PROSPECTS & LIMITS OF
ASEAN
AS A
SECURITY COMMUNITY:
LOOKING AT THE WAY FORWARD

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LOOKING AT THE WAY FORWARD

The effectiveness of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)[1] as a regional security institution in addressing security issues has been subject to continuing debate among policy makers, academics and practitioners. The contestation on its significance has been heightened in the face of the emerging regional rivalry between the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC) and the United States (US) over the South China Sea (SCS) on the one hand, and sovereign and maritime rights dispute between the PRC and four (4) other ASEAN Member States (AMS)[2] in the SCS on the other hand. Taiwan has territorial claims too in SCS that runs in conflict with PRC and the four other AMS. This is aside from disputes over maritime boundaries and islands between and among AMS. Mistrust and suspicion among regional and extra-regional states have thus fuelled territorial disputes.

While some argue that ASEAN and its regional institutions are simply "talk shops" hence structurally ineffective in resolving inter-state conflict (Jones and Smith 2007, Bisley and Cook 2014, Nishihara 2016), others view ASEAN's founding norm and value of non-interference into the affairs of another country in the region, known as the ASEAN Way,[3] as the key salutary factor that contributes to the amiable relation between and among states in Southeast Asia (SEA) (Severino 2005). They further argue that the ASEAN Way standardizes behaviour of states through the doctrine of non-use of force or threat of force in dealing with disputes, and respects sovereignty and territorial integrity of nations (Acharya 2004, Katsumata 2011). The ASEAN Way is claimed to have been responsible for thwarting inter-state armed conflict for nearly half-a-century.

Moreover, the issue of regional security is not limited to traditional inter-state discords but also includes non-traditional distresses, such as corruption, development gap, intolerance, infectious diseases, natural disasters, irregular migration, food shortages, human and drug trafficking, terrorism, and other forms of transnational organized crimes. In as much as these security challenges transpire across territorial boundaries of AMS, they cannot be resolved by simply by state policies alone but require a regional approach.

Given the aforesaid predicament, ASEAN resolved to consolidate more than four (4) decades of regional political-security cooperation in a comprehensive and concrete manner through the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) Blueprint. Adopted at the 14th ASEAN Summit in 2009 in Thailand in line with the ASEAN Charter, approved two years earlier at the 13th ASEAN Summit in Singapore in 2007, the APSC Blueprint forms one of the three (3) pillars of the ASEAN Community along with the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Blueprints. The Community presupposes a strong ASEAN integration, a culmination of the region's resilience and dynamism reflective of its economic and cultural development, social progress, regional peace and security.[4]

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Designed to be implemented in seven (7) years (2009-2015), the APSC Blueprint is generally envisaged to strategically address traditional and non-traditional security challenges with the end in view of bringing about peace, stability, and prosperity in the region as well as protect the interests and welfare of the people of ASEAN.

In its conclusion in 2015, the APSC Blueprint (2009-2015) was assessed by ASEAN to have deepened and expanded "ASEAN political and security cooperation" and strengthened "ASEAN capacity in responding to regional and international challenges" (ASEAN 2016, para 2, p 1). Building on the said "achievements" the Blueprint was further extended to 2025 "to elevate ASEAN political and security cooperation to an even higher level...(and) to ensure that the APSC Blueprint 2025 is relevant, contemporary and responsive to the challenges of the times" (ASEAN 2016, para 2, p. 1).

The "achievements" of the APSC Blueprint was however contested by some. In a scorecard developed by ASEAN to gauge the performance of the three (3) pillars of the ASEAN Community, the APSC the latter received the lowest as reported by Chachavalpongpun (2015). APSC scored 12 percent while AEC and ASCC got 92 percent and 82 percent respectively. Apparently, the APSC faces more challenges in the community-building process compared to the other two communities. "There is still a long way to go before we get to an ASEAN Political-Security Community," said Mr. Ong Keng Yong, executive deputy chairman of Singapore's S Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) and former ASEAN Secretary-General (2003-2007) in an interview with Today in 2015 (Wai 2015). While Baviera (2017) views APSC fell short of its action plans, notably, in the "promotion of human rights and cooperation for good governance" (p. 17).

Against this backdrop, the paper is an attempt to examine the strengths, hopes, and prospects as well as the weaknesses,

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rizal Buendia, Ph.D

is a non-resident Fellow of Stratbase Albert del Rosario Institute. He is an independent consultant and researcher in Southeast Asian Politics and International Development, Wales, UK and a former Teaching Fellow at the Politics and International Studies Department and the Department of Development Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. He is also a former Chair of the Political Science Department, De La Salle University in Manila, Philippines.

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constraints, and bounds of ASEAN as a security community envisioned in the APSC Blueprint. Specifically, it explores the efficacy of the ASEAN Way as a security framework in confronting a host of new challenges in the region, the phenomenon of increasing military expenditures among AMS, and general utility value of ASEAN's institutions in resolving conflict in Southeast Asia. Finally, the paper concludes on ASEAN's praxis as a regional security community in strengthening stability and maintaining peace in the region.

Shaping a Security Community in a Diverse Region

Security community, as coined by Karl Deutsch and his collaborators in 1957, refers to a group of people bound by a sense of community believing that common social problems must and can be resolved through institutional procedures and processes of "peaceful change," without resorting to physical force (Deutsch et.al. 1957). Constructivist scholars redefined Deutsch et. al.'s concept of security community at the end of the Cold War to a community of people having shared identities, norms, values, and reciprocal long-term interest (Adler and Barnett 1998).

In international relations, "constructivism," a term credited to Nicholas Olaf, claims that significant aspects of relations between and among states are historically and socially constructed, i.e., they are formed not by "power politics," a core realist concept,[5] but through a process of social practice and interaction. Alexander Wendt (1999) states its two (2) tenets, namely: (1) "the structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces"; and (2) "the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature" (p. 1).

