

Taiwan's New South Bound Policy and the Prospect of Security Cooperation with Southeast Asia

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Abstract

This paper contends that Taiwan's New Southbound Policy is not just a trade and economic policy, but should be located at the strategic level and taken as part of Taiwan's foreign and security policy. To seek a common ground on which the goal of "forging a sense of community" may be achieved, the paper briefly explores national security policy and practice of five ASEAN members, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. It is found that the South China Sea issue and the rise of China may not necessarily be a common concern for the five countries. Instead, they all prioritize maritime security and other internal security issues. To establish some commonality between Taiwan and the Southeast Asian countries, this paper suggests that Taiwan should first promote itself as a case to test the notion of "rules-based order," because even if China may not be taken as an existential threat for Southeast Asian countries, its rise to a hegemon still poses certain risks that need to be managed collectively. Second, the paper suggests that Taiwan may seek security cooperation with its neighbors through capacity-building/enhancing projects that are concrete and less politically sensitive, so as to cultivate substantial relationships on a step-by-step basis.

Keywords: *Securitization, Political Security, Maritime Security, New Southbound Policy, Southeast Asia*

台灣的新南向政策及其與東南亞之安全合作前景

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摘 要

本文申論台灣的新南向政策不應僅被視為一個經貿政策，而亦應在戰略層次上被定位為安全與外交政策之一環。由於新南向政策的目的之一為建立「共同體意識」，本文乃藉由簡要回顧東協五個成員國—印尼、馬來西亞、菲律賓、泰國、與越南—的安全政策與實踐，試圖識別台灣與這些國家之間可有的共同基礎。本文發現，南海議題與中國的崛起並不必然是這五個國家的共同關切；相對的，它們皆將海事安全與其他內部安全的議題列為政策的優先考量。因此，為建立台灣與這些國家之間的共通性，台灣首先應將自身表述為「以規則為基礎的國際秩序」之試金石，因為即使中國並不被東南亞國家視為生存威脅，其之崛起為區域霸權的事實仍帶來某些風險，並需要區域國家的集體經營。其次，台灣應透過能力建構的計畫尋求與周邊國家的安全合作，因為這些計畫既符合其具體需求，政治上的敏感度亦相對較低，而有助於以逐步的方式建構實質的關係。

關鍵詞：安全化、政治安全、海事安全、新南向政策、東南亞

I. Introduction

On August 16, 2016, Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen convened a meeting on international economic and trade strategy and adopted the "Guidelines for the New Southbound Policy." The New Southbound Policy (hereafter, the NSP) aims at strengthening Taiwan's relations with Southeast Asian countries, South Asian Countries, Australia and New Zealand through economic collaboration, talent exchange, resources sharing, and forging regional links. In the two stated "overall and long-term goals" the first stipulates that the policy seeks to forge a "sense of economic community" between Taiwan and the target countries, while the second also refers to the cultivation of "mutual trust and sense of community."¹

The official discourse posits the NSP as a trade and economic policy. As a trade and economic policy, however, the goal of forging a "sense of economic community" seems redundant. In both theory and practice, the development of inter-state economic relations in terms of integration is usually described as evolving from free trade area to custom union, common market, economic union, and to political union.² Major regional integration projects such as the North America Free Trade Area (NAFTA), Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), and Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) are instances of the first stage, while the most "mature" case of regionalism, the European Union, is at the stage of economic union. Regardless of what stage they are at, none of these projects requires or foresees an element of "sense of community." It is therefore contended that if the NSP is driven by the pursuit of economic interests, a sense of economic community is not a

¹ "President Tsai convenes meeting on international economic and trade strategy, adopts guidelines for 'New Southbound Policy'," Office of the President, Taiwan, August 16, 2016, <http://english.president.gov.tw/Default.aspx?tabid=491&itemid=37868&rmid=2355>.

² John J. Wild, Kenneth L. Wild & Jerry C.Y. Han, *International Business: The Challenges of Globalization* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2010, 5th edition), pp. 218-220.

necessary condition but an overstatement.

There is therefore some space for the NSP to be re-interpreted. For some, the emphasis on “people to people connectivity” is crucial and is what makes the NSP more of a social-economic policy than pure economic diplomacy.³ This paper suggests that the NSP should be located at the strategic level and taken as part of Taiwan’s foreign and security policy. There are two reasons for this. First, what makes the *New Southbound Policy* “new” is its reference to the “Southward Policy” that was put forth in 1993-4. One objective of the latter, among others, was “to create local job opportunities, facilitate economic development, and raise the income level, so as to substantiate Taiwan’s relationships with Southeast Asian countries and enhance its role in *regional security system*.”⁴ Second, what makes the NSP to emphasize a southern orientation is a desire to manage if not halt the business sector’s inclination to move “westwards” to China. The politics of “south versus west” in Taiwan dated back to 1995 when the ex-Democratic Progression Party (DPP) Chair Hsu Hsin-liang crafted the term “boldly heading west” [大膽西進] to encourage the people of Taiwan to engage with China with confidence and braveness. In this context, redirecting Taiwan’s business to South and Southeast Asia is never a pure economic reasoning but reflects a political and security calculation that aims to reduce Taiwan’s economic reliance on the Chinese market so as to counter the danger of China’s “using economics to promote unification” [以經促統] strategy.

Political and security concerns are intrinsic to the NSP, although it has to be made clear that this judgement is not the official stance. The NSP implies re-positioning Taiwan from being at the margin of China to being

³ Cf. Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao & Alan H. Yang, “Repositioning Taiwan in Southeast Asia: Strategies to enhance People-to-People Connectivity,” *NBR Brief*, January 11, 2018, <http://www.nbr.org/research/activity.aspx?id=832>.

⁴ “Joint Meeting Record of the Foreign and Overseas Compatriot Affairs, Economics, and National Defense Committees, the 2nd Session of the 2nd legislature,” *Legislative Yuan Bulletin*, Vol. 82, No. 73, December 22, 1993, p. 417. Italics added.

part of a wider region that is now called the “Indo-Pacific.” Forging a “sense of economic community” is not only about trade and economic interests, but also about securing Taiwan’s economic, social, and political autonomy.

Based on this tenet, this paper explores Taiwan’s security relations with Southeast Asian countries, i.e. member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The second section briefly reviews the current security relations between Taiwan and ASEAN and discusses the reasons for their weak ties. To close the gap and identify common ground on which a sense of community may be constituted between Taiwan and its southern neighbors, the third section explores the security discourse and practice of some of the ASEAN members. The fourth section then proposes some possible areas of cooperation. The final section concludes the findings.

II. A Glance at Taiwan- ASEAN Security Relations

Taiwan’s current security relations with ASEAN and its member states are weak. The only inter-state military cooperation is Project Starlight, a Taiwan-Singapore agreement signed in 1975 regarding the training of Singaporean troops in Taiwan. At the regional level, Taiwan has been excluded from the ASEAN-led security architecture such as the foreign ministerial-level ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the leader-level East Asia Summit (EAS), and the defense ministerial-level ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM+).⁵ Taiwan can only take part in semi-official platforms such as Shangri-La Dialogue (SLD) and Track 2 processes like the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP).

