The Absence of ASEAN:
Peacekeeping in Southeast Asia

Belinda Helmke

Since the end of the Cold War peacekeeping has become an increasingly popular tool to address conflicts worldwide. More than two-thirds of all peacekeeping operations have occurred over the past eighteen years alone. Contemporary peacekeeping has been used foremost to settle internal unrest and violence, rather than conflict between states. Unlike military enforcement action, peacekeeping has to adhere to what Alex J. Bellamy refers to as the 'Holy Trinity' of operational principles: consent, impartiality and minimum use of force. (Bellamy, 2004). Consequently, states tend to accept peacekeeping operations on their territory more readily than they do peace enforcement action.

An examination of both armed conflicts and multilateral peacekeeping operations (MPO) worldwide shows an interesting relationship between the two in some regions. In the Middle East, the Americas and Africa the correlation between conflicts and MPO, sanctioned or authorized by the UN Security Council, is relatively proportional. In Asia and Europe, however, a very asymmetrical relationship is apparent. Europe has witnessed 8 per cent of armed conflict worldwide over the past decade and a half. Yet a third of all peacekeeping operations have occurred in this region. In comparison, Asia has developed as the number one hot spot for armed conflict, claiming 40 per cent of the overall stake. In spite of this, only slightly over a tenth of all MPO have taken place in the region (see Graph 1 and 2).

Southeast Asia (SEA) is particularly affected by this asymmetrical phenomenon. The region has witnessed serious armed conflict and internal unrest in the majority of its ten states. In recent times Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia and The Philippines have been particularly affected. Yet, peacekeeping operations in the post-Cold War era have been rare and limited to Cambodia in the early 1990s (UN) and East Timor since 1999 (INTERFET and UN). What is the reason for this disproportional ratio of armed conflict to peacekeeping in the SEA region?

The immediate answer lies in the analysis of the actors undertaking peacekeeping operations. Since 1990 half of all MPO have been conducted by regional organizations, followed by the UN with 37 per cent and ad hoc coalitions with 16 per cent (Graph 3). A lack of enforcement capabilities, amongst other things, has meant that the UN has increasingly subcontracted tasks to the above-mentioned actors. Regional organisations which are located between the UN and ad hoc coalitions in the hierarchy of legitimacy regarding peacekeeping, have been particularly active in Europe, Africa, and to a lesser degree the Americas. This is as opposed to Asia where organisations, particularly in the sub-region represented by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), have been noticeably reserved.

Consequently, the conduct of peacekeeping operations as the SEA region shows, is not solely dependent on the existence of regional organizations. Instead, it is their effectiveness, willingness and ability to both undertake and finance such MPO which are crucial. Why then is the SEA region not reflective of the overall trend in the post-Cold War era towards both increased peacekeeping and outsourcing of such MPO to regional organisations and ad hoc coalitions? In order to understand the lack of MPO in the SEA region one has to examine the issue from an economical, political and strategic standpoint.

Hurdles to Peacekeeping

At first glance, it appears that the major hurdle to MPO in the region is the difficulty which SEA states may face in financing such operations. The costs for MPO in SEA over the past two decades have amounted to around $5.5 billion. Half of all ASEAN nations (Brunei, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam) have an annual military expenditure smaller than this amount. Is the UN, with its top contributors being the US, Japan, Germany, UK and France, therefore better suited financially to conduct such operations? Not necessarily. ASEAN states could finance peacekeeping if the more prosperous states (of course, this is relative compared to Western standards) such as Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singa-

Graph 1:
Regional Distribution of Armed Conflict
1990-2005, Share in %
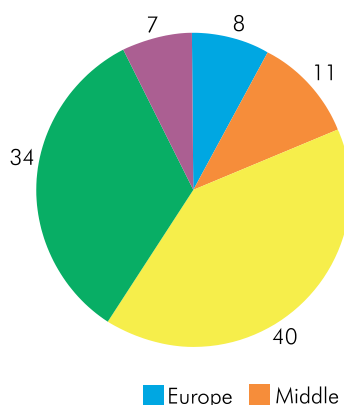
Graph 2:
Regional Distribution of Multilateral
Peacekeeping Operations
1990-2005, Share in %

