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The Dynamics of Intra-ASEAN Relations: Implications for Regional Defense Diplomacy

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Introduction

December 2019 will mark the end of the current work program of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM). The work program identifies specific areas of cooperation among the ADMM's members, as well as cooperation under the ADMM-Plus platform. Indeed, the work program guides the efforts of the ADMM and ADMM-Plus in advancing multilateralism in the region. Mindful of the organization's diplomatic accomplishments, it is likewise important to understand the limitations of ASEAN in promoting multilateralism in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region. Thus, this policy brief aims to discuss the dynamics of intra-ASEAN and its implications for regional defense diplomacy. Thereafter, the paper shall identify some policy considerations in furthering regional defense diplomacy efforts, specifically for the ADMM and the ADMM-Plus.

To examine these issues, this paper¹ shall use Jürgen Rüländ's theory on multilateralism, particularly his "hedging utility" concept.² Rüländ pointed out that multilateralism has been defined largely in normative terms. Indeed, one scholar defined multilateralism as "an institutional form which coordinates relations among three or more states on the basis of 'generalized' principles of conduct — that is, principles which specify appropriate conduct for a class of actions, *without regard to the particularistic interests of the parties or the strategic exigencies that may exist in any specific occurrence.*"³ This definition suggests the surrender of some aspects of sovereignty to supranational authority. In this regard, Rüländ argued that there are two categories in which multilateralism is being used: multilateral utility, and hedging utility.

Rüländ pointed out that some international organizations (IOs) are not multilateral utilities in the sense that they sacrifice the sovereignty of their member-states. Rather, these IOs are used by states as

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hedging utilities in the sense that they "act more pragmatically" and multilateral institutions are used "primarily as devices to influence the regional and global power equation."⁴ Among other indicators,⁵ the level of institutionalization illuminates a key difference between multilateral utility and hedging utility. Whereas the former builds institutions primarily for problem solving anchored on binding legal agreements that entail a degree of sacrificing sovereignty (also known as "deep institutionalization"), the latter is primarily for institutional balancing that uses non-binding agreements and protects the sovereignty of member-states (also known as called "shallow institutionalization").⁶

Using these theoretical underpinnings, this paper argues that in cognizance of intra-ASEAN dynamics, the organization's defense diplomacy platforms, particularly the ADMM and ADMM-Plus, are largely hedging utilities playing out in the broader regional security environment. Intra-ASEAN relations shape the dynamics that govern its various platforms, including the ADMM and ADMM-Plus.

Inter-State Relations in Southeast Asia

Multilateral diplomacy in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region is largely led by ASEAN. Indeed, ASEAN has been able to convene a diverse group of states whose geopolitical relations are at times contentious—some

of which have a history of armed conflict. For example, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) counts among its members the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Republic of Korea (ROK), as well as India and the People's Republic of China (PRC). However, notwithstanding its accomplishments, ASEAN has often been criticized as a mere "talk shop"⁷ focusing more on form and less on substance, with its "ASEAN Way" of decision-making under increasing scrutiny.⁸ Such criticisms are often amplified whenever ASEAN is compared to the European Union (EU), which has evolved into a supranational organization that can make binding decisions on behalf of its members.⁹ It is therefore crucial to understand the geopolitical background of ASEAN's evolution that governs the organization's dynamics and the constraints that it faces.

ASEAN was founded in 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. It was already the third attempt to form a regional organization in Southeast Asia, following the short-lived Association of Southeast Asia (ASA), and Malaya, Philippines, and Indonesia (MAPHILINDO). Southeast Asia is a diverse region. As Donald Weatherbee pointed out, "there is no region-wide identity such as race, ethnicity, language, religion, culture, and history such as [those found] in the Arab world, Western Europe, or, with the exception of Brazil, Latin America."¹⁰ In addition, ASEAN member-states (AMS) have different levels of economic development, and political systems.

