

2024

Defence and Strategic Analyses

**Enhancing ASEAN Defence
Cooperation for Regional
Peace, Security Resilience**

Siti Nurnabilah binti Haji Abd Rahman

**Conflicts Affecting the Region,
and the ADMM / ADMM-Plus
Role in Conflict Prevention
and Management**

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**ASEAN and the Regional
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Defence and Strategic Analyses

2024



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All correspondence should be addressed to:

Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah
Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies
Ministry of Defence
Bolkiah Garrison
Bandar Seri Begawan BB3510
Negara Brunei Darussalam

Tel: +673 2385278

Fax: +673 2381424

Email: shhb.idss@mindef.gov.bn

SHHBIDSS

Defence and Strategic Analyses (DSA)

The Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (SHHBIDSS) is a policy research think tank under the ambit of the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF), Brunei Darussalam. The institute supports and strengthens policy planning in the MINDEF and the Royal Brunei Armed Forces (RBAF) by providing research and analysis on defence, security, and the strategic environment.

The Defence and Strategic Analyses (DSA) is a publication of SHHBIDSS covering aspects of defence, security and strategic issues. It aims to share perspectives and promote awareness related, but not limited to issues under the Institute's three main research clusters: Defence Management Studies, Defence and Military Studies, and Regional Strategic and Security Studies.

This DSA 2024 is based on the commentaries by SHHBIDSS researchers in Track 2 engagements in the region including in the Track 2 Network of Defence and Security Institutions (NADI) and their own papers that review and assess the various regional security developments and challenges.

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1. Enhancing ASEAN Defence Cooperation for Regional Peace, Security Resilience¹

Siti Nurnabilah binti Haji Abdul Rahman

Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies

1.1 Overview

As we approach the second half of 2024, the ongoing conflicts in regions like Ukraine and the Middle East, notably Palestine, continue to cast profound shadows over global discussions on international security, leaving an indelible mark on the intricate tapestry of the defence and security realm. Concurrently, the world is punctuated by a myriad of both conventional and non-conventional threats, ranging from the complexities of major-power rivalries to the emergence of middle powers, all amidst the backdrop of rapid technological advancements and the looming specter of the global climate crisis. These multifaceted challenges resonate across diverse sectors, underscoring the intricate interplay of issues in shaping the landscape of the world's future.

Within the Southeast Asian region, still grappling with the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the direct and indirect impacts of the complex global security environment are being keenly felt, encompassing geopolitical, economic, security, humanitarian, and diplomatic realms. Despite the formidable array of challenges, ASEAN has exhibited remarkable resilience, making notable strides in its pursuit of regional cohesion, solidifying its stature as one of the most triumphant regional entities. While security was not explicitly enshrined in ASEAN's initial declaration, the organisation has showcased its adaptive prowess, incorporating defence and security within its pillars to nurture a climate of regional tranquility and harmony. This commitment is exemplified by the establishment of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) in 2006 and the subsequent ADMM-Plus in 2010, emblematic of the substantial progress in defence cooperation and diplomacy among ASEAN members and their partners over the past two decades.

1.2 Achievements of the ADMM and ADMM-Plus

Since its inception, the ADMM and ADMM-Plus have emerged as effective platforms for fostering practical cooperation among the defence establishments of ASEAN and participating countries. To date, the ADMM has overseen the establishment of over fifteen initiatives in areas including maritime security, counter-terrorism, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), peacekeeping operations (PKO), military medicine and cybersecurity, border management, defence industry, defence education and other confidence building measures. These initiatives have been instrumental in addressing both traditional and non-traditional security challenges over the years.

¹ This commentary was presented on the 17th NADI Annual Meeting held from 29 April 2024 to 02 May 2024, hosted by Military Science and History Department (MSHD), Ministry of National Defence of Lao PDR.

The aspiration to further strengthen the region's defence engagement with its external partners are further demonstrated through the successful formation of the Experts' Working Groups (EWGs) under ADMM-Plus. Under the formation of EWGs, it has contributed in facilitating collaboration in seven specific areas such as maritime security, counter-terrorism, HADR, PKO, military medicine, humanitarian mine action, and cyber security reflecting the concerted efforts to place ASEAN at the core of the region's defence engagement with its external partners. Additionally, the EWGs have helped to advance defence interoperability and have leveraged diversity in capabilities, expertise and resources for AMS and its Dialogue Partners. Through the ADMM-Plus EWGs, ASEAN has also identified a practical means of offsetting operational limitations that could hinder its defence development, and ensure ample opportunity to enhance awareness, capacity building and development of cooperative solutions within the ADMM-Plus. Beyond the defence sector, the EWGs have measurably contributed towards wider ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) building efforts by means of norms-setting, confidence-building, conflict prevention, and conflict resolution measures within the region.

