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# Constructing a Peaceful Community in the Asia-Pacific Region: Lessons from Indonesia and ASEAN

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1. Introduction – Trust Deficit in the Asia Pacific Region
2. The pre-ASEAN Historical Context of Southeast Asia
3. The Indonesian/ASEAN Approach to Constructing a Peaceful Community
4. Indonesia: Bridging the Region Together
5. Conclusion

## Trust Deficit in the Asia Pacific Region

- Marty Natalagewa (then-Indonesian Foreign Minister): Jakarta's key foreign policy for 2014 was maintaining regional peace and security
  - “the most fundamental challenge before us”
  - ironic that as the ten member-states of ASEAN were entering the final stages towards realising the ASEAN Community 2015, the wider East Asian and Asia-Pacific region was witnessing a rise in tensions and insecurity

- Dispute between China and Japan over island claims in the East China Sea.
  - Beijing's announcement in 2013 of an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) over most of the East China Sea airspace
- Japan's announcement of a new national security strategy in late 2013
  - adopt a more forward posture and increase its defence spending.
  - coincided with Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine
  - drew not only strong criticisms from Japan and South Korea but also an unprecedented sharp rebuke from Japan's closest allies, the US.
- Earlier in 2013, there was much tensions on the Korean peninsula over North Korea's nuclear tests, as well as the ongoing disputes in the South China Sea.

- These cases are indicative of what Natalegawa described as a “trust deficit” in the wider East Asian and Asia-Pacific region and highlighted a worrying trend for countries to adopt unilateral approaches.
- As such, these cases demonstrate the enormous challenges that confront us in order to construct a peaceful community in the Asia Pacific region.

# The pre-ASEAN Historical Context of Southeast Asia

- Southeast Asia was also once beset by a “trust deficit.”
  - especially so in the years before ASEAN was formed in 196 where political and security concerns troubled the region at the time.
- Indonesia was a major source of regional instability and uncertainty
  - aggressive military posture against neighbouring Malaysia (and Singapore who were then a part of the Federation of Malaysia).
  - Jakarta’s use of military force to integrate West Papua and annexation of East Timor.
  - Consequently, Indonesia was very much seen as a “significant source of regional trauma” and as having “perceived expansionist tendencies.”



- However, these conflicts left a lasting impact by demonstrating clearly that armed aggression – rather than an effective tool for achieving national interests – was in fact detrimental for the nation.
- *“Indonesia, and not Malaysia, paid the higher cost for the event: Indonesia’s economy collapsed as a result of an international boycott, its international image was ruined as it was seen and cast in the light of an aggressor, and Indonesia was so effectively isolated that it later left the United Nations.”*
- It was this hard truth that made Jakarta and its counterparts in Southeast Asia come to the conclusion that the construction of a peaceful community was a more effective way for them to advance their respective national interests.
- In other words, by ensuring the governments in the region were not distracted by foreign policy concerns, Southeast Asian countries could concentrate on securing domestic peace, prosperity and stability.

## The Indonesian/ASEAN Approach to Constructing a Peaceful Community

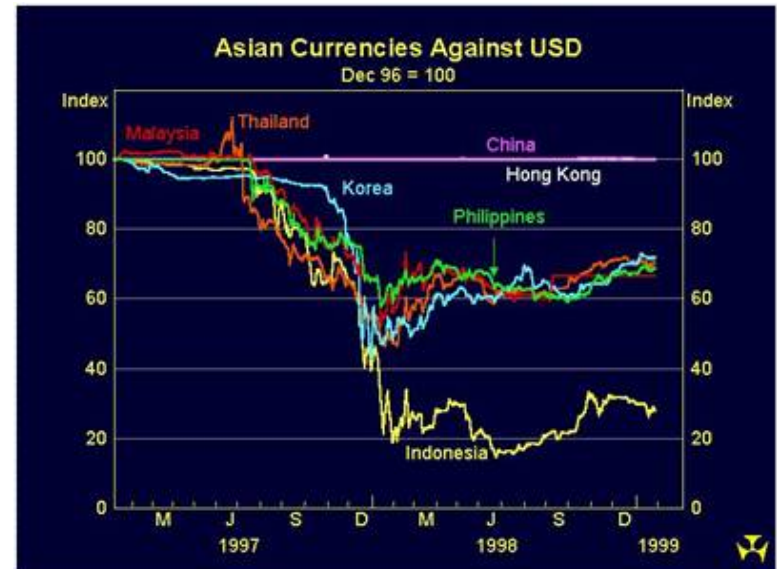
- Since abandoning its “perceived expansionist tendencies”, Jakarta has positioned itself as the *primus inter pares* in Southeast Asia and as a responsible member of ASEAN.
  - as “equals” Jakarta has sited itself on a level field as its much smaller neighbors in even if this is sometimes problematic for Indonesia.
  - Jakarta has for the most part refused to impose its will on others, despite frustrations from within the country that Jakarta has consistently been forced by its smaller neighbors into a compromise and/or that its policies were “largely ignored.”

