



Quo Vadis ASEAN Security Amidst the United States-China Rivalry in the Southeast Asia Region

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Abstract

Tensions between the United States and China intensify globally, particularly in Southeast Asia. Therefore, ASEAN countries should re-assess the ties between these two great powers, both within the ASEAN region and with external counterparts. Given the strategic value of the region, Southeast Asia has become the venue for strategic competition between the United States and China over the past decade. Therefore, rowing the ASEAN's boat among the two gigantic reefs in the ocean requires ASEAN resilience as a Community to overcome the current and future challenges. Potential conflicts intra-ASEAN could be entry points for major powers to weaken ASEAN's unity. The study aims to analyze the most suitable approach for ASEAN regionally to deal with the challenges and to meet the expectations for a sustainable ASEAN Community and assess whether ASEAN's orientation in maintaining neutrality against major powers remains suitable to serve the strategic interests of the member states in the current environment. In this regard, a qualitative method and concepts of Amalgamated Security Community and Pluralistic Security Community are applied to analyze the study. The results of the study show realistic calculation can never be overlooked to preserve sustainable common strategic interests for the member states, which include economic growth on the one hand, and stable regional peace on the other hand. In this regard, "a manageable United States-China rivalry" by a solid ASEAN Pluralistic Security Community in the region guarantees more sustainability of national strategic interests for its member states and ASEAN.

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INTRODUCTION

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, also known as ASEAN, was established on August 8, 1967, in Bangkok by its five original members: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand (Katsumata, 2009). It was stated that ASEAN's goals and purposes were mainly about cooperation in the economic, social, cultural, technical, educational, and other related subjects to promote regional security, peace, and stability by maintaining respect for justice, the rule of law, and compliance with the principles of the United Nations Charter (ASEAN, 2022). These aims and purposes also specify that ASEAN will be open for participation of all states in the Southeast Asian region which subscribes to ASEAN goals, principles, and purposes. Furthermore, ASEAN declared itself an association that symbolizes "the collective will of the nations of Southeast Asia to bind themselves together in friendship and cooperation and, through joint efforts and sacrifices, secure for their peoples and for posterity the blessings of peace, freedom and prosperity" to carry on the idea of its founding fathers (ASEAN, 2022). The establishment of ASEAN as a community then brought the relations of countries in the region to a higher level of cooperation, especially after the formation of the ASEAN Charter in 2008.

The ASEAN Charter then transformed ASEAN from a loose association into an organization's legal background that is based on clearly defined rules that bind its member countries in implementing various agreements that have been mutually agreed upon. In addition, the Charter also emphasizes that ASEAN must be a people-oriented organization (Acharya, 2014). Sharing similar history, common destiny, and geographical location, ASEAN has become one of the most successful organizations in the region among developing countries. Initially, the association was established in response to the strong desire of the ASEAN founding fathers to establish a peaceful, secure, and prosperous Southeast Asia region. Particularly in the 1960s, Southeast Asia was a conflict-prone region. There was a time when the battle of ideological influence of the big major powers, as well as conflicts between countries in the region, brought about instability. This began with the cold war between the United States and the Soviet Union (USSR), which had a broader impact on security stability for countries in the Southeast Asia region. Currently, ASEAN has grown to include 10 member countries, namely Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. However, it was not only then when the association was formed that the global and regional conditions affected ASEAN. To this day, global and regional conditions still play a significant role in ASEAN's dynamics. Southeast Asian countries have always been cautious of the world's big powers offering promises of security in return for ASEAN alliance and loyalty. When ASEAN was established, the struggle for influence between the United States and USSR was one of the factors that influence conditions in the region. In present days, the tensions between the United States and China become one of the dominant external factors that put ASEAN's ability to thrive to the test. To address this issue, the organization must find a way to encourage practical and concrete cooperation in its attempt to build regional order and establish common norms and standards, keep confrontations to a minimum, and raise awareness

to promote cooperation in the region with a future-oriented perspective, while also actively promoting cooperation in both bilateral as well as multilateral arena.

The fragmented economies of Southeast Asia, with each country chasing its very own limited objectives and dispersing its meager resources in the interrelating or even conflicting endeavors of each state, carry the seeds of weakness and incapacity to grow further of each country. Therefore, ASEAN is expected to assemble the yet untapped potential of the rich region through a more substantial collective action to bring prosperity to the region and maintain regional stability and security. The study aims to analyze the most suitable approach for ASEAN regionally to deal with the challenges and to meet the expectations for a sustainable ASEAN Community and assess whether ASEAN's orientation in maintaining neutrality against major powers remains suitable to serve the strategic interests of the member states in the current environment.