The commitment to further fortify the region's defence engagement with external partners is evidenced through the EWGs. Through the EWGs, ASEAN has facilitated collaboration in seven specific areas including maritime security, counter-terrorism, HADR, PKO, military medicine, humanitarian mine action, and cyber security. EWGs contributions underscore the concerted efforts to position ASEAN at the forefront of the region's defense engagement with external partners. Moreover, the EWGs have played a pivotal role in enhancing defence interoperability and harnessing the diversity in capabilities, expertise, and resources among ASEAN member states (AMS) and its Dialogue Partners. Through the ADMM-Plus EWGs, ASEAN has identified practical measures to overcome operational limitations that could impede its defence development, while also facilitating awareness, capacity building, and the development of cooperative solutions.

While the accomplishments of the ADMM and ADMM-Plus have maintained positive momentum, challenges have also emerged, particularly in light of escalating regional and global geopolitical dynamics.

1.3 Challenges of the ADMM and ADMM-Plus

1.3.1 Asserting ASEAN's central role?

The growing interest of non-Plus countries in joining the ADMM-Plus signifies a positive perception of its effectiveness in fostering defence engagement and cooperation in the region. However, this also raises concerns about whether the addition of new members to the ADMM-Plus, might impact, or even dilute ASEAN's central role in the region's defence networks.

For instance, the ADMM-Plus, like other regional and multilateral platforms, is susceptible to exacerbating strategic rivalry and distrust. The decision to withdraw a Joint Declaration during the 2015

ADMM-Plus due to differing views among members on the South China Sea dispute exemplifies this, potentially undermining ASEAN's decision-making process and institutional outcomes. While ASEAN has endeavored to reaffirm its role and address such challenges, it is important to acknowledge that multilateral platforms are often influenced by the political and strategic interests of their member states, with increasing pressure for greater involvement.

Despite these challenges, defence officials from AMS must remain committed to aligning the region's strategic aspirations and practical concerns in the defence sector. This involves promoting confidence-building measures, enhancing capacity, and fostering regional cohesion. Neglecting these efforts could lead to AMS being sidelined and external powers exploiting developmental gaps or divergences within the region to their advantage.

1.3.2 Plethora of programmes and initiatives by ADMM and ADMM-Plus

While the multitude of initiatives, activities, and meetings put forth by ADMM and ADMM-Plus over time has been encouraging, showcasing the robust commitment of ASEAN and its partners, questions have arisen regarding the utility and practical implications for the defence establishments of AMS and its Dialogue Partners. Some initiatives have shown limited progress since their inception, highlighting the need to evaluate and assess both ADMM and ADMM-Plus initiatives, ensuring that implementations and advancements align with the evolving dynamics of the current security landscape.

In response, efforts led by ADMM to ensure its relevance and adaptability in the contemporary operational environment have already commenced. This includes the formulation of a Strategy Paper 2, subsequent to the Stocktaking Paper on ADMM and ADMM-Plus. The Strategy Paper aims to underscore the necessity of looking towards the future of ADMM, ensuring its readiness, resilience, and adaptability, while maintaining the defence sector's continuous support for the broader ASEAN Community in addressing forthcoming challenges.

Ultimately, such endeavors would assist in establishing a clear trajectory for ADMM and, consequently, ADMM-Plus in the years ahead. However, this process should not overlook the collective voices of AMS and key stakeholders such as the ASEAN Secretariat.

1.4 Recommendations

1.4.1 Review and update domains of cooperation in addressing security challenges

In response to the constantly evolving landscape of security threats, there have been discussions about incorporating new domains of cooperation, such as artificial intelligence and climate change, into the existing or as a new EWGs. For instance, given the increasing prevalence of artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies across ASEAN, it is imperative to intensify efforts aimed at understanding and bridging technological gaps among the member states. At this critical juncture, the ADMM and

ADMM-Plus can leverage the existing working mechanisms of the EWG on Cybersecurity as a model for expanding interest in other emerging technologies. By examining best practices from technologically advanced countries, there is potential for valuable insights and strategies to be gleaned, facilitating progress in addressing these novel challenges.

This expansion into new domains of cooperation not only reflects the adaptability and forward-thinking nature of ASEAN's defence engagement but also underscores the collective commitment to enhancing regional security and resilience in the face of emerging threats. Additionally, this endeavor will aid in optimising existing EWGs and initiatives by minimising redundancies and enhancing effectiveness.

1.4.2 Supporting ASEAN cross-pillar collaboration in adapting to a future-ready cooperation

To foster a cooperation framework that is primed for the future, it is imperative to cultivate synergy and integration across diverse sectors. This approach is vital to avoid duplication of efforts, breaking down silos, and ensuring that initiatives are streamlined and effective in addressing emerging challenges holistically.

In this regard, collaboration among various sectors within ASEAN's three pillars-the ASEAN Political Security Community (APSC), the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) is pivotal for realising the overarching goals of the ASEAN community. By integrating existing efforts and mechanisms across these pillars, ASEAN can achieve full holistic integration in addressing complex challenges comprehensively, thereby promoting sustainable development, peace, and prosperity in the region.

