

East Asian perceptions of the UN and its role in peace and security

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■ Executive summary

With East Asia's ascendancy in world politics, a key question arising for the future role of the United Nations (UN) in international peace and security is how the region relates to and engages with the organisation, whose relevance and legitimacy depend on the buy-in and support of key member states. In this context this report explores what factors shape East Asian countries' views of the UN, and what drives their actual and potential investments in and contributions to the UN's peace and security mechanisms. The report concludes that East Asian relations with the UN regarding peace and security matters are on a positive trajectory. Indeed, the region's continued emphasis on the principle of non-interference in countries' internal affairs masks an important recent evolution in East Asian views of sovereignty, multilateralism and the UN in particular. This is reflected, among other things, in the fact that over the past decade East Asian countries have been showing (1) an increasing appreciation of the UN as a forum through which they can pursue their interests; (2) a growing readiness to contribute to UN peacekeeping; (3) a progressive institutionalisation of UN-ASEAN secretariat-to-secretariat cooperation; (4) deepening cooperation in disaster response; and (5) a declining resistance to engaging in discussions at the UN relating to human rights and the Responsibility to Protect.

Introduction

Over recent decades much of East Asia, understood in this report to comprise Northeast and Southeast Asia, has undergone a massive transformation from a region stricken by poverty and underdevelopment to being a key driver of global economic growth. Notwithstanding the significant discrepancies in the development and political trajectory of East Asian countries, the notion of the 21st century becoming an "Asian Century" marked by the wider region's progressive rise in world politics, economics, culture and demographics is one that enjoys wide currency. At least until recently, this rise has arguably not been matched by a concomitant political engagement in international institutions and on matters of global security, particularly at the United Nations (UN). This should be a cause of concern for the UN, because its role, relevance and legitimacy in international security depend on the buy-in of key member states into its collective security arrangements.

In this context, this report explores the factors that shape East Asian countries' views of the UN and what drives their actual and potential investments in and contributions to the UN's peace and security mechanisms. An underlying objective of the report is to provide contextual analysis

informing UN efforts to engage the region on how to strengthen the organisation's conflict management role. Such an inquiry is especially timely in light of the upcoming transition in UN leadership and a larger reform effort in the wake of major reviews of the organisation's peace operations and peacebuilding architecture. The report concludes that, encouragingly, East Asian relations with the UN in peace and security matters are on a positive trajectory, with growing engagement and investment by key countries in the UN conflict management architecture.

The report begins with a brief overview of how the region's history and geopolitics shape its views of the UN. It then divides its analysis into two parts, the first of which focuses on Northeast Asia and the second on Southeast Asia. The former part separately assesses UN relations with China, Japan and the Republic of Korea (commonly known as South Korea), as these are the three countries in the subregion that are most engaged in UN peace and security discussions. The section on Southeast Asia will be organised thematically rather than by country, accounting for the comparatively high degree of subregional integration in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) framework.

Research for this report was undertaken through a review of policy and academic literature, relevant UN documents and media reports, and interviews with two dozen academics and government officials from the region.

The backdrop: historical and geopolitical factors shaping East Asian views of the UN

Both East Asian history and geopolitics shape how individual countries in the region perceive the UN and its value as a collective security mechanism. These structural factors had long constrained the UN's political role in the region and relegated the organisation to a player of marginal importance in the peace and security considerations of many East Asian countries. Henry Kissinger (2015: 210) has observed that the history and diversity of East Asia has led the region to "deal with security and economic issues on a case-by-case basis, not as an expression of formal rules of regional order". However, mitigating these historical and geopolitical constraints, recent developments and trends seem to have caused many East Asian countries to reassess the UN's value.

With most East Asian countries having faced over a century of colonialism and foreign interference in domestic affairs, the region as a whole tends to be marked by a strong attachment to the principles of national sovereignty and non-interference in other countries' internal affairs. As a result, the UN's political engagement in East Asia has been relatively limited. International legal scholar Simon Chesterman (2015: 18) has argued that due to their historical experiences,

Asian states have consistently been the slowest to form regional institutions, the most reticent about acceding to major international treaties, the least likely to have a voice in proportion to their relative size and power, and the wariest about availing themselves of international dispute settlement procedures.

Meanwhile, the geopolitics of East Asia over the past few decades and the persistence of great-power rivalries in the region (which are nurtured by unresolved historical and territorial grievances) have reinforced a reliance on bilateral security arrangements rather than multilateral institutions as a provider of regional order. Indeed, the Asian security architecture has long been underpinned by a network of bilateral alliances between individual countries in the region and the U.S., which has become an "Asian power" and has been a regional balancer of power since the early years of the Cold War.¹

Overall, this had the effect of marginalising the UN as a security actor in the region, because political space for the organisation tends to grow when great powers agree on common approaches and shrink when they disagree. The

rise of China has further accentuated these dynamics in Asia, leading Beijing's northeastern rivals (Japan and South Korea) to strengthen their military ties with the U.S. China has also used its growing leverage in the region to prevent the emergence of common ASEAN positions, in particular with respect to maritime disputes over the South China Sea.

However, as this report will show, a focus on the region's attachment to the principle of non-interference in countries' internal affairs and its wariness of international institutions masks an important recent evolution in East Asian views of sovereignty, multilateralism and the UN in particular. At the regional level this has manifested itself in progressive regional integration (including on political and security matters) through institutions such as ASEAN or the ASEAN Regional Forum. At the global level this is reflected, among other things, in the fact that key East Asian countries have been showing (1) an increasing appreciation of the UN as a forum through which they can pursue their interests; (2) a growing readiness to contribute to UN peacekeeping; (3) a progressive institutionalisation of UN-ASEAN secretariat-to-secretariat cooperation; (4) deepening cooperation in disaster response; and (5) a declining resistance to engaging in discussions at the UN relating to human rights and the Responsibility to Protect.

Northeast Asia China

When the People's Republic of China (PRC) replaced the Republic of China (commonly known as Taiwan) as a UN member state in 1971, the Communist Party government shifted from being a UN outsider to being suddenly thrust into the privileged club of the five countries (P5) holding a permanent seat and veto power in the Security Council. Still mired in widespread poverty at the time, China has since grown into the world's second-largest economy, with rapidly growing political and military power, making it the dominant geopolitical player in its region.

Having been subjected to a "century of humiliation" under unequal treaties imposed by European powers and subsequently excluded from the UN in favour of Taiwan for nearly a quarter of a century, the PRC originally viewed the organisation with deep scepticism (Chesterman, 2015). Initial Chinese distrust manifested itself largely through an unwillingness to be an active participant in UN activities, for instance by refusing to vote on peacekeeping operations (PKOs) (Zhu & Len, 2015: 91).

However, over time, and in particular since the end of the Cold War, Beijing has significantly warmed to the UN. It has grown increasingly attached to its veto-power-related ability to shape Security Council outcomes and defend its interests, while also coming to appreciate the fact that its

¹ Major U.S. allies in East Asia include Australia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, South Korea and Thailand. Although Singapore is not a formal ally, it works closely with the U.S. under the countries' Strategic Framework Agreement.

strongly held principle of defence of state sovereignty is reflected in the UN Charter and shared by a voting majority in the General Assembly. As one leading U.S. scholar on China recently noted, “the Chinese government and scholars have become some of the world’s strongest advocates of the United Nations” (Shambaugh, 2013: 24-25). Interestingly, however, this feeling does not seem to be shared by the general Chinese public, among whom the UN scores the lowest approval rating in all of East Asia (Pew Research Center, 2013).

