

Political-Security Pillar of ASEAN

Overview

Promoting peace and stability in Southeast Asia and the surrounding region, based on the development of peaceful relations and mutually beneficial cooperation between Thailand and its neighbours, has always been a fundamental foreign policy priority of Thailand.

This is because Thailand believes that an environment of peace and stability is essential to pursuing sustained economic growth and sustainable development and to advancing human security that would benefit the Thai people and the peoples in the region. Such an environment is also essential to creating an ASEAN-centered regional architecture that would promote peaceful and mutually beneficial engagement between countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

For these reasons, Thailand attaches great importance to enhancing cooperation within the political-security pillar of ASEAN, leading to the realization of an ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) which is part of an ASEAN Community by 2015. In other words, Thailand sees the APSC as one of the primary frameworks and vehicles to promote regional peace and stability, as well as the central driving force for an ASEAN-centered regional architecture.

Historical Context

Promoting regional peace and stability as well as cooperation on political and security issues has been an important aspect of ASEAN's cooperation since its founding in 1967, even though the Bangkok Declaration which created ASEAN makes no explicit reference to political and security cooperation.

During the time of the Cold War in Southeast Asia, when the region experienced conflict and intervention by external powers, ASEAN sought to create some "diplomatic space" for itself by pursuing one of its first political-security initiatives. This was the establishment of the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) with the signing of the Kuala Lumpur Declaration in 1971. Following the end of the Second Indochina Conflict in 1975, Thailand played an active role within ASEAN in laying a foundation for peaceful relations amongst countries on both sides of the ideological divide in the region, through ASEAN Member States' adoption of the Bali Concord I and the signing of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC).

Such efforts at rapprochement between ASEAN and the rest of Southeast Asia were delayed, however, with the outbreak of the Third Indochina Conflict in 1978. During this conflict, Thailand played a leading part within ASEAN, through active cooperation on political and security issues and global diplomacy, to restore peace and stability in the region, based on the principles of respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of States and non-acceptance of the use of force in international relations, except for self-defense as provided for in the United Nations Charter.

The perseverance of ASEAN-led cooperation and diplomacy, in combination with other factors, led ultimately to the resolution of the conflict with the signing of the Paris Peace Accords in 1991. This paved the way for the pursuit of a “One Southeast Asia” policy, actively promoted by Thailand, whereby ASEAN sought to expand its membership to cover all countries in Southeast Asia at the time. Through Thailand’s initiative, the Southeast Asia Ten (SEA-10) Summit was convened in 1995 in Bangkok, bringing together Leaders from the ten Southeast Asian countries for the first time. The region’s coming together was completed with ASEAN’s expansion to its current ten Member States, achieved in 1999.

Political-Security Cooperation Under the ASEAN Political-Security Community and in the ASEAN-Centered Regional Architecture

With growing comfort-level amongst the ten ASEAN Member States and following successes in ASEAN’s economic integration through the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) which was initiated by Thailand, ASEAN began to discuss how to enhance further its cooperation on political and security issues. With key framework documents agreed by ASEAN as the ASEAN Charter (2008), the Bali Concord II (2003) and the ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint (2009), the stage was set for ASEAN to pursue enhanced cooperation on political and security issues based on several key concepts.

Peace and Stability as Regional Priorities

First, the maintenance and enhancement of peace, security and stability as well as the strengthening of peace-oriented values in the region, are fundamental priorities of ASEAN. These are enshrined in the first operative article of the ASEAN Charter. This reflects ASEAN’s belief in the critical importance of regional peace and stability to the long-term success of the ASEAN Community.

Many have even commented that the creation of ASEAN itself was recognition of the importance of regional peace and stability to economic

development. ASEAN's creation provided a framework for individual members not to feel threatened by one another and thereby enabled them to concentrate on the development of their respective economies. In this connection, it is noteworthy that since ASEAN's establishment in 1967, there has been no major armed conflict between countries that are Member States of ASEAN.

Importance of Shared Values and Respect for Diversity

Second, it is important to have shared values which are seen as an essential foundation for the development of a sense of community within ASEAN. Through active Thai support, fundamental principles such as democracy, good governance, rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms have been embraced by ASEAN, as reflected in the ASEAN Charter and other documents.

On human rights in particular, with strong impetus from Thailand, ASEAN established the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) during Thailand's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2009 and subsequently adopted the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration in 2012. This reflects the commitment of Thailand and ASEAN to pursue a community-building process which is people-centered.

Shared values, however, does not mean that Thailand and ASEAN do not welcome diversity. On the contrary, the diversity of ASEAN is considered to be its strength. Indeed, respect for diversity is one of the fundamental principles of ASEAN—a regional organization comprising Member States with different historical backgrounds and cultural heritage. Southeast Asia itself is a region where people of different religions and faiths, whether Buddhism, Islam, Christianity or others, have lived together peacefully for centuries. Because of this great respect for diversity, ASEAN and the region of Southeast Asia therefore remain a strong voice for and steadfast proponent of tolerance and moderation.