For instance, in the aspect of climate change, the ADMM may contribute to APSC objectives by addressing environmental security threats, such as natural disasters and resource conflicts, through regional cooperation and disaster response mechanisms within the HADR framework. Simultaneously, the other two pillars such as AEC may already have looked into initiatives for green growth, sustainable infrastructure development or renewable energy projects to foster economic growth, while ASCC in raising awareness, promoting environmental education, and encouraging community participation in conservation efforts. By collaborating across these pillars, diverse sectors can work together seamlessly to fulfill ASEAN's overarching goals, leveraging each other's strengths and resources to maximise the impact of cooperative endeavor.

2. Conflicts Affecting the Region, and the ADMM/ADMM-Plus Role in Conflict Prevention and Management²

Hajah Siti Diana binti Haji Othman

Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies

“We have witnessed significant shifts in the global strategic environment and the region’s security landscape. The urgency in addressing climate change and sustainability has intensified, especially amidst increasing climate-induced disasters in the Asia-Pacific.”

- Remarks of H.E. Dato Lim Jock Hoi, Secretary-General of ASEAN (2018-2022) at the Ceremony for the Transfer of Office of the Secretary-General of ASEAN, 9 January 2023

2.1 The Significance of Climate Change

Southeast Asia is among the world’s most vulnerable regions to the impacts of climate change. Its economies are heavily reliant on agriculture and much of its growing population consists coastal and low-lying settlements. They are exposed to the risks of shifting weather patterns, rising temperatures, and increasingly unpredictable natural disasters. As climate change disrupts ecosystems, the consequences ripple through the economy, threatening livelihoods, and security across the region. Evidently, according to the ASEAN State of Climate Change Report published in 2021, every year ASEAN countries experienced a number of climate-induced disasters, resulting in significant economic and human losses. A total of 33,325 deaths recorded and an estimated 222 million people were affected due to natural hazards during 2009–2020, with the estimated economic loss of USD 97.3 billion during the same period.

Beyond just an environmental issue, climate change is a non-traditional security challenge that transcends borders; demanding collective action on a global scale. It acts as a threat multiplier, worsening existing tensions and fuelling a range of security concerns, including resource competition, migration, and political instability. By intensifying these challenges, climate change heightens the risk of conflict and destabilisation, making it a critical issue for regional security and cooperation.

2.2 The Relationship Between Climate Change and Conflict

Climate change is increasingly recognised as a significant driver of conflict, with both direct and indirect impacts on security dynamics globally. As the intensity and frequency of climate-related events rise, existing vulnerabilities are heightened, particularly in regions already facing political and social strife. This interplay of climate change and conflict not only threatens stability but also complicates the resolution of existing security challenges, creating a cycle of instability that can be difficult to break.

² This commentary was presented on NADI Meeting on “Conflicts Affecting the Region, and the ADMM / ADMM-Plus’ Role in Conflict Prevention and Management’ held from 04 to 07 November 2024, hosted by S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

One of the most direct impacts of climate change that fuels conflict arises from competition over dwindling natural resources. As climate change disrupts food, water, and energy supplies, the struggle for these essential resources expands, leading to heightened tensions among communities and nations. These resource-based conflicts can be more pronounced in places where governance structures are weak, aggravating the potential for violence.

Natural disasters, another consequence of climate change, also contribute to insecurity. The destruction of infrastructure and displacement of populations due to floods, typhoons, and wildfires can destabilise cities and countries, and create power vacuums. In the aftermath of such disasters, competition for relief resources can further inflame tensions, particularly if some groups feel marginalised in the recovery process. The impact of these disasters is often compounded by existing socio-economic inequalities, leading to unrest and potential conflict.

Cross-border migration is another significant indirect impact of climate change on conflict. As conditions become uninhabitable due to extreme weather events or resource scarcity, populations are forced to migrate in search of better living conditions. This movement can create friction between host communities and newcomers, particularly in areas where resources are already strained. Tensions can escalate into conflict, especially when migrants are perceived as competing for limited jobs, housing, or social services.

Furthermore, climate change complicates existing conflicts by disrupting supply chains and worsening economic instability. Inflation driven by resource shortages can undermine the livelihoods of millions, increasing discontent and the likelihood of civil unrest. This economic strain is often coupled with rising health security concerns, including malaria and other water-borne diseases. As climate-related disruptions can overwhelm healthcare systems, leading to increased morbidity and mortality rates that further fuel instability.

Finally, the geopolitical implications of climate change cannot be overlooked. As nations vie for access to new resources and navigable trade routes affected by changing climates, international tensions may rise. The scramble for resources in areas like the South China Sea and the Mekong region, that cross national boundaries can lead to conflicts involving multiple countries. The involvement of external countries and other non-state actors add another layer of complexity to the security landscape, highlighting the urgent need for collaborative strategies to address both climate change and its conflict-related impacts.

2.3 Pathways to Conflicts – Scenarios

Climate change serves as a catalyst for conflict by aggravating existing tensions and creating new pressures on nations and communities. Various pathways illustrate how environmental stress can lead to conflicts across multiple dimensions.

