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Beyond the Outlook



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Executive Summary

- During their 34th Summit in Bangkok in June 2019, the ASEAN Leaders officially endorsed and adopted the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP). Given that it took just around one and a half year for ASEAN members to deliberate the document, the issuance of the AOIP is a remarkable success, especially given ASEAN's tendency to drag its feet on sensitive matters.
- While the AOIP serves as the much-needed ASEAN response to the emerging new pattern of major power relations, critics argue it remains short on actionable steps and avoids critical issues such as ASEAN's growing internal divisions in the face of major power frictions. It merely sketches a rough roadmap that leaves difficult but crucial issues unaddressed.
- Arguably, the AOIP might be a victim of unrealistic expectations; it might be expected to be something that it is not designed to be. While agreeing that giving substance to the AOIP is of paramount importance, this edition of *ASEAN Briefs* examines the AOIP as what it really is: the latest reiteration of ASEAN's effort of norms-setting.
- This edition of *ASEAN Briefs* argues that ASEAN's main role in regional security have been in norm-setting rather than exercising hard power or actual conflict-resolution. This conclusion is reached after exploring the strategic context in which the AOIP was issued, identifying the norms that ASEAN seek to promote through the AOIP, and briefly examining the role of Indonesia in developing the AOIP. This edition of *ASEAN Briefs* ends by looking at what lies ahead for the AOIP and the broader regional security architecture.



Introduction

During their 34th Summit in Bangkok in June 2019, the ASEAN Leaders officially endorsed and adopted the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP). It took just around one and a half year for ASEAN members to deliberate the document. For ASEAN, known for its tendency to drag its feet especially on sensitive matters, the issuance of the AOIP is a remarkable success. Indeed, the Indo-Pacific has increasingly been the most strategic region where the interests of major actors intersect. As the contemporary geo-economic and geopolitical centre of gravity, the stakes are high in the Indo-Pacific.

However, critics have pointed out that while the AOIP serves as the much-needed ASEAN response to the emerging new pattern of major power relations, it remains short on actionable steps and avoids critical issues such as ASEAN's growing internal divisions in the face of major power frictions.¹ It merely sketches a rough roadmap that leaves difficult but crucial issues unaddressed.²

Like seemingly any diplomatic initiative by ASEAN, the AOIP might be a victim of unrealistic expectations; it might be expected to be something that it is not designed to be.

While agreeing that giving substance to the AOIP is of paramount importance, this edition of *ASEAN Briefs* examines the AOIP as what it really is: the latest reiteration of ASEAN's effort of norms-setting.

In the following section, the record of ASEAN in setting norms that regulate interstate relations will be sketched. It shows that throughout its history, ASEAN's main role in regional security have been in norm-setting rather than exercising hard power or actual conflict-resolution. After that, the strategic context in which the AOIP is issued will be described. This context is mainly shaped by competing visions of great powers in the region. The section after that will identify norms that ASEAN seek to promote through the AOIP. A brief examination of the role of Indonesia in developing the AOIP will also be presented. This policy brief will be concluded with some words on what lies ahead for the AOIP and the broader regional security architecture.

ASEAN's record of regional norms-setting

Throughout its history, but especially so after the end of the Cold War, ASEAN has realised that keeping great power politics out of the region is not always a feasible option. The principles of non-interference notwithstanding, ASEAN

never denies the existence of great powers' interests in the region. What ASEAN members aspire to achieve, however, is to ensure that the great powers are socialised and their behaviour regulated with certain norms and principles that ASEAN set up. This regulated behaviour, ASEAN believes, would allow ASEAN to enjoy the provision of security as a public goods through great powers presence in the region while ensuring the environment is still conducive for ASEAN members to pursue their own respective development.