There are three reasons for Taiwan’s absence in regional security cooperation. First, since the end of World War II, the United States has maintained a hub-and-spokes system of bilateral alliances in Asia with the

⁵ For a discussion on security cooperation in East Asia, see Cheng-Chwee Kuik, “Institutionalization of Security Cooperation in East Asia,” in Alice D. Ba, Cheng-Chwee Kuik, and Sueo Sudo, eds., *Institutionalizing East Asia: Mapping and Reconfiguring Regional Cooperation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 81-106.

United States at the center.⁶ This arrangement provided little incentives for the “spokes,” which included South Korea, Japan, Taiwan (up to 1980), the Philippines, Thailand, Australia and New Zealand (the US-New Zealand security relationship suspended in 1986) to engage in defense and security cooperation. Only since 2000 or so and facing uncertain US security commitment to the region as well as the rise of China have some of the Asian countries begun to establish bilateral security ties among themselves.⁷

Second, China has established diplomatic relations with all the ASEAN members by 1991, with its “one-China principle” severely constraining the space in which the ASEAN members can engage with Taiwan.⁸

Third, China's fast-growing economy provides benefits for countries in the region. In the 1997-1999 Asian economic crisis, ASEAN members found International Monetary Fund (IMF) conditions intrusive, inappropriate, and insensitive to the environment where the affected countries found themselves, and also questioned the reluctant stance of the US. On the contrary, China not only pledged to help Thailand, but also upheld its promise of not devaluing its currency. This contrast made it possible that China began to be perceived by ASEAN as a valuable partner, if not a regional leader.⁹ China is now ASEAN's largest—and ASEAN is China's third largest—trading partner. Their import-export relations can be summarized as Figure 1.

⁶ Christopher Hemmer & Peter Katzenstein, “Why is There No NATO in Asia? Collective Identity, Regionalism, and the Origins of Multilateralism,” *International Organization*, Vol. 56, No. 3, 2002, pp. 575-607.

⁷ Patrick Cronin, et al., *The Emerging Asia Power Web: The Rise of Bilateral Intra-Asian Security Ties* (Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 2013).

⁸ With Vietnam on January 18, 1950, Myanmar/Burma on June 8, 1950, Cambodia on July 19, 1958, Laos on April 25, 1961, Malaysia on May 31, 1974, the Philippines on June 9, 1975, Thailand on July 1, 1975, Indonesia on August 8, 1990, Singapore on October 3, 1990, and Brunei on September 30, 1991.

⁹ Alice D. Ba, “China and ASEAN: Renavigating Relations for a 21st-Century Asia,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 43, No. 4, 2003, pp. 635-638.

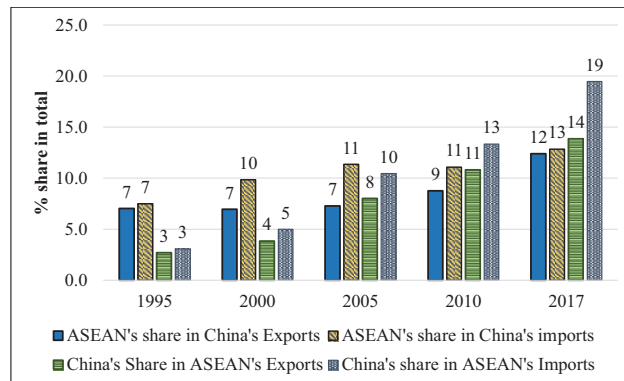


Figure 1 Presence of ASEAN and China in Each Other's Markets

Source: Sanchita Basu Das, "Do the Economic Ties between ASEAN and China Affect Their Strategic Partnership?" *ISEAS Perspective*, Issue: 2018, No. 32, June 2018, p. 4, https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS_Perspective_2018_32@50.pdf

ASEAN members are hence caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, the rise of China, especially its growing assertiveness in South China Sea under President Xi Jinping in recent years, has led to concerns of China's ambition and the impacts of the US-China rivalry on regional order and stability. On the other hand, China's economic growth and enormous market have made it attractive to many countries in the region. Put together, the security environment in East Asia is uncertain and complex. It renders the strategic behavior of many ASEAN members to be described as hedging, which is manifested in such behavior as military modernization; an increase in generalized, multi-lateral security cooperation; the absence of any overt balancing; and simultaneous bridge-building with China and the US.¹⁰

In this context, it is difficult for Taiwan to expand its security relations with ASEAN members. For Taiwan to craft a sense of (economic) community with its Southern neighbors, it is insufficient to stress the perceived or real threat that China's military power may pose to the region,

¹⁰ Cf. Van Jackson, "Power, Trust, and Network Complexity: Three Logics of Hedging in Asian Security," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol. 14, No. 3, September 2014, p. 336.

as the image of China is ambiguous that it represents both political and military risks and economic opportunities. Moreover, for Taiwan to response to the call for its contribution to the US “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy,” some common ground other than the Chinese threat has to be identified.¹¹

To explore how Taiwan can advance its security ties with ASEAN members, this paper takes the idea of “regional security complex” (RSC) put forth by Buzan and Waever as a reference. Generally speaking, Buzan and Waever’s work suggests that the study of international security should focus on the regional level, because on the one hand, security dynamics are inherently relational and no nation’s security is self-contained, while on the other hand, many threats travel more easily over short distances than long ones, rendering global security more like an aspiration than a reality.¹² Their work therefore first focuses on the states’ practices of securitization and desecuritization, and then determines from the constellations of these practices the boundaries of a security complex as well as its features. For the purpose of this paper, the main implication of RSCs is to take a closer look at how ASEAN and some of its members understand their security environment, i.e. what are thought of as threats to national and/or regional order and stability and what are not, so as to identify potential areas of cooperation for Taiwan and its Southern neighbors.

III. Security Policy and Practice of ASEAN Member States

In this section the security policy and practices of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam will be briefly discussed. Among the ten ASEAN member states, Indonesia and the Philippines are the two largest countries in archipelagic Southeast Asia, while Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam are major powers (in relation to Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar) in

¹¹ Central News Agency, “Taiwan Urged to Think Creatively on ‘Indo-Pacific’ Strategy,” *Taiwan News*, July 25, 2018, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3490393>.

¹² Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 43, 45.

the peninsular. The state of Singapore is peculiar in terms of size and socio-economic development. As the main purpose of this paper is to identify possible areas for security cooperation between Taiwan and Southeast Asia, the case of Singapore will be left aside.