Cross-Border Conflicts. The impact of climate change knows no borders, and can create conditions ripe for cross-border conflict. For example, recurrent forest fires in Indonesia, also affected the air quality in neighbouring countries. Such environmental issues can damage diplomatic relations, moreover, if there are

already other straining factors and hostile conditions. Furthermore, climate-induced migration, can disrupt international relations and creating a cycle of cross-border conflicts.

Diplomatic Stand-off. As climate change alters the availability of vital resources, climate-induced shortages could lead to regional competition over agricultural land, fishing zones and mines. In areas like the South China Sea, shifting marine ecosystems due to rising temperatures and changing salinity levels have intensified competition over fisheries and maritime resources. With ongoing territorial claims, and the urgency of securing resources, heighten these disputes. Diplomatic negotiations can break down under the strain of these tensions, leading to confrontations that jeopardise regional stability.

Economic and Trade Conflicts. Economic impacts from climate change, particularly on agriculture and resource availability, can lead to trade conflicts among nations. For instance, severe droughts may reduce crop yields, driving up food prices and prompting countries to impose export restrictions. These actions can trigger retaliatory measures; climate-related economic disruptions can create an environment ripe for conflict, especially when nations perceive that their survival is at stake.

Localised Military Skirmishes. Localised military skirmishes can emerge in areas where climate change leads to direct competition over resources. The South China Sea serves as a pertinent example, where nations have engaged in military posturing over fishing rights and oil reserves. As countries assert their claims more aggressively, incidents involving fishing vessels or military ships can escalate into confrontations. These localised conflicts not only threaten maritime security but also have the potential to draw in broader geopolitical interests, complicating the landscape further.

Domestic Unrest Driven by Environmental Stress. Climate-induced food and energy shortages could lead to domestic political instability, with governments facing protests, strikes, or even the rise of insurgent movements. For example, countries could experience mass demonstrations over rising food prices or inadequate energy supplies.

2.4 Recommendations

The interplay between environmental stress, resource scarcity, political and social dynamics and geopolitics emphasises the urgent need for cooperative strategies and conflict prevention measures to address the multifaceted challenges posed by climate change. While it is worth noting that the discussion on climate security is not unfamiliar within the ADMM, as addressed in the Jakarta Joint Declaration of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting for Peace, Prosperity, and Security back in 2022, there is room for further action. In light of this, SHHBIDSS presents the following recommendations for consideration by the ADMM and ADMM-Plus:

2.4.1 Climate Change as a Basis for Cooperation. Leveraging climate change as an issue of shared concern can foster cooperation among ADMM and ADMM-Plus, including in sensitive areas like the South China Sea. Key initiatives include:

1. *Climate Action Agreements*: Promote cooperative agreements that focus on joint climate action, including collaborative management of shared marine resources to ease regional tensions.
2. *Joint Research Initiatives*: Encourage collaborative research efforts on climate impacts and sustainable resource management through joint research initiatives by facilitating knowledge sharing and building trust.
3. *Regional Dialogues and Workshops*: Organise forums and workshops under the ADMM framework that bring together military and civilian stakeholders to discuss the interconnections between climate change and security.

2.4.2 Green Policies. Incorporating climate change considerations into the defence strategies and policies is essential for enhancing regional security and resilience. Actions under the ADMM and ADMM-Plus should include:

1. *Climate-Informed Defence Strategies*: ADMM should develop joint defence strategies that include comprehensive climate risk assessments. This will ensure military readiness is aligned with emerging environmental threats in the region.
2. *Sustainable Military Operations*: Encourage the adoption of sustainable practices within military operations, such as utilising renewable energy sources and enhancing energy efficiency across all military facilities and logistics.
3. *Civil-Military Coordination*: Strengthen collaboration between military and civilian agencies to ensure effective responses to climate-related disasters, particularly in humanitarian assistance efforts during crises.
4. *Joint Training and Exercises*: Conduct training exercises focused on climate-related scenarios, to build interoperability and confidence in climate-induced situations.

2.4.3 Environmental Peacebuilding. Promoting peace by integrating climate change considerations into practical conflict resolution efforts. Recommended actions include:

1. *Incorporating Climate Factors into Peace Negotiations*: Ensure that climate-related issues are part of dialogue in peace negotiations and conflict resolution initiatives.
2. *Community-Based Resource Management*: Support initiatives that empower local communities in managing shared resources sustainably, fostering collaboration and reducing tensions over resource scarcity.
3. *Capacity Building for Adaptation*: Invest in training programs to equip local communities with skills for climate adaptation, decreasing vulnerabilities that can lead to conflict and promoting stability.
4. *Monitoring Impact*: Establish mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness of climate interventions on peace and security, enabling adaptive strategies to respond to evolving challenges.

