Chapter I

Introduction

Recent developments at the global, regional and domestic levels, and more importantly, at the economic level, have paved the way for far-reaching changes in the dynamics of international security in Southeast Asia. The economic crash in Southeast Asia in 1997 substantially modified the Southeast Asian strategic scenario. The domestic and international orientations of some of these countries are in a process of flux, from their earlier preoccupation with traditional security to broader concerns mainly bordering around strengthening of their economies which suffered greatly during the recent inflation in the region. Until mid-1997 ASEAN was riding high on the strength of its diplomatic successes and the economic growth of its member countries. The economic and financial crisis which had its origins in Thailand in July 1997 and quickly spread to other countries of the region, suddenly exposed the inherent weaknesses of ASEAN according to many scholars. The crisis had a devastating effect on society and created political turmoil in Malaysia, Thailand, and most importantly, in Indonesia, where long-serving President Suharto was forced to resign in near-anarchy conditions. "ASEAN as an organization seemed ineffective and even irrelevant to the crisis." The situation further deteriorated because of the resurfacing of political and territorial disputes and the charges and counter-charges of interference in each others' domestic affairs.

The economic crisis as well as the political turmoil that followed seriously undermined bilateral relations. Concerns for security receded to the background and economic regeneration became the major preoccupation.

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However, during the Cold War in the Sixties, the major concern of these states, the one that proved to be the rallying point was the threat posed by Communist China. Dominant security concerns were of an internal nature since most of the member states during the period were in the early stages of nation-building. Their governments were being challenged by armed Communist and separatist movements. External threats perceived as indirect, and mainly in the form of a revolutionary China, provided stimuli to the existing destabilizing domestic elements.

The political structures in most of these countries was very fragile. There was an apparent stalemate due to the Vietnamese Communist forces battling US and South Vietnamese forces. Malaysia and Indonesia were locked in a bitter political and military struggle. There was very slow progress in Burma as well as periodic coups in Thailand. In the Philippines there was intra-elite scramble for power following the dynamic Magsaysay era. Maoism was triumphant in China and revolutionary contagion appeared ready to spread in Southeast Asia.

ASEAN was formed in 1967 due to the belief that local disputes were wasteful and self-defeating. Although each nation was anti-Communist, ASEAN was not conceived as yet another anti-Communist organisation. Rather, from the very beginning, ASEAN was self-consciously inward-looking and regional and devoted to individual and regional self-reliance and resilience. It was assumed that national resilience could be achieved through economic development leading to social and political stability.

A number of groupings which acted to serve regional interests and proved the usefulness of a regional grouping were formed even before ASEAN was conceived, due to the historic bilateral problems among the Southeast Asian nations. SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation) formed in 1954 was the first such effort. Since it was conceived by
the USA and at the same time was US-dominated, it did not hold much interest for nations other than the Philippines and Thailand, both military allies of the US at the time. In 1961 ASA (Association of Southeast Asia) was formed in Bangkok by Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand which deliberately focussed on economic, social, cultural and scientific and administrative rather than political concerns. ASA’s activities were hindered by its limited membership and the worsening of relations between Malaysia and the Philippines in 1963 over the Philippine claim to Sabah. The formation of Malaysia in 1963 by the inclusion of the former British possessions in Borneo-Sabah and Sarawak, led to a deterioration of Malaysia’s relations with Indonesia and the Philippines. The foundation of the MAPHILINDO (Malaysia, Philippines and Indonesia) or the Greater Malay Confederation in 1963 was aimed at tiding over the differences among these predominantly Malay states. The organisation became defunct after Sukarno launched his Crush Malaysia campaign.

Cooperation in the security field is not something new for the Southeast Asian states, on either bilateral or multilateral basis. Examples are the Soviet Vietnamese Treaty of Mutual Defence and Security of 1978, and bilateral security and defence arrangements between the US respectively with Thailand and the Philippines during the Cold War. Another multilateral security and defence cooperation in Southeast Asia, which was never an effective organisation was the SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation), while the FPDA (Five Power Defence Arrangements), an agreement to consult if the security of either Malaysia or Singapore is threatened, has continued to exist, involving Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Singapore. As far as the ASEAN member states are concerned, however, cooperation in the security field has continued to be conducted outside the framework of ASEAN regional cooperation, be it on a bilateral
or multilateral (if mostly limited to trilateral) basis. What clearly distinguishes the present security cooperation between ASEAN member states from any previous security arrangements is the absence of the involvement of any external great power.  

