

## **Evolving Attitudes to Peacekeeping in ASEAN**

*David Capie*

This paper provides an overview of evolving attitudes towards peacekeeping among the ten members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Created in 1967, ASEAN is an extraordinarily diverse regional group that brings together some of the world's richest and poorest countries; nascent democracies and authoritarian regimes.<sup>1</sup> Despite this diversity, there is a growing interest in peacekeeping among almost all member states. They include longtime and substantial contributors to UN missions (such as Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines), states that have contributed since the end of the Cold War (Thailand and Singapore) and three new participants (Cambodia, Brunei and Vietnam). As of November 2014, only Myanmar and Laos have not participated in any UN peacekeeping missions.

Drawing on extensive interviews, the paper discusses the changing place of peacekeeping in national foreign and defence policies across Southeast Asia. As well as summarizing the broad trend in favour of peacekeeping, it highlights two important recent developments. First, in 2012 Indonesia declared the goal of dramatically increasing its commitment to United Nations peacekeeping missions with the aim of becoming a Top 10 Troop Contributing Country (TCC). Second, in 2014 Vietnam decided to break with its historical opposition to sending its troops abroad and embrace peacekeeping as part of its strategy of comprehensive global integration. Following constitutional changes, Vietnam sent its first two officers to UNMISS in South Sudan in June 2014 and is planning new deployments. It also recently opened a Peacekeeping Training Centre—the sixth in Southeast Asia. The paper discusses the motivations behind the growing interest in peacekeeping and considers how Southeast Asian states are likely to contribute to PKOs in future.

In addition to changing national perspectives, the paper also discusses the place of peacekeeping as a focus for bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the region. The idea of an ASEAN peacekeeping force was raised for the first time by Indonesia in 2003, but it was opposed strongly by some other members. Despite this, peacekeeping has remained on the regional agenda through the goal of an ASEAN Network of

---

<sup>1</sup> The members of ASEAN are Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

National Peacekeeping Training Centres. Peacekeeping has also been a focus for wider regional cooperation through the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) processes. The paper concludes by exploring how these multilateral arrangements are likely to evolve in future and discusses obstacles to greater involvement in peacekeeping.

## Background

Southeast Asia's connection to peacekeeping dates back to some of the United Nations' earliest missions. Indonesia first sent peacekeepers—its so-called “Garuda contingent”—to Egypt in November 1956. In the decades since, it has deployed the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) more than 30 times, including to UN missions in the Congo (UNOC) from 1961-63, the Middle East (UNEF II) 1973-1979, Iraq (UNIIMOG) 1988-90, Asia (UNTAC) 1992-93, Latin America (MINUSTAH) and Europe (UNPROFOR and UNMIBH). Its largest deployment has been to Lebanon (UNIFIL), which is currently a battalion-sized contribution. As of September 2014, Indonesia was the largest contributor in ASEAN and the only regional state in the top 20 troop contributing countries, with a total of 1,832 personnel deployed (including 170 police and 27 military experts).<sup>2</sup>

Malaysia is another long-time supporter of UN peacekeeping within ASEAN. It has been a contributor to UN PKOs since the Congo mission in 1960 and deployed more than 1,400 troops to that mission at its peak.<sup>3</sup> Malaysian troops served as part of UNPROFOR in the former Yugoslavia, as observers on the Iran-Iraq border and also notably in Somalia in the early 1990s. Closer to home, the Malaysian military made a substantial contribution to the intervention in Cambodia (UNTAC) in 1992-3. It provided a smaller deployment to the Australian-led force in East Timor (INTERFET). Jurgen Haacke argues this was because Malaysia was perceived by Timorese forces as being “on the side of Indonesia,” although other accounts suggest it was because Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir was unhappy that a Thai officer was made Deputy Force Commander.<sup>4</sup> Subsequently Malaysia did provide a unit

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/contributors/2014/sept14\\_2.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/contributors/2014/sept14_2.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Alistair B. Cook, “Southeast Asian Perspectives on UN Peacekeeping” *Journal of International Peacekeeping* (forthcoming 2014) p. 169.

