

4th Berlin Conference on Asian Security (BCAS)

Berlin, 28-30 October 2009

A conference jointly organised by Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), Berlin, Federal Ministry of Defence, Berlin, and Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Jakarta

Discussion Paper

Do Not Cite or Quote without Author's Permission

***Session I: Managing Security Challenges in Southeast Asia:
Is there a Role for the European Union?***

Rizal Sukma
CSIS; Jakarta

SWP

Ludwigkirchplatz 3-4
10719 Berlin
Phone +49 30 880 07-0
Fax +49 30 880 07-100
www.swp-berlin.org

Introduction

1. Despite the relative stability over the last four decades, Southeast Asia continues to face a host of security challenges. Sources of tension come from internal, bilateral, trans-national and extra-regional domains. While the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has so far been successful in managing these challenges, its ability to do so in the coming years has become less certain.
2. This paper discusses security challenges facing Southeast Asia, and explores the possible role that the European Union (EU) can play in contributing to the stability and security in the region.

Major Security Challenges

3. Major security challenges confronting Southeast Asian states have not changed much over the last four decades. Most of regional countries remains preoccupied with a host of domestic problems, ranging from lack of economic development, fragile social cohesion, internal conflicts, to the problem of maintaining law and order. In short, addressing and maintaining domestic stability continues to serve as a top security agenda of most Southeast Asian states.
4. However, the need to response to the growing salience of non-traditional security in the region has also become a matter of urgency to regional states. The threat of trans-boundary problems, while they have long been recognised as a source of security problems in the region, has increasingly become more lethal and pressing in recent years. Issues such as terrorism, maritime security, illegal fishing, separatism, infectious diseases, and environmental degradation have all posed serious threats to regional stability. The problem in Burma --which led to the displacement of people and refugees-- has also reinforced the point that human rights is a security issue for the region. All these problems clearly demonstrate how security threats in Southeast Asia have increasingly become trans-national, and therefore blurred the distinction between internal and external security.
5. In addition to internal and trans-national (non-traditional) security challenges, threats to the security and stability in Southeast Asia also come from two sources: bilateral tension and tension with extra-regional power. Despite the intensification of the habit of cooperation within the ASEAN frameworks, member states are still not able to resolve bilateral territorial dispute. For example, disputes between Indonesia and Malaysia and between Thailand and Cambodia, have occasionally

become a source of tension in Southeast Asia. The South China Sea dispute between the majority of ASEAN states and China also serves as another flashpoint for the region.

6. Southeast Asia has also been increasingly subject to pressures emanating from strategic changes in major power relationship in East Asia, with significant implications not only for regional security but also for the role of ASEAN in managing the challenge. In this context, there are three challenges facing ASEAN.
7. The first is how to position itself properly in a changing strategic relationship among major powers, especially in the US-China-Japan relations. The current dynamics in the US-China-Japan triangle clearly demonstrate the emergence of a new regional order in the Asia-Pacific region. The relationship among these three major powers in the region will continue to be a complex one. While the three countries are seeking to establish cooperative relations among themselves, signs of emerging competition are also evident. China, clearly a rising power with its own interests, seems to see Japan and the US as two powers that might pose a limit to its regional pre-eminence. Japan is anxious about policy direction that China might take in the future; a feeling shared by some ASEAN countries, including Indonesia. Meanwhile, the US is clearly opposed to the rise of a new power that might pose a challenge to the country's pre-eminence in the region. Managing the uncertainties in the future direction of major power relations, therefore, serves as a major challenge for ASEAN.
8. The second challenge is how to respond to the rise of China. Over the last ten years or so, China has consistently demonstrated its ability to sustain economic growth at an impressive rate higher than those of its Southeast Asian neighbours. Along with its economic development, China's military capability has also improved significantly vis-à-vis Southeast Asian countries. The concern with China relates first and foremost to the question of how Beijing is going to use its new stature and influence in achieving its national interests and objectives in the region. Moreover, in economic terms, it is not yet clear whether China would become a competitor or a partner to ASEAN states. However, it is important to note that China has repeatedly assured regional states that its rise would be peaceful and China would continue to play a positive role for the stability and security of the region.
9. The third is the challenge of maintaining its role as the "manager of regional order." ASEAN has so far been successful in sustaining its role as "the primary driving force" within the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). A similar role has also been entrusted to ASEAN in the East Asia community-building process. ASEAN, however, cannot take this role for granted. Within the current context, ASEAN is playing that role more by default rather than by design. The utility and merits of

ASEAN's model of multilateral security cooperation among non-ASEAN participants has increasingly been questioned. Indeed, while ASEAN remains relevant for addressing trans-national security challenges in the region, it is not clear if the ASEAN's model would be able to cope with security challenges in the wider Asia-Pacific region, especially in addressing those challenges brought about by the changing power relationship among major powers.

