

Issue 5/June 2014

The Bali Concord III: Towards a More Common ASEAN Platform on Global Issues



SUMMARY

This issue of ASEAN Briefs examines the Bali Concord III which was adopted by the ten member-states of ASEAN in 2011. One of the key documents produced during Indonesia's 2011 Chairmanship of ASEAN, the Bali Concord III pledged ASEAN to a number of commitments to be achieved by 2022. Chief among them was to: (a) increasingly speak in a common voice on international matters of mutual concern at related international forums, and (b) to enhance ASEAN's capacity to respond and contribute solutions to those global matters.

However, the commitments raised some question marks given the extreme diversity that exists in the ASEAN region. ASEAN countries are divided not only in terms of history, culture, geography, economic development, and language but crucially also in their political systems. How possible is it to get all ten ASEAN member-states, each with their own individual national interests, to adopt a common regional position and present a united front externally?

In order to address this question, ASEAN Briefs examined the voting records of the ten ASEAN member-states at the United Nations General Assembly in the years prior and since the adoption of the Bali Concord III. By doing so it was able to trace whether the adoption of the Bali Concord III improved the amount of times the ten member-states of ASEAN were able to adopt a more coordinated, cohesive, and coherent position on global issues; and (b) whether this commitment was realistic and achievable based on ASEAN's past track record.

ASEAN Briefs is a regular publications about current development on ASEAN regionalism, especially in the Political-Security, Economic as well as Socio-Cultural Pillars.

The Habibie Center
ASEAN Studies Program ASEAN Briefs

Project Supervisor:
Rahimah Abdulrahim
(Executive Director)
Hadi Kuntjara
(Deputy Director for Operations)

Program Coordinator/Editor:
A. Ibrahim Almuttaqi

Researcher:
Herjuno Ndaru K.
Adhe Nuansa Wibisono

Finance and Administration:
Tia Nurhidayati

Design and Publication:
M. I. Qeis

The Habibie Center- ASEAN Studies Program
Jl. Kemang Selatan no.98, Jakarta 12560 Indonesia
(P): +62 21 7817211 (F): +62 21 7817212

Introduction

On the 17th of November, 2011, the ten member-states of ASEAN adopted the 'Bali Declaration on ASEAN Community in a Global Community of Nations' – otherwise known as the Bali Concord III. Proposed by Indonesia, the Bali Concord III was the key outcome/product of Jakarta's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2011 which had been looked upon with a great deal of hope and expectation. In the build up to the Bali Concord III's adoption, commentators had speculated over what direction and fate Indonesia would take ASEAN and this was especially fuelled by the fact that Indonesia's two previous chairmanship of ASEAN in 1976 and 2003 had produced two landmark documents: the Bali Concord I and the Bali Concord II. The first – officially known as the 1976 Declaration of ASEAN Concord - laid out ASEAN's fundamental principles, established the ASEAN Secretariat and dictated how member-states should engage with one another.^{1,2} Notably, the Bali Concord I formally adopted political co-operation as part of ASEAN's regular activities.³

Meanwhile the second – officially known as the Declaration of ASEAN Concord II – constituted the goal of an ASEAN Community to be achieved by 2020 (later speeded up to 2015) along the lines of three pillars: the Political-Security Community, the Economic Community and the Socio-Cultural Community. Significantly, the Bali Concord II was considered historic because the issue of democracy was explicitly mentioned "for the first time at such a high level of official scripture."⁴ As a result ASEAN committed itself to building a Community that is "just, democratic and harmonious", placing the promotion of democracy on the regional agenda.⁵ In doing so, Jakarta broke a long-held taboo over the use of the term "democracy" in the world of ASEAN and ever since, "a rhetoric in favor of democracy" has found its place in ASEAN discourse and was enshrined in the ASEAN Charter of 2007.⁶

The Bali Concord III

It was in this sense that, when the rotating chairmanship of ASEAN fell to Indonesia in 2011, the region looked to see how Jakarta would build upon the Bali ConCORDs I and II and whether the 'Bali Declaration on ASEAN Community in a Global Community of Nations' would measure up against its landmark predecessors. Prior to tabling the Bali Concord III to his fellow ASEAN Leaders, Indonesia's President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono declared,

"I believe ASEAN is able to respond to global dynamics...ASEAN wants to play a bigger role...to reach out to the world."⁷

