



Australia's proposal for an 'Asia Pacific Community': issues and prospects

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Executive summary

- In June 2008 Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announced that Australia would seek to encourage development of an 'Asia Pacific Community' by 2020. He argued that no existing cooperation forum so far brings together the whole Asia Pacific region and it was therefore desirable to review the region's 'architecture'. This paper surveys the background to and recent evolution of this proposal.
- After outlining the recent development of major cooperation forums in the very diverse East Asia and Asia Pacific regions, the paper discusses the proposal made by Australia since June 2008. It then surveys the range of academic, political and other responses which have followed, from within Australia and the region.
- The paper presents the key findings of the Government's Special Envoy Richard Woolcott, who has suggested that although there is little enthusiasm in the region for creating distinctly new institutions, there is a high degree of interest in discussing further how cooperation processes may be enhanced.
- The paper reviews recent developments relevant to evolving debates, including the changing emphases of the new governments in the United States and Japan and discussions at the East Asia Summit in October 2009. It suggests that several factors will be important in further consideration of Australia's proposal. These include determining the appropriate membership and institutional arrangements and cooperation styles in a revised dialogue, and considering the implications of such a revised dialogue for existing regional groupings.

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Introduction

On 4 June 2008, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announced that Australia would seek to make a contribution to enhance multilateral cooperation in the Asia Pacific region.¹ The existing multilateral associations and dialogues, he argued, had so far not produced a grouping which brings together the whole region for economic and political cooperation and it was therefore timely to review long term visions for the region's 'architecture'. Mr Rudd also announced that the government had appointed Richard Woolcott (a former Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) as a Special Envoy to consult widely in the region. A further step in the process of consultation and discussion will be a conference on these issues in Sydney with both official and non-official participants on 4–5 December 2009.

This Research Paper will outline the background to recent debates on Asia Pacific cooperation, the proposals advanced by the Rudd Government, responses to and comments about the proposals, and the outcomes so far of Mr Woolcott's consultations (as presented in his 'concept paper', October 2009). The paper concludes by reviewing some major issues and challenges arising in the process of ongoing debate about Asia Pacific regional 'architecture'.

Background

In the last four decades substantial efforts have been made to pursue inter-state cooperation in the very diverse regions of East Asia and the wider Asia Pacific.² For many years, in the aftermath of World War II, such efforts were hampered by the impact of post-colonial transitions and the impact of Cold War tensions. However, from the late 1960s, substantial efforts at cooperation began to be made by states in the region and in the four decades since,

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1. The author wishes to thank Graeme Dobell (Associate Editor, Radio Australia and Canberra columnist, Lowy Institute for International Policy) and Nigel Brew, Cathy Madden, Jeffrey Robertson and Juli Tomaras (Parliamentary Research Branch) for their comments on drafts of this paper.
 2. 'Regions' in international politics are often not geographically defined but socially-constructed entities, and appropriate definitions of them are frequently contested. For the purposes of this paper, the term 'East Asia' refers to the states of Southeast Asia along with China, Japan, and the two Korean states. The term 'Asia Pacific' commonly refers to those just mentioned states, along with other interested countries including the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific islands, Russia, and some states in Latin America which have declared significant identities with this wider region. In this paper, unless otherwise stated, 'Asia Pacific' will refer to the countries participating in ASEAN, the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation group, and the East Asia Summit (see footnotes below for specific membership details). For recent comparative analyses of East Asia and Asia Pacific cooperation groupings see W T Tow, *Tangled Webs: Security Architectures in Asia*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Canberra, July 2008 and A Gyngell, 'Design faults: the Asia Pacific's regional architecture', Lowy Institute for International Policy, 18 July 2007, viewed 22 November 2009, <http://www.lowyinstitute.org/Publication.asp?pid=638>

a number of regional groupings have developed to help advance economic and political security.

ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations), established in 1967, was the first major indigenous effort at cooperation and has since been the focus of much of the region's cooperative activity. ASEAN now includes ten Southeast Asian states and is pursuing ambitious plans to achieve an 'ASEAN Community' by 2020 with economic integration and close cooperation in political and security issues and socio-cultural affairs. It adopted a charter in 2008 and has also recently established a mechanism to monitor and discuss human rights issues. ASEAN's cooperation style has stressed respect for national sovereignty, avoiding confrontation, reaching agreement through consensus and proceeding at a pace all members are comfortable with.³

ASEAN has since 1994 sponsored several additional dialogues, with differing focuses and memberships. The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF, initiated in 1994) was inaugurated after the end of the Cold War to increase communication and dialogue among the major and regional powers. It now has 27 members from East Asia, South Asia, Oceania and North America (the European Union also participates) which discusses security challenges and confidence building measures.⁴ It meets annually at foreign minister level and reflects the ASEAN values of consensus decision making and minimal institutionalisation.⁵

In the wake of the Asian Financial Crisis (after mid 1997) ASEAN also moved to increase cooperation among the countries of East Asia. The ASEAN Plus Three grouping (inaugurated in 1997) brings together the ten ASEAN states along with Japan, China and South Korea. It has sponsored inter-governmental meetings in many areas, and has had a particular focus on developing regional financial cooperation. ASEAN's most recent initiative has been the East Asia Summit (EAS), which encompasses the ASEAN Plus Three members along with India, Australia and New Zealand. The EAS is a gathering of heads of government which met first in 2005 and has sponsored dialogue and cooperation in areas including energy and resource issues.⁶

3. For a detailed assessment of ASEAN see F Frost, 'ASEAN's regional cooperation and multilateral relations: recent developments and Australia's interests', Research paper, No 12, (Parliamentary Library), 9 October 2009, <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/rp/2008-09/09rp12.pdf>

4. ASEAN Regional Forum members are: Australia, Brunei, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Canada, China, European Union (Presidency), India, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), Russia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste, USA and Vietnam.

5. F Frost, 'ASEAN's regional cooperation and multilateral relations', op. cit., pp. 37–40.

6. F Frost, 'ASEAN's regional cooperation and multilateral relations', op. cit., pp. 36–47; see also F Frost, 'The East Asia Summit, Cebu, 2007: issues and prospects', Parliamentary Library

Alongside ASEAN and its associated forums, cooperation has also been pursued in the wider Asia Pacific region. In the broad Asia Pacific context, discussions were pioneered by non-governmental groups including the Pacific Basin Economic Council (PBEC, a forum for business leaders across the Pacific since 1967) and the Pacific Economic Council (PECC) which since 1980 has been a tripartite dialogue among business, government and academic figures to advance cooperation in the Asia Pacific.⁷

Dialogue was initiated at an official level with the inauguration in 1989 of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) grouping of economies which now has 21 members in East Asia, North America and Latin America.⁸ APEC was founded with a commitment to trade and regional economic growth. Its 'three pillars' of cooperation have been trade and investment liberalisation, business facilitation and capacity building and it has operated on a voluntary and consensual basis. While its prime focus is economic cooperation, since 1993 its scope has widened to include an annual leaders meeting and its discussions have extended to include political and security issues. APEC has been effective in areas including capacity building but has had difficulty in sustaining momentum on promoting trade liberalisation and many members have also pursued bilateral or multilateral free trade agreements.⁹

Other inter-governmental regional cooperation groups have included the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO, established in 2001 by China, Russia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) which has interests focussing on East and Central Asia, and the Six Party Talks process (South and North Korea, the US, China, Japan and Russia) which emerged in 2003 to try to alleviate and resolve tensions on the Korean peninsula.¹⁰ A further significant inter-governmental dialogue has developed between the three major Northeast Asian powers; China, Japan and South Korea. The three countries began to hold trilateral ministerial meetings in 1999 in the context of the ASEAN Plus Three