At that time of ASEAN's founding, Southeast Asia was called by some observers as the "Balkans of Asia," where newly independent countries were engulfed in nationalist fervor, territorial disputes, and rivalries.¹¹ These new countries were not only politically, economically, and socio-culturally diverse, they likewise had and still have diverging—and at times colliding—national interests. Indeed, most Southeast Asian states at the time were in conflict or at least suspicious of each other. Against the backdrop of the Cold War, the Viet Nam War was being fought between the Soviet Union-backed North Viet Nam and the United States (US)-supported South Viet Nam. In 1963, the new state of Malaysia was created which united the British colonies of Singapore, North Borneo, and Sarawak with the already independent country of Malaya. Indonesia, then led by its founding President Sukarno, denounced the creation of Malaysia, which he viewed as an instrument of British imperialism, and declared a policy of "konfrontasi" (confrontation) against the new country.¹² As part of its konfrontasi, Jakarta dispatched its marines to Singapore, then a state of Malaysia, and detonated bombs.¹³ Singapore

arrested, tried, and subsequently executed the marines, which caused further friction with Indonesia.¹⁴

The Philippines was likewise opposed to the creation of Malaysia because of Manila's sovereignty claim over portions of North Borneo. Indeed, this territorial claim, as well as Indonesia's opposition to the creation of Malaysia, was largely the reasons for the early demise of ASA and MAPHILINDO.¹⁵ When news broke out regarding Manila's reported attempt to seize portions of North Borneo from Malaysia by force in 1968, Acharya wrote that it "threatened the very survival of ASEAN, barely six months after its creation in August 1967."¹⁶

In 1965, as a result of political and economic differences, as well as racial tensions, Kuala Lumpur expelled Singapore from Malaysia.¹⁷ A small island just at the tip of the Malay Peninsula, Singapore then became an independent state, with a heightened sense of vulnerability because of its size in the face of two larger neighbors.

There is an apparent consensus in the academic literature that the pivotal point in Southeast Asia's regionalism was the change of government in Indonesia.¹⁸ After gradually replacing Sukarno as Indonesia's leader in the mid-1960s, General Suharto shifted course in foreign policy by abandoning his predecessor's konfrontasi. The new regime in Indonesia—geographically the largest country in Southeast Asia—ultimately "made ASEAN possible."¹⁹

ASEAN was founded primarily to manage the contentious relations of its original five founding members. One of the preambular provisions of the 1967 Bangkok Declaration thus provides: "the existence of mutual interests and *common problems among countries* of South-East Asia [sic] and convinced of the need to strengthen further the existing bonds of regional solidarity and cooperation."²⁰ The key in managing contentious relations and diversities among independent sovereign states would ultimately depend on the principles that would guide inter-governmental relations. Stated briefly, the guiding principle of intra-ASEAN relations is what has been called as the "ASEAN Way," an approach to inter-state relations codified in the organization's 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC).²¹ Pursuant to the treaty, inter-state relations must be guided by the following core principles: "a) Mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity and national identity of all nations; b) The right of every State to lead its national existence free from external

interference, subversion or [coercion]; c) Non-interference in the internal affairs of one another; d) Settlement of differences or disputes by peaceful means; e) Renunciation of the threat or use of force; [and] f) Effective cooperation among themselves.”²² This mode of inter-state relations has been reaffirmed in the organization’s Charter signed in 2007.

Whereas the first three principles are basically about respecting each other’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, the last three tenets are largely about the mode of cooperation and decision-making. Indeed, the ASEAN Way of cooperation is influenced by the two concepts from Bahasa Indonesia: “musjawarah” (consultation); and “mufakat” (consensus).²³ As noted earlier, the objective of ASEAN is to manage relations among its very diverse member-states. Clearly, ASEAN was not founded to resolve the conflicts among its members. Neither was it established as a supranational organization nor as a military alliance. Rather, as an inter-governmental body, ASEAN was designed as “a conflict avoidance system, relying on informal negotiations in loose settings as opposed to adversarial modes in legally grounded institutions.”²⁴ Consensus, it must be noted, is defined as unanimity with each AMS exercising a de facto veto power.²⁵ Thus, in a system of interaction designed to strengthen the sovereignty of each member-state and in cognizance of their diversity, the ASEAN Way has two strategic objectives: 1) to prevent bilateral disputes among between or among AMS to affect regional stability and the ASEAN’s operations; and 2) to avoid contentious issues between AMS and non-AMS to adversely affect relations within ASEAN.²⁶ However, as a result of unanimity-based decision-making, ASEAN’s initiatives are mostly on non-controversial issues and have focused on the “low-hanging fruits,”²⁷ or “lowest common-denominator”²⁸ areas of cooperation.

