led platforms such as the ADMM and the ADMM-Plus. Specifically, the SCS dispute has two implications for ASEAN Centrality: (1) the dispute has sown disunity among ASEAN member-states¹⁷; and (2) ASEAN has been drawn closer to great power rivalry.¹⁸ The apparent disunity of the ASEAN member-states with respect to the SCS issue came to the fore during the 2012 ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Meeting (AMM) when the Southeast Asian top diplomats failed to issue a joint statement—a first in the history of the organization. While it may be argued that developments regarding the SCS have been mentioned in subsequent AMM declarations, it must be noted that a unanimous consensus on what exactly to do has yet to be fully achieved. Indeed, in the 2015 AMM joint declaration, the foreign ministers said: “We took note of the serious concerns expressed by some Ministers on the land reclamations in the South China Sea...”¹⁹ Such phrasing seems to suggest that not all of the chiefs of the foreign policy establishments are seriously concerned with the massive land reclamation activities in the maritime heartland of the region—and therefore an apparent division among the ASEAN member-states exists.

It may also be argued that the ADMM has not failed to issue joint declarations, most of which mention the SCS. However, the reference to the dispute is phrased in such a mundane manner to which no state can disagree. The 2011 joint declaration, which has been reaffirmed in subsequent declarations, noted: “**Reaffirm** ASEAN Member States’ commitment to fully and effectively implement the Declaration on the Conduct of the Parties in the [SCS] [DOC], and to work towards the adoption of a regional Code of Conduct in the [SCS] [COC]...**Reaffirm** also the importance of regional peace and stability, and freedom of

navigation in and overflight above the South China Sea as provided for by universally recognized principles of international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).”²⁰ It would be highly unlikely for a minister to disagree to a statement phrased in such a manner and prevent the “some Ministers” formulation of the AMM 2015 joint declaration. Moreover, the absence in the ADMM pronouncements of any mention of important developments in the SCS further suggests division among ASEAN member-states.

It must be noted that such division among ASEAN member-states, as a result of the SCS dispute, will have a medium to long-term repercussion on ASEAN Centrality, in general, and the ADMM and the ADMM-Plus, in particular. However, the other implication—ASEAN being drawn into great power political rivalry—will have a more immediate impact when the Philippines host the ADMM-Plus. It must be noted that the 3rd ADMM-Plus meeting did not produce a joint statement. While it was reported that the ASEAN member-states sought for the mention of the SCS dispute in the document, some of the dialogue partners insisted for its non-inclusion in the joint declaration.²¹ Because of this deadlock, a joint declaration was not issued. It is therefore a challenge for the Philippines, as it hosts the 4th ADMM-Plus in 2017, to ensure the issuance of a joint declaration agreed upon by the members.

Another strategic challenge faced by the ADMM and the ADMM-Plus is the seeming deficiency of functional cooperation initiatives to spill-over traditional security concerns.²² While the two platforms appear to have made progress on such non-traditional security issues, there has yet to be a clear and definitive indication that the ASEAN and its dialogue partners have moved towards cooperation on more contentions geopolitical issues. As noted earlier, the ADMM and ADMM-Plus pronouncements have not even mentioned major security developments in the SCS, let alone specific policy initiatives that would at least manage tensions in the maritime heartland of the region.

Evidently, the limitations of cooperation among states, through international institutions, are now in the surface. As noted earlier, the anarchy is the ordering principle of the international system. Hence, with no higher authority above states, the major actors in foreign relations—nation-states—have to pursue courses of actions that will safeguard their respective national interests. No other actor in the system can be reasonably expected to protect and advance such interests other than the nation-states themselves. Indeed, if a state is faced by a scenario in which it has to choose between its own interest, on the one hand, and international interest, on the other, the former will prevail. Hence, the notion of a “collective action problem” or the “prisoner’s dilemma” in international relations.

Operational Challenges

Aside from the strategic issues, there are also operational challenges facing the ADMM and the ADMM-

Plus. First, there is a need to delineate specific roles of the ADMM and the ADMM-Plus vis-à-vis other regional platforms of cooperation. Specifically, it is necessary to avoid the duplication of efforts between the ADMM and the AMM, on the one hand, and between the ADMM-Plus and the ARF, on the other hand.

The second major operational challenge to the ADMM and the ADMM-Plus is the deficit in review mechanisms for evaluating their progress, specifically the three-year work programs of the former and EWGs of the latter. With respect to the ADMM, three-year work programs must be regularly evaluated. This three-year program is of vital importance for the Philippine hosting of the ADMM because it is under Manila’s chairmanship that the next program—for 2017-2019—shall be issued. In addition, it is likewise important for the ADMM to review the recommendations it has received from the Network of ASEAN Defense and Security Institutions (NADI). Also, a thorough examination of the progress made by the ADMM-Plus EWGs must be determined and initiated in order to plot the progress made thus far.

