

**SULTAN HAJI HASSANAL BOLKIAH INSTITUTE OF
DEFENCE AND STRATEGIC STUDIES**

Defence & Strategic Analyses

2019

**Perspectives on ASEAN Defence Security Foresighting in the Next Two
Decades**

Fatinah Abdul Wahab

Drivers that Lead to Sustainable Security: An ASEAN Context

Ampuan Yura Kasumawati binti DP Hj Adnan

Perspectives on ASEAN Defence Cooperation on Dealing with Climate Change

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Norms and Principles for Defence and Security Cooperation

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Defence Strategic and Analyses (DSA)

The mission of the Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (SHHBIDSS), as the Ministry of Defence's policy research institute, is to study and discuss defence, security and strategic issues relevant to Brunei Darussalam and its surrounding environment.

The Defence Strategic and Analyses (DSA) is a publication of SHHBIDSS covering aspects of defence, security and strategic issues. It aims to share perspectives and promote awareness related to but not limited to issues under its Research Programmes in the Defence Management Studies, Defence and Military Studies and Regional Strategic and Security Studies.

DSA 2019 is based on the commentaries by SHHBIDSS researchers in Track 2 engagements in the region including The Track 2 Network of Defence and Security Institutions (NADI) and their own papers that reviews and assess the various regional security developments and challenges.

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1. Perspectives on ASEAN Defence Security Foresighting in the Next Two Decades¹

Fatinah Abdul Wabab



In the past decade, ASEAN member states have faced tremendous challenges on its defence and security front. The inception of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) in 2006 and ADMM-Plus in 2010 has improved and strengthened regional cooperation on a wide range of defence and security matters among ASEAN member states and its dialogue partners. The formation of Expert Working Groups (EWG) on Maritime Security, Counter-Terrorism, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief, Peacekeeping Operations, Military Medicine, Cybersecurity and Humanitarian Mine Assistance is a testament of the region and plus members' commitments to address the challenges in numerous ways varying from dialogues, confidence-building efforts to concrete practical activities.

Despite all these, the rapidly changing strategic and defence security environment continues to test the effectiveness of the concerted efforts and cooperation by ASEAN member states and dialogue partners, in addressing the complex and dynamic security challenges, in the best way they can. This paper highlights four security issues that would dominate ASEAN defence and security environment and impact defence cooperation in the next two decades, namely emerging technologies, major power interplay in the South China Sea, region-based terrorism and climate change.



¹ This commentary was prepared for the 12th NADI Annual Meeting and NADI Retreat from 25 February to 3 March 2019, taking place in Holiday Inn Hotel, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

1.1. Foresighting in the Next Two Decades

1.1.1. Emerging Technologies

Effects of 4IR technology in particular cuts across many issues from economic, political, security and environment dimensions. The current new technology age is moving at a fast pace especially with the maturity of the third industrial revolution and advent on the fourth industrial revolution or Industry 4.0. The fourth industrial revolution is transforming how everyone operates especially with the emergence of Internet of Things (IoT), Big Data, Cloud Computing and Artificial Intelligence for example. Though the benefits brought by technology is endless, it also poses a wide range of potential risks to nations and regional security. The IoT for example, will allow more users and devices to be connected; however, the more devices that are connected to the Internet, the greater physical damage attackers can bring on to systems and nations.

In ASEAN itself, member states are going through a rapid technological development needed to support their economies and the growing demands for technological applications such as AI, IoT and nanotechnologies. As such, the digitalisation of the region's economy is inevitable.

Technological advancements have transformed how the economy works as business transactions (online retailing, purchase and banking) becoming easier and more efficient. The continuous progress to digitalise the economy presents a big opportunity for ASEAN to boost its economy, to be more economically integrated and in both competition and cooperation with one another. However, the variation in technological maturity among each of ASEAN member states might be a hurdle for them to further cooperate in addressing technology-security related issues.

The region's high internet penetration and progressive technological advancement is also not matched with an equal capability needed to cope with security issues that come with it. ASEAN member states for example, have only spent around \$1.9 billion collectively (excluding Singapore) making most member states' infrastructure vulnerable to be manipulated as platforms for cybercrimes and attacks.

The advent of the fourth industrial revolution and the emergence of the IoT, Big Data, Cloud Computing and Artificial Intelligence can be expected to further expand cyber threats in the next two decades. Coupled with the imminent operationalisation and commercialisation of 5G networks, it would create a next-generation threat landscape to the region's security. Most countries are currently still struggling to address

the threats posed by today's technologies. Recent data breaches and spread of fake news through social media to influence political process/outcomes in a country has affected state relations and heightened risks to international security. The prospects of ever more complex technological changes to regulate and control would be more daunting.

1.1.2. Major Power Interplay in the South China Sea

The South China Sea (SCS) remains to be one of the region's continuous flashpoint and an all-time priority that still needs tremendous regional cooperation. There have been significant developments over recent years, with the Permanent Court of Arbitration Tribunal judgement in 2016, China's continuous land reclamation works and 'militarisation' on its claimed maritime features, and improved China-Philippines bilateral relations, to name a few.