A. Indonesia

President Joko Widodo, “Jokowi,” came into office on October 20, 2014, and has promoted the strategy of “Global Maritime Fulcrum” (*GMF*), which re-affirms Indonesia’s identity as a maritime big power.¹³ In April 2016, the Indonesian government published the *Defence White Paper 2015 (DWP)* to implement the *GMF*.¹⁴ The *DWP* claims that the regional security dynamics have brought to Indonesia various traditional, non-traditional, and hybrid threats, which together can be classified into two categories. The first category consists of the so-called “factual threats,” i.e. dangers that are known and can occur at any time. These include radicalism, separatism and armed uprisings, natural disasters, border trespassing, piracy and natural resources theft, epidemics, cyber attacks and espionage, as well as trafficking and drug abuse. The second category refers to “non-factual threats,” i.e. open conflict threats or conventional wars, which are deemed “unlikely to affect Indonesia at present and in the future.”¹⁵ Indonesia’s national security concerns hence focus more on internal and non-traditional security issues than on external threats, as the government “assumes its neighbouring countries are friendly countries who shared commitment in maintaining regional security and stability.”¹⁶

Indonesia’s security practices in recent years generally match the tone

¹³ Lyle J. Morris and Giacomo Persi Paoli, *A Preliminary Assessment of Indonesia’s Maritime Security Threats and Capabilities* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2018); Evan Laksmana, “Indonesian Sea Policy: Accelerating Jokowi’s Global Maritime Fulcrum?” Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, CSIS, March 17, 2017, <https://amti.csis.org/indonesian-sea-policy-accelerating/>.

¹⁴ Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Indonesia, *Defence White Paper 2015* (Jakarta: Ministry of Defence, 2015).

¹⁵ Ministry of Defence, Indonesia, *Defence White Paper 2015*, pp. 24-25.

¹⁶ Ministry of Defence, Indonesia, *Defence White Paper 2015*, p. vi.

of the *DWP*. President Jokowi's foreign policy places emphasis on drawing foreign investment, while his security policy prioritizes maritime security. As a result, Indonesia keeps an "equidistant diplomacy" with China and the US. With respect to its relations with China, while incidents of fishing rights led Indonesia to rename the northern reaches of its Exclusive Economic Zone in the South China Sea as the North Natuna Sea in July 2017, both sides managed to retain good relations.¹⁷ On September 29, 2017, China leased two pandas to Indonesia to mark their friendship.¹⁸ With respect to Indonesia-US security relations, the two countries tend to focus on narrow issues, as the Trump administration prefers bilateralism in its economic policy and mini-multilateralism in security policy (e.g. the Quad of the Indo-Pacific Strategy that includes the US, Japan, Australia and India), while President Jokowi prioritizes commerce to geopolitics. In January 2018, then US Secretary of Defense James Mattis visited Indonesia and Vietnam. The main topics in his trip to the former included counter-terrorism, the training of Indonesia's special forces unit known as Kopassus, and maritime security cooperation.¹⁹

With respect to security cooperation with other states, President Jokowi spoke over the phone with the Philippines' President Duterte on June 22, 2017, agreeing to increase joint efforts to fight Islamic terrorism in the region.²⁰ South Korean President Moon Jae-in paid a state visit to Indonesia

¹⁷ Tom Allard and Bernadette Christina Munthe, "Asserting Sovereignty, Indonesia Renames Part of South China Sea," *Reuters*, July 14, 2017, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-indonesia-politics-map-idUKKBN19Z0YU>.

¹⁸ Angie Teo, "Indonesia Welcomes Giant Pandas on Loan from China," *Reuters*, September 28, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-indonesia-pandas/indonesia-welcomes-giant-pandas-on-loan-from-china-idUSKCN1C329A>

¹⁹ Alex Horton, "Secretary Mattis Seeks Ties with Once-Brutal Indonesia Special Forces Unit, with an Eye on China," *Washington Post*, January 23, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2018/01/23/secretary-mattis-seek-s-ties-with-once-brutal-indonesia-special-forces-unit-with-an-eye-on-china/?utm_term=.98bad48489f7.

²⁰ Haeril Halim, "Jokowi, Duterte Talk on the Phone about Terrorism, Security," *Jakarta Post*, June 24, 2017, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2017/06/24/jokowi-duterte-talk-on-the-phone-about-terrorism-security.html>.

on November 9, 2017, and his meeting with President Jokowi focused on bilateral trade and economic relations.²¹ On May 30, 2018, Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi in his trip to Indonesia declared with President Jokowi to form a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the two countries on the basis of “shared vision on maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.” In the domain of security and defense cooperation, the two countries agreed to continue regular security dialogues and meetings, enhance exchanges of armed forces, conduct joint exercise and training, and promote bilateral cooperation in countering terrorism, intelligence, law enforcement, and coordinated patrol.²²

B. Malaysia

On January 1, 2017, the Malaysia government approved the *National Security Policy* that was set to be reviewed in every three years. It indicates that “Malaysia’s national security refers to a state of being free from any threat, whether internally or externally, to its core values.” The nine core values include territorial sovereignty and integrity, socio-political stability, national integration, good governance, economic integrity, social justice, sustainable development, people’s security, and international recognition. It is clear that the threats to these values come from traditional as well as non-traditional security issues. Accordingly, the *National Security Policy* identifies thirteen threats, amongst which the top three concerns are “fragility of national unity,” “challenges facing the nation’s democratic system,” and “illegal immigrants and refugees,” with “disputes over territorial claims” ranking the fourth. This order suggests that as a multi-ethnic federation, Malaysia places internal security, i.e. the integrity of the state and the harmony among the people, as its top concern. It is worth

²¹ He-suk Choi, “Moon Hopes to Give Shape to Southeast Asian Vision on Tour of Region,” *Korea Herald*, November 9, 2017, <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20171109000883>.

²² “India-Indonesia Joint Statement during visit of Prime Minister to Indonesia (May 30, 2018),” Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, May 30, 2018, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29932/IndiaIndonesia+Joint+Statement+during+visit+of+Prime+Minister+to+Indonesia+May+30+2018>.

mentioning that the *National Security Policy* seems to downplay the importance of territorial disputes in the South China Sea. In the section of “disputes over territorial claims,” no specific geographic term is mentioned. When the South China Sea is referred to, it is used to illustrate Malaysia’s strategic interest as well as the threat of transnational crime in that area.²³

The 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) scandal led to Prime Minister Najib Razak’s defeat in the May 2018 election and Dr. Mahathir Mohamad’s return to power, and seemed to mark a change of Malaysia’s foreign and security policy. To achieve internal harmony and stability, Malaysia under Mahathir’s first term (1981-2003) emphasized on economic development. In a recent interview, Mahathir explained that “if Malaysian politics is unstable, its economic development will be jeopardized. If Malaysian economy is backward, its security will be threatened...As such, the best strategy to manage Malaysia’s national security is through combining political and economic factors as a thrust to its philosophy.”²⁴ Along this line of reasoning and with China’s economic open-up since 1978, commerce between Malaysia and China grew steadily. China has become Malaysia’s largest trading partner and its largest source of foreign investment, while Malaysia under Najib’s term (2009-2018) also embraced China’s investment and several projects of the “Belt and Road Initiative” in particular. As anti-corruption became a main appeal of the Mahathir-led opposition in the 2018 election, Malaysia’s deals with China in Najib’s era also became a target for the new government. On August 20, 2018, Mahathir announced during his trip to China that the Chinese-funded \$20 billion East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) project and a natural gas pipeline project in Sabah would be canceled because the deals were unfair and Malaysia was not able to afford.²⁵ This move was interpreted by some as Malaysia’s “resetting” its

²³ National Security Council, Malaysia, *National Security Policy*, January 1, 2017, https://www.mkn.gov.my/media/story/English-National_Security_Policy.pdf.

