The Changing Notion of Security in Southeast Asia

State, Regime and "ASEANized" Human Security

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Abstract: This paper discusses the changing notion of security in Southeast Asia. Even though the neorealist state- and regimecentric view of security is still dominant, the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997/98 and the natural disasters in the last years, notably the 2004 tsunami and cyclone Nargis in 2008, have further pressured the regimes to adopt a more people-oriented notion of security. The new ASEAN Charter, in force since 2008, though, is still based on sovereignty and non-interference, not on human security. ASEAN has even framed its counter-terrorism policies under the "ASEAN Way" values. In addition to this "ASEANization" approach, the Association has also depoliticized its counter-terrorism policies, emphasizing the socioeconomic and educational dimension of the fight against terrorism. This paper therefore concludes that we do currently not witness a fundamental redefinition but a further broadening of security in Southeast Asia.

Key Words: Southeast Asia; ASEAN; Human Security; ASEAN Charter; Counter-Terrorism

The notion of security is gradually changing in Southeast Asia. Even though the neorealist state- and regime-centric view of security is still dominant, the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997/98 and the natural disasters in the last years, notably the 2004 tsunami and cyclone Nargis in 2008, have further pressured the regimes to adopt a more people-oriented notion of security. The new ASEAN Charter, in force since 2008, though, is still based on sovereignty and non-interference. It therefore illustrates that we do currently not witness a fundamental redefinition but a further broadening of security in Southeast Asia. Since the end of the Cold War, non-traditional security threats such as people, drug and weapon smuggling, organized crime, the spread of mass diseases, terrorism or environmental degradation have increased around the globe. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was among the first regional institutions to address these new threats conceptually. Already in the late 1980s, ASEAN has subscribed to the notion of comprehensive security, a modern approach that includes both traditional military and non-traditional threats. Politically, however, ASEAN has actively tackled non-conventional menaces only in the mid-1990s, starting with drug and people smuggling and terrorism (Gerstl 2009).

Comprehensive security

The concept of comprehensive security has been endorsed by almost all regional security organizations since 1989/91, as it adequately reflects the challenges our globalized and interconnected societies face today. In Southeast Asia, however, neorealist perceptions of security remain strong. An expression of neorealism is that the regimes still stress sovereignty, non-interference (enshrined in the "ASEAN Way") and favor only limited cooperation, steered by the governments rather than independent institutions[1]. Accordingly, in Southeast Asia where most regimes are output- rather than democratically legitimized, comprehensive security has a strong state-centric dimension (Caballero-Anthony 2004: 160–163). This concept was according to Amitav Acharya (2006: 249) "developed and propagated by governments and the policy community in Asia (except in Japan, where the concept originated) primarily as an instrument of regime legitimization and survival, by making the governments of day appear to be seriously concerned with challenges other than military

threats, primarily poverty and underdevelopment".

Human security

Even human security is in Southeast Asia viewed through a neorealist lense. This broad approach was first promoted by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in 1994 to further the idea that individuals and communities can also be threatened by insecurity and legitimate referent objects in international politics. According to the UNDP, human security comprises of seven core threats: economic, food, health, environment, personal, community and political security.

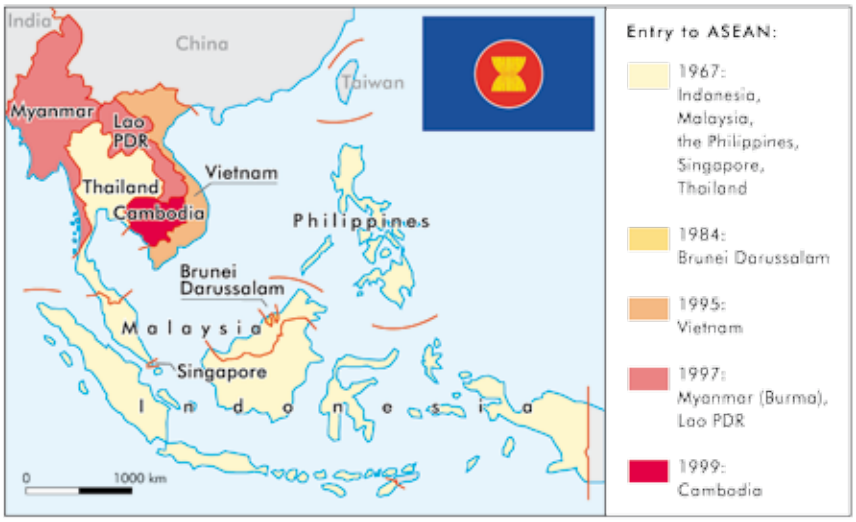
Ideally, this multidimensional and multifaceted notion of human security strengthens state, regime and individual security. In practice, however, especially in non-democratic countries, these three dimensions of human security can conflict with each other. As human security is a security, developmental and potential democratic concept alike, it poses a political challenge to the regime security of the non-democratic countries. Empowered people become aware of their needs for – and entitlement to – political participation, free media and other basic human rights. Especially as the case of Myanmar illustrates, it is very often the regime itself that endangers the security of its own citizens. The junta is of course an extreme example, but many other governments in the developing world seem to be also more concerned with their national and regime security rather than that of their citizens.