While ASEAN welcomes the interests of dialogue partners and friends to work together in many areas including maritime security issues, ASEAN at times are placed in a predicament with the growing interests of countries outside the region keen on maintaining and showing presence in the South China Sea. The interests of these powers in the SCS are reflected with the undertaking of more military and security cooperation such as exercises, intelligence sharing, and capability building efforts. The increasing presence of foreign defence forces particularly in the form of freedom of navigation exercises by the US and the UK, as well as the underlying support of Australia, France, Japan and India in the FoNOPs add to the existing complexities as ASEAN deals with China on the matter. The utmost concern of ASEAN member states are heightened tensions and escalation of military incidences due to misinformation or miscalculation that could lead to unwanted accidents in the air and at sea.

Looking ahead, the strategic challenge would persist as major powers the US and China continue to aggressively compete and exert influence in the region. ASEAN would need to continue to manage tensions and at the same time ensure its processes within its cooperation framework run smoothly. In moving forward, ASEAN must also continue to engage and address issues of mutual interest with multiple foreign players through capacity building exercises and sharing of experiences and knowledge, in accordance with the needs of ASEAN.

1.1.3. Terrorism

Since ISIS declared a caliphate back in 2014, more than 40,000 foreigners from about 110 nations, including hundreds from ASEAN member states, have joined the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). With the loss of ISIS caliphate territories in the Middle East in 2017, the remaining ISIS militants were left on their own. Many have decided to return home including several hundred radicals from Southeast Asia. While countries like the US and UK have resorted to blocking returnees, ASEAN member states have strengthened national terrorism laws, and increase regional cooperation to counter-terrorism.

Terrorism presents a real threat to the peace and stability of the region and would likely remain a threat in the long term. In recent years, ASEAN experienced increasing terrorist attacks including the ISIS failed attempt to establish a mini state in Poso in 2015 and ISIS siege of Marawi in 2017. Despite ISIS losing its battle in the Middle East, their extremist narratives remain to be a huge problem, regionally and globally. In this regard, populations in ASEAN member states are vulnerable to be exploited and influenced by extremist and radical ideology. Self-radicalisation through social media also remains a high threat in the region as there are still sympathisers who could act on behalf of radicalised individuals within the region. It is important to continue to counter negative narratives that showcase ASEAN member states and ASEAN as a whole that values cohesiveness and harmony, based on a community that is tolerant and respectful of all cultures, languages and religions.

1.1.4. Climate Change

Countries in the region are also increasingly vulnerable to climate change and its impacts. While the UN predicted increase of incidences of flooding through the year 2040 in the region; the Global Climate Risk Index reflected that four of the world's ten countries most affected by climate change are located in the Southeast Asia such as Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. A study conducted by the Asian Development Bank further projected a 4.8 °C rise in annual temperature and a 70 cm rise in sea level by 2100 in Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. This makes it important for ASEAN member states to mitigate against challenges of climate change as the region has large coastal communities.

The region is also one of the most disaster-prone areas globally; and the changing and uncertain weather extremes associated with global warming and climate change will likely increase climatic disasters in the region. Looking back at disasters in the past 15 years in the region, Southeast Asia has had numerous

disastrous incidents including the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami that affected 14 countries including Indonesia and Thailand. This was the third largest and deadliest disaster recorded where more than 230,000 people killed, more than 600,000 people affected, and 141,000 houses destroyed. In 2008, cyclone Nargis affected numerous countries including Myanmar killing a total of 140,000 people and affected 3.4 million people region wide. The devastation of typhoon Haiyan in 2013 that swept through Northern Southeast Asia caused high death tolls (more than 6,000 people lost their lives) and severe damages on property.

Last year, ASEAN experienced numerous intense disasters including Typhoon Mangkhut in the Philippines in September 2018 affecting 2,634, 617 people; the earthquake and tsunami in Palu Indonesia in October 2018 affecting 82,775 people; and as recent as January 2019, Indonesia experienced landslides and flooding that affected 6956 people. The growing intensity of disasters in the region is a reminder for ASEAN on the urgent need to address the impacts of climate change. ASEAN member states have done and achieved a lot through numerous initiatives driven by AHA Centre. ASEAN member states also need to continuously strengthen their community resilience, enhance knowledge on best practices in terms of skills and knowledge needed during disasters, sharing of technical know-how, and including skills in climate prediction and enhancing regional warning systems.

In supporting ASEAN's readiness and preparedness in HADR, the defence sector also needs to be continuously prepared and improve the region's coordination and cooperation through bilateral or multinational HADR exercises and cooperation, and to upgrade their capabilities and assets adaptable to climate change.

1.2. Conclusion

The next two decades would unravel opportunities for cooperation in defence and security against a precarious security environment that is unpredictable and with increased uncertainty. Policy makers in ASEAN need to take on a more coordinated and collaborative approach with relevant stakeholders, with the involvement from all levels at the public, private and community level as well as across all sectors with ASEAN in dealing with the security challenges.

2. Drivers that Lead to Sustainable Security: An ASEAN Context¹

Amþuan Yura Kasumawati binti DP Hj Adnan



In an increasingly integrated, interconnected and interdependent world, countries and the region are not free from global risks in political, security, economy and technological aspects. Today's regional security environment is increasingly uncertain and unpredictable. There are more complex trends that crosscut issues of concern. The concept of sustainable security identifies underlying drivers of insecurity, which could range from climate change, competition of resources, socio-economic marginalisation and global militarisation. In ensuring sustainable security, navigating and managing these trends is crucial where countries and the region identify opportunities, threats, and discuss possible strategies to deal with them.