<sup>4</sup> Jurgen Haacke, *ASEAN's Diplomatic and Security Culture: Origins, Development and Prospects* (London: Routledge, 2005) p. 248, n. 15. Cf. Ian Martin and Alexander Mayer-Rieckh, “The United Nations and East Timor: From Self-Determination to State-building” *International Peacekeeping*, vol. 12, no. 1 (2005) pp. 125-145, p. 132.

of 125 police to UNMISSET in 2003 and later sent troops to help the Timor-Leste government respond to a mutiny in 2006. In 1995, Malaysia established the first Peacekeeping Training Centre in Southeast Asia, with support from the US State Department's Enhanced International Peacekeeping Capabilities (EIPC) programme. As of December 2012, the Centre had trained 2,114 military officers, 17 police and 28 civilians from 51 different countries.<sup>5</sup>

The Philippines, ASEAN's third largest contributor, first sent troops on MONUC in 1963. It has increased its contributions since the late 1990s, with the INTERFET mission to East Timor marking its largest single deployment with more than 600 Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) troops involved. Other missions include Liberia (UNMIL), Haiti (MINUSTAH) and the Golan Heights (UNDOF). The latter operation involved controversy when in March 2013, 21 AFP troops were abducted by Syrian rebels but released following mediation by the Jordanian government. In late August 2014, AFP troops reportedly broke the chain of command by refusing to surrender their weapons to an al-Qaeda-related rebel group and instead "repositioned" themselves, something described by their Indian force commander as "an act of cowardice."<sup>6</sup> The Philippines has approximately 700 troops in the field, and it also ranks in the global top 10 contributors of police and military experts.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to these three larger contributors, Singapore has sent more than 1,500 troops on UN missions since first taking part in Namibia (UNTAG) in 1989. According to its Ministry of Defence, because it has "limited resources and manpower, Singapore's approach is to focus our contributions in niche areas where the SAF has expertise and which our international partners find useful."<sup>8</sup> Since 1997 it has also had a UN Standby Arrangement in place. Singapore has been wary of supporting peacekeeping closer to home, however, and blocked discussion of an Indonesian proposal for a regional peacekeeping force in 2004 (see below). Like Singapore, Thailand did not begin to participate in UN peacekeeping missions until the end of the Cold War. The first deployment was to the demilitarized border between Kuwait and Iraq

---

<sup>5</sup> Cook, p. 166.

<sup>6</sup> Camille Diola, "UNDOF Commander: Filipinos' Defiance Unprofessional" *Philippines Star*, 4 September 2014; Camille Diola, "Recalled UNDOF Official Returns Home" *Philippines Star*, 14 September 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Noel Morada, "Contributor Profile: the Philippines" <http://www.providingforpeacekeeping.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Philippines-Morada-15-December-2013-Final.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> "Overseas Operations" Singapore Ministry of Defence website, [www.mindef.gov.sg](http://www.mindef.gov.sg) (accessed 20 October 2014).

(UNIKOM) in 1991. In 1993, Thailand sent 705 military engineers to neighbouring Cambodia, where they were engaged primarily in construction and demining work. In 1999, Thailand made its largest contribution to date, sending 1,581 troops to the Australian-led force in East Timor (and subsequently 925 to UNTAET).<sup>9</sup> Since the completion of a Thai deployment to Darfur in 2012, Thailand has only made a minor contribution to peacekeeping. This has coincided with a period of significant domestic political turmoil in the country. As Sorpong Peou notes, “the extent to which the political crisis has negatively affected Thailand’s commitment to peacekeeping is difficult to assess, but some observers note that domestic problems have kept the government preoccupied.”<sup>10</sup>

At one level, then, five Southeast Asian countries have shown a strong if uneven commitment to peacekeeping for several decades. However, I argue that in the last ten years there have been three changes that suggest a significantly more positive attitude to peace operations. The first is the emergence of new, formerly reluctant states, as contributors to peacekeeping operations. The second is the desire of Indonesia to play a much larger role in UN operations and its advocacy for the creation of a regional peacekeeping capacity. Third, peacekeeping has emerged as an important area of bilateral and multilateral security cooperation and seems likely to only become more important in the future. That said, ASEAN states still have concerns about certain aspects of international peacekeeping and there are constraints with regard to how far they are prepared to go with regional peacekeeping cooperation.