ASEAN was formed after the failure of all these attempts to foster cooperation, with the view that because of fortuitous political changes, the nations that formed ASEAN were at least intellectually and conceptually prepared to cooperate with each other. Although each nation was anti-Communist, ASEAN was not conceived as yet another anti-Communist organisation. Rather, from the very beginning ASEAN was conceived as self-consciously inward-looking and "regional" and devoted to individual and regional self-reliance and resilience. It was assumed that national resilience could be achieved through economic development resulting in political and social stability. This would further promote regional resilience.

The states which formed ASEAN realized that unless they ensured a peaceful environment both within and outside the region, development would not be possible. Such an environment was possible only through consultation in order to resolve mistrust, and by playing down the sources of conflict between the countries. To tackle the insurgency emanating essentially from Communist challenge or religious fundamental challenges, they decided to discuss amongst themselves and evolve cooperation to cope with such challenges. Thus, the need for a security organization arose essentially from the fear that threat emanated from within. These threats could be removed through control of the political system by evolving a strong governmental structure in their respective states as also by directly controlling the hostile groups through cooperation.

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The five founding partners of ASEAN began to think in terms of regional cooperation especially after Indonesia renounced a radical nationalism and returned to a conventional diplomatic practice. Regional partnership was intended to control conflict, to ease the management of fragile political systems and thus reduce vulnerability of security integral to the original concept of collective security. ASEAN members could not openly declare their intention of forming a security organisation since their Association would be termed as an anti-Communist organisation. Hence neither security, nor defence formed an important agenda for discussion during the first summit. Another hidden agenda behind the formation of ASEAN was to keep Indonesia under leash. The US helped in the formation of ASEAN since it realized that the only way to protect its interests in the region was by developing models for Southeast Asia, which would act as bulwarks against Communist China.

A common approach to all issues reflected a consensus, since a regional association deficient in military capabilities and unable to engage in collective defence might contribute somewhat to regional security. Collective defence was not possible at this stage since four of its founding members retained long-standing security relationships with extra-regional powers. The Preamble to the Bangkok Declaration inaugurating ASEAN however indicated a desire of the members to ensure their stability and security from external interference in any form or manifestation in order to preserve their national identities in accordance with the ideals and aspirations of the people.3

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3 ASEAN Declaration, reprinted in ASEAN Documents Series, 1967-1985, ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta, 1985, p.17
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The ASEAN members’ main motivating aim was to ensure a peaceful environment both within and outside the region, to foster development. Member states decided to play down the sources of conflict between their countries. To tackle the insurgency emanating essentially from Communist challenge, or religious fundamental challenges, members decided to use ASEAN as a forum for discussion to evolve consensus and a collective effort to cope with such challenges. What was significant about the security cooperation from any previous arrangement, was the absence of involvement of any external great power.

ASEAN countries have shown a commitment from the early years of ASEAN not to allow bilateral conflicts and disputes to hamper regional cooperation. During its early years ASEAN’s existence was threatened by the outbreak of bilateral tensions between Malaysian and the Philippines and between Indonesia and Singapore. Kuala Lumpur severed diplomatic relations with Manila over reports that the Philippines’ government was preparing an invasion of the Malaysian state of Sabah which was also claimed by the Philippines. Incidents such as these clouded external relations of the member countries once in a while but never disrupted the functioning of ASEAN and the member countries continue, even today, to attend regional meetings.

Although not a security organisation, ASEAN’s presence was conceived as a security buffer by the member states. To tackle insurgency emanating from Communist and religious fundamentalism, they decided to discuss among themselves and evolve cooperation to cope with such challenges. Countries in the region realised that internal problems in many instances could be solved only through cooperation with neighbours;
domestic sources of threat often assumed a cross-border nature and hence the need for bilateral cooperation. Bilateral cooperation assumed importance for these countries also because of the fact that the authoritarian regimes in these countries needed legitimacy. For regime consolidation and in order to crush any sort of opposition, or insurgency, which threatened their new governments, it was important for these countries to garner support from the neighbouring countries. Hence they took resort to bilateral cooperation. In addition, they realised that the only way to put down internal insurgencies which sometimes received both moral and material support from neighbouring countries was through bilateral cooperation. For example, Indonesia suspected Malaysia to be offering material and moral support to the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka rebels in Aceh. Similarly, Thailand suspected Malaysia of extending support to the Muslim-Malay rebels in the Pattani province of Thailand. Subsequently, most of the countries in the region found cooperation amongst themselves easy and conducive. Hence, bilateral cooperation seemed to be the solution to internal security problems, while on the other hand, external security would be taken care of by defence pacts which existed with external powers, including, the presence of the US security umbrella in the region. Dispute management constituted the backbone of regional order. It was a collective effort to stabilise the fragile political system while managing intra-regional conflict, in the process reducing vulnerability.

