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ISBN: 978-1-921933-02-8

Published 2011.
ABSTRACT

Contemporary peace operations have evolved tremendously from the traditional peacekeeping operations of only a couple of decades ago, with peacekeeping objectives increasingly encompassed within a broader peacebuilding agenda. It is against this backdrop that this paper attempts to take stock of the current attitudes towards peace operations in Southeast Asia and to forge a way forward for ASEAN states’ more active engagement within the region and more specifically, with the broader emerging peacebuilding agenda. ASEAN States have often come under criticism for their limited engagement in peace operations. For example, it has been noted that although approximately 40% of armed conflicts have occurred in the wider Asian region, just over 10% of multilateral peace operations have been undertaken there. In the case of Southeast Asia, this is often put down to political and strategic factors – in particular, strong adherence to a traditional understanding of state sovereignty and non-interference. At the same time, however, it must be acknowledged that ASEAN countries have not been completely passive vis-à-vis involvement in regional and international peace operations. In particular, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines have substantial experience in the provision of uniformed peacekeeping personnel globally. Where ASEAN states have engaged militarily however, it is observed that it has often been in the context of traditional peacekeeping activities, rather than in complex missions that may require peace enforcement. For many other ASEAN countries, they either continue to lack the military capabilities or involvement in peacekeeping operations has simply not been a part of their military doctrines. Consequently, while overall ASEAN’s normative framework has typically engendered a degree of hesitation on the part of some states to intervene militarily - specifically within the ASEAN region and in complex operations - some countries have demonstrated a willingness to contribute militarily to peace operations.

Key Words: ASEAN, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, peace enforcement engagement

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Contemporary peace operations have evolved tremendously from the traditional peacekeeping operations of only a couple of decades ago, with peacekeeping objectives increasingly encompassed within a broader peacebuilding agenda. In multidimensional peace operations, ‘peacekeepers’ are being tasked with an ever-growing list of responsibilities, from building up a nation’s infrastructure, assisting in the reform of the police, judiciary, penal, and other rule of law institutions, undertaking disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, supervising elections, providing humanitarian assistance and security for its distribution, and assisting with the return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). In line with this trend, civilians have moved from the periphery to the core of peace operations in the last 5-10 years. This reflects a growing awareness that security and development are two sides of the same coin, and that if the ultimate goal is conflict transformation and sustainable peace, peacekeeping and peacebuilding must not be conceived of as separate endeavors but as linked in an inseparable and mutually reinforcing partnership. Put another way, peacekeeping might be seen as merely one component of a broader peacebuilding “toolbox” and agenda, for fragile or post-conflict states.

At the heart of the evolution in thinking on peace operations is recognition of the critical role that ‘peacebuilding’ measures often play in the period immediately following the cessation of hostilities. Indeed, it is in the fragile post-conflict environment following intra-state violence, particularly when open hostilities have ended but when public order is still elusive, that specialised skills are particularly critical capacities. Bringing such specialised capacities in to the early stages of a mission arguably greatly improves the chances of creating an enabling environment for both the securitization – but also long-term sustainment – of peace, particularly following the eventual draw down of a mission. As Taft has argued, the growing importance of civilian/specialized requirements in multidimensional peace operations coincides with the painstaking lessons learned in the peacekeeping operations of the last decade: the ramifications of failing to address the rule of law and the restoration of public safety and key infrastructure in the immediate aftermath of a military intervention. She makes a very simple but salient point that, in this environment, the nations and regions that are willing to provide such capacities are proving to be just as critical as those that have been contributors of ‘boots on the ground’.

Without taking the immediate post-conflict needs into account, there is a risk of a security vacuum – or ‘public security gap’ – developing, potentially doom a mission to failure before reconstruction even has an opportunity to begin. Key specialised capacities may include the provision of engineering units critical for rebuilding destroyed infrastructure, rapidly deployable medical teams, police personnel to establish the early foundations for institutions, proper governance, and an orderly environment, judicial experts, personnel for carrying out DDR, de-mining units, etc. Specialised capacities such as these have a key role to play in ensuring that the peace secured by peacekeepers is not jeopardized by failing to establish the necessary foundations for maintaining it.