## **New Players**

### **Cambodia**

In addition to long-term contributors like Malaysia and Indonesia, the last decade has seen a growing interest in peacekeeping on the part of three new players: Cambodia, Brunei and Vietnam. Cambodia is best known as the recipient of tens of thousands of peacekeepers during the UNTAC mission in the early 1990s. Peacekeeping was first mentioned in the Cambodian Defence White Paper in 2006, but since then it has deployed more than 1,600 troops on seven missions. These include UNMIS (Sudan), UNMISS (South Sudan), MINURCAT (Chad/CAR), UNIFIL (Lebanon),

---

<sup>9</sup> Sorpong Peou, “Contributor Profile: Thailand” <http://www.providingforpeacekeeping.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Thailand-Peou-21-May-2014.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

UNSMIS (Syria), MINUSMA (Mali).<sup>11</sup> The Cambodian military has been acknowledged as having particular skills in demining and explosive ordnance disposal and Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) troops have made a major contribution to UN missions in Africa and the Middle East in this respect, with Cambodia contributing four mine clearance teams to UNMIS with about 135 personnel in each team and more recently a deployment of 150 military engineers and 50 deminers to UNIFIL.<sup>12</sup>

The motivations for Cambodian contributions are mixed. On the one hand, like many states, Cambodia values the prestige, status and reputational benefits that come with peacekeeping. The country's 2006 Defence White Paper said the RCAF "is striving to build its prestige in the international arena. A role in peacekeeping is one opportunity to which the RCAF can contribute in an effort to strengthen peace and security."<sup>13</sup> But Cambodia also acknowledges the utility of these missions in improving the capacity of its forces. It has provided a focus for bilateral training and cooperation with the United States (see below for more details) and the compensation payments it receives from the UN also help offset the costs of military reform efforts.<sup>14</sup>

## Brunei

In 2008 the tiny sultanate of Brunei dispatched its first peacekeepers to Lebanon. Despite having a national military made up of just three battalions and still relying on the presence of British Gurkhas for its own security, Brunei has maintained regular deployments to UNIFIL since that time. In August 2014, the most recent deployment of 30 Royal Brunei Armed Forces (RBAF) troops left for the Middle East, where they would be under the command of the Malaysian battalion (MALBAT 850-2).<sup>15</sup> This was Brunei's largest deployment to date.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to sending troops to Lebanon, Brunei has supported peace operations in the southern Philippines by sending smaller numbers of troops as part of

<sup>11</sup> Vannarith Chheang, "Contributor Profile: Cambodia" available online at <http://www.providingfor-peacekeeping.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Cambodia-Chheang-24-Jan-2014-Final.pdf> (accessed 23 October 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Carlyle A. Thayer, "Cambodia Commits to UN Peacekeeping" *Thayer Consultancy Background Brief*, October 23, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Chheang, "Contributor Profile: Cambodia" p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Quarantul-Ain Bandial, "26 Peacekeepers Return Home" *The Brunei Times*, 4 October 2014; Azaraimy HH, "Brunei UNIFIL Peacekeepers Return from Lebanon" *Borneo Bulletin*, 4 October 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Waquiuddin Rajak, "Brunei Sends Largest Number of Peacekeepers to Lebanon" *The Brunei Times*, 26 August 2014.

the Implementation Monitoring Team (IMT) overseeing the ceasefire agreement between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Philippines government in Mindanao.<sup>17</sup>

The policy justification for these contributions is set out in Brunei's Defence White Paper. The most recent White Paper in 2011 described contributing to "stability operations" as a "current priority," and said it sought to make "tailored contributions to wider international efforts to promote stability and a rules-based international order, particularly peace support and humanitarian relief operations."<sup>18</sup> Peacekeeping operations in Lebanon and Mindanao are believed to have "reinforced Brunei Darussalam's image as a neutral and constructive contributor." They have also had practical returns, most notably improving "the RBAF's capacity to undertake small scale operations in difficult environments."<sup>19</sup> The White Paper argues that "strengthening the RBAF's capacity to make a regular, and where appropriate concurrent contributions to stability operations whether regionally or in support of the UN will be an important aspect of future capability development and deployment planning."<sup>20</sup>

