

Probing the Interstices between Regional, National and Domestic Levels of Security in Southeast Asia

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Introduction

The conceptualization of security in Southeast Asia is a by-product of the historically conditioned experience of the states in the region and the people who populate them. It is framed in the context of post-colonial states seeking to consolidate power and the exercise of its sovereign authority over its territory, which, more often than not, is contested by neighboring states as well as groups within that same territory. The result is a regional approach to security that emphasizes a common set of normative aspirations embodied through a regional association but operationalized by each individual state according to their capabilities and comfort levels. It is an approach that gives as much importance to addressing economic and socio-cultural vulnerabilities as it does political and military ones. It creates a dynamic of security that emphasizes the well-being and welfare of *people* in the region but which at the same time very curiously strengthens state power. It holds to the need to intensify cooperation and coordination among regional states even as there is a continued preference for maintaining the inviolability of state sovereignty. Consequently, security cooperation in the region is conducted with a decided lack of importance attached to enhancing the level of institutionalization.

This paper seeks to illustrate how this framing of security continues to influence the security dynamic in the region despite major changes in the domestic political or economic situation of a number of the constituent states, as well as in the regional environment. It argues as well that the success of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a regional organization has been a key factor in the acceptance of and eventual promulgation of the way security is framed by its member-states beyond the Southeast Asian region. Finally, even as the security framework of the region is fundamentally a state-centric and –oriented one, it provides the conceptual flexibility in addressing emerging security concerns in the region at both the national and regional levels.

ASEAN and Comprehensive Security

The vision of a regional order that has become associated with Southeast Asia is closely linked with the predominant concept of security in the region. Formally embedded in its new Charter is the commitment made by the member-states of ASEAN to comprehensive security. This has been a continuing commitment since the inception of the Association in 1967, and it is a concept that has seen many iterations in several ASEAN documents. Briefly, comprehensive security includes the following characteristics:

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- Security of all the fundamental needs and vital interests of man, society, and state, be they political, social, economic, cultural, environmental, personal or physical in nature. This will result in national resilience and national security.
- Mutuality and interdependence of all dimensions of security.
- Encompass both the domestic and external environment.

Among ASEAN members, at least three states—Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore—have developed their own versions of comprehensive security. Indonesia's notion of comprehensive security has been expressed in the idea of *Ketahanan Nasional* (national resilience) which became its national security doctrine as far back as during the New Order regime. In its promulgation, comprehensive security was “a dynamic condition of will-power, determination and firmness with the ability to develop national strength to face and overcome all manner of threats internal and external, direct or indirect that may endanger the Indonesian identity and the total way of life of the nation and its people.”³ The means through which resilience was to be attained was through a multi-pronged approach covering “ideological, political, economic, political, socio-cultural, and security-cum-defence policies” with particular attention given to economic development.⁴ Malaysia's concept was very much similar to Indonesia's. Although the first articulation of this concept was only in 1984 in a speech entitled “Malaysia's Doctrine of Comprehensive Security” given by former Deputy Prime Minister Musa Hitam, the same ideas buttressed the need to have “a sound, secure and strong Malaysia”⁵. This “kind” of security could only be attained through a multi-dimensional approach “traversing political, socio-cultural, psychological and economic dimensions”.⁶ Singapore, on the other hand, has pursued a comprehensive approach to its security through the concept of “Total Defence” which covers five constituent elements: “Psychological, social, economic, civil and military defence”.⁷ Similar themes are also found in the security policies of Brunei, the Philippines and Thailand.

Comprehensive security therefore became the organising security concept in the region. As noted by Alagappa, regardless of the labels and the various interpretations of the term, comprehensive security implied that security “goes beyond (but does not exclude) the military to embrace the political, economic and socio-cultural dimensions”.⁸ If, however, security is to be regarded in a comprehensive manner, the approaches to attain security must necessarily also have to be comprehensive. These two were not mutually exclusive. To be sure, the approaches were not simply confined or limited to military security. Concomitant with the strong non-military orientation was also the emphasis on regime stability or political survival critical to national and regional resilience, as well as the importance of promoting regional economic cooperation and the building of ties with like and non-like minded states by fostering trust and confidence-building through institutionalised habits of dialogue.

³ For an excellent account of the ASEAN's concept of comprehensive security, see Muthiah Alagappa, “Comprehensive Security: Interpretations in ASEAN Countries”, Research Paper and Policy Studies, No. 26, Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, n.d.

⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 60-61.

⁵ Noordin Sopiee, “Malaysia's Doctrine of Comprehensive Security”, *Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 259-65.

⁶ Muthiah Alagappa, “Comprehensive Security”, p. 67.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

⁸ Muthiah Alagappa, *Asian Security Practices: Material and Ideational Influences*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 624.

The emphasis on economic development for national security and as a crucial element for national/regional resilience cannot be understated. As noted above, the importance of economic development was highlighted in the Bangkok Declaration. It is not therefore surprising that many security analysts working on ASEAN have consistently cited economic development as an essential approach to regional security. In fact, the evolving notions of regional security defined within the rubrics of comprehensive security, cooperative security and human security have always included economic development as a crucial factor in the way security is conceptualised in Asia.⁹

But while national and regional resilience were paramount, engaging major powers and building ties with potential enemies through confidence building measures (CBMs) were also considered critical for regional security. This was an integral in ASEAN's vision of a regional order and reflected in ASEAN's 1971 Declaration of the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN). Conscious of the dynamics of great power competition during the early years of its inception, ASEAN's ZOPFAN committed its members to non-participation and impartiality in conflicts between other states, especially extra-regional states. It also called on external powers not to interfere in the domestic and regional affairs of the neutral states."¹⁰ This was articulated most explicitly in the statement "...the right of every state, large or small, to lead its national existence free from outside interference in its internal affairs..."¹¹

Indeed, a close look at ZOPFAN would reveal that while the term "neutrality" was used in the document, this was more a declaration of intent given the presence during that time of foreign military bases in the Philippines and Thailand. Although aspirational, ZOPFAN nonetheless makes no allowance to the idea that the great powers have any effective role to play in the region. Instead, it strongly implies that the great powers should respect the sovereignty of ASEAN states. Thus, ZOPFAN was essentially about reducing the role of the great powers in the region, regional autonomy and "regional solutions for regional problems".