Despite its attachment to the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention in countries’ internal affairs, China has not prevented the emergence of an increasingly activist Security Council following the end of the Cold War. Starting with the 1991 Gulf War, Beijing has repeatedly allowed the authorisation of the use of force, most recently in Libya in 2011, where it initially shared the West’s humanitarian concerns, notwithstanding subsequent controversies around NATO’s implementation of the Security Council mandate. Since 1990 Beijing has also consented to the adoption of 25 sanctions regimes over as many years, as well as the deployment of PKOs in over 30 different countries and territories around the world.

For the first decade-and-a-half after the end of the Cold War China used the veto sparingly and primarily as a means to enforce its “One China” policy in relation to Taiwan (Zhu & Len, 2015: 90-91). More recently, in keeping with its political and economic rise, Beijing has become more assertive in the Security Council and more ready to defend its interests – in particular those related to energy security. Demonstrated by a rise in joint vetoes with Russia over the past decade (one on Myanmar, one on Zimbabwe and four on Syria), China has also fostered a closer relationship with Moscow at the UN in the pursuit of common goals. These include efforts to soft-balance² through the Security Council what both countries see as unfettered U.S. power and to push back against what they perceive as a U.S.-led assault on global order manifested in the repeated illegal use of force to pursue a regime change agenda under the cover of humanitarian or non-proliferation norms (as in Libya, Iraq and Kosovo) (Von Einsiedel et al., 2015: 840-43).

Nevertheless, China displays a continued desire to maintain the Security Council as a functioning organ to address challenges on which its interests converge with those of the other P5 members, including on nuclear non-proliferation, counter-terrorism and conflict management in Africa.

On nuclear non-proliferation, China shares with its fellow P5 members a desire to prevent any expansion of the small club of nuclear-armed states and achieve a diplomatic solution to the North Korean and Iranian nuclear crises. In

2006 China supported the imposition of Security Council sanctions against both North Korea and Iran, the former of which had carried out its first nuclear test that year, and the latter of which was suspected of harbouring nuclear weapon ambitions after having failed to disclose the extent of its nuclear programme. While significant steps have since been undertaken to resolve the Iran file (not least thanks to Beijing’s consent to strengthen the sanctions regime in 2009), the North Korean nuclear issue has further escalated, reflected most recently by yet another nuclear test conducted by Pyongyang in January 2016, which was followed by another round of Security Council sanctions.

However, unlike in the case of Iran, where nuclear negotiations explicitly took place in a format (P5+1) linked to the Security Council, the North Korean case is dealt with through a format (the Six Party Talks, including North Korea, South Korea, China, Japan, Russia and the U.S.) that China can more easily control and that keeps the Security Council at a certain distance. By supporting a degree of UN coercion while simultaneously continuing to trade with and offer aid to North Korea, and not fully enforcing sanctions (whether through acts of omission or commission), China is pursuing a balancing act aimed at mitigating Pyongyang’s often-unpredictably aggressive behaviour while refraining from taking steps that may endanger the stability of the Kim regime (Albert & Beina, 2016; Lewis et al., 2014).

On terrorism, throughout the 1990s China displayed a degree of scepticism vis-à-vis efforts to muster robust Security Council action in response to acts of state-sponsored terrorism. However, having long faced (and characterised as “terrorist”) separatist ethnic violence in its Muslim-majority Xinjiang province, and becoming increasingly concerned about the spread of radical Islamist groups and ideologies in the wider region (Gill & Murphy, 2005), China was far more inclined to support sanctions against the Taliban in 1999, whose ascent to power in neighbouring Afghanistan had been viewed by Beijing with great concern. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks China agreed to a series of remarkably robust counter-terrorism resolutions.³ Over the following 15 years China has shown continued support – albeit through little initiative of its own – for further strengthening the Security Council’s counter-terrorism measures set up in 2001 and 2002.

The constructive Chinese approach toward the UN is most evident in its attitude towards UN peacekeeping. Beijing has progressively increased its participation in Security Council-mandated PKOs, including robust operations with protection of civilians mandates under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. As of January 2016 China was the ninth-largest troop contributor in the world to UN PKOs, the

² The term refers to non-military forms of power balancing.

³ In particular: (1) the issuance of a *carte blanche* for U.S. military action in Afghanistan through Resolution 1368 (2001); (2) the imposition of far-reaching counter-terrorism obligations binding on all UN member states through Resolution 1373 (2001); and (3) the strengthening of the existing Resolution 1267 regime through Resolution 1390 (2002), which made indefinite the financial sanctions, travel ban, and arms embargo, while also extending their reach beyond Afghanistan, targeting Taliban and al-Qa’ida associates anywhere in the world.

largest contributor from East Asia and by far the largest contributor among the P5. These contributions also make China a primary driver of East Asia's region-wide growth in participation in PKOs over the past decade (see Figures 1, 2 and 3).

In September 2015 Chinese president Xi Jinping pledged a variety of resources for peacekeeping, including a standby force of 8,000 peacekeepers and a \$100 million contribution to African Union (AU) PKOs, as well as \$1 billion for a ten-year China-UN peace and development fund to support the UN's work in both of these fields, although further specifics of the fund are yet to be announced (UN News Centre, 2015). One Chinese scholar has characterised this growing engagement as “a turning point of a transforming UN diplomacy – paying more attention to agenda setting, leading role, and value shaping”.⁴ While the defence of its rapidly growing economic and energy interests on the African continent is certainly a driver, the main factor explaining the growing Chinese role in peacekeeping has been an effort to burnish its soft-power credentials and “to raise its profile in the international community as a constructive and responsible power” (Saferworld, 2011: 76).

China has also long backed UN peacebuilding efforts. It has signalled its support for the UN Peacebuilding Architecture by participating in the Organisational Committee of the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) and by contributing financially to the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), albeit at a modest level of \$8 million since 2006. In contrast to its stated scepticism towards externally driven democracy promotion efforts in the domestic context, China has largely supported the Security Council-mandated democracy promotion activities in other countries, not least because it is cognisant of the fact that the establishment of legitimate governments through national elections remains the most promising exit strategy for UN PKOs from troubled countries (Croissant, 2008: 665). In light of the Non-Aligned Movement's long-standing scepticism of efforts to strengthen the political capacities of the UN Secretariat, it is noteworthy that China has repeatedly called for greater emphasis on mediation through the use of the Secretary-General's good offices function (UNSC, 2015a).

This growing Chinese acceptance of and engagement with the UN on peacekeeping and peacebuilding is matched by the development of a sizeable academic community interested in conflict-related UN activities. However, the relative lack of readily available English-language research outputs and resources remains an impediment to this community's participation in international policy dialogue.

Regarding UN reform, China has rhetorically supported the expansion of non-permanent Security Council seats, but has been actively unenthusiastic about measures that would expand permanent membership of the Security

Council, not least in light of Japan's candidacy (Mahbubani, 2015: 163). Leveraging its growing influence among African member states, China has also actively lobbied against any efforts to reform the Security Council's working methods, especially with respect to proposals to discourage use of the veto in situations where mass atrocities are committed (Wenaweser, 2015: 182).

Overall, China's confidence in its engagement with the UN has grown in tandem with its political and economic standing, making Beijing more willing to exercise its veto power, as evidenced by the fact that six of its total of ten vetoes have been cast over the past eight years. As China's economic primacy continues to grow together with its network of overseas relationships, it would not be surprising to see the country continue to become more outspoken on matters where it clashes with the West, but also more energetic in supporting UN activities that defend or advance its interests.