## Vietnam

Perhaps the most important recent development in Southeast Asia's involvement with peacekeeping is the emergence of Vietnam as a new troop contributing country in 2014. Vietnam had a long history of opposition to UN peacekeeping operations, regarding them as an infringement on state sovereignty. From 1975 until 1994 it declined to pay its peacekeeping levy as a UN member. United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali first raised the possibility of Vietnam taking part in PKOs in 1993, but the suggestion did not receive any support from Hanoi. This began to change after 2004, with more positive comments made by Vietnamese officials and the creation of an inter-agency committee to make preparations for peacekeeping operations under the direction of the Deputy Prime Minister.<sup>21</sup> However, it was not until 2009 that a Vietnamese Defence White Paper explicitly referenced peacekeeping, noting that:

---

<sup>17</sup> Ak Mohd Khairuddin and PG Harun, "Brunei Peacekeepers Return from Mindanao" *The Brunei Times*, 9 September 2014.

<sup>18</sup> *Defending the Nation's Sovereignty: Expanding Roles in Wider Horizons* (Brunei: Ministry of Defence, 2011) p. 12.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Interview, Vietnam Peacekeeping Centre, Hanoi, 10 October 2014.

Vietnam greatly appreciates the role of the UN and regards the peace-keeping operations (PKO) as an important function of the UN. [...] Vietnam is accomplishing its preparations for effectively participating in UN PKO, in conformity with its capability and conditions. Vietnam's relevant agencies are actively studying experience of other countries, and preparing its personnel with sufficient professional skills, foreign language proficiency and knowledge of international laws to participate effectively in UN PKO.<sup>22</sup>

Vietnam's decision to take part in a PKO was finally confirmed by Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung at the annual Shangri-La Dialogue conference in Singapore in 2013. Vietnam amended article 89 of its constitution to allow its armed forces to be deployed overseas and in June 2014 two Vietnamese officers were dispatched to the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) as liaison officers.

The potential contribution Vietnam could make to peacekeeping is significant. The Vietnam People's Army (VPA) is one of the ten largest ground forces in the world with more than 400,000 troops under arms and it has considerable expertise in demining, engineering and military medicine. According to one source, the VPA has more than 50,000 medical staff (doctors and nurses) in its ranks who could make a valuable contribution to peace operations.<sup>23</sup> As a tangible sign of its new commitment to peacekeeping, Vietnam opened a national Peacekeeping Training Centre on 27 May 2014. The Centre, which is currently located in a tower block near West Lake in Hanoi, will transition to a 6.8 hectare site in the Thạch Thắt district, west of Hanoi, once construction is complete. The new complex is being supported by the United States and other international donors.<sup>24</sup>

Vietnam is also cautiously moving ahead with increasing its participation in peacekeeping operations. In 2014, Vietnamese Government officials were negotiating a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with France that would allow French-speaking Vietnamese military engineers to join the French-led mission in Mali.<sup>25</sup> Vietnam's Deputy Prime Minister was one of only two representatives from ASEAN to join US Vice President Biden for a meeting at the White House about support for

---

<sup>22</sup> *Vietnam National Defence White Paper* (2009) p. 27.

<sup>23</sup> Interview, Hanoi, 11 October 2014.

<sup>24</sup> Interview, Vietnam Peacekeeping Centre, Hanoi, 10 October 2014.

<sup>25</sup> Interview, Hanoi, 11 October 2014.

peacekeeping in September in 2014.<sup>26</sup>

Despite this momentum, political and normative reservations about peacekeeping remain. Vietnam's 2009 Defence White Paper expressed concerns about more robust mandates around interventions, saying, "UN PKO must abide by the principle of respecting independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries; ensure impartiality; and only be carried out with the acceptance of parties concerned."<sup>27</sup> Vietnam has expressed muted support for ideas such as the Responsibility to Protect.<sup>28</sup>

In terms of domestic politics, while military and political elites are strongly supportive of UN peacekeeping, there is widespread acknowledgement that they are "ahead of public opinion." With the enormous costs of war still fresh in the memories of many Vietnamese, there is opposition to risking the lives of Vietnamese troops overseas. The government has initiated a campaign to change these attitudes, meeting with provincial and district levels officials to help them see the advantages of sending troops abroad.<sup>29</sup>

## Indonesia: Aiming High

In addition to new players emerging in support of UN peacekeeping operations, Southeast Asia's longest-serving contributor has also signaled that peacekeeping will play a much more important role in its foreign policy in the future.