On global level,w the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), sponsored by Canada, promotes since 2001 the idea of a global "responsibility to protect" (R2P). In case of severe human rights violations the international community would have the moral duty to intervene directly into domestic affairs. This concept of humanitarian (military) interventions – a logical evolution of the human security concept – poses a direct challenge to traditional notions of sovereignty and non-interference (Helmke 2009).

People-oriented approach

Despite the dominance of neorealist thinking, ASEAN has since the mid-1990s further developed its security concept towards a more people-oriented approach (Emmerson 2008a). The Asian Financial Crisis (AFC) of 1997/98 acted as a crucial catalyst to put human security on the political agenda. Similar to the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic in 2003, the devastating tsunami in 2004 and cyclone Nargis in 2008, the AFC highlighted that the peoples can be more affected by economic, social, environmental or political crises than the state or regime. Furthermore, the popular uprising in Indonesia against the corrupt Suharto government that culminated in a regime change in 1998 demonstrated the Southeast Asian governments that the failure to effectively tackle human insecurity can end their hold on power.

Thus, the legitimacy of the non-democratic Southeast Asian governments is apparently no longer solely based on their ability to provide equitable growth and socioeconomic development – but human security as well. As most human security menaces are transnational in character, the governments have to find at least a minimal form of regional cooperation. Yet while Indonesia has now clearly embraced the principles of democracy, human rights and human security (Sukma 2008), other regimes have nolens volens agreed to a common ASEAN approach. Acknowledging the Association's political and institutional limits to deal with new non-traditional and human security challenges such as underdevelopment, migration, the spread of mass diseases or climate change, ASEAN announced in October 2003 its far-reaching plans for an Asian Community by the year 2015 (initially by 2020). The official goal is to create a more people-oriented, caring and inclusive community that shall consist of a political-security, economic and socio-cultural pillar. As the role model is the European Economic Community, not the supranational European Union collaboration in the economic pillar will be much deeper than in the two other sectors.



ASEAN Member States and their Entry Date

The ASEAN Charter

The ASEAN Charter of 2007 is instrumental for establishing the East Asian Community. Signed in November 2007, it is, after the ratification through all members, in force since December 2008. Legally binding, the Charter gives ASEAN for the first time a legal personality. By means of the Charter, which consists of 55 articles, ASEAN aimed to codify its existing norms and values. It reflects a political compromise but it is nevertheless a progress into the direction of a more people-oriented understanding of security. Though, it must be the start rather than the end of the journey.

Even though the Charter highlights the requirements of sustainable development and the furthering of human development in Southeast Asia, it falls short of clearly defining the Association's human security approach. Its security concept is still work in progress – a mixture of state, regime and individual notions of security. In the Charter, the political dimension of human security is again framed under a neorealist, state-centric perspective. An illustration is Article 1, §7 which specifies as one of ASEAN's purposes: "to strengthen democracy, enhance good governance and the rule of law, and to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, with due regard to the rights and re-

CO2 Champion Award to World Leaders on 01/22/2010

A Greenpeace activist standing in front of the United States Embassy in Bangkok holds a banner reading "Carbon Dioxide Champions" as he stands beside impersonators of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd of Australia, US President Barack Obama, and Prime Minister Stephen Harper of Canada. Over 75 Greenpeace activists from Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines demonstrated at the US embassy in Bangkok condemning the derailment of the climate negotiations in Copenhagen by a handful of countries led by the US.

sponsibilities of the Member States of ASEAN." The section "principles" (Art. 2) exemplifies the last caveat even better: The emphasis is here on the traditional core principles sovereignty, non-interference into domestic affairs, dialogue and consensual decision-making.

