INTERNATIONAL STUDIES CENTER

POINTS OF VIEW

The International Studies Center (ISC) publishes commentaries on international issues in its Points of View. The views expressed are the authors' own and do not represent those of the Royal Thai Government or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand. Permission to reproduce the commentary(s) may be obtained from the ISC at isc@mfa.go.th, and due recognition to the author(s) should also be given as appropriate.

No. 9/2026 | November 2026

Middling the ASEAN Way:
The (Con)Test of ASEAN Centrality in the Indo-Pacific Century [1]

Jittipat Poonkham [2]

Since its inception in 1967, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has been a subject of debate and dissensus. In the most important geopolitical shift in the twenty-first century, ASEAN is often dubbed as a mere "talk shop" (Terada 2011; Pongsudhirak 2022). Rhetorically, it is an Asian "NATO" in the sense of no action, talk only! ASEAN's conduct is recently criticized as a slow and sluggish response to complex issues such as the Myanmar crisis and the South China Sea conflict.

However, in reality, ASEAN is not (and will never be) an Asian NATO. Nor is a supranational organization. Unlike the European Union, ASEAN's ultimate aim is to build a regional pluralist international society, focusing on principles and practices of intergovernmentalism, sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs, consensus-building and

[1] This article was presented at the ISC International Forum organised by the International Studies Center (ISC) on 14 August 2026 at Eastin Grand Hotel Sathorn.

[2] Associate Professor of International Relations and Director of International Studies Program in the Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University.

informal diplomacy, which is oft-cited as an “ASEAN Way”. Accordingly, some praise ASEAN as “the region’s most successful multilateral organization” whose one of its greatest achievements is “its ability to prevent disputes among member states from becoming open armed conflicts” (Sukma 2024, 3).

This article is neither pessimistic nor optimistic, but rather pessopmistic. As an ASEAN pessopmist, I take a more realistic and nuanced view on Southeast Asian security community. Every so often, ASEAN is ineffective, incomplete and imperfect but it is an indispensable actor in the Indo-Pacific region. To be indispensable, ASEAN has to become not only an inclusive platform that does not exclude anyone else but also a reliable, resilient, responsible and thereby relevant player.

That is to say, ASEAN has played a good and constructive role in non-traditional or soft security but it is not quite successful on managing hard security, most notably the South China Sea and Myanmar crisis. On the one hand, ASEAN is too silent and cautious on the urgent sirens of human security and humanitarian intervention that are related to sovereignty. ASEAN prefers a non-interference and non-intervention stance. ASEAN’s approach to traditional security concerns has typically focused on soft, non-sensitive, cautious and consensual issues, which leads the grouping to “tiptoe” around hard security challenges.

However, on the other hand, ASEAN is, to a certain extent, a salient and robust player on non-traditional security ranging from transnational crime (such as terrorism, illicit trafficking, sea piracy, illegal migration, cybercrime) to health and environmental security concerns, disaster management, decarbonization, and the development of a regional agenda on women, peace and security (see Caballero-Anthony 2011; Martel 2016; Dosch 2023). In other words, ASEAN has played soft ball with hard security issues while claiming to play hard ball with soft security.

This article makes a case for a pessopmistic perspective of ASEAN Centrality. It is structured into three main parts. The first examines and problematizes a conceptual or discursive formation of ASEAN. As a regional pluralist institutional community, ASEAN has faced discursive anxiety regarding irreconcilable normative principles and discursive practices. This section outlines the two narratives of ASEAN – namely, ASEAN Way and ASEAN Centrality – and traces how this regional organizaation works accordingly. The second part explores why ASEAN Centrality is highly (con)tested. It is largely due to the multiplicity of ASEAN identities and its different and diverging practices of peace management. This section elucidates three models, namely unity amid diversity, diversity without unity, and diversity with disinterest with three case studies (the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo Pacific (AOIP), South China Sea and the Russia-Ukraine War, respectively).

To revitalize and resuscitate ASEAN Centrality, the last section calls for a "leading from the middle" approach, which could develop a new narrative of ASEAN middle way, and reposition itself as a middle power – or perhaps a concert of middle powers – so as to sustainably navigate geopolitical competition and radical uncertainty. Therefore, this article is not only to explicitly explain why ASEAN Centrality fails but to reassess how this discursive practice comes about and comes apart.