In the post Cold War period, conflicts emerged more on ethnic and religious lines resulting in occasional suspicion towards each other in encouraging separatist tendencies. As a result bilateral cooperation, which was one of the major concerns of these countries during the Cold War, became increasingly difficult. Before discussing these security
concerns, it is important to understand the issue of security in the context of the ASEAN countries.

Among a host of momentous political and social changes in the 20th century, the most important was the transformation of old societies into nation states. This altered the nature of political systems and international relations. There were social changes which made nation building and material development simultaneous political problems. The discontinuities in tradition, culture, social organisation and material standards led to transformation into new cultural and social forms which resulted in stress.

Hence, unlike the issue of security in the more advanced Western world where nations and states have intermingled, the issue of security in the developing countries cannot be intermingled. Security in the developing countries cannot be understood solely in terms of power relations among states and, more specifically, in terms of military defence against external threats. Security for these countries include safeguarding the political and territorial survival of the state, ensuring the physical and collective survival of the population, establishing conditions of social welfare, and, achieving and preserving harmony among diverse ethnic, linguistic, religious and racial groups within the state.

Threats to the security of a state emanate essentially from three different but interrelated areas — domestic political conflict and instability resulting from the lack of consensus and social cohesion over the basic aims and directions of the state; interstate animosity and collision; and direct or indirect Super Power confrontation and intervention. All three levels have their own dynamic, yet there is a connecting link between them, for in many cases, domestic conflict in one state spills into the neighbouring states disturbing the interstate equation.
Regional security is vulnerable to threats, tensions, and conflicts originating from indigenous and exogenous sources. The domestic level has assumed great importance in this region because most of these states are confronted with the problem of integrating diverse groups of citizens under one political authority through the creation of viable and stable state structures, as well as with the task of governance so as to provide social and economic security to the citizens. The domestic challenges often assume a violent form which not only affects political and societal stability but also disrupts the pattern of regional security.

ASEAN countries view security as comprehensive, multidimensional and holistic. Believing that a nation’s security begins from within, Indonesia stressed the primacy of domestic security by solving internal sources of security threats such as Communist insurgency, ethnic tensions, economic malaise, and social divisions within its island country, aimed at achieving national resilience. The same notion is supported by all the ASEAN states, i.e., when all the states in the region achieve national resilience, there would be no security problems for any of these countries. The result would be regional resilience, or regional stability and security.4

This concept in itself implies a multi-dimensional character as well as the inter-relationship between domestic and external stability. Comprehensive security for Malaysia accrues from non-military sources of security threats, from within the state. For Singapore “total defence” is multidimensional, holistic and comprehensive and begins from within. The Philippines and Thailand also harbour similar notions of security.

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4 Amitava Acharya, *Development and Security in Southeast Asia*, Ninth Asia Pacific Round Table, Concurrent Workshop, VI, 5-8 June, 1995, Kuala Lumpur, p. 2
making for an ASEAN-wide acceptance of comprehensive security in Southeast Asia by the Eighties.\(^5\)

In the last couple of decades, Southeast Asia has had to gear itself to face two serious challenges: one, in the ethnic and religious conflicts that often tend to overlap borders of neighbouring countries, and two, in the process of unstable governments. In the past, the region was separated by the impact of confrontation and conflict between the West and the East in the Cold War, especially by the Cambodian problem and the policy of great powers in connection with it. For almost a half century the region was divided into two hostile groups, the ASEAN countries and the Indochinese countries. While the first group entered the stage of constructing and developing their independent states, the second group had to oppose US aggression for national salvation. There was an element of mistrust between them. The ASEAN countries considered Indochinese countries, especially Vietnam, as dangerous factors in the region, and vice-versa, the second group considered the first group as a military bloc of the USA.

The end of the Cold War merely changed the concerns for security in the region. Defence cooperation and security was at that point of time still of relevance and significance to these countries since the end of the Cold War merely meant the disappearance of just one dimension of its security problem. Since the very beginning, the region contained within itself seeds of potential conflicts, both domestic, and regional and inter-state. The continuing conflict situations in Cambodia and Burma and the ethnic insurgencies in some ASEAN countries were examples which survived the Cold War and which were basic domestic conflicts, although the Cambodian conflict from the very beginning involved external powers. Indeed, examples of inter-state conflicts, actual as well as

\(^5\) ibid
potential are many. In fact, the end of the Cold War coincided with an important shift in ASEAN states’ security predicament. In the past the important issues were Communist insurgency, ethnic separatism, political dissidence and civil-military conflicts. But as mentioned earlier, in the post Cold-War era, inter-state and external security issues became important factors. Cooperation in order to maintain collective political defence against common threats, provided the appropriate environment for enhancing the scope and quality of bilateral collaboration among member states. Defence cooperation involved attempts by neighbouring countries to check cross-border insurgencies, sharing of information about subversive elements, denial of sanctuary to insurgents and political opponents of regimes as well as extradition procedures of a mutually helpful nature.