ASEAN's main role in regional security have been in norm-setting and confidence-building, rather than in exercising hard power or conflict-resolution.³ In international relations, norms are often defined as standard behaviours defined in terms of rights and obligations.⁴ In addition to the spaces for diplomacy it provided, these regional norms and practices are meant to incentivise and constraint great power behaviour.⁵ As a security regime, ASEAN aims to enhance its members' common long-term security interests through the formation of certain codes of conduct, certain level of institutionalisation and prolonged existence of common interests.⁶

In his seminal work on ASEAN as a security community, Acharya divides ASEAN norms and principles into four core categories: those dealing with the non-use of force and the pacific settlement of disputes; those concerning regional autonomy and collective self-reliance; the doctrine of non-interference in the internal affairs of states, and; the rejection of an ASEAN military pact and the preference for bilateral defence cooperation.⁷ The promotion of these norms and principles has been evident in the development of ASEAN and its relations with great powers.

ASEAN has been resilient and adaptive towards the changing dynamics of great powers interaction in the region. In 1971, only four years after its establishment, ASEAN's founding members declared Southeast Asia as a "Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality, free from any form or manner of interference by outside powers." This ZOPFAN Declaration can be seen as a response towards the declared disengagement of the Anglo-American powers from the region.⁸ It underlined the essence of ASEAN's approach to relations with the great powers -attempting to hold them at bay while striving to strengthen the internal cohesion that underlies ASEAN's external clout and defences.⁹

After the U.S. finally withdrew its forces from Vietnam, ASEAN issued the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in 1976. Through the TAC, ASEAN asserted the basic rules of the game for international relations in Southeast Asia, including respect for national independence, sovereignty and territorial independence, freedom from external interference, subversion or coercion, and commitments to the peaceful resolution of disputes and the non-use of force.¹⁰ The principles of the TAC has since formed a basic normative framework upon which ASEAN's engagements with great powers are undertaken. The accession of great powers to the TAC also reflects ASEAN's ability to induce them to pledge respect for regional norms.¹¹ China acceded to the TAC in 2003 while the U.S. acceded in 2009.

The redistribution of power after the end of the Cold War presented an enormous challenge for ASEAN. The Soviet Union was suddenly gone, the U.S. closed its military bases in the Philippines, and China was rising. In response to that, ASEAN issued the Singapore and Manila Declaration. The former called

for, among others, intensified cooperative relationships with ASEAN's dialogue partners while the latter emphasised peaceful means to resolve disputes in the South China Sea and for all parties to exercise restraint.

ASEAN also made considerable efforts to deepen regionalism as a means to engage, integrate and constrain external powers, channelling them towards desired areas of cooperation and into multilateral spaces where ASEAN members can pool their weight.¹² The short-lived unipolar moment allowed ASEAN to focus more on deeper institutionalization and the regional community-building project.¹³ In 1994, the first meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) was held. Through the ARF, in addition to keeping the U.S. engaged in the regional security architecture, ASEAN seeks to promote and institutionalise the norm of cooperative security relations as the backbone of regional security.¹⁴

Despite the recent criticisms over the slow progress, the ARF has undoubtedly formed an important part of ASEAN's broader effort to promote cooperation through multilateralism. The changing attitude of the non-ASEAN ARF participants – such as China, the U.S., and Australia – towards ASEAN-led multilateral initiatives throughout the 1990s suggests that ASEAN cooperative security enterprise had been developing rather successfully.¹⁵

In addition to the security-centred ARF, ASEAN's norms have been promoted through the leaders-led process in the East Asia Summit (EAS). This was launched in 2005 amidst the realisation of contemporary challenges in the changing region and the need to maintain ASEAN centrality in the regional architecture. Indeed, ASEAN goes as far as requiring all the countries involved in the EAS

to accede to ASEAN's TAC, hence declaring their commitment for ASEAN-promoted norms such as mutual respect for sovereignty and non-interference. Recently, there have been calls for transforming the EAS into the premier regional institution to ensure regional stability.¹⁶ Indeed, with membership covering almost all key players in the region, the EAS is set to be a perfect platform for ASEAN to continue its norms-building efforts.

