

The Important Position of the ASEAN Political Security Community in Resolving Conflicts and Problems of the Southeast Asian Region

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This study describes and analyses the critical position of the ASEAN Political Security Community in resolving security issues and conflicts of the Southeast Asia region, and addresses challenges following the establishment of the 2015 ASEAN Community policy, which aims to create stability in the Southeast Asian area. The research method used was a qualitative descriptive method. The results of the study show that the ASEAN security community is only engaged in cooperative security and never moves up to the degree of collective security and collective defense. Its position is as a facilitator of peacemaking.

Key words: *Regional Policy, ASEAN, Security, Conflict.*

Introduction

The objective conditions of the Southeast Asian region after the end of the cold war are very dynamic, full of challenges, and must be taken seriously by its leaders. ASEAN initially consisted of five core countries, plus Brunei. From 1995-1999, Indochina countries joined ASEAN, which put the organisation into two rhythms, fast, to describe the five founding nations of ASEAN plus Brunei, and slow, to describe the Indochina communist countries plus Myanmar, as they started to open up. The economic and political conditions of the five founding nations of ASEAN plus Brunei have been fluctuating, and only Singapore remained stable.



The understanding that ASEAN is a security community is based on the fact that none of its members use armed forces, or it is deemed necessary to use military force in resolving conflicts in the region. ASEAN is a security community because of its ability to prevent conflict, from a possible escalation of armed confrontation, to become a political community. The absence of war between ASEAN member countries, since the establishment of the organisation in 1967, is ASEAN's most significant achievement in regulating peaceful interaction within the region. (Leifer, 1995: 191)

The core countries of ASEAN have serious problems. Coupled with the decision of Indochina countries to join the group and add more issues that are difficult to solve. Seeing the regional situation, which is difficult to predict, ASEAN has to make the ASEAN political security community as a facilitator of regional peace. The internal problem that will be raised in this paper is How is the Political Security Community resolving conflicts and issues that occur in Southeast Asia?

The research refers to the literature about the way the security community establishes links between identity, community, and security. The debate about the security community begun when Karl Deutsch proposed an initial definition of the security community that had been developed by other writers to form a flexible analytical framework (Vesa, 1999: 18-25). The security community must protect all members from conflicts arising from internal and external threats. Second, the security community needs to facilitate the prevention of inter- and intra-state disputes. Third, the security community must form a community spirit within the regional membership to create a shared identity to be seen by outsiders as a single entity, in other words having a sense of we-ness (Bellamy and McDonald, 2004: 307-330).

The ASEAN security community or the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) was formed to maintain the stability of the Southeast Asian region. Political and security stability will support the economic sector to create a peaceful and prosperous area. A healthy regional economic climate will encourage political and security stability due to reduced economic disparity between countries. Theoretically, it seems simple. But at the level of reality, the road to the integration is steep and winding. It is coupled with the fact that the Southeast Asian region is diverse.

Collective security can be interpreted as security, political, regional, or global arrangement, where every country in the system accepts that safety is the concern of all people, and is therefore committed to a collective response to threats, and violations of peace. Collective security is more ambitious than an alliance or joint defense system, in which it seeks to encompass the totality of countries in a region or even globally, and to overcome various possible threats.



The importance of this research in the lens of security and regional international politics lies in the ability of the ASEAN Political Security Community to respond and to resolve security issues, and conflicts that often occur in Southeast Asia and to make this Community needed by its member countries.

This study aims to determine the actions or relentless efforts of the ASEAN Political Security Community to resolve security issues and the conflicts that surround them.

Research Method

The type of method used by the writer is a descriptive qualitative method, which, according to David Williams (1995), as quoted by Lexy J. Moleong, is a research that uses a natural setting, with the intention of interpreting phenomena that occur, and is carried out by involving various existing methods to explain events. Qualitative research uses different research methods, such as interviews, observations, and documents.

Result and Discussion

ASEAN Problems

The following are several security issues that are of concern to countries in the Southeast Asian region and should get mutual security.