Japan

Since the adoption of its constitution following the devastating end to the Second World War, Japan has been precluded constitutionally from possessing a military for anything other than defensive purposes. Forsaking its own coercive military capacity has had the two-fold effect of forcing Japan to rely on its alliance with Washington and the U.S. nuclear umbrella for its security, and placing a central emphasis on diplomacy as the key tool to pursue its favoured policies in the international arena. As such, engagement at the UN has been a key element of Japan's foreign policy ever since it became a member state in 1956. Indeed, Japan's first diplomatic bluebook published in 1957 lists “UN-centred diplomacy” as the first of its three pillars of foreign policy, together with cooperation with the free world and active participation in the Asian community (Japanese MFA, 1957).

Japan's emphasis on the UN is underscored by its claim for a permanent seat on the Security Council and the fact that it is the member state that has served most often as a non-permanent Security Council member, with a total of 11 terms, including the one in 2016-17. During its 2015 campaign for a seat on the Security Council, Japan emphasised issues such as disarmament and arms control (of serious concern to Tokyo in light of the North Korean nuclear crisis); human security (which, as described below, Japan has long promoted); the Women, Peace and Security agenda (in line with Prime Minister Abe's broader focus on the empowerment of women); and the reform of the Security Council's working methods (which Tokyo did much to advance during its Security Council stint in 2009-10) (UNSC, 2015b: 4).

However, Japan's peace and security engagement at the UN faces important constraints as a result of constitutional and other legal restrictions. The country's UN Peacekeep-

⁴ Author interview with Chinese academic, January 2016.

ing Law of 1992 states that the Self-Defence Forces (SDF) may only participate in UN PKOs when a ceasefire is in place, host country consent has been obtained, operations are impartial and the use of force is limited to self-defence (Japan, 1992). Although Japan has deployed over 10,000 personnel to peacekeeping missions since the passage of the law (Japanese MFA, 2015), these principles have combined with constitutional restrictions to keep Japanese forces from operating on the front lines of missions and to limit them to non-combat activities such as engineering and logistics. At present, Japan only contributes a 272-strong engineering unit to the UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan.

With UN PKOs now increasingly deploying in hostile theatres and routinely equipped with robust mandates for the protection of civilians (which Tokyo tends to support), Japan's peacekeeping principles have become increasingly anachronistic. This tension has contributed – in combination with perceptions of a growing Chinese threat and efforts to enhance its value as a U.S. ally – to the Abe government's decision to push for a constitutional reinterpretation, rather than an amendment, that would broaden Japan's scope to engage in collective self-defence activities, including peacekeeping (Japan, 2013). Indeed, new security laws adopted in the autumn of 2015 loosen the restrictions of the country's peacekeeping principles and allow Japanese troops to be more active in defending a UN mission's mandate. In particular, these laws would allow peacekeeping troops the expanded use of their weaponry, shifting from a paradigm of only using their weapons for self-defence purposes towards the "use of weapons for the purpose of execution of missions", for instance by coming to the defence of civilians or other peacekeepers that have come under attack (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 2014).⁵

While these measures are unlikely to lead to a substantial expansion of Japan's role in UN PKOs, they helpfully reinforce what appears to be renewed interest by Tokyo in peacekeeping. Participation in peacekeeping is valued because it is seen to enhance the country's standing, bolster its case for a permanent seat on the Security Council and provide useful experience for SDF personnel (Ishizuka, 2013). In September 2015 Prime Minister Abe acted as a co-host, together with President Obama, of the Leaders' Summit on Peacekeeping in New York, committing Japan, among other things, to supply strategic airlift capacity for PKOs. However, Japan will remain extremely reluctant to place its troops in harm's way, in light of the Japanese public's aversion to Japanese casualties abroad. The intense criticism of the Diet and the media scrutiny surrounding the death of a Japanese police officer during the UN mission in Cambodia in the 1990s continue to reverberate, explaining why Japan remains reluctant to contrib-

ute police to UN missions to this day (Woolley, 2005: 144; Ishizuka, 2013).

Japan's pacifist ethos also partly explains why Tokyo has become fixated on the concept of "human security", which, starting in the late 1990s, it has used to try to shift security-related discourse away from the military aspects of state security towards a more development-oriented approach. Originally proposed by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) in the 1994 Human Development Report, Japan adopted the concept in the late 1990s, subsequently enshrining it in its Official Development Assistance Charter (Japan, 2003), and institutionalising it at the UN through the UN Trust Fund for Human Security, which continues to rely heavily on funding from Tokyo (Edström, 2011). However, the concept remains ill-defined and has failed to either reshape debate at the UN – which since the 1999 Kosovo intervention has revolved more around the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) – or to meaningfully influence the UN operationally.

Perhaps sensing that its efforts to promote human security have borne little fruit, Japan has recently shown that it is warming up to the R2P concept. In 2015 Tokyo for the first time appointed a national focal point for R2P and joined the Group of Friends on R2P, stating that the country's previous concern about the potential conceptual conflation of R2P and human security had been obviated by a General Assembly resolution that clarified the distinction between the two (Japanese Mission to the UN, 2015).

Geographically, Tokyo has in recent years increasingly focused on Africa – the UN's primary theatre of PKOs – partly in an effort to counter growing Chinese investment and influence on the continent. Not only are Japan's only active peacekeepers stationed in South Sudan, but Abe has also committed over \$30 billion in aid and investment to the continent aimed at initiatives in fields ranging from infrastructure development to peace and security (Reuters, 2013). Abe has also increased the frequency of the meetings of the Tokyo International Conference on African Development with African leaders, the next iteration of which, scheduled for August 2016, is set to take place for the first time in Africa and focus on health and stemming the growth of violent extremism (Kyodo, 2015). This ongoing competition for influence on the continent may act as a driver of increased Japanese engagement with UN PKOs.

Japan has also been an active proponent of UN peacebuilding efforts, which align well with the country's focus on non-military post-conflict activities. Conceptually, and reflecting its own post-war experience, Japan tends to focus in particular on economic development, democratic governance, and cultural aspects, sometimes to the neglect of some of the other political dimensions of

5 Author interview with Japanese academic, January 2016. For detailed information on the security legislation and to view the text of the new laws in Japanese (not available in English), see <http://www.cas.go.jp/jp/gaiyou/jimu/housei_seibi.html>. An English summary can be found at <http://www.cas.go.jp/jp/gaiyou/jimu/pdf/anpohosei_eng.pdf> and <http://japan.kantei.go.jp/97_abe/Documents/2015/_icsFiles/afieldfile/2015/11/05/peace_security_20151102_1.pdf>.

peacebuilding. Japan has been a member of the PBC Organisational Committee since its founding in 2005 and has invested considerably in the PBF – \$42 million since 2006, making it the fifth-largest contributor overall. Interestingly, although Japan continues to harbour some lingering resentment over the “victor’s justice” carried out by the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal following the Second World War (Chesterman, 2015: 3), in recent decades Tokyo has been a supporter of the use of international tribunals as a means to pursue transitional justice. For example, as of November 2015 Japan had contributed over \$83 million to the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, making it the largest donor, while it has also expressed support for similar tribunals in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, as well as the International Criminal Court (ECCC, 2015; Japanese Mission to the UN, 2005).