From the above, it comes as no surprise that the security approach taken by the member-states of ASEAN when compared with the dominant security approaches were often regarded as aberrations. ASEAN took a different path in crafting its regional security approaches by eschewing any form of defence arrangement in the region.¹² Thus, instead of adopting the conventional strategies of deterrence, power-balancing and alliance building, ASEAN's security approaches are remarkably low-key, in the sense that they emphasise the cultivation of habits of dialogue, observance of regional norms, and building of informal institutions to support these process-oriented approaches to preventing regional conflicts and maintaining regional security.

⁹ Muthiah Alagappa, op.cit. See also Amitav Acharya, "Human Security: What Kind for the Asia-Pacific" and Mely Caballero-Anthony, "Human Security in the Asia-Pacific: Current Trends and Prospects", in *The Human Face of Security: Asia-Pacific Perspectives*, David Dickens (ed.) Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence, No. 144, Canberra: Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, 2002.

¹⁰ For a more intensive discussion of this concept, see Heiner Hanggi, *ASEAN and the ZOPFAN Concept*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1991, particularly p. 51.

¹¹ See the *Kuala Lumpur Document on the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality*, 27 November 1971.

¹² ASEAN as a regional grouping has however allowed member states like the Philippines and Thailand to continue with their own bilateral defence arrangements with the United States which existed even before ASEAN was established in 1967.

The building of norms had been enshrined in the ASEAN Way, and the adoption of the 1976 TAC which codified the principles of sovereignty, non-interference, peaceful settlement of disputes, renunciation of threat or use of force, and effective cooperation among members.

It should be noted, however, that aside from the “soft”, informal approaches to regional security, ASEAN does have a thick web of security arrangements, mostly bilateral with some expanded to include other regional members. The most common bilateral agreements are between neighbouring states. These would include Joint Border Commissions between Malaysia and Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, and Thailand and Myanmar. Bilateral security arrangements can be in highly specialised areas such as irregular immigration or smuggling. There are also joint bilateral military training arrangements called “defence spider web” which began as early as in the 1970s involving intensive programmes of joint exercises, participation in each others’ training programmes and provision of training facilities to one another.¹³

These exercises have also included some form of intelligence sharing and joint exercises especially focused on maritime and air-space concerns. For example:¹⁴

- Malaysia and the Philippines which concluded a bilateral defence cooperation agreement in 1994, have since expanded their joint army exercises to include navy and air force. Apart from joint military exercises, there are also exchanges of military information, and provision for possible use of each other’s military facilities for maintenance and repair.
- Indonesia and Malaysia have also deepened its bilateral defence cooperation, including regular military exercises and frequent high-level military exchanges and visits.
- Indonesia and Singapore have included in their joint training exercises the Air Combat Manoeuvring Ranger (ACMR) since 1994.
- Thailand and Singapore have joint air forces training arrangements in the Philippines, and Singapore has also had access to excellent training facilities in Brunei.
- Thailand and Vietnam have joint maritime patrol to monitor smuggling and other illegal activities in the Gulf of Thailand.
- Similarly, Malaysian-Thai air exercises have been extended to patrol maritime areas.¹⁵

The bilateral “defence spider web” has provided solid bases for intra-regional security cooperation. Among these are: Quadrilateral cooperation among the countries in the Golden Triangle comprising Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and China, which sets out joint efforts in the control of chemicals and precursors used in manufacturing drugs, narcotic crop substitution, law enforcement cooperation and training; and cooperation among ASEAN Chiefs of Police (ASEANPOL) which has, since 1981, become a regional body to fight transnational crime, including terrorism. In the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attack in the United States,

¹³ Malcolm Chalmers, *Confidence-Building in Southeast Asia*, Bradford Arms Register Studies, No. 6, Bradford, United Kingdom: Redwood Books, Trowbridge, Wiltshire, 1996, pp. 28-31. See also Amitav Acharya, *A New Regional Order in Southeast Asia: ASEAN in the Post Cold War Era*, Adelphi Paper 279, London: International Institute of Strategic Studies, 1993.

¹⁴Hisato Toyama, “Extra-Regional Military Cooperation in Southeast Asian Nations”. Available at <<http://www.drc-jpn.org/AR-5E/toyama-e.htm>>.

¹⁵Hisato Toyama, “Extra-Regional Military Cooperation in Southeast Asian Nations”. Available at <<http://www.drc-jpn.org/AR-5E/toyama-e.htm>>.

ASEAN members stepped up cooperation in fighting terrorism with the 2001 ASEAN Declaration on Joint Action to Fight Terrorism as one of its key initiatives.