Over the years, bilateral approaches to peace and conflict management have given way to greater regional coordination over security issues. In the Nineties several Southeast Asian NGOs put forward proposals for confidence-building in the region. The Indonesian government sponsored workshops for managing potential conflicts in the region where all contesting participants came together. ASEAN countries regularly hold meetings of senior functionaries of the national intelligence agencies to exchange intelligence assessments on regional security developments and discuss particular security issues. There is also a mechanism for regular dialogue with the navies of the region including those of Japan, US, China, Korea, Australia, Papua New Guinea and New Zealand on matters relating to the Law of the Sea, maritime activities, pollution, environmental concerns, high seas robbery, fisheries infringement, search and rescue, suspicious activity including narcotic activity and humanitarian concerns.
In case of the Malaccan Strait, a joint operational coordination against piracy was established between the Indonesian, Malaysian and Singaporean navies in late 1992. In the Cambodian conflict, ASEAN's political and diplomatic efforts were successful in mobilising the support of the international community. This effort led to a reasonable resolution of the conflict. Based on these experiences, and based on the so-called doctrine of the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN), ASEAN initiated a decisive approach to influence the future developments of Southeast Asia.

The first approach was to increase ASEAN's security cooperation, especially by starting to have a multilateral dimension to the cooperation, beginning with dialogues and efforts to increase CBMs (Confidence Building Measures) and transparencies between themselves through early warning on exercises near borders, publication of White Papers on defence expenditures, invitations to observe exercises and other technical activities. These activities were important because there was a reduction in inter-domestic conflicts of ASEAN countries, but their defence policies were aimed at the defence of territories, including EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone). For that objective, naval and air power had to be increased. The need for transparency and confidence-building measures was uppermost in forging multilateral cooperation among the military.

Some coordination on procurement and their operations, for instance in maritime surveillance capabilities, was needed, since those platforms are still very expensive. Cooperation in dealing with smuggling, illegal entries of immigrants, pollution, fish-poaching and drug trafficking were also important for cooperation in the ASEAN context.

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This regional, multilateral cooperation was not meant to form a military alliance against an external aggression, but aimed at creating a real “community of security interests,” to implement what is known as “a comprehensive security” concept, including in the area of military cooperation.

Not all member states, however, have been involved in bilateral or trilateral security cooperation, particularly Malaysia and the Philippines, mainly because of their continued dispute over Sabah. Yet, despite a similar dispute over Sabah between Malaysia and Indonesia, these ASEAN states have been engaged in bilateral security cooperation, even trilateral arrangements, particularly in the form of joint military exercises.

The limited scope of security cooperation among the ASEAN states even at the bilateral level as officially endorsed for the first time by the Declaration of ASEAN Concord of 1976, was due to a number of reasons. Important among these were the unresolved territorial disputes between some of the ASEAN member states. Also, a multilateral security cooperation has continued to give the image of a military pact with the involvement and support of an external great war. And past experience has shown that the presence or involvement of a great power in such a multilateral security cooperation may precisely invite external interference whenever a domestic or interstate conflict involving one of the parties to the security arrangement, or a neighbouring state, occurs.

Most important is the fact that in a multilateral security cooperation, the member states are usually bound together by a common perception of an external threat as in NATO, SEATO and the Warsaw Pact during the Cold War.

However, a common perception of threat was limited to being that which emanated from Communist China. The constant and different factors such as geographical setup, size of territory and population, and historical backgrounds continued to shape their different and
perhaps unchanging perceptions of threat to their security, especially of an external nature.

Although ASEAN was founded without any explicit security agenda besides the generalization in the Preamble to its Founding Declaration, its intramural role proved it as a vehicle for confidence-building and preventive diplomacy in accordance with international principles of common and cooperative security. Over time, ASEAN assumed a distinctive, although limited security role based on the medium of political dialogue. As ASEAN evolved politically in response to regional changes and challenges, other intra-mural differences served to point out the inter-governmental nature of the association. Internal political disorder would not spill over to affect neighbouring countries nor would it provide external powers with a pretext to enter Southeast Asia. ASEAN members could not openly declare their intention of forming a security organisation, since it would be termed as an anti-Communist organization. Hence neither security, nor defence formed an important agenda for discussion during the first summit. A common approach to all issues reflected a consensus, since a regional association deficient in military capability and unable to engage in collective defence might contribute somewhat to regional security. The ASEAN leaders dealt with security alongside with social, economic and well-being of a nation. Their aim was the peaceful progress, development and betterment of their respective countries.