Problematizing ASEAN Discourses

Approaching 60 years old in 2027, a middle-age ASEAN has reached a mid-life crisis. Why is ASEAN partially successful and partially failing? This is largely due to the irreconcilability of ASEAN norms and ordering principles, which are competing and contrasting ones between

ASEAN Way and ASEAN Centrality. These two discursive practices are challenged from within and without throughout many decades of ASEAN regionalism.

Internally, ASEAN has an "ASEAN Way" discourse. This is a, if not the, DNA of ASEAN. First of all, ASEAN Way largely focuses on institutional, non-binding mechanisms such as consultation, consensus-building, and informal diplomacy. Second, it is also committed to the principles and practices of sovereignty and non-intervention. ASEAN is a non-interferer in internal affairs of other member states (see Jones 2010; Yukawa 2017). In turn, this persisting practice is a justification for the regional status quo. Through its own way, ASEAN is a pluralist international society, rather than a solidarist international society. To a certain extent, ASEAN Way is able to loosely unite ASEAN Community together but it is unable or quite difficult to move forward in a constructive and proactive way.

In addition, the resilience of pluralist international society is complicated by a regional divide. Despite its oversimplified picture, the bifurcation of mainland and maritime Southeast Asia is quite obvious on various fronts, especially the (re)alignment with major powers. Almost all ASEAN leaders have recurrently raised concerns about choosing side in this great power rivalry. A fear of being forced to choose side, however, does not stop or decrease ASEAN member states to take side. Rather than adopting a strategic hedging, many, if not all, states are aligning/ realigning/ unaligning with either Washington or Beijing. Almost all mainland Southeast Asian nations are bandwagoning with China whereas maritime Southeast Asia prefers to engage with the US. The Russo-Ukrainian War since 2022 and the Israel-Palestine War since 2023 have intensified this imaginary divide along the mainland and maritime southeast Asia.

In contrary to a conventional wisdom on hedging as omnipresent state behaviors in Southeast Asia (Kuik 2021; Gerstl 2022), some scholars such as Yuen Foong Khong and Joseph Chinyong Liow (2025) assert that Southeast Asian nations have already begun to choose sides amid geopolitical rivalry. In this sense, hedging is an exception, rather than a rule (of the game). Even worse, some countries might be "hedging by default" (Poonkham 2023b). That is, different domestic players and bureaucracies strive to play great powers off against one another for maximum maneuverability, rather than having a whole-of-the-government approach.

More fundamentally, the unprecedented rise of China and its concomitant Sino-US geostrategic contest have accelerated ASEAN anxiety. ASEAN has encountered anxiety, most notably discursive anxiety, when the old narrative is not making sense anymore. In the time of discursive anxiety, international actor is subject to find new discourse or narrative in order to make sense of the changing global politics and to position itself in the changing configuration of power. Discursively, ASEAN has not yet developed a nuanced and well-rounded strategy toward the Indo-Pacific. ASEAN attempts to pursue what I call "discursive balancing" by promulgating the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo Pacific (AOIP), which will be discussed below.

Internationally, ASEAN has an "ASEAN Centrality" discourse. What is ASEAN Centrality? It means ASEAN's role and position as a center of multilayered and multipronged region-wide institutional frameworks. ASEAN is seen as being "at the driver's seat" and a "fulcrum" building regional security and economic architecture (see Caballero-Anthony 2014, 2017; Acharya 2014). ASEAN Centrality centers on an ordering regional security architecture comprising such key institutional frameworks as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting (ADMM)-Plus, and so forth. ASEAN Centrality is largely based on inclusiveness.

However, ASEAN Centrality and its institutional cohesion have been increasingly contested and undermined by major powers (Poonkham 2023a). Although extra-regional players rhetorically recognized or paid lip service to ASEAN Centrality, ASEAN-centered institutions have been increasingly bypassed by US-led minilateralism with treaty allies such as Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad, now a renamed "Squad"), and other trilateral groupings including the Australia–UK–US (AUKUS), Japan-ROK-US (JAROKUS) and Japan–Philippines–US (JAPHUS). Although China has principally and practically endorsed and engaged with ASEAN-centered institutional frameworks, it also establishes its own institutional initiatives, most notably the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). By doing so, great powers, more or less, have set and played their own rules of the game, thereby transcending ASEAN Centrality.