Maritime Security

The maritime security issue certainly places Indonesia, as the most significant naval region in the Southeast Asian region, prone to security issues and disturbances. Southeast Asian waters are very vulnerable to piracy activities, illegal fishing, illegal logging, illegal immigrants, and drugs. The Indonesian maritime area is divided into three Indonesian Archipelagic Sea Lines (ALKI) that are used in the crossing of commercial ships. Limited infrastructure and security devices, which were owned by Indonesia and several Southeast Asian countries, make security a major issue for Indonesia and various regional powers, including the US. The US had offered the collaboration titled Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) and also the Maritime Regional Security Initiative (MRSI). PSI and MRSI are joint security regimes consisting of several countries (US, Japan, South Korea, Australia, Philippines, etc.) that have the same idea (likeminded). Members can chase down foreign vessels that are suspected of carrying WMD or other threats in other member regions. Due to the sovereignty reason, Indonesia rejected the invitation to join the cooperation (Simamora, 2013). TNI cannot work alone in securing the Malacca Strait from piracy. Since 2004, the coordinated patrol cooperation has been established with Malaysia and Singapore. The cases of theft of fish and

other natural resources in the region of Indonesia and its surroundings made Indonesia suffered trillions of rupiah (Sudarsono, 2007: 336).

Many fish-stealing vessels are from Southeast and East Asian countries, such as Vietnam, Thailand, and also China. During the wars in Iraq (2003) and Afghanistan (2001), a growing number of refugees and illegal migrants to Asia and Australia passed through Indonesian waters towards Australia (Pujayanti, 2009: 20-21). Indonesia feels this is not only an Indonesian responsibility, so the patrol cooperation in the maritime area bordering other countries becomes a crucial issue day-by-day.

The issue of terrorism is still a severe threat in the Southeast Asian region, especially from Jamaah Islamiyah (JI), Ansjarul Tauhid Jamaat (JAT), Abu Sayyaf group in Moro (Philippines), and the separatist group in Pattani (Thailand). The JI group tried an unsuccessful attack on a foreign embassy in Singapore in 2000, but in Indonesia and the Philippines, they succeeded in several places. JI once tried to help Al Qaeda to find people who are experts in the preparation of weapons of mass hostility (911 Commission Report: 2003). During 2000-2009, JI carried out attacks on hotels, entertainment venues, and foreign embassies in Indonesia. It was a real threat to the security of Indonesians and foreigners. The terrorist group of Abu Sayyaf not only attacked the Philippine government but also kidnapped foreigners. The terrorist group is included in the list of US terrorists as it is considered a threat to US security interests. The US government wants to help countries in Southeast Asia fight terrorism through the counterterrorism course program.

The latest development of terrorism in the region was the action of the Abu Sayyad Group (ASG), led by Isnilon Hapilon, along with the Maute brothers, to move to Marawi, which is a small town in Mindanao, South Philippines in May 2017. The group managed to occupy Marawi for five months, from May to October 2017. The Philippines' military defeated the ASG and retook Marawi with the help of the US and its military state. ASG leaders, Isnilon, and the Maute brothers were killed in the conflict, which became the longest-running urban warfare military operation in the Philippines' history (Aljazeera.com, 2017).

South China Sea (SCS) and Other Borders

The South China Sea is thought to have abundant gas and oil reserves, so several countries, namely the PRC, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, and others compete to claim the region. Conflict involves six countries, which are: Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, and Taiwan. The conflict has surfaced since the 1980s until now, in which China claims the SCS region, especially the nine-dash line as its territory, passed down since the Chinese empire. Since the early 1990s, Indonesia has discussed the potential conflict in the area. It considers an open battle would be detrimental to the stability of the Southeast Asian region. Thus,

Indonesia consistently prioritises dialogue and consensus efforts in resolving the terrestrial conflict. In 2002, China signed the Declaration of Conduct in the South China Sea (DoCSCS) together with the countries involved in the conflict. Indonesia is pushing for a behavioural agreement (COC) in the South China Sea, which guarantees the stability of the Southeast Asian region (voaindonesia.com, 2002). On the other hand, Indonesia-Malaysia, Malaysia-Philippines, and Thailand-Cambodia have territorial dispute issues that have not been resolved until now. The conflicts could erupt at any time between these ASEAN countries.