3. ASEAN and the Regional Security Architecture: What's Going On?

Muhammad Faiz Safwan bin Mohammad Nazri

Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies

3.1 Overview

In an ever-evolving geopolitical order increasingly centred on the geostrategic competition between the United States (US) and China, there is no shortage of significant developments in recent memory that has contributed to the growing anxiety of ASEAN and regional countries as they prepare to embark on an uncertain future in the Asia-Pacific region. The region may have a long history of withstanding the pressure of major powers, but several key aspects in the defence and security domain may indicate that regional security architecture has and will continue to become more complex and complicated.

3.2 Regional Security Architecture: State of Play

3.2.1 The Minilateral Trend and Emerging Partnerships

There is merit to the argument that as the Asia-Pacific, or 'Indo-Pacific' for a different conception of the Asian region, appears to shift from US-dominated unipolarity to multipolarity that regional countries are in a better position to maintain their autonomy and preserve their interests. The reality however for ASEAN Member States (AMS) – even after launching the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) in 2019 which advocates ASEAN's regional centrality – is that the region is now experiencing a proliferation of new political and security partnerships. Such partnerships include US-led minilaterals of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), AUKUS (the security alliance between Australia, United Kingdom, US), and the US-Japan-South Korea security pact, all of which seeks to counter China's influence in the region. In similar fashion, China is forging its own partnerships and groupings, by utilising geopolitical tools such as the Global Security Initiative (GSI), and membership in organisations like BRICS (an intergovernmental organisation comprising nine countries - Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates), towards realising an alternative Asian security order centring on Chinese interests. The emergence of these partnerships indicates that the trend of minilateralism is here to stay for the long-term, which has the potential to undermine ASEAN's pivotal role in the regional security landscape.

3.2.2 ASEAN and Geopolitical Challenges in 2024

Historically, ASEAN has shown resilience in managing major power relations and weathering geopolitical challenges. However, prominent issues such as the South China Sea dispute and the Myanmar crisis appear unresolved as we draw closer to the end of 2024. These major issues not only raise questions on ASEAN's ability to resolve complex geopolitical matters, but also demonstrate the internal divisions within ASEAN because of the differences among Member States on how to respond to these major issues. Furthermore, the unity among AMS may be exacerbated by the proliferation of minilaterals and partnerships. Throughout this year, the Philippines has been actively strengthening its defence relationships with various major powers and

countries, notably forming a trilateral between itself, Japan and the US amid repeated escalations with China's assertive behaviour in the South China Sea. The Philippines is not alone as other AMS have also redefined or improved their defence relationships such as the finalisation of a defence pact between Indonesia and Australia which can cement closer ties between both countries, and enable more complex military activities. Also, Cambodia's defence relations with China has deepened in 2024 with the latter's continued support for former's military modernisation program, particularly of Beijing's involvement in the upgrading works at Cambodia's Ream Naval Base. Unless ASEAN succeeds in remedying its internal differences and demonstrates effectiveness in confronting geopolitical issues, certain AMS may give less priority to their ASEAN commitments, and lean closer to other groupings that are faster in 'getting things done', and appeal more to their national interests and alignments with certain major powers.

3.2.3 Military Exercises: A Core Pillar of the Regional Security Order

Over the past two decades, regional military exercises in the Asia-Pacific – whether conducted bilaterally, minilaterally or multilaterally – have upgraded substantially as the quality of exercises has increased in complexity, the quantity of such exercises have grown, and the set of countries participating in exercises has become more diverse. For major powers, conducting such exercises can build trust and reassure their commitment to regional countries and allies given the amount of resources to execute these exercises.

The US and China are the main driving forces in this domain, and while the latter has actively improved the nature and number of its military exercises, the US still maintains a significant lead not just in frequency, but also in the diversity of participating countries, and the complexity of its exercises which cover security priorities such as joint warfare, naval and air-combat operations. China's military exercises on the other hand are thus far limited to less sensitive areas such as counter-terrorism and humanitarian and disaster relief (HADR), which are also within the scope of US-led exercises.

Much like other domains, the US-China rivalry is at the heart of the regional military exercise network, and it is expected that both superpowers will continue to upgrade their military exercises in the coming years. However, China has a long way to go in matching the extensive US military exercise network in the Asia-Pacific that historically dates back to the 1950s, and thus has decades of institutionalising its exercises with regional countries. Evidence of the gap between the two can be seen with the largest iteration of the US' Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) maritime exercise, involving 29 countries and 25,000 personnel that took place this year in June. Also, in September 2023, amidst increasing tensions between the US and China, and escalations in the South China Sea, all ten AMS conducted the first ASEAN-wide military exercise without involving any external party, likely a demonstration to major powers of ASEAN's own agency to carry out military missions during a regional crisis.

3.3 Conclusion

Media and academic discourse on the regional security architecture tends to focus more on diplomacy, regional cooperation, and major geopolitical issues such as the South China Sea dispute and the rise of minilateralism. However, to better understand the complex geopolitical realities of the region requires

monitoring the developments of regional military exercises. The exercises not only provide operational values for the participating countries' militaries in building interoperability and in practicing tactical concepts and experiment equipment, but also the bolstering of defence relationships amongst the countries involved. In simple terms, regional military exercises are deemed as a key pillar capable in shaping the security architecture.