Nowhere does the Charter acknowledge that human rights are the base for human development. It merely reiterates the "respect for fundamental freedoms, the promotion and protection of human rights, and the promotion of justice" (Art. 2i) as one of ASEAN's core principle. At the 15th ASEAN summit in Thailand in October 2009, the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), promised since the early 1990s and reiterated in the Charter (Art. 14), has finally been established. Though, dependent bureaucrats rather than civil society representatives have been delegated as watchdogs by the member states (Ashayagachat, 2009).

The main reason for ASEAN's wariness in endorsing democracy and human security both on national and regional level is that the majority of the ASEAN countries are authoritarian regimes. The Freedom in the World Index 2008 labels Indonesia as the only "free" democracy in Southeast Asia. The Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand are regarded as partly free, Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam as not free. It can therefore not be expected that Myanmar or Vietnam advocate democracy and human rights.

In the Charter, both the authoritarian and democratic ASEAN leaders have agreed to a less contested depoliticized, yet fragmented concept of human security under an overall neorealist and output-oriented conceptual framework. This understanding reconciles state and regime security with individual security, both conceptually and politically. Depoliticization means that rather than emphasizing the human rights and democratic aspects of human security, ASEAN stresses pragmatic long-term policies to eradicate poverty, provide socioeconomic development and implement reforms in the economic, social and education sector. As it emphasizes the economic and social rather than the political dimension of human security, the junta in Myanmar is in no danger of facing a humanitarian intervention conducted by ASEAN. To minimize such a threat to their regime security was one of the key reasons for the authoritarian governments to work on an ASEAN-wide position on human security.

Not surprisingly, the new ASEAN Charter falls short of the initially high expectations civil society groups such as the ASEAN People's Assembly (APA) and the Solidarity for Asian People's Advocacy (SAPA). SAPA and other civil society groups as Greenpeace have criticized these conceptual and political shortcomings (Dosch 2008, Emmerson 2008b). The Eminent Persons Group (EPG) has in its draft for the Charter in 2006 recommended more ambitious aims too. Consisting of former senior politicians, the group has even suggested reconsidering the ASEAN Way: "ASEAN may need to calibrate the traditional policy of non-intervention in areas where the common interest dictates closer cooperation" (EPG 2006: 1). However, "retired officials could be creatively liberal; sitting ones could

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Global Day of Action in Quezon City, 12/12/2009

Greenpeace and other organizations under the "tiktoktiktok" ("tcktcktck" in some countries) movement unfurled a banner saying "Time is Running Out, Climate Action now" in front of Quezon City Hall on Saturday morning during a musical noise barrage as part of Global Day of Action activities worldwide. The group is calling on world leaders for a fair, ambitious and binding deal at the ongoing United Nations Climate Change Summit in Copenhagen, Denmark.

not" (Dosch 2008: 83), and therefore the Charter, written by politicians and diplomats is a realist document. According to Donald Emmerson's (2008b: 39) counting, while the EPG makes 57 references to liberal reforms, the Charter only 20. Strikingly, both mention the ASEAN Way almost as often (23 and 24 times, respectively), though the Charter more often in a positive context.

Strong impulses for the promotion of human security, notably human rights and democratic values, can only be expected from the increasingly active, transnational organized civil society groups – and from Jakarta. Since its successful democratization after the ousting of President Suharto in 1998, Indonesia has pressured ASEAN to adopt a human security agenda (Sukma 2008). It can also be assumed that the new ASEAN Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan will play a crucial facilitating role, in particular as the Charter has strengthened his institutional position. Pitsuwan, a former Thai foreign minister and International Relations scholar, is a credible advocate of human security.

ASEANization of counter-terrorism

An illustration for ASEAN's human security concept as well as for its depoliticization and ASEANization approach are its counter-terrorism policies. Responding to growing international pressure, notably from Washington after September 11, and increased terrorist activities in Southeast Asia itself, ASEAN has more effectively addressed the non-traditional threat of terrorism.

Political, ethnic or religious violence and terrorism, though, have haunted Southeast Asia for decades. Thus ASEAN has already in the mid-1990s cautiously started to promote collaboration in counter-terrorism policies. After the terror attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Washington viewed Southeast Asia as the "second front in the war on terror". Initially, the United States kept a low profile in its regional counter-terrorism efforts, engaging in capability building and intelligence sharing. The Bush doctrine from 2002 that proclaimed the "right" of the United States to conduct pre-emptive military strikes against suspected terrorist bases in foreign countries, though, alienated Washington from its Southeast Asian partners. Even though the US returned in Southeast Asia at the end of 2003 to its initial strategy, popular distrust remained and made it politically difficult for the ASEAN countries to collaborate with the US and Australia in counter-terrorism affairs (Gerstl 2009).