In 2012, Indonesia announced its intention to become a top 10 troop contributing country, with plans to increase its troops involved in UN missions from the 1800 currently participating today to over 4,000. (According to one official, the number 4,000 was picked because it was regarded as the threshold to make it into the top 10).<sup>30</sup> Indeed, in a speech at the opening of the Bogor Peacekeeping Training Centre in March 2012, President Yudhoyono said Indonesia's longer term "more challenging" goal was to deploy 10,000 troops.<sup>31</sup> Indonesia is already making larger deployments,

<sup>26</sup> The other ASEAN member to attend was Indonesia. See "Joint Statement on Support for United Nations Peacekeeping Operations" available online at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/26/joint-statement-support-united-nations-peacekeeping-operations> (accessed 16 October 2014).

<sup>27</sup> *Vietnam National Defence White Paper* (2009) p. 27.

<sup>28</sup> David Capie, "The Responsibility to Protect in Southeast Asia: Framing, Resistance and Localization Myth" *The Pacific Review*, vol. 25, no. 1 (2012) pp. 153-173.

<sup>29</sup> Interview, Hanoi, 11 October 2014.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Indonesian foreign ministry official, Jakarta, July 2013.

<sup>31</sup> "Indonesia to Send 4,000 Troops, Helicopters to UN Peacekeeping Missions" *The Jakarta Globe*, 20 March 2012.

such as the battalion-size force currently in Lebanon and the dispatch of another battalion to Darfur in 2012. It has made its first deployment to the Americas (Haiti), and more notably, following a request from UN Secretary General Ban-Ki Moon, it has also agreed to deploy enabling platforms, such as 3 Mi-17 helicopters to Darfur and a naval vessel to Lebanon.<sup>32</sup> In another important symbol of Indonesia's growing profile, an Indonesian officer was appointed Force Commander of UN Mission in Western Sahara (MINURSO) in 2013.<sup>33</sup>

What is driving Indonesia's greater interest in peacekeeping? There are at least two important factors. The first is a growing sense of self-confidence on the part of Indonesia's leaders about the country's place in the world.<sup>34</sup> After a period of introspection and distraction following the end of the Suharto era, Indonesia has emerged as a confident, active, democratic state. It is a member of G20, recently served a term as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council and chaired ASEAN in 2011. Indonesian leaders see the country playing a role on the global stage equivalent to its 240 million people and sprawling territory. As one Indonesian official put it, "it's the Spiderman principle: with great power, comes great responsibility."<sup>35</sup> In this sense contributing to peacekeeping operations is a tangible way to make a statement about Indonesia's place in the world. There is also a sense that it says something about the country's changing identity. As another official put it, peacekeeping helps Indonesia "project a democratic image."<sup>36</sup>

Second, the heightened interest is partly shaped by changes in the country's civil-military relations since 1998. For much of its history the TNI has had a particular focus on internal security operations. This changed after the fall of Suharto and the formal separation of the police and military in April 1999. In the last decade, with the end of the war in Aceh, the TNI has become increasingly outward-facing and there is a growing need to find something for it to do. It is no accident that UN operations found strong support during the Yudhoyono administration, given the former president himself had been a peacekeeper in UNPROFOR. Peacekeeping is a popular mission among the military, in particular the younger officer cohort.<sup>37</sup> It provides practical

<sup>32</sup> Suherdjoko, "RI Dispatches Peacekeeping Mission to Sudan" *The Jakarta Post*, 27 April 2013.

<sup>33</sup> "Indonesian Major General Appointed Force Commander of UN Western Sahara Mission" United Nations News Centre, 27 August 2013.