In 1971 the principle of ZOPFAN (Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality) was mooted. This principle excluded any important role for the major powers in the region, and at the same time avoided rigorous stands like neutralization. This declaration made a reference to the settlement of intra-regional conflicts by peaceful means. The Communist occupation in the Indo-China countries provided additional stimulus to ASEAN to create
a regional order as is evident from the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation concluded in Bali in 1976. The significance of the ASEAN Concord was that a matter of secondary consideration in the original ASEAN Declaration had been elevated in importance and the security goals of the organization conceived as complimentary, were reiterated. It was maintained that the stability of each member state of the ASEAN region was an essential contribution to peace and security. Promotion of regional resilience was the foremost priority of the ASEAN governments in August 1967 also. At Bali the implicit collective internal security role of ASEAN was explicitly stated. "Within the Declaration of ASEAN Concord, one facet of the security role of ASEAN was articulated albeit in ideal and other than conventional terms." There was a brief but specific mention of defence cooperation in the Declaration.

The Declaration endorsed continuation of cooperation on a non-ASEAN basis between the member states in security matters in accordance with their mutual needs and interests. Indonesia's defence ministry had earlier tried to make more explicit provisions for such cooperation, but a consensus did not exist even for bringing existing bilateral defence cooperation under ASEAN auspices.

Efforts to promote regional security cooperation were designed to address issues of common regional concern (such as increasing regional uncertainty, maritime issues, vigorous arms acquisition programmes and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction). It was just as important that these efforts proceeded in the Asian fashion. Western predilections for creating organisations and formal structures, deciding modalities and delineating responsibilities were disdained. "The Asian way stresses

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patience, informality, pragmatism, consensus and evolution." Institutionalised mechanisms and arrangements for dialogue are an essential building block. Rather than the establishment of new organisations, the path of progress has been through the strengthening, expansion and gradual multilateralisation of the bilateral arrangements, and the adaptation and augmentation of existing processes of regional dialogue to include security matters.

President Suharto of Indonesia defined ASEAN's essence in 1976: "The stability of each member state and of the ASEAN region is an essential contribution to international peace and security. Each member resolves to eliminate threats posed by subversion to its stability, thus strengthening national and ASEAN resilience".

ASEAN also evolved a political diplomatic instrument in the ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference (ASEAN PMC) to deal with the Great Powers in a more balanced way.

After the end of the Cold War, ASEAN prompted the creation of a new and wider multilateral structure in the Asia Pacific with a clearly-defined security role. ASEAN's primary responsibility for this new venture and institutional development is reflected in its title — the ASEAN Regional Forum. It was the ASEAN PMC which established the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). The first working session of the ARF convened in July 1994 in Bangkok. ASEAN is responsible for organising and chairing the Forum's annual meetings and co-chairing its inter-sessional activities.

This development is definitely an extension of ASEAN's idea of comprehensive security or national and regional resilience based on ZOPFAN (Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality), which has till date remained inward-oriented and is not adequately equipped

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8 Desmond Ball, "Strategic Culture in the Asia Pacific Region," Security Studies, vol. 3, no. 1, p. 44
9 Etel Solingen, ASEAN Quo Vadis? Domestic Coalitions and Regional Cooperation, Contemporary Southeast Asia, vol. 21, no. 1, April 1999, p-41
to deal with post Cold War developments. This effort is part of “cooperative security” approach, including “preventive diplomacy,” that ASEAN tried in an ad-hoc fashion on dealing with Spratlys and has worked in the case of Cambodia’s conflict.

The forum was established mainly because there was no regional institution to talk about region-wide security issues, such as arms control and non-proliferation of mass-destructive weapons and conventional arms. There is also a lack of a body which can push through transparency, CBMs and preventive diplomacy in general could be undertaken through dialogues, exchanges, inspection or training.

The principle underlying the regional security cooperation of ASEAN remains relevant, that is, the member states bear responsibility for the peace and security of the region of Southeast Asia free from external interference as stated in the Bangkok Declaration.

Indonesia’s defence ministry had earlier tried to make more explicit provisions for such cooperation, but a consensus did not exist even for bringing existing bilateral defence cooperation under ASEAN auspices. Military cooperation it was likely would lead to intra-mural tensions. Hence it was restricted to bilateral border cooperation, control operations begun before the operation of ASEAN, as also, to symbolic naval and air-force exercises. An underlying obstacle to ASEAN moving from collective internal defence to collective defence was the absence of a common strategic perspective among ASEAN states.

