

Investing on Preventive Diplomacy: How ASEAN can Generate Soft Power through Its Peacemaking Mechanism

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Abstract

Preventive diplomacy is defined by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum as diplomatic or political action used by states to avert disputes that has the possibility of threatening regional peace and stability. The 2015 ASEAN integration offers possibilities for the establishment of ASEAN soft power. Soft power is the ability to attract and co-opt rather than coerce. Recent trends suggest that it can be used by multilateral organizations such as ASEAN and the European Union (EU) in the international system. This paper intends to propose that the ASEAN, in order to wield soft power, must invest in its mechanisms of conflict management on its domestic control. Through a matrix of events and actors, the paper will establish a connection between the peacemaking efforts of ASEAN and its increasing number of partnerships between member countries. The paper raises two important arguments: first, the experience of ASEAN is different from that of the EU. Hence, how the former will forge its soft power is not similar to the latter. The second argument, as inspired by Nye's soft power, believes that the peacemaking mechanisms of ASEAN allowed admiration from other international actors.

Keywords: Soft Power, Preventive Diplomacy, ASEAN Integration

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Introduction

The primary objective of the formation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967 was to have economic cooperation in the region. A closer examination however shows that in the past twenty-five (25) years, ASEAN has been more effective in its diplomacy in the political arena than on the economic cooperation anterior (Kurus, 1993). There was certainly no peace and stability when the Association was formed. The region was in an environment of insecurity and distrust given the numerous difference and that the countries themselves are competing rivals in the global economy. When the Association was created, it was a purely political undertaking (Blankert, 2014). Compared to other Regional Organizations (ROs) as well as the unpredictable and unstable condition of the region, ASEAN is weak. Thus, the creation of ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). In 1994, the ARF was formed with the objective of enhancing peace in the Asia-Pacific by way of political and security dialogue. It was expected to develop through three stages of security cooperation namely: confidence building, preventive diplomacy (PD), and conflict resolution mechanisms (Emmers, 2012). The ARF, however, has been losing momentum these past few years with the Association focusing more on its economic development.

The 2015 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) attempts to create an open-market in a highly competitive economic region to be able to economically develop in a global financial system. The economic integration of ASEAN, however, might not benefit all of its members given that most are agricultural countries and cannot compete within an open-market economy. Economic development is difficult for all the member countries and there have been questions asked with regards to the integration such as “Will the ASEAN Integration benefit all of its members?” The major issue with regard to the socio-economic inequality among ASEAN country members, especially with the CLMV countries or Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam hinders the development of the Association. Though it is not yet proven that the economic integration will not succeed, it is imperative to now look at the other possibilities and successes that ASEAN can gain from this integration. This paper aims to discuss that ASEAN can generate soft power through PD from this integration. With this being said, the role of ARF is very important and will be the focus of this paper.

Soft Power and Preventive Diplomacy

Soft power, as first discussed by Joseph Nye Jr., has been a very popular concept in the academic and the political world and is constantly present as important parts in the foreign policies of many countries. It is a persuasive approach of obtaining control and influence over others. Unlike hard power, it is mainly cultural and pose importance on political values. Nye (2004), states that soft power “is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies”. Soft power is related to cultural influences. In fact, Fergusson (2009) stated that Great Britain in the 19th century led the way in the use of soft power with the projections of its culture by the way of the sermons of their missionaries and the commentaries in Anglophone newspapers (Nye J. S., Think Again: Soft Power, 2006). Soft power lies in the capability to influence the preferences of others without using force, coercion or

violence. It can be perceived in different settings and with different degrees of intensity, and evidence (Pallaver, 2011). At the personal level, soft power can be likened to the ability to seduce another person in order for them to do your bidding without the use of force or coercion. Countries can also use “seduction” to get what they want without using force as stated that “a country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries - admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness - want to follow it” (Nye J. , 2004).

Soft power promotes the use of diplomatic means in resolving conflicts rather than the use of force and coercion. Preventive diplomacy is one of the most useful tools of action that the ROs and countries in possession of great soft power use. Preventive diplomacy (PD), as the name says, is the use of diplomatic means in resolving disputes. It refers specifically to diplomatic action taken at the earliest possible stage in order to “prevent disputes from arising between parties, to prevent existing disputes from escalating into conflicts and to limit the spread of the latter when they occur” (General, 2011).