In sum, through a number of declarations, agreements and treaties, ASEAN has provided a comprehensive framework for managing inter-state relations and promoting closer political and security cooperation. The relative peace that has prevailed in Southeast Asia over the last 40 years has earned ASEAN the reputation as one of the more successful regional security organisations in the world. It has also been referred to as a *de facto* security community in the Deutschian sense, which defines security community as: “A group that has become integrated, where integration is defined as the attainment of a sense of community, accompanied by formal or informal institutions or practices, sufficiently strong and widespread to assure peaceful change among members of a group with ‘reasonable’ certainty over a ‘long’ period of time.”¹⁶

ASEAN’s success, however, was severely tested in the mid-1990s as the region went through a series of crises quite different from those that occurred at the time of ASEAN’s inception. The conservative path chosen by ASEAN of maintaining good neighbourly relations through norm-building was woefully inadequate to respond to trans-border problems such as 1997-98 financial meltdowns, environmental disasters, humanitarian crises (East Timor in 1999), terrorism and highly infectious epidemics. Clearly, the kinds of crises and challenges that confronted the region required much more than what a loosely-structured organisation could provide. As the region found itself beset with a number of crises, ASEAN was roundly criticised for being ineffective and irrelevant. Many analysts decried the prevalence of regional norms which were seen as obstructive to effective regional action. At its worst time, ASEAN was also dismissed by its critics as a sunset organisation.¹⁷

More importantly, the security dynamics in Asia present a more complex picture of the kind of regional order within which these security institutions operate. The response of regional states to their security environment has been and will be largely shaped by their ability to construct effective multilateral institutions for cooperation and/or integration. Over the years since the post-Cold War era and the turn to multilateralism in Asia, the assessment of security institutions has been mixed. Security analysts with a realist lens tend to downplay the importance of institutions and argue that the overlay of balance of power politics lead states to either “initiate or manipulate institutions”.¹⁸ On the other hand, those who come from a liberal institutionalist and constructivist perspective have argued that security institutions in Asia—particularly ASEAN and the ARF—have succeeded in putting in place a set of norms, albeit rudimentary, that has defined inter-state conduct in the region and has to a large extent shaped state behaviour for the better. These broad norms include: Respect for the principles of sovereignty and non-

¹⁶ Karl Deutsch, “Security Communities”, in James Rosenau (ed.) *International Politics and Foreign Policy*, New York: Free Press, 1961.

¹⁷ See for example, Jurgen Ruland, “ASEAN and the Asian Crisis: Theoretical Implications and Practical Consequences for Southeast Asian Regionalism”, *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 421-51; Jeannie Henderson, *Reassessing ASEAN*, Adelphi Paper 323 (London: Oxford University Press for IISS, 1999); John Garofano, “Flexibility or Irrelevance: Ways Forward for the ARF”, *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 21 No. 1 (April 1999).

¹⁸ For a more recent, comprehensive debate on the merits of multilateralism in Asia, see Michael J. Green and Bates Gill (eds.) *Cooperation, Competition, and the Search for Community: Asia’s New Multilateralism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

interference, prohibition of the use of force, and commitment to pacific settlement of disputes. These legal-rational norms are encapsulated in the 1976 ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) of which most states that participate in one way or other to multilateral security cooperation are signatories to the Treaty. Apart from these legal-rational norms are also the so-called social-cultural norms, reputed to be particular to Southeast Asia and are oftentimes referred to as “the ASEAN way”.¹⁹ They focus on the processes of consultation and consensus-building, non-confrontation, stressing informality and organisational minimalism, and inclusiveness. The normative framework defined by the TAC and the elements of the ASEAN Way were later on adopted as the guiding operating procedures for the ARF.

ASEAN and Regional Security Cooperation

Using ASEAN as a case study for regional security institution may raise questions with regard to its classification as a security institution. After all, the 1967 Bangkok Declaration – the political document that announced the formation of ASEAN—had declared that its objectives were “to accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region...”²⁰ However, what is often missed is the other equally important objective of ASEAN (also cited in the Bangkok Declaration) which was “to promote regional peace and stability...”

In fact, many of the earlier studies on ASEAN had highlighted the main motivation behind the establishment of a regional association for Southeast Asia. In a regional milieu once characterised by intra-mural dispute, regional reconciliation was ASEAN’s *raison d’être*.²¹ Forming ASEAN had allowed member states to have a regional framework for building a stable structure of relations to contain and manage intra-mural tensions. These bilateral tensions included the conflict between Malaysia and Indonesia over the formation of the Federation of Malaysia and resulted in the *Konfrontasi* in 1963, and the conflict between Malaysia and the Philippines that disputed the territory of Sabah.²² To ASEAN’s founding members, regional reconciliation was essential to attain regional security order. But undergirding a stable regional order was also the shared understanding of the need to guarantee the national security of respective member states. To this end, member states had to build their own (national) resilience by ensuring their national security and which would in turn result in the building of

¹⁹For examples on several works that explain the “ASEAN Way”, see Hong Anh Tuan, “ASEAN Dispute Management: Implication for Vietnam and An Expanded ASEAN”, *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol. 18, no. 1, June 1996; Mely Caballero-Anthony, “Mechanisms of Dispute Settlement: The ASEAN Experience”, *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol. 20, no. 1, April 1998; Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order*, London and New York: Routledge, 2001; and Jurgen Haacke, *ASEAN’s Diplomatic and Security Culture*, London and New York: Routledge, 2003.

²⁰ The Bangkok Declaration, 8 August 1967. Available at <<http://www.asean.sec.org/1629.htm>>.

²¹ The five original members of ASEAN were Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Brunei Darussalam joined the grouping in 1984, followed by Vietnam in 1995, Laos and Myanmar in 1997 and Cambodia in 1999.