Given that it shoulders roughly 10% of the UN’s budget, financial considerations play a significant role in Japan’s views of UN peace and security activities. Although the country’s economy has been largely stagnant since the 1990s and the national debt is now more than double Japan’s GDP, Tokyo has remained the second-largest contributor to both the UN’s regular and peacekeeping budgets (behind the U.S.). Consequently, issues related to UN financing are an ongoing priority and Japan places great emphasis on “financial sustainability” and “efficiency” (Japanese Mission to the UN, 2014a; UNSC, 2014a). These considerations have, for instance, led Japan to encourage the timely shutdown of international tribunals; slow down its funding for the PBF;⁶ push back against efforts to increase the reimbursement rate for troop contributions; and promote more timely drawdowns (“right-sizing”) and closures of UN missions (Japanese Mission to the UN, 2005; 2014b). As such, it is evident that although Japan has long been a strong supporter of conflict-related UN activities, Tokyo is not prepared to write a blank cheque and offer indefinite support.

Finally, it is worthwhile mentioning that Japan hosts – by East Asian standards – a relatively large academic and think-tank community working on UN-relevant issues. Significantly, this community includes a significant number of scholars and policy experts with senior-level experience in and around the UN (including two former heads of UN field missions).

South Korea

Despite only being a UN member state since 1991,⁷ South Korea’s relationship with the UN is distinctly rooted in the nation’s history, as a result of the Security Council authorising the use of force in 1950 to repel the North Korean invasion of South Korea. Aided in part by significant international donor assistance for reconstruction and

economic development, South Korea has since embarked on a remarkable economic and political transformation. The experience of owing its sovereignty to a UN-authorized military coalition and its economic rise – at least partly – to international aid, combined with the more recent pride felt at seeing a South Korean national being elected to the post of UN Secretary-General, have contributed to an overwhelmingly positive perception of the UN among both the South Korean general public and political and academic elites (Pew Research Center, 2013). South Korean leaders have even referred to the country as a “child of the UN” (Fifield, 2006; Lewis & Sesay, 2013: 8). Less attached, as a consequence, to notions of national sovereignty than most of its East Asian peers, South Korea is strongly supportive of the UN’s taking an active role in preventing and managing conflicts around the world.

However, the country remains a relative newcomer to the UN system. Consequently, in spite of South Korea having a strong desire to contribute to the UN at a level commensurate with the country’s status as an emerging power and a responsible stakeholder in the international system, it remains in an extended exploratory phase during which it is still trying to determine how best it can have a positive impact on UN activities. One South Korean government official described the country’s two terms in the Security Council (1996-97 and 2013-14) as “learning experiences” during which it was able to engage on a wider range of international issues than it had been accustomed to before.⁸ Thematically, South Korea used its most recent term to emphasise the role played by regional organisations in managing conflicts relevant to the Security Council, the need for stronger policies aimed at the protection of civilians in armed conflict and in particular the need for gender-relevant policies in this regard (UNSC, 2013a; 2013b).

Another factor that limits South Korea’s engagement with the UN on matters of peace and security has been the ongoing tension with North Korea, with which it technically remains in a state of war. The security policy discourse of both the country’s foreign policy community and the general public has therefore naturally focused primarily on North Korea rather than on the UN’s involvement in other issues. Similarly, security-relevant research in the South Korean academic and think-tank community tends to focus on the North Korean threat, both in and out of the UN setting, while UN-relevant research outputs tend to focus more on UN development activities. As such, the research community that focuses on civil-war-related UN policies is relatively small. For all of these reasons, the South Korean public tends to have a low level of awareness of peace and security debates taking place at UN headquarters.⁹

⁶ Japan contributed \$20 million to the PBF in 2006, while it made donations of \$12.5 million in 2011 and \$10 million in 2014. Further information is available at <<http://mptf.undp.org/factsheet/fund/pb000>>.

⁷ Both North and South Korea were admitted to the UN in 1991 due to the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War.

⁸ Author interview with South Korean government official, December 2015.

⁹ Author interview with South Korean academic, December 2015.

These limitations notwithstanding, ever since its accession to the UN, South Korea has demonstrated interest in participating in UN PKOs. This has been driven by a desire to repay the country's debt to the international community (Ko, 2015; Roehrig, 2013; Hwang, 2012), a growing sense of responsibility to make positive contributions at a level matching the country's rising status, and the practical consideration that participation in UN PKOs can provide valuable field training to South Korean military personnel.¹⁰ These positive drivers are partly counteracted by the ever-present possibility of renewed hostilities with North Korea and a resulting hesitancy in Seoul to deploy its troops to far-away peacekeeping missions, because they may be needed at short notice on the country's northern border. Also, as with Japan, South Korean public opinion remains highly averse to the idea of military casualties overseas (Lee & Park, 2014), which has somewhat hampered the country's ability to participate in peacekeeping missions in areas with little peace to keep. One government official noted that even a single South Korean casualty in a UN mission would likely spark public outrage and potentially cause a South Korean withdrawal from the mission in question.¹¹

South Korea's views on Security Council reform are significantly shaped by its fraught relations with Tokyo, against which the South Korean public and elites continue to harbour strong suspicions arising from Japan's colonial legacy on the Korean Peninsula. As a middle power without a credible claim to a permanent seat on the Security Council, South Korea therefore opposes reform proposals that foresee expansion in the permanent category, which would likely lead to an upgrade of Japan and thus, in Seoul's eyes, a relative downgrade of its own status. Instead, it supports the Uniting for Consensus initiative proposing expansion of the non-permanent category with longer-term, re-electable seats. Similarly, South Korea has also supported initiatives like the French and Mexican proposal to restrict the P5's use of the veto in cases of mass atrocities, as well as the Security Council code of conduct proposed by the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency (ACT) group that proposes a range of measures aimed at making the Security Council more transparent and facilitating greater involvement in its decision-making by non-council members, including with respect to the process of selecting the Secretary-General.¹² Interestingly, South Korea is the only East Asian country that is part of the ACT initiative.

Southeast Asia

Factors shaping regional attitudes to the UN

Unlike Northeast Asia, which comprises two major political and economic powers (China and Japan), one high-income middle power (South Korea), and one pariah state (North Korea), the 11 Southeast Asian countries are predominantly low- and middle-income countries. However, their combined status as the world's seventh largest economy (World Bank, 2016) and eighth largest consumer market (UN Stats, 2015), along with their growing political weight and progressive integration within the ASEAN framework, make them an important member state constituency at the UN.

Southeast Asian relationships with, engagement in and perceptions of the UN are a function of a number of factors. These include the region-wide affinity for sovereignty and opposition to international institutions, Asian geopolitics, the record of the UN's activities in the region, the foreign policy outlook of individual governments, and their calculations of the degree to which the UN is a helpful forum within which to pursue their interests on any given issue.

As mentioned earlier, as a result of the experience of colonialism, the doctrine of non-intervention in countries' internal affairs remains paramount for many countries in the region. The solidification of non-interference as a central precept in the ASEAN Declaration of 1967 and the adoption of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in 1976 are associated in regional capitals with spreading peace and stability in the region.¹³ This largely explains their strong resistance to UN involvement in conflicts in their neighbourhood, as well as a general wariness of UN interventionism globally. Compared to other regions in the world, ASEAN countries have also been less predisposed towards multilateralism and international institutions, and less represented and invested in institutions of global governance (Chesterman, 2015: 19-26). Indeed, at the UN, despite accounting for 9% of the global population and 3.2% of global GDP, these countries pay less than 1.5% of the regular UN budget and 0.6% of the organisation's peacekeeping budget; collectively account for 3.5% of representation on the Security Council over the past quarter-century;¹⁴ and, as of 2015, are the countries of origin of only 1.9% of senior officials in the UN Secretariat.¹⁵

Not sharing the romantic attachment to the UN common among European political elites (with the exception of the Philippines, no Southeast Asian country was among the UN's founding member states), Southeast Asian countries' approaches to the UN tend to be more instrumentalist, based on an assessment of how their engagement in the organisation benefits them on any given issue. Overall,

10 Author interview with South Korean academic, December 2015.

11 Author interview with South Korean government official, December 2015.

12 The ACT group was launched in 2013 and consists of 27 small and mid-sized countries specifically focused on reforming the Security Council's working methods without altering its composition. For more information, see Swiss Mission to the UN (2015).

