

"AN ANALYTICAL REVIEW OF THE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH EAST ASIAN NATIONS (ASEAN)"

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INTRODUCTION

Association of South East Asian nations (ASEAN) was established in 1967, by the governments of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. It was formed during the Vietnam War and supported unsuccessful United States effort to prevent the establishment of a communist government in Vietnam. ASEAN constitutes a cohesive, generally Pro-western political bloc in the United Nations but has had difficulty in promoting closer economic ties among its members. The cold war wound down by fall of Berlin wall and the unification of Germany. As a result the United States closed its military bases in the Philippines and the Soviet Union did the same in Vietnam. At that point ASEAN turned in Japan's direction and became relatively dependent on investment, aid, exports, and technology sent from Japan. But over the last few years it was suggested by many critics that ASEAN should gain confidence in enhance its ability to stand on its own feet. The ASEAN members are helping to expand its membership to cover all Southeast Asia with the admittance of Cambodia, Laos and Burma.

OBJECTIVES OF ASEAN

In the broader context the ASEAN envisages to promote economic growth, social and cultural development, and a balance of power in the Southeast Asia region. Its goals include not only regional economic co-operation but also prevention and management of regional conflicts. According to its Declaration in 1967, it focuses on the following key objectives:

- i) To accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region through joint endeavors in the spirit of equality and partnership in order to strengthen the foundation for a prosperous and peaceful community of South East Asian nations;

- ii) To promote regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law in the relationship among countries of the region and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter;
- iii) To promote active collaboration and mutual assistance on matters of common interest in the economic, social, cultural, technical, scientific and administrative fields;
- iv) To provide assistance to each other in the form of training and research facilities in the educational, professional, technical and administrative spheres;
- v) To collaborate more effectively for the greater utilization of their agriculture and industries, the expansion of their trade, including the study of the problems of international commodity trade, the improvement of their transportation and communication facilities and the raising of the living standards of their people;
- vi) To promote South-East Asian studies; and
- vii) To maintain close and beneficial co-operation with existing international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes, and explore all avenues for even closer cooperation among themselves.

REVIEW OF KEY ACTIVITIES

ASEAN's first summit meeting was held in Bali, Indonesia, in February 1976. Two major documents were signed:

Treaty of Amity and Co-operation, laying down principles of mutual respect for the independence and sovereignty of all nations; non-interference in the internal affairs of one another; settlement of disputes by peaceful means; and effective co-operation among the member countries; and

Declaration of Concord, giving guidelines for action in economic, social and cultural relations, including: the maintenance

of political stability; the establishment of a 'Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality' (ZOPFAN); the promotion of social justice and improvement of living standards; mutual assistance in the event of natural disasters; and co-operation in economic development.

- A basic agreement on the establishment of ASEAN Preferential Trade Arrangements was concluded in 1977, but by mid-1987 the system covered only about 5% of trade between member states, since individual countries were permitted to exclude any 'sensitive' products from preferential import tariffs.

Under the ASEAN-Australia Economic-Cooperation Program, Australia gives financial support for ASEAN activities, and joint Business Council was set up in 1980. A third phase of the program was initiated in mid-1994, with assistance amounting to \$A32m for the period to June 1998, which was to concentrate on projects in the environmental management, telecommunications, transport and agro-industrial sectors.

In March 1980 a cooperation agreement was signed between ASEAN and the European Community (EC, as the EU was known prior to its restructuring on 1 November 1993), which provided for the strengthening of existing trade links and increased cooperation in the scientific and agricultural spheres. A Joint Cooperation Committee met in November (and annually thereafter); it drew up a program of scientific and technological cooperation, approval measures to promote contacts between industrialists from the two regions, and agreed on EC financing of ASEAN regional projects.

The ASEAN-EC Business Council was launched in December 1983 to provide a forum for business representatives from the two regions and to identify joint projects. Three European Business Information Councils have since been established, in Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand, in order to promote private sector cooperation. The first meeting of ministers of economic affairs from ASEAN and EC member countries took place in October 1985.