Geopolitics and ASEAN-led Defense Diplomacy

Although not without its share of challenges, the ASEAN Way of inter-state relations has nevertheless attained some achievements in the realm of regional security. Since ASEAN’s founding, none of its member-states have gone into armed conflict with each other.²⁹ As a result of the strict application of the principles of non-interference and consensus, ASEAN contributed in fostering a measure of regional stability, which allowed its member states to promote economic development in their respective countries, albeit with varying degrees of success.³⁰

Since the 1970s, ASEAN has also engaged external actors through Post Ministerial Conferences

(PMCs) which were initially driven by economic motives but have also taken, in the words former ASEAN Secretary General Rodolfo Severino, “significant political and security dimension[s].”³¹ To date, ASEAN has ten (10) Dialogue Partners: Australia, Canada, China, EU, India, Japan, ROK, New Zealand, Russia, and the US.³² ASEAN also has four (4) Sectoral Dialogue Partners: with Pakistan, Norway, Switzerland, and Turkey.³³ With Germany as Development Partner, ASEAN has two (2) Observers: East Timor, and Papua New Guinea.³⁴

Following the end of the Cold War, ASEAN, having expanded its membership and established dialogue relations, gradually became the driver of multilateral diplomacy in the broader Indo-Asia-Pacific region. Apart from the ARF, ASEAN is also at the center of various platforms of dialogue and cooperation, such as the ASEAN-Plus Three (APT), and East Asia Summit (EAS), as well as ASEAN’s primary regional defense diplomacy platforms: ADMM and ADMM-Plus.

As part of the efforts in building the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), the ADMM was founded in 2006 and, just four (4) years hence, the ADMM-Plus was convened to include eight dialogue partners: Australia, PRC, India, Japan, New Zealand, ROK, Russia, and the US. The establishment of the ADMM-Plus, led by the ADMM, arguably reinforces ASEAN’s centrality in the multilateral diplomacy of the region. Like other ASEAN platforms, the ADMM and ADMM-Plus rely mainly on non-binding agreements that guide their cooperation. Their founding documents themselves, as well as various cooperative agreements, are non-binding and flexible in nature.

Both the ADMM and ADMM-Plus operate under the tenets of the ASEAN Way. As underscored in the Protocol to the Concept Paper for the Establishment of the ADMM, “The ADMM shall actively engage ASEAN friends and Dialogue Partners in dialogue and cooperation on defense and security matters, through an ADMM-Plus process, at a pace comfortable to all [AMS], while *respecting the principles of consensus-based decision making, independence, sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs.*”³⁵

The dynamics of the ASEAN Way of decision-making appear to have an effect on the ADMM and ADMM-Plus. As noted earlier, because of a unanimity-based consensus mode of decision-making, ASEAN has tended to focus on less controversial areas of cooperation. By and large, the same can be said of the ADMM and ADMM-Plus. While the Protocol to the

Concept Paper for the Establishment of the ADMM noted that the defense ministers' grouping would "discuss practical cooperation in traditional and non-traditional security concerns,"³⁶ most of the body's initiatives have focused on non-traditional security cooperation.³⁷