<sup>34</sup> Natalie Sambhi, "Indonesia's Push for Peacekeeping Operations" *The Strategist*, 17 September 2013.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Indonesian foreign ministry official, Jakarta, July 2013.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Indonesian foreign ministry official, Jakarta, July 2013.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with senior TNI military officer, Ministry of Defence, Jakarta, July 2013.

experience for troops, increases their prospects for promotion and also has economic advantages. As one interviewee said in Jakarta, the new commitment to peacekeeping is likely to be sustained, in part because “*the military* is very interested in the mission.”<sup>38</sup>

It remains to be seen if enthusiasm for peacekeeping will continue under the new Jokowi administration. On the one hand, Jokowi has talked about Indonesia playing a larger role in world affairs beyond ASEAN and has also mentioned peacekeeping as an area for potential cooperation with other regional partners such as Japan.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, however, he has signaled that maritime forces will be the priority for greater defence spending, which may see cuts to the Army’s budget.<sup>40</sup>

### **Peacekeeping in Bilateral and Multilateral Cooperation**

In addition to these changing national positions on peacekeeping on the part of new and established contributors in Southeast Asia, peacekeeping has also become a growing focus for defence cooperation between ASEAN members and external partners. This includes bilateral agreements to build local capacity but is also reflected in a growing commitment to peacekeeping in Asia’s nascent regional security architecture, most notably the ADMM-Plus process.

One of the largest funders of peacekeeping in ASEAN has been the United States, through the State Department’s Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI). The GPOI was launched during the Bush administration with annual funding of around \$100 million, and extended for a second five-year term under President Obama. Through it the US has provided assistance to 69 countries and regional organisations around the world, including six ASEAN members. Significant funding has gone towards supporting National PKO Training Centres, including the impressive Indonesian centre at Sentul and the new Vietnam Peacekeeping Centre.<sup>41</sup> In December 2013, Malaysia’s Peacekeeping Training Centre was the first in the world to be certified by the US to have attained the level of Full Training Capability.

---

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Indonesian foreign ministry official, Jakarta, July 2013.

<sup>39</sup> Emirza Adi Syailendra, “Jokowi Preparing Indonesia for a World beyond ASEAN?” *The Nation* (Thailand), 10 January 2015.

<sup>40</sup> Joshua Kurlantzick, “Jokowi’s Maritime Doctrine and What It Means” *The Diplomat*, 29 November 2014.

<sup>41</sup> State Department Fact Sheet, “US-Indonesia Cooperation on Peacekeeping” 18 November 2011; Raymond Drumsta, “Peacekeeping Operations Center Ribbon Cutting” [www.army.mil](http://www.army.mil) 11 June 2013 (accessed 20 October 2014).

Peacekeeping is also a focus for several military US exercises with regional states. For example, in 2014 the US-Indonesia “Garuda Shield” exercise was held based around a peace support operation. 500 US army troops from Hawaii joined 700 troops for a series of training events, including a command post exercise, jungle field training and a combined arms live fire exercise.<sup>42</sup> An annual US-Cambodian exercise called “Angkor Sentinel” is focused around peacekeeping and demining. The fifth of these annual exercises was held at the Cambodian Training Centre for Multi-National Peacekeeping in April 2014.

It is not just the United States that is an enthusiastic supporter of peacekeeping in its regional diplomacy. Peacekeeping is a growing theme in Australia’s defence ties with Indonesia, including an annual bilateral military exercise, Garuda Kookaburra.<sup>43</sup> A 2013 statement released by the two countries’ defence ministers talked about building links between the Australian Defence Force (ADF)’s Peace Operations Training Centre and the new Indonesian Peacekeeping Centre and “establishing a formal peacekeeping partnership between our two defence forces.”<sup>44</sup> Australia has also been a major provider of language training for the Vietnamese People’s Army. According to report in *The Australian*, the ADF has put a remarkable 17,000 Vietnamese troops through English-language courses in recent years.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, peacekeeping has been a focus for Japanese engagement with ASEAN. The 2011-15 ASEAN-Japan Plan of Action talks about peacekeeping as a key area for cooperation, including through the exchange of instructors and training.

Why is peacekeeping a growing focus in bilateral military engagement? One important reason is that it is seen as a “soft” security issue, which avoids some of the sensitivities that may come up in more traditional forms of defence cooperation. For example, the US military ties with Vietnam and Indonesia have been historically constrained by allegations of human rights abuses. Some states, for example Malaysia, are also sensitive to traditional military exercises with the US, which might be seen as potentially targeted against China. Peacekeeping provides a useful way to interact without those concerns. Framing defence cooperation around peacekeeping has not been

---

<sup>42</sup> For a series of film clips and other information about Garuda Shield 2014 see: <http://www.dvidshub.net/feature/GarudaShield2014#.VE4uAZOUcdo>.