Europe | Middle East | Asia | Africa | Americas
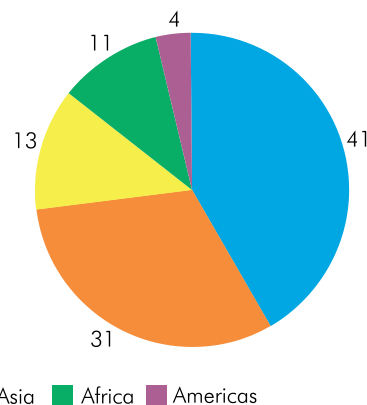
pore and The Philippines were willing to carry the main burden. In 2007 the military expenditure of the ten ASEAN countries combined, topped $64 billion which is more than ten times the amount used for MPO in the region since 1990. Hence, the barrier to peacekeeping operations through ASEAN is not so much economic in nature, as it is political and strategic.
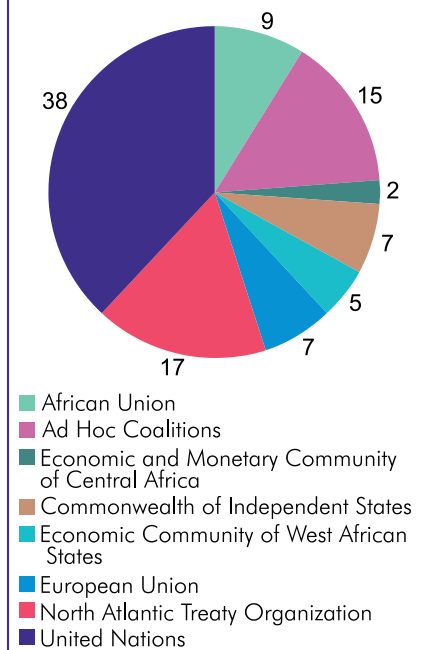
To begin with SEA is deeply characterized by the colonial past of its member states. Having spent significant time fighting for independence they now closely guard their sovereignty. SEA nations are furthermore all members of the so-called Non-Aligned Movement or Group of 77 at the UN (now consisting of more than 130 states) which strongly advocate a doctrine of non-intervention. The embrace of these principles is clearly reflected in the ASEAN Charter which calls for the "respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity and national identity of all ASEAN member states" (Article 2, 2a). Peacekeeping, despite its operational principles of consent, impartiality and minimum use of force, cannot help but challenge the territorial integrity and political independence of the host state by the mere presence of foreign troops. This alone is sufficient for ASEAN to be uncomfortable with the practice of peacekeeping.

As a result, the organisation's approach to conflict management has been characterized by consensus based decision-making and has focused on four core aspects: first, regular ASEAN meetings; secondly, multilateral treaties; thirdly, the ASEAN Ad Hoc body established in 1999 to address security issues; and fourthly bilateral negotiations, including referral of disputes to the International Court of Justice if necessary (Caballero-Anthony, 2005). These steps have successfully enabled ASEAN to prevent the outbreak of armed conflict between member states. Violence within borders, however, has not been prevented through these measures. Instead there is a dominant belief that internal conflict and causes thereof need to be addressed and solved on a national basis. As long as ASEAN vehemently rejects direct involvement in the domestic affairs of member states and places a premium on political independence and territorial integrity, the quest for a region free of internal unrest and violence cannot be achieved.

From a strategic standpoint the need to preserve internal unity within ASEAN against external forces, particularly China, has tended to dominate security concerns. According to Austrian academic Alfred Gerstl, there remains a large

Graph 3:
Actors undertaking Multilateral Peacekeeping Operations
1990-2005, Share in %