During times of great crisis and seeming war, preventive diplomacy has been used by the leaders of many countries to prevent the apparent dangers that might come to them. Numerous conflicts have been avoided with the use of preventive diplomacy and the successful negotiation gave way into the increase of the country’s or institutions soft power. PD has been used to resolve conflicts arising from different circumstances thus in 1994, Acharya defined preventive diplomacy as actions carried out by governments, multilateral organization, and international agencies that is diplomatic, political, military, economic, and humanitarian with the purpose of: preventing major disputes and conflicts to take place between and among states; preventing these disputes into escalating as armed conflict; controlling the amount of violence into minimal and preventing it from spreading towards other places; preventing and organizing serious humanitarian crises connected with these conflicts; and as part of the response, instigating methods in order to help with resolving the disputes.

Soft power provides ample opportunities for a country to create alliances with other countries and organizations. It also gives the states or organization more legitimacy and authority over others. PD is an approach that is used to prevent conflicts into escalating with the use of peaceful negotiations and diplomacy. Any country or organization exercising preventive diplomacy is also capable of gaining and strengthening its soft power. Therefore, with the use of preventive diplomacy, ASEAN can gain greater soft power making it a greater and stronger player in the international system. The Association is composed of diversified countries which makes cooperation difficult but when they are all united, the integration will bring in attributes, that when used wisely, will give the association great preventive diplomacy capabilities and a special brand of unique soft power, and yet this is not the case.

PD is embraced by the ARF and not ASEAN itself. In fact, the ARF is the only inclusive security arrangement serving more or less the entire Asia-Pacific. It is to be noted that the membership of the ARF is larger than that of ASEAN with its current participants as follows: Australia, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Canada, China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, European Union (EU), India,

Indonesia, Japan, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Russia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste, United States, and Viet Nam (Secretariat, 2011). This diversity of members however, also poses threats in the Forum.

The establishment of the ARF resulted from several motivations. It was created to guarantee the regional association's ongoing importance to regional security. ASEAN's original objective which is to institutionalize great power relations within a multilateral framework – has arguably been achieved. The ARF, however, has lost its momentum and is often being criticized for being no more than just a 'talk shop' in the region and is incapable of responding to the developments of security in the Asia-Pacific (Emmers & Tan, 2009). Though in the past few years, the Asia-Pacific has been relatively peaceful with a developing economy, the possibility of armed conflict is still high in the region. This has been proven to be correct with the current security dilemma in the South China Sea and the seemingly unending conflict in the Korean Peninsula. With the ARF losing steam, it is important to once again employ the means of diplomacy by the ARF in order to avoid armed conflict in the region. However, despite these circumstances, the ARF appears to be incapable of developing PD which in turn could be one of the reason why the soft power of ASEAN is relatively weak.

There are a number of explanations with regard to the ARF's historical inability or disinclination to develop PD. The reasons seem to be focused on its institutional size, design, and practice. Cooperation is difficult to achieve in the forum with the large number of participating states. The ASEAN model of regional security was adopted by the ARF in its sovereignty norms and consensus based decision-making strategy. This however resulted into divergent strategic outlooks among the participants of the forum which could have collectively hindered the emergence of a more advanced cooperation. Nonetheless, this limitation did not hold back the Asia-Pacific governments from engaging in PD using other arrangements and modalities and a closer examination states that the principles of sovereignty and noninterference, the forum's preferred diplomatic agreement and security culture known as the 'ASEAN Way' and the innate differences among the members of the forum is the reason behind ARF's lack of progress (Emmers & Tan, 2012).

The ARF is the most ambitious attempt to manage security in the post-Cold War Asia-Pacific. All of the ASEAN countries are members of the ARF. ARF's appeal to non-ASEAN states on the other hand is because of its reputation as a unified diplomatic entity. From its creation up until today, the situation of ASEAN has been quite peaceful which gives merit to the method of interaction developed by the Association alleviating tensions between and among its member states. This method is generally referred to as the "ASEAN way" or the "ASEAN process". The ASEAN way comprises of extensive consultation and consensus-building to develop intramural solidarity. The ASEAN way is the model of the ARF and from the perspective of the proponents of this approach, "if the ASEAN process of dialogue and consultation can successfully alleviate intra- ASEAN tensions and engender the habit of cooperation, then it should be able to produce similar effects in the larger Asia-Pacific region" (Narine, 1997). From a diplomatic standpoint, this method can improve the relationship of countries and also decrease the chance of armed conflict. A peaceful dialogue process is certainly something ASEAN needs as the member countries do not boast arms that are similar to the developed ones. However, it should

