

In 2003 with the Bali Concord II, ASEAN come to an agreement to establish three pillars namely the security cooperation [now referred as political and security], economic cooperation and socio-culture cooperation.

Next, the ASEAN Charter entered into force on 15 December 2008. This called for all ASEAN member states [as they were referred to since] to implement necessary institutional and legal framework. With this in place, it has also brought about increased responsibility for the ASEAN Chairman to hold two ASEAN Summits. It also created new ASEAN bodies with three community councils: the ASEAN Coordinating Council, the Committee of Permanent Representatives and ASEAN Inter-governmental Human Right Body. The various sectoral under ASEAN are streamlined under each pillar [although some issues are recognized to be cross-sectoral].

In 2009, the ASEAN Leaders adopted the Roadmap for an ASEAN Community for 2009-2015 which includes three specific blueprints for each of the community pillars. Basically, the blueprints consisted of series of action plans or programmes of the past [Bali Concord II. Hanoi Plan of Action and Vientiane Action as well as the respective sectoral Work Plans). Most recently, the master plan for ASEAN Connectivity was also agreed upon and established the ASEAN Connectivity Coordinating Committee.

The ASEAN Political Security Community [APSC] pillar consists of various sectoral mainly the Foreign Ministers [wears different hats in the SEANWFZ Commission and ARF], Defence Ministers, Law Ministers and those responsible for transnational crime and immigration matters. The council itself is led by the Foreign Ministers as well.

The APSC is envisioned to be based on shared norms and rules of good conduct in interstate relations; effective conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms; and post conflict building activities. It aims to promote ASEAN's wide political and security cooperation, and mutually reinforcing bilateral cooperation between member states while recognizing the sovereign rights of member countries to pursue their own foreign polices and defence arrangements. The ASEAN Declaration of 8th August 1967 in the last paragraph of the preamble¹ reinforces the recognition that as sovereign states, they could pursue their own defence arrangement.

In essence, ASEAN cooperation and the vision for a community aim to work towards deeper interstate relations and are not meant for the establishment of a defence pact, military alliance or joint foreign policy. It is safe to say that ASEAN will unlikely move towards becoming a supranational institution such as the European Union.

ASEAN Challenges

As we all know, the strategic environment is ever changing and unpredictable. The Asia Pacific is an important engine of economic growth, home to the world's biggest militaries and it is strategically located with sea lanes and choke points transporting crucial energy and goods. To make it more complicated, the region has been long embroiled in historical territorial disputes, overlapping claims and competition for resources in the maritime domain.

ASEAN has assumed its centrality in the region. ASEAN Centrality is actually three pronged: internally to build a successful ASEAN Community, externally to lead in ASEAN initiated processes/arrangements and institutionally to strengthen the ASEAN Secretariat and mobilise resources.

The challenge for ASEAN is in the managing of its cooperation among ASEAN [internal].

¹ 'Affirming that all foreign bases are temporary and remain only with expressed concurrence of the countries concerned and are not intended to be used directly or indirectly to subvert the national independence and freedom on states in the area or prejudice the orderly processes of their national development.'

The other challenge is in managing the dynamic of relations within the region and with its dialogue partners [external].

A balance and good management of these two elements is important for ASEAN to remain central in the regional security discourse and reaffirms its relevance as an “honest broker “or neutral party.

From our perspective, the centre of force or influence in the region are namely: China as an emerging power and its progressive military modernization; the US ‘rebalancing policy with the shift of focus towards the Asia-Pacific; and the establishment of the ADMM Plus and other defence cooperation such as the Five Power Defence Arrangement. In this regard, how do we fit all these together in the region? How will they interplay? To what extent would they complement or counterbalance one another and not affect the security of the region?

Against the backdrop or strategic landscape, many questions and concerns arise. Could ASEAN maintain its neutrality? Is ASEAN necessary or still relevant/ could ASEAN stand united and maintain its centrality to ensure the region’s stability?

ASEAN ensure that we do not caught in two world powers. Today, member states are often seen preoccupied with everyday domestic politics and swayed by other national pressures or interests. It is worth mentioning that one of ASEAN’s principle is the practice of shared commitment and collective responsibility in enhancing regional peace, security and prosperity. Yet, recent actions saw ASEAN divided on a crucial issue and its unity was questioned. If ASEAN’s unity or one voice is challenged further, external powers may manipulate the situation to their advantage. ASEAN needs to deepen its cooperation among themselves to develop further understanding and improve cooperation.

How and to what extent can ASEAN member states balance between domestic priorities and regional commitments for peace, prosperity and stability? Will ASEAN remain as a central player in the regional security architecture? It would not be in the best interest of ASEAN to have a security architecture in which its dialogue partners take the lead or for ASEAN dialogue partners framework deemed as more important than ASEAN itself. The architecture needed is one where ASEAN have a voice in shaping the future regional community.

Therefore, centrality of ASEAN is important in order ASEAN to remain relevant. It also seems that ASEAN centrality is necessary for other powers to use it as a channel for cooperation amid bilateral tensions or power rivalry [spats between Japan-Korea and Japan-China as well as diplomatic tensions between US-China]. In doing so, ASEAN must ensure that it speaks with one voice and that it ensures that regional power dynamics would not disrupt the ASEAN vision. ASEAN’s role in the regional security architecture is still needed.

Defence Cooperation in ASEAN

This brings to how do we strengthen the newly established ASEAN defence sector?

The establishment of the defence sector supports the broader aim of the ASEAN Political Security Community whereby no member would seriously consider the use of force against another to settle dispute. Most importantly, the establishment of a formal defence sector reinforces ASEAN’s central role in the regional security architecture with emphasis on practical cooperation.