Such respect for diversity also means that ASEAN Member States respect the different security orientations and foreign policies of one another, and do not regard them as inimical to ASEAN's interests. This means that Thailand can engage its relations with the major powers and key actors in this region without affecting Thailand's commitment to promoting regional peace and stability through the APSC and to supporting the building of an ASEAN Community by 2015.

Norms and Codes of Conduct

Third, promotion of peace, stability and security in the region must be based on important internationally accepted norms and codes of conduct. These include non-use of force and the resolution of disputes by peaceful means through negotiations, for example. Building trust and confidence as well as engaging in preventive diplomacy are additional actions that Thailand and ASEAN view as important for promoting regional peace and stability. These norms are reflected in important framework documents such as the ASEAN Charter and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC).

Indeed, the increasing number of countries that have acceded to the TAC to date, reflect the general acceptance of the norms and principles contained therein as a general code of conduct for States with regard to the conduct of relations in Southeast Asia. In this connection, Thailand played an important role in encouraging key countries outside the region to accede to the TAC, including the United States in 2009 and the European Union in 2012.

Comprehensive Security

Fourth, security is viewed in a more comprehensive manner and with an increasing focus on people. That is why the ASEAN Charter states as one of ASEAN's purposes, the need to respond effectively, in accordance with the principles of comprehensive security, to all forms of threats, transnational crimes and transboundary challenges.

ASEAN therefore attaches importance to addressing transnational crimes, from countering terrorism through the ASEAN Convention on Combatting Terrorism (ACCT) to eradicating illicit drug trafficking through realizing an ASEAN Drug Free Zone by 2015. Indeed, with ASEAN pursuing enhanced regional connectivity, it is becoming more important than ever to develop more effective safeguards against the inherent risks of enhanced connectivity, especially transnational crime and cross border challenges, through more effective border management. Moreover, enhancing ASEAN cooperation against human trafficking will continue to be a priority for Thailand.

Moreover, in view of the transboundary nature of such threats and challenges, achieving security becomes increasingly dependent on regional cooperation through information sharing, intelligence exchange and collective action. At the same time, Thailand and ASEAN Member States still recognize that each country in Southeast Asia has unique perceptions of security

challenges and therefore respects the various bilateral or other security arrangements that each country may have.

Being Open and Outward-Looking

Fifth and lastly, while recalling that big power rivalry and conflict in the region has had a negative impact on the region in the past, especially during the Cold War years, ASEAN also recognizes that regional peace and stability cannot be fully attained without the constructive engagement of important countries from outside Southeast Asia. After all, ASEAN has always been and continues to be an open and outward-looking organization, and the region of Southeast Asia depends heavily on global commerce for its growth and prosperity.

It is therefore important to engage with countries outside the region based on mutual benefits. On issues affecting regional peace and stability, therefore, ASEAN remains prepared to work in partnership with countries outside the region, especially its Dialogue Partners, but the principle of ASEAN centrality remains intact. With this in mind, as part of ASEAN's strategy to develop a regional security architecture that is inclusive and ASEAN-led, ASEAN developed several frameworks to provide an arena for constructive engagement between ASEAN and countries having an impact on the region, with a view to building trust and confidence and thereby promoting regional peace and stability.

To this end, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) was created in Bangkok in 1994 and currently comprises 27 countries and organizations, including key external powers such as Australia, China, the European Union, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Russia and the United States. Subsequently, the East Asia Summit (EAS) and the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) Plus were established, the first to provide a forum for strategic dialogue on key issues of common concern, the second, a more specialized forum for defense ministers of 18 countries in the region to engage in defense dialogue and cooperation.

ASEAN's active engagement with external parties on political-security issues are also undertaken through other instruments such as the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC), as mentioned previously, and the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ) Treaty which ASEAN where ASEAN is consulting with the five Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) to get their endorsement of the Treaty. The Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DoC) of 2002 provides a framework to enhance trust and

confidence in the South China Sea including through cooperation between ASEAN and China on a wide range of issues of shared interest. It also provides a starting point for the development of a Code of Conduct (CoC). As Country-Coordinator for ASEAN-China Dialogue Relations from 2012-2014, Thailand will continue to work with all parties to advance the strategic partnership between ASEAN and China, and to implement the DoC and develop the CoC.

Implementation of the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) Blueprint

Under Thailand's ASEAN chairmanship in 2009, Thailand took the lead in drafting the ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint which, following ASEAN consultations, was adopted as part of the Cha-am Hua Hin Roadmap for the Building of an ASEAN Community. Since then, Thailand has played an active role in promoting implementation of the Blueprint with a view to building an effective and resilient APSC as part of the ASEAN Community by 2015.