²² These major conflicts were in fact stumbling blocks to earlier efforts to form a regional association and became the major reasons why the first two attempts to establish the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA) in 1961 and MAPHILINDO in 1963 failed. For accounts on earlier attempts to form a sub-regional organisation in Southeast Asia, see for example, Arfinn Jorgensen-Dahl, *Regional Organisation and Order in Southeast Asia*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982; Michael Leifer, *ASEAN and the Security of Southeast Asia*, London: Routledge, 1989; and Michael Antolik, *ASEAN and the Diplomacy of Accommodation*, Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc. 1990.

regional resilience to ensure regional security.²³ Thus, ASEAN had, for all intents and purposes, become a diplomatic device—a mechanism—for managing regional conflict and promote regional reconciliation for regional peace and security in Southeast Asia. In describing what the grouping was in its first decade, the late “Aseanist”, Michael Leifer, had described ASEAN as a “security organisation without the structure of an alliance”.²⁴ This, to Leifer, was the paradox of ASEAN since the underlying concerns of its members at the time of its founding were more to do with the intra-regional disputes than the changes in the balance of external influences bearing on the region.

Since regional reconciliation has been ASEAN’s *raison d’être*, its security approaches and practices were also defined by this orientation. As seen over its 42-year history, the process of “regional reconciliation” was extended beyond the boundaries of the original, non-communist member states when ASEAN expanded to include other states in the region regardless of their political orientation.²⁵ The unstated objective was to build a kind of a security community founded on the assumption that no member state would ever go to war with another.

With increasing realisation that much more needs to be done in ensuring regional security, the nature of defence and security cooperation in Southeast Asia saw a number of significant developments. So far, one of the most important initiatives in this regard was the decision to establish an ASEAN Political and Security Community (APSC) by the year 2015. Announced at the 9th ASEAN Summit in Bali, Indonesia in 2003, the ASC signalled a new phase in the nature of security cooperation in Southeast Asia. With the goal of “bringing ASEAN’s political and security cooperation to a higher plane to ensure that countries in the region live at peace with one another”, and at the same time building regional capacity to respond to regional challenges, the APSC is by far the clearest indication that ASEAN is now moving away from its reticence in dealing with defence and security issues to a more open and robust engagement among its member states.²⁶

Plans for the ASC were outlined in the Vientiane Plan of Action (VAP) in 2004. The VAP had proposed a number of strategies to push forward the agenda of security cooperation in the region and these have been grouped under the strategic clusters or thrusts on conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post-conflict peace building. In the area of conflict prevention, for instance, among the strategies identified have been the convening of an annual defence ministers’ meeting, enhancing CBMs through conducting more military exchanges between defence officials and military academies, in addition to enhanced bilateral military exchanges, and producing an ASEAN Annual Security Outlook. Following these ideas, the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting (ADMM) was convened on 9th May 2006 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The convening of the ADMM became the clearest signal to the international

²³ For an excellent account of ASEAN’s concept of comprehensive security, see Muthiah Alagappa, “Comprehensive Security: Interpretations in ASEAN Countries”, in Robert A. Scalapino, et al. (eds.) *Asian Security Issues Regional and Global*, Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1998, pp. 50-78.

²⁴ Michael Leifer, “The Paradox of ASEAN: A Security Organisation without the Structure of an Alliance”, *The Round Table*, no. 27, July 1978, pp. 261-8. Reprinted in *The 2nd ASEAN Reader*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2003, pp. 265-8.

²⁵ Vietnam joined ASEAN in 1995, followed by Laos and Myanmar in 1997 and finally Cambodia in 1999.

²⁶ Mely Caballero-Anthony, *Regional Security in Southeast Asia: Beyond the ASEAN Way*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005.

community that defence and security issues have now become legitimate subjects for regional cooperation in Southeast Asia.

ASEAN's vision of regional order and security approaches is reflected in the assiduous efforts taken by the group to manage intra-regional relations and ensure regional security from within. It also discussed the extent to which ASEAN as a body had tried to avoid major power domination and eschew becoming the cockpit of major power competition. Yet the enduring feature of *realpolitik* in Asia has remained, as seen in the way the San Francisco system of hub and spokes/alliances has endured despite questions about its relevance in a post-Cold War environment. Within Asia, four states have defence alliance relations with the United States: Japan, Korea, Thailand and the Philippines. But despite the latter two Southeast Asian countries being part of the US-led alliance system, this has not precluded them from actively participating in the ASEAN-led efforts at promoting multilateral security cooperation through a set of regional processes geared to build trust and CBMs, as well as enhance mutual security interests.

Whether these two broad approaches hinder or promote regional order and security and the extent to which they enhance prospects of deepening regionalism in Asia need to be further examined. So far, there is no consensus yet on whether the differing security systems in Asia would enhance or undermine regional peace and stability. Yet, the myriad security challenges confronting the region, from the traditional inter-state competition to emerging trans-border security threats, demand no less than a broader multilateral security framework for promoting cooperative security. This had been the overriding rationale in the idea behind the establishment of the ARF.

The ARF was the culmination of a process that began with non-ASEAN actors who argued that the post-Cold War Asia-Pacific region needed a security organisation that could alleviate regional tensions.²⁷ Initially, the ASEAN states resisted these calls, but eventually ASEAN realised that if an Asian security regime was going to develop, it was better for ASEAN to be pulling the cart than trying to catch up.²⁸ Some analysts have argued that ASEAN initiated the ARF, in part, to ensure that the grouping remained the pre-eminent regional institution in the Asia-Pacific. But more important in the decision to establish the ARF was the realisation that some kind of a cooperative security “enterprise” linking ASEAN's major partners in Northeast Asia and North America was needed to fill in the power vacuum left by the ending of Cold War.²⁹ The anxieties by regional states during this period was best articulated by former Singaporean Foreign Minister Wong Kan Seng who told his fellow ministers at the ASEAN

²⁷ Mikhail Gorbachev suggested something along these lines as early as 1986. By 1988, Gareth Evans of Australia was suggesting a regional security organ along the lines of the Council for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). Joe Clark of Canada also added his voice to these calls. Japan later advanced the idea, with the support of Canada and Australia, though the US opposed any regional security organization that it did not control.