As for ASEAN, the difficulty in which the AMS are able to adopt a collective and decisive stance on geopolitical issues will continue to affect the regional bloc's centrality and credibility. ASEAN has not been completely silent as evident recently, for example, by the ASEAN's foreign ministers' joint statement in December 2023 which came at a time of heightened tensions in the South China Sea. However, existing and future statements of this nature should be reinforced by the ability and willingness of ASEAN to be bolder, confident and united in addressing the region's complex and sensitive issues. Even achieving tangible progress on at least one geopolitical challenge by shifting towards an assertive approach can greatly assist ASEAN in preserving its credibility for the foreseeable future. In the long-term, as the global landscape undergoes rapid and significant changes, there is an urgent need for ASEAN to reexamine its principles, initiatives, and mechanisms to secure and enhance its strategic importance in the Asia-Pacific to the US, China, and other external partners.

4. From Ukraine to Gaza: Key Lessons on Hard Power for Small States

Nor Azriah Aziz binti DSS Haji Abdul Aziz

Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies

4.1 Overview

As global politics become increasingly complicated, small states often face a constant dilemma as major powers precariously pursue influence. The ongoing conflicts in both Ukraine and Gaza present an intricate landscape where not only were double standards exhibited by major powers, but these conflicts also offer crucial lessons on the use of hard power for small states to ponder upon.

4.2 The Discrepancies and Double Standards

The responses by the international community to the two crises varied to a greater extent; drawing criticism for the palpable double standards. Ukraine was supported vigorously by many countries through aid packages in terms of military, financial and humanitarian support. Responses concerning Gaza, on the other hand, contrasted strikingly with a more subdued tone, particularly in areas of humanitarian support. This was augmented with the disparate treatment of refugees fleeing Ukraine versus those escaping Gaza, where the Ukrainian refugees received a more welcoming reception, especially from the Western countries, compared to their Gazan counterparts. Arguably, this inconsistency only further diminishes the credibility of the Western governments and their commitment to human rights.

4.3 Hard Lessons for Small States

4.3.1 Leveraging Strategic Alliances

Through Ukraine's constant resistance to Russia in particular, small states can apprehend the critical role of strategic alliances in times of crisis. Possibly one of the most important lessons from the two crises is that strategic alliances with major powers can go a long way in sustaining the very survival of small states. Highlighting the importance of enhancing alliances and establishing multilateral diplomacy; small states that align themselves with major powers (and international organisations) have proven to have a greater sense of security, scoring not only support but also international legitimacy simultaneously.

4.3.2 Navigating through International Norms

Irrespective of the double standards in the international responses – small states can always leverage international laws and norms and approach them as tools when faced with aggressors. The international legal discussion concerning the Israeli occupation of Gaza and the global responses to the Russian atrocities in Ukraine denote the vital roles of the international norms and framework in determining any conflict's dynamics and to an extent, its aftermaths. On this note, counting on the international norms in times of crisis is (still) a worthy feat.

4.3.3 Understanding the Asymmetrical Warfare

In the face of uncertainty, small states must be able to recognise their adversaries' dynamics as they may not adhere to the same ethical principles or operational standards. In both cases, Ukraine and Gaza utilise unconventional tactics to counter their aggressors, who are more often conventional in nature; adopting superior military technology and warfare. For small states, understanding the role of asymmetric warfare such as leveraging local knowledge and utilising technology can even out the playing field.

4.3.4 Strengthening Internal Resilience

More than anything, the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza portray the importance of having a strong domestic resilience. Remarkably, both countries have shown their national unity and endurance in the face of the harsh aggressions. Hence, small states must build domestic resilience as a resilient society is highly capable to withstand any external pressures.

4.4 Conclusion

Serving as a powerful reminder of the complexities of the modern-day conflicts, small states can learn valuable lessons from the wars. In the intricacies of navigating hard power, alliances, and international norms; small states that study the patterns and trends of such wars may have a better directive at navigating their own security challenges amidst the increasingly volatile world.

5. Green Defence: Necessity or Choice?

Hajah Siti Diana binti Haji Othman

Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies

5.1 Overview

Brunei Darussalam adopts an ambitious plan involving a whole-of-nation approach in addressing the impact of climate change. Through ten strategies, the country is committed to paving low carbon and climate resilient pathways for a sustainable nation by 2035, and towards carbon neutrality by 2050. The Ministry of Defence plays an essential role in Brunei Darussalam's multi-sectoral effort towards the country's climate commitment as outlined in the Defence White Paper (DWP) 2021 as part of its *Green Initiatives*.

5.2 What is Green Defence?

Green defence refers to the development and implementation of eco-friendly processes undertaken by armed forces to increase energy efficiency and mitigate the adverse effects on the environment without negatively affecting operational readiness.³ Therefore, green defence takes account of sustainability, carbon footprint reduction, as well as mitigating the impacts of climate change to defence. The effects of climate change, such as heatwaves, storm, flooding and rising sea levels pose direct threats, not only to critical infrastructure and military installations, but also to its personnel, while in operations or training.