In 1986 a joint group of experts on trade was set up, to examine problems of access to ASEAN markets and similar matters, and in 1987 joint investment committees were established in all the ASEAN capital cities.

In December 1987 the meeting of ASEAN heads of government resolved to reduce such exclusions to a maximum of 10% of the number of items traded and to a maximum of 50% of the value of trade, over the next five years (seven years for Indonesia and the Philippines).

In 1990 ASEAN and the USA established an ASEAN-US Joint Working Group, whose purpose was to review ASEAN's economic relations with the USA and to identify measures by which economic links could be strengthened. ASEAN-Canadian cooperation projects included fisheries technology, the telecommunications industry, use of solar energy, and a forest seed Centre.

In January 1992 heads of government, meeting in Singapore, signed an agreement to create an 'ASEAN Free Trade Area' (AFTA), by 2008. In accordance with the agreement, a Common Effective Preferential Tariff (CEPT) scheme came into effect in January 1993. The CEPT covered all manufactured products, including capital goods, and processed agricultural products (which together accounted for two-thirds of intra-ASEAN trade), but was to exclude unprocessed agricultural products. Tariffs were to be reduced to a maximum of 20% within a period of five to eight years and to 0%-5% during the subsequent seven to 10 years. Fifteen categories were designated for accelerated tariff reduction, including vegetable oils, rubber products, textiles, cement and pharmaceuticals. Member states were, however, still to be permitted exclusion for certain 'sensitive' products.

In January 1992 ASEAN leaders agreed that there should be greater cooperation on security matters within the grouping, and that ASEAN's post-ministerial conferences (PMCs) should be used as a forum for discussion of questions relating to security with its dialogue partners and other countries.

In July 1992 the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting issued a statement calling for a peaceful resolution of the dispute concerning the *Spratly Islands* in the South China Sea, which are 'claimed, wholly or partly, by the People's Republic of China, Vietnam, Taiwan, Brunei, Malaysia and the Philippines. (In February China had introduced legislation that defined the *Spratly Islands* as belonging to its territorial waters.) The ministers proposed a code of international conduct for the South China Sea to be based on the principles contained in ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Co-operation.

In July 1993 both India and Pakistan were accepted as sectoral partners. Under this both partners invited to participate in ASEAN meeting on certain sectors such as trade, transport and communications and tourism'. The ASEAN-India Business Council was established, and met for the first time, in New Delhi, in February 1995.

In October 1993 ASEAN trade ministers agreed to modify the CEPT, with only Malaysia and Singapore having adhered to the original tariff reduction schedule. The new AFTA program, under which all member countries except Brunei were scheduled to begin tariff reductions from 1 January 1994, substantially enlarged the number of products to be included in the tariff-reduction process (for example, unprocessed agricultural products) and reduced the list of products eligible for protection.

Cooperation relations with New Zealand are based on the Inter-Institutional Linkages Program and the Trade and Investment Promotion Program, which mainly provide assistance in forestry development, dairy technology, veterinary management and legal aid training. An ASEAN-New Zealand Joint Management Committee was initiated in November 1993, in order to oversee the implementation of cooperation projects. The USA gives assistance for the

1 In December 1995 the ASEAN summit meeting agreed to enhance India's status to that of a full dialogue partner; India was formally admitted to the PMC in July 1996. In July 1998 India rejected a proposal that Pakistan attend that month's ARF to discuss issues relating to both countries' testing of nuclear weapons.

development of small and medium-sized businesses and other projects, and supports a Center for Technology Exchange.

In September 1994 ASEAN ministers of economic affairs agreed to accelerate the implementation of AFTA: tariffs were to be reduced to 0%-5% within seven to 10 years, or within five to eight years for products designated for accelerated tariff cuts.

A Joint Planning and Monitoring Committee were established in 1994 (and met for the first time in October 1995) to oversee projects at the planning and implementation levels. In July 1991 the Republic of Korea was accepted as a 'dialogue partner', and in December a joint ASEAN-Korea Chamber of Commerce was established.