Norms and identities are key concepts under the constructivist framework that emerged in shaping the behaviour of states and in promoting international cooperation. Constructivism challenged the dominance of the realist thought as it unlocked the possibilities for the cooperation of nation-states in view of established norms and shared identity. Regional organizations are thought to have the capability to set collective norms of nations and influence the behaviour of its member states. Amitav Acharya (2006) says that shared identity is key to building a community.

Building a community of any geographical size (e.g. a village or town, nation, or multi-national/regional) that shares common values is most desirable but daunting. Fostering a sense of "community" among people of varied ethnicities, cultures, religions, and ways-of-life in ASEAN would yield durable relations not only within one's national boundaries but beyond as this fortifies social identity, practice, and regional vision that eventually mitigates conflict and promotes social harmony. In a globalized world, "community" is regarded not simply limited to national and international communities but includes virtual communities that cross and transcend physical borders.

Carving a "community" with a sense of oneness and unity out of a plural and diverse region such as Southeast Asia is indeed overwhelming and exigent. The rich diversity of the region provides both opportunities and challenges not only in safeguarding economic growth and development but also in advancing political stability and security among AMS. The long history of migration in Southeast Asia (SEA) from within and other regions, the ecological, cultural, and social differences between lowland and upland peoples, and the presence of linguistic[6] and religious pluralism have created multi-ethnic societies in every country in the region.

The region is the seat of three of the world's biggest civilizations – the Christians (Roman Catholicism and Protestantism), the Muslims (Sunni) and the followers of eastern beliefs, namely Buddhists (Theravada and Mahayana), Confucian Chinese and Hindus. They coexist peacefully for centuries. The common characteristic of mainland SEA is Buddhism. It is widely practiced in Thailand, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Viet Nam and there are very significant variations

across and within countries. Islam is the majority religion in Indonesia, Brunei, and Malaysia, and there are significant minority Muslim populations in Singapore, southern Thailand, and the southern Philippines.

With regard to the system of faith and worship, Christianity is the major religion of the Philippines – predominantly a Roman Catholic nation – not only in SEA but also in the entire Asian continent. There are also small Christian communities in Singapore, Myanmar, Malaysia, Viet Nam, Indonesia, and Thailand. In Indonesia, home of the largest Muslim population in the world, Sunni Islam is adhered to by 99% of the population. Hinduism is the major religion in Bali, an island in Indonesia, and among the Indian minority populations of Malaysia and Singapore. Under the ASEAN, no religion dominates. All AMS agree to respect moderation, tolerance, and to cooperate to achieve human welfare.

Ethnic diversity is the hallmark of the region and an important feature of SEA. Incredible indigenous cultural variation has been overlaid with centuries of contact, trade, migration, and cultural exchange from within the region and from other parts of Asia, and for the past 500 years from Europe (for general overviews of the region, see Osborne 1997, Somers 2000, Shamsul 2001, Wertheim, 1968).

Historically, one of the defining features of the region was the relatively easy absorption of peoples, ideas, and cultural practices from elsewhere. Recently, however, assimilation into Southeast Asian societies became more difficult with the creation of political and social barriers. Some of the key sources of ethnic and religious conflict in the region are illuminated in Chirot and Reid's (1997) collection of essays that compare the experiences of the Chinese in Southeast Asia with those of Jews in central Europe. As the study depicts, like Jews, Chinese in some Southeast Asian countries have been regarded as archetypal "outsiders" and targets of majority nationalist prejudices and suffer from discrimination, even when they are formally integrated into the nation.

Ethnic Chinese in Indonesia likewise were blamed for the economic crisis following the fall of former President Suharto in 1998, triggering widespread

anti-Chinese riots that killed an estimated 1,000 Indonesian-Chinese (Hutton 2018). In 2015, Myanmar was accused of forcibly displacing Myanmar's Muslim Rohingya ethnic group from the Rakhine state of Myanmar to neighbouring Bangladesh. The International State Crime Initiative at Queen Mary University of London reports that Myanmar has committed "genocide against the Rohingya" (QMUL 2015).

The implications of religious and ethnic diversity in the region towards democratization have also garnered scholarly attention. In Hefner's (2001) edited volume, the Politics of Multiculturalism, the study argues that achieving an effective participatory approach in mediating ethnic, religious, and gender conflict does not only depend on the presence of an independent civil society but more importantly on a synergy of state and society that nurtures a public culture of tolerance and recognition of differences of various cultures, ethnicities, and values between and among disparate groups of people.

In particular, the relationship between politics and Islam is a topic of growing regional research interest with implications far beyond the region. Even with their majority Muslim populations, Indonesia and Malaysia have managed to maintain relatively secular states in spite of challenges from opposition parties that espouse religiously oriented politics. In Hefner's (2011) another edited book, Civil Islam, he challenges the widely asserted stereotype that democracy is unable to flourish in the presence of Islam. Using the case of Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim nation, he emphasizes the importance of civil institutions and public civility or a civilized state for democracy to prosper.

The diverse and plural socio-cultural and religious environment of the region is reflected in the plural system of government among the AMS where political power is variably ensconced in accordance with one's conception of political legitimacy. Over time, there are usually sharp disagreements on views about legitimacy or illegitimacy of governments as well as the role and purpose of government. Some seek a proactive and an engaged government to solve peoples' most pressing problems, bring about peace, equality, justice, and to protect individual liberty, while others want a more minimal government whose role and function is limited to the creation of an environment where private sector and civil society organizations operate freely and unhampered by the powers of the state. It is commonly thought that undue exercise of political power is often just a step away from tyranny. In many cases, the conceptual discords on the question of legitimacy and mode of governing a political community is contingent on the country's history, political philosophy, and religious beliefs.