At the same time, the defence and military sectors are not only getting the brunt of the changing climate, but these sectors are considered one of the largest contributors to the climate crisis. One widely cited estimate suggests militaries are responsible for around 5 percent of global emissions.⁴ In comparison with the country's total carbon footprint, the military came in fourth, after China, US and India. In an effort to curb greenhouse gases (GHGs) emissions, the military is actively going 'green' and being environmentally responsible.

Brunei Darussalam's Ministry of Defence incorporates the use of energy-efficient systems in its infrastructure, application of energy efficiency procedures in its maintenance tasks, and expanding energy management practices in all existing and future buildings as well as its maintenance systems as part of their support for green defence. Aligning with the whole-of-government approach, the Ministry of Defence recognised that it 'will be required to continue to play its part in monitoring its own environmental behaviour and consciously make reductions to its overall carbon footprint' and 'to be increasingly prepared to react to instability caused and crises arising from climate change'.⁵

³ Stanley-Lockman Z., 'Enhancing Operational and Cost-Effectiveness Utility of Green Defence to Small Nation-States', S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies Policy Report (March 2018).

⁴ Joint study by Scientific for Global Responsibility and Conflict and Environment Observatory (COEBS).

⁵ Brunei Darussalam Defence White Paper 2021, p. 46

5.3 Climate Crisis Altering Contemporary Operating Environment (COE)

The climate crisis is changing the strategic context and security environment for the defence and military sectors, hence for the defence and military to operate effectively, they must anticipate these changes and adapt accordingly. Brunei Darussalam identified climate change and the impact of natural disasters as one of the challenges facing the region, which in turn, drives and shapes the nature of the strategic security and defence environment for the country. The ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) has also recognised climate change as a complex security challenge for ASEAN.⁶

The recognition of climate change's implications on national security has led to a heightened focus on sustainability and resilience within the defence sector. Realising this, climate and defence priorities need to be reconciled, and balanced. Climate change poses a double challenge to the defence and military sectors; it changes the operating environment 1) through extreme weathers such as dangerous heat or high tides, and 2) towards responding to crises from the impact of climate change i.e., HADR operations.

5.4 Conclusion: Developing Green Defence Policy

To maintain its operational effectiveness and fulfil its tasks, the defence and military must adopt a green defence policy that addresses the challenges posed by climate change. Countries such as the US, UK and France, and regional groupings such as European Nations and NATO have developed climate change and defence strategy papers, roadmaps and adaption plannings in their effort to go green.

In the region, the ASEAN State of Climate Change 2021 report, outlined that several AMS are achieving their climate ambitions, however, the relations between climate change and defence is hardly touched. Nevertheless, countries like Singapore, Malaysia and Philippines acknowledged climate change is affecting the defence and military, which have been outlined in their defence white papers and defence policies. In the ADMM, the climate crisis is only addressed within the agenda of disaster relief operations.

Brunei Darussalam's Ministry of Defence has provided initial direction towards its Green Initiatives in the DWP 2021. A lot can be learned from the efforts and experiences of other countries in their endeavour to address climate change, however, understanding the complexity and outlook of climate change, 'green' strategies must be interwoven in every aspect of future defence policies.

⁶ The Jakarta Declaration of the ADMM for Peace, Prosperity and Security, November 2023

6. Irreversible Tech Wave: Force Multiplier or Force Headache?

Siti Nurnabilah Rahman binti Haji Abdul Rahman

Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies

6.1 Overview

Throughout history, nations have invested massive amounts of resources to the development of advanced technologies in defence and military realm, leading to the evolution of sophisticated weaponry in areas such as ballistic missile defence, hypersonic missiles, autonomous weapon systems, cyber and space weapons. Concurrently, the relentless pace of technological innovation such as AI, 5G, Internet of Things (IoT), big data, and cloud computing in commercial space demands the defence and military sectors to scale up their military technologies, which in return lead to a shift in the nature of warfare.

6.2 Technological Trends in Defence and Security Realms

Undeniably, emerging military technology has been recognised to have the ability to reshape traditional ideas of military tactics, whereby the dual-purpose technologies promise enhancement in future battlefields in terms of connectivity, lethality, autonomy, and sustainability. With such promises, 2024 has seen a substantial rise in the use of artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, and the Internet of Things (IoT) to optimise defence operations and enhance military efficiency. This is further backed by a 2023 report by The Insight Partners, an industry research firm, stating the convergence of artificial intelligence and defence systems has sparked a global spending increase among developed nations (to create autonomous weaponry, battlefield analytics systems and other AI tools) where they forecasted revenue in such sector is estimated to grow to \$13.1 billion in 2028, up from \$6.9 billion in 2022.

