

Moving Towards Intervention

Southeast Asia is often associated with diversity due to the myriad of communities of varying social and ethnic backgrounds that reside in this domain. In light of this diversity, each nation in the region agreed to work together as one organization through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which aims to provide stability, security, and peace throughout the entire Southeast Asian region.

The development of the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (AHRD) by members of ASEAN in 2012 has led to the institutionalization of democracy and human rights within Southeast Asia. However, despite these achievements, there is much to critique regarding ASEAN policies in its attempts to uphold these goals. In its own charter, the ASEAN called for the promotion and protection of human rights, as well as strengthening its principles of good governance, democracy, and the rule of law. Moreover, it includes the right to participate in governments, directly and indirectly, through democratically elected representatives, based on Article 25 of the AHRD. Notwithstanding these clauses, in 2021, the Tatmadaw deposed a government attempting to transition to democracy in Myanmar (Marsh, 2021). In addition, several of its member states, China and Taiwan, are currently embroiled in a maritime border conflict, that being the extent of the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) of these nations in the South China Sea (Beckman, 2013).

In light of this, a paradigm shift prioritizing legal mechanisms to resolve these internal conflicts via mediation through dialogue must be enacted as non-interference is no longer a viable strategy in the conservation of democracy and human rights in the region. Trihartono (2017) suggested that a possible way to resolve such future crises would be the convening of the APSC (ASEAN Political-Security Community) to provide frameworks for the resolution of tensions regarding future regional responses conducted by the nations within ASEAN.

Another possible option is the modification and subsequent ratification of ASEAN's ideal of non-interventionism as according to Davies et al. (2017), ASEAN's policy of non-interventionism is more of an ideal rather than a practice. Possible revisitings of this thought are needed as non-interventionism may be a shackle in the current geopolitical climate.

Bearing these options in mind, there are practical reasons as to why these should be taken into account by ASEAN, with the first being to contain conflicts and prevent spillovers in other countries. The potential collapse of one country may destabilize another, especially if the aforementioned conflict has religious and ethnic undertones with its government. In the interest of domestic stability, some countries might opt to provide military assistance, intelligence, or economic capabilities as a form of intervention and possibly as a way to influence the foreign and local policies of these nations (Bani Salameh, 2019). Moreover, there is also the matter of the potential sudden influx of refugees

that may arise from such conflicts. Desiderio (2016) found that refugees could drastically affect the job market of a country, increase ethnic tensions, and increase the burden on these neighboring countries due to logistical issues. Such effects have already been shown in far more industrialized countries in the West, with refugees from the Middle East migrating to Europe as a side effect of the Arab Spring and the subsequent failure to restore order in these areas (Bani Salameh, 2019). A more local example of such an issue can be seen in the 2015 violence and genocide against the Rohingya minority in Myanmar, which caused significant regional instability as millions of refugees fled to Bangladesh to avoid persecution, subsequently burdening the economy of Bangladesh (László & Schmidt, 2018).

As such, while the notion of human rights may exist in Southeast Asia, it is heavily dependent on the sovereignty of nations in this region, a concept that is entrenched in the policy of non-interference among members of ASEAN. While the AHRD may have laid the foundation for the institutionalization of human rights within Southeast Asia, ratifications in the declaration are needed in order to move beyond non-intervention when it comes to resolving internal conflict in members of ASEAN and an increase in frequency regarding the convening of the APSC to provide regional discourse on tackling regional issues.

(Total 687 Words)

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