

DISCUSSION PAPER ON THE ASEAN OUTLOOK ON THE INDO-PACIFIC (AOIP) FROM A DEFENCE PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

1. ASEAN has been able to create peace, security, stability and prosperity in the region for the last 5 (five) decades and beyond. Mutual trust and cooperation between ASEAN countries have become a strong component in maintaining the development of the region. ASEAN needs to continue being an honest broker within the strategic environment of competing interests and be consistent in forging and shaping the vision of closer cooperation and maintaining its central role in the evolving inclusive regional architecture in Southeast Asia and its surrounding regions as well as "bridging" and "balancing" other powers in the Indo-Pacific region.

2. The 34th ASEAN Summit, which was held on 20-23 June 2019 in Bangkok-Thailand, focused on Advancing Partnership for Sustainability. It has produced an important document: **ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific/AOIP**. AOIP serves as a guide for ASEAN's engagement in the Asia-Pacific and Indian-Ocean regions and is meant to contribute to the maintenance of peace, security, stability, and prosperity.

3. The AOIP demonstrates ASEAN's collective leadership in forging and shaping the vision for closer cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, and in maintaining its central role in the evolving regional architecture in Southeast Asia and its surroundings. It is a perspective of viewing the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean region, not as contiguous territorial spaces but as a closely integrated and interconnected region, with ASEAN playing a central and strategic role. In particular, ASEAN should not be placed in a position where we have to choose between major powers. We must be a region where international laws and rules are observed.

4. The AOIP undertakes cooperation in a broad range of areas, including Maritime Cooperation, Connectivity, UN Sustainable Development Goals as well as Economic and other possible areas of cooperation.

5. For this reason, the purpose of this paper is to explain in more detail ASEAN's approach to the Indo-Pacific from a defence perspective, particularly defence cooperation with ASEAN dialogue partners, which has greatly contributed to creating peace and prosperity in the world.

Principles

6. AOIP from a Defence Perspective is a step forward and strategic policy to maintain security in the region and as an expression of ASEAN unity and centrality in bridging the interests of Indo-Pacific countries in order to maintain peace, stability and prosperity.

Based from the principles outlined in the AOIP, the AOIP from a Defence Perspective shall observe the following principles:

- a. Defence cooperation in relation to the AOIP should be based on the principles of ASEAN as enshrined in the AOIP.
- b. Prioritising the strategic interests of ASEAN Member States (AMS) to settle differences and disputes through peaceful means, in accordance with the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), ASEAN Charter and principles of international law, including refraining from the threat or use of force as well as adopting peaceful dispute settlement mechanisms while strengthening confidence building measures, promoting preventive diplomacy activities, and conflict resolution initiatives.
- c. Mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity and national identity of all AMS
- d. Every form of ASEAN defence cooperation with other countries will be carried out through consensus of all 10 ASEAN Member States in promoting security and stability in the region.
- e. ASEAN shall be the primary driving force in the ADMM's interactions with ASEAN's friends and Dialogue Partners.

Key Elements of the AOIP from a Defence Perspective

7. The AOIP from a Defence Perspective encompasses the following key elements:
 - a. Viewing the Indo-Pacific region as a region that promotes an enabling an environment for peace, stability, and prosperity, with ASEAN playing a central and strategic role.
 - b. Leverage on existing and future practical defence cooperation in accordance to the principles and guidelines in the ADMM's External Engagements Concept Paper.
 - c. An Indo-Pacific region as a window of opportunity to enhance ASEAN Community building process.
 - d. Prioritises key areas of cooperation of mutual interest with countries in Indo-Pacific region for the benefit of ASEAN.

Objectives

8. The AOIP from a defence perspective is aimed at achieving the following objectives:
 - a. To complement the AOIP and serve as a guide on defence cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.
 - b. To enhance ASEAN's central and strategic role in maintaining and sustaining peace, security, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region in addressing common security challenges for mutual benefits, upholding the rules-based regional architecture, and strengthening confidence-building measures of cooperation.
 - c. To build upon progress made by our defence forces in forging practical, multilateral cooperation and exercises, which have contributed to building mutual trust and confidence between our defence establishment, as well as strengthening their capability in dealing with transboundary security challenges.
 - d. To enhance defence cooperation with Plus partners within the framework of ADMM-Plus while continuing to promote and build relations with other countries in Indo-Pacific region on mutual areas of cooperation.
 - e. To enhance ASEAN Community-building process by optimising defence cooperation of ADMM with dialogue partners to seize opportunities arising from the current and future regional and global environments, while maintaining ASEAN unity and centrality.

Scope of implementation

9. Defence cooperation related to the AOIP shall be based on consensus of all 10 AMS and may include various areas related to defence cooperation within the framework of ASEAN-led mechanism but not limited to, as follows:
 - a. Enhance capacity building in the maritime security field through joint trainings and information exchange aimed at promoting confidence building measures, maritime safety and security, and freedom of navigation and overflight in accordance with universally recognized principles of international law and treaties, including the 1982 UNCLOS.

- b. Explore areas to improve communication and practical cooperation among ASEAN member states and with other Indo-Pacific countries to address existing and emerging challenges effectively and in a timely manner.
- c. Explore ways to promote the renunciation of aggression and of the threat of use or force or other actions in any manner inconsistent with international law to create a secure and peaceful Indo-Pacific region.

Way forward

- 10. Strategic discussions on security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region will continue to be addressed in the ADMM to increase collective understanding and commitment towards peace and security in the region. In relation to this, the discussion paper may be developed into a concept paper upon consensus by all AMS.