<sup>43</sup> Australian Department of Defence, “Australia and Indonesia Troops Participate in the Inaugural Bilateral Peacekeeping Exercise Garuda Kookaburra” 17 May 2013.

<sup>44</sup> Hon. Stephen Smith, “Second Annual Australia-Indonesia Defence Ministers’ Meeting” 26 July 2013.

<sup>45</sup> Brendan Nicholson, “Australian Defence Force to Train Vietnamese Troops for UN Peacekeeping Role” *The Australian*, 20 March 2013.

without controversy, however. The April 2014 Angkor Sentinel exercise in Cambodia was criticized by Human Rights Watch, who argued US troops were providing training to Cambodia's gendarmerie, which had been used to violently break up protests by garment workers in January 2014.<sup>46</sup>

### Regional Cooperation on Peacekeeping

If some ASEAN states have been contributors to UN peacekeeping operations for decades, the idea of peacekeeping cooperation *within* ASEAN is relatively new and remains controversial. The idea of an ASEAN Peacekeeping Force was first mooted in 2003 by Indonesia when it was serving as ASEAN Chair. The proposal initially came from Rizal Sukma, the well-connected executive director of the CSIS Jakarta think tank, as part of a speech he gave setting out his vision for an ASEAN security community. Sukma's argument was that Indonesia had found the Australian-led intervention into East Timor deeply disturbing, and that it would have been much better if an ASEAN force had been available, but no such capacity existed. His idea was picked up by Indonesian Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda and Marty Natalegawa, who was then Acting Director General for ASEAN Cooperation in Indonesia's foreign ministry.

Wirajuda called for the creation of an ASEAN Standby Force, which could respond to crises in Southeast Asia. As Natalegawa said at the time, "What we are saying is ASEAN countries should know one another better than anyone else and therefore we should have the option for ASEAN countries to take advantage of an ASEAN peacekeeping force to be deployed if they so wish."<sup>47</sup> The idea was ambitious (as Sukma said later, "we thought if we asked for ten we might get five")<sup>48</sup> and was strongly opposed in particular by Singapore, as was a call for a regional peacekeeping training centre.<sup>49</sup> But although the goal of greater regional peacekeeping capacity did not find an enthusiastic audience among ASEAN leaders, it did not die entirely. The proposal surfaced in the Blueprint for the ASEAN Political and Security Community (APSC), which ASEAN is supposed to accomplish by 2015. It has been identified as a project for the nascent ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) process to advance.

At a meeting in Jakarta in May 2011, the ADMM adopted a Concept Paper on the Establishment of ASEAN Peacekeeping Centers Network. This has the objective of

<sup>46</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Cambodia: US Training of Abusive Military Exposed" 20 May 2014.

<sup>47</sup> Cited in Carlyle Thayer, "ASEAN and UN Peacekeeping" *The Diplomat*, 25 April 2014.

<sup>48</sup> Rizal Sukma, interview, Jakarta, July 2013.

<sup>49</sup> "Singapore Sidesteps ASEAN Peacekeeping Force" *Reuters*, 4 March 2004.

“facilitating existing and future peacekeeping centers of ASEAN respective countries to conduct joint planning/training and exchange experiences” and other various activities. These fall into short-, medium- and long-term baskets. As short-term goals, ASEAN members have committed to information sharing on peacekeeping training curricula, materials and methodology, and assistance for ASEAN member states to establish their own peacekeeping centers. Medium-term goals are to develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), develop common training, operations and best practices manuals, and commence joint training. Finally, over the longer term, the ADMM will establish a common standby arrangement, enhance interoperability, and develop existing centers into centers of excellence. Following the adoption of the concept paper by the ADMM, ASEAN launched a formal meeting for establishing the ASEAN Peacekeeping Centers Network with an inaugural conference held in Bangkok in September 2012. Although Malaysian Defence Minister Hishammuddin Hussein said recently that “ASEAN members [should] move as a team in undertaking endeavours such as peacekeeping missions,” few expect a regional Standby Force to be a realistic prospect any time soon.<sup>50</sup>

In addition to ADMM, peacekeeping has been a topic for discussion in wider regional groups such as the ARF and the ADMM-Plus. Created in 1994, the ARF is the largest regional security dialogue in the Asia-Pacific with 27 members. It includes annual meetings of foreign ministers and a series of inter-sessional meetings that address a wide range of security issues. Since 1996, the ARF has held a semi-regular Peacekeeping Experts’ Meeting. Much of this has been concerned with sharing perceptions and dialogue, but at the most recent meeting in Beijing there was a focus on more practical cooperation, including a “train the trainers” session.