E-Brief, 20 December 2006,

http://www.aph.gov.au/library/INTGUIDE/FAD/eastasia_summit2007.htm

7. On PBEC see <http://www.pbec.org/>, viewed 22 November 2009 and for PECC see <http://www.pecc.org/>, viewed 22 November 2009.
8. APEC's members are: Australia; Brunei Darussalam; Canada; Chile; China; Hong Kong, China; Indonesia; Japan; Korea; Malaysia; Mexico; New Zealand; Papua New Guinea; Peru; The Philippines; Russia; Singapore; Chinese Taipei; Thailand; USA and Vietnam.
9. Gyngell, op. cit., p. 6; J Ravenhill, 'East Asian regionalism: much ado about nothing?', Working Paper, 2008/3, Department of International Relations, Australian National University, December 2008, viewed 21 November 2009, http://rspas.anu.edu.au/ir/pubs/work_papers/08-3.pdf
10. See the SCO website at <http://www.sectsc.org/html/00026.html>; on the Six Party Talks see Scott Snyder, 'Six Party Talks: "Action for action" and the formalization of regional security cooperation in Northeast Asia', *International Journal for Korean Unification Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2007, pp. 1–24.

process but their dialogue now involves heads of government discussions on a 'stand alone' basis (most recently in October 2009).¹¹

Dialogues have also continued to be pursued on a non-official or semi-official basis. A notable example of a forum initiated by a non-governmental body is the 'Shangri-La Dialogue' on regional security issues, which has been sponsored by the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies and has since 2000 brought together defence ministers and senior officials for discussions annually in Singapore.¹²

Cooperation has thus been pursued through a number of different dialogues, developed and pursued by differing sets of participants—and creating in the process what some observers have termed an 'alphabet soup' of dialogues and forums.

The evolution and character of cooperation in East Asia and the Asia Pacific regions have been affected, and constrained, by several major factors.¹³ One major issue is that there has not been a consensus on how best to define the geographical 'region' in which cooperation should be best pursued. Some concepts of cooperation have sought to pursue this in a way associating major Asian states with those across the Pacific (especially the US) and in the Southwest Pacific: APEC is a notable example. Other cooperation concepts have sought to focus more closely on East Asia; such as ASEAN Plus Three. These differing ways of conceiving of 'region' have been one reason for the proliferation of groupings and dialogues.¹⁴

A second central challenge is the great diversity of the states in East Asia and the Asia Pacific—which includes great variations in population size and economic development (for example between Laos and Japan), in cultural characteristics and religious adherence (including Buddhism, Islam, Confucianism and Christianity) and in types of political systems (which include highly autocratic regimes, market-oriented Communist governments, polities

11. J Rathus, 'East Asia Community: little chance of the breakthrough at the Trilateral Summit', *East Asia Forum*, 11 October 2009, viewed on 19 November 2009,

<http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2009/10/11/east-asia-community-little-chance-of-a-breakthrough-at-the-trilateral-summit/>

12. For details of the 2009 dialogue (29–31 May) see International Institute of Strategic Studies, 'Shangri-La Dialogue 2009', viewed 23 November 2009, <http://www.iiss.org/conferences/the-shangri-la-dialogue/shangri-la-dialogue-2009/>

13. See E L Frost, *Asia's New Regionalism*, Lynne Rienner Publications, Boulder, Colorado, 2008, pp. 217–231.

14. See J Ravenhill, 'East Asian regionalism: much ado about nothing?', Working Paper, 2008/3, Department of International relations, Australian National University, December 2008, pp. 23–24, viewed 21 November 2009, http://rspas.anu.edu.au/ir/pubs/work_papers/08-3.pdf, and D Camroux, 'Asia ... Whose Asia? a "return to the future" of a Sino-Indic Asian Community', *The Pacific Review*, vol. 20, no. 4, December 2007, pp. 551–575.

with elected governments normally dominated by major ruling parties, and a range of democratic systems).

A third factor which poses challenges for multilateral cooperation is that many states have in the past century experienced foreign intervention and colonial domination, which in turn was often followed by periods of struggle to regain and secure national independence. With periods of foreign intervention and dominance still in the memories of senior figures and leaders in a number of countries, there has been a high level of sensitivity and reluctance to see inter-state multilateral cooperation involve any significant surrendering of national sovereignty to a regional institution.

A third major issue is that a number of states have longstanding historical differences, territorial disputes and political rivalries which can easily limit the degree of trust and confidence on which multilateral cooperation might be based (examples include relations between China and Japan, China and India, and Thailand and Cambodia). Some major political and strategic rivalries have also had an impact on the development of regional institutions, with rival states preferring different groupings as their preferred cooperation vehicle. A notable example of this is that China has been particularly supportive of the ASEAN Plus Three process (which has a defined membership of 13 East Asian states, among whom China can expect to play a predominant role) while Japan has favoured the grouping of the wider 16 member East Asia Summit as a basis for long term enhanced cooperation (in which the 13 APT members are joined by India, Australia and New Zealand). Both groups operate alongside each other but with overlapping agendas, for example in pursuit of trade liberalisation.¹⁵

Against this background, it is not surprising that cooperation in East Asia and the Asia-Pacific has been characterised by caution, a strong emphasis on building dialogue especially among leaders and senior officials, and a reluctance to try to develop binding sets of rules or any large supra-national structures or bureaucracies to pursue multilateral goals.

All of the regional dialogues and groups have made some contributions towards building communication and fostering cooperation. ASEAN's contribution over 42 years so far is especially notable. However, in terms of membership, no existing forum covers all the major countries with deep interests in the Asia Pacific. ASEAN and ASEAN Plus Three are by design groups with specific memberships focusing on Southeast and East Asia. The East Asia Summit also includes India, Australia and New Zealand but not the United States. APEC includes the major Asia Pacific economies, but does not include India. As a result, attention has been given to whether the existing 'architecture' will in the future meet the needs of states across the Asia Pacific to be able to meet and discuss issues of concern with all key interested states able to take part as members.¹⁶

15. On the origins of the East Asia Summit see F Frost, 'the East Asia Summit, Cebu, 2007', *op. cit.*, and Ravenhill, 'East Asian regionalism: much ado about nothing?', *op. cit.*

16. See Gyngell, *op. cit.*

Prime Minister Rudd's 'Asia Pacific Community' proposal

Mr Rudd's speech on 4 June 2008

Prime Minister Rudd added another strand to discussion on regional cooperation in a speech on 4 June 2008 to the Asia Society Australia/Asia Centre, Sydney, when he argued that it was desirable to review the long-term vision for the architecture for the Asia Pacific region.¹⁷ Strong and effective regional institutions, he argued, are needed '...that will underpin an open, peaceful, stable, prosperous and sustainable region.' Regional institutions are important in addressing common challenges that no one country can address alone. These challenges, he stated, include:

Enhancing a sense of security community (we have something to learn from Europe where centuries of animosity have been transformed into an unparalleled degree of transnational cooperation);

Developing a capacity to deal with terrorism, natural disasters and disease—problems that definitionally transcend national boundaries;

Enhancing non-discriminatory and open trading regimes across the region in support of global institutions; and

Providing long-term energy, resource and food security.

Mr Rudd said that '...we need to have a vision for an Asia Pacific Community' to be achieved by 2020: this vision needed to embrace, '[a] regional institution which spans the entire Asia-Pacific region—including the United States, Japan, China, India, Indonesia and the other states of the region', and '[a] regional institution which is able to engage in the full spectrum of dialogue, cooperation and action on economic and political matters and future challenges related to security.' Mr Rudd argued that 'At present none of our existing regional mechanisms as currently configured are capable of achieving these purposes.' He proposed 'a regional debate about where we want to be in 2020'.

Mr Rudd stated that:

Such a debate does not of itself mean the diminution of any of the existing regional bodies. APEC, the ASEAN Regional Forum, the East Asia Summit, ASEAN Plus Three and ASEAN itself will continue to play important roles, and longer-term may continue in their own right or embody the building blocks of an Asia Pacific Community. There will be wide ranging views about this across the region—some more supportive than others. New bodies and new ideas will continue to emerge...

17. K Rudd, (Prime Minister of Australia), 'Address to the Asia Society Australasia Centre, Sydney: It's time to build an Asia-Pacific Community', 4 June 2008, viewed on 15 November 2009, http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Speech/2008/speech_0286.cfm

Mr Rudd referred to the experience of both Europe and the European Union and ASEAN.