Some important recent examples include the following:

Increased accession of countries outside the region to the TAC:

As stated earlier, the accession of countries outside Southeast Asia to Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) was encouraged to strengthen recognition and acceptance of TAC's norms and principles and of TAC as a code of conduct for the region. Through Thailand's initiative, guidelines were developed for accession of non-ASEAN countries to the TAC. Countries that have recently acceded to the TAC include the United States, Turkey, Canada, the European Union, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Brazil.

Encouraging the Nuclear Weapons States (NWS) to endorse the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ) or Bangkok Treaty:

Coinciding with the growing momentum of support for global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation in 2009 including the launching of the idea of creating a world free of nuclear weapons, Thailand initiated the process of ASEAN consultations with a view to re-starting the long dormant consultations between ASEAN and the Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) on the possibility of having the NWS sign a protocol to the SEANWFZ Treaty.

As Depositary State of the SEANWFZ Treaty, Thailand continues to play an active role in promoting such ASEAN-NWS consultations which

appear to be reaching a mature stage in 2012. Thailand believes that the signing of the Protocol by the NWS would further promote peace and stability in Southeast Asia and contribute to attainment of the goals of global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, as called for by the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

Promoting enhanced ASEAN maritime cooperation:

Thailand supports enhanced regional maritime cooperation and dialogue on maritime issues of common interest and concern, especially in view of the rising importance of maritime connectivity to ASEAN community-building, and regional peace and prosperity. This is seen as complementing such dialogue and cooperation at the global level through the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and others.

With the increasing importance of maritime issues for ASEAN, the ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF) was established in 2008 with Thailand chairing the 2nd AMF in 2011. The AMF seeks to enhance ASEAN dialogue and cooperation on maritime issues of common interest and concern, including on maritime security and safety. Thailand supports the sharing of national experiences and best practices on maritime cooperation such as Thailand's participation in the Malacca Straits coordinated patrols and participation in the anti-piracy operations in the areas surrounding the Gulf of Aden. The recent convening in 2012 of the 3rd AMF in an expanded AMF format, involving participation by non-ASEAN countries, serves to enrich the dialogue on maritime issues by bringing in other perspectives, but the agenda on maritime cooperation remains AMF-led.

Addressing transnational crime and cross border challenges:

ASEAN's pursuit of enhanced regional connectivity as one of its top priority strategies since it was initiated by Thailand in 2008 has brought into sharper relief the challenges posed by the downside risks of enhanced connectivity, namely, the possible rise in transnational crimes and cross-border challenges. These downside risks can be addressed effectively only through collective and coordinated action across the region, including in the important area of border management. The need for such enhanced coordination to deal with these risks and challenges has already been anticipated and incorporated into the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity, but ideas for concrete cooperation will need to be elaborated further.

To help address these challenges, Thailand has undertaken a number of initiatives including the convening of the Special Ministerial Meeting

on Drug Matters in Bangkok in 2012 to help realize a drug-free ASEAN by 2015 and the ASEAN Senior Officials' Meeting on Transnational Crime (SOMTC) in Bangkok in 2012 to promote greater cooperation on transnational crime issues.

On the issue of trafficking in persons, Thailand supports ongoing ASEAN efforts to develop an ASEAN convention to help address this challenge. In the meantime, Thailand is working to develop an ASEAN Plan of Action on this issue, as a stepping stone to such as convention. Recognizing the growing incidents of flood related disasters in the region, Thailand is also promoting enhanced ASEAN cooperation in dealing with flood disasters, while encouraging greater coordination to deal with the challenge of climate change.

Lastly, Thailand is proposing to develop networks of cooperation with nuclear regulatory agencies in ASEAN Member States, in order to enhance nuclear safety and security, as announced at the Nuclear Security Summit in 2012. All these measures are designed to help make the ASEAN region safer from such transnational challenges and cross border challenges, and enable all parties to benefit fully from enhanced connectivity in the region.

Promoting regional cooperation in peacekeeping:

Building on the experience of many ASEAN Member States in peacekeeping under the framework of the United Nations, Thailand initiated a number of proposals designed to enhance ASEAN's dialogue and cooperation on peacekeeping issues. One of these is the compilation of information on ASEAN peacekeeping activities that can be used to promote common ASEAN views on this issue at the UN or other fora. Another is the development of a network of ASEAN peacekeeping centres or institutes to promote sharing of best practices, curricula and other ideas related to peacekeeping. To this end, the first ever meeting of ASEAN peacekeeping centres and institutes was convened in Thailand at the Thai national peacekeeping centre in 2012.