These global dynamics referred not only to the Arab Spring and the Eurozone economic crisis which were major concerns at the time, but also to long-term

wider worries over scarcities in food, energy and water resources, climate change, natural disasters and so forth.⁸ On the one hand, the proposal for the Bali Concord III was driven by the painful memories of the Asian Financial Crisis of the late 1990s, with President Yudhoyono warning that ASEAN must never become a "passive actor" victimized by global problems from external sources.⁹ On the other hand, the Bali Concord III was driven by the belief that the regional organization had "passed the tests of history...[and] become a mature association capable of creating regional stability and security, and able to increase its economic strength."¹⁰ It was in this framework that Indonesia's proposed Bali Concord III sought to drive ASEAN forward by raising ASEAN's international profile and by transforming it into a regional organization that was able to respond and contribute solutions to key global issues rather than be a passive actor/victim.

The 'Bali Declaration on ASEAN Community in a Global Community of Nations' – otherwise known as the Bali Concord III pledged ASEAN to a number of commitments to be achieved by 2022. Namely, they were: (1) to increasingly speak in a common voice on international matters of mutual concern at related international forums; (2) to enhance ASEAN's capacity to respond and contribute solutions to those global matters; and (3) to empower the ASEAN Secretariat so that it is able to support the vision and development of the ASEAN Community in a global community of nations.¹¹

Building on current practice and achievements, we will identify key global issues of common interest and concern, enhance ASEAN coordination and cooperation on these key global issues in relevant multilateral fora and international organizations, such as the United Nations, and raise ASEAN's profile and constructive role in the global stage."
– The Bali Concord III

Of particular interest for this edition of ASEAN Briefs is the commitment for the ten member-states of ASEAN to adopt "a more coordinated, cohesive, and coherent ASEAN position on global issues."¹² ASEAN member-states seek to present a more united front and speak with a common voice on the international stage in such arenas as the United Nations by 2022. On the one hand, such an ambition makes sense given ASEAN's current regional integration process. By the end of 2015 the region is slated to witness the realization of the ASEAN Community, which will see the ten ASEAN member-states come together to present a regional bloc boasting 600 million people, US\$ 2.3 trillion GDP, and a land area of 4.46 million square km.¹³ In this way, presenting a more united front externally is merely a reflection of its internal integration.



The signing of the Bali Concord III by ASEAN Leaders
(Image: News.cn)

However, just as there are now concerns over whether or not the ASEAN Community 2015 will be fully realized by the deadline of 31st December 2015, there are also question marks over how realistic the Bali Concord III's commitment is for ASEAN to adopt a more coordinated, cohesive, and coherent position on global issues at the international stage?

Question Mark: How Realistic?

The region of Southeast Asia which the ten ASEAN member-states call home is one that is characterized by extreme diversity. This is not only applicable in terms of history, culture, geography, economic development, and language but crucially also in their political systems. While Indonesia and the Philippines are seen as vibrant democracies, Singapore is a city-state republic and Myanmar a newly democratizing republic after decades of military rule. Meanwhile Brunei Darussalam is an absolute monarchy, Cambodia and Malaysia have constitutional monarchies, and Thailand has recently seen in May 2014 the 12th military junta since 1932. The remaining two member-states of ASEAN, Lao PDR and Vietnam, are one-party socialist states.

In addition to this political diversity are the continued territorial disputes that sporadically break out into diplomatic spats and in some cases even military clashes. In the past decade the region has witnessed disputes between: Indonesia and Malaysia over Sipadan, Ligitan, and Ambalat; Malaysia and Singapore over Pedra Branca; Malaysia and the Philippines over Sabah; and Cambodia and Thailand over Preah Vihear. To this one could add the fact that four ASEAN member-states (Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam) have various claims over the South China Sea.

Given the aforementioned diversity and varying degrees of tensions that exist among the different ten ASEAN member-states, it is perhaps unsurprising that their pledge to adopt a “more coordinated, cohesive and coherent position on global issues of common interest and concern” has raised eyebrows among some. Observers have quite rightly asked whether it is realistic for all the ten member-states of ASEAN – each with their own individual national interests – to adopt a mindset that prioritizes the regional interest of ASEAN. To illustrate, one could question whether the global economic crisis would interest the smaller markets of Cambodia and Laos as much as Singapore and Malaysia? Would the War on Terror interest Myanmar and Vietnam as much as countries hit by terrorists acts such as Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines? Would one-party state Vietnam or the absolute monarchy of Brunei Darussalam be as interested in the Middle East's Arab Spring as democratic Indonesia?