In the new era of geopolitical competition, ASEAN has become an irrelevant player despite stating that it is not a pawn in a great power politics game. It is internally divided, especially between mainland/ continental and maritime/ archipelagic Southeast Asia. ASEAN as a regional institution is often criticized as an inactive and ineffective actor in managing various challenges inside ASEAN such as Myanmar, South China Sea and so on. A resilience of pluralistic international society is shaping the multiplicity of ASEAN identities and interests. Equally important, ASEAN is also challenged internationally. ASEAN Centrality is (con)tested by geopolitical rivalry especially between the US and China as well as outperformed by the rise of minilateralism.

(Con)testing ASEAN Centrality

The second section explains why ASEAN and its Centrality are highly (con)tested. This is because ASEAN Centrality has no single model of peace management, but rather at least three

models, namely unity amid diversity, diversity without unity, and diversity with disinterest. This helps explicate why and how there is no single voice since ASEAN identity is elusive and not singular. This multiplicity of ASEAN Centrality will be elucidated through three case studies, including the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, the South China Sea, and the Russo-Ukrainian War, respectively.

The first elusive identity of ASEAN is diverse but united. The good example is the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP). The AOIP came into prominence during Thailand's ASEAN chairmanship in 2019, but its foundation largely relied on an Indonesian draft (see Dewi 2020). Arguably, ASEAN pursued a strategy focused on depoliticizing security agendas, emphasizing nontraditional security challenges, and maintaining its Centrality in the evolving Indo-Pacific security landscape. This approach combined institutional hedging and community building to engage with major powers, all while representing a form of discursive counterbalancing. Instead of outright hard balancing, ASEAN crafted its alternative discourse, embodied in the AOIP.

At the 34th ASEAN Summit in Bangkok on 23 June 2019, ASEAN leaders officially adopted Indonesia's proposed AOIP (ASEAN 2019). This signified a critical consensus within ASEAN, ensuring a unified approach to address broader Indo-Pacific security agendas while preserving regional autonomy. As one commentator noted, "The AOIP represents the grouping's latest common effort to interface with all other Indo-Pacific initiatives and face a new world in which many emerging powers are competing for influence and turf in the most unpredictable ways" (Chongkittavorn 2019).

In contrast to Washington's FOIP strategy, ASEAN's AOIP took a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to regional security challenges. First, it was more inclusive, avoiding discrimination against undemocratic states. ASEAN refrained from engaging in a normative

contest with nondemocracies, partly due to its own political diversity and adherence to the "ASEAN Way," emphasizing sovereignty and noninterference in internal affairs.

Second, unlike FOIP, AOIP did not explicitly address great-power competition or the Sino–US geostrategic rivalry. For ASEAN, China was not viewed as a strategic competitor aiming to displace the United States in the Indo-Pacific security complex. Without directly addressing Sino-American geopolitical competition, ASEAN aimed to engage with both superpowers, benefit from their involvement, and avoid taking sides.

Third, through AOIP, ASEAN framed security agendas and challenges within the framework of regional institutionalization. By integrating security within existing ASEAN-led multilateral mechanisms like ARF, EAS, and ADMM-Plus, ASEAN reaffirmed its Centrality in the Indo-Pacific.

Fourth, AOIP adopted a comprehensive security approach with four priority areas of cooperation: maritime security, connectivity, sustainable development, and economic security. This reflected ASEAN's approach to nontraditional security cooperation.

In contrast to the security-centric FOIP, Thailand under Prayut Chan-o-cha embraced a more inclusive AOIP. Initially, Thailand's stance seemed reactive, aligning with Indonesia's initiative and the broader Indo-Pacific imperative. Nevertheless, Thailand's vision of the Indo-Pacific, by default, incorporated the ASEAN outlook, which diverged from the American perspective, particularly in the context of ASEAN and Thailand's reluctance to constrain China within the Indo-Pacific security architecture (Poonkham 2024).

The second elusive identity of ASEAN Centrality is its diversity without unity, which can be seen in the case of South China Sea (SCS). On the one hand, this dispute is complicated by external powers. Through more than four decades of assertiveness, China has officially presented

its “nine-dash line” cartography to illustrate its own role-taking as a claimant state in 1993 and extended to so-called “ten-dash line” in 2023. Since 2013, Beijing shifted from a claimant state to a more assertive power, which commended island building on an unprecedented scale, including its militarization of the Paracel Islands in 2016 and elsewhere across the SCS (Fravel 2011; Quyet 2023).