For instance, Brunei Darussalam is still a unitary Islamic absolute monarchy whose power rests on the Sultan. The Kingdom of Cambodia has a Leninist foundation. Although it has proclaimed itself as a "multiparty democratic state," it remains to be ruled by one-party state dominated by the Cambodian People's Party. Malaysia and Thailand have constitutional monarchies whose Kings reign as heads of state but do not rule. While both countries have a parliamentary form of government, Malaysia is considered as a dominant party state together with Singapore which also possesses a parliamentary system.

Lao PDR and Viet Nam remain one-party political systems modelled after China where the communist party still monopolizes power. Myanmar remains generally a military regime for over three decades in spite of the recent democratization process. The Philippines has a presidential form of government while Indonesia has a quasi-parliamentary/presidential form of government with a president who is popularly and directly elected by the people.

There is no single form of government in ASEAN. The legitimacy of each AMS's government is, as what Max Weber opines, "the basis of every system of authority, and correspondingly of every kind of willingness to obey, is a belief, a belief by virtue of which

persons exercising authority are lent prestige." (Henderson & Parsons, 1964, p. 382). Thus, no leader in any AMS has the authority nor right to say which government is better or one that practices "good" governance. The diversity of governance and political system depicts the varying vision and values of governance and differences in the belief of managing their socio-economic, cultural, and political life.

Evidently, the multiplicity of cultures, ethnicities, religions, and political systems in Southeast Asia has deep and far-ranging implications on the region's development, security, and stability which the APSC wishes to achieve. Ba (2009) for instance contends that such diversity has been the source of vulnerability of AMS as they interact with the major powers, affecting "how ASEAN elites conceive, approach, and practice regional cooperation" (pp. 5-7). On the other hand, ASEAN leaders have acknowledged that this ineradicable fact of diversity has characterized their collective co-existence:

> *Our rich diversity has provided the strength and inspiration to us to help one another foster a strong sense of community (ASEAN Vision 2020, 1997).*

Rather than seeing this as a source of weakness, AMS have capitalized on their diversity as a source of strength for regional cooperation, identity formation, and community- building that need to be promoted and protected. The Declaration on ASEAN Unity in Cultural Diversity stipulates:

> *Whilst recognizing and respecting cultural diversity, ASEAN Member States will strengthen their cooperation to protect and promote the diversity of their cultures consistent with their respective international obligations. Furthermore, ASEAN Member States will ensure the utilization of their cultural diversity with a view to achieving the establishment of the ASEAN Community (ASEAN Unity in Cultural Diversity 2011).*

Acharya and Layug (n.d.) view that the very constitutive elements of ASEAN identity – i.e. ideas, norms, and values – help construct Asia-Pacific regional order that provides ample space for peaceful regional cooperation as the common interest of all regional stakeholders. Acharya (2006) perceives that ASEAN identity is anchored on what he considers as "normative regionalism," a type of regionalism that puts more importance on ideational variables (norms, ideas, and identities) rather than materialist variables such as relative gains and balance of power. He contends that this kind of regionalism creates enabling and facilitative conditions for regional cooperation. And such normative regionalism is anchored on ASEAN identity.

The diversity of the region hence produces diversity on perceptions on the source of its stability on the one hand, and vulnerability on the other hand. Against this context, the attainment or regional peace, enhanced stability and reduced vulnerability to inter-and intra-state conflict is premised on the creation of a robust and forceful security community through the ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint, which is anchored in advancing ASEAN values, norms, and principles.

ASEAN as a Security Community: Promises and Constraints

As mentioned earlier, the ASEAN Political Security Community Blueprint (2009-2015) consolidates the more than four (4) decades of political and security cooperation in the region; an attempt to build a "cohesive, peaceful and resilient" ASEAN. It provides the regional framework

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for AMS to handle security matters and disputes more effectively, and to raise security cooperation to a "higher plane" (ASEAN 2009b, p. 1). Moreover, it relies "exclusively on peaceful processes in the settlement of intra-regional differences" and regard the security of each AMS as "fundamentally linked to one another and bound by geographic location, common vision and objectives" (ASEAN 2003).

Insofar as Community building is an on-going process, the APSC Blueprint 2025 is basically a continuation of the previous Blueprint (APSC 2015) – building on the achievements and rectifying the missteps or filling-in the inadequacies of the preceding Blueprint's defined goals and objectives. APSC Blueprint 2025 avows that it shall continue to implement "relevant programmes and activities" having "enduring significance" contained in the APSC Blueprint 2015 (ASEAN 2016, p. 1). Its vision remains to realize a "united, inclusive, and resilient community" where peoples of ASEAN:

> *... live in a in a safe, harmonious and secure environment, embrace the values of tolerance and moderation as well as uphold ASEAN fundamental principles, shared values and norms. ASEAN shall remain cohesive, responsive and relevant in addressing challenges to regional peace and security as well as play a central role in shaping the evolving regional architecture, while deepening our engagement with external parties and contributing collectively to global peace, security and stability. (ASEAN 2015, p. 14).*

The current APSC Blueprint equally affirms its adherence to the ASEAN Charter which provides among others the defense and protection of democracy, the rule of law and good governance, respect for and promotion and protection of rights and basic freedoms (ASEAN 2009a). The founding of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) in 2009, as mandated by the ASEAN Charter, represents the overarching body with a cross-cutting and cross-sectoral cooperation and collaboration with other ASEAN bodies, external partners, stakeholders, and other relevant international organizations to ensure that human rights are mainstreamed in all pillars of ASEAN. This includes, among others, the rights of persons with disabilities, business and human rights, and trafficking in persons. More importantly, it institutionalized the participation of civil society organizations (CSOs) in state affairs.

The ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (AHRD), approved in November 2012 with the Phnom Penh Statement on the Adoption of the AHRD signed by ASEAN Heads of States further enhanced the ASEAN Charter. The two (2) documents embody the commitment of the Governments of AMS to safeguard, protect, and advance human rights and fundamental freedoms of the people of ASEAN. Geared towards a "rules-based, people-oriented, people-centred" APSC, it is deemed to promote and adhere to the principles of democracy, rule of law and good governance, protection of "human

rights, fundamental freedoms and social justice, embrace the values of tolerance and moderation, and share a strong sense of togetherness, common identity and destiny" (ASEAN 2016, p. 2).

Similar to the APSC 2015 Blueprint, the current Blueprint is committed to the principle of "comprehensive security" (ASEAN 2016, p.2). The comprehensive approach to security upholds the interlocking relationship of political, economic, socio-cultural, and environmental dimensions of development. It sustains existing ASEAN political instruments such as: the Declaration on Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) which keeps SEA free from any form or manner of interference by outside Powers; the Treaty of Amity and Co-operation in South East Asia (TAC) which is a key code of conduct governing inter-state relations in the region; the Treaty on the Southeast Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ) which preserves the region free of nuclear weapons;. the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC); and the on-going discussion on a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC) which endorse peaceful settlement of disputes and practical maritime cooperation in the South China Sea. The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)[7] remains an important mechanism that advances security cooperation in the wider Asia-Pacific region especially on a wide array of existing and emerging non-traditional security threats.

The comprehensive security nonetheless is not new. The term was first used by the late Japanese prime minister Masayoshi Ohira (1978-1980), but the concept can be traced back to Japanese thinking on security during the fifties (Radtke and Feddema 2000). Its meaning encompasses not only the needs of military defence against a certain "enemy," but also takes into account other aspects vital to the security of one's country: food, energy, environment, communication and cybernetics, and social security (separately known as economic security, environmental security, and human security). The doctrine also defined security policy in terms of its various levels, e.g. domestic, bilateral, regional and global. In 1987, prior to the collapse of the Cold War, the ASEAN adopted a comprehensive concept of security and hitherto practices it. It emerged at a time when regimes looked at economic growth and domestic political order/stability as the chief "ideology" of security, both national and regional.

Comprehensive security served as a tool of national security, regime survival, and legitimization. It considers threats caused not only by "high politics" such as military attacks, but also threats emanating from the arena of "low politics," such as socio-economic and transnational issues (corruption, infectious diseases, natural disasters, illegal migration, food shortages, human and drug trafficking, terrorism, illicit drug and arms trafficking, maritime piracy, environmental pollution, and other forms of transnational organized crimes). With this approach, countries of the region have looked at external and internal threats – both military and non-military – that have the potential for destabilization and put their survival as nations at risk (Othman 2004).

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Even so, while ASEAN took up comprehensive security as its principal security framework, AMS did not totally reject the realist concept of military security. They continue to emphasize the relevance of national security in defensive terms and carry on to defend the statist principle of sovereignty and the international norm of non-interference in the domestic affairs of states. Although the comprehensive security concept enlarges security to include the non-military issues, the primacy of state's survival and territorial integrity remains the fundamental interest. As Emmers (2009) expresses, "[i]ndividual member states are responsible for their own security and preservation of national sovereignty." (p. 162). Henceforth, the concept may be more fittingly classed as "comprehensive national security."

In as much as state security remains paramount to AMS, they do not wish to offer or entrust the defence of their state's sovereignty to a regional supranational body, like the ASEAN. Conflicts and disputes over territorial and maritime rights have, historically, resolved not through the employment of existing regional modes of peaceful settlement of disputes such as conciliation and mediation or use of the High Council of the TAC, but by way of international or extra-regional bodies engaged in dispute settlement.

The Malaysia– Indonesia dispute over the Sipadan and Ligitan Islands in the Sulawesi Sea and the Singapore–Malaysia dispute over the Pedra Branca islands in the South China Sea and have been settled in 2002 and 2008 (in favour of Malaysia and Singapore respectively) through arbitration by the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The Thai–Cambodia dispute over the Preah Vihear temple (called Phra Viharn in Thailand), one of the worst intra-ASEAN conflicts on record, was likewise decided by ICJ in 2013. Moreover, the Ambalat sea block in the Celebes sea continues to be contested by Indonesia and Malaysia and their case has been submitted to the ICJ. Similarly, Singapore and Malaysia's dispute over the Horsburg Lighthouse is before the ICJ.

In 1999, the East Timor crisis was referred to the United Nations rather than to ASEAN for resolution. The referendum vote on whether or not East Timor would be independent from Indonesia was administered by the United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET). After the vote for independence, the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) administered the region for two (2) years, and not ASEAN, before turning over the administration to the independent Government of East Timor in 2002.

In the case of the on-going territorial dispute in South China Sea (SCS), claimed by the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC), Taiwan, and four (4) ASEAN countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam), the Philippines broke ranks with ASEAN and opted not to use ASEAN institutions and mechanisms as the route in addressing the dispute and claiming its maritime rights. Instead, it filed a case and sought a ruling from the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA)[8] in 2013 concerning the country's legal entitlements under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Contrary to what the ASEAN Way prescribes, this was done without prior consultation with other ASEAN member states.