Despite a remarkable surge in technological advancements, concerns arise regarding the dual nature of new technology in defence capabilities, posing both as a force multiplier and a potential source of nightmares in the defence and military domain. Yet, despite the perils of an arms race and global destabilisation, brought by burgeoning technological progress and a large disparity in military power globally, the imperative to ensure adequate military capabilities, underscores a heightened urgency for embracing new military technologies for maintaining interoperability.

6.3 Are we moving in the right direction?

Like other regions, Southeast Asia is contending with a broad spectrum of non-traditional security (NTS) threats, including maritime security issues, climate change, and cybersecurity, alongside ongoing geopolitical tensions that affect economies and livelihoods. These transnational threats exacerbate security vulnerabilities and add complexity, highlighting the growing importance of the multifaceted role of defence and military in addressing cross-cutting issues by extending its influence beyond mere protection against traditional security threats. This would also mean the need to secure appropriate military capabilities to maintain interoperability through the adaptation of new military technologies.

In Brunei Darussalam, where internet penetration is among the highest at 95% in the world, risks brought by technologies, specifically cyber threats, are identified as one of the significant threats to national security. To address these challenges, the Ministry of Defence has focused on enhancing cybersecurity within the defence and military sectors. This commitment is evident in the establishment of the Cyber Defence Unit (CDU) under the Royal Brunei Armed Forces (RBAF). Since its formation, the CDU has played been instrumental in protecting the RBAF's information and communication technology systems from cyber threats and attacks. It also supports Cyber Security Brunei, the national cybersecurity agency, in coordinating national efforts to monitor threats, manage cybersecurity, and combat cybercrime.

Simultaneously, the integration of C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance) within RBAF, hopes to improve military efficiency and give an advantage to the battlefield dynamics, by enhancing situational awareness, sensing and response, as well as knowledge of the adversary and environment.

While the new initiatives are put in place, questions have arisen about whether this itself would be adequate to maintain our military technological posture within the region. Given the evolving regional security landscape and rapid technological advancements, maintaining the status quo may not be prudent, which calls for further evaluation of its adaptation of new technologies in its military capabilities. Nevertheless, the pursuit of adopting new technologies within current military capabilities would also entail implications. This necessitates expansive thinking, particularly in policy and strategy development, which is further complicated by the high costs associated with these advanced technologies.

6.4 Policy Recommendations for the Ministry of Defence and Royal Brunei Armed Forces

In an unpredictable and rapidly evolving security environment, the ability to swiftly adapt to new threats is paramount, necessitating a fresh approach to Brunei Darussalam's defence and military strategies. Several approaches must be considered to develop cutting-edge, advanced, and sophisticated military technologies:

6.4.1 Recapitalisation of defence budgets to cope with new and emerging threats

Given the high cost associated with developing military technology development, strategic financial allocation is essential. This approach will indefinitely equip the defence sector with the necessary resources to formulate rapid and effective responses to emerging threats. By recapitalising defence budgets, Brunei Darussalam's Ministry of Defence can enhance its capability to develop asymmetric military solutions and deploy technologically advanced military assets, such as unmanned vehicles and autonomous systems, which are anticipated to play pivotal roles in future battlefields.

Within this vein, it is important to identify and understand the challenges that limit military technological progress in the Ministry of Defence. Part of the limitations that hinder military technological investment usually stem from constraints in financial resources for research and development (R&D), technological infrastructure, and skills shortages. Addressing these challenges requires substantial funding allocated specifically to R&D projects within the defence sector. This includes providing modern facilities and cutting-

edge research tools to support technological advancements within the military. Moreover, overcoming barriers to military technological investment necessitates nurturing a skilled workforce. At the same time, specialised expertise in fields such as science, engineering, and technical operations is indispensable for implementing and maintaining advanced military systems effectively.

6.4.2 Revision of existing doctrines and operational concepts to accommodate emerging military technologies and the new type of battlefield environments

Besides a recapitalisation of budget, new doctrines, operational concepts, and tactical manuals for operations are needed to be continuously reviewed and updated from time to time. Some existing doctrines and operational concepts will have to be revised to accommodate emerging military technologies and the new type of battlefield environments. As outlined in the 2021 DWP, it should encompass and integrate all-domain warfare, taking into account the next-generation platforms which might be involved in a future war.

This would require a culture of adaptability and continuous innovation within the military, and addressing ethical and legal considerations to better leverage emerging technologies within its domain. This would also mean that the introduction of new technologies may necessitate changes in force structure and organisational hierarchies, for example, reduction in the scale and number of existing large platforms, and also, probably, a reduction or addition in military personnel, which require further thinking and consideration.

6.5 Conclusion

Staying at the forefront of technological advancements allows a nation to adapt to emerging threats and challenges, ensuring a proactive rather than reactive security posture. At its core, technological advancements may have its own sets of challenges, these advancements are considered integral to maintaining and enhancing national security, providing the tools and capabilities necessary to address a wide range of modern threats and challenges.



SULTAN HAJI HASSANAL BOLKIAH
INSITUTE OF DEFENCE AND STRATEGIC STUDIES