2.1. Drivers of Sustainable Security

2.1.1. ASEAN Wide

Within the wider ASEAN context, drivers for sustainable security has been rooted since its formation in 1967. This could be identified through firstly, ASEAN's collective leadership and political equality. ASEAN recognises the strength in unity through diversity and have evoked the ASEAN way of consultation and consensus. With equal footing, each ASEAN member state has a say in shaping the region's future.

Secondly, ASEAN has taken a comprehensive approach to security in which it is cognizant that the three pillars of ASEAN Community in Political Security Community, Economic and Socio-Cultural are interlinked and interdependent in building the ASEAN Community. In this regard, coordinated and collaborative efforts have been undertaken in all three pillars. The cooperative feature in the ASEAN framework has built resilience, cultivated trust and increased comfort levels through various initiatives and efforts in confidence building and preventive diplomacy.

¹ This commentary was prepared for the 12th NADI Annual Meeting and NADI Retreat from 25 February to 3 March 2019, taking place in Holiday Inn Hotel, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Thirdly, ASEAN has placed importance on cohesiveness and inclusiveness at both levels within internal ASEAN to become a more people-centred and oriented community. Externally, ASEAN aims to be open, flexible and outward looking in close cooperation with its dialogue partners and friends.

2.1.2. ASEAN Political Security Community (APSC)

In the realisation of the APSC, ASEAN has underscored the importance of building the Community that is based on shared norms and rules of good conduct in inter-state relations, effective conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms and post-conflict peace building activities.

The shaping and sharing of norms developed over the years adheres to various principles. This includes non-alignment, fostering of peace-oriented attitudes of ASEAN member states, conflict resolution through non-violent means, renunciation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction and avoidance of arms race in Southeast Asia; and renunciation of the threat of the use of force. All of these are embedded in the ASEAN Charter, ASEAN Declaration, the ZOPFAN, the TAC and the SEANWFZ regimes.

2.1.3. ADMM and ADMM-Plus

From the defence aspects, establishing and reaffirming good ties between defence and military organisations are seen as important drivers of sustainable security. Looking at the defence and military platforms, ASEAN have progressed well at various levels of diplomacy and cooperative efforts in the bilateral, regional and international arenas.

ASEAN member states, through the ADMM and ADMM-Plus have made significant progress. The ADMM has become the primary driving force for regional and extra regional defence engagement and in promoting collective actions in managing shared challenges among ASEAN defence and military through development of common understanding on security issues.

DEFENSE/MILITARY DIPLOMACY & COOPERATION



Figure 1 Compiled by SHHBIDSS

Over the years, there is growing and stronger support towards the process. This is reflected in the ADMM-Plus cooperation, not only in its expanding EWGs, but also the high-level exchanges among ASEAN ministers and vice ministers with their dialogue counterparts. There is also interest from countries like the UK, France, Canada and the EU to be part or an observer of the ADMM-Plus. This in part is a recognition to the ASEAN that brings together partners for strategic dialogue that contributes to mutual trust and confidence.

The defence and military interactions in ASEAN have moved from dialogue to a more action-oriented cooperation. In the last few years, the region saw multilateral exercises done by the ADMM and the ADMM-Plus. This includes the HADR and MM Exercise in 2013, the MS and CT Exercise in 2016, the MS Exercise in 2016, the ASEAN-China Maritime Exercise in 2018 – aimed to improve cooperation, coordination and interoperability; enhance knowledge based on the sharing of best practices; and most importantly, to reduce strategic mistrust among one another.

Yet there are challenges in managing the expectations of the ADMM and ADMM-Plus specifically in an evolving security architecture. Today, ASEAN increasingly faces a delicate balance between national or domestic responsibility versus regional commitment as societies become more involved and the broader interest of other countries for ASEAN to play a more prominent role. The use of ASEAN platforms such as the ADMM-Plus, ARF and EAS to further their respective strategic interests calls for ASEAN to keep the agenda focused on the long term vision to build on the ASEAN Community.

In practical terms, issues such as HADR, Counter-Terrorism and Maritime Security are also discussed in existing multilateral processes namely the AMM, ARF and EAS as well as within ASEAN+ 3 and bilateral cooperation with individual Dialogue Partners. The ADMM and ADMM-Plus often overlap in its agenda with the ARF, the only regional security dialogue in the Asia-Pacific region. There is no clear distinction between defence and security but there is a need for synergy and clear prioritisation of efforts especially in light of constraints in resources and capabilities. The commitment towards practical cooperation particularly in planning major exercises needs careful consideration and include scenarios that will enhance civil military readiness and response.

2.2. Conclusion

The concept of sustainable security identifies underlying drivers of insecurity and places emphasis on preventive strategies to manage and resolve conflicts in addressing the future of security. This underscores the importance of resilience, early detection and fast recovery so the region remains agile and anticipatory to challenges ahead.