Another avenue through which ASEAN wishes to engage external powers through consultation practices is the ASEAN Defence Minister's Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus). Inaugurated in 2010, the ADMM-Plus is designed to be a mechanism for multilateral security dialogue as well as a framework for non-traditional security cooperation. By putting emphasis on practical cooperation and elaborately avoiding the sensitive issues such as territorial disputes, the ADMM-Plus has seemed to be successful in garnering support from ASEAN external partners. Indeed, in terms of concrete deliverables, the ADMM-Plus has gone further than any existing regional cooperative framework that ASEAN has initiated.¹⁷

ASEAN does not want interference, but they are not interested in keeping the great powers away as well. ASEAN members realise that the right amount of great powers presence that is balanced in Southeast Asia is necessary to keep the strategic stability of the region.

Strategic context of the AOIP

The AOIP was issued against the background of ongoing profound changes in the global and regional context. In the words of an Indonesian diplomat, "We live in a turbulent world, where the old is being dismantled and the new is yet to emerge. Faced with such strategic



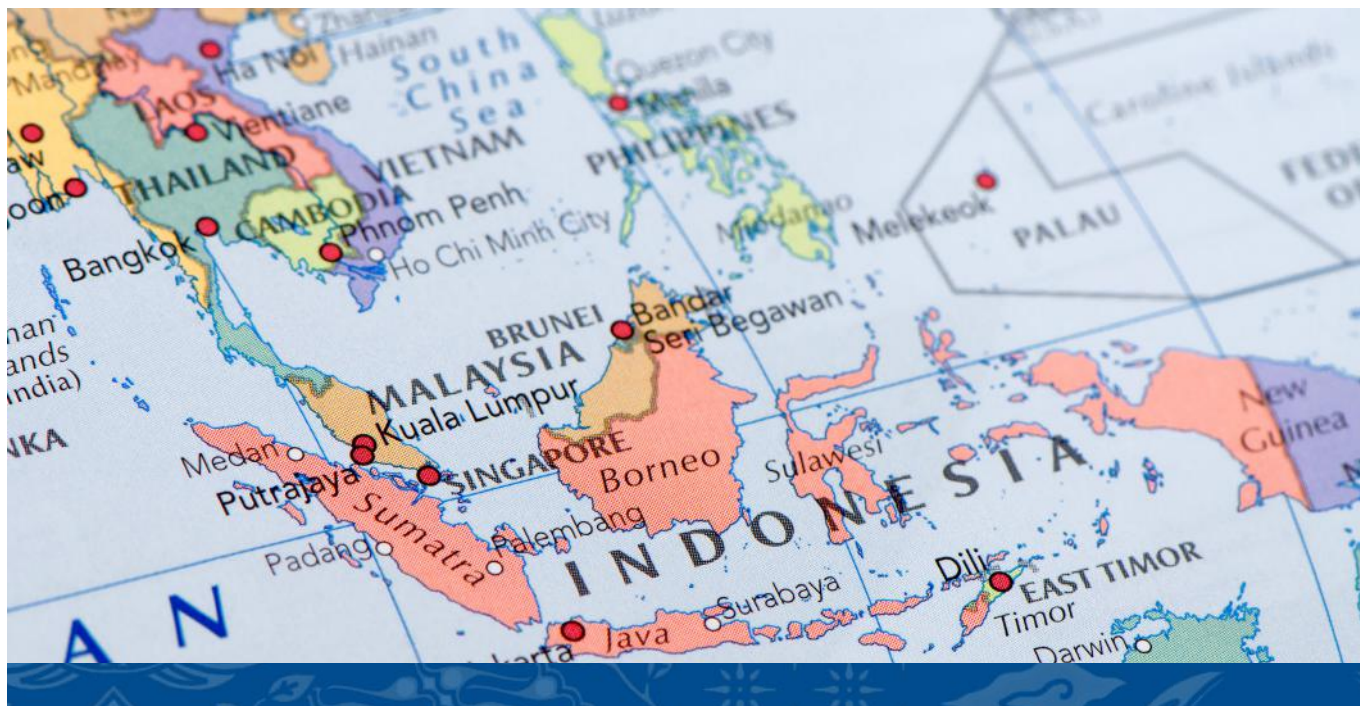
uncertainty, every nation is scrambling and struggling to find the most suitable place for itself in the emerging strategic environment, individually or collectively.”¹⁸ The future balance of power in the Indo-Pacific will largely depend on the actions of the U.S. and China as well as a number of other major powers including Japan, India, Australia, and Indonesia. The changing distribution of power is the most important driver that shapes the Indo-Pacific strategic landscape.