Some Policy Considerations

The strategic and operational challenges discussed above suggest that ASEAN and ASEAN-led platforms in general have severe limits and constraints, which prevent them from moving more proactively in addressing the pressing security concerns of the region. Moreover, the said challenges are likely to go beyond the hosting of multilateral activities by one country. Hence, there should be tempered expectations regarding the possible outcome of these ministerial conferences, especially with respect to any envisioned breakthrough in the resolution of geopolitical disputes. Against this backdrop, the Philippines, as the host of the ADMM and the ADMM-Plus for 2017, must navigate within two extremes. On the one hand, Manila’s leadership must project the strategic significance and relevance of these platforms to the regional security architecture by addressing not only non-traditional security concerns, but sensitive traditional issues as well. Such a move is important because, as noted earlier, there is an emerging power shift in the region. On the other hand, because of the anarchical nature of the system of nation-states, an attempt to address geostrategic issues, such as the SCS, risks the undermining of ASEAN Centrality. Evidently, the Philippines must strike a careful balance between these important considerations as it hosts the two regional defense bodies. From this context, the following initiatives may be considered:

First, the Philippines may propose a delineation of functions between the ADMM and the AMM vis-à-vis defense and security issues. To avoid such perception of overlapping functions, the AMM, may continue to call for the full implementation of the DOC and the conclusion of the COC. Meanwhile, the ADMM may focus more on the conduct of exercises on maritime rules of engagement (ROE), such as the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea

(CUES). As the “highest ministerial defense and security” mechanism in ASEAN, the ADMM can provide guidance to military-to-military interaction platforms, such as the ASEAN Chiefs of Defense Forces Informal Meeting (ACDFIM) and the ASEAN Navy Interaction (ANI). It is interesting to note that in the 2014-2016 ADMM Three Year Work Programme, the defense ministers called for the development of “rules of engagement and procedures needed to ensure safety of navigation, search and rescue and others.”²³ Indeed, the development of and exercises under ROE give flesh to the “practical cooperation” among the defense establishments. Such operational cooperation distinguishes the ADMM from the AMM on defense and security issues.

Second, develop review mechanisms for the progress made under previous and succeeding ADMM Three-Year Work Programmes. Since the 2nd ADMM, the ministers have adopted Three-Year Programmes that identify key activities to be undertaken throughout the said time frame. Mapping out the progress made is important in order to determine what has been accomplished and what remains to be accomplished. Such review mechanisms may be undertaken in the following forms: (1) a detailed technical report of the activities under the Work Programs issued annually, which may then be attached to ADMM joint statements; and (2) creation of a review committee that will conduct an assessment of the body’s accomplishments.

Third, review the recommendations made by NADI to the ADMM. As the track-two counterpart of the ADMM, NADI hosts workshops and other activities where defense and security issues are discussed. Although NADI itself has its limitations and other constraints as far as the conduct of its affairs are concerned, the frequency of the activities of the track-two platform nevertheless provides a regular opportunity for discussions on security concerns and policy recommendations. These recommendations may serve as inputs to the policies to be developed at the Track I level.

Fourth, delineate the functions of the ADMM-Plus and the ARF. As has been previously proposed, the ADMM-Plus, like the ADMM, could focus more on the operational aspects of cooperation while the ARF may concentrate on the strategic aspects of regional defense and security.²⁴ Given that its membership includes the great powers of the region, the ADMM-Plus offers a more opportune venue for an institutionalization of the conduct of exercises of maritime ROEs, like CUES. Such a delineation of function is in line with the objectives of the said regional platforms. Indeed, the ARF envisions itself “to carry preventive diplomacy and conflict-resolution.”²⁵ The operational aspects of defense and security cooperation, on the other hand, is with the ADMM-Plus.

Fifth, develop review mechanisms for the work of the EWGs. The ADMM-Plus EWGs have been constituted to focus on specific areas of practical cooperation. Like the Three-Year Programme of the ADMM, there should be a

detailed report on the progress made by the ADMM-Plus EWGs which may also be attached to the joint declarations of the ADMM-Plus.

Conclusion

Defense diplomacy, especially at the multilateral level, is an attempt to promote peace and security through institutions. However, such cooperative endeavor has limits and constraints as a result of anarchy that continues to underpin the international system. This paper argued that the Philippines must strike a careful balance between two extremes. On the one hand, Manila must project the strategic significance of these platforms by addressing traditional security concerns. On the other hand, an attempt to address contentious geostrategic issues, such as the SCS dispute, risks the undermining of ASEAN Centrality. Therefore, it can be concluded that notwithstanding the challenges, the Philippine chairmanship of the ADMM and ADMM-Plus offers the country an opportunity to review the progress of the said regional mechanisms in order to enhance the same in promoting peace and stability in Southeast Asia and the larger Asia Pacific.

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Mico A Galang is a Defense Research Officer in the Research and Special Studies Division (RSSD) of the National Defense College of the Philippines. The views expressed in this policy brief are those of the author alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of NDCP. The readers are free to reproduce copies or quote any part provided proper citations are made. For comments and suggestions, please email galangmico@gmail.com.

Notes

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