NADI could further contribute in defence and security discourse on strategic challenges, discussing their implications to ASEAN. This could cover developments of FoNOPs in East Asia, 'new' strategic concepts such as the Indo-Pacific Strategy of different extra-regional powers, understanding impacts of 4IR technologies and the impact of defence diplomacy towards building the APSC and the ASEAN Community as a whole.

3. Perspectives on ASEAN Defence Cooperation on Dealing with Climate Change¹

Selina Farahiyah Teo



Southeast Asia is one of the most vulnerable regions to climate change and its impacts as four of the world's countries most affected by climate changes are located in Southeast Asia, namely Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. Southeast Asia is already affected by rising sea levels, extreme weather events and heat wavesⁱ and this trend will continue as rising sea levels and weather extremes associated with global warming will continue to rise, storms will become stronger and the UN predicted increasing incidences of flooding through the year 2040 in the region.

Within the region, countries experiences different forms and levels of climate change and this paper highlights Brunei Darussalam's experiences and approaches in dealing with climate change and its impacts, and the need to further enhance ASEAN defence cooperation and coordination in building its resilience in managing and dealing with climate change.



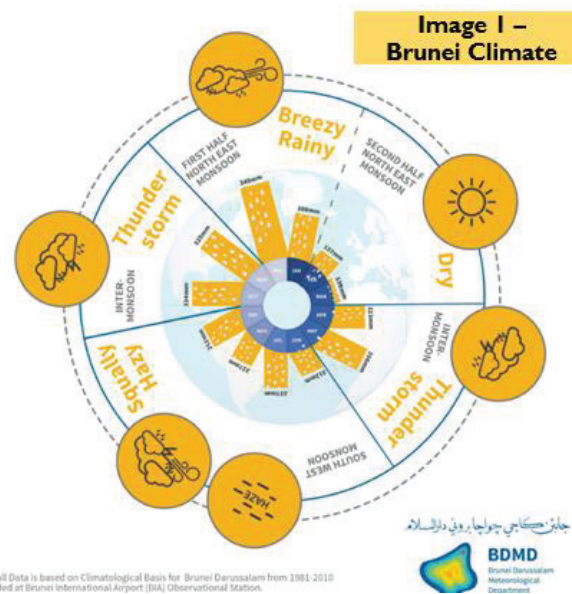
3.1. Nation's Perspectives

3.1.1. Brunei's Climate Context

Situated within the equatorial tropics, the climate of Brunei is generally hot and wet throughout the year and governed by the shifting flow of winds following the Northeast and Southwest Monsoons cycle. In the past decade, Brunei has been experiencing changing weather that are determined by many variables and interaction between nature and man-made. The infographics in Image 1 gives an overview of Brunei's climate cycle as it transition from one weather to another.

¹This commentary was prepared for the NADI Workshop on ASEAN Defence Cooperation on Dealing with Climate Changes from 22 to 25 July 2020, taking place in Ha Long, Quang Ninh, Vietnam.

With the changing weather patterns, Brunei's wet months are getting wetter as we are seeing an increasing trend of rainfall during the wet months (November to January) extended to the dry months (February to August) where the collective average rainfall is 37.2mm above climate normal. At the same time, the country also experience rise in temperature and warming by +0.3 degrees and peaks during el-Niño years; and increasing wind speed in excess of 25 knots when the climate normal is only 7 knots. With wetter and hotter months, coupled with stronger wind gust, the weather is getting unpredictable.



However, rising rainfall trends and temperature are not the only effects of climate change. Urbanisation, for one, has been considered to be the top driving factor in this era of modernisation and fast-paced culture that may increase the numbers, intensity and severity of disasters. This can be seen in the huge population displacement and economic loss in the aftermath of disasters across countries in the region. For Brunei Darussalam however, there is minimal rural-urban migration unlike in other ASEAN countries. Brunei's urbanisation is more focused on developing land area for both residential and commercial purposes across the country. The process of deforestation and construction, however, may contribute to flooding, landslides, air pollution, haze, and forest-fires, and as such, must be carefully controlled and planned carefully. On a national level, floods are the most common and biggest threat as seen below:

- In 2009, Brunei Darussalam experienced the worst flood season, during which, the National Disaster Management Centre (NDMC) received 59 calls related to landslides and 165 related to flash flood. Records show that there were abnormal intensities of rainfall recorded at 167.6mmⁱⁱ and the highest tides were experienced by the water village. Although the casualty was low at two deaths, this was the worst flood experienced and a big blow to the country due to its small size and close-knit society.

- In 2014, Brunei experienced another episode of extensive flooding during which, over 115 cases of flooding and 105 landslides were reportedⁱⁱⁱ. Consequently, the government was pushed to review its development plans to upgrade the waterways and drainage system. The successes of these plans can be seen, as most flood-prone places are no longer prone to flood except in a few low-lying and least populated areas across the country.
- In March 2019, Brunei experienced a prolonged dry period (February to April) which caused forest fires across the Brunei-Muara district for four days, with flames ravaging an area of more than 161 hectares. The Fire and Rescue Department (FRD) stated about 461 bush and forest fires were reported across the country between January and March^{iv} and due to its intensity, Brunei experienced localised hazy conditions.