In July 1995 Viet Nam was admitted as a member of ASEAN and was granted until 2006 to implement the AFTA trade agreements.

In September 1995 ASEAN economy ministers, meeting in Brunei, advocated a further acceleration of the tariff reduction deadline, to 2000. The ministers emphasized the importance of maintaining momentum in trade liberalization, in order to ensure ASEAN's continued relevance in relation to other regional groupings.

In December 1995 heads of government, convened in Bangkok, agreed to maintain the objective of achieving AFTA by 2003, while pursuing efforts to eliminate or reduce tariffs to less than 5% on the majority of products by 2000. Liberalization was to be extended to certain service industries, including banking, telecommunications and tourism.

In July 1997 Laos and Myanmar became members of ASEAN and were granted a 10-year period, from 1 January 1998, to comply with the AFTA schedule.

In December 1997 ASEAN heads of government again agreed to accelerate the implementation of AFTA, but without specifying any new target date.

- In October 1998 ASEAN ministers of economic affairs, reiterating their commitment to reducing restrictions to intra-ASEAN trade, estimated that by 2000 some 85.2% of all products would be subject to tariffs of 0%-5%.

ASEAN AND POST COLD WAR CHALLENGES

There is still some concern over the regional instability and uncertainty despite the ending cold war, reduction of tension in Asia and else where in the world. There is also a significant change in the power relationship and balance in Asia. Instead of the two super power hegemony, multi power centres have developed in Asia, the new power balance in post cold war Asia need to be more stable party because nuclear capabilities of some of the countries in Asia. The ASEAN whose regional goals are not only regional economic cooperation, but also prevention and management of regional conflicts has to take more cohesive and leading role towards political and economic stability in the region.

As in face of the actual and potential challenges, many countries in Asia - Pacific region have also increased their military strength. The Asia - Pacific region has become the number one region in terms of weapons imports. Military expenditure have exceeded US \$ 250 million, accounting for 22% of the world wide total and the percentages continues to grow. Seven of the 15 major weapons importing countries are from the Asia - Pacific region. Japan, in particular, is the major weapon importer amongst developed countries, in 1991, the Volume of weapon imports of the Asia - Pacific region accounted for 34% of the world - wide, total a sharp contrast compared to the 1982 figure of 15%.

One the other hand, military industries in United States and in some Western countries were confronted with a difficult situation at the end of the cold war, and have since taken the opportunity to meddle in regional conflicts by exporting a large volume of weapons. Since the end of the gulf war, the United States has exported weapons valued at over US \$ 63 billion to 142 countries. Economic difficulties have forced Russia to sell various types of weapons on the world market and have been

an important aspect in fuelling the arms build-up in various other regions, there by becoming a factor inducing regional conflicts.

East Asia that still faces unsolved territorial problems, including the armed stand-off between Japan and Russia over ownership of *Kuril Islands*, and the rival claims over the *Spratly Islands* in the South China Sea. China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines and Brunei have overlapping claims on the Islands, and keep troops stationed on many of atolls and reefs they control. This is just one of a large number of territorial disputes in the waters between China and its neighbors and underlying basis for most of them are the possible oil and gas reserves in area.

The Sino-Burmese frontier has been expanded. The China's military ties with Burma and Laos are perceived that China is extending its influence beyond its border. It may be seen as natural that China wants to provide its new market with a military Umbrella, but Burma's neighbors do not necessarily see it that way. They have watched with unease the massive Chinese shipments to Burma's army and air force.

Clearly, China's military and economic ties with Laos are growing apace. Since the two countries reached a defense cooperation agreement in 1993, China has delivered about 1,600 tonnes of military hardware mostly small arms and artillery shells. Indeed, if there is to be a connection between China and South East Asia it makes sense to build it through Laos. The collapse of the Soviet Union has allowed the Chinese to rapidly advance this agenda and created power vacuums among many of China's neighbors which Beijing is taking advantage of. The Chinese have keyed the development of their outlying regions both in terms of economic development and security concern to establishing symbolic relations with adjacent territories.