13 Not since 1979 have two East Asian states fought a war with each other, and from a situation before 1979 where there were 35 instances of states providing military support to the enemies of other states in the region, after 1979 that figure fell to close to zero. The authors thank Alex Bellamy for drawing their attention to this point.

14 Between 1990 and 2015 ASEAN countries have spent a total of 6½ terms on the Security Council, accounting for 13 "country years" on the council of a total of 375 country years.

15 "Senior officials" are here defined as those with the UN seniority rank of D1 and above. See UN Secretary-General (2015).

countries in Southeast Asia are less deeply invested in the collective UN security system than some other regions. Partly, this is a function – at least until recently – of ASEAN countries' limited political relations with and economic interests in Africa, where much of the UN's peacekeeping and peacebuilding engagement is concentrated. For instance, over half of ASEAN members maintain only two or fewer embassies on the African continent.¹⁶

In this context it should not be surprising that diplomats, academic institutions, and the think-tank community are primarily focused on the issues of most immediate concern to the region, such as the foreign policies of ASEAN members, conflicts in Southeast Asia, and the implications of the rise of China. Very few researchers in the region have special expertise in and focus on the UN's work in the fields of peacekeeping, peacebuilding, mediation and African conflict settings, which prevents larger policy debates on broader UN issues.¹⁷ Partly, this is a function of the lack of funding for UN-centred research. Similarly, foreign ministry divisions in charge of the UN file tend to be thinly staffed and have struggled to keep up to date on the UN reform discussion in New York on the issues of peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

Notwithstanding the countervailing factors listed above, government and think-tank representatives have highlighted a generally positive trend of Southeast Asian engagement with the UN. Small countries, such as Singapore, highlight the value of the UN as a “force-multiplier” and as a provider of a rules-based framework for international relations, countering a world where “might makes right” (Jayakumar, 2011: 76). Consequently, reform initiatives spearheaded by Singapore tend to be geared towards enhancing the participation in UN decision-making of less powerful countries (as in the case of the “S5 Initiative” for reforming Security Council working methods, which Singapore proposed together with Costa Rica, Jordan, Liechtenstein and Switzerland)¹⁸ and in enhancing the rule of law (as in the case of its long-standing efforts to promote the Law of the Sea) (Wenaweser, 2015; Gafoor, 2015: 79). At the same time, Singapore is keen to limit its exposure at the UN, showing no interest in running for another term in the Security Council after having successfully served in the body in 2001–02 (in the words of one interlocutor: “it’s too resource-intensive for us and we learned what we need to know 15 years ago”) and declining to field a candidate for Secretary-General in 2006, despite encouragement from the U.S., China and Europe to do so (Gafoor, 2015: 73–75).

The more powerful countries in the region see the UN as a useful forum to further enhance their prestige and promote

their foreign policy interests in the region and globally. Indonesia, for instance, uses its active engagement in the UN to underpin its aspirations of regional leadership, manifested, among other things, in its claim to recurrent non-permanent membership on the Security Council every ten years. Indonesia also uses the UN to highlight its democratic progress and, together with Malaysia, to position itself as the representative of moderate Islam at the UN. However, a slight hardening towards the UN seems to have taken place with the change in government in 2014. While former president Yudhoyono defined his foreign policy goals as “advancing multilateralism through the United Nations and creating harmony among countries” (*The Economist*, 2016), his successor, President Jokowi, may be instinctively less drawn towards the UN, having criticised it for cementing an “imbalance of world power”. Indonesia’s foreign policy has thus become more assertive and interest-driven (*Jakarta Globe*, 2015).

Vietnam, following its progressive economic integration into the international system since the 1990s, is now increasingly seeking international political engagement, in particular at the UN, in line with the new policy of “international integration” set at the 2011 Communist Party Congress. In this context it is already campaigning for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council in 2020–21, comparatively soon after its last (and first) term in 2008–09 (Tinh, 2012).¹⁹ And Myanmar, following the landslide win of the National League for Democracy in the 2015 elections, is expected by some analysts in the region to increasingly turn towards greater UN involvement in its political transition process.

ASEAN countries may also develop enhanced interest in the UN's conflict resolution role as a result of growing economic interests in Africa and security vulnerabilities arising from instability in the Middle East. Indeed, Southeast Asian economic relations with Africa have grown considerably in recent years and the trade volume between the two regions has increased from \$2.8 billion in 1990 to \$42 billion in 2012, with the largest traders being Thailand, Indonesia and Singapore.²⁰ Growing economic relations are mirrored by efforts to foster closer political ties, as reflected in enhanced ASEAN-AU cooperation that started in 2012, and the 2015 Asia-Africa Summit that took place in Jakarta. Meanwhile, ASEAN countries may be increasingly affected by instability in the Middle East, in light of the significant numbers of foreign fighters (predominantly from Indonesia) who have joined the Islamic State (IS) in Syria and the terrorist threat they may pose on their return (Jones & Solahudin, 2015). The IS-inspired attack in Jakarta in January 2016 has heightened the concern in the

16 The number of Southeast Asian countries' embassies in Africa is as follows: Indonesia, 15; Vietnam, 9; Malaysia, 7; Thailand, 6; Philippines, 5; Brunei, 2; Timor-Leste, 2; Myanmar, 1; Singapore, 1; Cambodia, 0; Laos, 0.

17 One notable exception to this rule is Singapore, where a comparatively large number of academics possess deep knowledge of the UN, although with a heavy focus on international legal issues.

18 Singapore has chosen not to join the S5's Swiss-led successor initiative ACT calling for accountability, coherence and transparency in the Security Council due to internal disagreements with fellow S5 members on the value of tabling their reform agenda for a vote in the General Assembly.

19 Le Dinh Tinh is the former deputy director-general of the Institute of Foreign Policy and Strategic Studies at the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam.

20 The trade volume of Thailand is \$11.6 billion, that of Indonesia \$10.7 billion and that of Singapore \$9.5 billion. See Devonshire-Ellis (2015).

region, and international counter-terrorism cooperation is a top Indonesian priority (*The Economist*, 2016).

Asian geopolitics, and in particular concern in the region about the rise of China and its territorial claims in the South China Sea (clashing with the counter-claims of Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam), are likely to heighten Southeast Asian appreciation of maritime dispute settlement mechanisms under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).²¹ This appreciation may be further spurred by the October 2015 ruling by the Hague-based Permanent Court of Arbitration – in the face of Chinese objections – that it had jurisdiction in an arbitration case brought before it by the Philippines.²²

In 2014 both Vietnam and the Philippines used the UN in an effort to enlist international support for their respective claims in the South China Sea, sending letters to the UN Secretary-General for distribution in the UN General Assembly stating their legal case for sovereignty over disputed islands, protesting Chinese actions and calling on the UN to engage in “conflict prevention”.²³ China, on the other hand, has adamantly rejected any international involvement (whether through arbitration, mediation or adjudication), insisting instead on bilateral negotiations between claimants and going as far as to argue that adjudication and arbitration would no longer fall within its understanding of “peaceful dispute settlement” (Hiebert et al., 2014: 22-23).