3.2. Addressing Climate Change and its impacts

3.2.1. Whole-of-Nation Approach

In addressing the climate change and its impacts, the Brunei Darussalam Meteorological Department (BDMD) is responsible for the provision of meteorological and climate services. They maintain a weather forecast office that provides warnings, forecast and advisories for government and non-government agencies as well as for the general public such as agriculture, aviation, construction, fisheries and tourism, as well as safety and emergency responders. The National Disaster Management Centre (NDMC) is another important agency that has been entrusted by the government to shoulder the responsibility to manage disasters in the country. The Centre ensures the safety and well-being of the people by being responsible for all aspects of disaster management ranging from prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery through policies, strategies and practices.

The NDMC acts as a leading government agency to coordinate the multi-agency effort in any event that requires relief operation. This is where government agencies, private sectors and volunteers from NGOs cooperate and coordinate their efforts in providing assistance to the affected population. Besides that, the NDMC also initiates interaction and engagement through its various community outreach across the four districts as part of creating awareness, as well as collecting localised knowledge as part of its preventive efforts to ensure any foreseeable disasters such as failure of drainage system, uproot of trees and others that may cause floods and landslides could be avoided through early management.

3.2.2. Defence Role – Domestic and Regional

Domestically, the Royal Brunei Armed Forces (RBAF) has always served in a supporting role in the multi-agency efforts along with the Royal Brunei Police Force (RBPF), the Fire and Rescue Department as well as others, in curbing natural calamities such as floods, forest-fires and landslides. So far, the RBAF has been involved in a number of domestic natural disaster relief efforts. In 2008 and 2009, the RBAF was heavily involved in relief operations throughout the country when Brunei Darussalam experienced some of its worst floods, landslides and strong winds. In 2014, the RBAF committed manpower and assets to other flash flood incidents across the nation, and together they extended assistance to relief operations and flood victims. Drones also played an important part in providing aerial views of flood and forest-fires.

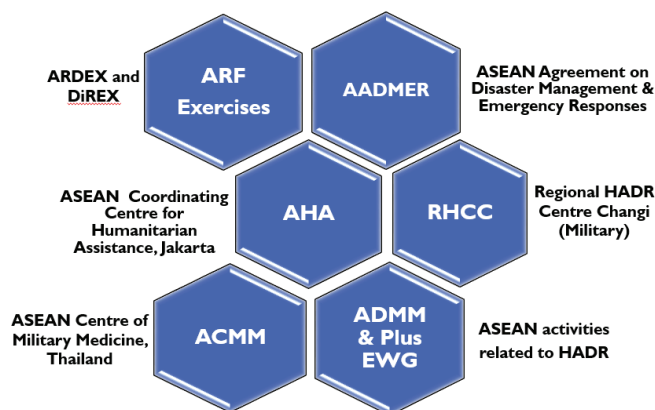
While the initial response to disasters and the primary responsibility for the protection of life, property and the environment in emergencies rests with the NDMC, the RBAF has demonstrated its adaptable nature and ability to respond to challenging and complex tasks especially at short notice when civilian resources are exhausted, unavailable or cannot be mobilised in time. This arrangement has positioned the RBAF to contribute significantly in saving lives, alleviating suffering and preventing loss of property.

3.3. Enhancing Regional Defence Cooperation

In the past decade, there has been a tremendous intensification of regional initiatives and cooperation in dealing with climate change and its impacts through better management and coordination in dealing with disasters. This was done specifically through the various mechanisms under ASEAN, including through the ADMM and ADMM-Plus where substantive discussions were done via Expert Working Groups (EWGs) as seen in Image 2.

Through the various platforms and mechanisms, there has been improvements in national disaster-response coordination and capabilities derived from the sharing of best practices among member states as well as regional cooperation, when required. Coordination between military and civilian responders has also improved.

Image 2 – Regional Cooperation in HADR



Compiled by: SHHBIDSS, Brunei Darussalam

Despite these, there is a need to further enhance and strengthen current ASEAN defence cooperation in dealing with climate change especially as ASEAN's priority remains to be centred on working together to build societal resilience and to address and mitigate the impacts of climate changes. Hence there is a need to strengthen and work on (1) achieving a more coordinated region-based HADR cooperation through the various platforms seen in Image 2; (2) ensuring continuous improvement in regional coordination when providing assistance especially civil-military cooperation; and (3) further streamlining processes between ASEAN and military mechanisms as well as among military related mechanisms.

In moving forward, these are the recommendations to consider to further enhance regional defence cooperation:

- Develop more HADR scenarios in tabletop/ field exercises to enhance civil-military cooperation.
- Workshops under ADMM-Plus EWG HADR must involve relevant stakeholders including civilian-related agencies to share knowledge and experiences as well as to improve coordination such as streamlining SOPs between existing civilian and military mechanisms.