Among ADMM's major areas of cooperation, the following initiatives have been pursued thus far: First, in the area of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), ADMM adopted the following: Concept Paper on the Use of Military Assets and Capacities HADR, Concept Paper on the ASEAN Militaries Ready Group (AMRG) on HADR and its Terms of Reference (TOR), as well as the TOR of the Military Representative to the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (AHA Centre) for the AMRG on HADR.³⁸ Second, in the area of peacekeeping, ADMM established the ASEAN Peacekeeping Centres Network.³⁹ Third, ADMM also has pursued initiatives with respect to military medicine, particularly the Concept Paper on the Establishment of the ASEAN Center of Military Medicine (ACMM), and its TOR.⁴⁰ Fourth, in the area of counter-terrorism, ADMM has, among others, adopted the following: Joint Statement of Special ADMM on Countering Violent Extremism, Radicalization, and Terrorism; Joint Statement by the ASEAN Defence Ministers on Countering Terrorism in ASEAN; Concept Paper on "Our Eyes" Initiative; and the Discussion Paper on the Resilience, Response, and Recovery (3R) Concept of Counter-Terrorism.⁴¹

ADMM also adopted a Concept Paper on the Establishment of Logistics Support Framework in order to support cooperation on various non-traditional security challenges, including HADR, search and rescue (SAR), and peacekeeping operations.⁴² Aside from promoting people-to-people ties among ASEAN defense officials through the ASEAN Defense Interaction Programmes,⁴³ ADMM also adopted a Concept Paper on Establishing ASEAN Defense Industry Collaboration.⁴⁴

The focus on non-traditional security cooperation is also apparent in the workings of ADMM-Plus. Cooperation among member-states of the ADMM-Plus is facilitated through Expert Working Groups (EWGs).⁴⁵ Initially, there were five ADMM-Plus EWGs: 1) HADR; 2) maritime security; 3) military medicine; 4) counter-terrorism; and 5) peacekeeping operations.⁴⁶ Subsequently, there were two additional EWGs: humanitarian mine action, and cyber security.⁴⁷ To note, since 2011, ADMM has released three-year work programs to guide its cooperation, as well as its cooperation with the Plus-countries. Thus far, ADMM

has issued three work programs: 2011-2013; 2014-2016; and 2017-2019.⁴⁸

The ADMM and ADMM-Plus both operate on the principles of ASEAN Way. Indeed, both not only underscore consensus and non-interference, but also the importance of working at "a pace comfortable to all,"⁴⁹ and the voluntary nature of key initiatives, such as briefings on defense and security policies.⁵⁰ Clearly, with sovereignty protected from supranational entity, both the ADMM and ADMM-Plus are hedging utilities; their level of institutionalization is anchored not on legal instruments but rather on what Rüdland called as non-binding and non-precise "soft law."⁵¹ In other words, viewed from Rüdland's theoretical lens, ADMM and ADMM-Plus have shallow institutionalization. This is not to suggest that the ADMM, ADMM-Plus, and its cooperation initiatives are unimportant. To the contrary, these ASEAN-led mechanisms are crucial in providing platforms for dialogue and practical cooperation among the countries in the region. However, it is equally important to understand the dynamics that govern ADMM and ADMM-Plus in order to set the proper expectations on what they can and cannot do.

Notwithstanding ASEAN's institutional weaknesses, Evelyn Goh argued that its member-states are pursuing a security approach which she labeled as "omni-enmeshment" of the major powers.⁵² According to Goh, enmeshment is "the process of engaging with a state so as to draw it into deep involvement into international or regional society, enveloping it in a web of sustained exchanges and relationships with a long-term aim of integration."⁵³ The prefix "omni" is added because ASEAN's efforts are multi-directional and are therefore targeted not only on one country (i.e. China) but also on other powers in the region, including the US, South Korea, and India.⁵⁴ These omni-enmeshment efforts are geared toward "developing closer economic relations, creating political/security dialogues, exchanges, and cooperation, and establishing military exchanges and relationships."⁵⁵ Alice Ba made a similar argument when she discussed "ASEAN's great power predicament."⁵⁶ Ba underscored that ASEAN's fundamental dilemma is about the "relative dependency on and autonomy from China and the [US]."⁵⁷ Specifically, "the [US] because it played such an important role in the regional security and economic development of Southeast Asia; and China because it has been a primary security concern of ASEAN states first as an internal security threat in the period after post-World War II and now as a rising power in the post-Cold War era."⁵⁸ Indeed, the ADMM-Plus is one of the key mechanisms—apart from the

ARF and EAS—to promote omni-enmeshment against the backdrop of the major power predicament facing the region. Evidently, as Rüländ argued, ASEAN is more of a hedging utility than multilateral utility in the sense it more about institutional balancing amidst major power competition.