²⁴ Ruhanie Ahmad, “Security matrix enhances nation’s core values,” *New Straits Times*, September 13, 2018, <https://www.nst.com.my/opinion/columnists/2018/09/410836/security-matrix-enhances-nations-core-values>.

²⁵ “Malaysia’s Mahathir cancels China-backed rail, pipeline projects,” *Reuters*, August 21, 2018,

relations with China.²⁶

On closer look, Mahathir's attitudes toward China do not signify a sea change as some might have expected. The ECRL project was renegotiated in April 2019 to offer more opportunities for Malaysian local companies.²⁷ With respect to the South China Sea disputes, Mahathir commented that "[a] warship attracts other warships" and that ASEAN countries patrol the disputed waters by small boats "to deal with pirates, not to fight another war."²⁸ When asked about choosing between China and the US if forced to, Mahathir replied that he would prefer the economic largesse of Beijing, emphasizing the need to navigate the relationship between the two countries.²⁹ This, however, does not mean that Malaysia is leaning towards China. While the unpredictability of the Trump administration may be worrying, Malaysia nevertheless maintains regular military exchanges with the US, manifested in 14–16 bilateral and multi-lateral exercises each year, various military education and training programs, and visits.³⁰ These

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-malaysia/malaysias-mahathir-cancels-china-backed-rail-pipeline-projects-idUSKCN1L60DQ>.

²⁶ Richard Heydarian, "For Prime Minister Mohammad Mahathir, revisiting China's Malaysian projects is part of resetting a relationship," *South China Morning Post*, September 1, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/2162339/mahathir-revisiting-chinas-malaysian-projects-part-resetting>; John Teo, "Resetting ties with China," *New Straits Times*, August 21, 2018, <https://www.nst.com.my/opinion/columnists/2018/08/403587/resetting-ties-china>.

²⁷ "Renegotiated ECRL offers plenty of opportunities for local contractors," *New Straits Times*, April 19, 2019, <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2019/04/480971/renegotiated-ecrl-offers-plenty-opportunities-local-contractors>.

²⁸ "Better not to have warships in Malaysian waters," *The Sun Daily*, June 6, 2018, <https://www.thesundaily.my/archive/better-not-have-warships-malaysian-waters-EUAR-CH553213>; Cheng-Chwee Kuik and Chin Tong Liew, "What Malaysia's 'Mahathir doctrine' means for China-US rivalry," *South China Morning Post*, August 20, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/geopolitics/article/2160552/what-malaysias-mahathir-doctrine-means-china-us-rivalry>.

²⁹ Bhavan Jaipragas, "I'd side with rich China over fickle US: Malaysia's Mahathir Mohamad," *South China Morning Post*, March 8, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/2189074/id-side-rich-china-over-fickle-us-malaysias-mahathir>.

³⁰ "Office of Defense Cooperation," U.S. Embassy in Malaysia, n.d., <https://my.usembassy.gov/embassy/government-agencies/office-of-defense-cooperation/>.

suggest that Malaysia undertakes an equidistance approach to the two great powers, which also reflects the country's tradition of holding a "pragmatic, principled and neutral attitude."³¹

C. The Philippines

In April 2017, the Philippine office of the President published *National Security Policy 2017-2022 (NSP 2017-2022)*, which provides guidance and a comprehensive approach in addressing the Philippines' national security challenges. In April 2018, *National Security Strategy 2018 (NSS 2018)* was further adopted and published to implement *NSP 2017-2022*.³² The overarching principle of *NSP 2017-2022* is that "national security and economic development are closely intertwined and mutually reinforcing concepts." According to this rather broad understanding of national security, *NSP 2017-2022* lists three pillars underpinning national security, eight national security interests, and a twelve-point national security agenda, all of which are followed and elaborated by *NSS 2018*.

For the Philippines, national security priorities are placed on internal security and economic development. "Resolving internal armed conflicts remains ours [the Philippines'] top security concern and a key cornerstone of our peace and development strategy."³³ The Philippines has long been tackling issues such as crime, militancy, piracy, and terrorism. The issue of terrorism has drawn regional and international attention. The country faces, on the one hand, challenges from communist insurgency by the New People's Army (NPA), which President Rodrigo Duterte declared to be a terrorist group in December 2017.³⁴ On the other hand, there are also

³¹ National Security Council, Malaysia, *National Security Policy*, p.9.

³² Office of the President of the Philippines, *National Security Policy 2017-2022 (NSP 2017-2022)*, April 2017, <https://www.nsc.gov.ph/attachments/article/NSP/NSP-2017-2022.pdf>; Office of the President of the Philippines, *National Security Strategy 2018*, April 2018, <http://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/downloads/2018/08aug/20180802-national-security-strategy.pdf>.

³³ Office of the President of the Philippines, *National Security Strategy 2018*, p. 7.

³⁴ "Country Report: Philippines," *Economist Intelligence Unit*, August 27, 2018, p.4,

threats from various Islamist militant groups, in particular the Muslim-dominated areas of Mindanao. The siege of Marawi City, Mindanao, by ISIS inspired Maute group in May 2017 was described as the “most serious terror event” in Southeast Asia since the 2002 Bali bombings.³⁵ This has led President Duterte to place Mindanao under military rule, which was further extended to the end of 2018.³⁶ The root causes of these internal security problems, as *NSP 2017-2022* points out, include poverty and social injustice, widespread economic inequality, poor governance, abuse and control of political power, and marginalization of cultural communities.³⁷ These are also the causes of other internal security and public safety problems such as illegal drugs, piracy and armed robbery, smuggling and kidnapping activities, and related maritime and border security issues. As a result, both *NSP 2017-2022* and *NSS 2018* place internal armed conflicts, terrorism and transnational crimes before overlapping territorial claims and maritime domain issues, prevention (governance and development) before treatment (military enforcement), and people (or society) before the state. Even the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) was established following a referendum held on January 21, 2019, and the political power was transferred to former rebels, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the causes of social instability remain.³⁸

As for the external security environment, *NSP 2018* declares that the country “has not faced any direct threat of foreign armed invasion since the

https://country.eiu.com/FileHandler.ashx?issue_id=167038800&mode=pdf.

³⁵ Audrey Morallo, “Marawi Siege ‘Most Serious Terror Event’ in Southeast Asia in Past 15 Years,” *Philstar*, August 25, 2017, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2017/08/25/1732611/marawi-siege-most-serious-terror-event-southeast-asia-past-15-years#8tMluuH2571SD7j4.99>.