10. The fourth challenge points to the need for a new regional architecture that could remedy the problems and weaknesses of the ASEAN-driven model of the current Asia's security architecture. Indeed, the most fundamental weakness lies in the uncertainty regarding its future viability. The ASEAN-driven processes are not comprehensive enough to address strategic challenges in the region. Is it capable of accommodating the rise of China and the emergence of India? Would it continue to assure the prominent place of Japan and the US as existing crucial players in the region? Would it continue to guarantee that the interests of lesser powers will be served? Are the existing structures of the architecture strong enough? It has been acknowledged that "there is a persistent perception that they are not, that the security burden is too heavy for the structures the architects have given us."¹
11. If that is the case, the region needs an architecture that will guarantee that relationship among major powers –the US, China, Japan and India—would be primarily cooperative rather than competitive. It should also prevent strategic rivalry among the four major powers from becoming the main feature of regional relations. At the same time, it should also prevent the emergence of a concert of powers among the four powers at the expense of other lesser powers in the region. The current ASEAN-driven processes or system has not yet provided such guarantee. Various changes and strategic re-alignments in the relationship among the major powers, as a result of global transformation and regional power shift, have the potential to marginalise the central role of ASEAN within the current security architecture. ASEAN, therefore, needs to embark upon new initiatives to maintain its relevance.
12. Unfortunately, ASEAN itself is in a deep crisis in facing the ongoing strategic transformation. Even though ASEAN leaders, on the initiative by Indonesia, have agreed to consolidate and strengthen ASEAN's cohesiveness through the promise of an ASEAN Community, the process towards that direction is still fraught with difficulty and uncertainty. Different levels of economic development, diversity in political system, would lead to more divergent interests among ASEAN members. The ugly face of Burma has also undermined ASEAN's image further. All these problems have in turn undermined ASEAN's credibility. If these unfortunate

¹ Richard Smith, "Regional Security: Is 'Architecture' All We Need?" *Policy Analysis Brief* (The Stanley Foundation, December 2007), p. 4.

trends continue, then it is likely that great powers would begin to look beyond ASEAN in their efforts to craft a new security architecture best suited to their individual and common strategic interests. If a great powers-driven security architecture becomes a reality, ASEAN would soon find itself in the passenger's seat.

The Role of the European Union: Limitations and Some Options

13. The relations between ASEAN and the EU, which was still the European Economic Community (EEC) then, dated back to 1972 when the two organisation established informal relations. However, the relationship centred almost exclusively on commercial, economic and technical cooperation. Any reference to political and security cooperation was conspicuously absence.² The expansion of the scope and nature of cooperation began to intensify in 1994 with the decision to establish an ad hoc Eminent Persons Group (EPG) tasked to develop a comprehensive approach to ASEAN-EU relations, which this time included specific reference to political and security cooperation. In the 2003 Communication from the Commission on A New Partnership with South-East Asia, the EU consolidated the place of human rights and democracy-promotion agenda as one of the six key priorities in EU relations with Southeast Asia.³
14. At the 16th ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting in Nuremberg in March 2007, ASEAN and the EU adopted the Nuremberg Declaration on an EU-ASEAN Enhanced Partnership. To implement the Nuremberg Declaration, the Plan of Action to Implement the Nuremberg Declaration on an ASEAN-EU Enhanced Partnership was drawn and adopted during the first ASEAN-EU Summit in November 2007 in Singapore. Both documents are meant to provide a comprehensive basis for enhancing cooperation between the EU and ASEAN in political, security, economic, socio-cultural and development areas as well as in the fields of energy security and climate change/environment.
15. Is the current framework of EU-ASEAN cooperation adequate to address security challenges in Southeast Asia? The role of EU within the geo-strategic transformation in Asia remains uncertain, if not limited. It has not been a factor in the changing power relationship among major powers. Indeed, the regional countries do not see the EU as an important player in providing “hard security” for the region. The EU itself does not have any significant role in influencing the process and outcomes of great

² The summary of EU-ASEAN relations can be found at <http://www.aseansec.org/7209.htm>.

³ The other five priorities are (1) supporting regional stability and the fight against terrorism, (2) mainstreaming justice and home affairs issues, (3) injecting a new dynamism into regional trade and investment relations, (4) continuing to support the development of less prosperous countries, and (5) intensifying dialogue and cooperation in specific policy areas. See, COM (2003) 399.

strategic transformation taking place in the region. Indeed, it has been acknowledged that “Europe is unlikely to provide the hard power capability to cope with Asia’s various regional security challenges.”⁴

16. However, the EU is a useful partner for addressing “soft” security issues for ASEAN. First, the EU has played, and should continue to play, an important role as a “peace-investor.” Indeed, the EU has been involved in a series of peace-making investment in the region. It’s contribution in promoting and assisting economic development, good governance, human rights, and democracy-promotion has been acknowledged. It has also served as a source of inspiration for ASEAN in its efforts to foster greater regional integration in Southeast Asia.
17. Second, the EU’s security role in the region can be enhanced by broadening and strengthening its role as a “peace facilitator “. The EU, for example, has played a significant role in facilitating peace process in Aceh, Indonesia. The ASEAN Political and Security Community (APSC) Blueprint does provide an opportunity for the EU to enhance its engagement in Southeast Asia. It could work with ASEAN in order to strengthen the Associations’ capacity to implement its agendas on conflict resolution, conflict prevention, and post-conflict peace-building). The EU can also play a role in facilitating the search for solution to the South China Sea dispute between ASEAN states and China.
18. By playing a role as both “peace-investor” and “peace-facilitator” in Southeast Asia, the EU would be able to fill the existing “gap” in regional security. The region, despite the serious efforts by ASEAN, still need to develop the “soft” side of security. The EU could contribute significantly in assisting ASEAN to do so.

⁴ Christian Wagner, “To Do So, the EU Needs First to Emphasise Its Aid Contribution,” *Europe’s World*, Summer 2007, p. 39.