Apparently, ASEAN prefers not to speak with a single regional voice when it comes to contentious issues affecting individual AMS as in the case of the SCS row with PRC in the interest of maintaining a cordial relation between parties and avoiding enmity among disputants. For instance, in a Special ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting, Kunming, Yunnan Province, in China (13-14 June 2016) held ahead of a ruling by the PCA in The Hague, ASEAN withdrew a "strongly-worded statement" released by the Malaysian foreign ministry, while not naming China directly, expressed:

> *...our serious concerns over recent and ongoing developments, which have eroded trust and confidence, increased tensions and which may have the potential to undermine peace, security, and stability in the South China Sea (Latiff 2016).*

The initial statement reiterated ASEAN's anxieties over China's artificial island building and the militarization of the region, but also defied China's position that the dispute should be settled by the parties directly concerned and that it is not an issue between ASEAN and China. But just hours later, a Malaysian ministry spokeswoman retracted the statement, stating "urgent amendments" are necessary to be made and an updated version would be issued. However, no updated joint statement was later distributed and the spokeswoman said that countries would make individual statements.

Vietnam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in a statement on the Kunming meeting, made no reference to the earlier ASEAN statement but echoed its disquiets over increased military build-up in the South China Sea, "especially the large-scale accretion and embellishment and construction of the reefs, the militarization of the artificial islands and actions of sovereignty claims that are not based on international law." Singapore and Indonesia, meanwhile, took a softer tone, calling on ASEAN and China to "continue working together to maintain the peace and stability of the South China Sea" (Latiff 2016).

Ian Storey, an analyst at Singapore's Yusof Ishak Institute, said the withdrawal of the initial statement showed the lack of unity between ASEAN members on the South China Sea disputes. The perceived deficiency in unity among AMS is invariably tied up with the state's national and political interest especially when they are confronted with mighty China which provides an enduring source of economic and financial resources not only in Asia but the world in the most recent decades.

The South China Sea dispute demonstrates the primacy of individual country's commitment to their own sovereignty and national interest over regional interest. The "ASEAN Way" of mutual respect for sovereignty, non-interference in the internal affairs of the state, consensus-style decision-making based on tolerance and equality, and a preference for relaxed and unceremonious mode of dialogues has virtually rendered ASEAN as a consultative body, lacking authority and power to discipline its members or re-shape its behaviour. It is for this reason that AMS

favour international or global governance mechanisms, like the UN, ICJ, or any UN-affiliated institutions, to adjudicate inter-state disputes rather than ASEAN's institutions engaged in conflict resolution.

Former ASEAN Director-General, Rodolfo Severino (2005) attributes the absence of any major conflict between any of the AMS for over half-a-century from the founding of ASEAN in 1967, to the following: networks of personal relationships fostered by frequent ASEAN interaction; norm of non-use of force or threat of force in dealing with disputes; non-interference doctrine in internal affairs; and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of nations. These factors, collectively known as the ASEAN Way, have defined ASEAN's framework as a security community. Still, the APSC's intention to raise security cooperation of AMS to a "higher plane" has yet to materialize by enhancing the capacity of ASEAN's institutions in peacefully resolve conflict without or minimal employment of international or extra-regional institutions and mechanisms in adjudicating regional disputes.

Rethinking the ASEAN Way as a Security Framework

The norm and value of non-interference into the affairs of another country in the region, known as the ASEAN Way, is one of the fundamental and binding principles of ASEAN that underpins the concept of comprehensive security and the APSC Blueprint. The "ASEAN Way," is a concept of inter-state relation and regional cooperation that consists of avoidance of formal mechanisms and legalistic procedures for decision-making, and reliance on musyawarah (consultation) and mufakat (consensus) to achieve collective goals

(see Acharya 1997 for details). This is the manner how AMS work, i.e., tolerance and patience, the snail pace of decision-making process in the ASEAN.

Where decisions are made on the basis of unanimity, decision-making in ASEAN takes a long time with no fixed time-table and negotiations are made until all parties have reached an agreement (Mak 1995). There is minimal use of institutions and mechanism in the legal sense to instill regional cooperation and resolve trans-boundary issues and problems.

The challenge to ASEAN's non-interference doctrine comes from three sources. First, the global political context which made the norm so crucial to ASEAN during its formative years has changed. The norm was adopted from the UN Charter at a time when the newly independent members of the grouping still harboured vivid memories of colonialism and saw themselves as potential or actual victims of superpower rivalry. Non-interference provided a shield against the Cold War and offered an important basis for conducting intra-regional relations without challenging the post-colonial territorial status quo that would have proven especially destabilizing. But with international norms, including those of the UN moving away from a strict adherence to non-interference, ASEAN can ill afford to remain inflexible.

Secondly, there was a collection of strong personalities in the capitals of the founding members: Singapore (Lee Kuan Yew [1959-1990]), Jakarta (Suharto 1967-1998]), Bangkok (Thanom Kittikachorn [1958-1973]), Manila (Marcos [1965-1986], and Kuala Lumpur (Mahathir Mohamad [1981-2003]). ASEAN members pursue their national development strategies within the framework of strong central government and manage to achieve what is called the "ASEAN miracle." Today, ASEAN counts a

THE SOUTH CHINA SEA DISPUTE DEMONSTRATES THE PRIMACY OF INDIVIDUAL COUNTRY'S COMMITMENT TO THEIR OWN SOVEREIGNTY AND NATIONAL INTEREST OVER REGIONAL INTEREST. THE "ASEAN WAY" OF MUTUAL RESPECT FOR SOVEREIGNTY, NON-INTERFERENCE IN THE INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF THE STATE, CONSENSUS-STYLE DECISION-MAKING BASED ON TOLERANCE AND EQUALITY, AND A PREFERENCE FOR RELAXED AND UNCEREMONIOUS MODE OF DIALOGUES HAS VIRTUALLY RENDERED ASEAN AS A CONSULTATIVE BODY, LACKING AUTHORITY AND POWER TO DISCIPLINE ITS MEMBERS OR RE-SHAPE ITS BEHAVIOUR

number of weak, or "near-failed" states (Myanmar, Lao PDR, and Cambodia) as its member's states which require positive and pro-active assistance from other ASEAN members even if this will entail some degree of interference in their domestic affairs.