The European Union of course does not represent an identikit model of what we would seek to develop in the Asia Pacific. But what we can learn from Europe is this – it is necessary to take the first step. In the 1950s, sceptics saw European integration as unrealistic. But most people would now agree that the goal of the visionaries in Europe who sat down in the 1950s and resolved to build prosperity and a common sense of a security community has been achieved. It is that spirit we need to capture in our hemisphere.

Our special challenge is that we face a region with greater diversity in political systems and economic structures, levels of development, religious beliefs, languages and cultures, than did our counterparts in Europe. But that should not stop us from thinking big.

ASEAN was an example of the benefits of a long-term vision. 'In a diverse region, ASEAN has brought together a varied group and forged a common outlook on many questions. ASEAN has built habits of cooperation and dialogue. And ASEAN has played a critical role in building and maintaining peace in the region through its work...'

To pursue the initiative of seeking an Asia Pacific Community by 2020, Mr Rudd announced that he had appointed Richard Woolcott as a Special Envoy.¹⁸

Additional Government comments

Prime Minister Rudd and the Minister for Foreign Affairs Stephen Smith have made a number of subsequent comments and statements about the Asia Pacific Community proposal.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Stephen Smith, speaking on 18 July 2008, shortly before the ASEAN ministerial meetings, affirmed Australia's interest in engaging '... in conversation with our friends and neighbours about how the Asia Pacific regional architecture might evolve...' He said that:

This conversation doesn't diminish any of the existing regional bodies. On the contrary, they will continue to play their essential roles. There could be a new piece of architecture, as ASEAN and APEC once were. Or it could evolve and emerge from and through the existing architecture, as the ASEAN Regional Forum and the East Asia Summit have.¹⁹

Prime Minister Rudd presented his ideas to a regional audience when he spoke in Singapore on 12 August 2008.²⁰ He placed strong emphasis on the contribution which had been made

18. Ibid.

19. S Smith (Minister for Foreign Affairs), 'Australia, ASEAN and the Asia-Pacific', 18 July 2008, Lowy Institute, Sydney, viewed on 15 November 2009, http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/2008/080718_lowy.html

20. K Rudd (Prime Minister of Australia), 'The Singapore Lecture: Building on ASEAN's Success—Towards an Asia Pacific Century', 12 August 2008, viewed on 15 November 2009, http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Speech/2008/speech_0419.cfm.

towards regional cooperation by ASEAN, which he called 'an outstanding essay in institutional success'. He said that:

Our region has benefited greatly from the regional architecture that has emerged. The founders of ASEAN, of APEC and of the East Asia Summit did us a great favour in establishing these organisations. These institutions have made, do make and will continue to make a great contribution to our security, stability and prosperity.

It was also important to help shape the future of the region and it was desirable '...to have a regional discussion about the sort of regional architecture we want to see in the next 20 years'.²¹

When Mr Rudd had first made his proposal for an Asia Pacific Community in his 4 June speech, his remarks on the relevance of Europe's experience had been interpreted by some observers to mean that he was proposing a European Union model for the Asia Pacific region (although he had included the statement that, 'The European Union of course does not represent an identikit model of what we would seek to develop in the Asia Pacific').²² In his Singapore address in August, Mr Rudd sought to clarify the objectives of his proposal:

Furthermore, let us be clear about what an Asia Pacific Community is not. It is not an economic union. It is not a monetary union. It is not at this stage a customs union. And it is certainly not a political union.

He went on to state that:

All of our existing regional mechanisms have a critical role to play both now and into the future – including ASEAN, APEC and the EAS. But, at the same time, we need to begin our conversation about where our wider region goes from here. And this is where the wider region needs to learn from ASEAN's success—how to build the institutions, habits and practices of cooperation across the policy spectrum and across historically uncomfortable national divides...

Australia remains open to the suggestions of our regional partners as this discussion unfolds. Because by definition, an APC by 2020 is very much a long-term project for the future.²³

Mr Rudd reaffirmed the Government's support for the Asia Pacific Community concept in several speeches in late 2008. In a speech to the Kokoda Foundation on 20 November, Mr

21. Ibid.

22. C A Thayer, 'Kevin Rudd's Asia-Pacific Community initiative: suggestions and insights for the future process of East Asian regional cooperation', Presentation to international conference on East Asia and South Pacific in Regional Cooperation, Shanghai, People's Republic of China, 9–10 September 2009, pp 5–6, viewed on 22 November 2009, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/19660661/Thayer-Australian-PM-Rudds-Asia-Pacific-Community-Proposal>

23. Ibid.

Rudd linked the challenges posed by the onset of the global financial crisis with the need for enhanced architecture for regional cooperation. He said that:

As a striking example of the interdependence of nations and the interconnectedness of the challenges we face, the global financial crisis highlights the need for coordinated responses and coordinated approaches to dealing with problems. We need to ensure that we have a regional architecture that can drive regional cooperation to meet existing and emerging challenges. Regular dialogue across all areas of government and at all levels will be essential to positioning the region to address the range of security and economic challenges which we are set to face.²⁴

The Prime Minister also endorsed the importance of the proposal in his National Security Statement to the Parliament on 4 December 2008. He listed as one of the Government's ten new priorities '... Support for an Asia-Pacific Community'. He said that:

It is in Australia's interests to be proactive about shaping the strategic environment in the Asia-Pacific, and our own future, through regional engagement. Our diplomacy needs to be pervasive, formative and influential and it needs to be resourced for the challenges that Australia faces now and into the future...

We have proposed the development of an Asia-Pacific Community by 2020 as a means of strengthening political, economic and security cooperation in the region in the long term. Many of the challenges we will face cannot be addressed by one country alone. Enhancing the regional architecture is an important step in working towards combined solutions. It is also about inculcating and institutionalising the habits of cooperation—as our friends in ASEAN have so successfully done over the years within their community.²⁵

Prime Minister Rudd continued to advocate the concept in 2009; particularly in his address to the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore on 29 May 2009.²⁶ In this speech, Mr Rudd again emphasised the desirability for Asia Pacific states to act to shape the future of the wider region by building the architecture that would be needed. He warned of the potential dangers of 'miscommunication, of miscalculation and misadventure' and said that:

We need mechanisms that help us to cope with strategic shocks and discontinuities. We need a body that brings together the leaders of the key nations in the Asia-Pacific region, including Indonesia, India, China, Japan, the US and other nations, with a mandate to

24. K Rudd (Prime Minister of Australia), 'Towards an Asia-Pacific century: Speech to the Kokoda Foundation Australia-US Trilogy', 20 November 2008, viewed on 29 November 2009, <http://www.pm.gov.au/node/5460>

25. 'The First National Security Statement to the Parliament: Address by the Prime Minister of Australia the Hon. Kevin Rudd MP, 04 December 2008', viewed on 29 November 2009, <http://www.pm.gov.au/node/5460>

26. K Rudd (Prime Minister of Australia), 'Address at Shangri-La Dialogue, Singapore', 29 May 2009, viewed on 22 November 2009, <http://www.pm.gov.au/node/5128>

engage across the breadth of the security, economic and political challenges we will face in the future.

Prime Minister Rudd then presented three major findings from the consultations undertaken by his Special Envoy, Richard Woolcott, with regional leaders:

First, there has been broad agreement on the value of a focused discussion about how regional architecture can best serve all of our interests in the future...

Secondly, there is widespread recognition that our current structures do not provide a single forum for all relevant leaders to discuss the full range of political, economic, and security challenges we face in the future.

Thirdly, it is clear that no one wants more meetings. There is no appetite for additional institutions.

Mr Rudd concluded by stating that 'Australia has no prescriptive view...The clear conclusion from my envoy's report is that there is an interest in the region in this discussion, and there is a wish to explore the possibilities without any fixed or final views on a destination.' He said that he would brief leaders at the forthcoming EAS and APEC summits scheduled for later in the year and that Australia would invite 'key government officials, academics and opinion makers from around the region' to attend 'a one and a half track conference to further explore the idea of an Asia-Pacific community.'²⁷

The proposal: comments and responses

Mr Rudd's Asia Pacific Community proposal has produced a number of reactions from commentators and analysts (including academic specialists), foreign government representatives, and the Australian Parliamentary Opposition.

