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Security regime or “security community”? Classifying ASEAN in the spectrum of regional security organizations

Deniz Kocak

Abstract
The ASEAN community comprises the ASEAN economic community, ASEAN social and cultural community, and ASEAN security community. Particularly the ASEAN security community is controversially debated among scholars. By focusing on key variables such as the states’ sovereignty, the societal level and the military collaboration among ASEAN, the article assesses the level and limitations of ASEAN’s intrastate cooperation and classifies ASEAN in the spectrum of regional security structures. It is argued here that ASEAN forms a security regime rather than a security community and that the prospects for a mature security community in the next decade are far from reality.

Introduction
In 2003, ASEAN leaders proclaimed an agenda for closer integration called VISION 2020 which aims to establish an ASEAN community buttressed by three sub-communities: A security community, an economic community and a socio-cultural community. Scholars have recently debated about the character, the functionality, and the feasibility of an ASEAN security community. Particularly Amitav Acharya contributed several works on this topic and came to the highly controversial conclusion that ASEAN forms a security community already (Acharya, 2001; Ba, 2005; Collins, 2007: 203f; Khoo, 2004).

This paper picks up the debate and tries to locate and classify ASEAN in the spectrum of regional security organizations. First, the paper defines the term security and clarifies that there has been a shift in the analysis of security. Second, three important levels of
analysis concerning ASEAN are examined: The states' sovereignty, the societal level, and military collaboration among ASEAN. Third, the theoretical concepts of a security regime and a security community are reviewed, and finally the findings are confronted with the theoretical concepts in order to assess the reality and prospects of security cooperation in ASEAN.

What is “security”? Approach to a concept

The traditional security concept focuses on the state-security (or insecurity) provided by armed forces. Therefore, according to Walt, "security-studies may be defined as the study of the threat, use, and control of military force... and the ways that the use of force affects individuals, states, and societies, and the specific policies that states adopt in order to prepare for, prevent, or engage in war” (Walt, 2006: 54). However, since the end of the 1990s, the security concept has been developed to a much broader understanding of security and encompasses nowadays such “non-traditional” entities as environmental security, economic security, and human security. The traditional security concept perceives the state or government as the main actor. However, the non-traditional concept stresses on the individual or the society and the outside influences that affect the individuals such as environmental factors. Especially Barry Buzan et al. and the Copenhagen School focus their research on the post-positivist scholarship emphasizing the necessity of recognizing that individuals create the ideas of security. Therefore, they argue, “security is about survival. It is, when an issue is presented as posing an existential threat to a designated referent object” (Buzan and Weaver, 1998: 21). Particularly environmental destruction and climate change are perceived as causes of new conflicts. This claim is meaningful because scarcities of resources as commodities or as nourishments and population increase can lead to serious conflicts between groups inside a country as well as between states (Collins, 2003: 93ff.). The non-traditional security approach therefore can be linked with Karl W. Deutsch's interpretation of security as a facilitation of “undisturbed social life” (Booth and Wheeler, 2008: 182).
ASEAN: Three scopes of analysis

Sovereignty

One of the most important rules within the ASEAN legal framework is the principle of non-interference which saves every ASEAN member country from any military or diplomatic interference in its internal affairs. By signing the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in 1976, the signing parties committed themselves to refrain from interference in the domestic issues of any ASEAN member and to show mutual respect towards their national sovereignty, independence, and territoriality (Collins, 2004: 213; Tan, 2004b). However, as Acharya states, the collaboration and the principle of non-interference within ASEAN was not only a result of the external threat from communist Indochina, especially Vietnam, but the need of like-minded, mostly authoritarian regimes to consolidate state authority within their own borders. This process of state building was a necessity for Southeast Asia nation states recently released into independence in face of separatist movements and rebellions against centralist governments. Furthermore, the fear of a “fifth column,” the infiltration of the society and the overthrow of government by socialist-oriented guerrillas, made ASEAN concentrate on easing and avoiding interregional conflicts and giving member states plenty of rope in domestic affairs (Acharya, 2003: 43–50; Collins, 2007: 212; Khoo, 2004: 36; Wah and Suryadinata, 2005: 137).