The UN’s record in the region has also influenced Southeast Asian views of the organisation. In general, interlocutors highlighted a widespread appreciation for UN development work and a high regard for UNDP among elites and the general population alike (even though some NGO members interviewed for this project have commented critically on UNDP’s tendency to bend over backwards in efforts not to offend its host governments). The two UN PKOs in the region, in Cambodia and East Timor, are widely viewed as success stories and have contributed to a generally positive view of the UN. (However, Cambodian media have blamed the UN mission for an increase in the incidence of HIV/AIDS in the country; and the UN-sponsored tribunal is widely seen as an unproductive investment of funds that could be better spent on development endeavours.)

Operations in Cambodia and East Timor were also an important opportunity for regional militaries to engage, with significant troop contributions coming from Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines. Timor-Leste in particular, informed by its direct experience with the UN, has emerged as an important voice in UN peace and security debates. It has advocated for issues such as the inclusion of a “peace and justice goal” as part of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, the elaboration of principles of international engagement in conflict-affected states in discussions on the “New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States”, and the High-Level Independent Panel for the Reform of Peace Operations, which was chaired by former Timorese president and later senior UN official José Ramos Horta.

UN-ASEAN relations

In spite of the relatively successful history of PKOs in Southeast Asia, ASEAN countries remain extremely reluctant to grant any meaningful role to the UN in addressing conflicts in their region, including with respect to conflicts in Mindanao (the Philippines),²⁴ southern Thailand and Myanmar,²⁵ and the Thai-Cambodian border dispute.²⁶ Against this background the UN has increasingly endeavoured in recent years to engage countries in the region through ASEAN in an effort to gain some political space and in recognition of progressive ASEAN integration (manifested through its 2007 Charter and its goal of creating the ASEAN Community, which came into force in 2015). Consequently, ASEAN’s relevance has grown under the UN Charter’s Chapter VIII on regional arrangements.

UN-ASEAN relations have become increasingly institution-alised in recent years, starting with a series of now-annual UN-ASEAN Summits initiated in 2000, the granting of UN observer status to ASEAN in 2007, and the 2011 signing of a Joint Declaration on Comprehensive Partnership by the secretaries-general of the two organisations. The declaration called for greater cooperation in matters of peace and security (pillar 1), and in economic and sociocultural affairs (pillars 2 and 3), and also provided a framework for closer cooperation between the two secretariats (pillar 4).²⁷

In particular pillars 1 and 4, coordinated by the UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA), has allowed for enhanced

21 These mechanisms are listed in Part XV of UNCLOS and include: (1) the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea established in accordance with Annex VI; (2) the International Court of Justice (ICJ); (3) an arbitral tribunal constituted in accordance with Annex VII; and (4) a special arbitral tribunal constituted in accordance with Annex VIII for one or more of the categories of disputes specified therein. It is noteworthy in this context that, unlike their Northeast Asian brethren, Southeast Asian countries have shown a greater inclination to call on international dispute settlement mechanisms, as evidenced by a number of territorial disputes brought over the past half century to the ICJ: the 1962 Preah Vihear ICJ judgment on a dispute between Cambodia and Thailand; the 2002 Sipadan and Ligitan ICJ judgment on a dispute between Indonesia and Malaysia; the 2008 Pedra Branca/Pulau Batu Puteh ICJ judgment on a dispute between Malaysia and Singapore; and the 2012 Myanmar-Bangladesh ITLOS judgment on a maritime dispute between these two countries. See Koh (2015).

22 In 2009 Malaysia submitted a joint claim alongside Vietnam to the UNCLOS Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf to underpin its legal claims. However, reluctant to publicly confront and anger Beijing on the issue, it has refrained from overtly supporting the Philippines’ arbitration suit. See Parameswaran (2015).

23 See, for instance, UNGA (2014a; 2014b).

24 The UN, through UNDP, with funding from the PBF and in collaboration with the Philippines government, developed a multi-dimensional programme in support of the implementation of the March 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. A P5-level peacebuilding adviser has been deployed to Manila to support the resident coordinator and UN Country Team members engaged in peace and development initiatives in Mindanao.

25 As of early 2016 work is under way to have the UN play a role in Myanmar’s peace process through a joint monitoring mechanism. While the UN had non-resident envoys continuously in place since 1994 to provide “good offices”, their work did not focus on armed conflict in the country, but on democracy promotion. See Magnusson and Pedersen (2012).

26 The Thai-Cambodian border dispute briefly appeared on the Security Council’s agenda in 2011, but only to affirm ASEAN’s lead role in addressing it.

27 See also CHD (2009).

UN engagement with the region on conflict-related issues. Under pillar 4, DPA organises annual UN-ASEAN meetings between the two secretariats on how to improve cooperation, in particular in mediation and conflict prevention. These meetings have been helpful in building confidence and establishing personal relationships at the working level of the two organisations. Because the meetings are accompanied by dedicated sessions with research outfits from ASEAN countries, the secretariat-to-secretariat cooperation has also improved the understanding of the UN among think tanks and academics. Finally, pillar 4 arrangements have also allowed DPA to permanently deploy two mid-level political affairs officers to the region (one stationed in Jakarta and one in Bangkok) to liaise between the two secretariats. Such a political in-country presence would have been unthinkable as recently as ten years ago.

However, the potential of the UN-ASEAN relationship to serve as a gateway for an enhanced UN role in the region faces important limitations. Firstly, the ASEAN Secretariat is deliberately kept weak by its member states, which only grant it negligible resources (its annual budget is \$17 million, around 0.3% of that of the UN Secretariat) and circumscribe its policy autonomy, denying it the authority to speak on behalf of its member states (Pilling, 2015). And secondly, mirroring a trend that has also been observed with respect to Africa and Latin America, as Southeast Asian integration progresses, it is reinforcing the assertiveness of ASEAN members in claiming that it does not need the UN to solve its problems (Griffiths & Whitfield, 2010).

A number of interlocutors have therefore suggested that UN efforts to engage ASEAN on conflict management matters should focus less on what the UN has to offer to the resolution of conflicts in Southeast Asia (all the more so when no such assistance has been requested) and more on what the UN could learn from Southeast Asian insights and experiences for successful conflict resolution outside the ASEAN region. Indeed, over the years countries in the region have accumulated significant conflict resolution expertise through efforts to mediate in one another's internal conflicts. Such efforts include those of Thailand in Aceh; Malaysia and Indonesia in southern Thailand and Mindanao; and Indonesia in Cambodia (in the late 1980s) (Acharya, 2014), Myanmar and the 2011 Thai-Cambodian border conflict.

In particular Indonesia can credibly claim to have important lessons to share from its own handling – and resolution – of the conflict in Aceh. And even where countries are not directly involved, as in the case of Thailand with respect to Mindanao, they may still follow a peace process closely in an effort to learn from it for conflict resolution efforts in their own countries. The ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation, created in 2013 with the purpose of, among

other things, creating a knowledge base and capacity on mediation and conciliation, may be developed into a useful platform for the exchange of best practices between the UN and ASEAN and a launching pad for Track II initiatives. However, with the centre still not having become operational, it may yet take several years before it can act as a credible interlocutor between the two organisations.

Peacekeeping

Among the most noteworthy developments with respect to ASEAN engagement at the UN is the region's growing participation in UN PKOs. By comparison with South Asia or Africa, the Southeast Asian role in peacekeeping is still modest. Indonesia, with close to 3,000 blue helmets in the field – by far the region's largest provider of UN troops – is only ranked the 12th-largest contributor globally, followed by Malaysia (34th), Cambodia (35th) and Thailand (86th). Nevertheless, Southeast Asian contributions to UN PKOs (in parallel to that of Northeast Asia) have increased significantly over the past decade, both in absolute and relative terms, with Indonesia, Malaysia and Cambodia being the key drivers of this growth (see Figures 1, 2 and 3).