Separatism and Communal Conflict

Several ASEAN countries are experiencing problems of separatism and communal conflicts, such as Papua in Indonesia, South Patani in Thailand, Moro in the Philippines, Rohingya and other ethnic minority resistance in Myanmar. Of all these issues, the Rohingya's case in Myanmar was the most highlighted at the Southeast Asian and international level by the United Nations, the European Union, or even the leadership of the Catholic Church. Here, the weakness of ASEAN appears on the surface, as criticism from ASEAN and the international community in the Myanmar regime has not pushed them to respect the human rights of the minorities. Myanmar's democratically elected government has not taken significant steps in changing Myanmar's military policy in the ethnic conflict.

On the other hand, Indonesia has become the most active country defusing the conflict that emerged in 2011 until the peak of the conflict in 2017, in which 600,000 Rohingya residents were driven from the Rakhine region of Myanmar. The UN even bluntly condemned the Myanmar regime for genocide against its Rohingya ethnicity. The reluctance of institutional norms is standard, and it seems that ASEAN is comfortable with the implementation of the rules.

Natural Disaster

The threat of earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, and typhoons are often present in the Southeast Asian region, especially in Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Myanmar. The excellent cooperation between ASEAN countries and other neighbours is needed in disaster management and the distribution of humanitarian assistance. The lessons were learned from the 2004 tsunami in Aceh and the 2005 earthquake in Nias when the Indonesian military was embargoed that weakened its capacity. At that time, only 40% of Hercules aircraft of the Air Force could be used to transport personnel and goods (Kemhan, 2008). Indonesia was in dire need of the repair and replacement of its Hercules' parts. As a response to Indonesia's weaknesses in air transportation, neighbouring countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand deployed transport aircraft and ships as part of humanitarian operations and disaster relief. Also, ASEAN members often help the Philippines when the tropical cyclones hit the

country. The cooperation in tackling the disaster proves that solidarity among fellow Southeast Asian countries is still active.

ASEAN Security Community

The ASEAN security community is a society that relies on the peace process in resolving disputes, which occurs among fellow members. The community adheres to the principles of non-interference, decision making based on consensus, national and regional resilience, mutual respect for national sovereignty, the avoidance of the use of threats or force, and the peaceful resolution of the differences or disputes. The goal of security cooperation is to ward off conflicts between members, and between the member and non-ASEAN countries. It tries to prevent the escalation of disputes to conflicts.

The understanding that ASEAN is a security community is based more on the fact that none of its members uses armed force, or the perceived necessity of using military force in resolving conflicts in the region. The role of ASEAN as a security community can be seen from its ability to prevent conflict from a possible escalation of armed confrontation to become a political community. The absence of war between ASEAN member countries since the organisation was founded in 1967 is ASEAN's most significant achievement in regulating peaceful interactions within the region. (Leifer, 1995: 191).

The ASEAN security community or the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) was formed to maintain the stability of the Southeast Asian region. Political and security stability will support the economic sector to create a region that is both peaceful and prosperous. A healthy regional economic climate will support political and security stability due to reduced economic disparity between countries. Theoretically, it seems simple. In reality, however, the road to integration is quite steep and winding. Coupled with the fact that the Southeast Asian region is diverse.

The formation of an ASEAN political and security community is an interesting phenomenon as the community was formed in a regional region that consists of countries with similar military capabilities. There was no regional hegemony in the region.

The community is expected to reduce the intensity of conflict and even open warfare between ASEAN countries. It was formed to provide a regional framework among members to resolve security issues and disputes within it as well as to increase and to accelerate cooperation to a higher level. Also, members are aware of the growing threat of transnational security that cannot be resolved unilaterally. The Security Community aims to accelerate the cooperation of security politics in ASEAN to bring about peace in the region, which includes the international community. The community is open, based on a comprehensive security

approach, and is not intended to form a defense pact/military alliance or a common foreign policy. It refers to various existing ASEAN political instruments, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) with its three pillars: building a sense of trust (CBM), preventive diplomacy, and conflict resolution, The Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN), The Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC), and Treaty on Southeast Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ). It also adheres to the UN Charter and other relevant international legal principles.