In their effort to find their place in the increasingly strategic Indo-Pacific region, countries have come up with their own respective strategic narratives. The U.S.’ approach to Indo-Pacific, despite being claimed as a “whole-of-government” approach, tends to be primarily driven by security interests. The U.S. Department of Defence’s Indo-Pacific Strategy Report (IPSR), released on June 2019, is arguably the most comprehensive document through which the U.S.’ overall approach to Indo-Pacific can be gauged. Like the previous administration’s Pivot to Asia, the Indo-Pacific Strategy, in a way, serves as justification for

continued U.S. presence in the region.

The IPSR advances the idea of a “free and open Indo-Pacific”. In addition to the commonly-accepted principles of respect for sovereignty and peaceful resolution of disputes, the “free and open Indo-Pacific” is envisioned to be based on “free, fair, and reciprocal trade and investment, which includes protections for intellectual property” and “adherence to international rules and norms, including freedom of navigation and overflight.” The IPSR also highlights that a “free” Indo-Pacific region requires at the national level “good governance and the assurance that citizens can enjoy their fundamental rights and liberties.” This vision puts the IPSR at odds with China. Indeed, in line with the National Security Strategy released in 2017, the IPSR goes as far as to single out specific countries that could potentially undermine U.S.’ interests in the Indo-Pacific. It calls China a “revisionist power”, Russia a “revitalised malign actor” and North Korea as a “rogue state”.

China has indeed been accused of trying to



reshape the world order to better serve its own interests.¹⁹ Central to this effort is the organising concept of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Dubbed as the Chinese Marshall Plan, under the BRI China has been carrying out or planning construction projects in more than 60 countries along the “belt” of overland corridors and the “road” of maritime shipping lanes. These “belt” and “road” connect almost the entire Eurasian landmass. While being advertised as a purely economic initiative, Beijing has allegedly used economic leverages to gain political benefits across the region.

On top of the economic and political leverages, China has significantly expanded its military power projection capabilities. In the contested South China Sea, China has nearly completed the artificial islands projects that can serve as military outposts. China has also continued to use its military might to coerce other disputants including the Philippines and Vietnam.

While the U.S.-China rivalry would undoubtedly become the major determinant that shapes global and regional order, geopolitical

complexity in the region is confounded by middle powers’ strategy. Countries like Japan, India, and Australia have now more space to take part in shaping the international outcomes. They have also come up with their vision with regards to the Indo-Pacific.

India envisions an “open, stable, secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.” Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has transformed the long-standing Look East Policy into the Act East Policy which underlines the focus to improve relations with ASEAN and other East Asian countries. India’s vision for the Indo-Pacific region consists of five elements: (1) inclusivity, (2) centrality of ASEAN, (3) common rules-based order, (4) freedom of navigation, unimpeded commerce and peaceful settlement of disputes, and (5) open and stable international trade regime. Lastly, India’s engagement in Indo-Pacific is wrapped up by the theme of SAGAR which stands for Security and Growth for All in the Region.

Although being a participant of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), in articulating its

vision for Indo-Pacific, the Indian government appears to be cautious not to be seen as too close to the U.S. In his address at the 2018 Shangri La Dialogue, Prime Minister Modi spent a fair amount of time outlining India's relations with different countries in East Asia and beyond. India-China relations was characterised as having more layers than any other partnership of India.

Meanwhile, Australia, in ensuring access to its trading partners in the Indo-Pacific region, has put stability of the region as one of its strategic interests. The Australian vision for the Indo-Pacific is “a neighbourhood in which adherence to rules delivers lasting peace, where the rights of all states are respected, and where open markets facilitate the free flow of trade, capital and ideas.” This vision shares the same spirit as the U.S.’ Indeed, its alliance with the U.S. is considered “central” to Australia’s approach to the Indo-Pacific for “without strong U.S. political, economic and security engagement, power is likely to shift more quickly in the region and it will be more difficult for Australia to achieve the levels of security and stability” that it seeks. As far as defence is concerned, the Australian government has committed to build “a more capable, agile and potent force”.