Finally, ASEAN needs to deal with a host of new problems which were not salient during the initial years of its existence. Some of these problems may originate within the domestic realm of its members but could have a clear regional implication and cause serious tensions among them. A strict adherence to non-interference can ill position ASEAN to deal with such challenges.

Notwithstanding the ASEAN Way can be credited for its ability to moderate and mollify brewing tensions between intra- and extra-ASEAN states and encouraged bilateral negotiations to avert armed conflict, the doctrine had not been critical in resolving brewing intra-regional territorial conflict. Its frailty as a framework of ASEAN security consequently increases insecurity in the region. The non-intervention of ASEAN over the Rohingya genocide committed by the Myanmar state or indiscriminate killings of Patani minorities in Southern Thailand led to massive refugee crisis and greater instability in neighbouring countries. This is similar to NTS issues – i.e., drug trafficking, maritime piracy, people smuggling, etc. – that affect all AMS and destabilize the region, yet ASEAN simply watches with a blind eye.

Equally important is the ability of the ASEAN Way to maintain regional unity in rallying behind AMS in the face of the PRC and US rivalry in the SCS. The ASEAN Way of non-interferences, conflict avoidance, face saving and an incremental approach to conflict resolution through consensus and dialogue makes it increasingly difficult to cope with the new contours of Sino-American contestation in SEA. While many like to see a strong US presence in Asia to provide an effective balance in the region, few want to be caught in the crossfire between Washington and Beijing (Thayer 2011).

Overall, the need to rethink non-interference should be seen not as an abstract moral concern associated with human rights protection and intra-regional environmental interests, and cross-border issues but as a matter of "practical" necessity without which ASEAN cannot stay relevant and address real world changes and challenges.

Rising Military Expenditures

As the APSC Blueprint commits to prevent conflict by strengthening confidence and trust within the ASEAN Community, mitigate tensions and avert disputes from arising between or among member countries as well as between member countries and non-ASEAN countries, thwart the escalation of existing disputes, the rising military expenditures among AMS is worrisome. The territorial disputes between and among AMS on the one hand, and tension between some AMS and PRC over the South China Sea, on the other hand have fuelled mistrust and suspicion among regional and extra-regional states have put in peril the vision of the APSC.

As examined by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), an independent international institute in Sweden dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament, the region has seen steady growth in military expenditure between 2010 and 2014. Data show that all countries have increased their military spending with Viet Nam leading with 59.1 percent increase, followed by Cambodia, 56.2 percent, and Indonesia, 50.6 percent. The average net rise in military outlays was 37.6 percent in U.S. dollars. They have spent $38.2 billion on defense in 2014.

Additionally, SIPRI's 2018 report presents AMS's 2017 military expenditure vis-à-vis share in government spending (see Table below). Notably, the smallest country and least populated among AMS (Singapore) had both the biggest military expenditure and share in government spending followed by Myanmar, one of the poorest countries in the region. See table below:[9]

COUNTRY	MILITARY EXPENDITURE IN 2017 (US$ Million)	SHARES OF GOVERNMENT SPENDING IN 2017 (%)
Singapore	10,198.4	17.2
Indonesia	8,178.1	4.8
Thailand	6,334.5	1.0
Philippines	4,377.9	6.9
Malaysia	3,494.8	5.0
Myanmar	1,708.5	12.4
Cambodia	463.5	9.0
Brunei	346.7	8.6

Note: There's no available data for Laos and Vietnam

Other highlights contained in the SIPRI report are as follows: (1) The largest relative increases in military spending between 2008 and 2017 were made by Cambodia (332 per cent), Indonesia (122 per cent) and China (110 per cent). There were other significant increases (higher than 40 per cent, but less than 100 per cent) in Viet Nam and the Philippines; and (2) Only Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam decreased spending over the decade.

In 2018, military expenditure in Asia and Oceania totalled US$507 billion or 28 per cent of the world's total, up from just 9 per cent two decades ago (Koh 2019). Abuza (2019) estimates that defence expenditures in Southeast Asia in 2018 totalled $40.8 billion, a 1.9% increase from 2017. SIPRI's latest data would almost certainly invoke the ever-popular calls about an arms race taking place in the Asia-Pacific.

Acharya contends however that although increases in military spending among AMS has historically driven by domestic insurgencies, security and safety of sea lanes from disruption by piracy and terrorism (which are common security concerns of ASEAN members), the recent rise of arms purchases are propelled by bigger players—the PRC, India, and Japan—rather than Southeast Asia. He argues that extra-regional security challenges such as "uncertainty over the PRC's strategic intentions or fear of retrenchment of the US military presence in the region" is one important factor that propelled countries to beef up its military hardware (Archarya 2013, p. 10).

Apparently, the more assertive Chinese approach and actions, especially in the South China Sea disputes have reignited the United States involvement in the region. The US has recognized China's growing geopolitical importance and has made decisive actions to strengthen its position, via balancing and engaging with China. This is what has been called "the pivot to Asia", first announced by then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in Hanoi in July 2010, a shift in the focus of foreign policy from the Middle East to East Asia to try to balance the growing influence of China—and the threats of North Korea (cited in Buendia 2014).

While Hall (2014) believes that AMS are not in any way on the verge of armed conflict in spite of on-going tensions and disputes, the escalating military outlays in recent years is alarming. The APSC seems to be ineffective in regulating the elevation of arms acquisitions among AMS. In as much as the burden of securing Asia falls squarely on the region itself, ASEAN, is being severely tested by the growing intensity of the PRC's territorial disputes with its maritime neighbours in the East and South China Seas.