- A hallmark of Indonesia's relationship with ASEAN is its commitment to multilateralism and norm-based approaches – something that has been taken up by ASEAN.
  - this approach is in accordance with the liberalist school of international relations
  - regards international institutions as a platform for increasing trust and faith among nation-states
  - such institutions can “help to improve communication between states, reducing uncertainty about intentions and increasing the capacity of governments to make credible, binding commitments to one another.”
  - This norm-based approach reflects the liberalist notion that the main cause of conflict is the lack of central processes to regulate competition that leads to conflict.



- ASEAN has introduced a whole raft of regional instruments including: Treaty of Amity and Cooperation of 1976, the ASEAN Regional Forum and the East Asian Summit.
- It is worth noting, while Northern American and Western European nations organised themselves into a military alliance in the form of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) and the Soviet Union and its Eastern European allies organised themselves into the Warsaw Pact, ASEAN did not constitute a mutual defence alliance.
- Indeed the Bangkok Declaration of 1967 stated,
  - *“all foreign bases are temporary and remain only with the expressed concurrence of the countries concerned and are not intended to be used directly or indirectly to subvert the national independence and freedom of States in the area or prejudice the orderly processes of their national development.”*
- One scholar, Emmers adds the ASEAN Declaration on the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) of 1971 and the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) of 1976 articulated the Association’s desire for a regional order that was managed by the region itself and free of external interference.

- It is also worth noting the evolution of how threats to ASEAN's construction of a peaceful community have been conceived in the region
- While the original Bangkok Declaration of 1967 saw threats to the regional order emanating from classical sources (i.e. other nation-states and state actors, etc.), there has been growing acceptance within the region of the political and security threats posed by non-traditional sources.
- This was particularly highlighted by the Asian Financial Crisis of the 1990s that brought economic hardship, social unrest and eventually the political downfall of Indonesia's General Suharto.



- Based on ASEAN's painful experiences of the 1990s, there is now a much broader conception of what constitutes risks to the Southeast Asian region's peaceful community
- The ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) Blueprint states,
  - *'The APSC subscribes to a comprehensive approach to security, which acknowledges the interwoven relationships of political, economic, social-cultural and environmental dimensions of development.'*
- In this sense, Indonesia and ASEAN's construction of a peaceful community focused on a commitment to multilateralism and a norm-based approach that does not require a mutual defense alliance and that subscribes to a comprehensive conception of a peaceful community (and all the threats it must face).

## Indonesia: Bridging the Region Together

- Focusing more specifically on Indonesia, it can be said that Indonesia has always positioned itself as a key actor shaping regional affairs.
  - Preamble to the 1945 Constitution explicitly outlines Indonesia's duty to “participate toward the establishment of a world order based on freedom, perpetual peace and social justice.”
  - To pursue this duty, Indonesia's founding fathers developed the “free and active” (*bebas aktif*) foreign policy concept.
- Anchored by this constitutional duty and guided by the *bebas aktif* concept, Indonesia has for decades put itself forward as part of the solution and not as part of the problem facing the region.
  - Indonesia's role in helping to open up Myanmar to the international community and embracing human rights and democracy
  - Jakarta's effort in preventing clashes between Thai and Cambodian forces from escalating into open war over the Preah Vihear temple complex a few years ago.