Demonstrative of how the different national interests of ASEAN member-states can be a hindrance to the adoption of a regional position, one only needs to look at their response to the United State's pivot to the region and in particular the stationing of 2,500 U.S. troops in Darwin, Australia. While the Philippines strongly supported the move – seeing it as Washington D.C.'s attempt to counter the threat posed by China in the Asia-Pacific region, Malaysia and Singapore took a neutral stance, whilst Indonesia initially took objections.¹⁴

A further question mark raised by the Bali Concord III's pledge for the ten ASEAN member-states to adopt a more coordinated, cohesive and coherent position relates to the actual mechanism to achieve it. In other words, how exactly will ASEAN reach a common position? A media release accompanying copies of the Bali Concord III vaguely explained ASEAN's intention to build on “current practice” to identify those key global issues of common interest and concern.¹⁵ Once identified, they would then “enhance ASEAN coordination and cooperation” on these issues at related international forums.¹⁶ The vagueness of this explanation does little to dispel the uncertainties over ASEAN's actual mechanism and stands in stark contrast to the institutionalized mechanism found in another regional organization, the European Union, which possesses an EU High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (in other words an EU Foreign Ministry).

Perhaps mindful of the inherent difficulties of getting all ten ASEAN member-states to forsake their individual national interests in favor of prioritizing the regional interest of ASEAN, the wording employed in the Bali Concord III deliberately used the term “*a more coordinated, cohesive and coherent ASEAN position*” [emphasis added]. This is significantly different and much weaker than the EU's more definitive “*Common Foreign and Security Policy*” [emphases added]. The different wordings and the consequent implications that follow are indicative of the fact that ASEAN is

still tied down to its intergovernmental approach to decision-making which reinforces the regional organization's state-centrism. As opposed to the EU's supranational system for decision-making, which automatically see its member-states surrender some of their sovereignty for the regional interest of the EU, the state-centrism found in ASEAN lies at the heart of the Southeast Asian region's inherent difficulty in getting ten different countries with ten different national interests and foreign policies to agree on a common regional position to global issues.

The Statistical Evidence: Do they support the theory?

The extreme diversity found among the ten ASEAN member-states, their continued territorial disputes with one another, and the lack of clarity over the regional organization's proposed mechanism to streamline ten different national interests and foreign policies into a regional position at the world stage suggests that the Bali Concord III's commitment for ASEAN to adopt a more coordinated, cohesive, and coherent position on global issues is unrealistic. However do the facts and statistical evidence support this theory?

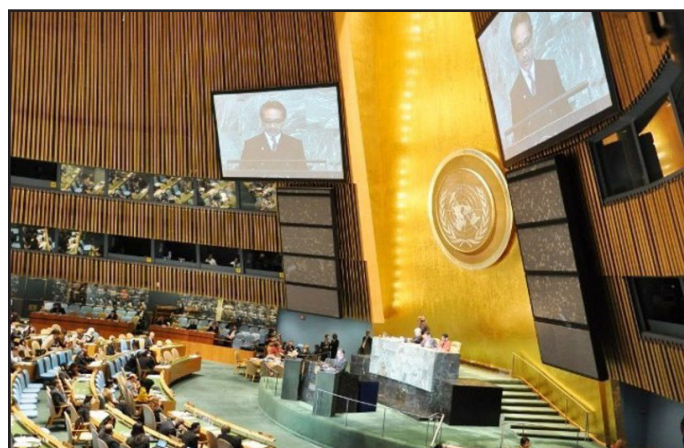
Perhaps one way to verify/falsify this theory is to examine the voting records of the ten ASEAN member-states in the United Nations General Assembly in the years prior and since the adoption of the Bali Concord III in 2011. This approach takes inspiration from a study conducted by Ziad Salim in 1987 who analyzed the voting behavior of the five original ASEAN member-states from 1966 to 1978 in the United Nations. His study found that in 1966 the voting concordance of the five original ASEAN member-states was only 35%.¹⁷ However by 1977 this had risen to 89%.¹⁸ Interestingly, while the voting concordance of the original five ASEAN member-states was high, the average voting concordance of the ten Southeast Asian countries as a whole over the same period was a lowly 53%.¹⁹ Thus while the five original ASEAN member-states perhaps found it easier to coordinate a common position due to their relative homogenous outlook and solidarity (for example as anti-communist countries), the same was not true when the entire region was taken into consideration.²⁰