²⁸ As noted above, while many ideas about cooperative security mechanism was being floated from the outside the region, ASEAN members also started to explore other possible models that were more suitable to regional conditions. Between 1990 and 1991, several official meetings were held on this subject. These in turn generated specific proposals emanating from academics, think-tanks and government officials on how Southeast Asia could address the new security challenges. One of these proposals was the recommendation from the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS) in 1991 that ASEAN should use the Post Ministerial Conference for political and security dialogues with non-ASEAN countries in the region.

²⁹ Simon Sheldon, “Wither Security Regionalism?”, in Amitav Acharya and Evelyn Goh (eds.) *Reassessing Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007, pp. 113-33.

Ministerial Meeting in Kuala Lumpur: “With the end of the Cold War, we cannot assume that the Western powers will continue to woo ASEAN...we need to transform the substance of both ASEAN and our relationship with the major powers.”³⁰ The formation of the ARF can be said to be the result of that transformation.

Following the need to fill the perceived gap was also the desire by ASEAN states to invite the major powers in Asia to have a stake in the stability and security of Southeast Asia, not through the practice of *realpolitik* but through an “enmeshment” process of socialisation and norm-building.³¹ By promoting the norms codified in ASEAN’s TAC, the ARF’s vision of a larger regional order was the hope that the TAC’s commitment to peaceful resolution of disputes could be extended to and imbibed by other states joining the institution.

Other analysts, however, point to the unstated objective of ARF’s norm-building exercise, that is, the goal of “socialising” China—the only extra-regional state with territorial claims in Southeast Asia. Tacitly, by cultivating habits of dialogue and fostering trust and confidence-building, China would be encouraged to explain its security policy to its neighbours. In turn, China’s neighbours could respond with their own concerns about its policies and thus enhancing regional stability.³² Thus, by ‘locking-in’ the major powers in the region—the US, China, and Japan—ASEAN had tacitly aimed to blur the divide between the *realpolitik* and liberal approaches to building regional order and security in Southeast Asia and beyond.

From the start, ASEAN exercised its leadership role in the ARF, insisting on the right to set the agenda and adapting the ASEAN Way of interaction to the proceedings of the ARF. ASEAN also laid out a three-step program for the ARF’s evolution into a more robust security structure: In the first stage, the ARF would focus on confidence-building methods, followed by the second stage of preventive diplomacy, and the third stage of conflict resolution. No timetable was set for the achievement of each of these stages; these measures would evolve at their own pace. In the meantime, the ARF will continue to be a forum in which the regional powers could meet and interact.

The conscious attempt by ASEAN to shape the institutional design of the ARF is indicative of the preferences of members to ensure that the ARF would not be seen as some kind of a “superstructure” that subsumes ASEAN nor competes with it. At the first ARF meeting in Bangkok, Thailand in 1994, it was decided that “in its initial phase the ARF should therefore concentrate on enhancing the trust and confidence among participants and thereby foster a regional environment conducive to maintaining the peace and prosperity of the region.”³³ It was also envisioned that the ARF adopt two complementary approaches to building confidence. Firstly, this could be done by following the ASEAN-established practice of consultation, consensus and frequent dialogue through the exchange of high-level visits. In practical terms,

³⁰Singapore Government Press Release, No. 38/Jul 09-1/91/07/19, p. 3.

³¹ For earlier analyses on the concerns of regional states at that time, see for example Jusuf Wanandi, “ASEAN and an Asia-Pacific Security Dialogue”, in Hadi Soesastro (ed.) *ASEAN in a Changed Regional and International Political Economy*, Jakarta: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 1995, pp. 143-158.

³² Simon Sheldon, op. cit., p. 122. See also Alistair Iain Johnston, “Socialisation in International Relations: The ASEAN Way and International Relations Theory”, in G. John Ikenberry and Michel Mastanduno (eds.) *International Relations Theory and the Asia Pacific*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003, pp. 123-44.

³³ 1995 ASEAN Regional Forum: A Concept Paper

this has been embodied in the ARF's endorsement of the terms of the TAC and the requirement that all new members first accede to the TAC before admission into the ARF. Secondly, concrete CBMs could be implemented at both a Track 1 (government) and Track 2 (non-governmental and other non-official organizations) level. The latter is a result of a 1997 study on the ARF commissioned by the Canadian Government which showed that confidence-building efforts in the Asia Pacific region would be key to:

- Reducing tensions and suspicions;
- Reducing the risk of accidental war or war by miscalculation;
- Fostering communication and cooperation in a way that deemphasizes the use of military force;
- Bringing about a better understanding of one another's security problems and defence priorities; and
- Developing a greater sense of strategic confidence in the region.

In the pursuit of these objectives, a number of initiatives were established within the ARF to increase transparency and to encourage the exchange of information between ARF member states. Chief among these have been the ARF Inter-sessional Support Group (ISG) on Confidence Building Measures (which has since become the ISG on CBM and PD). Other Inter-sessional Meetings have also been conducted to promote the sharing of expertise and discussion in such areas as Search and Rescue Coordination and Cooperation, Peacekeeping, Disaster Relief among others. Seminars and expert group meetings have also been organised on such areas as De-mining, Transnational Crime, Terrorist Financing and Prevention, Marine Security Challenges and many others. Furthermore, a number of military-to-military meetings and exchanges (such as the meeting of the heads of Defence Colleges and Institutions) have also been held under the ARF ambit. In addition, ARF member states have taken the initiative to increase transparency by publishing defence White Papers and statements outlining their perspectives on regional issues. It is worth noting that the CBMs undertaken by the ARF are predominantly principle/declaratory and transparency measures, with very few, if at all, constraining in nature.