Whenever governments cooperate with security in mind, it is not unusual for their collective enterprise to assume some collective form. The same was not true for ASEAN. Defence cooperation, beyond exchanges of intelligence does take place among ASEAN states but primarily on a limited basis, and then only outside of a formal institutional
structure. In early 1992, a summit in ASEAN agreed that ASEAN should establish intra-regional security cooperation within the wider Asia-Pacific region.

However, ASEAN leaders continued to resist the idea of an alliance by reiterating that without a military pact, ASEAN states could continue to operate more flexibly. The leaders were at the same time skeptical of the usefulness of intra-ASEAN security commitments. There were also doubts as to whether an ASEAN alliance would deter any prospective aggressor.

This was indicative of the fact that a full-fledged military pact outlining military arrangements was regarded as unnecessary or unimportant. Hence, the goal of creating "security community" at a sub-regional level assumed priority. A "more defined security community" was considered to be more appropriate for regional security concerns. After the end of the Cold War, ASEAN prompted the creation of a new and wider multilateral security structure in the Asia-Pacific with a clearly-defined security role. ASEAN’s primary responsibility for this new venture and institutional development was reflected in its title — the ASEAN Regional Forum. The first working session of the ARF was convened in July 1994 in Bangkok. ASEAN is responsible for organizing and chairing the Forum’s annual meetings and co-chairing its inter-sessional activities. Moreover, the prime model for the ARF is ASEAN’s own distinctive, political approach to regional security problems. Thus, the ARF may be regarded as ASEAN’s own distinctive political approach to regional security problems. Thus conspicuously absent from the ARF is any robust provision for addressing the use of force in conflict and conflict
resolution. Foreign ministers especially defence ministry officials form the backbone of ARF like ASEAN.

The ASEAN approach adopted by the ARF lays stress on positive focusing, not on controversy, but on areas of common interest, from which multilateral cooperation can be developed and expanded. Divisive issues can be simply passed over for later resolution — or until the time they become irrelevant or innocuous with the passage of time and events.

The main problem at the moment is about the form that future ASEAN security policy should take. It was hoped that the Post Ministerial Conference would provide a platform for a political security dialogue which in turn would enhance regional security. However, till date not much has been achieved in this direction, except the institutionalisation of a security dialogue in the form of a meeting of senior officials prior to the PMC. Many other important developments during the last few years have induced changes in ASEAN’s role as a regional manager.

As recently as 1997, there was talk of ASEAN developing the ARF as the regional mechanism to promote comprehensive security (or cooperative security) not only in Southeast Asia but also in the greater Asia-Pacific region. There was a lot of optimism that “the flexibility and pragmatism that ARF has shown thus far might be the most remarkable principles of ASEAN that will make ARF relevant in the region. The importance of the ‘second track’ process is being recognized by the ARF. And now that China has become a member of CSCAP (Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia

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10 Michael Leifer, "The ASEAN Regional Forum: Extending ASEAN’s Model of Regional Security," Adelphi Papers, No. 302, p.3
Pacific), it is expected that CSCAP can take a lead in undertaking studies, research and develop ideas for the ARF in the future.\textsuperscript{11}

Although the ARF has concentrated its early efforts on CBMs and transparency agreements, including the publication of Defence White Papers, by all members, it has achieved a sort of diplomatic breakthrough on the Spratlys. Facing a united ASEAN, China agreed for the first time to multilateral discussions on the South China Sea disputes. The PRC also agreed that the 1992 Law of the Sea could form the basis of these discussions. The implication of the latter is that it would seem to contradict the National People’s Congress 1992 law which declared the South China Sea to be national waters.\textsuperscript{12}

ASEAN has in the last 2-3 years lurched from crisis to crisis, and according to critics has had only a marginal impact on Southeast Asian affairs. This is mainly as a consequence of increase in the size of the association, economic crisis and Indonesia’s political transition as a result of the resignation of President Suharto in May 1998.

The transition in Indonesia could pose a range of problems for its neighbours. In recent times it has been experiencing tumultuous problems including illegal population flows, violence against ethnic Chinese Indonesians and renewed destabilization of the Indonesian currency. A return of the smog in future will prove to be more costly for Malaysia and Singapore than it was in 1997. Relations between ASEAN members might worsen over the treatment of Indonesia’s ethnic Chinese minority. Worsening economic conditions or communal tensions could further boost an outflow of illegal immigrants to Malaysia, Singapore or other ASEAN states. According to traditional practice, ASEAN countries would respond to such developments bilaterally. However, the situation calls

\textsuperscript{12} Simon W. Sheldon, Security in the Asia-Pacific, Pacific Affairs, vol. 67, no. 3, Fall 1996, p-394
for a regional management role for the association since it affects a number of ASEAN members simultaneously and especially because there has been a decline in intra-ASEAN cooperation over the last couple of years.