On the other hand, the SCS conflict illustrates that internally, ASEAN is diverse and disunited. Indonesia has attempted to position itself as leadership in the South China Sea dispute, but even complicated ASEAN’s disunity. Since 2014, the Joko Widodo government had shifted the role of Indonesia from the previous position of mediator toward a more proactive role as an enforcer of regional order. As part of Global Maritime Fulcrum, Jakarta entailed more expansive (military, trade and diplomatic) functions to achieve a new identity of a maritime power in the region. Instead of mediating between claimant parties, Widodo’s expectation of Indonesia is much more focused on advancing regional order through Indonesia’s vision (Friedrichs and Fellenz 2023).

Second, in contrast to his predecessors, Widodo sought to position Indonesia’s maritime power role more prominently vis-à-vis China and the U.S. Indonesia’s role was more exclusive as it developed closer ties to both superpowers at the expense of ties with ASEAN. For Widodo’s Indonesia, ASEAN is less a forum to institutionalize roles for claimants in the SCS dispute, but rather a platform to project its archipelagic vision (Friedrichs and Fellenz 2023).

Third, Widodo’s foreign policy is paradoxical. On the one hand, he tried to position Indonesia as a rule-based player. In May 2020, the Widodo government expressed its support to the UN Secretary General for the 2016 arbitral award and rejected China’s nine-dash line, underlining its role expectation of Indonesia to have a stronger orientation vis-à-vis China.

However, on the other hand, Jakarta sought to attract Chinese investment in major infrastructure projects and even (unsuccessfully) tried to convince Beijing to headquarter its Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in Jakarta.

Fourth, Indonesia was successful in managing to establish non-binding resolutions between ASEAN and China, most notably the 2018 Code of Conduct (CoC). However, Jakarta could not broker a legally binding document since ASEAN is guided by consensus-building diplomacy.

Fifth, ASEAN member states have largely been reluctant to accept Indonesia's leadership role as a mediator in the SCS dispute, and instead continued to pursue bilateral roles towards Beijing (see Koga 2022). China's maritime assertiveness precipitated Philippines' unilateral decision to seek international arbitration in the The Hague in 2015/2016. In turn, this complicated Indonesia's role and ASEAN Centrality (see Nguyen and Tok 2024).

Even at the ASEAN Summit, South China Sea dispute divides more than unites ASEAN Community. For instance, during Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2012, ASEAN failed to issue a joint statement for the first time after the Hun Sen government refused to include language criticizing China's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea. In April 2016, China, Brunei, Cambodia and Laos agreed to eliminate the SCS issue from the agenda of regular ASEAN-China meetings. Two months later, ASEAN withdrew a statement of concern about China's assertiveness in the disputed region (Hu 2023). Consequently, ASEAN's peace management on the South China Sea highlights its identity as a diverse and disunited ASEAN.

Last, but not least, is ASEAN Centrality as diversity with disinterest. This can be seen in the case of Russo-Ukrainian war. While Russia's assault on Ukraine has consolidated and revitalized collective solidarity among NATO and European countries, it has mixed regional responses in Southeast Asia. Initially, ASEAN members' reactions are varied (see Storey and

Choong 2022). Vietnam and Thailand have maintained a neutral stance, refusing to either directly condemn or condone Russia's actions and calling for a peaceful and diplomatic resolution to the conflict.

On the other hand, Singapore has taken the strongest stance, imposing outright sanctions on Russia. Others such as Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines have aligned in their concerns about Russia's war in Ukraine. Subsequently, eight ASEAN members voted for a UNGA non-binding resolution condemning Moscow's aggression against Ukraine while only Laos and Vietnam abstained.

Thailand has taken a cautious and measured stance on Russia-Ukraine war. It voted for the resolution but its written position stopped short of condemning Russia by name. Myanmar is an interesting case: while the military junta strongly supported Russia, Myanmar's UN ambassador, which is still the one from the elected government and accepted by the UN, voted against Russia at the UNGA.

However, it has the potential to narrow down the gap between ASEAN countries. As the conflict intensifies, many countries envisioned that Russia's invasion of Ukraine undermined ASEAN principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference. Hun Sen's Cambodia, for example, explicitly warns that Russia's attack on sovereign state might set a bad example and perhaps precedent for similar phenomenon that might makes right and risk the likelihood that other great powers might do so in the region. As ASEAN's chairmanship, Cambodia has interestingly taken a tougher stance on Russia's invasion of Ukraine. To a certain extent it strengthens ASEAN way (see Storey 2025).