China favors ASEAN's pre-eminent role in the Asian Regional Forum (ARF) because it is comfortable with a regime that is not dominated or led by a rival great power. ASEAN's methods of interaction make it far easier for any single actor to

be obstructionist and far more difficult for the majority of states to impose their will on any recalcitrant party. Thus, China's support for ASEAN is a significant factor accounting for the organization's prominence. However, despite Chinese support, there are strong reasons to believe that, even under the best of circumstances, ASEAN could not maintain its leading role in the ARF for long. The United States and Japan have long considered the ASEAN Regional Forum a transition stage to an *Asian Regional Forum*; other countries in the ARF have already expressed resentment about ASEAN's dominant role. Given these factors, it was already highly unlikely that ASEAN could sustain its dominance in the ARF over time. With the Economic Crisis, its ability to maintain its primary role has been further compromised. From a practical point of view, the ability of most ASEAN states to continue upgrading their militaries, thereby claiming a legitimate military role in the region, has been reduced as a result of the economic downturn. More importantly, the political prestige underpinning ASEAN's role in the ARF has been greatly reduced.

ASEAN AND ASIAN TURMOIL

The East Asian economies crisis was an event with global implications. The crisis started in Southeast Asia but its effects spread to Northeast Asia (particularly South Korea) and beyond. Ultimately, its impact was felt around the world. It is important to note that the exact causes of the crisis – both in Southeast Asia and beyond – remain debatable. At its heart, however, the economic crisis in Southeast Asia appeared to be a crisis of banking regulation, at both the national and international levels along with the confluence of a number of domestic and international factors.

The deregulation of Southeast Asian economies in the early 1990s made it easier for Asian companies to obtain foreign credit. Restrictions on opportunities for foreign investment led to over-investment in unproductive economic sectors, such as real estate or over-supplied industrial sectors, creating the increasing problem of bad debt for banks and bubble economies.

Extensive foreign borrowing, particularly short-term loans, and growing foreign debt also made the affected Southeast Asian economies vulnerable to the vagaries of international financial markets. These conditions were exacerbated or, in some cases, made possible by poorly regulated banking sectors, crony capitalism, and currencies unrealistically pegged to the American dollar.

It is mentioned that the Southeast Asian dimension of the economic crisis can also be related with the domestic structural weaknesses, which were greatly exacerbated by the easy availability of foreign credit. In opening themselves up to the benefits of the world economy, the ASEAN countries also made themselves vulnerable to currency speculators. Disentangling these effects, however, is impossible. The ASEAN countries were faced with the task of cleaning up their banking sectors and putting in place measures that will encourage new foreign investment. In this respect, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) guided them².

2 The IMF took the lead in re-structuring the economies of Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines.

It required that the governments of these countries cut spending, reduce subsidies, and raise interest rates even further, so as to stabilize their currencies. IMF reforms have been strongly criticized as being inappropriate for the Asian crisis. The IMF's measures had significant political and social effects.

IMF reforms largely contributed directly to the political unrest in Indonesia that led to the resignation of President Suharto. Later in the crisis, the IMF did alter some of its policies to allow for government spending and deficits and the continuation of creation vital subsidies. While there is evidence that the IMF has learned from some of its mistakes, its initial policies were more harmful than helpful. Asians widely perceived the IMF as making its primary goal the recovery and protection of the money of wealthy foreign investors. Foreigners who had been every bit as imprudent as Asians in their choice of investments - were being protected at the expenses of the weakest segments Asian societies. Moreover, some of the IMF's actions were clearly meant to further the United States' economic and political goals in some of the affected East Asian states, most notably South Korea. Despite its learning curve and moderation of policy, Asians now see the IMF as an instrument of American opportunism and it may have de-legitimized its activities for the future.

On the whole, one would argue that the institutional development of ASEAN resulting from crises was affected in three interconnected ways. First, it undermined the confidence, born of economic success, which is at the heart of ASEAN's assertiveness on the international stage. Without the legitimacy accorded to its demands by the economic prosperity of its key members, ASEAN will have considerable difficulty in assuming a leading regional role. Economic prosperity also underpinned the willingness of other states to listen to ASEAN.