This edition of *ASEAN Briefs* therefore conducted an analysis of all the United Nations General Assembly resolutions that were put to a vote at the 65th regular session (in 2010), the 66th regular session (in 2011), the 67th regular session (in 2012) and the 68th regular session (in 2013). The 62nd regular session in 2007 was also included for analysis as this was in the same year when the ten member-states of ASEAN adopted the ASEAN Charter. Using data found on the United Nations website (<http://www.un.org/documents/resga.htm>), the analysis involved collecting the voting records of all ten ASEAN member-states and noting

how many times they voted "Yes", "No", "Abstain" or were "Non-voting" (i.e. absent). This edition of *ASEAN Briefs* was particular interested to see how often the ten member-states of ASEAN displayed:

1. Unanimous agreement – defined as when all ten member-states voted and their votes were similar
2. Overall agreement – defined as when a unanimous agreement was not achieved because not all ten member-states voted (i.e. due to non-voting/absence) or they did not vote similarly due to one or more abstaining (*but not because of any dissenting vote*).
3. Divided/No agreement - defined as when there was one or more dissenting vote against the rest (*to emphasize, abstentions and non-voting/absence were not counted as dissenting votes*).

By seeing how often the ten member-states of ASEAN displayed either unanimous agreements, overall agreements and divided/no agreements at the United Nations General Assembly, this edition of *ASEAN Briefs* could therefore: (a) trace whether the adoption of the Bali Concord III improved the amount of times the ten member-states of ASEAN were able to adopt a more coordinated, cohesive, and coherent position on global issues; and (b) whether this commitment was realistic and achievable based on ASEAN's past track record.



Indonesia's Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa addressing the UN General Assembly
(Image: vivanews)

Example of unanimous agreement:

	Vietnam	Thailand	Singapore	The Philippines	Myanmar	Malaysia	Lao PDR	Indonesia	Cambodia	Brunei
The right of the Palestinian people to self-determination (A/RES/67/158)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Example of overall agreement:

	Vietnam	Thailand	Singapore	The Philippines	Myanmar	Malaysia	Lao PDR	Indonesia	Cambodia	Brunei
The arms trade treaty (A/RES/67/234 B)	Non-voting	Yes	Yes	Yes	Abstain	Yes	Abstain	Abstain	Yes	Yes

Example of divided/no agreement:

	Vietnam	Thailand	Singapore	The Philippines	Myanmar	Malaysia	Lao PDR	Indonesia	Cambodia	Brunei
Moratorium on the use of the death penalty (A/RES/67/176)	Abstain	Abstain	No	Yes	No	No	Abstain	Abstain	Yes	No

Result and Findings: What do they tell us?

Results:

From the analysis of the ten ASEAN member-states voting records during the United Nations General Assembly sessions of 2007 and 2010-2013, the following results were produced:

Table 1 – Voting behavior of ten ASEAN member-states at UN General Assembly (as frequency)

	2007	2010	2011	2012	2013
No. of Unanimous Agreement	61	57	37	48	48
No. of Overall Agreement	17	15	30	22	12
No. of Divided/ No Agreement	2	1	3	2	0
Total	80	73	70	72	60

Table 2 - Voting behavior of ten ASEAN member-states at UN General Assembly (as % to 2 d.p.)

	2007	2010	2011	2012	2013
% of Unanimous Agreement	76.25	78.08	52.86	66.67	80.00
% of Overall Agreement	21.25	20.55	42.86	30.56	20.00
% of Divided/ No Agreement	2.5	1.37	4.29	2.78	0.00
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Findings:

Based on the results above a number of findings can be made. *Firstly*, the ten member-states of ASEAN displayed a high level of unanimous agreement in the two years under examination before the introduction of the Bali Concord III – 2007 and 2010. All ten ASEAN member-states voted similarly in 61 of the 80 resolutions that were put to a vote in the United Nations General Assembly of 2007. This amounted to 76.25%. In 2010, all ten ASEAN member-states voted similarly in 57 of the 73 resolutions that were put to a vote in the United Nations General Assembly which amounted to 78.08%.