Given the overall objective of promoting cooperative security through fostering 'habits of dialogue', the ARF's institutional development is at best parsimonious. This has earned the ARF the title of being nothing but a "talk shop". So far, there has been very little progress in moving to Stage II on Preventive Diplomacy (PD). Aside from the much-talked about "achievements" of the ARF in: First, adoption of the Concepts and Principles of PD (including the eight key principles of PD); second, establishment of the ARF Register of Experts/Eminent Persons Group; and third, enhanced role of the ARF Chair, there is no basic infrastructure put in place to advance PD—such as early-warning procedures, good offices or fact-finding arrangements and procedures for preventive deployment in case of contingencies, e.g. ASEAN Troika.

Given the lack of institutional support, the ARF is understandably neither prepared nor equipped to respond to crises that need specialised expertise. For example, the ARF was not able to act during the East Timor crisis in 1999. Being no Peacekeeping Training Centre which can act not only as a good CBM but also as a ready supplier of troops for peacekeeping operations, it hence did not come close to having any rapidly deployable peacekeeping force. Moreover, while

fostering habits of dialogue has its advantages, this type of modality as informed by the ASEAN Way may not be suitable for the ARF to handle certain crises without appropriate institutionalisation; its refusal to deal with domestic issues and relying instead on consensus-building. In a much bigger grouping and with members having different expectations (e.g. ASEAN keeping its centrality in the region, China's desire to reduce US influence, the US as supplementing its alliance-based strategy), the ARF is therefore severely constrained in adopting a more robust agenda beyond its initial limited objectives of fostering habits of constructive dialogue and consultation, promoting transparency and create predictable patterns of relationships.

Against these constraints, the ARF's responses to crises have also been mostly ad hoc. In response to the global war against terrorism, the ARF ISG has sponsored several ARF workshops on the prevention of terrorism. Discussions had focused on blocking terrorist financing and looking at possible coordination with international financial institutions (IFIs) and the Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering (FATL). The ARF also established an ISG on Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime. The ARF also adopted the Statement on Cooperation against Piracy and Other Threats to Maritime Security at its ministerial meeting in Phnom Penh in June 2003. Yet, there is the question of effectiveness of these ad hoc responses. Moreover, much of the activities under the aegis of the ARF have been undertaken on a voluntary basis, which means that only those members that are interested in the issue areas outlined for cooperative activities participate. In this regard, one would agree that without a strong Secretariat, the effectiveness of initiatives taken by the ARF which require close coordination and constant monitoring would be severely handicapped. Almost two decades since its establishment, the ARF still relies on the ASEAN Secretariat to carry out the task of coordination.

Given the above factors, the nature of regional capacities and responses indicates one crucial fact: the ARF can only be as strong and effective as how its member states want it to be. Against these observable trends, it not surprising that assessments of the ARF have not been positive. It harks back to an argument raised sometime back by Michael Leifer who declared that it would be "a categorical mistake to think that the ARF can actually solve problems". To Leifer, it was more realistic to regard the Forum as "a modest contribution to a viable balance or distribution of power within the Asia-Pacific by other traditional means" but that these means were limited since "the multilateral undertaking faces the same order of difficulty as the biblical Hebrew slaves in Egypt who were obliged to make bricks without straw."³⁴

But against all the inadequacies of the ARF, one would note that even its fiercest critics would agree that as a multilateral forum for security, the ARF has had moderate success. The importance of the ARF as a vehicle for airing the security concerns of member states has been recognised. Many security analysts also credit socialisation through the ARF for engendering a more positive attitude from states that were initially suspicious of multilateralism. Thus, contrary to Leifer's contention, the cooperative security aspects of the ARF, though modest, are not just adjuncts to the workings of the balance of power. Through constant dialogue, CBMs, preventive diplomacy, and the norms of ASEAN's Treaty on Amity and Cooperation—the ARF continues

³⁴ Michael Leifer, *The ASEAN Regional Forum: Extending ASEAN's Model of Regional Security*, Adelphi Paper No. 304, (Oxford: University Press/ International Institute of Strategic Studies, 1996), p.59.

to aim at “moderating and mitigating the competitive and conflictual by products of power balancing behaviour.”³⁵

From Regional Security to the security of people

Revisiting concepts like national/regional resilience, comprehensive security, ‘neutrality’ as adapted by the member-states of ASEAN, regional autonomy and cooperative security are necessary in order to better understand ASEAN’s preference for ‘informal’ or ‘soft’ institutionalism. Attempts by ASEAN members to apply the modalities of the ‘ASEAN way’ writ large to the wider Asia-Pacific institution like ARF were conscious efforts by *small and weak states*—clearly mindful for their inherent limitations—to influence the conduct of inter-state relations in a complex environment very much mired in major power competition. But instead of getting sucked into the game of balancing, hedging, and bandwagoning, ASEAN has opted to choose the tedious processes of consensus-building, incrementalism, confidence-building measures, and norm-building in preventing conflicts and promoting cooperative security in Asia. These strategies essentially make up the dense web of socialisation that has been taking place among members of the ARF and other ASEAN-led institutions in Asia.³⁶ It also emphasized the fundamental concerns of post-colonial states engaged in a protracted process of consolidating power and sovereign authority. Only Thailand among all the current members of ASEAN never experienced colonial rule (although it was subjected to external pressure throughout the colonial era from competing colonial powers). It, nonetheless, was subject to the same kind of internal pressures that post-colonial states had to contend with upon independence – the presence of armed groups which sought to either capture political power or force the secession of a portion of the national territory. Despite the regional dynamic of great power competition and inter-state conflict, the most serious threat to security came from within each Southeast Asian state. The imperative to meet the challenge posed by national liberation movements made internal security a priority for most governments in the region. It also provided the foundational rationale for the comprehensive way that security was framed in the region.