A continuation of this trend is likely: in 2012 Indonesia set itself the goal of joining the ranks of the top-ten troop contributors and increasing its contribution to 4,000 troops by 2019. And at the September 2015 New York Peacekeeping Summit, Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia and – notably – Vietnam all made commitments to increase their contributions to UN peacekeeping missions, mostly in the form of engineering units.²⁸ Vietnam's new engagement is particularly noteworthy, both because it represents a very recent break with its historical opposition to participating in UN operations (Capie, 2014) and also because of its potential to contribute, given that it possesses one of the ten largest ground forces in the world.

The enhanced engagement in peacekeeping is also reflected in the establishment of peacekeeping training centres by a number of countries in the region, including Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. In 2011 ASEAN defence ministers agreed to unite those centres within an ASEAN network of peacekeeping centres, an initiative led by Indonesia in the hope of sharing information, standardising training and procedures, and making it a stepping stone towards the creation of an ASEAN peacekeeping force, which Indonesia had originally proposed in 2004. However, the realisation of this last goal clearly remains far off in light of opposition by a number of ASEAN members, including Singapore and Vietnam (Tay & Choo, 2013: 232-33).

The motivations of individual countries for participating in peacekeeping missions are remarkably similar across the region.²⁹ Most importantly, they see engagement in these missions as a means of enhancing their respective coun-

28 At the September 2015 Peacekeeping Summit hosted by President Obama, Vietnam committed a field hospital, an engineering company and staff officers.

29 This paragraph is based both on interviews in relevant capitals and the country profiles of troop-contributing countries available at Providing for Peacekeeping (n.d.).

Figure 1: Average monthly UN PKO troop contributions by East Asia, 2000-15

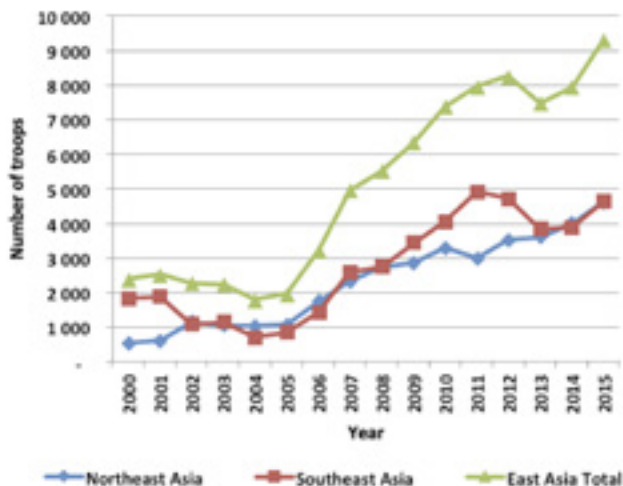


Figure 2: East Asian share of global troop contributions to UN PKOs, 2000-15

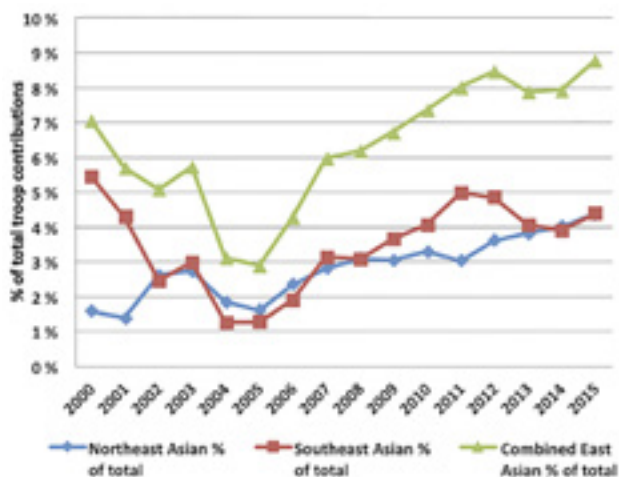
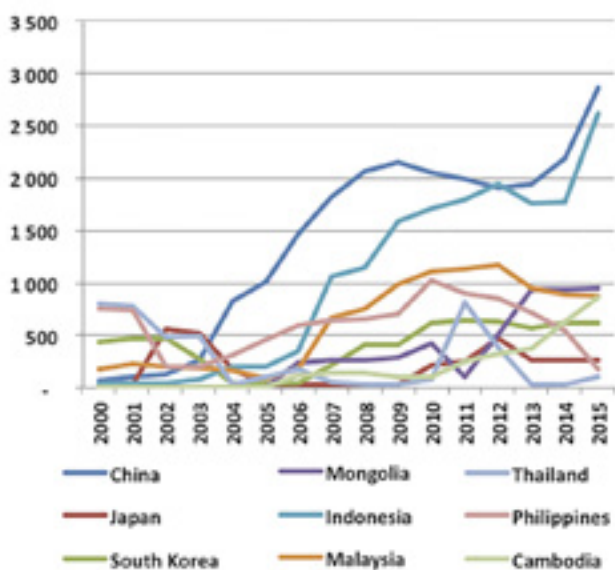


Figure 3: East Asian countries' troop contributions to UN PKOs, 2000-15



tries' prestige on the international stage and as an opportunity to increase the professionalism and operational experience of their troops. Militaries in the region also tend to welcome participation in peacekeeping as a way to strengthen their domestic legitimacy. Some countries highlight their troop-contributing role in an effort to strengthen upcoming candidatures for a seat on the Security Council (e.g. Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam). Indonesia's and Malaysia's significant contribution to the UN mission in Lebanon has been explained in terms of Muslim solidarity and their support for the Palestinian cause (which also explained both countries' significant role in the UN mission in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s). For Indonesia, participation in UN peacekeeping missions is also seen as an opportunity to promote its fledgling defence industry, in particular to showcase a new domestically produced armoured personnel carrier for potential purchase by other troop contributors. Vietnam sees its peacekeeping contribution as central to its new "international integration" agenda.

However, a number of factors limit the region's greater engagement in UN peacekeeping missions. For instance, militaries in some troop-contributing countries (TCCs) struggle with a lack of adequate English- and French-language skills. More important, however, is the fact that Southeast Asian troop contributors are strongly attached to the three peacekeeping principles that have guided the UN's operations since the 1950s (host country consent, impartiality and the limitation of the use of force to self-defence) and have thus viewed the trend toward robust peacekeeping with some scepticism. With that said, they realise that UN peacekeepers are increasingly deployed to situations where there is no peace to keep, acknowledge that a degree of robustness is therefore unavoidable and accept the legitimacy of protection-of-civilians mandates. Scepticism towards robust mandates, therefore, appears to be less ideologically motivated and more a reflection of the limited capacities of militaries in the region to participate in robust – let alone offensive – operations. This in turn places a premium on enhanced consultation with TCCs in the formulation of peacekeeping mandates, for which countries in the region strongly advocate.³⁰

While some countries, such as Indonesia, are slowly developing doctrines and capabilities that would allow for greater "robustness", other ASEAN countries tend to highlight the role of their peacekeepers as early peace-builders who engage in activities aimed at fostering development and societal cohesion. Together with the significant role played by Indonesia in promoting the Civilian Capacities initiative to strengthen civilian involvement in conflict prevention and PKOs (including through co-sponsorship of the General Assembly resolution on this issue), this would suggest some potential for engaging Southeast Asian countries more proactively around support for field-based special political missions.