Second, reflecting the high level of unanimous agreement found among the ten ASEAN member-states, 2007 and 2010 saw few moments of divided/ no agreements. ASEAN member-states dissented with one another only twice in 2007 and once in 2010. In terms of percentages, these amounted to 2.5% and 1.37%, which were the two lowest levels in the years under examination. Interestingly, the ten member-states of ASEAN dissented over a moratorium on the use of the death penalty (both in 2007 and 2010) and the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (in 2007). Arguably, a

moratorium on the use of the death penalty cannot be categorized as a “key global issue of common interest and concern” on which the ten member-states should adopt a more coordinated, cohesive, and coherent ASEAN position. Here, ASEAN member-states may argue that the death penalty is very much an internal issue, relating to national laws and up to each individual member-states to determine.

In stark contrast, a resolution on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea is one that ASEAN should clearly be united on, especially given that the twice-yearly ASEAN Chairman’s Statement regularly includes a special mention on the developments on the Korean Peninsula. Indeed, for the purpose of defining “key global issues of common interest and concern”, this edition of *ASEAN Briefs* referred to the ‘Regional and International Issues’ found in the ASEAN Chairman’s Statements. For the record, resolution A/RES/62/127 on the ‘Situation of human rights in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea saw Cambodia vote in favor, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar and Vietnam vote against, and Brunei Darussalam, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand abstain.

Third, the year in which the Bali Concord III was introduced saw the lowest level of unanimous agreement from ASEAN. In 2012 the ten member-states of ASEAN reached a unanimous agreement on only 37 of the 70 resolutions up for a vote at the United Nations General Assembly. This amounted to 52.86%. The significant drop in the level of ASEAN unanimous agreement was caused by an upswing in the level of overall agreement (defined as when a unanimous agreement was not achieved because not all ten member-states voted or they did not vote similarly due to one or more abstaining). The analysis of the ten ASEAN member-states voting records during the United Nations General Assembly session of 2011 show that Myanmar was largely responsible for spoiling ASEAN’s unanimity. On 15 occasions Myanmar was recorded as non-voting/absent and on a further 5 occasions it was recorded as abstaining. This was far higher than the second highest country, Cambodia which was non-voting/absent on 10 occasions and abstained on two occasions.

Fourth, 2011 also saw the highest level of divided/no agreement from ASEAN at 4.29%. This was triple the amount of the previous year’s 1.37% of divided/no agreement. Critically, the three incidents on which ASEAN member-states dissented with one another were on resolutions that can be categorized as “key global issues of common interest and concern.” The analysis showed the ten member-states of ASEAN disagreed on two resolutions over Syria and on one resolution over the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. Just as the twice-yearly ASEAN Chairman’s Statement regularly includes a special mention on the developments on the Korean Peninsula, so too does it include a special mention on the situation in the Middle East. As such it is arguably worrying that the ten member-states were unable to find unanimity

on these key global issues of common interest and concern and suggest the regional organization remains divided. It is worth noting that of the three incidents of ASEAN divided/no agreement, Myanmar dissented on all three votes and Vietnam dissented once.

Fifth, the first year since the introduction of the Bali Concord III also saw a relatively poor level of ASEAN unanimous agreement. Only 48 of the 72 resolutions up for a vote at the United Nations General Assembly saw all ten ASEAN member-states voting similarly; equating to 66.67%. This was the second lowest level of ASEAN unanimous agreement among the five years under examination. Once again, the relatively poor level of ASEAN unanimous agreement was due to a sizeable level of overall agreement instead. All ten ASEAN member-states failed to vote similarly on 22 occasions – or 30.56% - because one or more was absent or abstained. The analysis of ASEAN’s voting records at the United Nations General Assembly of 2012 show that Myanmar was absent on 8 occasions and abstained on 6 occasions. The next ASEAN member-state most responsible for the low level of unanimous agreement was Lao PDR with 7 absence and 3 abstentions.

2012 also saw the 2nd highest level of divided/no agreement among the five years under examination. ASEAN member-states dissented with each other on two occasions. The first was on a resolution on entrepreneurship for development and the second was on a resolution on the moratorium on the use of the death penalty. Though 2012 represented the 2nd highest level of ASEAN divided/no agreement among the five years under examination, the issues of entrepreneurship for development and the moratorium on the use of the death penalty are arguably not considered matters of key global issues of common interest and concern. As such the 2.78% of ASEAN divided/no agreement in 2012 should not be seen as worrying as the year before when the ten member-states of ASEAN dissented over issues that were clearly key global issues of common interest and concerns.