When the Vientiane Action Program (VAP) was presented by ASEAN in 2004, it clearly enunciated ASEAN’s continued adherence to comprehensive security as a central consideration. This is a perspective of security which has always moved away from the traditionally military outlook of mainstream understandings of the concept. As the VAP points out, comprehensive security recognizes that there is a strong interdependence between the political, economic and social life of the region, and its foundational elements include political and social stability, economic prosperity, narrowed development gaps, poverty alleviation, and the reduction of social disparity. The VAP, however, also presents a commitment to the establishment of a peaceful region in the context of “a just, *democratic*, and harmonious environment.”³⁷ The elements of the VAP that spell out the three pillars of the ASEAN Community, i.e. the ASEAN

³⁵ Yuen Foong Khong, “Making bricks without straw in the Asia Pacific?”, *The Pacific Review*, Vol.10, No.2, 1997, p.298

³⁶ Much has been written about the normative approach to security by ASEAN. See for example, Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order*, London and New York: Routledge, 2001, Jurgen Haacke, *ASEAN’s Diplomatic and Security Culture: Origins, Developments and Prospects*, London and New York: Routledge, 2003, and Mely Caballero-Anthony, *Regional Security Beyond the ASEAN Way*, op.cit.

³⁷ Association of Southeast Asian Nations, “The Vientiane Action Programme (VAP),” 2004, p. 6.

Security Community, the ASEAN Economic Community, and, more particularly, the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, what emerges is an accession to a security framework that goes beyond what ASEAN has traditionally taken to constitute “comprehensive security” with its state-centric orientation and begins to incorporate “human security” into the mix.

Within Southeast Asia, the cause of human security had effectively been advanced by the developments in the realm of human rights. The emphasis on counter-insurgency and internal security (even where there was no insurgency to speak of) brought with it the issue of human rights violations – an issue that all countries in the region had to contend with. The common experience with human rights violations made it the logical issue around which a nascent regional civil society began to form. In 1996, a loose grouping of human rights advocates took the ASEAN to task for its failure to follow up on a “promise” to look into the possibility of establishing a regional human rights mechanism made in 1993. This group eventually formalized its existence as the Working Group for an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism. Their work over time eventually led to the ASEAN commitment to the establishment of a regional human rights body enshrined in the ASEAN Charter. Similarly, the ASEAN Institutes for Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS) had initiated in 1992 a dialogue mechanism which over time contributed to the increased acceptance within formal ASEAN channels of actual discussions using the concepts and language of human rights. Known as the ASEAN-ISIS Colloquium on Human Rights (AICOHR), it provided a platform for human rights in the region at a time when discussing it even in informal channels where officials were present was unthinkable.³⁸ The Seventh AICOHR, however, was particularly significant to the evolution of a human security discourse in the region because of its explicit treatment of the conceptual linkage (with the concomitant policy implications) between human rights and human security – a connection that was clearly illustrated by the experience of the financial crisis in 1997.

The priority presented in the ASC Action Program by the ASEAN states to issues of welfare and social well-being, alongside the physical safety of their citizens represent what is essentially an emerging human security perspective. The attention given by the Association to human rights indicates a move to go beyond the traditional state-centric frame of comprehensive security. Whether this is a calculated response by the member-states of the Association is not clear. It was notable that even within the defense establishments of countries in the region, a more wholistic conception of security has become increasingly the norm as reflected in the reference made by then Malaysian Defense Minister Najib tun Razak to the idea of “People’s Security” at the First Meeting of the ASEAN Defense Ministers in June 2006 in Kuala Lumpur.

More than the expanded scope with which comprehensive security began to be taken by the ASEAN states, it was the increased participation of non-government organizations in ASEAN processes that provided a clear difference in the expanding scope and rhetoric of comprehensive security in Southeast Asia. There was initially a dearth of fora within which government officials and non-government groups could directly engage with each other. Indeed there was mutual suspicion in the relationship between civil society and governments – a relationship that has not quite been completely breached till the present. Nonetheless, as the case of the Regional

³⁸ Herman Joseph S. Kraft, “11 September 2001 and Human Security,” *OSS Digest: A Forum for Security and Defense Issues*, 1st and 2nd Quarter 2006.

Working Group on Human Rights indicated, civil society groups began to organize to meet the ASEAN states at the regional level.

Initial mechanisms were established through the intermediation of track two networks. Aside from the AICOHR, a successful platform which broadened the scope of engagement between civil society groups and officials was the ASEAN People's Assembly (APA). For the former, APA contributed not only in providing a platform for engagement with officials but also became a major forum through which they could initiate region-wide coordination of their activities and advocacies. Prior to APA, many such attempts at coordination had been on specific issue areas such as the struggle for East Timor independence. With APA, the lesson on the importance of organizing beyond specific issue areas was strongly imbibed and led to the establishment of the Solidarity for Asian People's Advocacy (SAPA) and the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict-Southeast Asia (GPPAC-SEA). Both these networks sought different platforms where the ASEAN governments could be engaged on broad issue areas (such as human security and security sector reform), as well as on specific issues (such as the peace process in Mindanao). GPPAC-SEA, for instance, is very actively engaged in the Inter-Parliamentary Forum on Security Sector Governance, a series of workshops intended to influence the legislative agenda in the ASEAN states so that it would give more attention to the issue of security sector reform. This is being conducted with support from Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES). At the same time, it has been active in pushing the peace process in Mindanao to the point of indicating its interest in becoming one of the interlocutors between the government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. Their increased involvement ensured that the comprehensive security frame of the ASEAN states would incorporate elements of human security.