METHODS

To achieve the purpose of this research, qualitative research in a descriptive manner is employed. Qualitative research is an examination process to comprehend social or human problems, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words (Creswell, 2014). It is a research methodology to explore and comprehend the meaning of individuals or groups attributed to a social problem. This method is primarily exploratory and chosen to discover trends in thoughts, opinions, and events. This method is also used to dive deeper into the problem. Literature study is the main source of data to draw a conclusion and answer the question provided in this research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Challenges for ASEAN as a Security Community

After the cold war, the bipolar characteristics of the world's politics that had previously been the focus of international relations have shifted to multipolar characteristics. It was no longer focusing on the polarity of the world's power (Acharya & Goh, 2007). Although the world's attention is also changing by the increasing portion of the involvement of non-state actors in various international issues, the emphasis on the importance of security and issues can never be overlooked by global and regional institutions. Hence, it always brings about a set of challenges for regional organizations including ASEAN. Furthermore, regionalism in ASEAN has experienced many ups and downs and shows an interesting trend for the development of international relations.

The establishment of ASEAN was marked with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration by representatives of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of its member countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. The signing resulted in the ASEAN Declaration which obliges signatory countries to cooperate in the framework of economic, and social progress, cultural development, and the promotion of regional peace and stability. Regionalism in Southeast Asia developed rapidly, followed by the participation of Brunei Darussalam on January 7, 1984. The membership of ASEAN has since been growing. The association was later followed by Vietnam on July 28, 1995, and then Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Cambodia on July 23, 1997, and December

16, 1998, respectively. The ASEAN declaration also stated that the main purpose of ASEAN as an organization is regionalism in Southeast Asia (The ASEAN Secretariat, 2015). The purpose was established to fast-track economic growth, social progress, and cultural development in the Southeast Asian region. It is done through joint efforts in the spirit of equality and partnership to strengthen the foundations of a prosperous and peaceful society of Southeast Asian nations (Severino, 2006). Moreover, ASEAN has a goal to improve regional peace and stability that upholds justice and the rule of law in the interaction between countries in the region and adheres to the principles of the United Nations (UN) Charter (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2008). It is worth noting that ASEAN should keep on trying to improve approachable relations and mutually beneficial dialogue, cooperation, and collaborations with other countries and the sub-regional, regional, and international world. Since the association was founded in Bangkok on August 8, 1967, until the present day, the development of security dynamics in the Southeast Asian region has shown an interesting trend.

The improvement of a new order for security in the Asian region, within the existence of ASEAN acts as a closed regional organization, is then carried out by a statement that all countries in the Southeast Asian region are a nuclear weapons-free area. This was done through the Declaration on a Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality or ZOPFAN in 1971 (Jetschke, 2011). This was then followed by the signing of the Southeast Asian Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation as the establishment of the basic principles of interactions between countries on February 24, 1976, in this region. The rejection of the threat or use of weapons, nonviolent settlement of problems, do not interfere in the domestic problems of each country (non-interference), and 'effective cooperation' was also included in this treaty. Twenty-one non-ASEAN-member states organizations also agreed to the Treaty. This was considered ASEAN's initial contribution to regional security and created a stable environment as the main element for development. However, there are several remaining serious problems, such as the lack of capacity and political will, scarcity of resources, and the principle of non-interference often standing in the way of more effective regional security governance (Lehmann & Steinhilber, 2006).

Analyzing ASEAN as a Security Community

ASEAN defines itself as one of the regional organizations which are close, but then further integrates itself into a security community. Therefore, there are several things that one needs to comprehend when it comes to ASEAN. First, according to (Deutsch, 2016), the security community concept is divided into two main types, the amalgamated security community, and the pluralistic security community. The amalgamated security community is simply described as two or more independent states forming a single government or regime in common, meanwhile, the pluralistic security community are retaining the legal independence of separate governments (Deutsch, 2016). Then ASEAN became a consensus among its members that the integration of ASEAN into the ASEAN Community was an integration that was pluralistic, not amalgamated as characterized by the formal integration of two or more sovereign states under one roof of governance.

ASEAN member states remain independent in their national governance. It will bring about impacts on ASEAN's actions in international competition with major powers in the region, particularly with the United States, China, and Russia. Furthermore, ASEAN is seen as an amalgamated community when there is a joint agreement regarding ASEAN actions, which is translated into the agreement of one ASEAN Outlook in Indo-Pacific. However, it creates a dilemma when ASEAN had to agree upon one stance to address the issue of the rise of China which uses the instrument of the One Belt One Road policy to expand its influence in Asia.