Despite strong verbal condemnations of terrorism and the promise to strengthen its counter-terrorism efforts after 9/11, it was only after the Bali bombings in October 2002 that ASEAN started to regard terrorism as a severe transnational security threat both for the state and the people. Yet even after "Bali", its members could not agree on how big the terrorist danger really is in Southeast Asia. While Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) is active in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore and has established networks with Islamic terrorist groups in the Philippines where the Moro Islamic Liberation Front or Abu Sayyaf have strongholds too, terrorism poses no threat to Indochina.

However, overall, Southeast Asia seems to be "more of a transit, support, and facilitation point rather than an operation hub or a target in itself in al Qaeda's strategy" (Acharya & Acharya 2007: 77).

In addition to the different threat perceptions, the capabilities of the national police forces, the military and the law enforcement agencies vary extremely. Furthermore, there remains still considerable distrust even among the ASEAN founding members, e.g. Singapore, to share sensitive intelligence with partners perceived as less reliable. Consequently, it was politically difficult for ASEAN to agree on a robust common counter-terrorism policy.

The compromise ASEAN achieved was, first, to frame terrorism as a transnational organized crime rather than a political offence. This criminalization implies a depoliticization of a politically contested issue. Depoliticization does neither mean desecuritziation nor that counter-terrorism measures are not discussed in the parliaments or the media – it claims that the focus rests on the non-political, law enforcing and technical measures to resolve terrorism. In the authoritarian ASEAN countries, however, this strategy has also removed the crucial question from the agenda if political oppression or lack of democracy and human rights in general do legitimate non-violent political opposition. Secondly, terrorism has been securitized under the specific context of ASEAN's core principles of sovereignty, non-interference, nation-building and socio-economic development. In other words: ASEAN has ASEANized its counter-terrorism policies, aiming to resolve terrorism and political violence with the implementation of a non-political human security approach (Gerstl 2009).

The most important political outcome of this political concept is the ASEAN Counter Terrorism Convention (ACTC) of 2007. Its main aim is to create a regional legalistic and institutional frame to combat terrorism. The first step is the strengthening of the national policing and law enforcement agencies. Subsequently, the member countries shall increase their bi- or multilateral cooperation, e.g. increased multilateral training of police and military forces, the exchange of passenger data or even the extradition of terrorism suspects to another ASEAN country. The ACCT is one of the few binding ASEAN conventions, though it has not been ratified yet by all members.

Overall, ASEAN's counter-terrorism approach also reflects the organization's classic conflict-resolution method: Economic and social development will eradicate the root causes for conflicts, in this case for political violence and terrorism. In addition, ASEAN and in particular Indonesia and Singapore stress the need for investments into human development. In both countries, the re-education of terrorists has yielded results. Claiming that terrorists are guided by wrong ideologies, the re-education program targets the family members and broader community of terrorists and terrorism suspects, including religious and communal leaders.

So far, the Association's depoliticized and ASEANized counter-terrorism approach has proven surprisingly successful as it has in fact increased the prospects for a pragmatic, functional cooperation in this field, both among selected ASEAN members and with external powers such as the United States and Australia. Notably Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia have since 2001 deepened their collaboration with Western partners. However, due to domestic criticism, the regimes tend to downplay these partnerships.

Conclusion

ASEAN's counter-terrorism approach is a comprehensive, but long-term reform project with a strong emphasis on resolving the economic and social rather than political root causes of terrorism and political violence. It does therefore mirror the gradual evolution of ASEAN's security concept into a more-people oriented direction. Though, it also shows that too many Southeast Asian governments still believe to improve human security is only a means for strengthening their regime security. A fundamental shift in the regional notion of security has therefore not occurred. The human rights groups thus need to remind their leaders that even though human security encompasses both state and individual security, it should foremost be a security and political concept that primarily address the needs of the individual citizens.

End-note:

1 Excellent analyses of the theoretical and analytical strengths and shortcomings of neorealist approaches can be found in Donnelly (2005) and Mearsheimer (2007). Emmerson (2008a) gives a very good overview over current comprehensive and human security approaches.

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