The Emerging Human Security Discourse in ASEAN

The emphasis given to human security concerns within the region, however, has opened up the vista for human security within ASEAN itself. The basic security framework of the APSC has been evolving since the Declaration of ASEAN Concord II, or Bali Concord II. In this document, the reference to the ASEAN Political-Security Community (then still the ASC) re-emphasized a number of fundamental norms that ASEAN defined as being essential to its nature as a long-standing regional association. These included:³⁹

1. the continued subscription to comprehensive security with its recognition of the interconnectedness of political, economic and socio-cultural realities;
2. respect for national sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries;
3. consensus-based decision-making; and
4. the renunciation of the use or threat of the use of force, and peaceful settlement of disputes and differences.

It also noted, however, that some issues, particularly maritime issues, are trans-boundary in nature and require a regional response. This, in fact, is the starting point for the rationale behind

³⁹ Association of Southeast Asian Nations, "The Declaration of ASEAN Concord II (Bali Concord II)" 2003.

the APSC: the need to intensify ASEAN cooperation in areas of security where self-help is an insufficient approach. While comprehensive security largely emphasized *national resilience* and attention to the development of national capacities, the security issues that the ASEAN states identify as being central to their concerns increasingly require a regional approach. To this end, Bali Concord II specifically mentions that the members of ASEAN are committed to strengthening regional and national capacities to address terrorism, trafficking in drugs, persons and other transnational crimes – issues which are more directly of concern to the security of the human person rather than the nation-state.

The human security element in the ASC is even more evident in the VAP. In typical ASEAN fashion, both traditional and non-traditional security issues are given renewed emphasis. Thus, the specific activities that ASEAN is committing itself to in the context of the ASC include the implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties on the South China Sea, military exchanges and cooperation short of a formal defense agreement, counter-terrorism, counter-insurgency and concerns regarding the maintenance of territorial integrity and respect for national sovereignty. At the same time, it also includes non-traditional security issues such as transnational crime and other transboundary problems, maritime security cooperation, law enforcement cooperation, and cooperation on environmental problems. The ASC Plan of Action in the VAP, however, also specifically commits the ASEAN states to issues that were formerly taboo to ASEAN (or were not located within its predominantly comprehensive security frame). Issues such as democratization, human rights promotion (and even outright protection in the case of women, children and migrant workers), and post-conflict peace-building are given space in the ASC. When the ASEAN Charter was adopted in 2008, these same aspirations were expressed across the documents which made up the ASEAN Community Roadmap. These issues indicate the direction being taken as far as identification of security threats to the region is concerned. These increasingly have a bearing on individuals and individual communities as the referent object of security. All of them require cooperative mechanisms at the regional level to be effectively addressed. As states and governments have primary responsibility for the welfare of their citizens, the ASEAN states collectively should see to it that states are not only willing to undertake that responsibility but are also prepared to undertake what is necessary to develop the capability to do so. As noted in some of the cases above, capacity- or capability-development may in fact be a regional undertaking rather than a purely national one.

Some closing observations

That socialisation and/or enmeshment have worked in avoiding wars in Asia is still being contested. Indeed, despite occasional conflicts between and among members in ASEAN and the ARF, war has yet to break out. Instead, the enhanced relations between China and ASEAN had proven to be successful test-case of how norm-building and socialisation worked. China's signing of the ASEAN TAC in 2003, eight years after its posturing in the Mischief Reef has gone a long way in warming ties with her ASEAN neighbours which not too long ago regarded China as a security threat. Further, the latest move of the United States to finally sign TAC after years of prevarication demonstrates clearly that norms do matter.

Equally important to ASEAN and ARF's vision of order is the idea of building a community—security community. It could be argued however that ASEAN's notion of a (regional) security

community differs substantially from how the ARF or SCO would conceive it to be. Nevertheless, security community could be another way of framing and or promoting cooperative security and regional interdependence to respond to complex, trans-border problems that require multilateral solutions. The rise in non-traditional security issues like infectious diseases, terrorism, disaster prevention and mitigation has provided genuine opportunities to develop the level of trust and confidence among Asia's major power to deepen cooperation in responding to these challenges. The language of community also allows for the deepening of inter-regional institutional linkages. For example, cooperation in combating transnational crimes (drug trafficking, smuggling, etc) within the SCO provides opportunities for also building cross-institutional linkages with the ARF that already has a robust agenda in this issue area. The 'we-feeling' associated with security communities can therefore be translated to a greater sense of interdependence between and among the plethora of regional security institutions which were created with a common purpose of managing complex security issues. Arguably, it is this accelerating trend of regional interdependence that serves as a powerful deterrent to conflict and conducive to peace and stability in the Asia Pacific.

As to whether a strong sense of regional identity paves the way for institutional transformation and provides incentives for states to cede sovereignty to supra-national institution remains in doubt. To be sure, the emphasis on norms of non-interference and respect for principle of sovereignty undergird the desire of regional institutions for regional autonomy. Thus, while the lexicon of comprehensive and cooperative security has continued to dominate discourses in the region, the stress has not been on surrendering of sovereignty. Regional security institutions in Asia are still very much organised as inter-governmental bodies. The emphasis therefore is more about the pooling of sovereignty rather than ceding it to a supranational body in order to provide the regional goods. That said, the rhetoric and assertions about identity allow Asian states, in their respective sub-region settings and beyond, to have a greater voice and bigger role to play in shaping the regional security architecture along their visions of regional order.

Finally, Asia will continue to see the proliferation of security institutions as long as new security issues emerge and there are willing builders. The region's history of co-existence allows for accommodating a mosaic of institutions. In a highly inter-connected global environment, the hard task is in balancing competing state-centric interests and the urgency to respond to a host of non-traditional security challenges that transcends state borders like climate change and pandemics. Facing up to these challenges make a compelling case for strengthening regional, multilateral institutions in Asia.