The insecurity inside developing states poses a serious threat to the legitimacy and stability of a regime. According to international law, states are contained territories with an exclusive power of disposal. They encompass a well defined territory and their borders to other states are fixed. Furthermore, as Max Weber stated, the existing state as the bearer of rule of law needs to hold the legitimate monopoly of the use of force beyond dispute. No other actor within the state may exercise physical force at his own discretion. If, however, there are corporate actors within the state who claim a certain territory and assert their claims by physical power, the sovereignty and legitimacy of a state and its government is in danger (Parkin, 2002: 72). These patterns of state instability are often found in postcolonial countries where the citizens are a
collection of different peoples brought together by a former colonial power. After a mostly bloody decolonization phase, the newly emerged “nation states” not only lacked a national consciousness but also legitimacy. Although states deny the existence of armed uprisings and separatist movements against central state authority, they have to spend on enormous financial and military capacity to hold rebellions down. However, these strategies of suppressing unrest only result in more violence which leads, as Collins argues, to an internal security dilemma (Collins 2003, 94; Jones, 2008: 746ff.).

Therefore, the contested sovereignty and legitimacy by separatists and ethnic minorities in some states within ASEAN raises serious questions about the states’ claims to sovereignty at the regional and international level and their ability to protect human security within their own borders and beyond on a regional and multilateral level (Collins, 2003: 99; 2000).

An ASEAN society?

ASEAN not only consists of different religions and ethnicities but also a variety of cultural backgrounds (Acharya 2001: 47). If ASEAN is to be called a “community,” it is legitimate to ask where the community factor, or the “we feeling” as Acharya (2001: 28) puts it, can be located and on what level the community factor is pivotal and effective.

The latter can be answered by a reference to Caballero-Anthony. She argues that socialization within ASEAN can only be found “among state officials,” and that ASEAN is only an exclusive club for the elite (Caballero-Anthony, 2005: 62ff.). Furthermore, any attempts to integrate civil society organizations into the structures of ASEAN were rather reluctantly handled by ASEAN bureaucrats. Yet ASEAN leaders voiced their willingness to involve civil society organizations as a requirement for a deeper cooperation between nation states because they monitor, counterbalance the states’ actions, and represent the people (Collins 2007, 210; Gellner, 1994: 5). The promotion of the ASEAN People’s Assembly (APA) in the late 1990s by ASEAN-ISIS as a track-two instrument was one of few exemptions to foster the co-determination of civil society organizations into the ASEAN
decision-making process. According to ASEAN-ISIS, APA should act as forum for such topics as curtailing poverty, monitoring environmental issues, and promoting human security inside ASEAN. However, the promotion of APA faced many obstacles: For instance the funding of APA failed several times due to reservations of some ASEAN governments about the role, character, and impact of APA on ASEAN. Although civil society organizations gained some influence in ASEAN, as the example of APA has demonstrated, more needs to be done to create a solid people-oriented organization. Without including the governed people into ASEAN's decision-making processes, the imagined ASEAN "community" and even more the "socio-cultural community" will be a hollow structure and ASEAN will remain what it is now—an exclusive club for an elite (Caballero-Anthony 2005, 242ff.; Collins, 2007: 219 ff.).

The "we feeling" that Acharya proposes as a prerequisite for a community, however, cannot be created by an elite organization. Transactions, workers' exchange, and travel between ASEAN states have been eased only for officials and for experts. Ordinary citizens are not only hindered by visa restrictions but also by travel costs. Although the visa regulations are understandable due to the wide economic and prosperity gap between the ASEAN states and the fear of migration by low-cost workers into more prosperous countries, a "we feeling" among the people and cultural exchange between nations can only be achieved by direct contact and experiencing the "others" (Jones, 2008: 742). In addition, although the colonial experience in Southeast Asia is now several decades in the past, it lasted long enough to shape the region significantly. Each colonial power shielded and insulated its possessions from the others and therefore cut former communication channels between the regional centers. Each colonized Southeast Asian country experienced the colonial phase and the introduction of modernity very differently. Each was oriented to its respective colonial metropole and lost sight of its regional neighbors. Therefore, the colonization phase created a relative ignorance about neighbors and a large distrust between them (Owen, 2005: 75–83).