- African Union
- Ad Hoc Coalitions
- Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa
- Commonwealth of Independent States
- Economic Community of West African States
- European Union
- North Atlantic Treaty Organization
- United Nations

distrust even amongst member states regarding possible external interference. Despite overarching security goals, regional collaboration in SEA has therefore focused primarily on economic, technical and cultural affairs (Gerstl, 2008). Regarding security, there is a widespread perception within ASEAN that threats emanating from internal conflicts tend to be limited to a state's respective borders rather than being transnational. The conclusion drawn by ASEAN is that such internal conflict and violence poses a local, not a regional problem. Therefore, no external interference, including peacekeeping, is necessary. This is, of course, not always true. Refugee flows, separatist movements, Islamic fundamentalism, narcotics and pandemics are just some of the threats which have come to be transnational in nature. As a result, there is an urgent need for ASEAN to take on peacekeeping responsibilities. Today, regional organisations are the main operators of MPO and ASEAN can no longer defer the responsibility for such actions solely to the UN (Cambodia) or ad hoc coalitions led by states outside the region (East Timor). In addition, regional organisations provide a substantial platform for action in light of the fact that SEA nations, like many non-Western states, are largely excluded from the decision-
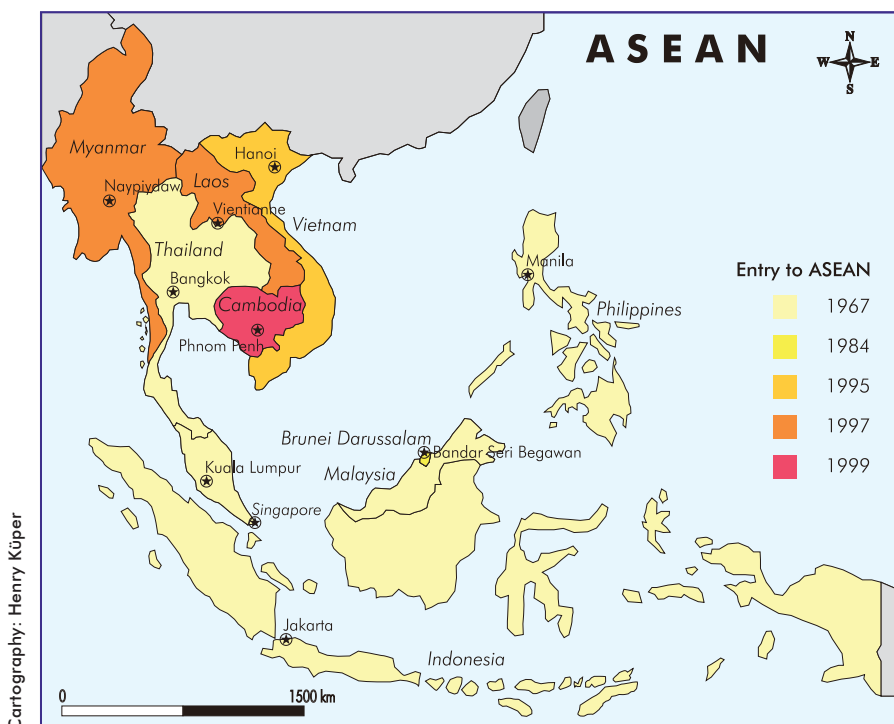
Overview ASEAN

Cartography: Henry Küper

making processes within the UN.

Sense and Sensitivity

In the 1990s ASEAN first attempted to redefine its security role, launching the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) which, in return, suggested the establishment of a regional peacekeeping training centre. Yet, with the exception of some meetings, workshops and seminars on the topic, little happened on the peacekeeping front. In 2003 the ASEAN Summit proposed an ASEAN Community by 2020, consisting of a security, economic, as well as social and cultural sphere. As part of the security community, Indonesia proposed the creation of a regional peacekeeping force. Twelve months later, however, ASEAN froze the proposal, citing differences in military capabilities and doctrines as reasons. Makarim Wibisino, Indonesian Director General for Asia, Africa and the Pacific sought to put a positive spin on the defeat suffered by arguing that "the idea (of peacekeeping) is still there […] we only changed the wording because some countries are still sensitive to the words" (Asian Political News, 2004). As explained earlier, the predominant reasons for the rejection of the peacekeeping proposal were political and strategic in nature rather than financial or military concerns.