The last, and arguably the most important, issue that ASEAN must address is to solve the problem of geopolitical and geo-economic rivalry in the region. To manage the said problem, ASEAN member states should bring all the alternative strategies into a tight comprehensive regulation that allows all possible measures at bilateral or multilateral levels by also considering sovereignty. In addition, those strategies should also not overlap with national legislation where each state has higher authority over any other regime or security cooperation mechanism. Moreover, the common problems that occurred are the different approaches chosen by member states and security cooperation mechanisms in dealing with rivalries in the Asia Pacific region. This then compromises the level of effectiveness of ASEAN's response to the issue. To strengthen its position in the region, ASEAN must keep abreast with reality and keep in mind that following the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, the bilateral relationship between countries often experiences ups and downs. The downfall of the Soviet Union and the end of bipolarity showed a massive shift in power. The shift in paradigm, particularly in Asia-Pacific, has turned the United States into the regional hegemon that soon put its domination in many forms of interstate interaction. However, on the other side of the spectrum, China came as a new emerging power that slowly builds its power to be in an equal place with the United States while at the same time preparing itself if the transition of power happens (Daly, 2015). ASEAN, as one of the security communities, must understand that both major powers expect ASEAN to not turn itself into an amalgamated security community. By doing so, ASEAN will have more flexibility in taking certain foreign policies.

When ASEAN Security Community (ASC) was established through the agreement at the 9th ASEAN Summit in Bali which was held on October 7-8, 2003, the Bali Concord II agreement was agreed upon. In Bali Concord II, the head of states of the ASEAN member states declared that all member states refuse to interfere in the internal affairs of each ASEAN member state and refuse to make threats or use violence in the process of solving problems faced by ASEAN member states (Smith, 2004). As stated in ASEAN declaration, the association agreed on introducing ASEAN Community. The community is supported by three key pillars of cooperation: politics and security, economy, and social culture. The three pillars are interrelated each other to achieve closer integration and mutual advantage both among member countries and between communities to promote peace, security stability, development, and prosperity of the region (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2008). ASC is the only form of joint agreement among states in ASEAN which also places a great weight on ASEAN cooperation after the

Cold War. This is not only limited to the developing issues but also shifts to efforts to accelerate the said integration. Bali Concord II reflects the desire of ASEAN member states to be able to have their integration more quickly, something that ASEAN has long desired as it was based on Bangkok Declaration in 1967.

ASC is the entry point for ASEAN member states to reach their full integration, since security matters were one of the high politic issues, it needs strong commitment for ASEAN member states to be fully integrated as one region. ASEAN is an international organization at the regional level in Southeast Asia that carries different interests in the Indo-Pacific region. In addition to the member states in Southeast Asia, the two major powers also share their different interests and policies in the Indo-Pacific region. The United States applies its foreign policy based on a free and open Indo-Pacific strategy, while on the contrary, China has its Chinese dream and currently working on the project of the Belt and Road Initiative in the Indo-Pacific region. National interest is crucial to a state as was stated by Lord Palmerston's speech to the House of Commons on 1.03.1848 "We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests are our duty to follow (Kuznar & Menkes, 2017). Therefore, it is wiser to prepare for every possibility when it comes to achieving one state's interest.

The Impact of the United States and China's Dynamics on ASEAN

Broadly speaking, the security dynamics in Southeast Asia are not only being shaped by global and Asia-Pacific, but also domestic trends. Southeast Asia will have to put more effort to maintain its regional autonomy as global powers erode the states' boundaries between Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia. Not only that but the significance of the historic meeting cannot also be ignored. The meeting expressly signaled the turn towards 8 multilateralism in ASEAN's approach to managing regional security (Caballero-Anthony, 2005). Furthermore, there was a paradox between domestic and regional approaches. ASC has obtained a fundamental role in peace and security matters over the past decade with several promising regional approaches which have developed into a security policy. ASC then has currently taken on new mandates such as reducing prejudices between countries in a region by confidence-building measures, managing an unresolved conflict, and ensuring peace and stability in the region from non-traditional threats.

ASEAN moves toward several programs in the ASEAN Security Cooperation discourse even while security areas are sensitive issues even for Southeast Asian states, as the member states agreed to integrate themselves into a community. This problem becomes important because the non-traditional issue has its impact on the domestic area of a state and gives influence the regional area. Moreover, one can observe that ASEAN has been attempting to strengthen and widen its regional security cooperation uniquely and differently. Unique in terms of its conflicting ideas with the non-interference norm. It is however different in terms of ASEAN member states approach to building their defense and security cooperation. When examining political practice, several serious problems cannot be ignored. Notwithstanding the positive aspects,

particularly in the developing countries regional organizations such as ASEAN, precarious challenges remain, such as the lack of competence and political will, lack of resources, and the principle of non-interference which frequently still stands in the way of more effective regional security governance (Lehmann & Steinhilber, 2006). Within the context of the ASEAN Security Cooperation, existing principles and norms adopted by ASEAN are also implemented in several patterns of security cooperation. They combine and compete with the external powers and individuality of the Southeast Asian states and multilateral efforts with ASEAN as its center (The Habibie Center, 2016).