Second, ASEAN's inability, as an institution, to respond effectively to the crisis draws attention to the weakness of its claims to be an economic institution. This calls into question ASEAN's attempts to find a new purpose for itself in the post-Cold War. If ASEAN has proven useless during the region's most serious crisis in thirty years, what purpose does it serve? The crisis also underlines the extent to which ASEAN has not been a factor in the economic success of its members.

Finally, ASEAN's ineffectiveness draws attention to its structural limitations. The economic crisis creating problems that ASEAN could not address without violating the "ASEAN way". Principles and practices that have been fundamental to ASEAN's survival throughout its history are now working against its continued viability in a changing regional environment. The inability of the ASEAN states to agree on ways in which to reform these procedures underlines ASEAN's dilemma.

For the time being, the economic downturn has affected the attractiveness of the ASEAN states to foreign investors. This means that ASEAN's political and economic influence will wane accordingly. In addition, the dynamics of the economic relationship between the ASEAN states and foreign actors is also changing. Under IMF pressure, ASEAN countries such as Thailand and Indonesia are restructuring their economies in a manner that will afford less influence to government policy and more to the operation of markets. The main impact of the crisis on ASEAN's institutional standing, however, is psychological. The ASEAN states once prided themselves on their economic

dynamism. They attributed their success to "Asian values" - a supposedly Asian focus on the welfare of the group over the individual, the encouragement of self-sacrifice and hard work, and a general propensity towards elite-led, authoritarian governments. Now, many of these same ASEAN states have been accused of economic mismanagement. The factors that led to the initial economic boom are now being blamed for the ongoing crisis. Crony capitalism and government-managed economies are now being depicted by outsiders as aspects of "Asian values" and are blamed for the economic collapse. The source of prestige by which ASEAN claimed a prominent regional role has been seriously harmed.

ASEAN's inability to launch any coordinated response to the crisis underlines the weakness of its aspirations to be a regional economic organization. ASEAN may claim to want to grow in this direction, but the organization has traditionally been a political regime for very good reasons. The ASEAN economies have usually been more competitive than complementary. Throughout its history, ASEAN has been dismally unsuccessful as an economic entity. Its members have preferred to pursue economic projects on their own and with outside actors. Intra-ASEAN projects have been relatively few and usually unsuccessful. The ASEAN states have been unwilling to put aside their individual national interests for the sake of ASEAN economic development.

ASEAN members set forth a number of proposals to deal with the crisis as a group. One suggestion was to conduct intra-ASEAN trade in the Singapore dollar, which is the strongest ASEAN currency. In addition, Singapore conducts most intra-ASEAN trade. However, the proposal was, in part, rejected because of the realization that such trade was too small to significantly counteract the effects of currencies devalued in relation to the American dollar. ASEAN's apparent inability to coordinate an effective response to the economic crisis drew attention to the reality that, as noted above, the ASEAN countries are dependent upon economic interaction with the outside world. Moreover, not surprisingly given the economic nature of the

crisis, the ASEAN states lacked any leverage over their foreign economic partners. Under these conditions, legitimate questions may be raised about the utility of reorganizing ASEAN as an economic entity.

In the wake of the economic crisis, ASEAN states have recognized their mutual vulnerability. The fact that the Asian contagion passed quickly from state to state made clear that these countries will stand or fall together on the international economic stage. Bearing this in mind, ASEAN has discussed establishing a regional mechanism, under ASEAN auspices, which would monitor the economic policies of its member states. On the one hand, for ASEAN, this is a revolutionary idea, given that it directly infringes upon the sovereignty of its members. On the other hand, for precisely this reason, there is considerable reason to doubt that this idea will ever amount to very much. The commitment to non-intervention within ASEAN has been a fundamental principle of the institution precisely because it has allowed ASEAN to stay within the parameters of what its members could accept.