Despite this drawback and a lack of consensus within ASEAN, discussions and practice show that there has been a shift in member states' attitudes towards peacekeeping. Thailand, Malaysia, The Philippines, Indonesia and, to a lesser extent Singapore, have gathered extensive experience in the field through their participation in UN peacekeeping operations (Cambodia), as well as other multilateral arrangements (East Timor).

In 1999 ASEAN had the opportunity to take the initiative regarding the deployment of a peacekeeping force to East Timor. Instead, the organisation opposed collective intervention, predominantly due to its unwillingness to compromise on the doctrines of sovereignty and non-interference. This reluctance left Australia to interfere with the support of individual ASEAN countries (Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, The Philippines) and the consent of Indonesia. This at least preserved the regional character of the INTERFET operation. In 2002 Indonesia furthermore invited troops from Thailand and The Philippines to support the peaceful settlement of its conflict with separatist movements in Aceh. Two years later, The Philippines invited Malaysian peacekeepers to monitor the ceasefire in Mindanao. While ASEAN as a whole may not be moving towards a concrete policy on peacekeeping, individual states are increasingly embracing the concept.

In spite of the successful track record of the two core post-Cold War peacekeeping missions in the region, SEA nations currently still prefer to leave such tasks to the UN and, in exceptional circumstances such as East Timor, to an ad hoc coalition. This way the region's ten states do not challenge each other's sovereignty openly. Rather this is done by the two above-mentioned actors. ASEAN is used solely for less controversial diplomatic and conflict prevention measures.

Conclusions

The future of multilateral peacekeeping operations in SEA is rather sobering. In the realm of peacekeeping the region remains a rather isolated island in a sea of change. It appears largely unaffected by the international trend towards both increased peacekeeping and the outsourcing of such operations to regional organisations and ad hoc coalitions. A lack of need is certainly not the issue with many parts of Indonesia (Aceh, West Papua, Kalimantan) and The Philippines (Mindanao), for example, being in dire need of peacekeeping operations. The core barrier towards the conduct of peacekeeping in the region therefore remains ASEAN's strong endorsement of the norms of sovereignty and non-interference.

The changing attitudes towards these two concepts in the UN, particularly when it comes to intervention based on humanitarian grounds, may cascade down to the regional level in due course. However, according to M.C. Abad Jr., Assistant Director of the ASEAN Secretariat the embrace and establishment of peacekeeping operations through the organisation is also highly dependent on member states' internal political structures. Abad argues that "the more democratic (ASEAN states' political systems), the more open they would be to offers of external assistance" (M.C. Abad, Jr., 2003). A substantial change in political and strategic attitudes toward both governance and security is therefore necessary to make the conduct of peacekeeping operations through ASEAN possible.

References

Abad, M.C. Jr., (2003), "Prospects for UN-ASEAN Cooperation in Conflict Management", Paper presented at the Third UN-ASEAN Conference in Conflict Prevention, available at http://www.aseansec.org/14202.htm

Asian Political News (21 June 2004), "ASEAN drops regional peacekeepers plan"

Bellamy, Alex J., Williams, Paul, and Griffith, Stuart (2004), Understanding Peacekeeping (Cambridge: Polity).

Caballero-Anthony, Mely (2005) 'Introduction: UN Peace Operations and Asian Security', International Peacekeeping, 12:1, 1-17

Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset 1946-2005 (Version4-2006), available at http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/UCDP/our_data1.htm

Gerstl, Alfred (2008), The China Factor in Regional Cooperation: The ASEAN Regional Forum and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Austrian Journal for South East Asian Studies (forthcoming)

Gleditsch, Nils Petter (2006), UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset Codebook Version 4-2006 (Uppsala: Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University)

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Database on Multilateral Peace Operations, available at http://www.sipri.org/contents/conflict/database-Intro/

Data Sources of Graphs 1-3:
Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Database on Multilateral Peace Operations, available at http://www.sipri.org/contents/conflict/database-Intro/

Belinda Helmke [belindahelmke@mac.com] was recently awarded a PhD from Macquarie University, Sydney, for her thesis entitled "Under Attack: The Challenge of Recent State Practice to the Rules Governing the International Use of Force". Her research focuses primarily on international law and the use of force. Belinda currently works as a writer and political risk analyst.