also be noted that dialogue can only do so much and that there are some limitations to this ASEAN way. The assumption that a process of interaction such as this can create the social and political linkage that can alter the behavior of states underestimates the importance of historical and strategic context within which the ASEAN developed. In addition, this assumption generalizes ASEAN's nature of internal cohesion (Narine, 1997).

The ASEAN way which is the core of the ARF is ironically not embraced by ASEAN itself. ARF, on one hand, is not that successful in using the ASEAN way to its fullest due to the fact that ASEAN was able to interact with each other peacefully because majority of its members are developing countries and weak states. The ARF members, on the other hand is consists of strong states leading into a more difficult peaceful dialogue among its members. Aside from the number of the members of the ARF, their status and differences have resulted into a lesser degree of success in the implementation of PD with the use of the ASEAN way.

Soft power in the ASEAN can be generated with PD, however, it is not being implemented by the Association but by ARF instead. History suggests that ASEAN has been successful in its peacemaking mechanisms and it would be a shame not to use it for the establishment and strengthening of the Association's soft power. Today, ASEAN member countries are in conflict with China and other member states as well. Because of this, ASEAN is now in danger of armed conflict and now is the time for the Association to use PD and prevent the conflict from escalating. The only problem there is, is that this appears to be the job of the ARF and not ASEAN itself. Amidst this situation, ASEAN can still implement PD and generate soft power though there might be some challenges underway. However, with the successful implementation of it, ASEAN will not only evade armed conflict, but it will also generate soft power that others are admiring.

ASEAN Regionalism

The main challenge for ASEAN in generating soft power is regionalism. After the Cold War, regionalism has been significant to different ROs. Scholars has defined regionalism as a 'strategic goal of region building, of establishing regional coherence and identity' (Roberts, 2012). Majority of the projects and policies of ASEAN can be interpreted as a form of establishing regionalism in the region and a good example of this is ASEAN's project for a security community. The ASEAN Integration is also one form of regionalism project for the Association. The ARF resulted from a successful regionalization. Though the forum might be diminishing at the moment, we may witness its ascension once more with the current state of the ASEAN countries in their disputes.

Cooperation and a united ASEAN stand is very difficult to achieve because of the differences of the member countries. Most countries only deem to cooperate if it will be beneficial to them and will only help if they will be able to get something from it. A united ASEAN will surely be a force to reckon with but a divided ASEAN will be exploited by major powers. The territorial conflict with China as an example gives us a good view on how a divided ASEAN will look like with ASEAN countries scrapping each other rather than helping each other for the reason that most of the ASEAN countries will benefit more supporting China than their ASEAN fellows.

Each member nation view ASEAN as a means of pursuing their national interests. Putting the regional good first than their national agenda is an alien concept to ASEAN members as they are in favor of unity so long as it doesn't conflict with their respective national interests (Palatino, 2013). This is also the case with the economic integration in the ASEAN region. Majority of the ASEAN countries are agricultural countries acting as rice exporters and other raw materials. The integration will create an open market with the hopes of being able to compete in the global market but it seems that this will not be the case in other ASEAN countries especially those that lack the technology and manpower to compete in the global market – the countries that needed help the most. With no doubt, the more advanced countries will definitely benefit from the integration but others will not because the ASEAN countries will just be competing against themselves given that what they can offer to the global market are the same products.

How then can ASEAN benefit from an integration? In what manner will all the member states be able to put the regional good first? The answer lies in the potential of ASEAN preventive diplomacy and soft power. Most countries in the ASEAN region are developing countries and possess very little influence that can persuade other states. The only way most of them will be able to possess their coveted influence is to work together as a regional organization. One should keep in mind that success in the economic integration is going to be minimal. Thus, we then turn to the region's security community and ARF's PD.