Initial comments in 2008

After Mr Rudd's speech of 4 June 2008, early reactions included cautious non-commitment, negative responses and support. Early comments in the Australian media noted that the Asia Pacific Community proposal had been announced with what appeared to have been little advanced preparation or consultation and at an early stage in the Rudd Government's term in office. Michelle Grattan (in *The Age*) commented on 6 June 2008 that the announcement was 'breathtaking' but added that, 'Regional countries might see Rudd's initiative as the new boy on the block getting above himself. Best to wait awhile before you throw your weight

27. Ibid.

around'. Grattan also suggested that there might be a danger of the Government addressing too many issues at once.²⁸

The references Mr Rudd had made in his speech to Europe and the European Union also prompted some observers to the view that he was proposing a European model of cooperation for the region (as noted above). This interpretation produced some critical comments in Australia immediately after the 4 June speech, Former Prime Minister Bob Hawke said that, 'I don't want to knock references to the EU but don't let us say that's the way it must be for Asia'.²⁹ Former Prime Minister Paul Keating wrote that 'even the basic first step made towards the European community—the European steel plan of the 1950s—would not, I believe be capable of emulation these days, across East Asia and the subcontinent'.³⁰

Some early international reactions were either cautious or clearly critical. In early June 2008, just after Mr Rudd's initial speech, the head of the foreign affairs committee of the Indonesian parliament (Theo Sambuaga) said that that any moves to expand regional cooperation should be pursued through existing bodies: 'Rather than create a new body in the Asia-Pacific, why don't you push the development of ASEAN?'.³¹ Several senior regional analysts were interviewed just after Mr Rudd's 4 June speech, during the annual 'Asia-Pacific Roundtable' in Kuala Lumpur. Mohamed Jawhar Hassan (Chairman of Malaysia's Institute for Strategic and International Studies) said that Malaysia would not be able to support the proposal without more information: '(Mr Rudd) has a responsibility to tell us more instead of just giving us a skeleton and telling us to discuss—you know, we are quite busy ourselves'. Koji Watanabe, a senior former Japanese diplomat, said that, 'I'm not that convinced the situation has matured enough to be able to bring about that type of all encompassing mechanism. For the time being, my view is we will have to wait and see how various regional attempts will develop'.³²

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28. M Grattan, 'The danger of taking on too much', *The Age*, 6 June 2008, viewed 27 November 2009, [http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=\(Id:media/pressclp/tsnq6\);rec=0](http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=(Id:media/pressclp/tsnq6);rec=0); see also P Kelly, 'Time may not be ripe for brave new forum', *The Australian*, 9 July 2008, viewed on 27 November 2009, [http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=\(Id:media/pressclp/74yq6\);rec=0](http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=(Id:media/pressclp/74yq6);rec=0);
 29. M Steketee, 'Don't push EU model: say ex-PMs', *The Australian*, 6 June 2008.
 30. Quoted in P Hartcher and P Coorey, 'Keating delivers a blow to PM's pitch for regional unity', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 June 2008.
 31. 'Indonesia MP questions Rudd's Asia-Pacific alliance plan', ABC News, 5 June 2008, viewed on 27 November 2009, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/06/05/2266592.htm>
 32. D Flitton, 'Experts offer mixed reviews of ambitious forum plan', *The Age*, 6 June 2008, viewed on 27 November 2009, [http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query%3D\(Id%3Amedia%2Fpressclp%2F2qnq6\);rec%3D0](http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query%3D(Id%3Amedia%2Fpressclp%2F2qnq6);rec%3D0);

In late June 2008, the US Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte said that the Department of State did not yet have detail on the Rudd proposal. He emphasised the importance to the US of major bilateral relations in the Asia Pacific region and said that, 'It makes sense to aspire towards more meaningful region-wide institutions, but I think we're very much at the beginning of that process in historic terms'.³³

In early July 2008, Barry Desker (head of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore) said about Mr Rudd's proposal that, 'I would think it is dead in the water right from the very beginning. It would have been much more useful if it had been thought through before and conceptualised with regional leaders before it was presented as a bright new idea from Australia'.³⁴ Also in July, Prime Minister Badawi of Malaysia suggested that it would be desirable to develop the existing regional institutions, saying that, 'We already have a forum, the ASEAN Regional Forum. We can continue with the existing institutions'.³⁵

Other early reactions were supportive. Just after the Prime Minister's speech, a spokesman for the Indonesian Foreign Ministry (Teuku Faizasyah) said on 5 June that, 'We're following the idea with interest. We are really keen to study the issue further'.³⁶ When Mr Rudd visited the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta on 13 June 2008, ASEAN's Secretary General Surin Pitsuwan said:

You are now dreaming bigger dreams, scaling another awe inspiring height, swimming a wider ocean of hope and vision for a larger Asia-Pacific Community. We welcome your new vision. We want to know more about it... Australia has always been a catalyst and a strong pillar of those regional architectures of cooperation and prosperity in the past.³⁷

A senior Indonesian analyst, Hadi Soesastro (Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Jakarta), writing in early June 2008, indicated support for the principles and vision underlying the proposal and said that Indonesia should back Australia on it. Dr Soesastro said that:

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33. D Flitton, 'US diplomat wary of Rudd's big idea', *The Age*, 30 June 2008, viewed on 27 November 2009, [http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=\(Id:media/pressclp/vzuq6\);rec=0;](http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=(Id:media/pressclp/vzuq6);rec=0;)
 34. P Walters, 'Rudd Asia plan "dead in water"', *The Australian*, 4 July 2008, viewed on 27 November 2009, [http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query%3D\(Id%3Amedia%2Fpressclp%2Fsjuwq6\);rec%3D0;](http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query%3D(Id%3Amedia%2Fpressclp%2Fsjuwq6);rec%3D0;)
 35. A Grigg, 'Blow to Rudd's Asia plan', *Australian Financial Review*, 23 July 2008
 36. 'Indonesia "keen" to study Rudd's Asia-Pacific plan', ABC News, 6 June 2008, viewed 27 November 2009, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/06/06/2267782.htm>
 37. 'ASEAN Secretary General's Welcoming Speech on the Occasion of the Visit of the Hon. Kevin Michael Rudd, Prime Minister of Australia, to ASEAN Secretariat Jakarta, 13 June 2008', viewed 27 on November 2009, <http://www.aseansec.org/21642.htm>

Australian critics of Prime Minister Rudd's Asia Pacific Community initiative have got it wrong about the idea not being well thought out. Kevin Rudd's initiative should be seen as an invitation to other leaders, policy makers, and thinkers in the region to join... in a serious discussion about how best the Asia Pacific region could be organised. If Rudd had come up with a fully-baked proposal, the exercise could be self-defeating. Evolving regionalism in Asia Pacific requires that all parties concerned should have an active part in the process, especially in the shaping of a new vision for the region... Indonesia should support Rudd's initiative and the process of deliberations that will follow from it³⁸

In early July, Thailand's foreign minister expressed his country's willingness to discuss the proposal. Foreign Minister Nappadol Pattama said that, 'Any idea that brings peace and stability to the region, we can't see any reason why we shouldn't study or deliberate the issue'.³⁹

Continuing debate in 2009

Debate has continued among analysts about the Asia Pacific Community proposal, with contributions both critical and supportive. In April 2009, Hugh White (Australian National University) wrote that the key challenge facing the Asia Pacific was the need for a concert of powers to accommodate the major changes under way. The discussions necessary would need to be done quietly and might not be enhanced by big meetings of a number of regional states, including both major powers and smaller countries. Eventually, he suggested, once the major powers have reached a sustainable new set of relationships, a regional forum of the kind Mr Rudd is suggesting could indeed be needed, '[b]ut today it is important that APC not become a distraction from the region's most urgent tasks'.⁴⁰ Colin Heseltine (a former executive director of APEC) wrote in September 2009 that pursuit of a new dialogue forum for the region ran the risk of 're-inventing the wheel'. He stated that 'The Prime Minister's pronouncements have been remarkably lacking in detail and content... [and] unless there is a clear and substantive rationale, the concept is doomed'. He stated that 'The Prime Minister's pronouncements have been remarkably lacking in detail and content... [and] unless there is a clear and substantive rationale, the concept is doomed'.⁴¹