³⁶ Euan McKirdy, “Philippines Congress Extends Martial Law in Mindanao,” *CNN*, December 13, 2017, <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/12/13/asia/mindanao-martial-law-extension-intl/index.html>. The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao was established after a popular vote held on January 21, 2019.

³⁷ Office of the President of the Philippines, *National Security Policy 2017-2022*, p. 10.

³⁸ “The Jolo Bombing and the Legacy of ISIS in the Philippines,” *IPAC Report* No. 54, March 5, 2019, http://file.understandingconflict.org/file/2019/03/Report_54.pdf.

end of World War II, but there are newly evolving regional security uncertainties,” which refer to “the bitterly contested South China Sea and the Pacific Ocean, where competing interests of superpowers and other countries converge.”³⁹ *NSP 2017-2022* recognizes the South China Sea (West Philippine Sea) dispute as “the foremost security challenge to the Philippines’ sovereignty and territorial integrity,” and vows to handle this “complex and delicate issue” through diplomacy and with prudence. Partly because of this, it is claimed that “a continuing US security presence in the Asia-Pacific is a stabilizing force,” and “the US remains as the sole defense treaty ally of the Philippines.” China on the other hand is described as “generating policy concerns not only among developed countries...but also the ASEAN nations due to socio-cultural interactions, significant trade and investments, as well as territorial claims in the WPS [West Philippine Sea].” The Philippines thus calls for international support for a rules-based regime, which includes respect for the Award of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in July 2016, the implementation of the Declaration of Conduct (DOC), an urge to the conclusion of a Code of Conduct (COC), and other legalization activities under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.⁴⁰

In practice, the items raised in the Philippines’ security cooperation with other countries tended to focus on internal security as well. For instance, the governments of the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia signed the Trilateral Cooperative Arrangement (TCA) on 14 July 2016 to conduct trilateral maritime patrols to safeguard the tri-border area against illegal activities at sea. On the part of the Philippines, the particular threats are from the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), an Islamic extremist group based in southern Philippines and declared allegiance to the Islamic State (IS).⁴¹

³⁹ Office of the President of the Philippines, *National Security Strategy 2018*, pp. 7-8.

⁴⁰ Office of the President of the Philippines, *National Security Policy 2017-2022*, pp. 13, 14, 21.

⁴¹ Mary Fides A. Quintos, “Finding Solutions for Maritime Security Challenges in the Tri-Border Area,” *CIRSS Commentaries*, Vol. IV, No. 27 November, 2017, <http://www.fsi.gov.ph/finding-solutions-for-maritime-security-challenges-in-the-tri-border-area/>.

When Japan, Indonesia, Australia, Singapore, and China offered their security assistance to the Philippines in 2017-2018, a common theme revolved around countering terrorism and capacity-building. In President Duterte's meeting with Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad on July 16, 2018, the former pointed out the need to address terrorism and violent extremism in the region, as well as transnational crime such as piracy and armed robbery at sea and the illegal drug trade. President Duterte also expressed appreciation for Malaysia's role in facilitating peace negotiations between the Philippine government the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).⁴²

Since his inauguration, President Duterte has made several criticisms of the US and expressed a friendly attitude towards China. This has led some to conclude that there is a shift of the Philippines's foreign policy, and therefore marks a deviation from the tone in *NSP 2017-2022*. Upon closer look, however, President Duterte has maintained the Philippines' security agreements with the US. Only on issues that are related to South China Sea and may cause tension in bilateral relations was there a change in foreign policy behavior. It may hence be argued that President Duterte attempts to exercise a level of agency in his interaction with the two great powers.⁴³

D. Thailand

In May 2014, General Prayuth Chan-ocha led a coup and was named Prime Minister on August 21, 2014. The junta government threw out the old constitution and proposed a new one. In the new constitution that was signed off by King Vajiralongkorn on April 6, 2017, Section 65 stipulates that a national strategy should be set out as a goal for sustainable

⁴² Edith Regalado, "Duterte, Mahathir Vow Stronger Philippines-Malaysia Ties," *Philstar*, July 17, 2018, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2018/07/17/1834227/duterte-mahathir-vow-stronger-philippines-malaysia-ties>.

⁴³ Richard Javad Heydarian, "Philippines: Foreign Policy Manoeuvres to Address Dynamic Security Environment," in Ron Huiskens, ed. *Regional Security Outlook 2018* (Canberra: Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific, 2018), p. 36.

development of the country. The stated reason behind this is to ensure progress in critical areas will not be disrupted or discontinued by political expediency, and hence a long-term national strategy is required to function as guidelines for the existing 5-year Economic and Social Development Plans. For that purpose, the junta government put forth the *Thailand: 20-Year National Strategy (2017-2036)*, which was approved unanimously by the National Legislative Assembly on July 6, 2018.

Not much detail has been revealed about *Thailand: 20-Year National Strategy (2017-2036)*. What is known is that the vision is “Security, Prosperity, Sustainability,” and there are six key strategies including: national security; competitiveness enhancement; development and empowerment of human capital; boarding opportunity and equality in society; environmental-friendly development and growth; and performing and improving government administrative. The concept of “security” in the vision first refers to the state of being “secure and safe from natural disasters and changes from within the country and outside the country at all levels,” and then to those objects to be secured, i.e. the nation, society, people, and natural resources and the environment.⁴⁴

The latest (twelfth) 5-year *Economic and Social Development Plan (2017-2021)* provides more information. Among the 10 strategies it lists the fifth is “Strategy for Reinforcing National Security for the Country’s Progress towards Prosperity and Sustainability.” In that section external security is occasionally mentioned, and the primary concerns are defending and glorifying the monarchy; creating solidarity within the society; people in the southern border provinces; the readiness to combat both traditional military threats and non-traditional security threats such as terrorism, cybersecurity, maritime security, health, and disaster prevention and

⁴⁴ Churnrurtai Kanchanachitra, et al., *Thai Health 2017: Empowering Vulnerable Populations Creating an Inclusive Society* (Nakhon Pathom: Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, 2017), pp. 111-112.

mitigation.⁴⁵

It follows that for Thailand, national security generally means internal security. It does not seem to worry much about the rise of China, the South China Sea dispute, and the rivalry between the US and China. Thailand's security cooperation with the two is mainly out of political and diplomatic concerns. After the coup in 2014, the US and several western countries downplayed their relations with the junta government, making it possible for China to advance bilateral ties. The Thai cabinet approved the purchase of three submarines from China in April 2017 and agreed to buy armored personnel carriers and tanks from China in May. The act of procurement has three implications. First, it reflects a trend of military modernization in Southeast Asia. Second, it enhances the status of the junta government and the role of the military, as the purchase of submarines was highly controversial in domestic politics and even with the military. The move hence appears more out of political concerns than out of necessity. Third, the deal of submarines signifies warming Thailand-China relations, as China refused to sell submarines to Thailand in 2006 on the ground that the latter is a US ally.⁴⁶

Thailand's engagement with China appears to draw the US towards rapprochement, especially after the junta government promised to hold general elections at some point. In June 2017, the US agreed to sell four Black Hawk military helicopters;⁴⁷ Secretary of State Rex Tillerson visited Bangkok in August 2017, marking the restoration of high level exchanges between the two countries;⁴⁸ the US scaled back its attendance at Cobra

⁴⁵ Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, *The Twelfth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2017-2021)* (Bangkok: Office of the Prime Minister, 2017), pp. 149-159.