ⁱ https://issuu.com/gpulawska/docs/handbook_for_asean_government_offic, p.16

ⁱⁱ http://www.sultanate.com/news_server/2009/24_jan_1.html

ⁱⁱⁱ http://www.ipcbee.com/vol85/rp007_ICEEB2015-C0014.pdf

^{iv} <https://thescoop.co/2019/03/22/bomba-161-hectares-of-forest-destroyed-by-fire-in-past-week/>

4. Norms and Principles for Defence and Security Cooperation¹

Nor Azriah Aziz



Since its inception in 1967, ASEAN has played a key role in the Southeast Asia region in promoting and maintaining regional stability. It has also further progressed in developing other ASEAN-led groupings, making it the leading regional body when it comes to engaging with its regional neighbours. Against the backdrop of uncertainties in the security landscape, ASEAN continues to view challenges as opportunities for cooperation, as regional stability and security benefit states as a whole. Defence cooperation is part and parcel of the effort in maintaining regional stability, yet in addressing regional security challenges, ASEAN remains wary of promoting this agenda, while preserving its respect for non-intervention and sovereignty.



4.1. Relevant Norms and Principles for Defence and Security Cooperation: The ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) Context

4.1.1. Consensus-Based Decision-Making

As the highest platform for consultation and dialogue in the defence sector, the ADMM has made great strides since its inception in 2006. From the establishment of ADMM-Plus in 2010, to the annualisation of the ADMM-Plus, with the more recent ADMM informal meetings at the sidelines of ADMM-Plus, these developments signify the importance of engaging and continued dialogue with Plus Countries. What first began with informal meetings with the United States and China, arguably two of the world's, and this region's, strategic partners, the platform has recently seen Russia and Japan pursuing similar engagements. Despite *the Guidelines to Respond to the Request for Informal Engagements or Meetings by the ADMM-Plus Countries* stipulating that only two informal meetings can be held at each ADMM and ADMM Retreat, the conduct of these four meetings at the 6th ADMM-Plus were in principle agreed by all AMS without explicit reservation.

¹ This commentary was prepared for the NADI Workshop on Strengthening Defence Diplomacy: Challenges and Prospects of ADMM from 5-8 Nov 2019, taking place in Quest Plus Conference Center, Clark Freeport Zone, The Philippines.

In addition, the ADMM-Plus is seeing proliferated demands for informal meetings coming from the Non-Plus countries, either as a new member of the ADMM-Plus or as an observer. Not only does this point out ASEAN's growing strategic value, but it also recognises the platform that the ADMM has provided in bringing together partners that would contribute to mutual confidence and trust, amongst many other benefits. Nonetheless, engagements from the Non-Plus countries should not weaken the ADMM and ADMM-Plus processes, especially in its engagement with major power countries.

Particularly, with the increasing support directed towards the ADMM and the ADMM-Plus, ASEAN has been stepping up its cooperative efforts at various levels of diplomacy and engagements. Despite these engagements, there is still a need to ensure that ASEAN centrality is maintained and that consensus still needs to be sought from all ASEAN member states during all stages of consultations. Again, the decisions made are based on consensus, as they are clearly not vetoed by one country.

Every proposal for initiatives are always first discussed beforehand amongst ASEAN Defence Senior Officials' Working Group Meeting before being brought up for adoption. The layers of consultations and discussions in ADMM greatly manifested the principle of consensus-based decision-making, which indirectly undermines the significance of cooperation substantively.

4.1.2. Continued Engagements

Australia, as ASEAN's first dialogue partner, has achieved exceptional progress with ASEAN through constant dialogue sessions and summits over the span of 45 years. Particularly, after the fruitful convening of the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit in Sydney on March 2018, Australia has undoubtedly demonstrated its unparalleled interest in the Southeast Asian region. For 2020, Australia is requesting through the chair, although this has yet to be agreed upon, to have an ASEAN-Australia informal meeting along the sidelines of the next ADMM-Plus, which indirectly lends credence to the work that ADMM is doing. Besides Australia, Canada and the European Union (EU) have also been pushing their agendas in being a part of ADMM-Plus.

4.1.3. Shared Regional Security Concerns

As a crucial component of the evolving regional security architecture, the ADMM plays a major role in addressing common security concerns in the region. The 13th ADMM taking place in Bangkok, Thailand, back in July witnessed the chair, Thailand bringing up two major issues. Under the theme of “Sustainable Security”, the issue of border management and the problem of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing were put forward. It is worthy to note that these two subjects are not necessarily placed directly under the defence sector but in a way, they require defence support. Still, the ADMM has to defer to each country’s national processes and acknowledge that the matter requires more than a defence-force-oriented approach because resources need to be drawn out from other relevant agencies and stakeholders.

4.2. Future of Defence Cooperation

ASEAN is constantly looking to providing a better platform among experts essentially to exchange views that would be of value to participating parties and stakeholders. H.E. Dato Lim Jock Hoi, the Secretary-General of ASEAN, distinctively addressed this during his recent welcoming remarks during the celebration of 52nd ASEAN Day, in which he stated that it is the role of each ASEAN member state to “render enabling environments and platforms for peoples and their ideas to grow.”

Particularly in the defence and security platform, the ASEAN Political Security Community (APSC) highlights the importance of acknowledging the shared responsibility for comprehensive security. Initiatives and activities held by both the ADMM and ADMM-Plus which are primarily geared towards supporting the APSC pillar, are built on shared norms that have developed over the years.