Another important development from which it is obvious that ASEAN’s past concerns regarding security and other issues are undergoing transition is the debate on the association’s non-interference principle. After the inclusion of Burma and Cambodia, a number of changes have occurred in the consensus approach which existed before July 1997. ASEAN’s apparent weakness in the face of Cambodia's deteriorating political situation in 1997 opened the debate on non-interference. Thailand’s proposal of “flexible engagement” was supported by the Philippines. ASEAN subsequently agreed in July 1998 that “any political upheaval in an ASEAN member country will have security, political and economic impacts on neighbouring countries.” Flexible engagement was debated and rejected at the AMM in July 1998. The debate concluded with the announcement that henceforth there would be “enhanced interaction,” which meant that ASEAN could have more open exchanges on issues with clearly-defined cross-border effects. This is nothing but an uneasy truce between ASEAN’s conservatives and the forces for change.

Non-interference has also been challenged by forces other than those who demanded change in July 1998. After Mahathir’s dismissal of Anwar and his arrest in late 1998, both Indonesia and the Philippines broached the non-interference principle. They discussed the case of Anwar during a bilateral meeting in October 1998 and also publicised the fact. In February 1999, Goh called on Jakarta to hold elections which

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13 Jeannie Henderson, “ASEAN’s Challenges: Reassessing ASEAN,” Adelphi Papers, no. 328, 1999, pp.52-54
would be accepted as fair and legitimate by the Indonesians. More recently, Abdur Wahid took up the issue of Aceh in the November 1999 meeting of ASEAN.

These developments prove beyond doubt that the concerns for security have changed drastically over the years. As states evolve politically in the face of emerging challenges, security dimensions are fast changing. In fact, there are also suggestions for ASEAN member states to be prepared “to establish regional arrangements that would be necessary to give credibility, consistency and viability to an ASEAN common foreign and security policy.”

Whereas during the time of its inception the association’s purpose was exclusively political; security relations and all sorts of cooperation was a means to its political and security ends, today, it is trying to assume a problem-solving role in spite of existing suspicions and political diversity as well as a wide variety of expectations.

The debate on non-interference earmarks the tension between those states who are desirous of preserving ASEAN’s self-imposed limitations, and the more expansive claims which the association has made for itself.

A particular structural problem has arisen within ASEAN which has to be dealt with if the organization is to function effectively in future. While the organization was originally intended to handle only diplomatic issues, the inclusion of economics as one of the functions has created problems. There is lack of coordination between the foreign ministers and the economic ministers who meet in different fora. Economic ministers resented the fact that they were not consulted about the 4th ASEAN-EU meeting in September 1994 though economic issues formed a part of the agenda. Foreign ministers

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14 M.C. Abad. (Jr), "Towards an ASEAN Common Foreign and Security Policy," The Indonesian Quarterly, vol. XXVII, no.1, 1999, p. 8
deal with economic issues in the AMMs and in discussions with dialogue partners in the PMC, on the basis of proposals outlined by the economic ministers. Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir at one stage did propose that the status of the economic ministers be upgraded so that they, rather than the foreign ministers, deal with economic issues and meet with dialogue partners. This proposal is yet to be fully implemented and the problem of structural duplication remains. ASEAN may cope more effectively with economic issues if the economic ministers were given a prominent role within the organizational structure.\textsuperscript{15}

It is being largely debated that the Asian economic crisis and the attendant political effects have undermined ASEAN’s ability to provide leadership for regional security issues. “ASEAN members not only have to focus on their domestic economic and political problems, but the organization as a whole must also cope with the burdens imposed by an expanded membership. Economic disparities between the old and new members, the international condemnation of its decision to grant membership to Burma in July 1997, the attendant pressure to show results of its ‘constructive engagement’ approach to Myanmar and the political instability in Cambodia, are all issues that seriously test ASEAN’s capacity to manage regional order in Southeast Asia.”\textsuperscript{16}

At the same time, due to financial crises and sharp economic downturns, there is a lot of pessimism and uncertainty in the region. “Financial and economic crises in 1997-98 have brought about uncertainty in a number of ways; uncertainty regarding individual regional states’ national resilience, uncertainty regarding regional states’ relationships with external powers, particularly the US, China and Japan; and certainly regarding the


\textsuperscript{16} Amitava Acharya, A Concert of Asia, Survival, Autumn, 1999, vol. 41, no. 3, p. 88
ASEAN countries' collective capacity to deal with regional issues of common concern and to maintain unity amidst diversity.\(^{17}\)