⁴⁶ "A military engagement," *Economist Intelligence Unit*, June 23, 2017, <https://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=795612663&Country=Thailand&topic=Politics&subtopic=Forecast&subsubtopic=International+relations>.

⁴⁷ "U.S. Plans to Sell Black Hawk Helicopters to Thailand," *Reuters*, June 29, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-thailand-idUSKBN19K193>.

⁴⁸ "Trump Says Wants to Reduce U.S. Trade Deficit with Thailand," *Reuters*, October 3, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-thailand/trump-says-wants-to-reduce-u-s-trade-deficit-with-thailand-idUSKCN1C729U>.

Gold in February 2018.⁴⁹

Thailand's security relations with the US and China therefore have become complicated. It strengthens the ties with China while remaining a tradition ally with the US.

E. Vietnam

Vietnam published its third and latest defense white paper, *Vietnam National Defence*, in 2009. In the white paper a set of challenges to Vietnam's national security is listed, and the issues include: the lagging behind of its economy; the interference of hostile forces to undermine national solidarity and to incite violence and separatism; sovereign rights and jurisdiction over the territories in the East Sea [South China Sea]; non-traditional security issues such as illegal trafficking of weapons and drugs; piracy, organized trans-national crimes, terrorism, illegal migration and immigration; environmental degradation, climate change, and epidemics.⁵⁰ Facing these challenges, the white paper on the one hand reiterates the “three no’s” principles of its defense strategy, i.e. no to foreign military bases; no to foreign military alliances; and no to using a third country to oppose another, while on the other hand stresses the importance of defense cooperation with other countries.⁵¹

In January 2016, the cabinet approved the *Overall Strategy for International Integration Through 2020, Vision to 2030* (hereafter, *Overall Strategy*). While it looks to “peace, stability and development” in the Asia-Pacific region, certain risks such as an armed conflict between major powers as a result of the shift of power relations, an arms race, and more complicated territorial and maritime disputes, remain. The ASEAN is

⁴⁹ “Huge US Military Force Arrives for Exercises in Thailand,” *Express*, February 13, 2018, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/918317/US-military-thailand-marines-exercises-cobra-gold>.

⁵⁰ Ministry of National Defence, Socialist Republic of Vietnam, *Vietnam National Defence* (Hanoi: Ministry of National Defence, 2009), pp. 17-18.

⁵¹ Ministry of National Defence, *Vietnam National Defence*, pp. 19-24.

expected to encounter internal as well as external challenges arising from major power rivalry and economic competition. In this context, Vietnam needs to enhance its defense and security capacity, while promotes “politic, defense and security integration” both regionally and internationally. The *Overall Strategy* finds Vietnam’s efforts in integration not as effective as has expected. In the domain of security and defense cooperation, it stresses the importance of Russia, India, and Japan, while putting Australia and Israel as potential partners. The role of the ASEAN is emphasized, but neither the US nor China is mentioned.⁵²

For Vietnam the danger of involving in an armed conflict with China—whether because of the US-China rivalry or because of the South China Sea disputes—is real and Vietnam has to be prepared. Given the overall strategy of omnidirectional engagement, the recent Vietnam- China relations may be described as what former Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung once termed “cooperation and struggle.”⁵³ China is Vietnam’s largest trading partner and shares Vietnam’s nominal political ideology, and Vietnam has maintained diplomatic, military, and party-to-party channels to engage with China. Yet, their stances on South China Sea appear to be unreconciliatory. For instance, the Vietnamese government instructed the local subsidiary of Spanish energy firm, Repsol, to suspend operations in the South China Sea after pressure from China in July 2017 and March 2018, respectively.⁵⁴

⁵² “Overall Strategy for International Integration through 2020, Vision to 2030,” *VGP News*, January 31, 2016, <http://news.chinhphu.vn/Home/Overall-strategy-for-international-integration-through-2020-vision-to-2030/20161/29060.vgp>.

⁵³ Anh Duc Ton, “Vietnam’s Maritime Security Challenges and Regional Defence and Security Cooperation,” *Soundings Papers*, No. 14 (Canberra: The Sea Power Centre - Australia (SPC-A), Royal Australian Navy, 2018), p. 22.

⁵⁴ Jose Elías Rodríguez, “Repsol Says Drilling Suspended on Vietnam Oil Block Disputed by China,” *Reuters*, August 3, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southchinasea-vietnam/repsol-says-drilling-suspended-on-vietnam-oil-block-disputed-by-china-idUSKBN1AI27D>; James Pearson and Henning Gloystein, “Vietnam Halts South China Sea Oil Drilling Project under Pressure

In contrast to Thailand's case, where the US's suspension of financial assistance and halting of joint programs in response to the coup in 2014 have brought Thailand closer to China, Vietnam's struggle against China on South China Sea issues has helped the warming of its ties with the US. On May 23, 2016, President Obama announced the US has lifted its embargo on sales of lethal weapons to Vietnam.⁵⁵ On November 12, 2017, President Trump in his state visit to Vietnam reaffirmed with President Tran Dai Quang the importance of freedom of navigation, overflight, and unfettered commerce in the South China Sea and the commitment to a rules-based approach to resolving maritime disputes, among others.⁵⁶ US Secretary of Defense James Mattis visited Vietnam in January 2018, and US Navy aircraft carrier, *USS Carl Vinson*, made a historical port call in Vietnam and anchored off the coast of Da Nang on March 5.⁵⁷ The US also transferred six Metal Shark Patrol Boats to Vietnam later on to enhance the latter's capacity in maritime law enforcement.⁵⁸

Vietnam also seeks to deepen its relations with Japan. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe during his visit to Vietnam in January 2017 announced offering six patrol boats to Vietnam.⁵⁹ In June 2017, Vietnam's Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc visited Japan and both sides reached consensus on the

from Beijing," *Reuters*, March 23, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southchinasea-vietnam/vietnam-halts-south-china-sea-oil-drilling-project-under-pressure-from-beijing-idUSKBN1GZ0JN>.

⁵⁵ "Obama Lifts US Embargo on Lethal Arms Sales to Vietnam," *BBC News*, May 23, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-36356695>.

⁵⁶ "President Donald J. Trump's Trip to Vietnam," The White House, November 12, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trumps-trip-vietnam/>.

⁵⁷ Thomas Maresca, "U.S. 'supercarrier' USS Carl Vinson Makes Historic Port Call in Vietnam," *USA Today*, March 5, 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2018/03/05/uss-carl-vinson-arrives-vietnam/394324002/>.