Ultimately, more than a mere seamless transition from peacekeeping to peacebuilding, there is a need to do away with the ‘illusion of sequencing’ and to develop an agenda for bringing what might be conceived of as ‘peacebuilding’ elements into peace operations from their very inception. As noted by Jean-Marie Guehenno in 2004, ‘the complexity of post-conflict transitions means that…operations must advance concurrently on many tracks - political, humanitarian, development, human rights and security - often in high risk environments. Many of their tasks are peace building, as much as peacekeeping, and so our integrated peace operations must be linked to longer-term peacebuilding and development approaches’. Yet, in the words of the UN Secretary-General, the international community still grapples with exactly how to ‘bring peacebuilding upstream’.
It is against this backdrop that this paper attempts to take stock of the current attitudes towards peace operations in Southeast Asia and to forge a way forward for ASEAN states’ more active engagement within the region and more specifically, with the broader emerging peacebuilding agenda. ASEAN States have often come under criticism for their limited engagement in peace operations. For example, it has been noted that although approximately 40% of armed conflicts have occurred in the wider Asian region, just over 10% of multilateral peace operations have been undertaken there. In the case of Southeast Asia, this is often put down to political and strategic factors – in particular, strong adherence to a traditional understanding of state sovereignty and non-interference. At the same time, however, it must be acknowledged that ASEAN countries have not been completely passive vis-à-vis involvement in regional and international peace operations. In particular, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines have substantial experience in the provision of uniformed peacekeeping personnel globally. Where ASEAN states have engaged militarily however, it is observed that it has often been in the context of traditional peacekeeping activities, rather than in complex missions that may require peace enforcement. For many other ASEAN countries, they either continue to lack the military capabilities or involvement in peacekeeping operations has simply not been a part of their military doctrines. Consequently, while overall ASEAN’s normative framework has typically engendered a degree of hesitation on the part of some states to intervene militarily - specifically within the ASEAN region and in complex operations - some countries have demonstrated a willingness to contribute militarily to peace operations.

Against this background, a number of recent developments in ASEAN aimed at establishing institutional structures for addressing new security challenges provide fertile ground for exploring the future development of an ‘ASEAN’ capacity for peace operations. In particular, the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) reflects a substantive reshaping of the region’s architecture and signals a reassessment of the region’s modalities for conflict prevention and resolution. ASEAN’s vision of a Political Security Community is indicative of a more proactive attitude that is developing in ASEAN regarding the maintenance of regional peace and security, including the development of a greater regional peacekeeping capacity. However, while the continuing development of ASEAN states’ capacities for military contributions is crucial in order to be able to sustain an end to overt hostilities, above and beyond sending military troops, there is clearly an emerging trend in the region towards the civilianisation of states’ contributions to UN or multilateral peacekeeping/peace operations.

Arguably, the development of Southeast Asian states’ diverse civilian and/or specialized capacities provides the most propitious entry point for ASEAN to establish a more active and meaningful role in building peace in post-conflict societies and in strengthening states’ capacities to prevent violent conflict. By identifying and developing such capacities, ASEAN states can help to play an important role in contributing to building sustainable peace in fragile societies. Indeed, it is here that ASEAN countries are already beginning to forge a role for themselves. In order to push this agenda forward, we need to capitalise on the momentum currently building within ASEAN in regards to crafting new responses to new security challenges and on the movement towards the consolidation of a political-security community.
RECENT OVERVIEW OF ‘ASEAN’ ENGAGEMENT IN PEACEKEEPING AND PEACE OPERATIONS