Lastly, 2013 saw the highest level of unanimous agreement among ASEAN member-states. Two years on since the introduction of the Bali Concord III witnessed ASEAN voting similarly on 48 of 60 resolutions. This equated to 80.00%. More encouraging was the fact that there were no incidents of ASEAN divided/no agreement at the United Nations General Assembly of 2013. A resolution on the situation of human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic (A/RES/68/182) – which had twice been a source of divided/no agreement in 2012 due to a dissenting vote from Myanmar – saw Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand vote in favor, Brunei Darussalam, Lao PDR, the Philippines, Singapore and Vietnam abstain and Cambodia and Myanmar absent. Crucially this time around there was no dissenting vote. Meanwhile the level of ASEAN overall agreement was at 20.00%. This meant there was a significant improvement from

**Table 3 - Three incidents of ASEAN divided/
no agreement in 2011**

	Brunei	Cambodia	Indonesia	Lao PDR	Malaysia	Myanmar	The Philippines	Singapore	Thailand	Vietnam
The situation in the Syrian Arab Republic (A/RES/66/253 B)	Yes	Non-voting	Yes	Abstain	Yes	No	Non-voting	Yes	Yes	Abstain
Situation of human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic (A/RES/66/176)	Abstain	Yes	Yes	Abstain	Abstain	No	Abstain	Abstain	Yes	Abstain
Situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (A/RES/66/174)	Abstain	Abstain	Abstain	Abstain	Abstain	No	Yes	Abstain	Yes	No

previous years when all ten ASEAN member-states failed to vote similarly because one or more was absent or abstained on 42.86% of the time in 2011 and 30.57% of the time in 2012.

While it is perhaps too early to tell whether the adoption of the Bali Concord III has improved the amount of times the ten member-states were able to adopt a more coordinated, cohesive, and coherent position on global issues, the voting records of the ten ASEAN member-states in 2013 is certainly encouraging. The fact that the level of unanimous agreement reached by the ten member-states of ASEAN was 80.00% suggests that the Bali Concord III's commitment to adopt a more coordinated, cohesive, and coherent position on global issues at the international stage is not as unrealistic as thought. This all the more so given the fact that 2013 saw no incidents of divided/no agreement and that no ASEAN member-state dissented with the rest.

Final Thoughts and Conclusion

From the above analysis, this edition of *ASEAN Briefs* believes that the Bali Concord III's commitment for ASEAN to adopt a more coordinated, cohesive and coherent position on global issues is both realistic and achievable. It has been shown that despite the extreme diversity that characterizes the Southeast Asian region – history, culture, geography, economic development, language and crucially political

systems – ASEAN is able to come together and show a common, united stance. This was evident by the 80% level of unanimous agreement reached by the ten member-states of ASEAN at the 2013 United Nations General Assembly. This 68th regular session of the United Nations General Assembly was all the more significant because it demonstrated that ASEAN could avoid dissent among its member-states.

While more research is certainly needed to show whether or not the encouraging data of 2013 represents the start of a positive turning point in which the introduction of the Bali Concord III improves the amount of times ASEAN adopts a united position on global issues, it should be remembered that ASEAN has plenty of time to get its house in order before the deadline of 2022. What should be underlined is the fact 2013 shows clearly ASEAN *has* and *can* adopt a regional position on global issues at the United Nations despite all of its diversities.

However there were some worries. The data from 2011 and 2012 show clearly that these were difficult years for the regional organization with the level of ASEAN unanimous agreement reaching only 52.86% and 66.67% respectively. The 66th regular session of the United Nations General Assembly in 2011 witnessed three incidents of divided/no agreements over North Korea and Syria with Myanmar and Vietnam dissenting against the other ASEAN member-states. On these key global issues that ASEAN has regularly declared its regional and international interest in such public documents as the twice-yearly

ASEAN Chairman's Statements, the ten member-states found themselves divided when instead it should have presented a united front externally. With Indonesia's President Yudhoyono pushing for ASEAN to play a bigger role and reaching out to the world in response to global dynamics, the ten ASEAN member-states must find ways to prevent a repeat of such incidents in future; something that the Bali Concord III will hopefully help address.