Finally, Japan in 2016 introduced its new foreign policy strategy called the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy” (FOIP). In fact, the idea of a “free and open Indo-Pacific” seemed to be initiated by Japan before being signed onto by the U.S. government when President Trump started referring to the “Indo-Pacific region” during his first tour to Asia in November 2017. The Japanese FOIP policy itself is formulated upon the realisation that Asia is currently undergoing rapid growth while Africa possess huge potential for growth. The

Japanese Foreign Ministry states that the “key for stability and prosperity” is the “dynamism that is created by combining ‘Two Continents’, Asia and Africa, and ‘Two Oceans’, the free and open Pacific and Indian Oceans. Japan’s FOIP rests on three pillars: (1) promotion and establishment of rule of law, freedom of navigation and free trade, etc.; (2) pursuit of economic prosperity, and; (3) commitment for peace and stability. FOIP is seen by many as a sign of a more proactive Japanese foreign policy.

Putting the AOIP in context

During the Cold War, Europe, not Asia, was the main front of contestation between superpowers. Containment against the spread of communism notwithstanding, both the U.S. and the Soviet Union allocated more resources and energy to contest each other’s sphere of influence in Europe. When the superpowers’ interests collided in Asia, they collided indirectly through proxies. Today’s great power rivalry is different. One party, China, is a full resident in the region while the other, U.S., is at the very least a half-resident. The Asia-Pacific, where Southeast Asia is located, therefore, is the main front for contemporary great power rivalry. The stakes, therefore, are higher for ASEAN as the possible consequences of great powers collision would affect regional states directly rather than indirectly.

It is against this background of changing dynamics in the region that the AOIP was formulated. The AOIP consists of four elements: (1) a perspective on the integration and interconnectedness of Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions; (2) an Indo-Pacific region as a region of dialogue and cooperation instead of rivalry; (3) an Indo-

Pacific region as a region of development and prosperity for all, and; (4) the importance of maritime domain and perspective in the evolving regional architecture. In terms of the objectives, it is aimed to: (1) offer an outlook to guide cooperation; (2) help promote an enabling environment for peace, stability and prosperity; (3) enhance ASEAN's Community building process and strengthen existing ASEAN's mechanisms, such as the EAS, and (4) implement existing and exploring other areas of cooperation.

Reading the document, it is clear that ASEAN is trying to stress the norms and principles it has set up before. A long list of ASEAN's norms and principles is stated in the AOIP document including openness, transparency, inclusivity, a rules-based framework, good governance, respect for sovereignty, non-intervention, and respect for international law. Through the AOIP, ASEAN members try to make a point that the Indo-Pacific, both as an objective geographical reality and geopolitical narrative, does not exclusively belong to any single actor. At the same time, ASEAN members want to make sure that ASEAN's mechanisms remain at the centre of the changing regional dynamics. These mechanisms, fuelled by the norms and principles ASEAN is promoting, are expected to forge closer cooperation between parties in the Indo-Pacific region and hence decreasing the prospect of conflict. "Inclusivity", "cooperation", and "ASEAN centrality", therefore, are main themes of the AOIP.

The AOIP is ASEAN's attempt to preserve an ASEAN-centred regional order. The AOIP, in this sense, constitutes a response to the growing challenges stemming from external pressures that could threaten ASEAN's unity, undermine ASEAN's relevance and corrode

ASEAN's centrality.²⁰ It is stated that the AOIP "envisages ASEAN centrality as the underlying principle for promoting cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, with ASEAN-led mechanisms, such as the EAS, as platforms for dialogue and implementation of the Indo-Pacific cooperation, while preserving their formats."

