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THE ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM

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THE
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CONTENTS

| | | |
|-------------------------|--|----|
| <i>About the Author</i> | ix | |
| <i>Preface</i> | xi | |
| 1 | The Beginnings | 1 |
| | The Post-ministerial Conferences | 3 |
| | Changed Security Environment | 5 |
| | Paternity | 6 |
| | Preparatory Meetings | 10 |
| | The First ARF Ministerial Meeting | 14 |
| | Shaping the ARF's Nature | 16 |
| | Conclusion | 18 |
| 2 | Why Join the ARF? | 21 |
| | Criteria for Participation | 23 |
| | North Korea | 25 |
| | Pakistan and Timor-Leste | 27 |
| | Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Others | 28 |
| | Conclusion | 29 |
| 3 | Does the ARF Build Confidence? | 32 |
| | Defining and Clarifying Positions | 34 |
| | The ASEAN Role | 40 |
| | Promoting Transparency, Networking and Cooperation | 45 |
| | Conclusion | 48 |

| | | |
|-------------------|---|---|
| 4 | Diplomacy to Prevent What? Conflicts Within States? Non-traditional Security From Confidence-Building to Preventive Diplomacy Role of the Chair Experts and Eminent Persons Annual Security Outlook and Mutual Briefings Conclusion | 52 53 56 64 65 68 70 71 |
| 5 | Cooperating on the Ground Arms Control and Management Military Cooperation Civilian Use of Military Assets and Civil-Military Cooperation Civilian Undertakings and Non-traditional Security Security Perceptions The ARF Process Conclusion | 78 79 86 88 97 101 102 104 |
| 6 | Does the ARF Need Central Institutions? The Chair and Its Friends Experts and Eminent Persons The ARF Unit, ARFNet and the ARF Fund Cooperating with the UN Subsidiary Bodies? Conclusion | 112 114 116 118 121 122 123 |
| 7 | Assessing the ARF | 126 |
| <i>Appendices</i> | | |
| | Appendix A: The ASEAN Regional Forum: A Concept Paper | 141 |
| | Appendix B: Chairman's Statement: The Second Meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum | 146 |
| | Appendix C: Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia | 151 |
| | Appendix D: Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone | 161 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Appendix E: Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea | 173 |
| Appendix F: ARF Ministerial Meetings: 1994–2008 | 178 |
| <i>Index</i> | 179 |

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rodolfo C. Severino is the head of the ASEAN Studies Centre at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore and a frequent speaker at international conferences in Asia and Europe. Having been Secretary-General of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations from 1998 to 2002, he completed a book, entitled *Southeast Asia in Search of an ASEAN Community* (published by ISEAS in 2006), on issues facing ASEAN, including the security, economic, and other challenges confronting the region. He has also produced a book on ASEAN in ISEAS' Southeast Asia Background Series. Severino co-edited *Whither the Philippines in the 21st Century?*, a collection of papers on many aspects of Philippine life by eminent scholars and observers of the Philippine scene, in which he wrote the concluding chapter. He is currently working on a book on the Philippine national territory. His views on ASEAN and Southeast Asia have been published in *ASEAN Today and Tomorrow*, a compilation of his speeches and other statements. He writes articles for journals and for the press.

As ASEAN Senior Official for the Philippines, Severino was involved in the establishment of the ASEAN Regional Forum in 1994. He is one of the Experts and Eminent Persons registered by the Philippines for the ARF. Before assuming the position of ASEAN Secretary-General, Severino was Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines. In the Philippine Foreign Service, Severino served in Malaysia, China and the United States. He has a Bachelor of Arts degree in the humanities from the Ateneo de Manila University and a Master of Arts degree in international relations from the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies.

PREFACE

Ambassador K. Kesavapany, Director of the forty-year-old Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore, where I am a Visiting Senior Research Fellow and now head of the ASEAN Studies Centre, suggested that I write a book on the ASEAN Regional Forum.

The ARF is the only region-wide forum that deals with political and security issues in the Asia-Pacific. Inaugurated in mid-1994, the ARF initially encompassed Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, Oceania, Papua New Guinea, the United States, Canada, the European Union, and Russia. Since then, it has expanded to include four countries in South Asia as well. Yet, no book devoted exclusively to it had been published, although an enormous number of book chapters, monographs, papers and articles had been written on it or on certain aspects of it. The one exception I know of is the book by Takeshi Yuzawa, *Japan's Security Policy and the ASEAN Regional Forum* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), but, as the title suggests, it is specifically from the viewpoint of Japan's role in the ARF and in the context of its broad security policy.

Many of these works offer penetrating insights into the nature, potential, shortfalls and direction of the ARF. I do not intend to repeat or add to their analyses, many of which are excellent and to which this book owes much. What the book seeks to do is to establish certain facts about the ARF in some detail, so as to help illuminate its true character and what it can and cannot do, its potential and its limitations, as an institution and process *sui generis* in the unique circumstances of the Asia-Pacific in the current phase of its history. It does so on the ARF's own terms and not in terms of the experience

of other regional institutions and processes and without wishing that it were something else. At the same time, it acknowledges that the ARF can evolve and, to a certain extent and at a certain pace, has evolved and does evolve.

In the book, I review the environment in which the ARF was conceived and initiated and the forces that led to it and shaped it. The original participation in the ARF explains much of its nature and reflects and shapes its purposes and limitations. Each step in the expansion of the forum is examined for its implications and motivations. According to its original Concept Paper, annexed here, the first stage in the ARF's evolution is confidence-building. The book takes a look at the ways that the forum seeks to carry this out and whether they have succeeded. The next stage is "preventive diplomacy". The book discusses the questions of why the ARF is not able to deal with inter-state disputes in preventive terms, much less with those within nations, and why its future in "preventive diplomacy" may lie in cooperation on non-traditional, non-military threats to the security of all. The book details the increasing number of activities that take place between ministerial meetings, activities that the media and the public generally ignore, and seeks to evaluate their worth. One of the forum's limitations in terms of activism and implementation is its lack of adequate region-wide operative institutions. The book examines why this is so, despite the progress that has been made in setting up certain rudimentary ARF institutions. Finally, I attempt my own assessment of the ARF, its achievements and shortfalls, in the light of the limitations imposed by its composition and objectives, liberally citing the evaluation of responsible bodies and thoughtful scholars.

I do not bring theoretical constructs to this book. What I do bring to it are the experiences and insights that I gained as ARF SOM leader for the Philippines from the forum's beginnings to the end of 1997 and as ASEAN Secretary-General from the first day of 1998 to the last day of 2002, and from research and interviews thereafter.

In the writing of this book, I had much help from many people. Without them, the book could not have been done. I thank them all. Ambassador Kesavapany urged me to write the book and gave me frequent encouragement to see it through. Many others gave generously of their time, their knowledge and their insights in my interviews with them. I cite several of them in the text or in the endnotes or in both. Unfortunately, space limitations have prevented me from mentioning the others. The same holds true for those whose works I have consulted. I thank them all. Special thanks go to the anonymous referees for their very useful suggestions, most of which found their way into the manuscript. Needless to say, I alone am responsible for the

contents of the work, including its many shortcomings. I thank Triena Ong and her crew at the Publications Unit of ISEAS for shepherding the book through to the light of day. Finally, and not least, I thank my wife, Weng, for the support, patience and tolerance that she offered during the many hours, days, weeks and months that I devoted to working on this book.