It is also interesting to remember that 2011 and 2012 were not only difficult years for ASEAN at the United Nations General Assembly but also in a much wider context. For example in 2011, Cambodian and Thai soldiers clashed in a series of armed skirmishes over the Preah Vihear complex which left at least 20 deaths and displaced thousands of local Cambodians and Thais. Meanwhile 2012 saw the infamous diplomatic fallout at the 45th ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting in Phnom Penh, Cambodia when, for the first time in ASEAN's history, the region's foreign ministers failed to issue their usual annual Joint Statement. This unprecedented failure revealed the deep divisions among the ten ASEAN member-states on how to respond to China on the issue of the South China Sea.

With the South China Sea issue becoming just as prominent now – if not more – than it was back in 2012 there are legitimate concerns over whether ASEAN can retain its unity or whether it will find itself divided once again. Recent weeks and months have seen: the Philippines submit a 4,000-page case against China's claims to the South China Sea with the Permanent Court of Arbitration; Indonesia for the first time publicly declaring that China's nine-dash line overlaps with Indonesian waters and therefore staking itself as an interested party to the South China Sea issue; and more recently Vietnam being involved with China in incidents of boat ramming and sinking near a controversial oil rig in the South China Sea. The worry here is that individual member-states will pursue and defend their own national interests at the expense of regional unity.

To add to this worry are concerns over the ongoing contestation between the US – with their pivot towards Asia-Pacific – and China – with their military rise and assertiveness in the region. While ASEAN has responded to this contestation by asserting its concept of 'ASEAN Centrality', it could be argued that the regional organization's constant emphasis on the concept betrays a certain lack of confidence in its own ability to stay out of the Beijing-Washington DC's rivalry. It is also worth noting that Japan is also entering into the fray seeking friends and allies in the Southeast Asian region viz-a-viz its own disputes with China. The question therefore becomes: may we see more divisions between the ten member-states of ASEAN in the face of big power realpolitik? And if ASEAN is divided, can it really offer and contribute solutions to global issues?

Clearly then, this is the homework for ASEAN and its ten member-states. In hindsight, the introduction of the Bali Concord III was certainly timely and appropriate, reinforcing the urgency for the ten member-states to be more united if it wishes to play a bigger role in the world. Rather than pointing to the unrealistic impracticality of the Bali Concord III's commitments, the difficult years of 2011 and 2012 should be seen as a reminder to ASEAN that it should not take its unity for granted and that regional coordination, cohesion and coherence requires constant effort. With eight years left until the 2022 deadline for the realization of the Bali Concord III, there is still plenty of time for ASEAN to develop the proper mechanisms, frameworks and institutions to ensure the ten member-states can regularly adopt an ASEAN position on global issues and prevent future incidents of dissent. However one thing for certain is that despite the extreme diversities found within the region, ASEAN *has* and *can* display high levels of unanimous agreement at the world stage and this finding should inspire the ten member states of ASEAN to continue in its efforts to fully realize the Bali Concord III and make the ASEAN Community in a Global Community of Nations a reality.