The centrality of ASEAN and ASEAN's norms and principles in the unfolding architecture of the Indo-Pacific seems to be accepted by the major powers. In the 2018 edition of the Shangri La Dialogue, for instance, Prime Minister Modi delivered a speech in which he mentioned ASEAN no less than twenty-two times. He reiterated that "inclusiveness, openness and ASEAN centrality and unity" lie at the heart of Indo-Pacific. The centrality of ASEAN, Modi said, will always guide India as it seeks to cooperate for "an architecture for peace and security in the region". In the IPSR, the U.S. government also reiterates its commitment "to support ASEAN centrality in the regional security architecture, and the U.S. free and open Indo-Pacific strategy seeks to further empower it."

While these rhetorical announcements do not necessarily mean complete adherence, they show that the role of ASEAN is still valued. At the very least, this is a good start for ASEAN to further promote and socialise specifics norms and principles it already outlined in the AOIP.

Furthermore, to ensure that the relevant actors, both ASEAN and non-ASEAN states, continue to adhere to the rules of the game set up by ASEAN, the AOIP would be guided by the principles contained in the TAC including peaceful settlement of disputes, renunciation of the threat or use of force and promotion of



rule of law. Therefore, the AOIP can be seen as the latest reiteration of ASEAN's effort to set a normative framework for engagement with great powers.

From the perspective of the great powers, accession to ASEAN's norms makes strategic sense. For powerful states, there is a constant need to justify its power and presence. In other words, powerful states need "to turn brute ability for coercion into legitimate authority, because force alone is a costly and ultimately unreliable instrument for power."²¹

On the other hand, for smaller states, the preoccupation is with how to bind the interests and behaviour of the powerful states so as to maximise gains in terms of public goods but minimise costs in terms of disruptions to the rules and institutes that regulate international life.²² In other words, international institutions are means for smaller states to constrain hegemony.²³ Cooperative institutions are a key form of such frameworks through which

a hegemonic power agrees to bind itself to specified voluntary strategic restraints in dealing with their weaker partners, in return for the latter's long-term, institutionalised cooperation.²⁴ Weaker states in turn gain limits on the action of the leading state and access to political process in which they can press their interests.²⁵ International institutions bind all states, but especially the stronger states, using rules and other normative expectations of conduct.²⁶

ASEAN members have learned from their history that although great powers rivalry might bring negative ramifications, great powers presence in the region is necessary to ensure stability and security. By having great powers' behaviour regulated by norms that ASEAN has set up, ASEAN members can have space to pursue their own respective interests such as economic development.

The role of Indonesia in bringing the AOIP into reality is very important. As the informal leader of ASEAN, Indonesia is uncomfortable with the US approach, seeing it as an exclusionary and aimed at isolating China.²⁷ Unlike the U.S. and its allies who use the terms "free" and "open", Indonesia and ASEAN opt for "open" and "inclusive", implying that the AOIP is not designed to exclude any single player in the region. The AOIP is also in line with the vision set up by President Joko Widodo in 2014 to transform Indonesia into a maritime power.

Conclusion: What next for the AOIP?

Examining the AOIP as part of the ongoing effort of ASEAN to promote certain norms to bind and regulate its external environment helps us in looking at the AOIP in an objective and reasonable way. So, what are reasonable expectations from AOIP in the future?



First, the AOIP is a demonstration of ASEAN resilience. History shows that whenever ASEAN is faced with strategic uncertainty in its external environment, instead of being dragged apart, ASEAN members will seek to strengthen multilateral cooperative initiatives.

Second, as part of ASEAN's norms-setting agenda, however, the AOIP is not designed and should not be expected to solve all of the pressing problems in interstate relations in the Indo-Pacific region. At least not directly. ASEAN, therefore, cannot be expected to press too hard in making all aspects of the AOIP implemented. This is especially true when it comes to one of the areas of cooperation identified in the document: maritime cooperation.

The AOIP recognises that “the existing and arising geopolitical challenges facing countries in the region also revolve around maritime issues such as unresolved maritime disputes that have the potential for open conflict” [Emphasis added]. It also seeks to enhance, among others, cooperation for peaceful

settlement of disputes, promotion of maritime safety and security, as well as freedom of navigation and overflight. In addressing these issues ASEAN will inevitably need to come face to face with China that might not entirely agree with some of the ASEAN UNCLOS defenders that sea is a global public goods.