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38. Hadi Soesastro, 'Kevin Rudd's Architecture for the Asia Pacific', *East Asia Forum*, 9 June 2008, viewed 22 on November 2009, <http://eastasiaforum.org/2008/06/09/kevin-rudds-architecture-for-the-asia-pacific/>
 39. 'Thailand shows interest in Rudd's Asia-Pac Community', *ABC News*, 4 July 2008, viewed 27 November 2009, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/07/04/2295210.htm>
 40. H White, 'The Asia-Pacific Community concept: right task, wrong tool?', *East Asia Forum*, 26 April 2009, viewed on 15 November 2009, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2009/04/26/the-asia-pacific-community-concept-right-task-wrong-tool/>
 41. C Heseltine, 'Asia-Pacific Community: reinventing the wheel?', *The Asialink Essays*, no 7, September 2009, viewed on 15 November 2009, http://www.asialink.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/23898/Heseltine_essay7.pdf

Hadi Soesastro (in June 2009), in contrast, affirmed the desirability of pursuing a new drive for reform of regional institutions which should involve '... clear understanding of the need to have a regional forum that can address the full range of regional and global issues affecting all regional countries.' There is a '... need for a new Heads of Government meeting or Asia Pacific Summit – a forum that cannot be too large, because that would make it ineffective, but needs to be broad enough to make it representative. It would not need its own secretariat. APEC and ARF would develop issues for consideration by this new Asia Pacific Summit'.⁴² William Tow (Australian National University) wrote in October 2009 that criticism of the Australian proposal has been unjustified. Neither the US nor China are necessarily against the development of stronger regional security architectures. Each individual Asia Pacific state is taking its time assessing the Asia Pacific Community proposal and the most fundamental lesson in the debate so far is that vigorous and systematic discussion should continue: 'There is hardly any point in "killing the messenger" before the full meaning of that message is absorbed and systematically considered over the longer term'.⁴³

The Australian Parliamentary Opposition's responses

The Australian Parliamentary Opposition has been strongly critical of Prime Minister Rudd's Asia Pacific Community proposal and this criticism was expressed in a number of statements and comments from June 2008 onwards.

The Opposition's (then) Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs Andrew Robb made a number of critical comments. On 8 June 2008 he said that, 'Mr Rudd must put aside his ill-conceived and embarrassing stunt to create a Euro style Asia/Pacific Union and focus on repairing vital country-to-country relationships'.⁴⁴ On 20 June, Mr Robb criticised the proposal as hasty and ill-conceived and noted that it had been given only 25 lines in a speech of over 220 lines.⁴⁵ Mr Robb in a speech on 7 August 2008 depicted the Asia Pacific Community proposal as a reflection of long-standing tendencies in Labor approaches to foreign policy:

42. Hadi Soesastro, 'Architectural momentum in Asia and the Pacific', *East Asia Forum*, 14 June 2009, viewed on 15 November 2009, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2009/06/14/architectural-momentum-in-asia-and-the-pacific/print/>

43. W Tow, 'Asian regional community building: don't kill the messenger', *East Asia Forum*, 27 October 2009, viewed on 15 November 2009, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2009/10/27/asian-regional-community-building-dont-kill-the-messenger/>

44. A Robb (Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs), 'Actions, not words, solution to Rudd's snub of Japan', media release, 8 June 2008, viewed 27 November 2009, [http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query%3D\(Id%3Amedia%2Fpressrel%2Fsoor6\);rec%3D0;](http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query%3D(Id%3Amedia%2Fpressrel%2Fsoor6);rec%3D0;)

45. A Robb (Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs), 'More evidence that Rudd's Asia-Pacific union was a stunt', media release, 20 June 2008, viewed on 27 November 2009, <http://www.liberal.org.au/news.php?Id=1128>

Labor's primary instinct is to support an over-arching set of international and regional rules, to see the establishment of a universal set of moral imperatives and laws that all nations should follow.

This instinct was on full display in June this year with Mr Rudd's embarrassing proposal to create, within the next twelve years, a single European-style Union across the Asia - Pacific region.

The announcement, made with no prior consultation with any of our bilateral partners, presumed that the intrinsic merit of an over-arching rules based approach to regional security, trade, climate change and disaster response, would be obvious to all. It was not.

This presumptuous proposal marked a hasty return to Labor's long standing view that Australia's interests are best pursued through rule-based international systems.⁴⁶

The Leader of the Opposition, Malcolm Turnbull, cited the Asia Pacific Community proposal in his response to the Prime Minister's statement on 4 December 2008 on national security. Mr Turnbull said of Prime Minister Rudd that, '... his grand plan for an Asia-Pacific community has fallen flat in capitals around the region, not least because he sprang it on everybody—not least, it would appear, his envoy, Mr Woolcott—by surprise and without consultation'.⁴⁷

Critical comments continued in 2009.⁴⁸ The Opposition's Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs Julie Bishop, in a comment on 18 March, cited as one of the Prime Minister's 'wild goose chases', 'his failed attempt to establish a European Union type organisation in the Asia

46. A Robb (Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs), 'Australia in the world: past, present and future', Address to the Australian Institute of International Affairs 75th Anniversary National Conference Melbourne, 28 July 2008, viewed on 27 November 2009,

<http://www.liberal.org.au/news.php?Id=1374>. See also R Trood, 'Rudd needs a clearer idea to stem growing disarray', *The Australian*, 4 July 2008, viewed on 27 November 2009, <http://senatortrood.com/Media/Publications/NewspaperArticles/tabid/94/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/225/Rudd-needs-a-clearer-idea-to-stem-growing-disarray.aspx>

47. M Turnbull, 'National Security', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 4 December 2008, p. 12562, viewed 29 November 2009, <http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22chamber%2Fhansard%2F2008-12-04%2F0047%22>

48. See for example, J Bishop, 'Matter of public importance: Australia's foreign relations', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 19 November 2009, p. 57, <http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query%3DId%3A%22chamber%2Fhansard%2F2009-11-19%2F0104%22>

Pacific...'.⁴⁹ Senator Russell Trood commented on the proposal in a speech on 16 September 2009 on the Government's foreign policy approaches:

The Asia-Pacific community idea has all the hallmarks of having been hastily conceived and not fully thought through. A great many questions about the proposal remain unanswered, not least how the new institution would relate to all of the existing elements of the regional architecture. Having come up with a poorly conceptualised idea, the Prime Minister carelessly tossed it into the public domain. No preparations were made and no consultations with any of Australia's regional friends took place.

Given all this, it is hardly surprising that the Asia-Pacific community concept now lies dead in the water and commands no serious support around the region. This idea is going nowhere. Rather than spending more of the government's limited foreign policy budget on bankrolling an international conference in December, Mr Rudd would be well advised to find a dignified way to walk away from the APC and quietly dispatch it into history.⁵⁰

Richard Woolcott's consultations and 'concept paper' (October 2009)

In the second half of 2008 and through 2009, Richard Woolcott pursued a series of consultations on behalf of the Australian Government. He made visits to 21 countries: the members of APEC' (except Hong Kong and Taiwan) all ASEAN members (with the exception of Burma/Myanmar), and India.⁵¹ In a speech in June 2009 Mr Woolcott noted that Mr Rudd was still developing his ideas on the arrangements he wanted to pursue. He reaffirmed that the Government did not have in mind an EU-type institution or the creation of some supranational bureaucracy. Mr Woolcott also stated that the initiative reflected Australia's interests as a country which is a part of the Southeast Asian and Southwest Pacific region and which is committed to active middle power diplomacy. Australia already had a sound and established record in regional diplomacy, including its role in relation to the inauguration of APEC, the pursuit of the Cambodian peace process and the establishment of the ASEAN Regional Forum. It was better, he suggested, for a middle sized country such as

49. J Bishop (Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs), 'Rudd must halt wild goose chases', media release, 18 March 2009, viewed 27 November 2009, <http://www.liberal.org.au/news.php?Id=2771>

50. Senator R Trood, 'Matter of public interest: Rudd government', Senate, *Debates*, 16 September 2009, viewed on 29 November 2009, <http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22chamber%2Fhansards%2F2009-09-16%2F0064%22>

51. Senator J Faulkner, 'Answer to question on notice: Mr Richard Woolcott', [Question: E Abetz], Senate, *Debates*, 17 November 2009, pp. 95–98. The Answer stated that he had visited Brunei, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Russia, Singapore, Thailand, USA and Vietnam, viewed on 29 November 2009, <http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22chamber%2Fhansards%2F2009-11-17%2F0227%22>.