The NGO zone
Asian non-governmental organisations' role in shaping the human rights of the region

Dorottya Atol

"Universality. We can learn from different cultures in a pluralistic perspective and draw lessons from the humanity of these cultures to deepen respect for human rights. There is emerging a new understanding of universalism encompassing the richness and wisdom of Asia-Pacific cultures."

Bangkok NGO declaration
Bangkok, Thailand, May 29, 1993.

This paper addresses questions of regionalism and in particular, its significance in human rights protection; and explores the role non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have in this regard. It analyses these issues through examining the activities of four Asian NGOs that are similarly active in several countries of Asia. The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) is located in Hong Kong; the South Asian for Human Rights (SAFHR) in Kathmandu; the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (Forum Asia) in Bangkok; and the Asia-Pacific Human Rights Network (APHRN) in New Delhi.

Regionalism is an important aspect of international relations, and it is also a decisive factor shaping the human rights field. Although, the backbone of universal human rights protection is the international system, built mainly around the United Nations machinery, regional human rights structures in Europe (Council of Europe), the Americas (within the Organization of American States), and Africa (within the African Union) have played a significant role as well. Regional cooperation often functions as a protective counterbalance to excesses of globalisation, and also provides opportunities to step out of the rigid hold of extreme nationalism and sovereignty-guarding (Katzenstein, 2000). A regional human rights organisation can facilitate local intervention in the case of a human rights crisis, which can be beneficial especially in circumstances where the international system is slow to act and to appreciate the severity of the situation. Furthermore, it provides an additional supervisory mechanism to states.

Asia is the continent with the largest population and has a notoriously dismal record of human rights violations, yet human rights are conspicuously absent from the agenda of regional cooperation. The Asian region covers vast areas with immense diversity of ethnicities, languages, religions and cultures, and accordingly, it is difficult to view Asia as a single region. Asia is commonly divided into Central, South, Southeast, and Northeast parts. However, with respect to human rights, a region does not have to be strictly homogenous, since pluralism can in fact enrich the regional structure. Thus it is possible to conceive of an encompassing regional human rights framework for the Asian region, similar to those in existence in Europe, Africa and the Americas. More specific sub-regional arrangements could eventually develop under the banner of an Asia-wide system. The reality thus far is that despite growing public awareness about rights and the intense discussions precipitated by the escalation of the "Asian values" debate in the 1990s (Bell, 1999), human rights have still not reached a prominent place in the priorities of Asian inter-governmental politics. Recently there have been attempts within ASEAN to incorporate a human rights element into the organisation's work (Charter of ASEAN 2007, Art. 14.), yet the negotiations have not reached considerable results so far. Consequently, it is mostly the growing Asian civil society that has been taking on human rights problems in the absence of a coordinated and substantial governmental contribution. The operation of "native" Asian NGOs is especially significant, particularly those that go beyond local activism and extend their advocacy trans-nationally across large parts of Asia.

Asian NGOs in the forefront of human rights protection

The activities of the AHRC, the Forum-Asia, the SAFHR, and the APHRN demonstrate well the impact that civil society can have on the Asian human rights discourse. These NGOs are "natively Asian" in the sense that they were founded and are still operated by individuals

AHRCHK.NET — Asian Human Rights Commission
About AHRC | Material in other languages: 한국어 中文 francais Deutsch Italiano ...
Home | ALRC site | Book Store | Join! | Contact us — Quick Launch to AHRC

November 13, 2008 , 17:57

SOUTH KOREA: Presidential commission must be allowed to continue investigations into suspicious military deaths

STATEMENT: Due to its maintenance of a conscription system, South Korea\'s military has long been plagued with ill-treatment, resulting in trauma and even suicide for the individuals concerned. After several years of civil society struggle, a law enabling the investigation of suspicious deaths in the military was finally passed, establishing a presidential commission to begin its work on January 1, 2006 for a three-year period. The commission has reportedly received 600 complaints to date, of which only 295 have been settled.
Read More...