In the region, the formation of the ASEAN Community is facing the ever-changing balance of power in the Asia Pacific. China and India's maneuvers with their policies to pursue their national interests in the region have brought about a distinct vision of the regional order. Another obstacle for ASEAN is the persistence of intra-ASEAN territorial conflicts such as the territorial dispute in the South China Sea, which triggers the programs of military transformations commenced by ASEAN states and the resulting prospects for an intra-ASEAN arms race. This condition has brought about a certain level of uncertainty and conflict caused by the demands for domestic political alteration. However, the dangers that are posed by the non-traditional security threats such as terrorism, human trafficking, and illegal fishing, as well as other maritime issues also further generate a particular circumstance for the ASEAN member states to initiate an in-depth dialogue concerning building an advanced political-security community. Despite all the issues mentioned above, ASEAN still must address the paradox in the domestic and regional approaches with the norms, identity, security, and interests of each member state remaining an issue for ASEAN internally. Thus, within the context of ASEAN Security Cooperation, countries in the region must enhance their participation to achieve the concept of peace and stability at the domestic and regional level through the "ASEAN Way".

In consideration of the situation, it becomes important to foster a culture of cooperation and foster practical and concrete cooperation to build a regional order. It also has to be done by creating common norms and standards, and in the neighboring countries and regions, to eliminate the sense of confrontation and prejudice. They are done to nurture a cooperative manner with a future-oriented perspective and actively promote cooperation in the bilateral and multilateral arena. ASEAN must have a common belief that the accomplishment of cooperative security hinges upon several factors. Above all else, it also requires the common belief that ASEAN member states should share a common future and that cooperation offers the best alternative means of accomplishing security. Increasing the commitment to ASEAN Security Cooperation is part of the biggest challenges for the ASEAN member states, which undoubtedly will lead to a better condition to manage tension with major powers and threats in the region. Note that the majority of Southeast Asian states welcome a stronger regional presence for the United States. But this re-orientation towards the United States should be tempered by the expectation that, over the medium-term, most of Southeast Asia will continue to seek an even-handed "hedging" concerning both the US and China's

influence. This is intended to maximize their strategic autonomy during an uncertain period of intensified great power competition.

China's presence in the region is considered an emerging power. As a geopolitical countermeasure, the United States (the U.S.) is building up its military strength and then seeking allies and partners in the strategic system or Indo-Pacific region, which they have created jointly. However, while Beijing can point to many successes in Southeast Asia, it will continue to face many challenges in achieving greater authority and influence among its nearest neighbors, including in Southeast Asia. China struggles with balancing its aspirations for regional influence against growing concerns as to its coerciveness in pursuing its interests, especially in the South China Sea. Therefore, it is an American interest and imperative to deepen and sustain the U.S. strategic engagement in the region, all the more so as China continues to grow in military, economic, and diplomatic strength. Given the current dynamics, careful attention to the concerns and priorities of ASEAN will be required, including in balancing their relations with China.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is very unlikely that ASEAN, as a regional institution, will dispose of its position of neutrality nor its policy of non-interference in its member states' internal affairs. ASEAN remains skeptical about a particular stress on ideological values as it is not a significant factor when it comes to the policy regarding international relations matters of its member states. The security trends in Southeast Asia are formed not only by global and Asia-Pacific developments but also by domestic developments. Southeast Asia will have to work harder to maintain its regional autonomy as global forces erode the boundaries between Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia. Also, the significance of the historic meeting cannot be ignored. The meeting expressly signaled the turn towards multilateralism in ASEAN's approach to managing regional security. However, when examining the matter from the perspective of political practice, there are some serious problems, such as the lack of capacity, political will, scarcity of resources, and the principle of non-interference. They often stand in the way of more effective regional security governance. ASEAN also must share a common belief that the success of cooperative security hinges upon several factors and, above all else, it requires the belief that the member states of ASEAN member share a common future and that cooperation offers the best alternative means of achieving security.

Strengthening the commitment to any ASC is part of the biggest challenges for the ASEAN countries, and this will undoubtedly lead to better conditions for ASEAN to tackle non-traditional threats in a region. To strengthen ASEAN's efforts to secure its position in the region, the association must stay abreast with the reality and keep in mind that after the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, the bilateral relations between the two major countries in the region often experience ups and downs from time to time. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of bipolarity showed a massive shift of power as well as the shifting of paradigm, particularly in Asia-Pacific, the growing impact of China and the interests of the United States have brought about many challenges for ASEAN. ASEAN, as

one of the security communities, must understand that both major powers expect ASEAN to not turn itself into an amalgamated security community. It is also wiser to prepare for every possibility when it comes to achieving one state's interest. By doing so, ASEAN will have more flexibility in taking certain foreign policies and gain maximum impact on its effort to fulfill its national interest and maintain stability in the region.

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