--end--

ENDNOTES

- 1 Xinhua (2011, November 17). "ASEAN to Act in Unison in Global Matters: Indonesian." Retrieved from http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2011-11/17/c_131253581.htm
- 2 Jakarta Post (2011, December 8). "Insight: The 2011 ASEAN Summit and its Significance." Retrieved from <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2011/11/17/insight-the-2011-asean-summit-and-its-significance.html>
- 3 Wahyuningrum, Y (December 2009). 'Understanding ASEAN: its Systems and Structures'. Retrieved from: http://www.dpiap.org/resources/ppt/ASEAN_structuresmechanisms_Yuyun_10_03_04.ppt
- 4 Emmerson, D.K. (2005). Will the Real ASEAN Please Stand Up? Security, Community and Democracy in Southeast Asia". Retrieved from http://iis-db.stanford.edu/evnts/4130/Emmerson_04_05_2005.pdf
- 5 ASEAN Secretariat (2003). *Declaration of ASEAN Concord II (Bali Concord II)*. Retrieved from: <http://www.asean.org/news/item/declaration-of-asean-concord-ii-bali-concord-ii>
<http://www.asean.org/archive/documents/19th%20summit/Bali%20Concord%20III.pdf>
- 6 Burchill, R. (2009). "Regional Integration and the Promotion and Protection of Democracy in Asia: Lessons from ASEAN". *Asian Yearbook of International Law*, Vol 13, pp.113-142.
- 7 Yudhoyono, Susilo Bambang (2011, November 17). 'Speech H.E. Dr Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, President of the Republic of Indonesia, at the Opening Ceremony of the 19th ASEAN Summit'. Retrieved from: <http://www.asean.org/news/item/speech-he-dr-susilo-bambang-yudhoyono-president-of-the-republic-of-indonesia-at-the-opening-ceremony-of-the-19th-asean-summit>
- 8 Jakarta Post (2011, November 18). "ASEAN pledges a common platform." Retrieved from <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2011/11/18/asean-pledges-a-common-platform.html>
- 9 Antara News (2011, November 17). "'That is ASEAN's Contribution to the world': President". Retrieved from <http://www.antaranews.com/en/news/77655/that-is-aseans-contribution-to-theworld-president>
- 10 Antara News (2011, November 18). "ASEAN showing increasing problem-solving capability." Retrieved from <http://www.antaranews.com/en/news/77700/asean-showing-increasing-problem-solving-capability>
- 11 Nhan Dan Online (2011, November 18). "ASEAN leaders sign third Bali Concord." Retrieved from: <http://www.nhandan.com.vn/cmlink/nhandan-online/homepage/world/asean-leaders-sign-third-bali-concord-1.321756#pQqdAEyvJxzA>
- 12 ASEAN Secretariat (2011). *Bali Declaration on ASEAN Community in a Global Community of Nations "Bali Concord III"*. Retrieved from: <http://www.asean.org/archive/documents/19th%20summit/Bali%20Concord%20III.pdf>
- 13 Marimas, Larry (No Date). 'ASEAN Regional Cooperation on Disaster Relief.' Retrieved from: <http://www.the-ecentre.net/resources/workshop/materials/349/ASEAN%20AADMER%20AHA.pdf>
- 14 Jakarta Post (2011, November 25). "ASEAN Summit: the Lingering Questions." Retrieved from <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2011/11/25/asean-summit-the-lingering-questions.html>
- 15 The Brunei Times (2011, November 18). "ASEAN leaders ink Bali Concord III." Retrieved from <http://www.bt.com.bn/news-national/2011/11/18/asean-leaders-ink-bali-concord-iii>
- 16 Ibid
- 17 Salim, Ziad (1987). "ASEAN in the United Nations". *Indonesian Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (April 1987).
- 18 Ibid
- 19 Ibid
- 20 Anwar, Dewi Fortuna (1994). *Indonesia in ASEAN: Foreign Policy and Regionalism* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies).



Talking ASEAN on "U.S. Rebalancing to Asia and Chinese New Leadership: Challenges for ASEAN Centrality and its Implications on Neighbouring Countries"
The Habibie Center Building, 17 September 2013



Talking ASEAN on "ASEAN Connectivity: Opportunities for Business and Shaping ASEAN Identity"
The Habibie Center Building, 29 October 2013



About ASEAN Studies Program

The ASEAN Studies Program was established on February 24, 2010, to become a center of excellence on ASEAN related issues, which can assist in the development of the ASEAN Community by 2015. The Habibie Center through its ASEAN Studies Program, alongside other institutions working towards the same goal, hopes to contribute to the realization of a more people-oriented ASEAN that puts a high value on democracy and human rights.

The objective of the ASEAN Studies Program is not merely only to conduct research and discussion within academic and government circles, but also to strengthen public awareness by forming a strong network of civil society in the region that will be able to help spread the ASEAN message. With the establishment of ASEAN Studies Program, The Habibie Center aims to play its part within our capabilities to the ASEAN regional development.

About Talking ASEAN

Talking ASEAN is a monthly public dialogue held at The Habibie Center in Jakarta. Covering a wide array of issues related to ASEAN, Talking ASEAN addresses topics of: Economic Integration, Socio-cultural, & Democracy, human rights and regional peace, among others. Featuring local and visiting experts, Talking ASEAN is one of a series of twelve dialogues regularly held each month and open to a target audience consisting of ASEAN officials, foreign ambassadors & diplomats, academics, university students, businesses, and the media.