Several ASEAN member countries actively contribute to peacekeeping duties at the international and regional levels in an individual capacity through the contribution of military and police personnel. Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines constitute the major and more active contributors. As of end December 2010, of 115 countries contributing uniformed military and police personnel to UN peacekeeping operations, Indonesia represented the 16th largest contributor, with 1,795 personnel. Malaysia was ranked 21st, with 1,163 and Philippines ranked 27th, with 926 military and police personnel. This can be compared to Germany’s 282, Canada’s 198, and Australia’s 109 military and police personnel. Further illustrating their commitment to increasing their peacekeeping capacities, there are already peacekeeping centers in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines. A peacekeeping training centre was established in Malaysia in 2006 and more recently, Cambodia has also announced the establishment of its own peacekeeping centre. Indonesia’s centre was established in 2010 under the auspices of the national defense forces (TNI) and notably aims to prepare peacekeeping personnel for deployment in UN operations, as well as to train a rapid reaction unit capable of responding to natural disasters.

In 2004, Indonesia proposed that an ASEAN Peacekeeping Force be established by 2012 as part of a future ASEAN Security Community. However, it received a lukewarm response from other ASEAN countries at the time for several reasons, including the fact that the establishment of a collective peacekeeping capability would have run counter to the principle of non-interference. In response to the objections, Jakarta amended the proposed time frame to 2015-2020. An ASEAN peacekeeping force is therefore conceived of as a long-term initiative, which should not be rushed into without first building the requisite trust and confidence among member states. Given the experience of several ASEAN states in peacekeeping operations in the region (e.g. in Cambodia and East Timor), we can be at least cautiously optimistic about the prospects of establishing a regional capability in the medium term.

Although ASEAN was criticised for failing to initiate any preventive diplomatic efforts in the case of Timor-Leste in 1999, and for rejecting a collective intervention following the violence that erupted after the referendum for independence, ASEAN countries were not completely passive in the immediate aftermath of the violence. A number of ASEAN members – including Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines – supported the Australian-led coalition. In fact, ‘ASEAN’ played an indirect role in facilitating INTERFET, in that the Indonesian government consented to the humanitarian intervention on the proviso that Australia did not dominate the mission and that ASEAN states participated. Thus, ASEAN member states’ participation on an individual basis allowed INTERFET to preserve its regional character and to ensure Indonesia’s consent. ASEAN member states also participated in a mission to Aceh in individual capacities in 2005. Following the cessation of hostilities in 2005 between the Indonesian government and GAM, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines and Brunei Darussalam participated in an EU-led civilian mission to implement the Memorandum of Understanding between the government of Indonesia and GAM (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, the Free
Aceh Movement). AMM’s tasks included overseeing the demobilisation of GAM and the decommissioning of its armaments as well as monitoring the human rights situation, the process of legislative change, and the reintegration of GAM members. In 2004, the Philippines invited Malaysian peacekeepers to assist in monitoring the ceasefire between the government and MILF in Mindanao. The multinational International Monitoring Team (IMT), which has been led for the most part by the Malaysian contingent (despite a period of withdrawal through 2009), but also incorporated Brunei, Japan, Libya and several EU members across its different components, has monitored the implementation of ceasefire, as well as socio-economic and humanitarian, agreements between the government of the Philippines and the MILF.

It was recently suggested that the future of multilateral peacekeeping operations in Southeast Asia is ‘rather sobering’ and that ‘in the realm of peacekeeping the region remains a rather isolated island in a sea of change... largely unaffected by the international trend towards both increasing peacekeeping and the outsourcing of such operations to regional organisations and ad hoc coalitions’. Certainly, to date, ASEAN countries have been more receptive to ad hoc arrangements and have resisted the establishment of an ‘ASEAN’ capacity for peace operations. However, it is clear that ASEAN member states are generally receptive to UN peacekeeping operations as an important element in the maintenance of international peace and security. Furthermore, this statement misses the subtle but significant transformation that is currently occurring in the region regarding states’ attitudes to addressing new security challenges. While there is still a degree of hesitation or conditionality on ASEAN states’ provision of military peacekeepers within the region, at the same time there is an increasing willingness on the part of many ASEAN states to become more active contributors to peace operations. While some states are working to improve their military peacekeeping capacities, many ASEAN members who have no or little peacekeeping experience are forging a greater role for themselves through the provision of civilian and/or specialised capacities that are consistent with their preferences, capabilities and resources. Thus, while ASEAN as a whole has not yet moved towards a concrete policy on peace operations, a number of individual states have embraced the concept.