Apart from the obstacles to a security community, ASEAN's opportunities for full integration are wide open. The political-security of the community can still be realised even though members are still maintaining their respective sovereignty cults. Disputes between countries in the Southeast Asian region are inevitable. The level of diversity and overlapping interests between countries that lead to conflict is common. But the political and security community does not require the disappearance of the conflicts. Instead of eliminating conflict, this community refers to the ability to manage conflicts in a group peacefully (Acharya, 2001: 16). So the future format of ASEAN is how members treat conflicts in a legitimate manner.

The most serious challenge is the lack of knowledge of the individual communities in ASEAN about the APSC. In his 2014 research, Ta Wei Chu, of the University of Leeds, found that most people in the ASEAN region did not know that the ASEAN Community would be formed in 2015, with APSC as one of the pillars aimed at creating the conditions they wanted. It shows the inability of ASEAN to provide in-depth socialisation and education to the public about the existence of APSC. There are indications that the focus of socialisation and education is still at the level of leadership of members only, and has not touched at the lower level.

ASEAN Norms

Since the Bangkok declaration in 1967, ASEAN has always emphasised efforts to peace and security stability in the region, by complying with the international norms and institutional principles (Acharya, 2000). Initially, it was labelled as a collection of anti-communist countries that are united in regional institutions. Historically, most ASEAN countries faced internal conflicts, such as the communist threat (PKI) in Indonesia and (NPA) in the Philippines, and the Malaysian uprising. It is known that the five founders of ASEAN are close friends with western countries led by the United States. ASEAN, as a regional organisation, is closely related to western countries (anti-communist). It is at least felt by Vietnam (Acharya, 200). After the cold war, ASEAN began to accept new members, such as Brunei, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar. With the awareness that the greatest threat comes from outside of the Southeast Asian region, the consideration of good neighbours and economic cooperation is a driving factor to enlarge ASEAN.

As time goes by, ASEAN realised the need to strengthen the organisation through the establishment of norms as summarised in the TAC, ZOPFAN, SEANZ, ASEAN Charter, even the preparation of the ASEAN Community of 2020.

The earliest ASEAN norm, the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), was adopted in 1976. TAC was declared at the Bali I Summit meeting as the guideline for relations between ASEAN members, which consists of the following principles; First, mutual respect for independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity; Second, free from external intervention, subversion or creatives; Third, not interfering in the domestic affairs of other countries; Fourth, the use of peaceful means for disputes; Fifth, rejection of the use of force (threat). The norm confirms that ASEAN is not only a socio-economic organisation but also a political security organisation. Therefore, TAC is adopted by ASEAN as political and security norms to reflect the practice of diplomacy in ASEAN countries and other ASEAN-formed multilateral forums, such as the APT, APTT, ARF, ADMM, and others. An interesting development about TAC is not only ASEAN members who can adapt it, but also countries such as China, Japan, Russia, India, and the US. It indicates that other countries respect the norm. It becomes the foundation of the diplomatic relations in handling political and security issues in the Southeast Asian region.

ASEAN as the Facilitator

With quite a lot of conflicts or disputes that occur between ASEAN countries, then it needs a special treatment to deal with the problems. The previous section talked about the legal framework or legal basis that is related to the issues surrounding the conflict, in which there are issues of conflict management, cooperation between countries, the principle of non-interference to the peaceful resolution of disputes within ASEAN organisations itself. However, the problem is that by relying on the principle of no interference, the above legal frameworks do not have a significant impact on the behaviour of ASEAN members

Why did it happen? It is because each ASEAN member country must respect the actions or domestic policies of others, as not all ASEAN's conflict management legal frameworks have been ratified domestically. All international treaties or agreements, whether bilateral, regional or multilateral, must first be approved into the internal rules to be enforced and applied optimally. With ratification, the regulations will be binding. Then, herein lies the problem, which the writer will try to elaborate in this paper.