It is being increasingly being advocated by many that ASEAN's security is a function of the stability of the wider Asia-Pacific region. This has resulted in a number of dilemmas. During the days of the Cold War ASEAN's security concerns rallied around Indochina and the role of external actors in creating internal instability. Those concerns go well beyond Southeast Asia today and relate to China's regional role, the South China Sea and the Korean Peninsula, yet doubts are expressed in many quarters whether the organization on its own is capable of handling these problems. An overarching Asia-Pacific security regionalism which is being repeatedly proposed would seem an obvious answer to the security needs of the individual members of ASEAN, but this might in the long run affect the individuality of ASEAN and undermine the very functions for which it was founded. ASEAN leaders are well aware of the fact that their security to a considerable extent would depend on an Asia-Pacific security dialogue involving all the major actors, but they are apprehensive about the consequences. Thus attempts have been made to ensure that the development of Asia-Pacific security regionalism would be based upon existing regional structures, which are to be expanded and strengthened accordingly.

In spite of these attempts, considerable tension exists between current security requirements, which dictate a commitment to an Asia-Pacific dialogue, and ASEAN's organizational interests which demands that adjustments be made to the role of ASEAN.

ASEAN leaders have been very conscious of the danger that an Asia-Pacific security
dialogue would lead to the displacement of the organization. At the 26th AMM Goh Chok
Tong stressed that ASEAN must not allow its future to be decided by external powers
and emphasized the need to maintain organizational cohesion.\textsuperscript{18}

At the Fifth ASEAN summit, held in Bangkok in December 1995, Mahathir declared that
ASEAN should insist on an appropriate share in the management of regional affairs, and
that it should guard against becoming "a pawn" in global politics.\textsuperscript{19} This is what
prompted ASEAN leaders to shape regional security dialogue in a way that would retain
the regional organization as its central feature.

ASEAN countries prefer bilateral negotiations in order to retain maximum national
control over the issue in question. Good offices and conciliation have been used on a
number of occasions but primarily for diffusion of tension and not for conflict resolution.
ASEAN states have been reluctant to opt for third party mediation in the resolution of
disputes. Therefore the pacific settlement provisions have not been put into operation.
ASEAN has stressed more on avoidance of conflicts rather than their resolution.

Cooperation through ASEAN enhanced the security and stability of states in the region.
Many of the member states which were conflict and tension-ridden in the mid-sixties and
mid-seventies improved their bilateral relations, mainly due to the efforts of ASEAN.

ASEAN also helped to boost the domestic legitimacy of incumbent regimes. No doubt,
ASEAN created goodwill, trust, and confidence among its member states, thus
facilitating the transformation of a sub-region of turmoil into a more stable and peaceful
one, in which the use of force was minimized. The stable environment has boosted the

\textsuperscript{18} Henderson, n.13, p.571

\textsuperscript{19} ibid
mobilization of domestic and international resources in the pursuit of economic growth and development. At the same time it should be borne in mind that the compulsions of remaining within a framework act as a subduing effect and prevent differences and conflicts from flaring up into open hostilities. Periodic interaction between officials as well as non-officials provides scope for discussion for sorting out differences even before actual measures are defined or undertaken.

ASEAN is faced with a number of challenges in the near future. The expansion of the organization will definitely cause a diversion from past practices so that members might not support each other in all circumstances. Since most ASEAN members have economic relationships with China, they would not like to get involved in case of a conflict between Vietnam and China. The same situation might arise in case of Myanmar where ASEAN has provided the regime with international legitimacy. In order to gain a higher diplomatic profile internationally, ASEAN will have to modify its approach towards Myanmar. All these will definitely lead to a change in the structure of the organisation.

Additionally, ASEAN as an economic body has attracted greater interest than ASEAN as a security organization. This has resulted in a kind of tension. Increased emphasis on its economic role may change the very exclusive characteristic of the association as a Southeast Asian body. This will give rise to problems of identity. It remains to be seen whether the existing multilevel structure which places ASEAN at the centre of the ARF can meet the pressing needs of the region in the near future.

It also remains to be seen whether ASEAN is able to provide a platform to the new regionalism that is emerging and whether it is able to shape new expectations and developments as a result of the economic, diplomatic and security linkages the organization has established with various actors in the region. The very pace of the
economic and social changes occurring in the region is a potential source of instability and conflict, generating new challenges for the region's weak states. There is reason to believe that the approach adopted by the ARF will help develop a more cooperative security culture in the region, building on the norms established within ASEAN during the Seventies and Eighties, but adapting them to the needs of the 21st century.