In working towards an annual Defence ministers meeting, ASEAN has adopted the ASEAN Security Community Plan of Action in the Bali Concord II. It becomes more significant at the 10th ASEAN Summit which formally opened the door to explore modalities in the establishment of the ASEAN defence sector in 2004.

The ASEAN defence sector was established in 2006 and structured with ADMM as the highest defence body. It adopts a three-year work programme and so far has focused on defence industry, civil-military cooperation and a network of peacekeeping centres. The ADMM Plus is in fact part of the ADMM framework. It has agreed on five areas of cooperation – maritime security, peacekeeping, HADR, military medicine and counter-terrorism. Each has its Expert Working Group that is understood to be up of military as well as defence officials. The EWGs have specific objective to engage in practical cooperation among the militaries at the operational level.

Outside the umbrella, there are informal military track meetings. The ASEAN Defence Chiefs of Armed Forces Informal Meeting (ACDFIM) meet annually and has its own two-year work plan. The Intelligence and Operational officials meet prior to the ADCFIM. Within the military track are the four meetings/conferences among military services-land, air and navy as well as military medicine. Each has its own gathering and proposals for cooperation. Exchange programmes for junior officers are being implemented in all military services cooperation.

The changing security environment also requires the armed forces to adapt in their work. The unpredictable nature of security in the region makes it more pressing to promote understanding and deeper friendship in defence and military. This is hoped to ensure that there are miscommunication, misinformation and misjudgments.

In assessing the cooperation, measures identified in APSC under conflict prevention and conflict resolution and activities in the respective work plan in defence/military track have been carried out national, regional and international level. In fact, from the military side, they have embedded a strong bond and shared experiences and expertise.

Domestically and bilaterally, respective ASEAN armed forces have contributed in HADR and peacekeeping operations. There is an increasing realization of the importance of interoperability, understanding each other's doctrine or SOPs at regional and even international level in addressing peace support. The first ASEAN military HADR Exercise was co-hosted by Singapore and Indonesia last year. Brunei will host the 2nd ASEAN HADR Exercise and the first ADMM Plus HADR & Military Medicine Exercise.

The Army Chiefs themselves, the oldest track among militaries have recently worked in an ASEAN Army HADR SOPs. Bearing in mind, the army makes up a majority in HADR operations is a significant contribution and its constitutes a benchmark in any SOPs with other partners. The Navy Chiefs have made positive strides in its cooperation and even proposed ideas that are not yet floated among its Defence Chiefs of Armed Forces such as the ASEAN Navy Chiefs Meeting with Plus countries and setting up an ASEAN Navy Secretariat.

Within the ARF, defence officials have met at the Defence Dialogue and the Asia Security Conference. The ARF Defence University heads have also met and exchanged views on their management of their respective institutions.

Conclusion: Lessons Learnt for ADMM

so what we do next to improve defence cooperation among ASEAN? In what ways can we complement other defence cooperation? How much do we prepare ASEAN in its cooperation with Dialogue Partners in light of the strategic picture mentioned earlier?

The message is – we must continue in getting our house in order. For ADMM, our recommendations are:

a. Strengthening ADMM's priorities

The institution must take a step back and look inwards to deepen its links and cooperation as it also looks outwards seeking a dialogue partner's expertise. ADMM itself must be open to exchanging views on the current strategic environment and how this would affect ASEAN, in particular, defence.

Practical cooperation in practical terms should be within the confines of five areas of cooperation agreed in the ADMM Plus. ADMM is still in the early stages of cooperation and could learn from earlier sectoral. With a strong ADMM strong where members are mindful of each other's view and can readily reach a consensus, it would likely not be overrun in its cooperation with other Dialogue Partners.

How?

- ✓ Take stock of past activities and initiatives under ADMM –Plus Meetings and under the umbrella of ASEAN Chiefs of Defence Forces
- ✓ Continue support in transparency through positive contributions to the annual ASEAN security Outlook
- ✓ Conduct briefings for understanding of defence policies and security perceptions.

b. consolidates and coordinate efforts between defence and military

In looking inwards, ADMM must consolidate its own processes and bring in the military services to the overall ASEAN defence sector. The military may be comfortable with its own informal setting. However, coordinated approach from top down and cross over as well as from strategic to operational level should be translated into cooperation among ASEAN militaries. This would ensure the military will not be working in isolation and this will contribute towards cohesion in regional defence cooperation.

The ASEAN military services meetings are important to ensure centrality. Their proposals and recommendations should be recognized and set as an ASEAN benchmark or consensus. It is also recommended at this stage to prevent the proliferation of meetings to be established with Plus countries under the respective military services.

How? This could be done by a review ADMM concept paper that looks into:

- ✓ Structured mechanism of all services reports to ADCFIM and submitted to ADMM
- ✓ Practical coordinated and cohesive Roadmaps and work Plans

c. Focused and flexible cooperation

Focused and flexible cooperation builds on existing cooperation or activities. This could include extending bilateral cooperation that could expand to other ASEAN member states/armed forces. This would indirectly strengthen centrality and improve ASEAN position as well as interoperability.

How?

- ✓ Take up ASEAN – x formula in defence cooperation
- ✓ Continue to add value or complement each other's regional activities/initiatives especially in maritime security and HARD

d. Role of Track II

Both official and non-official track could also work close together or complement one another.

How?

- ✓ NADI is in the best position to help develop ideas and initiatives which will lend its contribution to the ADMM 3-year work programme 2011-2013 “conduct study and research to explore cooperative activities in order to improve the cooperation in defence and security”.