The opportunities for the operation of conflict management mechanisms in the ASEAN region are wide open. Since its establishment in 1967, there has not been a single dispute between members that ended with the use of the armed forces. From the perspective of



negative peace in the opinion of Johan Galtung, ASEAN can claim itself to be successful in preventing a war between fellow members. There has never been a war in Southeast Asia (between fellow countries in the region) since the establishment of ASEAN.

However, from a narrower perspective, conflicts and minor disputes often occur between members. It can be seen on several occasions, such as tensions between Myanmar and Thailand in the late 1990s, and conflicts over the Preah Vihear temple between Cambodia and Thailand around 2008-2013, the involvement of the military of each country. It is occurred on a sporadic small scale and does not extend to the inter-state level.

However, this condition still endangers the regional security conditions in Southeast Asia, where ASEAN is an organisation that is committed as a guardian. Even though a long war involving the use of armed forces on a large scale has a little chance to happen, the conditions of uncertainty, tension, and poor diplomatic relations, to the possibility of changing the spectrum of conflict that influenced the non-state actors can create its own threats to the region. Today, the threats to a country and a region are not only from the military but also from non-military (non-conventional) sources, such as border conflicts (Indrawan, 2015: 69 & 178).

Since its establishment, ASEAN puts forward the mechanism of the bilateral dialogue between disputing countries. It is following the principle of non-interference adopted by ASEAN, as well as ethical conduct among fellow members. Disputes are generally resolved, or at least discussed, at the bilateral level by each country involved. In the late 1990s, Indonesia and Malaysia agreed to resolve issues regarding the ownership of the islands of Sipadan and Ligitan to external parties outside ASEAN.

By acting as a facilitator, ASEAN creates a conducive climate and situation to mediate disputes in the region. ASEAN can also create new norms among its member countries, namely the model of resolving disputes under the building trust of ASEAN as long the role of the organisation in conflict resolution remains true to the principle of non-interference.

Whatever documents are played by ASEAN, TAC, ASEAN Concord, ASEAN Charter, or even to APSC, ASEAN will only act as a dispute facilitator, nothing more. The general public should have known that ASEAN, through its conflict management documents, will not violate the principle of not interfering. The making of the papers reinforces ASEAN's role as a regional organisation that can play at all levels of issues, including the issue of dispute resolution or dispute settlement. One of the aims of establishing ASEAN is to increase regional peace and stability by respecting justice and the rule of law.



The use of conflict management's document mechanism is needed to maintain security and peace stability in Southeast Asia. For this reason, members must act in such a way as to solve problems, or the possibility of the issues that will arise, among their peers. Failure to do this will have an impact on regional stability, including the existence of ASEAN. Members must understand that the use of ASEAN and its documents as a dispute settlement mechanism is the wisest choice for maintaining safe and peaceful conditions in Southeast Asia.

Finally, ASEAN members are the main challenges of ASEAN today, and possibly in the future. The gap between the countries in ASEAN in the context of economic and social development creates a sense of mistrust of one another. The distrust will lead to a different orientation of foreign policy. To achieve unity in ASEAN, it must focus on developing the economic capabilities of less developed countries. If so, the distance between countries will be reduced to get a consensus for peace more easily (Diplomat, 2016).

Conclusion

Based on the above discussion, several conclusions can be drawn. There are still many ASEAN's problems that must be resolved to avoid an obstacle to ASEAN's success, which can slow down the progress in managing a good organisation. Among the issues are terrorism, border problems between communal conflict countries, and others. The critical position of the ASEAN Political Security Community as a facilitator in creating peace in the Southeast Asian region is of fundamental progress. The prospects and challenges that are faced by the ASEAN Security Community can improve the ability of the security community to apply the norm of ASEAN WAY with its pluses and minuses. It can be said that the ASEAN security community is only dealing with the cooperative security that makes it hard for the community to move up to the next level to the degree of collective security and collective defence. However, it does not rule out the possibility that the complexity of the regional security faced by ASEAN may change at any time. ASEAN norms and principles such as national sovereignty, non-intervention dialogue, conflict avoidance, and consensus are referred to as the ASEAN Way. The ASEAN Way is a subjective term as ASEAN resolves problems by continuously engaging in dialogue and avoiding differences to reach consensus in the formulation of final recommendations and institutional political statements.



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