One of the trends that can be discerned as part of this greater engagement of ASEAN countries with notions of peacekeeping, peace operations and peacebuilding is ASEAN member states’ increasing willingness to develop and contribute civilian or niche capacities to multidimensional peace operations – i.e. there is a civilianisation of their involvement, whether in UN or other multilateral arrangements. The provision of civilian and/or specialised capacities is arguably a more acceptable premise for many states in Southeast Asia, particularly when it comes to conflicts in the region that might require more than traditional peacekeeping responsibilities. This was noted back in 2002 in a workshop on Conflict Prevention and Peace-building in Southeast Asia, which recommended that in light of the region’s adherence to a fairly strict understanding of sovereignty/non-interference, to enhance its role in conflict prevention and peace-building, ASEAN states should look to areas that comprise humanitarian actions and do not constitute political interference. It therefore recommended that ASEAN explore alternative means (to military force) of being involved in the domestic affairs of a country without deviating from the ‘ASEAN way’. This point is still salient, but as we will see, the ‘ASEAN way’ itself is not an entirely static concept and what is considered interference in the domestic affairs of a country is an ever-widening notion.
The institutional restructuring that is currently underway within ASEAN could be seen to be the grouping’s response to successive ‘new’ security challenges that confronted ASEAN from the 1990s onwards, providing a collective catalyst for the grouping to begin to fundamentally rethink its norms and modalities for addressing new security challenges, including intra-state conflicts. To begin with, crises in Cambodia and subsequently in Timor-Leste from 1999 onwards provided the realization for ASEAN that its traditional approaches to managing inter-state conflict were inadequate for addressing the new sorts of intra-state challenges that were threatening the security and stability of its member states and the region. In terms of conflict, traditional modalities for conflict prevention and management such as confidence building measures, multilateral treaties, and a consensus-based style of decision-making proved futile for dealing with such internal challenges. This was highlighted in the case of Timor-Leste’s difficult and violent transition to independence. The stark inability of ASEAN to respond to or stem the violence and gross human rights violations in Timor-Leste that erupted after a referendum for independence from Indonesia led to severe criticism being leveled at ASEAN.

These realisations were compounded by the emergence of a raft of ‘non-traditional’ security challenges from the late 1990s, largely heralded by the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997-1998, and other transnational problems such as the recurring haze that blanketed parts of the region, the emergence of potential health pandemics, the growing visibility of transnational crime, and environmental degradation. ASEAN found itself starkly unprepared to respond to such non-traditional security challenges and it began a slow but purposeful and calibrated recrafting of regional institutional structures. Arguably the most significant such development has been the adoption of the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), which along with the socio-cultural and economic pillars, is to provide the foundations for an ‘ASEAN Community’ to be established by 2015.

As agreed in Bali during the 9th ASEAN Summit in October 2003, the APSC is to serve as the umbrella for bringing ASEAN’s political and security cooperation to a higher plane and for ensuring that ‘the peoples and Member States of ASEAN live in peace with one another and with the world at large in a just, democratic and harmonious environment.’ It obliges ASEAN member states to create a ‘cohesive, peaceful, stable and resilient region with shared responsibility for comprehensive security’.