However, Russia's violation of international law and sovereignty is at odds with ASEAN principles. However, given the fact that the region is relatively far away from Ukraine and that

Russia is a global nuclear and energy superpower, many ASEAN states are reluctant to take any necessary steps. In addition, ASEAN members are in disarray and preoccupied with other regional challenges, such as the South China Sea and Myanmar incident. This is an ongoing internal division that would definitely endure with or without Russia's war.

Revitalizing ASEAN Centrality

Through its normative discourse of ASEAN Way, ASEAN is not directly meddling into others' domestic affairs, but rather muddling through in the twenty-first century. What is missing for ASEAN and its Centrality is middling. In order to achieve ASEAN Centrality, it needs to transcend ASEAN Way and strengthen ASEAN Centrality in the double sense: working with and working beyond.

Prescriptively, ASEAN should pursue the following 3Ds strategies: de-geopoliticization, discursive balancing, and diversification. Without these three Ds, we will face a zero-sum struggle regarding which country will be secure and which subordinated. Without a systemic reform, we are entrapped in counter-productive competition while the prospect of violent conflict looms large. First, ASEAN should de-geopoliticize regional dynamcis. De-geopoliticization is not the same as the Western concepts of decoupling or derisking. The latter's aim is ultimately to reduce dependence on others, principally China. By doing so, it risks creating friendshoring and bloc-building groups, thereby urging the ASEAN countries to choose sides. In addition, decoupling/ derisking is counterproductive. US-China bipolar world is unlike US-Soviet Cold War. The former is much more deeply intertwined and complex interdependent than the latter. To use the term of Harvard historian Niall Ferguson (2008), so-called "Chimerica" is a reality, rather than a myth.

Relying on both superpowers, ASEAN does not benefit from the geopoliticization of the region. International relations should not be framed in terms of geopolitics or geoeconomics. There is an unprecedentedly large global common interest in security and prosperity as well as protection of the planet from environmental deterioration.

Second, ASEAN should pursue discursive balancing, together with other "soft" balancing strategies such as institutional balancing. This practice of discursive balancing occurs at the level of discourse or narrative in order to make sense of itself in the changing configuration of power. The geopolitical tussle has exacerbated discursive anxiety for players, thereby rendering the old narrative untenable and obsolete. This in turn instigates the political formation of new strategic discourse in order to balance with the rising power. This new discourse will help players to make sense of the changing world and defend its core interests and influence.

In fact, ASEAN presumably prefers to de-geopoliticize security, thereby prioritizing non-traditional security challenges. By doing so, ASEAN has pursued a combined and mixed strategy of institutional hedging and community building in order to engage with the great power management. ASEAN's approach is the manifestation of discursive balancing. Avoiding a full-fledged hard balancing with the great powers, ASEAN preliminarily initiates and develops its own alternative discourse, culminated in the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) promulgated in 2019. Salient and sustainable discursive balancing is complementary to the revitalization of ASEAN Centrality.

Third, ASEAN should diversify its cooperative relationship. Diversification connotes practices such as active multialignment (rather than nonalignment or neutrality) and omnidirectional or multivector foreign policy. The ultimate purpose is to avoid the trap of choosing sides in the emerging US-Chinese bipolar system. Economically, it is necessary for ASEAN to

have a plurality and diversity of supply chains resilience, rather than following a bifurcation of global supply chains and friendshoring.

But the fundamental question is how to achieve a new détente that is based on a mutual understanding and mutual interests. Perhaps, ASEAN needs the narrative of middle way. This article recommends a new approach I call a "leading from the middle" strategy in order to revitalize ASEAN Centrality amid geopolitical competition. Combined with the aforementioned 3-Ds strategy, leading from the middle as a new strategy for ASEAN is defined as a strategic vision and position that a middle power or a group of middles powers pursues in order to (1) strategically hedge with the great powers, (2) bind them within the rule- or norm-based order in the region as well as (3) initiate region-wide politico-diplomatic innovations and advocacy (Poonkham 2020; 2021, see also Thao 2023).