It must be pointed out, however, that ASEAN’s centrality in the region’s multilateral architecture is in no small part due to the tacit license bestowed by the major powers of the Indo-Asia-Pacific region.⁵⁹ Indeed, ASEAN’s centrality is mostly a default position resulting from competition and apparent deficit of strategic trust among major powers.⁶⁰ The geopolitical competition between the US and China is increasingly becoming the broader strategic backdrop of international relations in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region. This major power rivalry is at play in some of the region’s potential flashpoints, particularly in the South China Sea (SCS).

Connecting the Indian and Pacific oceans, the SCS presents a major power with an opportunity to project influence and a platform for sustaining or altering the geopolitical balance.⁶¹ As the region’s rising power, China, in line with its widely perceived goal to dominate the First and Second Island Chain in the Pacific Ocean,⁶² has embarked on massive land reclamation activities in the SCS over which Beijing claims “indisputable sovereignty” almost in its entirety.⁶³ Such efforts have not gone unnoticed by the US, the region’s preeminent power. In unequivocal terms, Washington’s 2017 National Security Strategy declared that “China seeks to displace the [US] in the Indo-Pacific region.”⁶⁴ Noting Beijing’s efforts to militarize its reclaimed islands in the SCS, the US further stressed that “China has mounted a rapid military modernization campaign designed to limit US access to the region and provide China a freer hand there.”⁶⁵

Given these dynamics of great power politics in the region, ASEAN’s diplomatic efforts in the SCS will have to grapple with a strategic dilemma. On the one hand, ASEAN’s relevance in the multilateral security architecture will be enhanced by addressing traditional security challenges, including the SCS. However, the same challenges further risk the unraveling of ASEAN’s unity and centrality as it exposes the grouping’s internal rifts. In addition,

ASEAN’s consensus and consultation mode of decision-making—essentially a policy of veto-power for each member—has arguably made the organization increasingly susceptible to major power rivalry.

In the past few years, this ASEAN strategic dilemma has openly played out in some high level meetings. Because of the SCS dispute, the 45th ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in 2012 was not able to issue joint communiqué—a first in ASEAN’s history.⁶⁶ Former Singaporean ambassador Bilahari Kausikan candidly observed that the incident was “due to the stubborn refusal of the Cambodian [c]hair to consider any text on the SCS that might in the slightest way offend Cambodia’s Chinese patron.”⁶⁷ In 2016, in a meeting among the foreign ministers of China and ASEAN, a joint communiqué was issued but later retracted because of the SCS issue.⁶⁸ A similar incident also happened in a regional defense diplomacy platform. During the 3rd ADMM-Plus forum held in 2015 chaired by Malaysia, a joint statement was also not issued because of the SCS dispute.⁶⁹

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It must be noted, however, that despite ASEAN’s institutional weaknesses and the exposure of its internal divisions, coupled with the dynamics of US-China strategic rivalry, ADMM has nevertheless adopted some initiatives that could

modestly contribute to the management of tensions in the SCS, and more broadly complement efforts in addressing traditional security concerns. In 2014, ADMM adopted the Concept Paper on Establishing a Direct Communications Link (DCL)—now called the ASEAN Direct Communications Infrastructure (ADI)—with the purpose of “providing a permanent, rapid, reliable and confidential means by which any two ASEAN [Defense] Ministers may communicate with each other to arrive at mutual decisions in handling crisis or emergency situations, in particular related to maritime security.”⁷⁰ Under the 2017-2019 work program, ADMM seeks to complete ADI Phase 1, which includes secure voice communication, and ADI Phase 2, which is about secure email communication.⁷¹ The said work program also notes the initiative to include the Plus-countries in the ADI, at least initially in Phase 1.⁷²