At the APSC’s core are five strategic thrusts: conflict prevention, conflict resolution, post-conflict peacebuilding, political development, and norm shaping and sharing. To many observers of ASEAN, the measures introduced under conflict prevention and conflict resolution are rather progressive. For instance, under ‘Conflict Resolution and Pacific Settlement of Disputes’, under the subheading, ‘Developing regional cooperation for maintenance of peace and security’, the APSC Blueprint outlines a number of specific activities, including to (a) carry out technical cooperation with the UN and relevant regional organisations.
to exchange expertise and experiences; (b) identify national focal points, with a view to promoting regional cooperation in maintaining peace and security; and (c) establish a network among existing ASEAN states’ peace keeping centers to conduct joint planning, training, and sharing of experiences, with a view to establishing an ASEAN arrangement for the maintenance of peace and stability. Under ‘Post-conflict Peacebuilding’, the APSC envisages efforts to (a) ensure the complete discontinuity of conflict and violence and/or man-made disasters in affected areas; (b) facilitate the return of peace and/or normalisation of life as early as possible; and (c) lay the ground for reconciliation and all other necessary measures to secure peace and stability, thus preventing the affected areas from falling again to conflicts in the future. Salient here are the specific measures that ASEAN states might pursue, including strengthening humanitarian assistance; implementing human resources development and capacity building programs in post-conflict areas; and increasing cooperation in reconciliation and further strengthening peace-oriented values.

Overall, these measures clearly suggest a desire on the part of ASEAN member states to develop a greater capacity for participating in peace- and peacebuilding- operations, which not too long ago, would have been a politically ‘taboo’ subject. They not only emphasise a more proactive approach to regional security challenges, but also suggest that there is a gradual shift in attitudes regarding notions of state sovereignty and non-interference – ultimately a widening of what is considered a ‘regional’ security concern, and a narrowing of the scope of what is considered ‘interference’. Thus, both state and non-state actors have increasingly begun to call for regional responses to regional problems - even at the risk of appearing to interfere in the domestic affairs of member states. To this end, in addition to its practical measures for enhancing cooperation in regional security, there is another side of the APSC that is perhaps equally or even more salient.

The inclusion of ‘political development’ and ‘norm shaping and sharing’ within the APSC suggest that it is designed to be more than an instrument for practical cooperation, but is also a political project aimed at extending regional cooperation from the mere functional to the normative. In light of comments by the Assistant Director of the ASEAN Secretariat that the possibility for a greater embrace and establishment of peacekeeping operations through the organisation is dependent on member states’ internal political structures, the envisaged role of the ‘APSC’ in promoting and diffusing relevant people-centered norms becomes extremely salient. In principle, the APSC is one component of the recalibration in ASEAN that has the long-term potential to actually engender the requisite change in political and strategic attitudes towards both governance and security that will be needed to enhance the organisation’s role in peacekeeping and peace operations. Overall, the APSC bodes well for the development of a greater willingness and institutional capacity of ASEAN states to contribute to building peace in fragile countries in the medium to long-term.
A NEW AGENDA FOR ASEAN: CIVILIAN AND/OR SPECIALISED CAPACITIES

The increasing emphasis of a number of Southeast Asian states on the provision of civilians or ‘white helmets’ relative to military/uniformed personnel (‘blue helmets’) - specifically in regards to efforts within the region – is part of this growing momentum towards building capacities for regional peace and security. As an avenue for engaging with fragile states, the provision of civilian/specialised capacities is a way through which ASEAN countries – both with or without a traditional peacekeeping capacity - could contribute to the broader goal of laying the foundations for regional peace and stability. Thus, the identification of niche roles for states that have previously not played a role in keeping or building peace would answer to the growing need for civilian and specialist expertise in complex peace operations in order to build the foundations for a sustainable peace – i.e. in rebuilding, and peacebuilding.