Regionalism can be reflected as both a policy and a project. The successful apprehension of ASEAN's security community project would represent the outcome of adequate transnational integration (Roberts, 2012). Regionalism naturally entails the existence of a region, and with the diversified culture of the ASEAN countries, there is vast potential of soft power in the region. The only question is how.

The ARF has a predominantly ASEAN character. In the context of regional institution building, the ARF is unique. It was not created in the aftermath of war, unlike European institutions that developed in the aftermath of the Second World War and in the shadow of the Cold War. In addition, it was not a treaty or alliance confined to participants from the Southeast Asia region (Chanto, 2003).

Even though the ARF is also consist of other countries aside from ASEAN countries, this divides the forum in its ideologies but it can also give ASEAN a big voice in its decision making process. The ARF is split between activist (Australia, Canada, US, Japan) and reluctant (China and most of ASEAN) countries. ASEAN countries reject a more formal ARF because they want to avoid taking any steps that would undermine the ASEAN way. Hence a “pace comfortable to all participants” needs to be established, which often destabilizes the efficiency of the ARF as a regional security actor by leading to lowest common denominator decisions (Weber, 2009). ARF reflects ASEAN's preferred strategy of consensus diplomacy, which is to manage problems rather than resolve them. It can be understood that even though the ASEAN countries are inferior with the other members of the forum, as a collective entity it has great power over the forum. However, ASEAN is not a stable RO. Therefore, in order for ASEAN to wield soft power, it must first become a “real” RO through regionalism.

ASEAN Cooperation, values, and institutionalization

The diplomatic approaches of ASEAN have been more successful compared to its efforts towards economy. It would be much better then to focus on improving the diplomacy of ASEAN and think of having an economic integration when the ASEAN is more stable and more significant in the international arena than it is today. A very good example of the diplomatic success of ASEAN is the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC). The TAC started as a peace treaty between the members of ASEAN and it now includes an increasing number of other countries and ROs that have committed with the TAC's memorandum of peaceful cooperation and non-interference (Blankert, 2014). The relationship of ASEAN and China remains stable despite the tensions between the China and other ASEAN countries with the regards to the territorial claims of China and Vietnam, and China and the Philippines in the South China Sea. This dispute may lead into war in the region but fact of the matter is, China, Vietnam, and the Philippines has yet to use military armies in their full force. Diplomatic talks and negotiations have been working really well and it appears that ASEAN has been playing a good role as the stabilizer in the territorial disputes of the countries in the region. The relationship between western powers and ASEAN especially with the US have been quite successful as well. The counterbalance efforts of the US with China is a good indicator of the growing influence of ASEAN in the international arena.

No one can deny that compared to some of the other ROs in the world, ASEAN is one of the weakest considering the capabilities and resources of its members. Most are developing countries making them weak compared to others. ASEAN unites these small countries for them to create a powerful one to be able to compete with the other major powers in the world. ASEAN gives its member countries the psychological comfort and support that they needed and value giving them the feeling of inclusion which they all needed to be able to grow and develop and also encourages them to compete with the major powers as a united RO. It also gives the members the self-confidence to assert themselves in the global affairs (Kurus, 1993). Thus, ASEAN does not only provide companionship and development potential to its member countries, it also gives them the ability to persuade and influence the major power, giving ASEAN a significant role in global policymaking.

The peacekeeping methods of ASEAN has been so far effective given that no major war have occurred in the region so far even though the countries themselves are not the best of friends. This ability has been admired especially by the EU and that scholars have been stating that the EU should take note of the success of the ASEAN in its peacemaking and peacekeeping efforts. ASEAN was also able to use its diplomatic prowess with regards to China and other major powers avoiding the use of military power and resolving conflicts in a peaceful way. As for the soft power of ASEAN, the member's states of the RO all are very unique and attractive to others, the diversity of the cultures, language, and ideals of the member states and the charismatic abilities of the member states in the ASEAN is and will be a very valuable tool and soft power for the ASEAN. However, despite all of these possibilities, all of this will not be accomplished if the member states would not cooperate and unite as one by becoming a real RO. Only when they decide to put more importance with the regional good will ASEAN be able to meet its full potential and be a force to be reckon with in the international arena. The hard power

capabilities of ASEAN may not be that strong, but the soft power capability of the region is something to look forward to.

