CONCEPT PAPER ON THE ANNUALISATION OF THE ASEAN DEFENCE MINISTERS’ MEETING-PLUS

Introduction

1. Since its establishment in 2010, the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) has matured into a key regional security platform. It has facilitated dialogue and practical cooperation, resulting in enhanced trust and understanding among the ten ASEAN Member States and eight of ASEAN’s Dialogue Partners, namely Australia, China, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea, New Zealand, the Russian Federation, and the United States (thereafter referred to as the “Plus-countries”).

2. When the ADMM-Plus first convened in 2010, it was held once in three years with the provision that this frequency could be increased when the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting (ADMM) deemed it suitable to step up interactions with the Plus-countries. In 2012, the ADMM increased the ADMM-Plus’ frequency to once in two years, to allow the ADMM-Plus Defence Ministers to exchange views on security issues more often, foster greater momentum for cooperation, and allow the Plus-countries to enhance their engagement with ASEAN. Based on this current frequency, the 4th ADMM-Plus will be held in 2017 and the 5th ADMM-Plus in 2019.

3. This paper proposes that the ADMM-Plus be held annually from 2017 onwards. The paper outlines the rationale and details of this proposed change, and should be read in conjunction with all relevant concept papers relating to the conduct of the ADMM-Plus, namely: (a) ADMM-Plus Concept Paper (2007); (b) ADMM-Plus: Principles for Membership (2009); (c) ADMM-Plus: Configuration and Composition (2010); (d) ADMM-Plus: Modalities and Procedures (2010); (e) Attachment Paper to the “ADMM-Plus: Modalities and Procedures” (2010); (f) Review of Frequency of ADMM-Plus Meetings (2012); and (g) Additional Protocol to the Concept Papers on the Establishment of an ADMM and the ADMM-Plus (2014).

Review of the ADMM-Plus

4. In line with the principle of ASEAN centrality in the ADMM-Plus process, it is timely for the ADMM to annualise the ADMM-Plus for three reasons. First, an annual ADMM-Plus will result in enhanced dialogue and cooperation among ASEAN and the Plus-countries in the midst of an increasingly challenging regional security environment, via a platform that is led and driven by ASEAN. The nature of existing security threats such as terrorism has evolved and worsened, even as
emerging concerns such as cyber threats have proliferated. The eventual return of the more than 1,000 Southeast Asians believed to have joined the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) will pose a severe concern for the region, given the potential for these individuals to mount terrorist attacks and radicalise others. While the region continues to face transboundary security challenges like piracy and natural disasters, the cyber domain has emerged as a pressing area for defence cooperation among states. In the interconnected world of today, many vital military platforms are dependent on cyber systems and networks, and digital attackers are as dangerous as physical threats on the ground.

5. Given these developments, security cooperation among countries, both within ASEAN and with the Plus-countries, is even more vital. **This requires an open, inclusive, and sustainable arrangement with ASEAN at the centre which allows all ADMM-Plus members to contribute equally to dialogue and cooperation on security challenges.** Holding the ADMM-Plus on an annual basis allows ASEAN and the Plus-countries to hold in-depth discussions on key security issues with sufficient frequency, and reinforces the commitment of the Plus-countries to the region’s peace and stability. It will provide the Defence Ministers with more opportunities to discuss and identify security challenges, prioritise the ADMM-Plus’ cooperative areas, and task the Senior Officials to implement the agreements and decisions of the ADMM-Plus. Annualising the ADMM-Plus also presents an excellent opportunity to refresh the meeting’s format, to ensure it stays relevant to all stakeholders.

6. **Second, annualising the ADMM-Plus addresses concerns over the proliferation of informal ADMM+1 meetings.** In line with the 2015 Guidelines to Respond to the Request for Informal Engagements or Meetings by the ADMM-Plus Countries (thereafter referred to as the “2015 Guidelines”) adopted by the 9th ADMM, informal meetings with Plus-countries shall not be held during the years when the ADMM-Plus convenes. With the annualisation of the ADMM-Plus, the ADMM shall no longer consider requests for informal ADMM+1 meetings from Plus-countries. However, ASEAN also recognises that there could be value to ADMM+1 meetings. Therefore, in line with the principle of ASEAN centrality and the Guidelines Regarding the Conduct of ADMM’s Informal Engagements or Meetings with Plus Countries (2017), the ADMM shall retain the prerogative to call for special meetings with individual Plus-countries if there are urgent and/or important issues to discuss. This shall be formally conveyed to the Plus-countries at a suitable forum.
7. **Third, annualising the ADMM-Plus allows all ASEAN Member States to host the ADMM-Plus with equal regularity.** The 2012 Concept Paper on Review of Frequency of ADMM-Plus Meetings, adopted by the 6th ADMM in May 2012, had noted that a two-year cycle would rotate the hosting of the ADMM-Plus amongst only five ASEAN Member States in a steady state. The paper further noted that to allow all ASEAN Member States to host the ADMM-Plus, the ADMM could consider the appropriate modality before 2021 for the ADMM-Plus Chairmanship to be rotated to the other ASEAN Member States that had not chaired the ADMM-Plus between 2013 and 2019. In line with this provision, annualising the ADMM-Plus will allow every ASEAN Member State equal opportunity to host the ADMM-Plus henceforth.

**Proposal**

8. **This paper recommends that the ADMM-Plus meet annually.** This arrangement shall commence following the 4th ADMM-Plus in 2017, with the 5th ADMM-Plus taking place in 2018. The frequency of the ASEAN Defence Senior Officials’ Meeting-Plus (ADSOM-Plus) and the ASEAN Defence Senior Officials’ Meeting-Plus Working Group (ADSOM-Plus WG) will remain unchanged. In line with Art 31(2)(d) of the ASEAN Charter for a single ASEAN Chairmanship, the Chairmanship of the ADMM-Plus shall follow the Chairmanship of the ADMM.

9. **A post-implementation review (PIR) of the annualised ADMM-Plus will be held after the 7th ADMM-Plus in 2020, by which time the ADMM-Plus would have been held annually for four years. 2020 will also mark the 10th anniversary since the establishment of the ADMM-Plus, and would be a timely opportunity to conduct a PIR. Should the ADMM assess that holding the ADMM-Plus annually has been beneficial, this frequency shall continue.**

**Conclusion**

10. The ADMM-Plus is a vital component of the regional security architecture, and plays an important role in facilitating collaboration among the ADMM and its key partners. Holding the ADMM-Plus annually will strengthen ASEAN centrality in the regional security architecture. It will also enhance mutual trust and confidence among ASEAN and the Plus-countries to address common security threats, for the collective benefit of our region.