In 2017, ADMM adopted the Guidelines for Maritime Interaction (GMI), which aims to, among

others, “establish comprehensive and feasible maritime conflict management measures on the basis of confidence-building, preventive diplomacy, and peaceful management of tensions that could arise at sea.”⁷³ GMI notes that it “uphold[s] all existing maritime arrangements between [AMS], as well as between [AMS] and other states and organizations including, but not limited to, [United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea or UNCLOS] and [Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea or CUES].”⁷⁴ Albeit voluntary in nature, GMI encourages civil-military dialogue “among [AMS]’ naval forces, coast guards, maritime police assets, and private industries engaged in maritime activities.”⁷⁵ Among the activities that could be carried out under the GMI include “discussions on existing strategies, work plans, laws, reports, rules of engagement (ROEs), and other information relevant to maritime security, port security, and overflight jurisdiction; [and] further modalities and procedures.”⁷⁶ Moreover, ADMM opened the possibility of extending the GMI to the Plus countries.⁷⁷

In 2018, ADMM issued the Guidelines for Air Military Encounters (GAME) which, although non-binding and voluntary in nature, aims to apply to “unintentional encounters in flight between military aircraft over high seas, ensuring safe separation to avoid creating a safety hazard. To determine safe separation, military aircraft should comprehensively consider their own national rules, and relevant international guidance.”⁷⁸ GAME has four (4) annexes on: Observing Existing Aviation Conventions and Rules; Safe and Professional Communications; Standard Flight Procedures; and Encouraging Mutual Trust and Confidence in the Air.⁷⁹ Although more work remains to be done, these agreements can nevertheless complement existing crisis management mechanisms which aim to prevent and/or deescalate tensions.

To note, ASEAN’s main SCS initiative is the effort to forge a Code of Conduct (COC). Under the 2002 Declaration on Conduct (DOC) of Parties in the SCS, ASEAN and China agreed to the “eventual attainment” of the COC.⁸⁰ While there have been some modest progress in the years since, it was in 2017 that ASEAN and China agreed to a framework for the COC.⁸¹ The following year, ASEAN and China agreed to a Single Draft SCS COC Negotiating Text (SDNT).⁸² Although the COC negotiation process is primarily within the purview of the foreign ministries, the implementation of the adopted COC will largely become the responsibility of the defense establishments of ASEAN and China.⁸³ As such, the COC can also affect broader regional defense

diplomacy, albeit not ADMM and ADMM-Plus per se. In that negotiating document, Beijing proposed that China and ASEAN should “not hold joint military exercises with countries from outside the region, unless the parties concerned are notified beforehand and express no objection.”⁸⁴ Should this provision be included in the final COC, China could effectively veto military exercises of ASEAN states with other powers such as the US. As ADMM-Plus member Australia pointed out, the COC “should not prejudice the interests of third parties or the rights of all states under international law.”⁸⁵ The Philippines should work with fellow ASEAN members to remove this and other objectionable provisions from the final COC.

It is evident that ASEAN, which is governed largely by non-binding agreements anchored on protecting sovereignty as well as its mode of decision-making in which each member has a de facto veto power, is largely a hedging utility. The same is evident in its defense diplomacy platforms, particularly the ADMM and ADMM-Plus.

Policy Considerations

As noted earlier, the ASEAN Way of decision-making has come under scrutiny in view of the difficulty of achieving unanimity-based consensus in addressing contentious challenges. There have been proposals to relax the rigid application of the consensus rule through the “ASEAN minus X” formula⁸⁶ and/or majority-vote system.⁸⁷ While these proposals could, in principle, make ASEAN more efficient in decision-making, the likelihood of the same actually being implemented appears—at least for the foreseeable future—to be a remote possibility. Indeed, it is unlikely that the member-states will voluntarily surrender their de facto veto power within the organization—in a similar way the permanent members of the UN Security Council (UNSC) will not give up their veto power. As Kausikan pointed out: “Any other mode of decision-making risks rupture with unpredictable consequences. The basic consensus on which ASEAN rests is a consensus on always having a consensus: even if it is only a consensus on goals that we know full[y] well cannot be [realized] or can only be partially [realized]. Its corollary is the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other members.”⁸⁸