ASEAN has survived because it has not pushed any one of its members beyond what their own national interests would support. Beyond revealing ASEAN's practical limitations as an economic regime, the economic crisis has drawn attention to the weaknesses of ASEAN's established diplomatic practices. The crisis is a phenomenon that cut across political and geographical boundaries. To deal with the crisis effectively, ASEAN needed to address the domestic economic policies of its member states. As in the case of establishing an ASEAN monitoring system however, this need to run directly against some of ASEAN's founding principles and established practices. ASEAN was originally created to preserve the independence of its members; they explicitly reject interference in one another's affairs. Over the years, the concept of non-interference has become broadly defined, to the point where various ASEAN governments expect their fellow members to control what is said about each other in the private media. The notion that the ASEAN states would tolerate being criticized by each other through official channels seems a sure recipe for political disaster. On the other hand, if

the ASEAN states develop a method of criticizing one another that is inoffensive, they may render the process ineffective anyway. In short, getting around ASEAN's established principle of non-interference will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the organization.

Another aspect of ASEAN's established methods is the interactions that it encourages between officials and leaders of its member states. ASEAN has often been described as a "social club". According to many observers, what make ASEAN effective are the social and personal ties that it has nurtured between the leaders of its member states. Insofar as this is true, the fall of President Suharto in Indonesia may profoundly affect ASEAN, especially given the prominence and central importance of Indonesia to ASEAN. Suharto himself was strongly supportive of ASEAN and enjoyed his role as the most senior leader in Southeast Asia. Ongoing leadership change in the region, and greater demands for accountability in government may mean that ASEAN will need to undergo fundamental reform if it hopes to adjust to an increasingly "democratic" environment. ASEAN has functioned as a gathering of elite foreign ministry official and government leaders. As ASEAN states become more democratic and open to political forces from within, the room for intra-ASEAN accommodation may narrow considerably. If ASEAN is to deal with this increase in democracy, it will need to reform its methods and institutionalize itself in a way that it has previously avoided. Greater institutionalization, however, may compromise the flexibility that has allowed ASEAN to survive for 32 years.

PAKISTAN AND FAREAST CRISES

It is mentioned that Pakistan directly benefited from Asian crisis, For example, its Pakistan exports rose by 12 percent during July - December 1997-98, with simultaneous increase in imports by 7.7 percent. Exports in the first six months of 1997-98 amounted to Rs.18.7 billion, as against Rs.16.7 billion in the corresponding period of 1886-97. The imports as Rs.48.7 billion were higher, compared to Rs. 45.2 billion in the first half of 1996-97. According to the Federal Bureau of Statistics (FBS),

exports to Malaysia jumped to Rs.758 million, compared to Rs.594 Rs.2.3 billion from Rs.1.1 billion. Exports to Philippines increased to Rs.454 million from Rs.260 million, followed by Rs.727 million to Thailand from Rs.399 million, while exports to Japan declined to Rs.8.8 billion compared to Rs.9.9 billion during July - December, 1996-97. Exports to Singapore during first six months of 1997-98 remained almost same at Rs.1.1 billion, while exports to South Korea increased to Rs.4.5 billion as against Rs.4 billion. Pakistan's main items of exports to these countries are textile yarn and fabrics, leather and leather products, rice, fruits, vegetable, raw cotton, fish and sports goods. According to Export Promotion Bureau (FBP), the share of ASEAN countries in Pakistan exports is 5 percent. On import side, Malaysia topped in the seven countries of South East Asia as its exports to Pakistan rose to Rs.13.4 billion during July - December, 1997-98, as compared to Rs.9 billion in the same period.

CONCLUSION

ASEAN constitutes a cohesive, generally Pro-western political bloc in the United Nations but has had difficulty in promoting closer economic ties among its members. The ASEAN whose regional goals are not only regional economic cooperation, but also prevention and management of regional conflicts has to take more cohesive and leading role towards political and economic stability in the region. ASEAN's inability to launch any coordinated response to the regional financial, economic, and political crisis underlines the weakness of its aspirations to be a regional economic organization.

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