This distrust can be seen in the still prevalent resentments between ASEAN states. The 2003 riots in Phnom Penh occurred in
protest against a Thai entertainer's claim that the terrain around the Angkor Wat temple in Cambodia legitimately belonged to Thailand. The Thai embassy was burned, and several Thai nationals were evacuated (Collins, 2007: 216). More recently, troops of both countries were placed on alert at the Preah Vihear temple complex. Such incidents, fuelled by nationalism, suggest that a "we feeling" among the ASEAN countries is far from reach (Acharya, 2001: 130ff; The Nation, 13 and 15 August 2008).

Military collaboration

According to Acharya, ASEAN members have always rejected the idea of a corporate or multilateral security policy although there is no clear rationale for that choice (Acharya, 2003: 112). Perhaps one reason lies in the authoritarian character of many ASEAN states. Authoritarian regimes tend to be more reluctant than pluralistic ones to cede a certain amount of sovereignty to a security regime, especially in a high profile area such as security policy. This is because authoritarian regimes rely heavily on their military forces to stay in power, and any concession or sharing of authority is a risky undertaking because it could be perceived as a weakness by internal as well as external adversaries (Linz, 2000: 132ff.). Furthermore it is questionable whether authoritarian regimes have any interest in binding themselves and their military capacities to regional regimes with fixed norms and regulations (Collins, 2007: 212). The alternative to a multilateral security policy approach within ASEAN are bilateral agreements covering selected issues. This has been commonly practiced by ASEAN states among themselves and with external powers. In addition, Acharya has pointed out that external powers such as China, which has outstanding territory disputes in the South China Sea with several ASEAN members, could perceive an ASEAN with a common security policy as a threat. Acharya thus suggests that an ASEAN with a common security policy could provoke the formation of antagonistic blocs and even destabilize the whole East Asian region (Acharya, 2001: 61ff.; Collins, 2003: 189ff.).

Another point that has to be mentioned is the massive arms build-up of the ASEAN states since the end of the Cold War. Although the increased purchase of recent weapon technologies was
dampened by the 1997 Asian economic crisis, since the beginning of the millennium, states have continued to build up their arsenals (Collins, 2003: 96). The main explanations for the heavy arms build-up in Southeast Asia are the increased prosperity and economic capacity of the ASEAN states, new rivalry among ASEAN states over disputed and potentially valuable territories in the South China Sea, the retreat of the great powers from Southeast Asia, a resurgence of old intrastate conflicts, and finally, as Collins (2003: 96) describes it, “a myriad of domestic sources, which range from prestige to the acquisition of technology to corruption.” Whatever the reasons, the arms build-up provokes serious distrust among ASEAN members. This distrust not only leads to enhanced competition and inhibits collaboration between countries, but also intensifies the intraregional security dilemma.

This distrust between ASEAN members is further reinforced by informal measures to weaken and undermine the sovereignty of bordering states such as the supply of weapons to rebellious groups in Myanmar and Cambodia by criminal networks to “promote conflicts in neighbouring countries” (Pasuk et al., 1988: 152ff.).

Classifying ASEAN: A security regime or “security community”?