Non-ASEAN countries have also benefitted from, ASEAN’s open and inclusive multilateral security framework, especially through the ADMM-Plus. This led to a proliferation of Non-Plus countries requesting to be a part of ADMM-Plus, indirectly signifying how a collective approach is paramount. Despite such a welcome development, ASEAN needs to be reminded that ASEAN is at the centre of the ADMM-Plus and that ASEAN must not back down in being the primary force in driving the ADMM-Plus. Essentially, initiatives introduced by ADMM that would be expanded to the Plus countries do not necessarily have to be endorsed by the Plus countries. This is to ensure the centrality of ASEAN is maintained so as not to be bullied by, especially, major power politics.

Within the context of the ADMM-Plus itself, there is an imperative need to prioritise and reassess ADMM's seven major areas of cooperation and its EWGs that require a lot of resources. Although the expansion of EWGs reflected the growing support towards ADMM-Plus processes, those responsible for introducing initiatives within the EWGs should take a step back and check whether the initial objectives have been met or not. Such an effort is vital in ensuring outputs and benefits are maximised within ASEAN, its friends and dialogue partners.

5. Singapore as the Chairman of ASEAN: Proud Achievements¹

Nor Azriah Aziz



2018 witnessed Singapore chairing ASEAN for the fourth time, with the focus on themes of resilience and innovation. Prior to the handing over of the chair from the Philippines in 2017, the outlook on Singapore's chairmanship seemed promising and optimistic, predominantly owing to the Philippines' apathetic leadership the year before. The Southeast Asian region is of great significance as it is situated in the epicentre of geo-political, geo-economic and geo-strategic vital point. Fundamentally, not only ASEAN is observed as the most ideal multilateral organisation when engaging with the region, ASEAN also served as the primary key to bring about crucial regional stability. Singapore has been the region's mediator for the most part and is generally neutral when it comes to U.S.-China rivalry in the region.



5.1. Singapore's Chairmanship Achievements

5.1.1. The South China Sea Dispute

Much anticipation was on how Singapore, being a non-claimant, would manoeuvre the South China Sea dispute. With China maintaining its assertiveness on its claims on the South China Sea, its growth of military build-ups has been an apparent verification of its rising power. China's claims in the dispute also suggested that prospects for resolution seem unachievable and that, according to Michael Yahuda, a Professor Emeritus of International Relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science, "the most that can be attained are measures for conflict avoidance."

Hence, when the ASEAN-China Single Draft on the South China Sea Code of Conduct Negotiating Text (SDNT) was agreed upon in August 2018, this step marks a significant progress between China and ASEAN, especially the claimant states. The fact that all eleven countries could sit and agree on a single

¹Commentary 01, 2019.

draft is a good start, as alluded by Ambassador Ong Keng Yong, former Secretary-General of ASEAN, during his keynote address at the 11th East Asia Security Outlook Seminar in Brunei Darussalam.

5.1.2. The Guidelines for Air Military Encounters (GAME)

Being neutral to the dispute allows Singapore for a greater manoeuvrability on the conflict particularly in drafting the Code of Conduct (COC). Undeniably, Singapore has an edge on the dispute given that it is not a claimant state, although such was anticipated of Singapore. Talks and negotiations on a potential COC between China and ASEAN had taken place as early as late 2016, with August 2017 witnessing the completion of the COC framework. It was expected of Singapore to come through with the negotiations and to have the draft ready under its chairmanship in 2018.

It is now up to Thailand, as the next chair, to pick up this momentum. While the COC is a work in progress, Singapore has much to take pride on regional confidence building having successfully pushed the ASEAN Air Encounter Code. Formally known as the Guidelines for Air Military Encounters (GAME), it is adopted by the Southeast Asian Defence Ministers in October 2018 to manage the likelihood of unexpected encounters between ASEAN states' military aircrafts.

5.1.3. Digital Revolution

On the technological front, a true milestone for Singapore would be the launching of its flagship project, namely the ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN). In Singapore's official website for its ASEAN Chairmanship, it mentions the project as "a collaborative platform where cities from the ten ASEAN Member States (AMS) work towards the common goal of smart and sustainable urban development."



The draft for the project was formally endorsed during the first inaugural meeting of ASCN on 8 July 2018, alongside the World Cities Summit. After 2018, the ASCN will continue to meet annually to discuss the progress of each city and to look into new opportunities that will further benefit the participants of the project. The ASCN, which aims to assist ASEAN Member States (AMS) to utilise technological and digital solutions, “thereby improving our citizens’ lives across the urban-rural continuum,” as stated in the project’s concept paper. Singapore’s efforts should be applauded as this could be seen as the nation’s approach of preparing the AMS for the ‘fourth industrial revolution’, by recognising and embracing the waves of globalisation.

5.1.4. The Rohingya Crisis

Another of Singapore’s achievements that deserves merit is how it has been tackling the Rohingya crisis. ASEAN has been shying away from the issue for years, especially during the 30th ASEAN Annual Summit in 2016 where there was even no reference made on the issue. The following 31st Summit witnessed a major turning point from ASEAN whereby they have “strongly urged” Myanmar to implement the Kofi Annan Commission report’s recommendations towards realising reconciliation between the disputed parties.