Maintaining ASEAN unity in the face of these conflicts has become very difficult for the organization. The ASEAN has found it increasingly challenging to cope with the new contours of Sino-American contestation in Asia. While many would like to see a strong US presence in Asia to provide an effective balance in the region, few would want to be caught in the crossfire between Washington and Beijing. Given the security complexity of the region, the APSC may largely be paralyzed in dealing with the brewing open territorial conflicts between AMS on the one hand, and between regional and extra-regional claimants in the South China Sea.

Institutions, Mechanisms, and Processes in Conflict Resolution and Prevention

The predominance of resolving intra- and extra-ASEAN conflict through the ASEAN Way rendered ASEAN's formal conflict resolution mechanism like the ARF, ASEAN Dialogue Partners,[10] ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus),[11] ASEAN Plus Three (APT), [12] Shangri-la Dialogue,[13] and the East Asia Summit (EAS),[14] remain to be fully utilized. On the other hand, in situations where conflicts are beyond the capability or expertise of the organization, are invariably sent either to the ICJ or Permanent Court of Arbitration as in the case of the South China Sea (as outlined above) for judgment. And where the issue of differences could be reasonably managed and addressed amicably and diplomatically, bilateral mechanisms are employed rather than any of ASEAN's regional institutions or processes.

Consequently, regional conventions in the form of treaties, fora, protocols, and meetings designed to settle disputes have yet to prove their efficaciousness to undertake steadfast decisions on contentious issues between member states of ASEAN. Oftentimes, the "non-interference" doctrine as embedded in the ASEAN Way and as espoused by the APSC has been invariably used to mitigate conflict. Chareonwongsak (n.d.) explains that:

> *... multilateral approach to settle disputes could make member countries see the disputes as extensive thus causing unnecessary distrust among member countries and even negatively affecting their national interests. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that the decisions... would be enforced. The settlings of disputes in the past were mostly done bilaterally.*

Whereas the ASEAN Way has benefitted the region in thwarting inter-state armed conflict for nearly half-a-century, the potential of multilateral approach in addressing conflict as planned in the APSC needs to be fully employed and explored vigorously to enable the region to gain positive lessons from mechanisms of multilateral conflict prevention and conflict resolution.

The importance of multilateral institutions lies in addressing transnational security or human security issues, like environmental degradation, pandemics, terrorism, maritime piracy, illegal migration, drug trafficking, people smuggling, money laundering, and other forms of transnational crime that do not respect national boundaries.

These are non-military in nature and cut across state boundaries. Challenges arise at very short notice and are transmitted rapidly as a result of globalization and technologies in communication. Given that these concerns are beyond state's geographical limits, they could not be resolved by individual state but requires multi-state endeavors. Hence requires multilateral mechanisms to mitigate their effects to sustain human security and survival (eds Caballero-Anthony, Emmers & Acharya 2006).

In terms of transnational or non-traditional security (NTS), the APSC's goal is to ensure that every citizen in ASEAN lives in peace and harmonious environment. From this perspective, it becomes paramount that a framework of regional governance based on the notion of democracy, human rights, good governance, and social justice be instituted covering the breadth and depth of AMS. Henceforth, as Caballero-Anthony (2010) concludes that:

> *... the drive for effective multilateralism has become more urgent and nowhere is this more salient than in current trends to strengthen cooperation and deepen integration processes in Southeast Asia through regional innovations (p. 14).*

However, there is little regional governance occurring in ASEAN as all AMS are wary about surrendering their sovereignty and political autonomy to a supranational authority (Putra, Darwis, Burhanuddin 2019). This is also in line with the ASEAN Way's norm and value of non-interference into the affairs of another country – the principle that underpins the concept of comprehensive security.

Jones & Hameiri (2016) for instance disclose that Southeast Asian states are increasingly networked into functional regional or global regulatory regimes designed to govern transnational issues rather than to ASEAN, a collective of nations having a variety of instruments of governance, societal interests, and ideologies. Given this predicament, APSC as a political and security initiative has yet to demonstrate its capability in building a system of regional governance in the domain of non-traditional and human security.

Conclusion

Twelve years after the APSC was conceived, together with the other pillars of ASEAN integration (ASEAN Economic Community and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community), and nine (9) years after the adoption of the APSC Blueprint, much remains to be done. As a rolling Blueprint, now extended up to 2025, it is envisaged to engender political development, provide a regional framework for AMS to handle security matters and disputes more effectively, and realize a robust regional security community.

The extent of cultural variation, ethnic diversity, stages of economic development, and a variety of political systems across Southeast Asian countries pose difficult challenges in shaping a politico-security community based on the values and norms of democracy, civil liberties, and basic guarantees on human rights. The differences between the conceptions and primacies of state rights on the one hand, and human security, on the other hand, are daring tasks in tightening up political regional cooperation. National policy objectives may contrast with broader regional collaboration while nationalist motivations or national priorities may go against a program that has a regional significance.

The ASEAN Way and its doctrine of "non-interference" entrenched as the binding principle among AMS enjoin every ASEAN member to respect the sovereignty of each member state over their internal affairs. This does not only impede swift decision making and action on critical regional issues or trans-boundary problems but also inhibit the shaping of a regional perspective that transcends national interest and crafting of a tight cooperative mechanism in achieving a regional vision. There is a need to rethink the doctrine of ASEAN Way as an approach and mode of securing and preserving peace in Southeast Asia. As a matter of practical necessity, the ASEAN Way has to make itself relevant in the face of real-world changes and challenges without sacrificing and compromising the peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of people comprising the ASEAN member states.