The reason for independent nations to collaborate with other nations concerning security issues is the need to overcome international as well as regional anarchy and the security dilemma among nations. A security regime is a low-level or first stage of security collaboration. A security regime enables states to reduce mutual distrust by establishing a certain set of rules or norms. While this provides a certain amount of security for the members, there is still a possibility that a state will abandon the code of conduct and start an armed conflict with another member. However, the more a security regime is institutionalized and is able to impose penalties for misconduct on its members, the likelihood of a war will vanish. Further integration may be achieved by collaboration beyond the intergovernmental level and a gradual transfer of decision-making to community institutions. These steps are a prerequisite to expand towards a regional community (Acharya, 2003: 158; Booth and Wheeler, 2008: 87ff.; Collins,
In his recent works about ASEAN and its collaboration concerning security, Acharya often refers to Karl W. Deutsch's description of a security community. Acharya (2003: 29) understands that a security community arises "when a regional group develops institutions strong enough...to assure stable expectations of peaceful change within its population." However, Acharya later suggests using a "narrower and somewhat different set of indicators" to define a security community, which is definitely useful given Deutsch's rather imprecise description. Acharya suggests four main variables: 1) the total absence of warlike interstate conflicts; 2) the absence of an arms race between the member states; 3) "formal or informal institutions and practices" to avoid conflicts; and 4) a high degree of political and economic integration (Acharya, 2003: 152–8). In contrast to Acharya, Wheeler and Booth (2008: 190–6) present a more elaborate definition related to the evolution of the European Union (EU), which makes sense given that the EU is genuinely a security community with a high degree of integration. In their definition, a security community must display: 1) a mutual compatibility of values in various fields; 2) strong economic ties with the expectation for more, a common market, and a monetary union with a single currency; 3) multifaceted social, political, and cultural transactions which take place in all segments of society and not exclusively among the elite; 4) a growing degree of institutionalized relationships due to the fact that common institutions hold and bind the members together; 5) mutual responsiveness and the ability to solve political problems as equal partners without threats and without involvement by the armed forces; and 6) a mutual predictability of behavior and mutual trust on a high level which excludes the possibility of any war.

Classifying ASEAN

ASEAN officials often refer to a so-called "ASEAN way" of solving problems. Although there is no exact and official definition, Acharya describes the ASEAN way as a rather informal, minimalist, and consensus-oriented way to solve problems peacefully. This rather vague description of ASEAN procedures has often been
criticized, especially by western scholars, on grounds that it claims to reflect cultural customs in the Southeast Asian region as a way to legitimize non-transparent, unofficial, and bargaining-led acts of governance. Furthermore, Acharya argues that the ASEAN way in combination with the official ASEAN treaties, especially the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation of 1976, form a certain set of rules and regulations (Acharya, 2001: 63–6; Haacke, 2003: 3ff.). This set of rules, Collins (2007: 212ff.) argues, can serve as the framework of only a low-level security regime because the other member states have no sanction against one that ignores or infringes on these rules. In addition, Khoo (2004: 40) questions whether the norm of non-interference has really been maintained by all ASEAN members, and highlights several instances where ASEAN members have interfered in the domestic affairs of other members, often on an informal basis. Finally, there is an argument that the ASEAN treaties and the so called “ASEAN norms” are not specifically Southeast Asian, but rather an imitation of existing UN norms and international law in combination with a local bargaining style, the so called *musyawarah* (a practice that sets a high value on consultation and discussion) (Collins, 2003: 132ff.). Therefore, the claim that ASEAN is distinctive because of the ASEAN way and its ASEAN norms is not valid. Additionally it should be kept in mind that even the so-called “ASEAN exceptionalism” cannot solve or ease prevalent issues in Southeast Asia (Khoo, 2004: 38).

In order to classify ASEAN as a security regime or security community, it is necessary to examine ASEAN’s evolution in the light of these definitions. The rather limited ASEAN norms helped to reduce hostility and prevent wars among its members, but border disputes which occasionally escalate into armed clashes between regular armies undermine any pretence that these norms are the basis of a security regime or security community. Furthermore, the existence of unsettled and potentially conflictual border disputes between almost all ASEAN members indicates a need for deeper collaboration which has not been achieved. Despite the imperative of security cooperation, there is no multilateral security policy within ASEAN but several bilateral security agreements between members. The uncoordinated arms build-up among ASEAN members since the end of the Cold War is further evidence that
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distrust prevails over cooperation.