As it was put in a five-year review of the UN’s peacebuilding architecture, although there is a widespread awareness that sequencing of peacekeeping and peacebuilding does not work, and that peacebuilding must accompany peacekeeping from its inception, there is a sense that in practice the UN still favors a sequential approach. Thus, the focus still appears to be on peacekeeping, with peacebuilding viewed as an ‘add on’ during the course of the peacekeeping operation. Nonetheless ASEAN has, recently, proven cognizant of the importance of bringing ‘peacebuilding’ elements into the early stages of peace operations. During the Sixty-fifth UN General Assembly Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) 16th Meeting in October 2010, Nattawut Sabeyroop of Thailand, speaking on behalf of ASEAN, noted that a key development in the area of peace operations has been recognition of the nexus between peacekeeping and peacebuilding, with him reiterating that ASEAN understood these as complementary. He argued that to ensure a smooth transition, peacebuilding should start building its foundation in post-conflict societies much earlier than at the exit of peacekeeping operations.
WHAT NICHE ROLES ARE BEING EXPLORED BY ASEAN STATES?

Policing and Law and Order Functions in Post-conflict Environments

Police officers are increasingly taking on responsibilities in international peacekeeping operations. Through building strong institutions and proper governance systems and by progressively establishing an orderly environment that can be sustained over a long period, police are arguably more capable of keeping the peace than military forces. For Singapore, the provision of civilian police is one of its greatest strengths, based on its understanding that while military forces are crucial in establishing initial security, civilian police forces are better suited for law and order duties and maintaining security. To this end, between 1989 and 2009, nearly 450 Singaporean police officers took part in 10 peacekeeping operations. Its personnel have been involved in several missions, usually under the auspices of the UN, training police, enhancing the operational readiness of local police, and supervising UN-sponsored elections. This included in Cambodia and Nepal, as well as Namibia and South Africa. In recent years, Singapore has also successively contributed critical police units to the UN Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT).

Besides from the distinctive role it has forged for itself in the provision of police, Singapore has also, under the MoU on UN Standby Arrangements (1997), pledged a quick reaction force which is capable of being mobilised and deployed at short notice in worldwide peacekeeping duties, comprising planning officers, military observers, medical personnel and police officers, and equipment, helicopters, tactical transport aircraft from the Armed Forces. In post-tsunami Aceh, Singapore’s specialized equipment also meant that it was the first country able to enter the disaster area. Indeed, Singapore is often flagged as a key ASEAN member in terms of technical and technological capability.

Capacity and Institution Building

In addition to provision of armed peacekeepers, civilian police, air support crew and equipment in Timor-Leste, Singapore has also provided technical assistance under the auspices of the Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP), administered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Between 2000 and 2009, more than 300 Timorese officials and advisors attended study visits and SCP training programs in areas such as Diplomacy, Finance, Public Administration, Healthcare, Port Management, Civil Aviation, Customs and Taxation and English language. Singapore’s first in-country training in Timor-Leste, in July 2003, involved training for the newly-recruited Foreign Service Officers of the Timor-Leste Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation (MFAC). Since then, Singapore has provided assistance in building Timor-Leste’s human resource capacity in areas such as Financial Administration and Management, Customs Development, and Internal Auditing and Control. In November 2008, Singapore hosted a study team of customs and tax officials to learn from the Singapore Customs and Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore.
Engineering and Medical Units

Thailand’s first engagement in UN peace operations was in Cambodia, under the auspices of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), where it provided two engineering battalions. Thailand has also in recent years been involved in Afghanistan and Iraq. In Afghanistan, it provided an engineering battalion to provide construction and engineering services. In Iraq, it has been involved in reconstruction tasks and in providing humanitarian assistance, having sent an engineering battalion as well as several medical teams. It has also been involved in the building of several roads, the renovation and reopening of schools and the establishment of a medical clinic among other things. As Taft has argued, since it is unlikely to ever become a major troop contributor, Thailand envisions the provision of specialized engineering and humanitarian assistance as crucial to its future peacekeeping policy.

Humanitarian Assistance Post-disaster — and Post-conflict?

