



Climate Change, Energy, and Environmental Sustainability: Are Regional Security Frameworks Prepared? by Mely Caballero-Anthony

ASEAN's 13th Summit in Singapore was highly eventful. Despite splendid efforts by the host to run the meeting and the series of related gathering of leaders – the 11th ASEAN Plus Three (APT) Summit, the 3rd East Asian Summit (EAS) – as smoothly as possible, the unexpected *volte face* of Myanmar, which prevented UN envoy Ibrahim Gambari from briefing the regional leaders on developments in the country, spoiled celebrations of ASEAN's 40th anniversary.

Myanmar's intransigence undermined ASEAN's credibility when a new phase of regionalism was being ushered in with the much-awaited adoption of the ASEAN Charter. It was a double-whammy given that some had expressed disappointment and dismay over what they considered a watered-down version of what could have been a promising Charter. There was a dilution of the recommendations of the Eminent Persons Group, who were assigned to offer ideas on the Charter after conducting consultations with civil society groups and business organizations in the region.

Still, the agreements and declarations at the end of the Summits should focus our attention on the issues and initiatives to respond to pressing security challenges confronting the region.

Recalibrating the Regional Security Agenda

Three issues dominated the various summits – climate change, energy, and the environment. At the ASEAN Summit, the leaders adopted the *ASEAN Declaration on Environmental Sustainability*. At the 3rd EAS, the *Singapore Declaration on Climate Change, Energy and the Environment* was adopted. Are these regional security frameworks adequate to respond to the security threats that have emerged?

Climate Change

Climate change is a major security issue. Climate change already featured in the agenda of the 2nd East Asian Summit in January 2007. There is now a flood of information from scientific studies like the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change on the security implications of climate change. Despite this, there had not been a clear regional strategy to deal with the cross-cutting security risks from climate change – at the ASEAN or the wider East Asian level – until the release of these statements.

The inclusion of climate change on the ASEAN and East Asian Summits agendas is highly significant, given the urgency this issue commands. The grave security implications of climate change should propel ASEAN and the EAS to craft more defined strategies to mitigate the risks and threats. The

decision not to include numerical targets on carbon emissions reductions, however, raises questions as to the capacity of this region – which has two of the largest emitting countries – to respond decisively.

Energy Security

Much forecasting in the region has identified energy as the key security issue. So far, the discussion has focused on security of supply, security of access to resources, and sustainable pricing. Yet, ASEAN has not had a clear policy on energy until very recently.

The ASEAN Plan of Action for Energy Cooperation (2004-2009) outlined plans to establish interconnecting agreements in the field of energy through the ASEAN Power Grid and Trans-ASEAN Gas Pipeline. Not much has been heard about the progress of these plans, except for the information that has been available through the ASEAN Secretariat. It may be time to examine the problems that have held up implementation of these projects.

Several issues need to be further explored. Based on the experience of the EU, these issues would include the possibility of stockpiling energy reserves, investments in infrastructures, sharing of technology (particularly in areas of energy efficiency), and conservation. Given the enormous task of dealing with energy security, inter-ASEAN cooperation needs to be synergized with other regional frameworks that deal with this issue, be it at the APT or EAS level.

Environmental Protection and Security Frameworks

Strategies to mitigate the effects of climate change, as well as to address energy security, must take into account their impact on the environment. Crafting regional responses also needs to consider the larger political, economic, and social conditions of the states and societies in the region. This is no easy task. Sustainable development as a possible framework for intra- and inter-regional cooperation can be useful.

The bringing together of “Energy, Environment, Climate Change and Sustainable Development” as one broad yet inter-related theme in this year's ASEAN and EAS Summits is therefore a positive development, which reflects the multi-sectoral impact of these issues. While disagreements could emerge in mapping out regional responses, the shared vulnerabilities of the regional states should be impetus for regional leaders, as well as the relevant state and nonstate actors, to urgently address these security threats.

As with many nontraditional threats which are transboundary, regional multilateral approaches are critical, given the limited resources of individual states. This is why despite their weaknesses and limitations, it is still worth pinning our hopes on strengthening regional frameworks to help ensure the security of states and societies in the region.

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