Leading from the middle strategy comprises such strategies as (a) collective leadership; (b) institutional balancing and discursive balancing and (c) binding strategy. It seeks to reduce strategic uncertainty amid the power rivalries and transition. The ultimate aims of such strategy are not only to hedge with the great powers but also to lead by political and diplomatic initiatives (and examples), norm binding and rule-making processes.

Combined together, these three Ds – de-geopolitization, discursive balancing and diversification – might not be able to generate peace, but it is necessary to avoid the new Cold War or eventually hot war. At least, ASEAN can embark on a cold peace. If ASEAN peoples and leaders alike can think and calculate prudentially, the likely costs and dangers of a cold war between the US and China are tremendous and far exceed the benefits. Both sides can agree to disagree and agree to difficult compromises/ détente, thereby finding common ground and adopting rules on nuclear deterrence, cyber conflict, trade and tech competition, Ukraine, Taiwan, and the South

China Sea. This is the spirit of former ASEAN Secretary-General, Surin Pitsuwan, who talked about "constructive engagement" of building a people-oriented community. ASEAN needs to rekindle this spirit in the turbulent world.

Towards the ASEAN Middle Way: Back to the Future?

For many decades, ASEAN has adopted what Henry Kissinger called "constructive ambiguity", which can be defined as "the deliberate use of ambiguous language in a sensitive issue in order to advance some political purpose" (quoted in Berridge and James 2003). For ASEAN, it is a source of policy legitimacy and institutional flexibility. It is also a source for achieving agreement and consensus. That is, political negotiability. It is wise to do so because if ASEAN adopts a strategic clarity it might be too much confrontational, if not conflictual. However, too much ambiguity and ambivalence can be destabilizing. Sometimes, ASEAN is unable to reach any consensus at all.

Undoubtedly, ASEAN Centrality is in difficult time amid strong wind of geopolitical struggle. Through the pessopmistic perspective presented in this article, I argue that neither staying strong nor lying low is a viable or sustainable option. That said, meddling and muddling through are both insufficient and too risky to navigate international and internal power dynamics.

What ASEAN really needs is middling or leading from the middle as an alternative strategy. The only way out/ ahead is to strengthen ASEAN Centrality. First, in order to properly and successfully manage great power rivalry, ASEAN should regain and revitalize its ASEAN-centered institutional frameworks and arrangements. Through discursive balancing, ASEAN should develop a new strategic discourse or narrative to shape a shared and common future. Second, without the middling strategy, ASEAN cannot (dis)solve internal divide and dissensus. ASEAN Way needs to

be rethought and reframed in a new light. Discursively, it might be termed “ASEAN Middle Way”. The key to regional peace and prosperity is for ASEAN to stay in the middle and lead from the middle in the twenty-first century great power politics.

REFERENCES

Acharya, Amitav. 2017. The Myth of ASEAN Centrality? *Contemporary Southeast Asia*. Vol. 39: No. 2, 273-279.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). 2019. ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, 23 June. https://asean.org/asean-outlook-on-the-indo-pacific/

Berridge GR and James A. 2003. *Constructive Ambiguity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Caballero-Anthony, Mely. 2011. Non-Traditional Security Challenges, Regional Governance, and the ASEAN Political Security Community (APSC). In *ASEAN and the Institutionalization of East Asia*, ed. Ralf Emmers. London: Routledge, 27-42.

Caballero-Anthony, Mely. 2014. Understanding ASEAN’s Centrality: Bases and Prospects in an Evolving Regional Architecture. *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 27: No. 4, 563–584.

Caballero-Anthony, Mely. 2017. ASEAN Centrality Tested. In *The Routledge Handbook of Asian Security Studies*. London: Routledge.

Chongkittavorn, Kavi. 2019. AOIP: A New Asean Regional Guide. *Bangkok Post*, 25 June. https://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/1701272/aoip-a-new-asean-regional-guide

Dewi, Fortuna Anwar. 2020. Indonesia and the ASEAN outlook on the Indo-Pacific. *International Affairs*, Vol. 96: No. 1, 111–129.

Dosch, Jörn. 2023. ASEANs governance and management of non-traditional security. In *The Elgar Companion to ASEAN*, eds. Jörn Dosch and Frederick Kliem. Cheltenham: Elgar, 93–107.

Ferguson, Niall. 2008. *The Ascent of Money: A Financial History of the World*. New York: Penguin.