For the Philippines, peacekeeping is important but the country has more in-depth experience in sending civilian personnel to humanitarian post-disaster missions (for example, the Asian tsunami, post-Nargis Myanmar, and the Indonesian and Haitian earthquakes). In 2006, the Philippine White Helmets framework was adopted as the mechanism for non-uniformed government, civil society and private sector involvement as a humanitarian and peacebuilding group in Philippine UN peace operations. The Philippines White Helmets also serves as the Department of Foreign Affairs’ own humanitarian action corps. Domestically, PWH helps to provide and coordinate local and international humanitarian assistance to calamities throughout the country. Regionally and internationally, this expertise in responding to and rebuilding after humanitarian crises could be utilised in both post-disaster and post-conflict situations if the necessary will exists to do so.

Demining

While demining might appear to be a peripheral issue, the presence of mines can severely inhibit the physical, psychological and economic well-being of individuals and communities. An environment rendered insecure by mines is not conducive to development or meeting a community’s basic needs — for instance by limiting the potential for agricultural regeneration of the (re)building of roads. Furthermore, the psychological impact of land mines increases feelings of insecurity in the local population and reduces the chances of stability and peace prevailing. Cambodia’s role in de-mining in peace operations is therefore indicative of the value of specialised capacities in fragile post-conflict environments. Given its tragic legacy of war, Cambodia has developed competencies in demining and subsequently participated in its first UN peacekeeping mission in 2006 when it deployed combat engineers to Sudan to clear landmines. It has continued to supply combat engineers to Sudan and has since also provided personnel to Chad and the Central African Republic. In November 2010, Cambodian peacekeepers were deployed to the UN Interim Force in Lebanon to provide de-mining and construction support. As was put by the UN Resident Coordinator in Phnom Penh at the time, it represents ‘an important step forward in Cambodia’s transition from a recipient country of peacekeepers to one that deploys highly skilled experts to assist in other countries where the need is great’. Cambodia has also set up several schools for demining, signaling that it is a capacity that it could develop even further. Vietnam has also indicated its intention to participate in demining operations. Although Vietnam’s contribution to UN peacekeeping operations has typically been limited to financial contributions — at that, since 1996, it recently indicated its intention to participate actively in peacekeeping operations in the future, with its relevant agencies presently assessing the experiences of other countries, including ASEAN members. A representative
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of Vietnam’s Ministry of Defence recently noted that the country intended to participate in activities which are in keeping with its ‘capabilities and conditions’, including in areas such as mine disposal, military medicine, and disaster relief. To forge a way forward, the representative proposed that ASEAN countries enhance the exchange of information and experiences and strengthen cooperation in education and training of personnel.\(^{22}\)

Looking Ahead — Just the Tip of the Iceberg?

The momentum towards the greater involvement of ASEAN states in UN or multilateral peace operations, in particular through the provision of civilian and/or specialized capacities, is starting to build. However, the examples illustrated here arguably present just the tip of possibilities that exist for ASEAN states’ increasing contributions to peace operations and broader peacebuilding strategies. To highlight one example, the joint UN-Cambodian ECCC established to try top cadre for war crimes and other mass atrocity crimes committed during the Khmer Rouge regime has potentially provided the opportunity for local Cambodians to develop capacities in investigations, human rights, international legal justice, and war crimes prosecution. This is expertise that Cambodia, for instance, may be potentially willing and able to share with other societies emerging from conflict.

