

*ASEAN's Security Cooperation and Non-Traditional Security (NTS) Challenges*

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Regional cooperation creates a platform for integrated actions of sovereign states. This paper briefly examines how ASEAN addresses NTS challenges which are currently adversely affecting the region. The paper mentions some of the principal approaches of this organisation like the 'ASEAN Way' making values for collective consensus-building among member states. However, some approaches determining collectivism have been questioned in the light of NTS challenges. ASEAN calls upon collective security to counter the NTS challenges at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and 'security community' formation in ASEAN Political Security Community (APSC). The paper presents a brief literature review of regional policies of ASEAN combating NTS challenges. The paper concludes with the key emphasis that regional cooperation is depend on individual's and state's genuine willingness for maintaining the dialogue. In fact, ongoing NTS challenges have created a dilemma for the ASEAN concerning member states' individual level of involvement.

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## Introduction

Over the last decade the dynamics that define the regional security environment in Southeast Asia have changed dramatically. Rather than conventional threats, the region has new security challenges which are proving to be more severe and more likely to cause insecurity among daily living of people (Murray, 2020, p.45). The Association for Southeast Asian Nations (hereinafter used as ASEAN) believes in greater regional cooperation and partnership among member states as a strategy for regional security. One of the most striking issues hindering security in the region is Non-Traditional Security (hereinafter used as NTS) challenges which produce a direct impact on peoples' safety. The United Nations has stated that the Southeast Asian region is very prone to environment and humanitarian issues due to its geographical positioning and unprecedented negative causes of economic influx (cited in Caballero-Anthony, 2007, pp.3-4). According to Amitv Acharya (2003), NTS challenges arise primarily from non- military sources and present a high threat not only to people but also to states' survival (pp. 15- 16). Given this background, this paper examines ASEAN security cooperation, particularly the ASEAN Regional Forum (hereinafter used as ARF) in 1994 and ASEAN Political-Security Community (herein after used as APSC) in 2009 are promoting shared responsibilities among member states border consensus and platform for security collaboration. This short paper overall briefly examine ASEAN security architecture explaining the importance of consensus-building and member states' willingness for addressing NTS challenges that obstacles to regional security.

## ASEAN's Regional Security Architecture

A considerable body of literature states that ASEAN has been one of the few sustainable regional organisations in the twenty-first century (Acharya, 2009, p.493; Deinla, 2017, p.3). ASEAN was established on 8 August 1967 through signing of the Bangkok Declaration with the cooperation of Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and Philippines<sup>4</sup>. ASEAN currently includes ten member states and a population of 649 million people that comprise 8.7% of the world population (ASEAN Secretariat, 2019). It is noteworthy that during the early 1990s ASEAN members collectively experienced an economic miracle and became a part of

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<sup>4</sup>ASEAN consists of 10 member states. There were five states at the inception of the organisation in 1967: Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Philippines. The other five states are: Brunei Darussalam which joined in 1984; Vietnam in 1995; Laos and Myanmar in 1997; and Cambodia in 1999.

the East Asian Development Model with this ASEAN was commonly recognized to be an alternative to the European model of regionalism (Camroux, 2008, p.7).

Given the emphasis on ASEAN's regional security framework, the 1967 Bangkok Declaration defined the goal of the regional organisation to "accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region through joint endeavors in the spirit of equality and partnership to strengthen the foundation for a prosperous and peaceful community" (Bangkok Declaration, 1967, Art. 1). The ASEAN Charter signed in 2007 sets out the "goal of becoming an integrated political, economic and security community" (ASEAN Charter, 2007, p.2). The region adheres to the 'ASEAN Way' which is the foundation for mutuality and mutual-respect. This is an approach globally renowned for regional cooperation that indicates a non-interference approach to decision making. According to Jusuf Wanandi (2008), "if each member nation can accomplish overall national development and overcome internal threats, regional resilience will automatically result much in the same way as a chain derives its overall strength from the strength of its constituent parts" (p. 26). Since there is no transfer of national sovereignty to a supranational authority, ASEAN regionalism is understood as a non-coercive and cooperative process. ASEAN security model strengthened through ARF made possible some regional collective decision making through dialogue and policy formulation (Tan, 2020, p.28). The security cooperation seeks to build deeper political, social, and security ties through *dialogue* and *consensus building* creating a foundation for new security institutional and legal frameworks (Haacke, 2009, p.428). Whereas the APSC paved the way to the states' need for border regional security cooperation along with rule-based political alignment among member states. The specialty of the APSC is that it intends to reshape the regional cooperation at a multi-faceted level that member states are governed to set of rules and meantime 'security community' take place.