ASEAN's multilateral institutions and mechanisms have to be operationalized not only as tools in confidence-building but also in adjudicating conflicting national interests especially on the issue of human and non-traditional security. These have yet to be empowered to enforce decisions and relevant provisions contained in conventions and treaties signed by all participating parties. Towards this effort, it would be worthy for APSC Blueprint to allow AMS the opportunity to carefully and clearly redefine and reinterpret the scope and definitions of "sovereignty", "non-interference", and "territorial integrity" principles stipulated in the ASEAN Charter.

The APSC has to live up to its emancipatory promises. Failure to do so increases insecurity in two fronts. One, domestically the pre-emptive intervention in weak or unstable states can cause greater instability as elites and leaders who have insufficient legitimacy orientate themselves around powerful external actors in order to achieve their goals, rather than having to compromise at home. Two, regionally the transformation of sovereignty and legitimization of intervention in the name of a "collective conscience of mankind" serves ironically to increase regional insecurity, as it allows unnecessary armed conflict on an arbitrary basis leading to greater fear and insecurity on the part of weaker states.

Given the prospects as well as limitations of the APSC, opportunities unfold for its continuing quest for a more politically consolidated and secured region in spite of its diversity. The vision of APSC to fortify ASEAN as a security community in the region may necessitate AMS to bargain part of its sovereign rights in exchange for achieving regional or multi-national goals based on the ideals of democracy, freedom, good governance, justice, and human rights and current regional and global challenges. The roadmap presumed to lead Southeast Asians to a "higher plane" of political oneness, belongingness, and secured future needs to be revisited and rethought.

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1 An inter-governmental organization, composed of 10 Southeast Asian (SEA) countries, was founded on 8 August 1967 by five (5) countries, namely: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. Other countries joined in 1984 (Brunei), 1995 (Vietnam), 1997 (Laos and Burma) and 1999 (Cambodia). It was organized to promote inter-state economic, political, security, military, educational, and socio-cultural cooperation.

2 ASEAN member states which lay territorial claims to parts of South China Sea are Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam. Brunei has established exclusive fishing right around Louisa Reef in the Spratlys, but has not publicly claimed the territory.

3 The "ASEAN Way" is a concept of inter-state relation and regional cooperation that consists of avoidance of formal mechanisms and legalistic procedures for decision-making, and reliance on musyawarah (consultation) and mufakat (consensus) to achieve collective goals. See Amitav Acharya, "Ideas, Identity and Institution-Building: From the ASEAN Way to the Asia-Pacific Way?" The Pacific Review, Vol 10, No. 3, pp. 319-346. (1997).

4 Goals and strategies of the ASEAN Community was laid down by The Vientiane Action Programme (VAP) 2004-2010, adopted in Vientiane (Lao PDR) at the 10th ASEAN Summit in 2004. (See Vientiane Action Programme 2004-2010. Retrieved from https://www.asean.org/storage/images/archive/VAP-10th%20ASEAN%20Summit.pdf

5 The concept of "power politics" is one of the key concepts in political realism, one of the schools of thought in international relations theory, the prioritizes the nation-state interest over the interest of the international community. It presupposes the use of the state's economic, political, military, and even cultural power to defend and advance its interest (See Hans J. Morgenthau, Scientific Man vs. Power Politics. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1946 and Hans J. Morgenthau, Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace. New York NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948 for details).

6 There are roughly a million Southeast Asians speaking languages classified into nine (9) groups. These are: Sinitic, which are the languages of the region's mainly Chinese communities; Tibeto-Burman; Karen; Miao-Yao; Tai, which includes the national languages of Thailand and Laos; Malayo-Polynesian, which is by far the largest and most widely-distributed group as it ranges from Madagascar to the South Pacific; Mon-Khmer; Viet-Muong; and Papuan (see https://www.britannica.com/place/Southeast-Asia/Linguistic-composition.

7 The ARF is a formal, official, multilateral, dialogue in the Asia Pacific region established in the 26th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting and Post Ministerial Conference, held in Singapore in July 1993. It was inaugurated in Bangkok on 25 July 1994. ARF's objectives are: to foster constructive dialogue and consultation on political and security issues of com-mon interest and concern; and to make significant contributions to efforts towards confidence-building and preventive diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region. As of July 2007, it consists of 27 participants: all ASEAN members, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, the People's Republic of China, the European Union, India, Japan, North Korea, South Korea, Mongolia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Russia, East Timor, the United States, and Sri Lanka. See http://aseanregionalforum.asean.org/ for details.

8 The PCA is an intergovernmental which has a UN Observer status that provides services of arbitral tribunal to resolve disputes between member states, international organizations or private parties. Cases include a range of legal issues involving territorial and maritime boundaries, sovereignty, and human rights among others. See https://pca-cpa.org/en/ home/ for details.

9 Obtained from A. Salikha (2018). Southeast Asian Countries' Military Expenditure. Retrieved from < https://seasia.co/2018/05/04/latest-southeast-asian-countries-military-expenditure>

10 ASEAN Dialogue Partners consist of ten parties: Australia, Canada, China, the European Union, India, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Russia, and the United States.

11 ADMM Plus is composed of 10 ASEAN Defense Ministers and other Defense Ministers of Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Russia and the United States.

12 ASEAN Plus Three (APT) is a forum that functions as a coordinator of co-operation between the ASEAN and the three East Asia nations of China, Japan, and South Korea.

13 The Shangri-La Dialogue (SLD) is a "Track One" inter-governmental security forum held annually by an independent think tank, the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) which participated by by defense ministers, permanent heads of ministries and military chiefs of 28 Asia-Pacific states. The summit serves to cultivate a sense of community among the most important policymakers in the defence and security community in the region. The SLD is attended by representatives from AMS, Australia, Canada, Chile, France, Germany, India, Japan, Mongolia, New Zealand, Pakistan, People's Republic of China, Russia, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Sweden, East Timor, United Kingdom, and the United States.

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