Regionally, if ASEAN states are to move forward on developing their contributions to peace operations, the most fundamental first step is for them to recognise the critical contribution of specialised capacities and to identify the niche expertise that ASEAN countries possess and could develop. Ideally, ASEAN would eventually establish an avenue for countries to share their experiences and ultimately to ‘pool’ the various capacities they are willing to potentially make available for deployment in the region. At the global level, greater civilian involvement will benefit from the reformation of the global system for the recruitment of civilian specialised capacities, which is currently under examination through the UN Review of International Civilian Capacities, and which among other things, aims to develop proposals on how to best mobilize and organise specific civilian capacities from the Global South and among women.\(^{23}\) Indeed, notwithstanding the various ad hoc arrangements in place across different regions for recruiting and deploying civilians to peace operations, and despite the Brahimi Report flagging the need for a more coherent and efficient system for civilian recruitment, there is still a distinct lack of an appropriate system to match the civilian needs of contemporary peace operations.\(^{24}\)

Finally, this look into the future of ASEAN countries’ involvement in peace operations inevitably reveals a number of critical concerns that have been flagged for further research. Some of these key concerns are the imperative of ‘local ownership’ and how this can actually be operationalised on the ground; the role of women in peace building – their specific skill sets and how their contributions can be mainstreamed through Southeast Asian efforts; and perhaps most fundamentally, how to address the fundamental concerns leveled at the ‘liberal institutionalist’ model of peace operations/peace building. Many critics suggest that a top-down approach to peace and state building essentially fails to identify the real needs and agency of local populations.\(^{25}\) We tentatively suggest that a human rights perspective could provide a framework for formulating and assessing measures designed to build the foundations of a sustainable future in post-conflict societies. Thus, rather than seeing institutions as an end in themselves, they merely become a means for addressing individuals and communities’ needs (from their point of view).\(^{25}\) This is related to the need for national ownership, and would mitigate the likelihood that measures or structures are imposed that are incongruous with local customs, existing structures, or needs.
CONCLUSION

As ASEAN maintains its centrality in multilateral initiatives in Asia toward the maintenance of regional peace and security, the onus is on the organisation to ride the current momentum in regional cooperation. A more active role in peace operations is certainly a step forward in this direction. Notwithstanding the continuing development of several members’ military peacekeeping capacities, for instance through the networking of national peacekeeping centers, an emphasis on identifying and utilising Southeast Asian countries’ niche civilian capacities would help to bolster UN or other multilateral peace operations in the region with the additional civilian and/or specialized expertise that they will inevitably require and benefit from. This also poses an avenue for working around the continuing hesitation of some states towards military interventions in the region and the absence, in some countries, of the requisite military capabilities or doctrine.

Ultimately, despite critiques leveled at ASEAN today that it remains impervious to the more progressive attitudes towards conflict prevention and resolution - based on a changing understanding of sovereignty and non-interference emerging at the global level - there is a clear attitudinal shift similarly occurring within Southeast Asia that promises to lend towards a more proactive, and effective, role for ASEAN member countries in future potential peace operations in the region.

Endnotes


Defining ASEAN’s Role in Peace Operations: Helping to Bring Peacebuilding ‘Upstream’?

12 ASEAN Political Security Community Blueprint, 2009.
14 UNGA & UNSC, Review of Peacebuilding Architecture, 10.
15 UN General Assembly (UNGA), 2010, “Cyclic Targets” for Peacekeeping Tantamount to Putting Price on Peace – Price Dearly Paid by Millions of Civilians in Conflict, Fourth Committee Hears, Sixty-fifth General Assembly Fourth Committee 16th Meeting (AM), 26 October, New York: Department of Public Information.
17 ‘Singapore Highlights its Role’, 2009.
18 ‘Statement by Singapore Ambassador to Timor-Leste Lee Chong Giam at the 2009 Timor-Leste and Development Partners’ Meeting’.
20 Taft, 2008, 77.
24 At a workshop in September 2010 on the Civilian Contribution to Peace Operations, Kuala Lumpur, jointly organised by APCCMOE, SIPRI and ISIS Malaysia, representatives from the academia, foreign ministries, UN peace operations, etc from across the wider Asian region generally understood/expressed a willingness on part of their countries to contribute more civilians to peace operations, but indicated that they were uncertain as to how to do so, identifying the need for a mechanism be put in place for recruiting civilian personnel (as there is for TCCs and PCCs).