ASEAN's security policy formulation and institutionalization were remarkably pushed after 9/11, in year 2001 when *Global War on Terrorism* embarked on an international security agenda. Particularly, the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) bombings in Bali, Indonesia, in October 2002 penetrated multilateral regional dialogues like The ARF new policy framework 2003 and 'security community' of the APSC in the same year. ASEAN had to extend the dialogue with extra regional states such as Australia, Singapore, China and South Korea for making policy initiatives for strengthening intelligence services and formulating range of collective actions for regional efforts on counter terrorism (Haacke, 2009, p.431). These initiatives have converged the military and non-military aspects. Furthermore, APSC Blueprint and Vision 2025 mandated political and security cooperation—adherence to more democratic norms. As criticized by Martel (2020) the Vision 2025 needs careful attention when dealing with individual state's matters assembly into the regional dialogue (p.588). Some principles contained within

the Blueprint relate to equal status regardless of gender, race, religion, language, or social and cultural background; thus all individuals are encouraged to participate in, and benefit from, the process of ASEAN security community building.

## **Increasing NTS Challenges**

The history of the region has experienced the vicious side of the spread of the NTS challenges. Some vital examples are the Asian Economic crisis in 1997, the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome crisis (SARS) in 2002- 2003, Bird Flu in 2007, H5N1 in 2009 and Zika virus in 1970s and the current risk situation with the Covid-19 spread. Up to 20 million people from the ASEAN region migrated illegally within and outside the region (Asia Pacific Migration Report, 2015, p.27). Up to current date informal migration patterns, including border violations are immense in the region. According to Caballero-Anthony (2010) NTS are much more intimidating than traditional ones as they require the national leadership to look not only outwards to cultivate international cooperation, but also inwards with an open outlook to execute internal socioeconomic and political reforms (pp.2-3).

There is also increased ecological disasters as climate change, natural disasters, and food shortages in different forms. Some catastrophic natural disasters were Indonesian forest fire in 2007, the Thailand floods in 2011, the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, and typhoons in the Philippines, Vietnam, and Cambodia, etc. causing tremendous impact to the region. Some populated and large states in the region such as Indonesia and the Philippine are located on the Pacific Ring of Fire which is a zone of volcanoes and earthquakes and where around more than 85% of the world earthquakes can be predicted (Dosch, 2006, p.180). Also, the ASEAN region has seen multiple transnational crimes, such as human smuggling, human trafficking, and drug trafficking. The popular tri-border area connecting Malaysia, Indonesia and Philippines is daily becoming more prone to terrorist activities. The transitional crime organisations in this region have strongly links to those in wealthy states such as China (Black Societies) and Japan (Yakuza). Illicit trafficking of drugs and humans, money laundering, piracy, cybercrimes etc. present a high security risk to the region. The regional dialogue has never been so curious on the potential security threat that can cause through South China Sea conflict. These issues are state to non-state and regional to extra-regional.

## **Is ASEAN's Security Cooperation cohesive enough?**

The increasing NTS challenges is where ASEAN security cooperation, their policies and mutual ties can be easily questioned. In fact, the spread of NTS challenges also provides an

opportunity to redefine the regional security model making it more vulnerable in each day. Therefore, addressing NTS challenges and remedies to counter them have become a crucial requirement not only to reach to collective consensus but also building stronger regional ties. Consequently, the approach to deal with NTS challenges go beyond traditional security policymaking efforts. Whereas the efforts extend to functional abilities at the multi-actor level. Some of the past responses to the 1997 Asian Economic Crisis and the 2003 SARS crisis were success stories in terms of ASEAN regional efforts to NTS challenges. ASEAN held multilateral dialogue for strengthening regional mechanisms to control the adverse effects of financial collapse. According to Pang (2000), the financial crisis in 1997 provided a direct impetus for the member countries to recognize the need for regional dialogue in financial management. Moreover, responding to the global SARS alert announced by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2003. ASEAN has introduced several obligatory legal mechanisms for combating NTS challenges since 9/11. The ARF increased their confidence building mechanism to reach at institutional collaborative efforts against global terror. The 2002, ARF's Statement against the Terrorist Financing and United Nations Security Council Resolution 1373 has broaden the regional-global cooperation. The Vientiane Plan of Action (VPA) indicates the need for collective responsibility and adherence to norms and good governance in security issues. As the literature explains, collective responsibility helps to control NTS challenges, such as transnational crime, terrorism, ecological disasters, etc. According to Masilamani and Peterson (2014) ASEAN's non-interference and consensus-seeking decision-making kept their diverse states together at a common denomination (p.10).