⁵⁸ "The United States Transfers Six Metal Shark Patrol Boats to Vietnam," US Embassy & Consulate in Vietnam, March 29, 2018, <https://vn.usembassy.gov/pr03292018/>.

⁵⁹ Ankit Panda, "Japan Pledges 6 New Patrol Boats for Vietnam Coast Guard," *The Diplomat*, January 17, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/01/japan-pledges-6-new-patrol-boats-for-vietnam-coast-guard/>.

future of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) after the US withdrawal as well as upgrading Vietnam's maritime security capabilities.⁶⁰ In April 2018, Defense Ministers of both countries signed a "Joint Vision Statement," which was further reiterated in the "Japan-Vietnam Joint Statement" announced in President Tran Dai Quang's visit to Japan in May. On the part of defense cooperation, both sides agreed to strengthen component-to-component exchanges, including visits to Vietnam by the Japan Self-Defense Forces' vessels and aircraft, and promote cooperation in such areas as human resources training, defense equipment and technology, aviation search and rescue, military medicine, United Nations peacekeeping operations, cybersecurity and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR).⁶¹

IV. Mapping Areas of Common Security Interests

From the discussion above, security issues of the five ASEAN members are summarized as follows.

Table 1 Security Issues of Selected Southeast Asian Countries

<i>Cases</i>	<i>Primary security referent</i>	<i>Origin(s) of threat</i>	<i>Nature of threat</i>	<i>Security interests</i>
Indonesia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • state 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • internal legitimacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • weak state apparatus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • counter-terrorism • maritime security
Malaysia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • state • society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • internal legitimacy • external 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • weak state apparatus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • domestic unity • counter-terrorism • maritime security

⁶⁰ "Japan and Vietnam Deepen Economic and Security Co-operation," *Economist Intelligence Unit*, June 23, 2017, <https://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=1265517510&Country=Vietnam&topic=Politics&subtopic=Forecast&subsubtopic=International+relations&u=1&pid=1367066520&oid=1367066520&uid=1>.

⁶¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Japan-Viet Nam Joint Statement on the Occasion of the State Visit by the President of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam to Japan," June 2, 2018, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000368992.pdf>.

		recognition		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • territorial integrity
The Philippines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • state 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • internal legitimacy • external recognition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • weak state apparatus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • separatism • counter-terrorism • maritime security • territorial integrity
Thailand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • regime • state 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • internal legitimacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • civil-military relations • weak state apparatus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • counter-terrorism • maritime security
Vietnam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • state 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • external recognition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • China 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maritime security • territorial integrity

Source: the author's analysis.

The five countries studied here all have complex security issues, but their primary concern can be conceptualized as “political security,” which is about “threats to the legitimacy or recognition either of political units [i.e. the state] or of the essential patterns (structures, processes or institutions) among them.”⁶² To put in more blunt words,

Political threats are aimed at the organizational stability of the state. Their purpose may range from pressuring the government on a particular policy, through overthrowing the government, to fomenting secessionism, and disrupting the political fabric of the state so as to weaken it prior to military attack. The idea of the state, particularly its national identity and organizing ideology, and the institutions which

⁶² Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Weldes, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1998), p. 144.

express it, are the normal target of political threats.⁶³

Among the five countries studied, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and to a lesser degree, Malaysia, share certain commonalities. Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand all have problems of separatist movements and radical extremism—for instance, Abu Sayyaf Group in Mindanao, the Philippines; West Papuan independence movements in Indonesia; and insurgencies in Southern Thailand—that contest the very idea of the state in each country. Thailand in addition encounters an issue of regime security, as the coup in 2014 has put the legitimacy of the junta government in question. Malaysia does not face threats of terrorism and separatism as much as the three neighbors do, but its multi-ethnic nature still renders unity of both the state and society a top national security concern. Consequently, for these four countries, the origin of the threat is mainly from within, i.e. an internal legitimacy crisis, although the dispute between the Philippines and China over South China Sea also adds a dimension of external threat to the former's conception of national security. As for the root cause or nature of the internal insecurity, these four countries all suffer from a lack of strong institutions that underpin a robust state apparatus to govern the national space effectively. What follows is that issues belonging to the category of "policing" are turned into "security" ones that traverse the boundaries between external and internal security.⁶⁴ Problems originated within one country can "spill over" and become external threats to other countries, and vice versa. The use of armed forces, a crucial difference between the police and military, can turn inwards. Hence, apart from counter-terrorism, the four countries all list domestic uprising, piracy, smuggling, drugs, trans-national crimes, etc. as prioritized security issues and areas of interest for

⁶³ Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1991, 2nd edition), pp. 118-119.

⁶⁴ For a discussion on internal/external security and the blurring boundaries between the two, see Didier Bigo, "When Two Become One: Internal and External Securitisations in Europe," in Morten Kelstrup and Michael Williams, eds., *International Relations Theory and The Politics of European Integration: Power, Security and Community* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 171 - 204.

international cooperation.

For Vietnam, the main security concern is state sovereignty and territorial integrity, i.e. its claims of sovereignty over part of South China Sea are contested by China. While Vietnam also stresses the importance of maritime security and international cooperation in that regard, the targets are mainly Chinese activities in the disputed area.

Where is the discussion leading? Three propositions are discussed as follows:

A. A sense of community cannot be forged based on the threat of China

For many people of Taiwan, political and military threats from China cannot be over-emphasized. China poses an existential threat to Taiwan's autonomy and *de facto* independence. For the ASEAN members studied in the previous section, however, the image of China is ambiguous and not necessarily a threatening one. Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand do not see China as an external threat that its rising (up to some point) needs be countered. The Philippines takes the South China Sea issue as "the foremost security challenge to the Philippines' sovereignty and territorial integrity," but it—together with Malaysia—nevertheless aims to manage it through political/diplomatic means rather than resorting to the use of force. Even Vietnam, which does not rule out the possibility of an armed conflict with China and actively seeks cooperation with other powers to balance China, maintains regular part-to party exchanges and close economic relations with the northern neighbor. As one study observes,

The approaches of the United States and regional powers to China's South China Sea policy fall into three different categories: "balancing," "accommodating," and "hedging." Using this framework, Vietnam and the Philippines—under President Aquino but less so under President Duterte—tend to proactively balance against China. By contrast,

Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, and Singapore have assumed a more restrained hedging strategy, while Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Myanmar have at times sought to accommodate China.⁶⁵

This affirms that the ASEAN members have different stances on China. The division also hinders ASEAN to reach consensus when it comes to great power relations. In the 51st ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting (AMM) and Related Meetings, for instance, it was reported that Indonesia Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi once circulated a document among ASEAN Foreign Ministers, aiming to craft a common position on the "Indo-Pacific Strategy."⁶⁶ The attempt was failed as the Joint Communique only states that the Ministers "discussed some of the new initiatives proposed by ASEAN's external partners... such as the concepts and strategies on the Indo-Pacific, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Expanded Partnership for Quality Infrastructure."⁶⁷

It is therefore suggested that for Taiwan to find certain common ground on which to forge a sense of community with its southern neighbors, stressing the threat of China is not an ideal strategy. It also follows that the US' "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" may not be as attractive as one might have expected, primarily because the image of China is ambiguous in Southeast Asia.