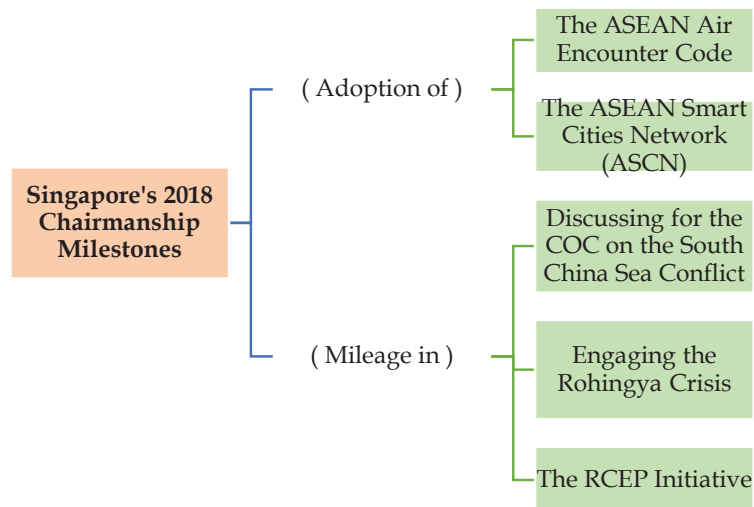
In October 2018, Foreign Ministers from ASEAN have expressed concern over the conflict, especially with the Singaporean Foreign Affairs Minister Vivian Balakrishnan asserting, “This is a man-made humanitarian disaster and something... which should not be happening in this day and age.” On 4 November 2018, Balakrishnan visited the refugee camps at Cox’s Bazar in Bangladesh. He went on the next day by meeting Myanmar’s de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi to discuss recent plans of repatriating hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees fleeing to Bangladesh back to Myanmar. Balakrishnan has further emphasised that both Singapore and ASEAN will continue to support the efforts of Myanmar and Bangladesh to address the Rohingya situation, especially when ASEAN’s reputation is at stake.

5.1.5. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)

Singapore has also put an effort on the economic dimension of the regional bloc with continuing talks on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). An economic pact led by ASEAN founded in November 2012, the RCEP is yet to be in force. The proposed free trade agreement, which looks into the ten AMS and six external partners – Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea – if realised, would be the world’s largest trading bloc, covering almost a third of the global economy. Despite the anticipation and urgency in completing the RCEP, the progress, however, remains slow for the most part.

Singapore’s particular effort to gain traction of the RCEP denotes its high dependence on economic arrangements with other nations. Donald Trump’s withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) (now renamed as the “Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific” (CPTPP)) in 2017 has catapulted the urgency to ensure the RCEP will never have to endure the same fate as that of the TPP.

5.2. Assessments



Singapore has commendably achieved its key goals as ASEAN Chair when Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong took over the lead from President Rodrigo Duterte in 2017. Most apparent is that Singapore has harnessed its niche as a leader, in terms of connectivity and digital transformation, by launching the ASEAN Smart Cities network, leaving a significant milestone of its 2018 ASEAN Chairmanship, and paving the way for the region's digitalisation as countries embrace the advent of the 4th Industrial Revolution.

Being a non-claimant to the South China Sea dispute does not mean that manoeuvring the delicate issue was any easier, and Singapore recognised this coming into the ASEAN Chairmanship. Despite the mixed opinions about the prospect of a speedy conclusion of the negotiated Code of Conduct, the agreement on the single draft South China Sea Code of Conduct Negotiating Text (SDNT) is a significant milestone in ASEAN efforts for a diplomatic approach to manage the overlapping claims, which have spanned over two decades. There is still much work ahead and it is up to Thailand now, as ASEAN Chair to keep the momentum going, in particular, to ensure that China remains engaged in the negotiation process. In this regard, Brunei Darussalam – being a champion of confidence building measures such as the ASEAN Direct Communication Infrastructure – can seize the opportunity, while capitalising from its deepening relations with China, to aim for an early conclusion of the Code of Conduct to happen during its Chairmanship in 2021.

In what would become the world's biggest trade pact, it is expected that the conclusion of the RCEP will remain elusive with a number of missed deadlines; the most recent being the 2018 year-end deadline. Although notable progress in negotiation was made during the Singapore Chairmanship, concerns now linger about whether the momentum of negotiation can be maintained towards the realisation of its new target conclusion timeframe, which is now set for end of 2019. At this stage, the more prolonged the negotiation, prospects of withdrawals from the talks (much like the US withdrawal from the TPP) cannot be ruled out.

The discussion on the Rohingya issue at the Singapore ASEAN Summit brought a significant bearing on ASEAN's image and credibility as a regional grouping, given that it has shied away from openly addressing the issue in previous ASEAN Summits. This is a promising step that lays out a path for ASEAN, and Thailand as the next Chair must begin working out on a more visible regional response to the humanitarian crisis, which will at the same time serve to appease the growing disquiet about ASEAN's perceived inaction on the matter.

The region is at a critical juncture in which the challenges in managing and balancing big power rivalries in the region are magnified, making the role of ASEAN and its centrality more important than ever. Thus, the huge task ahead for consecutive ASEAN Chairmen, including Brunei Darussalam in 2021, is in ensuring the relevance of ASEAN and maintaining its centrality on regional concerns.



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