Moreover, ASEAN's regional consensus has been extended to states outside the region: non-member states has become useful for the development and stability of member states. Cooperation with China, Japan and South Korea on regional development concerns takes place through the ASEAN Plus Three (APT). This initiative shows that ASEAN emphasises timely diplomacy to manage NTS challenges, resulting in a measured strategy within the whole Asia-Pacific region. The comprehensive security strategy of APSC equally emphasized military and non-military issues by broadening the security scope. This is a remarkable achievement of regional security framework. The APSC's first phase between for five year period from 2009 to 2015 was important for ASEAN's regional governance for several reasons. The APSC is considered a comprehensive functional agreement adhering to a new regional scope. Two important aspects need further elaboration. As mentioned earlier, one is the agreement's functional ability. This agreement covers vast areas of cooperation by adhering to the UN Charter. Law enforcement and provisions for regional governance, therefore, are more complex. The other aspect is the contribution of the APSC towards regional security framework. As explained by Sukma (2012), the APSC is a logical place to start political and security coop-

eration, since it advances modern international adherences like Right to Protect (R2P); so the APSC aims to safeguard its regional citizens (pp. 136-137). Moreover, the APSC Blueprint for a nearly decade of existence, shows the influence of dominant security agreement between member states.

In this context, the NTS challenges may be considered as a broader umbrella that brings together human security issues, where security is considered beyond the state to include societies and people. Amitav Acharya (2006), in “Imagined Community of East Asia?”, says that “East Asian community seeks to transcend powerful, physical, political and even cultural barriers confronting them - the idea for an East Asian community indeed ushers in a genuine sense of community backed by collective action to address the region’s common problems” (p. 409). Examining more recent examples, as argued by Fauzi and Paiman (2020) ASEAN’s regional cooperation has been expanded through the new coronavirus (Covid-19) spread. The member states are successful in the implementation of ‘mitigation efforts’ that collaborated with Movement Restriction Order (MRO) and strengthening of the virtual community initiative to build the rapid information sharing about pandemic spread and prevention. The pandemic emergency system of the region has recalibrated its existing institutional arrangements to move beyond rhetorical agreements toward deeper institutional commitments.

## Challenges Ahead

Despite longstanding regional engagements to deal with NTS challenges in Southeast Asia, the region faces issues concerning implementation and practice. The paper concludes some observations. One of the primary questions regarding policy effectiveness is whether states make an equal contribution towards effective consensus-building. Looking at the existing balance-of-power in the region, the unequal distribution of power between member states is a core obstacle to regional security architecture. ASEAN was originally established with five member states in 1967 (Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Philippines, and Indonesia). Studies have shown late-entry states such as Brunei, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam (BCLMV) are innately less capable and less powerful in adapting to new regional modalities. However, over the last decade Vietnam could perform differently due to its rapid economic growth in the region during this decade. Whereas Cambodia, Myanmar, Brunei and Laos are still moving slowly in economic development. In terms of the prospects for cooperation in Southeast Asia, two characteristics need examination: first, the relative ability and level of development of the state; secondly, the state’s internal dynamics such as economic backwardness, human poverty and political instability.

Another area for careful consideration is member states’ goodwill towards regional consensus-

building. Some argue that the security community is artificially created to foresee its ability for non-interference and flexibility in regionalism (Dillon, 1997, p.121). The question is whether traditional approaches like 'ASEAN Way' practically support security consensus-building. This can be criticized through recent initiatives like 'One-ASEAN-One-Response' framework (in April 2020) to combat Covid-19 spread. As concluding remarks it can be highlighted that ASEAN security cooperation for countering NTS challenges depend on willingness of member states towards unity is extremely important. It is important to have trans-boundary jurisdiction over issues, making inter-state agreements and multilateral agreements a possible solution. Mechanisms like the ARF and APSC have still not been able to set collective consensus on exchanging national jurisdiction for regional jurisdiction due to inadequate regional unity.

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