Australia or Malaysia to put forward new ideas for the region than for a major power like the US, China or Japan, lest smaller countries consider that the larger powers have some hidden or self-serving agenda.⁵²

In October 2009, Richard Woolcott completed a further summation of his thinking on the basis of his consultations on the Government's proposal, in a 'concept paper'.⁵³ The paper—'Towards an Asia-Pacific Community'—began by noting the 'major shift in strategic weight to the Asia Pacific' but argues that there is a 'high risk of instability' because of the 'rate of growth, change and internal interaction in the region'.⁵⁴ In discussing the existing institutions, the paper reaffirms that 'there is no single institution in the Asia Pacific region with a membership and mandate to address comprehensively both economic and strategic challenges'.

The 'concept paper' discusses the examples of Europe and of ASEAN. The paper states that Europe in the first half of the 20th century 'is a stark reminder of how badly things can go wrong' without effective architecture and the will to use such architecture to work cooperatively:

Europe has now found its solution along just these lines—an effective architecture and the will to work cooperatively. But it has built a uniquely European architecture, predicated on history and cultural characteristics unique to Europe. The Asia-Pacific region, which is much less compact and more diverse, will have to devise its own architecture, based on its own history and cultural characteristics.

The purpose of Australia's APc initiative is to launch a process of dialogue—a regional conversation—to make a start on collectively designing an overarching and effective regional architecture, and on engendering a stronger sense of the need for a region-wide will to work and plan cooperatively and in as coordinated a fashion as possible. The groupings and institutions already in place in the Asia Pacific region are making valuable contributions to the region's stability and prosperity and could themselves become the building blocks of an Asia Pacific community. But none of them as currently constituted represents a coherent

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52. R Woolcott AC, 'Address to the AIIA, Sydney 9 June 2009'. viewed 15 on November 2009, <http://www.newyork.usa.embassy.gov.au/nycg/files/Address%20to%20the%20AIIA%20-%20Richard%20Woolcott.pdf>
 53. The paper—'Towards an Asia-Pacific Community, 12 October 2009,—was made available on the website 'blog' of the Lowy Institute for International Policy—see S Roggeveen, 'APC: the Woolcott paper', *The Interpreter* (Lowy Institute), 2 November 2009, viewed on 15 November 2009, <http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/post/2009/11/02/APc-The-Woolcott-paper.aspx>
 54. R Woolcott, 'Towards an Asia-Pacific Community', op. cit. Note that in this paper, Woolcott uses the term 'Asia Pacific community, i.e. APc, with a small 'c') to refer to the concept during the period when it is under discussion: when the concept is developed into a formal process or institution, it is envisaged that the term Asia Pacific Community, with a capital 'C' (i.e. APC) will then be used.

focal point through which all of the strands of the regional dynamic can be drawn together at a meeting of the leaders of the key regional countries.⁵⁵

On the existing institutions, the 'concept paper' states:

APEC's mandate is economic, and its membership is so wide as to be unwieldy. The ARF has no leaders'-level meeting, can deal only with security matters, and many believe it is too large and has made insufficient progress since its inception. Meanwhile, ASEAN, APT and the EAS are each, to varying degrees, insufficiently representative of the Asia Pacific region to be said to constitute an APc. The EAS is most representative, and has a leaders' meeting, but does not include some key countries.

ASEAN, as a subregional grouping in the Asia Pacific, highlights the importance of developing the right institutions at the right time: it has been crucial in the transformation of South East Asia from a region of strategic conflict into one of cooperation and consensus. Australia believes the time has now come to extend the vision that drove formation of ASEAN to the wider Asia Pacific region. An Asia Pacific community could be seen as a natural broadening of the processes of confidence, security and community-building led by ASEAN.

The 'concept paper' states that the key findings from the consultation process are:

A high level of interest across the region in the APc proposal, including widespread agreement about the importance of a discussion on how regional architecture can be developed to best suit the region's purposes;

A strong recognition in the region that our current institutions, as they are currently configured, do not provide a forum for all relevant leaders to discuss the full range of economic security, environmental and political challenges the region needs to address;

Little appetite for creating new institutions in addition to existing forums, such as ASEAN, ASEAN+3, the EAS, APEC, ARF and others, given the heavy travel schedule and meeting demands that regional leaders face;

ASEAN's involvement in regional institutions is crucial to fostering habits of cooperation and understanding across the region, and has contributed strongly to the level of peace and stability the region has achieved; and

A keen interest in further discussion on the Asia Pacific community proposal, including on the geo-strategic and economic challenges we will face in the twenty-first century and how we might develop our institutions to meet these.⁵⁶

The 'concept paper' suggests that there are three key ways in which an Asia Pacific community could advance the interests of all countries in the Asia Pacific:

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

First, an APc will be crucial to ensuring that the process of regional economic and financial integration is driven forward, and that the region as a whole strives for a market-driven regional economy that is open to the world. The wealth of East Asia has been built on open markets and open investment. To secure our future prosperity and competitiveness at the global level, this approach needs to be reinforced through ongoing cooperation and endorsement at the leadership level.

Secondly, an APc will be crucial to nurturing a culture of dialogue and collaboration at the leadership level to enable regional countries to meet current and emerging challenges arising from strategic competition. The first steps should promote region-wide security building measures. Eventually—just as ASEAN has been able to build a degree of strategic congruence among countries beset with historic rivalries—an APc will help build a sharper sense of common regional strategic interest across all of Asia, on top of helping to ensure that regional relationships do not become adversarial.

Thirdly, an APc will provide a crucial vehicle for discussion and cooperation across a range of challenges with transnational reach including climate change, water and food security, non-proliferation, illegal people movements, transnational crime and terrorism. As with more traditional security challenges, such as territorial disputes, the objective would not necessarily be to reach a single region-wide position, but to use the mechanism of regional consultation to help advance solutions be they global, regional or bilateral. As with strengthening strategic stability, it will be the habit of consultation at the highest level that requires nurturing: not because it will solve all problems but because it can make the search for solutions easier and diminish the risks of miscommunication, miscalculation and of descent into crisis or conflict.⁵⁷

The paper notes that a further stage in the discussion process would be a conference in Sydney on 4–5 December 2009, hosted by Mr Woolcott, in which key government officials, academics and opinion makers from across the region would discuss the Asia Pacific's future and the potential shape of future regional architecture.

Recent developments and major issues

The debate about a possible Asia Pacific Community is ongoing. Since the proposal is at a stage of consultation and preliminary discussion, governments have accordingly not needed to take explicit stances on any particular institutional proposals. In 2009, however, several developments have been of significance in relation to the process of debate and discussion.

Recent regional developments

In the United States, the Obama Administration came to office with an interest in upgrading the country's profile in East Asia and in taking a more active role in multilateral cooperation. This approach has been reflected in US policies towards the ASEAN region. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton participated in July in the annual ASEAN post-conference meetings and

57. Ibid.

the ASEAN Regional Forum. In an important step, the US acceded to the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation. The treaty does not impose any binding commitments on the US and will not affect US commitments to its allies in the East Asia region. Secretary Clinton indicated that the US was taking this step as an executive agreement that does not require ratification by the US Senate. One significant implication of the accession is that it opens the way for possible US participation in the East Asia Summit, since ASEAN had made recognition of the Treaty a prerequisite for such membership.⁵⁸ The US's capacity for discussions with all ASEAN members was facilitated by the redevelopment of direct dialogue between the US Government and Burma/Myanmar, which included a visit to the country by US Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell in early November 2009.⁵⁹ During his visit to East Asia in November 2009, President Obama held the first summit meeting between the US and all ASEAN members, in Singapore on 15 November. In his speech on US regional policies on 14 November in Tokyo President Obama stated that:

As an Asia-Pacific nation, the United States expects to be involved in the discussions that shape the future of this region, and to participate fully in appropriate organizations as they are established and evolve... And the United States looks forward to engaging with the East Asia Summit more formally as it plays a role in addressing the challenges of our time.⁶⁰

These developments have aided the capacity of the US to deepen involvement with regional cooperation activities.