30 Indonesian interlocutors emphasised in particular the need for consultation with battalion commanders.

Humanitarian assistance and disaster response

In parallel with closer cooperation among Southeast Asian countries on peacekeeping, over the past decade there has also been closer regional integration on the issue of disaster response, leading to growing cooperation with the UN. Closer regional integration was largely triggered by ASEAN's inadequate response to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, which led Singapore to spearhead an initiative that resulted in the development of the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response, which entered into force in 2009 and constitutes not only one of the few legally binding ASEAN agreements, but also the first legally binding agreement on disaster response globally, underlining ASEAN members' progressive readiness to take steps towards integration on issues beyond the field of economics (Heiduk, 2015: 25).

Tightening regional integration in disaster management was followed by increasing cooperation between ASEAN and the UN in the aftermath of joint responses to Cyclone Nargis in 2008. Joint operations mounted in this context, even though cobbled together on an ad-hoc basis, showed both the necessity of and the potential for closer coordination and strengthening of operational ties in this area. This led to the announcement of the ASEAN-UN Strategic Plan of Action on Disaster Management 2010–2015 at the 2010 ASEAN-UN Summit. In November 2015 the UN and ASEAN confirmed at their annual summit their intention of developing a second iteration of the plan covering 2016–20.

Interestingly, humanitarian assistance, in particular with respect to refugees, is an area in which Southeast Asia has a long track record of cooperation with the UN. For instance, during the Cambodian civil war and ensuing refugee crisis in the 1970s, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) played an instrumental role in administering camps for displaced people along the Thai-Cambodian border. Indeed, one such camp grew to a population of 140,000 and was seen as "the most elaborately serviced refugee camp in the world" (cited in UNHCR, 2000; 91). This history of robust UN action in the region may in part explain ASEAN's willingness to work with the UN on humanitarian issues to this day and the high esteem in which UNHCR is held throughout the region.

Human rights and the Responsibility to Protect

Until fairly recently ASEAN countries rejected the notion of universal human rights, arguing that they were not compatible with Asian values. At the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, Singapore warned that "universal recognition of the ideal of human rights can be harmful if universalism is used to deny or mask the reality of diversity" (cited in Sen, 1997).

Since then there has been a significant reorientation in and a remarkable embrace of rights-related discourse in the region, which to an important degree is a result of successful democratisation in Indonesia. In the wake of its own successful democratic transition, Jakarta spearheaded

initiatives to anchor human rights and democracy promotion within the ASEAN framework, resulting in the inclusion of human rights principles in the 2007 Charter, as well as the establishment in 2009 of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights and the establishment in 2008 of the Bali Democracy Forum (Heiduk, 2015: 7-9).

The human rights discourse in the region remains influenced by the larger doctrine of non-interference in domestic affairs and the new mechanisms do not offer recourse mechanisms or punitive measures in case of non-compliance. Also, ASEAN countries remain averse to collective regional action in response to human rights abuses in their region and are extremely thin-skinned with respect to UN criticism of their individual human rights records. With that said, the developments over the past decade have allowed them to engage proactively and confidently in human rights debates at the UN, including in the Security Council, in ways that would have been difficult to imagine just a decade ago.

One area in which ASEAN countries' promotion of human rights has been particularly vocal is the protection and advancement of the rights of women. These efforts long preceded the 2007 Charter and can be traced back to the Declaration of the Advancement of Women in the ASEAN Region in 1988, followed by other initiatives such as the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women in the ASEAN Region in 2004. ASEAN countries tend to highlight the importance of the inclusion and empowerment of women in peace processes and peacebuilding activities during open thematic debates in the Security Council. Yet "none of [ASEAN] regional commitments or institutions expressly take [sic] up the core concern of the Women, Peace and Security agenda set out in UN Security Council Resolution 1325" (Davies et al., 2014: 333).

ASEAN is one of the few regional organisations that has thus far failed to adopt a Resolution 1325 regional action plan and, among the ASEAN membership, the Philippines is the only state that has drawn up such a plan at the national level (Davies et al., 2014). According to some analysts, this reflects a preference in ASEAN policymaking to confine the promotion of women's human rights to sociocultural or economic (instead of political) policy areas. Building on ASEAN engagement in UN peacekeeping missions, some commentators have therefore called for an ASEAN-UN dialogue on developing gender expertise in such missions (Davies et al., 2014).

Remarkably, the region as a whole has also embraced the R2P concept in recent years and, as scholars have pointed out, is more accepting of it than generally suggested (Bellamy & Beeson, 2010: 267-68). Indeed, the Philippines has been a strong supporter of the concept since its adoption at the World Summit in 2005. Thailand endorsed (but subsequently failed to further develop) the concept in 2005, not least because the blue ribbon panel on Threats, Challenges and Change that placed R2P on the agenda of

the World Summit was chaired by former Thai prime minister Anand Panyarachun. Singapore has become a member of the New York-based Group of Friends of R2P. Indonesia has spoken up in support of R2P in the General Assembly and even Vietnam, which just a few years ago was one of the concept's strongest critics, has softened its opposition to it.

It is noteworthy that while in 2008 ASEAN countries strongly rejected suggestions, floated by then-French foreign minister Bernard Kouchner, to have the Security Council invoke R2P in response to the Burmese refusal to accept international humanitarian assistance in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, Indonesia quietly – and successfully – used the possibility of Security Council action as a threat in its own endeavour to have Naipidaw grant humanitarian access (Bellamy & Beeson, 2010: 274).

More recently, the debate on ASEAN's R2P stance has been revived in the context of the 2014 *Report of the High-Level Advisory Panel on the Responsibility to Protect in Southeast Asia*, chaired by former ASEAN secretary-general Surin Pitsuwan. The report argued that ASEAN should proactively embrace R2P, not least in an effort to shape the norm in ways compatible with ASEAN norms and principles. While countries in the region constructively engage in the UN General Assembly's annual R2P dialogues (e.g. Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines and Malaysia) (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2015), they remain strongly reluctant to officially discuss R2P in an ASEAN framework, with the controversy around NATO's implementation of the Security Council's R2P mandate in Libya only reinforcing regional concerns. However, in academic and think-tank circles R2P continues to be a very live topic.

Conclusion

Overall, East Asian links with and attitudes to the UN in the field of peace, security, and conflict are on a positive trajectory. As previously poverty-stricken countries have grown economically, moved beyond their colonial histories, and learned that the UN can actually be a tool to advance national interests, many East Asian states have become more willing to engage with the UN on issues that might once have been considered off limits.

Trends in regional geopolitics, intra-regional trade relations, and the foreign policy trajectories of individual countries suggest both increasing integration among ASEAN countries and growing investment in the UN's collective security system. Encouragingly, the largest East Asian countries, such as China, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam, have all committed in various ways to deepening their relations with the UN.

Growing regional engagement at the UN is most apparent in the area of UN PKOs, as a result of increasing contributions by China and Indonesia and the emergence of promising newcomers such as Vietnam, all of which

consider participation in UN peacekeeping missions as enhancing their respective countries' prestige. This trend appears likely to continue.

East Asian countries have signalled their increasing willingness to engage with the UN in other areas as well, including humanitarian assistance and conflict resolution. Equally promising, regional normative development, in particular in the area of human rights and democracy promotion, allows for engagement on previously taboo subjects. Southeast Asia's appreciation for the UN's maritime dispute settlement role in particular will likely rise if the Permanent Court of Arbitration, in its upcoming decision on the South China Sea case, rules in favour of the Philippines.

Although the growing engagement between East Asia and the UN is likely to remain a slow and incremental process, it could very well prove to be beneficial for all those involved.

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