Fravel, M. Taylor. 2011. China’s Strategy in the South China Sea. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 33: No. 3, 292–319.

Friedrichs, G. M., and Fellenz, Á. 2023. When leaders disappoint: rejection and denial of leadership roles in international politics. *International Relations*, 1-25.

Gerstl, Alfred. 2022. *Hedging Strategies in Southeast Asia: ASEAN, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam and their Relations with China*. London: Rouledge.

Hu, Le. 2023. Examining ASEAN's effectiveness in managing South China Sea disputes. *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 36: No. 1, 119–147.

Jones, Lee. 2010. ASEAN's unchanged melody? The theory and practice of 'non-interference' in Southeast Asia. *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 23: No. 4, 479–502.

Khong, Yuen Foong and Joseph Chinyong Liow. 2025. Southeast Asia Is Starting to Choose Why the Region Is Leaning Toward China. *Foreign Affairs*. July/August.

Koga, Kai. 2022. *Managing Great Power Politics ASEAN, Institutional Strategy, and the South China Sea.* Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kuik, Cheng-Chwee. 2021. Getting hedging right: a small-state perspective. *China International Strategy Review*. Vol. 3, 300–315.

Martel, Stephanie. 2016. From ambiguity to contestation: discourse(s) of non-traditional security in the ASEAN community. *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 30: No. 4, 549–565.

Nguyen, Phuong Ly and Tok, Sow Keat. 2024. Domestic imperative of the Philippines' South China Sea policy: personality-driven policymaking and constant shifts between China and the United States. *The Pacific Review,* 1-31.

Poonkham, Jittipat. 2020. Thailand-Australia Relations and Regional Geopolitics: A Thai View. *The Center of Gravity Series Paper 53,* Strategic and Defence Studies Center, Australian National University, 22-24.

Poonkham, Jittipat. 2021. The Bamboo Breaks: Thailand's Diplomatic Challenge. *Asialink,* University of Melbourne, 9 September. https://asialink.unimelb.edu.au/insights/the-bamboo-breaks-thailands-diplomatic-challenge

Poonkham, Jittipat. 2023a. Pax Indo-Pacifica in the Sino-US Ice Age: Geopolitical Anxiety and America's Struggle for Global Supremacy. In *ASEAN and Regional Actors in the Indo-Pacific*, eds. S. Sudo and C. Yamahata. Singapore: Springer, 73-90.

Poonkham, Jittipat. 2023b. Thailand's Foreign Policy: Hedging by Default? *RSIS Commentary*, No. 38, 15 March. https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/thailands-foreign-policy-hedging-by-default/

Poonkham, Jittipat. 2024. Thailand's Indo-Pacific Adrift? A Reluctant Realignment with the United States and China. *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*. Vol. 7: No. 1, 82-96.

Pongsudhirak, Thitinan. 2022. The End of ASEAN as We Know It. *Project Syndicate*. 12 October. https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/asean-needs-realignment-for-new-geopolitical-realities-by-thitinan-pongsudhirak-2022-10

Quyet, Nguyen Huu. 2023. Chinese Strategy in the South China Sea: A Growing Quest for Vital Economic and Strategic Interests. *World Affairs,* Vol. 186: No. 3, 687-716.

Storey, Ian. 2025. *Putin's Russia and Southeast Asia: The Kremlin's Pivot to Asia and the Impact of the Russia-Ukraine War.* Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute.

Storey, Ian and Choong, William. 2022. Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: Southeast Asian Responses and Why the Conflict Matters to the Region. *Perspective,* ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, No. 24, 1–13.

Sukma, Rizal. 2024. Imperative to Improve on ASEAN's Institutions. *East Asia Forum Quarterly,* Vol. 16: No. 3 (July-September), 3-5.

Takashi Terada. 2022. ASEAN's talk shop function and US engagement. *East Asia Forum.* 10 August. https://eastasiaforum.org/2011/08/10/asean-s-talk-shop-function-and-us-engagement/

Thao, Tran Phuong. 2023. Middle Powers in the Indo-Pacific. In *Handbook of Indo-Pacific Studies,* eds. Barbara Kratiuk et al. London: Routledge, 429-439.

Yukawa, Taku. 2017. The ASEAN Way as a symbol: an analysis of discourses on the ASEAN Norms. *The Pacific Review,* Vol. 31: No. 3, 298–314.