The new Japanese Government led by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ, which took office in September 2009) has also given emphasis to regional engagement, although the direction of its policies is not yet entirely clear. Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama has had a long term interest in promoting development of what he has termed an 'East Asia Community' and the DPJ's manifesto for the elections called for the establishment of a regional cooperation area covering such fields as trade, finance, energy, disaster relief and the environment. Mr Hatoyama also set out a medium term goal of pursuing development of a common currency for the countries in the community he envisages.⁶¹ Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada has stated that the membership of the potential East Asia Community should be the same of that of the East Asia Summit (and would therefore include Australia and New Zealand). The new Government has so far been unclear on whether the US might be able to associate with the proposed East Asia Community or whether the Community would be confined to a

58. S Simon, 'US-Southeast Asia relations: the United States is back!', *Comparative Connections*, October 2009, viewed on 29 November 2009, http://csis.org/files/publication/0903qus_seasia.pdf

59. 'Top US officials meet Myanmar junta, Suu Kyi', Associated Press, 4 November 2009.

60. 'Remarks by President Barack Obama, Suntory Hall, Tokyo Japan', Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, 14 November 2009, viewed on 29 November 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-barack-obama-suntory-hall>

61. Yukio Hatoyama, 'A new path for Japan'; *The New York Times*, 27 August 2009.

membership based on that of the current East Asia Summit.⁶² The new government's conception of an East Asia Community has added to the climate of debate alongside Australia's own proposal for discussion.⁶³ However, since Japan's proposal has still to be clarified, it is not yet evident whether it may be a further useful catalyst for regional discussions which can ultimately be compatible with Australia's conception of a Community, or whether Japan's conception may evolve as a competitor in relation to Australia's proposal.

China (like Japan) is already heavily involved in the major existing regional dialogues and has expressed support in cautious terms for further institutional evolution. China has responded favourably towards Japan's concept of an East Asian Community. The Chinese Government has also indicated a willingness in principle to consider Australia's proposal. In August 2009, a spokesperson for China's Ambassador to Australia (Zhang Junsai) said that Beijing remained open to Australia's proposal: he commented that: 'We hope relevant countries in the Asia-Pacific region can work together and have more exchanges so as to build up political mutual trust, deepen cooperation of mutual benefit, promote common development and share win-win progress'.⁶⁴ China's interest in further discussions on the Asia Pacific Community concept was indicated by the fact that it offered to host the first conference on the proposal, (which will in fact be held in Sydney in December 2009; Japan and South Korea also made such offers).⁶⁵

South Korea has been involved as a founding member of existing major cooperation forums. Its government has been expressing recent interest in expanding its foreign relations role as a middle power with strong regional concerns and its potential interest in the Asia Pacific Community concept was indicated by its willingness to host the first conference on it.⁶⁶

ASEAN members have also been following closely debates over wider cooperation. ASEAN members are well aware of the challenges of pursuing political and economic cooperation in the East Asia region and the obstacles which can be encountered. The group continues to be sensitive about its position given the major role it has played as a sponsor and organiser of

62. 'EAC inches forward to distant realisation', *Oxford Analytica*, 6 October 2009.

63. A George-Mulgan, 'Is there a "Japanese" concept of an Asia Pacific Community?', *East Asia Forum*, 6 November 2009, viewed 15 November 2009, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2009/11/06/blurred-vision-is-there-a-japanese-concept-of-an-east-asia-community/#more-7735>

64. P Maley, 'China still interested in Rudd Asia-Pacific plan', *The Australian*, 24 August 2009, viewed on 29 November 2009, <http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22media%2Fpress%2FU3HU6%22>.

65. B Doherty, 'Rudd's forum gets a hearing', *The Age*, 24 October 2009, viewed on 29 November, <http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22media%2Fpress%2FYJ0V6%22>.

66. 'Lee pushes Seoul's regional agenda', *Oxford Analytica*, 21 October 2009.

several of the major dialogues, including the ARF, ASEAN Plus Three and the East Asia Summit. These sensitivities were evident at the ASEAN and East Asia Summits in Hua Hin, Thailand in October 2009. Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva (who was chair for the meetings) said at the time of the Summits that, 'Both Japan and Australia proposed bigger communities, which is a test for us... ASEAN must be firmly integrated when we enter a wider community'. He also said that ASEAN leaders, 'emphasised... that it wasn't all that important to decide on some kind of rigid structure at the moment, but to be aware that the regional architecture would continue to evolve'.⁶⁷

Developments at the East Asia Summit, 25 October 2009

A further indication of emerging attitudes of regional states towards the Australian proposal was provided by discussion in the meeting of the East Asia Summit in Hua Hin, Thailand on 25 October. Japan and Australia both presented their ideas on regional community building. Graeme Dobell (writing for the Lowy Institute for International Policy) has reported that Prime Minister Hatoyama said that the broad principles of the Australian proposals should be supported, although he differed in emphasis with Australia on the question of whether the US should be involved in a community-building process at the outset. Prime Minister Rudd said after a brief meeting with Mr Hatoyama that they were both in agreement on 'the need for change'.⁶⁸

At the meeting of heads of government in the EAS, Prime Minister Rudd had the opportunity to advance Australia's ideas on regional community building. Graeme Dobell has reported that there were comments in the meeting from the leaders of Singapore, China, Vietnam, Japan and New Zealand, and:

There were no negative comments. In this game, that amounts to a summit nod which can be parlayed into something of a mandate. The nod is defined by its limitations: it is agreement for more talks about regional architecture. Certainly, it is not a nod for any particular course of building.⁶⁹

67. Amitav Acharya, 'Competing Communities: what the Australian and Japanese ideas mean for Asia's regional architecture', *PacNet Newsletter*, Pacific Forum-CSIS, Honolulu, 27 October 2009, viewed 15 November 2009, <http://csis.org/files/publication/pac0970.pdf>

68. G Dobell, 'AP Community: Japan and Australia', *The Interpreter* (Lowy Institute, 3 November 2009, viewed 22 November 2009, <http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/author/Graeme%20Dobell.aspx>

69. G Dobell, 'AP community: the concept paper', *The Interpreter* (Lowy Institute) 30 October 2009, viewed on 22 November 2009, <http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/author/Graeme%20Dobell.aspx>

Issues and challenges

As discussion proceeds on ways of exploring Australia's proposal for an Asia Pacific Community, several major issues and challenges are likely to be significant in further considerations: they are in many ways inter-related.⁷⁰

One issue is membership. The existing major regional forums all have different memberships (as has been indicated). APEC for example includes Canada as well as the US and has some members from Latin America (Mexico, Chile and Peru). The ARF has a wide membership which includes East Asian states but also states from South Asia and North America, as well as the European Union (as a multilateral entity). An agreed concept would be needed as to what an appropriate and representative group would be. If the East Asia Summit emerges as the best focus for adaptation then its existing membership could be added to (see below). It should also be noted that there has been some discussion by observers about the potential value of cooperation being pursued on major strategic and security issues among a relatively small group of states (which might constitute an 'Asian G 8' or 'G-10').⁷¹ This kind of approach however would not include all the members of ASEAN, and this would be likely in turn to reduce ASEAN support for any activities pursued. A further possible issue in relation to membership is to what extent if any the smaller states of the Southwest Pacific may be represented or involved in the proposed forum's activities.

A second question is what specific institutional form might best serve development of an Asia Pacific Community. Richard Woolcott's consultations have indicated that there is little support for the inauguration of any distinctly new institution, so a development or extension of existing groupings might be pursued. Several suggestions have been advanced. APEC has been cited as a potential basis for further development, given that it comprises all major Asia Pacific economies except India. However, APEC's inclusion of Hong Kong and Taiwan suggests that China would not be likely to consider it an appropriate forum for the purposes envisaged. A more apposite institutional basis may be the East Asia Summit. The EAS already comprises 16 regional states and it could be expanded to include the US (whose

70. The section below draws in part from C A Thayer, 'Kevin Rudd's Asia-Pacific Community initiative: suggestions and insights for the future process of East Asian regional cooperation', Presentation to international conference on East Asia and South Pacific in Regional Cooperation, Shanghai, People's Republic of China, 9–10 September 2009, pp. 11–15, viewed 22 November 2009, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/19660661/Thayer-Australian-PM-Rudds-Asia-Pacific-Community-Proposal>.