The ASEAN concord, aside from the ASEAN way and conflict resolution, was also symbolically significant in developing ASEAN's *raison d'être* to include political cooperation. The establishment of the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta complemented this institutionalization. On the other hand, TAC sought to unite obligations with regards to respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, the settlement of differences or disputes via peaceful means, and a renunciation of the threat or use of force (Roberts, 2012). ASEAN is one of the success stories of regionalism in the international arena. But like most of the ROs, ASEAN is also vulnerable to challenges and conflicts among its members and from other countries outside of the Southeast Asia region. Nevertheless, ASEAN was still able to remain intact and some of the challenges even made the pact of the Association even stronger. Regional cooperation and displays of unity have considerably been driven by common challenges and threats in the security and economic spheres – whether derived from intra-regional or extra-regional sources (Roberts, 2012).

With the countries of the Asian region especially the ASEAN cooperating and working one, the soft power of ASEAN will be achieved. Though they may differ in many aspects, it is their diversity that actually makes ASEAN such a charismatic RO. However, majority of the ASEAN countries are still in some ways elitist and would disregard the voice of their citizens, which would harm not only the country but ASEAN itself. The policies and projects that ASEAN makes are for their citizens, and disregarding the voice and refusing public participation might result into redundancy and inefficiency of the policies implemented by the Association. Only by listening to the feedback of the people can the policy makers of ASEAN be able to formulate policies that are relevant and readily acceptable. The construction of a regional community will remain as only a political slogan without the support of the people. What is needed therefore in ASEAN is an immediate scheme by the member countries to solicit the views of their citizens and at the same time, educate them (Moorthy & Benny, 2012). This task is an easy one considering the technological improvements and also the willingness of the citizens of the ASEAN countries to help change and develop their country because in the first place, they are going to be helping themselves and also develop their country. This form of cooperation and communication by the leaders of the ASEAN country members and their citizens would also result into the strengthening of their citizen's nationalism in which most of them are short of. When the citizens of the ASEAN countries are patriotic, they embrace their culture and country more resulting into a stronger soft power.

The challenges that ASEAN has faced in its efforts to accomplish greater relationship and support can be further explained by reference to the region's norms and values. In the perspective of norms, the ASEAN way was necessary because of the lack of an alternative basis for the collaboration of the countries, the countries possess more differences than similarities. Despite this however, a degree of commonality was reached between them with regards to the countries' stances towards anti-communism and authoritarian values (Roberts, 2012). The member countries' similar views towards the respect of each other's sovereignty can be seen as a double edged sword as it also hinders the Association in arriving into a consensus with their policies.

Nevertheless, it resulted into a community like association that have resulted into the proposal of a security community and ARF.

The creation of the ARF resulted into a broader number of participants with regards to the situation in the Asia-Pacific and also endorsed the roadmap of ASEAN for a greater regionalism, and although the ASEAN is not embracing PD, it is still important to remember that the core of ARF's PD is the ASEAN way. Therefore, in some way or another, ASEAN might have used and is using PD as a peacemaking mechanism. Soft power was generated by other ROs with the use of different means and this paper suggests that soft power can be achieved by ASEAN using PD. The ARF is consist of all the ASEAN countries in which gives the Association great power over the decision making of the forum as in its consensus. The only problem is that sometimes the ASEAN countries tend to be divided. Regionalism and cooperation is the key for the united ASEAN. A united ASEAN will be able to influence the ARF more and in turn practice PD more also. History and recent trends suggests ASEAN to look more into the security perspective of the region rather than the economic side in which the former is more successful than the later. The ASEAN way in which PD is very much connected is more effective when used by the ASEAN countries themselves. Therefore, not only will the ARF be more effective with the engagement of the ASEAN countries more, it would also give the ASEAN countries the confidence booster that majority of them needed given that some of the ARF members are great powers and intimidating. The diversity of culture is already intact and cannot be changed but ASEAN can also use this to gain more perspectives from its members. With a wider perspective from the ASEAN countries, the Association can have a better understanding of the issues in the international arena and also strengthen cooperation in the Association. With a united ASEAN, the ARF will perform better and implement PD more effectively, leading to the ability of ASEAN to influence other countries more. Not only will the ASEAN countries be more significant in the international arena, it will also be one of the prominent peacemakers with the use of the ASEAN way in PD, leading to the generation and strengthening of the Associations soft power through its peacemaking mechanisms.

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