Third, unstable relations and uncontrolled escalation is not in anybody's interest in the Indo-Pacific region. We can safely expect, therefore, that great powers would at least nominally accede to the rules of the game set up by ASEAN through the AOIP. The continued accession, however, would very much depend on the credibility of ASEAN itself. In order to present itself as a credible model, ASEAN members need to demonstrate their ability to conduct their intramural businesses according to the norms and principles they have agreed upon. This means not only norms that ASEAN members are naturally comfortable with, such as non-intervention and respect for sovereignty, but also other principles such as openness, transparency, and rules-based framework.

ASEAN's comparative advantage is that it is universally acceptable as the 'driver' of regionalism in a situation in which the great powers are suspicious of each other.²⁸ ASEAN members need to allocate more resources and attention to strengthen this quality. In other words, in order for the AOIP to succeed, ASEAN members need to convince the great powers that it is indeed in their interests to commit to the initiatives set up by ASEAN.

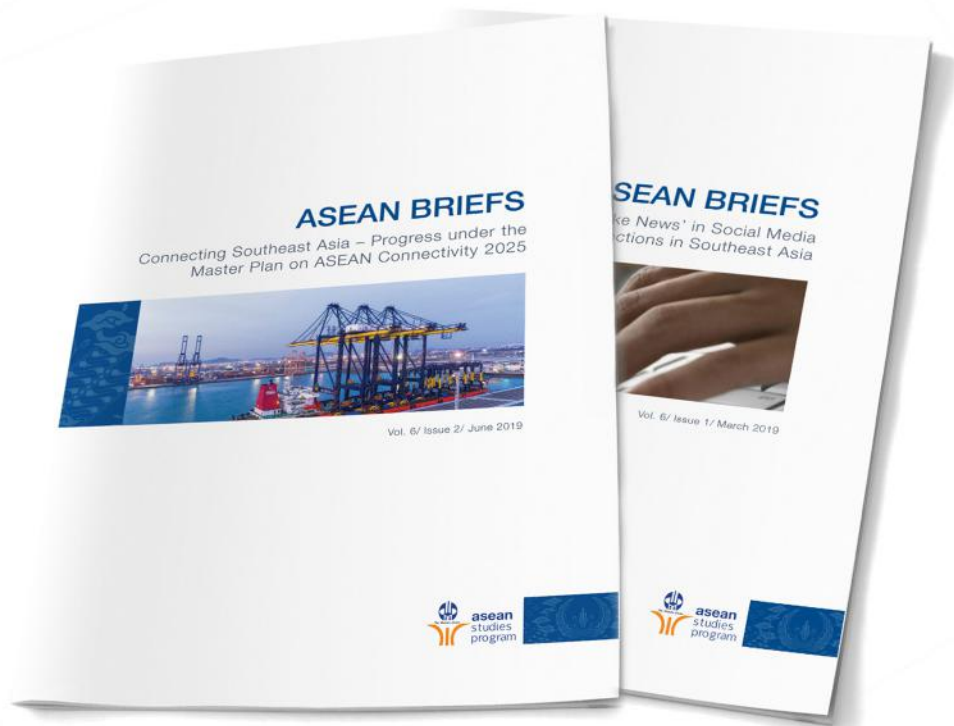
Fourth, ASEAN needs to go beyond the rhetorical pronouncement of "centrality" and "unity".²⁹ ASEAN needs to substantiate these notions with a clearer shared purpose and direction. ASEAN needs to remain central not only in institutional architecture in the region but also to the foreign policy thinking and strategic outlook of its members.³⁰ This would not be easy as ASEAN members are increasingly becoming more independent in making strategic considerations, including in choosing their individual approach to great powers. ASEAN members seem to be more prepared and willing to go pursue unilateral strategic interests, independent of ASEAN's collective interests, when they deem necessary.





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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.

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