71. Jusuf Wanandi, 'Remodelling regional architecture', *PacNet Newsletter*, Pacific Forum-CSIS, Honolulu, 18 February 2009, viewed 15 November 2009, <http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/pac0913.pdf>. Dr Wanandi suggested that countries which could be members of such a grouping are Australia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Russia and the US: ASEAN could be represented by the current Chair and also by the Secretary General as an associate member.

accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation has facilitated its position as potential member) and Russia (which has already expressed interest in it).⁷²

Development of the East Asia Summit in this way seems so far the most feasible basis for further pursuit of the Asia Pacific Community concept. Such a development, however, might have implications for APEC, whose annual leaders meeting would constitute a second gathering of many of the same major Asia Pacific leaders. It is unlikely that two different meetings of heads of government would be considered desirable or would attract continued participation. One suggestion in this context is that the two leadership meetings of APEC and the EAS could be merged to constitute an overarching forum for the region. APEC could continue its activities and role, led by ministerial meetings. An alternative concept would be to convene alternate meetings of heads of government, between APEC and the EAS.⁷³ Based on the outcomes of the consultations by Richard Woolcott, some form of modification and rationalisation of the existing forums appears to provide the most acceptable pathway towards development.

A third question is how the style of cooperation may evolve and how decisions might be made in an agreed institutional forum. If the forum is to be based on an extension of the EAS, then its initial mode of dialogue and deliberation is likely to reflect those of ASEAN, which established the body. ASEAN's styles of operation have depended heavily on the pursuit of consensus, caution and reluctance to establish binding commitments. These modes of cooperation were very necessary for ASEAN to be able to operate at all in its early years, but they have also been seen to have limited the capacity and effectiveness of forums sponsored by ASEAN, including the ARF. This consensual style of cooperation may not meet the expectations and requirements of participants, especially some of the major powers.

William T Tow and Brendan Taylor (Australian National University) have argued that in relation to the issue of 'security architecture', there are differences in the way the US and ASEAN approach such cooperation. While the US in multilateral activities tends to be very oriented towards material 'outcomes', ASEAN members see the process of cooperation as a means to an end, rather than an end in itself, and so emphasise processes and trust-building more than particular 'outcomes'. Developing an agreed basis for operations within an Asia Pacific Community may thus involve some major challenges, not only in identifying and

72. M Cook, 'The United States and the East Asia Summit: Finding the Proper Home', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol 30, no 2, August 2008, pp. 293–312.

73. See E A Feigenbaum and R A. Manning, *The United States in the new Asia*, Council Special Report no. 50, Council on Foreign Relations, New York, November 2009, pp. 19–20, viewed on 29 November 2009, <http://www.cfr.org/publication/20446>

agreeing on an agenda but in reaching agreement on how issues are to be defined and considered.⁷⁴

A fourth (and related) issue is the extent to which the major powers will be willing and able to cooperate in an Asia Pacific Community on sensitive issues. As William Tow and Brendan Taylor have argued, the development of multiple regional groups in East Asia and the Asia Pacific so far, has in fact facilitated the major powers' capacities to be able to pursue their often competing national interests through different regional forums:

Thus far, the multiplicity of multilateral institutions and activities in Asia has actually afforded the region's great powers, in particular, the option of using these mechanisms as instruments of competitive influence. Occasionally these regional heavyweights will square off against one another within institutional settings, as occurred between China and Japan at the inaugural EAS. Yet, more often than not, the broad menu of choice allows the region's great powers to make their presence felt within those institutions with which they feel most comfortable, and with which they have the most influence—Beijing in ASEAN+3 and the SCO; Moscow in the SCO; Washington in APEC and through its own ad hoc mechanisms such as the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue and the Proliferation Security Initiative; and Tokyo through the ARF and, increasingly, the EAS as it strives to check China's growing influence in the ASEAN+3 process. In short, this remains one of the great ironies of the remarkable growth in regional multilateral institutions and activities which has occurred since the beginning of the 1990s: that their emergence has raised as many problems as it has potentially addressed in terms of forging architectural consensus and establishing viable regional 'security architecture'.⁷⁵

Developing an Asia Pacific Community in which major and smaller powers can cooperate within an overarching dialogue process, when a number of those states have competitive interests and have been used to pursuing them in parallel regional groupings is part of the rationale for the proposed revisions to cooperative institutions. Such developments are nonetheless likely to pose major challenges for community building and the fostering of a new 'culture of cooperation'.

A fifth (and also related) issue is what the implications may be for pre-existing dialogues if an Asia Pacific Community emerges in institutional form. One question here is whether the development of a model of cooperation based on an Asia Pacific membership (specifically including the US) may leave countries in East Asia still wishing to caucus and cooperate in an 'Asia focused' grouping (such as ASEAN Plus Three). If the ASEAN Plus Three grouping continued to operate, which seems likely, ongoing inter-group dialogue and coordination

74. W T Tow and B Taylor, 'Emerging Regional Security Architecture: an Australian perspective', in W T Tow and Chin Kim Wah eds, *ASEAN India Australia: Towards closer engagement in a new Asia*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2009, pp. 8–9.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

would be desirable to minimise overlap and potential clashes in agendas and goals. Such a process should be feasible but would require careful attention.⁷⁶

These are some of the issues which may be considered at the conference in Sydney in December, and in further dialogues beyond that meeting.

Concluding comment

The process of discussions initiated by Australia on the Asia Pacific Community proposal is at an early stage. Since the proposal was first raised in June 2008, several developments have added to the degree of interest in reviewing regional institutions. The Obama administration in the US has given increased priority to regional cooperation in East Asia, including by acceding to ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation and indicating an interest in developing formal linkages with the East Asia Summit. The new government in Japan led by Prime Minister Hatoyama has also expressed increased interest in fostering a regional East Asian Community, although the details of this concept are still to emerge clearly. The discussions at the East Asia Summit on 25 October 2009 suggest that there is an interest among many regional states in reviewing regional institutional arrangements. However, the process of discussion so far has not reached the stage of specific proposals and governments have not needed as yet to take stances on any particular model for reordering of regional institutions.

The evolution of discussion is likely to be influenced by two major factors. The ways in which major bilateral relations evolve in the coming decade—and especially the relationships among the US, China, Japan and India—will play a major role in determining the potential for enhanced Asia Pacific cooperation. A viable arrangement for Asia Pacific cooperation would need to be based to a substantial degree on the capacity and willingness of the major powers, as well as the smaller regional states, to discuss and consider sensitive issues on a collective and cooperative basis. The quality of key bilateral relationships is in turn likely to influence substantially the degree of leadership which Asia Pacific governments can give to recasting multilateral cooperation. As this paper has suggested, the existing pattern of multiple and overlapping regional forums has developed partly because it has been congenial for states to pursue their competing national economic and strategic interests in different forums with differing memberships. It will take considerable inputs of leadership to develop agendas for cooperation on an Asia Pacific basis which can ensure that ongoing competition does not preclude opportunities for coordination on common problems and challenges.

A second key issue will be defining the type of institutional arrangements which can gain widespread support. Consultations so far indicate that a revised process of Asia Pacific dialogue is most likely to evolve from development of the existing forums. Of the possible options, expansion and remodelling of the East Asia Summit appears to be the most promising direction to pursue. Given that the EAS originated from ASEAN, further

76. Feigenbaum and Manning, *op. cit.*, pp. 19–21.

development of the Summit would underscore ASEAN's contribution to regional institution building. Development of the EAS is also likely to have implications for the roles and operations of some other forums and especially the current APEC leaders meeting. The forthcoming Sydney conference may produce clarification about what avenues can attract support for further discussion and development.

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