The primordial interest of any state or international organization is its continued existence. As argued in this paper, the ASEAN Way of decision-making, based on consensus and non-interference, has been the cornerstone of ASEAN’s very existence for

more than fifty (50) years. Sudden changes with the long-held principles of decision-making may lead to the unraveling of ASEAN. This is not to suggest that ASEAN may not recalibrate decades-old practices. Rather, ASEAN's evolution is likely to be very incremental over a long horizon period. Moreover, as its own history suggests, reconfiguration of the domestic political equation in AMS is a likely determinant of ASEAN's future.

Nevertheless, despite its shallow institutionalization, ASEAN can still have some modest contributions to regional security through its defense diplomacy platforms. ADMM can sustain the momentum of its cooperative initiatives through the continued implementation of its initiatives, particularly the ADI, GMI, and GAME. ASEAN's defense diplomacy could also be enhanced through the implementation of the Concept Paper on ADMM and ADMM-Plus Initiatives, which seeks to streamline various cooperative programs and address concerns on duplication with the goal of strengthening ADMM's capacity to deal with various security challenges, and the Principles for ADMM-wide Education and Training Exchanges, which seeks to facilitate training among AMS militaries and the status of forces present in one AMS for such purposes.⁸⁹

With 2020-2022 work program to be developed in the coming months, a discussion on how to address gray zone challenges may also be considered. As part of its efforts to promote regional preeminence, China has been employing gray zone tactics in the SCS.⁹⁰ Gray zone action has been defined as "coercive and aggressive in nature, but that is deliberately designed to remain below the threshold of conventional military conflict and open interstate war."⁹¹ While such gray zone tactics may fall short of an armed conflict, they are nonetheless one of the major security concerns in the region, particularly in the SCS. Indeed, China has been changing the status quo in the SCS without firing a shot through gray zone coercion tactics. The manner by which Beijing seized control of Scarborough Shoal in 2012 is now viewed as a successful employment of gray zone coercion that some in China have called for replication of the so-called "'Scarborough Shoal' model."⁹² While diplomats from ASEAN and China are now negotiating the COC, the defense establishments of ASEAN have crucial roles to play in promoting peace and stability in the SCS. Understandably, this is a rather sensitive issue, but jumpstarting discussion on gray zone issue at the ADMM and ADSOM-levels may be a modest step towards promoting maritime security. More importantly, despite institutional weaknesses, ASEAN must continue to engage the major powers through

the ADMM-Plus as it is important in performing its hedging utility given the intensifying US-China strategic rivalry.

Conclusion

This paper discussed the dynamics of intra-ASEAN relations and its implications for regional defense diplomacy. Using Rüländ's concept of hedging utility, this policy brief argued that ASEAN has a shallow institutionalization, largely because of its member-states' immense diversity and geopolitical history. The same level of institutionalization is apparent in ASEAN's main defense diplomacy platforms, ADMM and ADMM-Plus. Nevertheless, despite organizational weaknesses, ADMM and ADMM-Plus can still play modest roles against the backdrop of an evolving strategic milieu.

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Endnotes

- ¹ Some portions of this policy brief were culled from the author's previous publication: Mico A. Galang, "ASEAN'S Continuing South China Sea Dilemma," *Eurasia Review*, January 17, 2018, <https://www.eurasiareview.com/17012018-aseans-continuing-south-china-sea-dilemma-analysis/> (accessed April 17, 2019).
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- ³ John Gerard Ruggie, "Multilateralism: The Anatomy of an Institution," *International Organization* 46, no. 3 (1992): 571, italics supplied.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 84.
- ⁵ Rüländ compared the multilateral utility and hedging utility based on six indicators: level of institutionalization, governance costs, nesting, agenda setting, norm entrepreneurship, and mode of interaction. Due to limited space, this paper only focuses in the first indicator.
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