As long as ASEAN insists on the ASEAN norms and its informal working methods, the prospect for a more fertile and effective cooperation is unpromising. The much needed political integration within ASEAN is not possible without a solid institutionalization of commitments and the acceptance by each member state to follow binding rules. Institutionalization would help to overcome the prevalent distrust among ASEAN members and facilitate confidence building. The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) should act as a dialogue forum to ease intra-regional tensions, yet so far its only achievement has been some confidence building (Acharya, 2003: 195; Tan, 2004a: 30ff.).

In addition, ASEAN lacks an influential and transnational civil society organization which is fundamental for a working regional community. Civil society should ideally act as a counterbalance to national governments and communicate the needs and agendas of ordinary citizens to the political level. When civil society organization is weak or non-existent, there is no need for the governmental elites to be accountable towards their citizens. It can even be questioned whether the individual nations of ASEAN are capable of creating a national community given that more than one third of ASEAN members face violent resistance from separatist movements within their national territories. The absence of any transnational civil society organization within ASEAN suggests there is no "we feeling" which unifies Southeast Asian peoples, and consequently there is no community within ASEAN.

Summarizing the difficulties faced by ASEAN suggests that ASEAN cannot be classified as a security community, but only as a security regime at a low level due to its internal rivalry, low degree of integration, and limited multilateral cooperation in specific fields such as security. The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) which was formed during the Cold War in 1973, and its successor, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), managed to bring the socialist Warsaw Pact countries and the NATO-led countries peacefully together and create an efficient security regime. In contrast to ASEAN, CSCE was able to combine effective confidence-building measures with the individual states' demand for sovereignty and security, finally
enabling the CSCE to overcome the security dilemma between the Warsaw Pact and NATO. While the security regime of the CSCE was able to adjust its norms and principles in the context of the changing security and political conditions after the Cold War, ASEAN has clung to the same ASEAN norms since its founding and therefore has failed to meet new challenges such as the enlargement process to include the former communist countries and Myanmar (Krause, 2003: 128ff.).

**Conclusion**

Security studies do not only deal with the traditional security sector, but nowadays also include non-traditional security issues which encompass all areas of human life such as environmental problems, sanitation, or sufficient access to nourishment. Therefore ASEAN should perceive security as a combination of "military and non-military threats, including political, economic, social, and environmental" issues (Caballero-Anthony, 2005: 200).

One of the main reasons to launch ASEAN was as a means to maintain sovereignty. The non-interference principle was established in this context as a shelter against invasion or infiltration from a regional neighbor. However, in one third of the ASEAN member states, sovereignty is challenged by separatist movements and insurgents. Therefore, the state's monopoly of force as well as the security of its population is not adequately ensured. These facts should raise serious questions about the state's legitimacy and its performance.

ASEAN societies are heterogeneous in many ways, but this need not be an obstacle to forming a vibrant social community within ASEAN.

The obstacles to community formation are, firstly, the slow and constrained integration of civil society organizations into the decision-making process of ASEAN; secondly, the lack of any "we-feeling" among Southeast Asian people because travel costs and visa restrictions inhibit the experiencing of the "others"; and finally, a historically caused distrust among Southeast Asian states and peoples. Ethnic and religious differences combined with the dangerous use of nationalism and the high self-esteem of military
officials and politicians lead every now and then to risky maneuvers between ASEAN members. Therefore, the question whether there is an ASEAN community must be answered in the negative.

Military collaboration is rather weak since there is no multilateral security policy within ASEAN. Possibly this is because the mostly authoritarian led states rely heavily on their military and security apparatus and are reluctant to share the command with other states or regimes. Furthermore, bilateral agreements between states within ASEAN and a massive arms build-up have fomented distrust and created a possible security dilemma in Southeast Asia. Since the founding of ASEAN, no large-scale war has occurred between the member states. However, border disputes, clashes between armies, the arms build-up, and the government's antagonism towards civil society organizations lead to the conclusion that ASEAN is far from being a security community but rather a low level security regime, and will remain so as long as self-interest, prestige-led thinking, and competition rather than cooperation prevail. Therefore, ASEAN's VISION 2020 of a security community is, academically considered, not valid and will probably remain no more than a vision in the near future.

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