B. Taiwan can be a litmus test for a "rules-based order"

Having said that, given that some of the ASEAN members do see China as a potential threat or danger (the Philippines and Vietnam), "the China factor" can still function as a crucial element in Taiwan's security

⁶⁵ Anh Duc Ton, "Vietnam's Maritime Security Challenges and Regional Defence and Security Cooperation," p.19.

⁶⁶ "ASEAN crafts position on US 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' Strategy," *Nikkei Asian Review*, August 2, 2018, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-Relations/ASEAN-crafts-position-on-US-Free-and-Open-Indo-Pacific-strategy>.

⁶⁷ "Joint Communique of the 51st ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting," ASEAN, August 2, 2018, p. 23, <http://asean.org/storage/2018/08/51st-AMM-Joint-Communique-Final.pdf>.

relations with the target countries of the NSP. In other words, even if China is not seen as an outright threat, its rising to become a regional great power or “hegemon” does pose certain uncertainty to the region, and uncertainty is best managed through collective mechanisms or rules. Taiwan’s *de facto* independence, autonomy and democratic ways of life can in this context be presented as a litmus test for regional order. If a military confrontation across the Taiwan Strait erupts without prior provocation from Taiwan, it would be fundamentally challenging for China to withhold its self-promoted image as a peaceful and responsible power.

In recent years, notions like “rules-based order” and “rule of law” have become popular words in international politics and have been reiterated by several leaders and governments.⁶⁸ Taiwan can be taken as a test case for these notions as well as other values such as law abiding, democracy, and human rights and should promote the idea as such. In so doing, the fate of Taiwan is linked with that of its southern neighbors (and others as well), thereby forming a common ground. It may well be argued that these values are largely internal and insufficient to create common cause against an external threat, but this move is one of the limited options Taiwan can adopt. In addition, given that the notion of a “rules-based order” refers to norms as well as laws to be followed by the states, it also speaks to ASEAN’s “preventive diplomacy,” as the prevention of disputes and conflicts from arising and escalating involves a consensual model for states to take

⁶⁸ “The 13th IISS Asian Security Summit -The Shangri-La Dialogue-Keynote Address by Shinzo ABE, Prime Minister, Japan,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, March 30, 2014, https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page4e_000086.html; “Prime Minister’s Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue (June 1, 2018),” Ministry of External Affairs, India, June 1, 2018, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29943/Prime+Ministers+Keynote+Address+at+Shangri+La+Dialogue+June+01+2018>; “Briefing on The Indo-Pacific Strategy,” US Department of State, April 2, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/04/280134.htm>; “Remarks by Secretary Mattis at Plenary Session of the 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue,” US Department of Defense, June 2, 2018, <https://dod.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/1538599/remarks-by-secretary-mattis-at-plenary-session-of-the-2018-shangri-la-dialogue/>.

actions.⁶⁹

C. Common security interests rather than threats should be emphasized

The findings of this paper indicate that internal and maritime security issues are priorities in the national security agenda of the five countries studied, as Table 1 shows. It follows that for Taiwan to enhance its security relations with Southeast Asian countries, these issues can serve as the common ground for cooperation. The security environment of Taiwan, however, is very different from that of the five countries. While the possibility of Taiwan under terrorist attack cannot be ruled out, it is not taken as serious and likely; while there are indeed problems of trans-national crime, smuggling, drugs, piracy, and so on, these occur occasionally and fall within the domain of policing and public safety, not national security. Security cooperation between Taiwan and the Southern neighbors on these issues hence may appear unpractical.

This does not mean, however, that there is no room for Taiwan to maneuver. The fact that the chance is low for Taiwan to suffer from terrorist attacks does not mean that its nationals are free from such threats. As terrorism is a national security issue in several Southeast Asian countries, counter-terrorism training can become an item of common interests. For instance, it was reported that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan will provide funding to encourage Japanese small and medium enterprises to take training courses on counter-terrorism and abduction prevention measures in some Japanese as well as overseas cities, so that they are better prepared when doing business abroad.⁷⁰ This example suggests that

⁶⁹ "ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Concept and Principles of Preventive Diplomacy," ASEAN Regional Forum Inter-Sessional Support Group Meeting on Confidence Building Measures (ISC on CBMs), Hanoi, April 22-24, 2002, <http://www.asean.org/uploads/archive/arf/9ARF/ISG-CBM-HaNoi/Doc-5.pdf>.

⁷⁰ "Minister of Foreign Affairs Will Hold Counter-Terrorism Training for Small and Medium Enterprises for the First Time," *Kyodo News*, August 22, 2018, <https://tchina.kyodonews.net/news/2018/08/6b5d42c2eda5.html> (in Mandarin Chinese).

“capacity building” in security-related domains can be a common ground for regional security cooperation. The government of Taiwan and its agencies may develop international programs along this line of reasoning. As the NSP also puts emphasis on people-to-people connectivity, it is time for the strategies of resources sharing and forging regional links to move beyond students exchanges programs and tourism promotion, among others.

V. Conclusion

This paper is based on the idea that the NSP is not just a trade and economic policy, but also part of Taiwan's foreign and security policy. From this point of view, while the government of Taiwan engages with its southern neighbors in various domains, the dimension of security should also be addressed. Admittedly, given the limited international space Taiwan has, this is not an easy task. An initial step to do so, it is suggested, is to look into what and how those southern neighbors securitize, i.e. what they see as threats to their national security and how they act on those threats or dangers, because any community is constituted on certain common grounds, whether a common enemy or common interests.

This paper briefly explores national security policy and practice of five ASEAN members, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. It is found that the South China Sea issue and the rise of China may not necessarily be a common concern for the five countries. Even for the Philippines, Malaysia and Vietnam, which have overlapping sovereign claims over South China Sea with China, they also try to maintain good relations with the latter. Consequently, emphasizing the “Chinese threat” may not be a good strategy for Taiwan to advance its ties with these countries, because both securitization and desecuritization are at work in the region. Rather, the five countries under investigation all prioritize maritime security and its related issues. Seeking cooperation in these domains may yield more results for Taiwan.

It is therefore suggested that instead of emphasizing the South China Sea disputes, Taiwan should promote itself as a case to test the notion of “rules-based order.” If China assaults Taiwan without the latter's provocation, then it cannot assert itself as a responsible power; if the US and

others in the Indo-Pacific region allow this to happen, then “rules-based order” is nothing more than hot air. This at least establishes some commonality between Taiwan and the Southeast Asian countries. This paper also suggests that Taiwan may seek security cooperation with its neighbors through capacity-building/enhancing projects that are concrete and less politically sensitive, so as to cultivate substantial relationships on a step-by-step basis.

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