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## The Phnom Penh Post

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### Preah Vihear case: Indonesian ambassador offers help

Thu, 5 December 2013 [Cheang Sokha](#)

Indonesia has vowed to assist both Cambodia and Thailand in implementing the International Court of Justice's decision over the case of Preah Vihear temple, renewing its years-old involvement in mediating the dispute between the two nations.

Outgoing Indonesian ambassador to Phnom Penh Soehardjono Sastromihardjo made the pledge during a meeting with Foreign Minister Hor Namhong yesterday, Koy Kuong, spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said.

"Indonesia is ready to assist in whatever means if both countries ask for its support in implementing the ICJ order," Kuong quoted Soehardjono as saying.

According to Kuong, Namhong also thanked Indonesia for its mediation of ceasefires between Cambodia and Thailand in 2010 and 2011.

Due to internal unrest in Thailand, neither it nor Cambodia has decided on how to implement the ICJ's November verdict – which granted Cambodia ownership of the promontory where the temple is situated.

"It is just a matter of time, but the implementation of this order is not an issue," Kuong said yesterday.

- In the midst of regional uncertainty and increasing tensions – largely as a result of an unprecedented shift taking place in region's balance of power, Indonesia has a crucial role to play in mitigating some of these uncertainties and tensions by playing the role of a 'bridge country' to foster greater trust and mutual understanding between the major powers in the region.
- Under the Yudhoyono Presidency, Indonesia pursued a foreign policy of 'a thousand friends, zero enemies'.
  - Indonesia develop a Comprehensive Partnership with the US in 2010, and at the same time to develop a Strategic Partnership with China since 2005 (recently upgraded to a Strategic Comprehensive Partnership).
- While the term “a thousand friends and zero enemies” is no longer used by the new Government of President Joko Widodo, the basis for it remains true
  - Indonesia continues to face a “strategic environment where no country perceives Indonesia as an enemy and there is no country which Indonesia considers an enemy.”
- President Widodo's first state visits outside of the ASEAN region, saw him call on Tokyo and Beijing immediately after one another.

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- At the same time, at the recently concluded Asian-African Conference Commemoration 2015 held in Indonesia, both Chinese President Xi Jinping and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe sat next to President Joko Widodo in a symbolic show of Jakarta's potential to bridge the two sides.
- Indeed, the Asian-African Conference Commemoration 2015, where as many as 21 Heads of States/Governments gathered to honor the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Indonesia's 'highest achievement in foreign policy', was a timely reminder of Jakarta's potential to bridge all the various countries not only in the Asia-Pacific region but also that of Africa.



## Conclusion

- The goal of constructing a peaceful community in the Asia-Pacific is one that, while desirable to all parties in the region, is nevertheless confronted by a number of challenges and obstacles.
- Not least is the ‘trust deficit’ that marks the region and has consequently led to a rise in tensions and insecurity.
- However, history tells us that Southeast Asia too was once plagued by a similar predicament over half a century ago, and yet by the end of 2015 the ten member-states of Southeast Asia will soon usher in the ASEAN Community.
- Indonesia, once the “significant source of regional trauma”, is now ASEAN’s *primus inter pares* considering its fellow ASEAN member-states as “equals”. Time and time again, Jakarta has forwarded itself as part of the solution and not as part of the problem.

- This was brought about by a focused commitment to multilateralism and a norm-based approach that does not require a mutual defense alliance and that subscribes to a comprehensive conception of a peaceful community (and all the threats it must face).
- Such commitment was arguably focused from the hard truth that military approaches to resolving tensions and uncertainty - far from being an effective tool for achieving national interests - was in fact detrimental for the nation.
- As such, in order to construct a peaceful community in the Asia-Pacific region, a key lesson from Indonesia and ASEAN is arguably the hard truth that if governments in the region are not distracted by foreign policy concerns, Asia-Pacific countries could instead devote their time, energy and attention on securing domestic peace, prosperity and stability for the betterment of the peoples of this region.

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