ADMM-Plus was formed in 2010 and brings together defence ministers from the ten ASEAN states, with eight external actors: China, Japan, ROK, United States, Russia, India, Australia and New Zealand. In addition to a biennial meeting of defence ministers, ADMM-Plus maintains a work programme through a series of Experts’ Working Groups (EWGs). Peacekeeping was one of the five priority groups created by ministers when they met for the first time in Hanoi in 2010. The EWG on PKOs was initially co-hosted by the Philippines and New Zealand, and from 2011–2013 they held a series of meetings that included (i) a regional stock-take of capabilities and gaps; (ii) a survey of legal issues; (iii) operational challenges and (iv) force generation issues.

---

<sup>50</sup> “ASEAN Members Should Move as a Team in Peacekeeping Mission” *The Rakyat Post*, 16 July 2014.

In February 2014 the Philippines hosted the first ADMM-Plus table-top exercise (TTX) based on a peace operation.<sup>51</sup>

## Conclusion

This paper has argued that there has been an important shift in attitudes towards peacekeeping on the part of Southeast Asian states in the last few years. UN peacekeeping is increasingly seen as a way for regional states to enhance their legitimacy and to gain reputational advantages, as well as a way to enhance cooperation with external partners such as the United States. Long-time contributors such as Indonesia have set some ambitious goals for the future and three new states are set to increase their involvement in peacekeeping missions. Peacekeeping seems likely to only grow in importance to regional countries in the years ahead.

These changes notwithstanding, there are several obstacles to greater participation by Southeast Asian states in UN peace operations. The first is a longstanding problem of capacity. For emerging contributors like Cambodia and Vietnam, the problem is not a lack of people but a lack of English or French language skills. There is also a lack of familiarity with UN procedures and rules of engagement, legal issues and a lack of experience in working with other nations' forces.

A second challenge is material. According to Vietnam's foreign ministry, in order to send large numbers of troops on a peacekeeping mission the VPA needs to purchase equipment that meets UN standards.<sup>52</sup> Cambodia also faces "major challenges in relation to logistics [and] the procurement of modern equipment."<sup>53</sup>

But there are also remaining normative and political obstacles. In the case of Vietnam, there are domestic sensitivities to foreign deployments that will take time to overcome. Most ASEAN states continue to prefer a traditional notion of peacekeeping and are uncomfortable with more robust mandates and ideas like peace enforcement that are increasingly common in UN missions. A Thai official speaking on behalf of ASEAN to the UN's Fourth Committee last year noted that the development of ideas like MONUSCO's Force Intervention Brigade "have not come about without concerns regarding their consistency with the basic principles of peacekeeping." He went on to say that "it is important to remind ourselves that the three principles

---

<sup>51</sup> "About the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM-Plus)" <https://admm.asean.org/index.php/about-admm/about-admm-plus.html> (accessed 22 October 2014).

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Vietnamese foreign ministry official, Hanoi, 10 October 2014.

<sup>53</sup> Chheang, "Contributor Profile: Cambodia" p. 5.

of UN peacekeeping, namely consent of all the parties, impartiality, and non-use of force except in self-defense and defense of the mandate, remain at the basic tenet (sic) of all peacekeeping operations.”<sup>54</sup> Finally, at the regional level, the norm of non-interference and the value given to state sovereignty remain the key impediments to building an ASEAN peacekeeping capacity. There is little chance of a collective Southeast Asian deployment under an ASEAN flag any time soon, but that should not detract from the significance of the changes that have unfolded over the past ten years and that seem likely to continue in the future.

---

<sup>54</sup> Statement by Senior Colonel Nattawut Sabyeroop on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) before the Fourth Committee of the 68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, 28 October 2013.