

21st Century SEATO: A Renewed Approach for Security in the South China Sea

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14. ABSTRACT The South China Sea is one of the world's most strategic waterways, marked by tendencies, potentials, trends, and tensions involving a distinct group of actors. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) seeks continued economic growth and success. China has emerged as a revisionist state, taking competitive actions through territorial claims and confrontational maritime engagements. The U.S. continues to pursue regional security and stability with its allies and partners. In order to achieve a balance of power in the South China Sea, the turmoil and uncertainty must be replaced with stability, requiring a lasting security framework. Developing a coordinated multilateral security framework with its ASEAN partners will allow the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) to facilitate peace and stability in the South China Sea, while demonstrating strategic measured responses to competitive actions by China. A 21st century Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) represents a multilateral security framework that could be implemented as an effective approach to security cooperation in the region. Multilateral security cooperation will provide a number of significant benefits, including a balance of power in the South China Sea region, and ensuring ASEAN economic stability and growth. In the absence of a 21st century SEATO model of security framework, instability and conflict in the South China Sea will continue to increase. Allowing the status quo of volatility in the South China Sea will erode international order and could have considerable power balance consequences in the future. A 21st century SEATO has the potential to grow and evolve into an effective organization that could achieve regional security over the long term in the South China Sea.					
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Contents

Common Abbreviations	4
Illustrations	6
Tables	7
Introduction	8
The Benefits of Multilateral Security Cooperation	9
The Necessity of a 21 st Century SEATO	18
Conclusion	23
Recommendations	24
Endnotes	27
Bibliography	33

Abstract

The South China Sea is one of the world's most strategic waterways, marked by tendencies, potentials, trends, and tensions involving a distinct group of actors. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) seeks continued economic growth and success. China has emerged as a revisionist state, taking competitive actions through territorial claims and confrontational maritime engagements. The U.S. continues to pursue regional security and stability with its allies and partners. In order to achieve a balance of power in the South China Sea, the turmoil and uncertainty must be replaced with stability, requiring a lasting security framework. Developing a coordinated multilateral security framework with its ASEAN partners will allow the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) to facilitate peace and stability in the South China Sea, while demonstrating strategic measured responses to competitive actions by China. A 21st century Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) represents a multilateral security framework that could be implemented as an effective approach to security cooperation in the region. Multilateral security cooperation will provide a number of significant benefits, including a balance of power in the South China Sea region, and ensuring ASEAN economic stability and growth. In the absence of a 21st century SEATO model of security framework, instability and conflict in the South China Sea will continue to increase. Allowing the status quo of volatility in the South China Sea will erode international order and could have considerable power balance consequences in the future. A 21st century SEATO has the potential to grow and evolve into an effective organization that could achieve regional security over the long term in the South China Sea.

Common Abbreviations

A2/AD	Anti-Access/Area Denial
ADMM	ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting
AMF	ASEAN Maritime Forum
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASEAN	Association for Southeast Asian Nations
CARAT	Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CNGB	Chief of National Guard Bureau
EAS	East Asia Summit
EEZ	Economic Exclusion Zone
EU	European Union
FPDA	Five-Power Defense Arrangement
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HA/DR	Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
JP	Joint Publication
KFOR	Kosovo Force
NATO	Northeast Atlantic Treaty Organization
RS	Resolute Support
SACEUR	Supreme Allied Commander Europe
SEACAT	Southeast Asia Cooperation and Training
SEATO	Southeast Asian Treaty Organization

SPP	State Partnership Program
UN	United Nations
USINDOPACOM	United States Indo-Pacific Command

Illustrations

Figure 1. ASEAN GDP Annually Per Capita, 2000-2017	11
Figure 2. South China Sea Territorial Claims	12
Figure 3. Connectivity of International Organizations	16

Tables

Table 1. Military Expenditures Incrementally From 1992-2017 (In 2016 Millions of U.S. Dollars)	14
Table 2. Military Defense Spending of ASEAN Member Nations in 2018	14

Introduction

“Prudence dictates that there should be a balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region. This is reflected in a widely held consensus that the U.S. presence in the region should be sustained. A military presence does not need to be used to be useful. Its presence makes a difference and makes for peace and stability in the region. This stability serves the interests of all, including those of China.”

-Lee Kuan Yew, the former Prime Minister of Singapore, March 5, 2013¹

The first two decades of the 21st century have been marked by considerable changes to the operational environment in Southeast Asia, emphasized by U.S. defense strategy publications and demonstrating the increasing strategic importance of the region to the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM). China has emerged as a revisionist state, demonstrating tendencies to take competitive actions through territorial claims and confrontational maritime engagements. The South China Sea, one of the world’s most strategic waterways, is the primary focus of China’s attention, leading to aggressive behavior, military modernization, and threats to sovereignty and free trade in the region. China’s actions have created significant tensions and a power struggle in the operational environment of the South China Sea, prompting a measured response by the U.S. and its allies and partners. If a balance of power is to be achieved in the South China Sea, the turmoil and uncertainty must be replaced with stability, requiring a lasting security framework that will maximize potentials for the associated actors of the region in the immediate and long range future.

There are important lessons from the past that can be applied in order to build a promising future for the South China Sea region and the Association for Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN) member nations. From 1955-1977, the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO), modeled after the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), provided for collective defense throughout Southeast Asia.² Although the treaty was dissolved, the precedent

was set for a framework that could be reintroduced to build security cooperation in the region. A 21st century version of SEATO has the potential to increase security and stability in the South China Sea region, allowing ASEAN to maintain economic viability and growth.

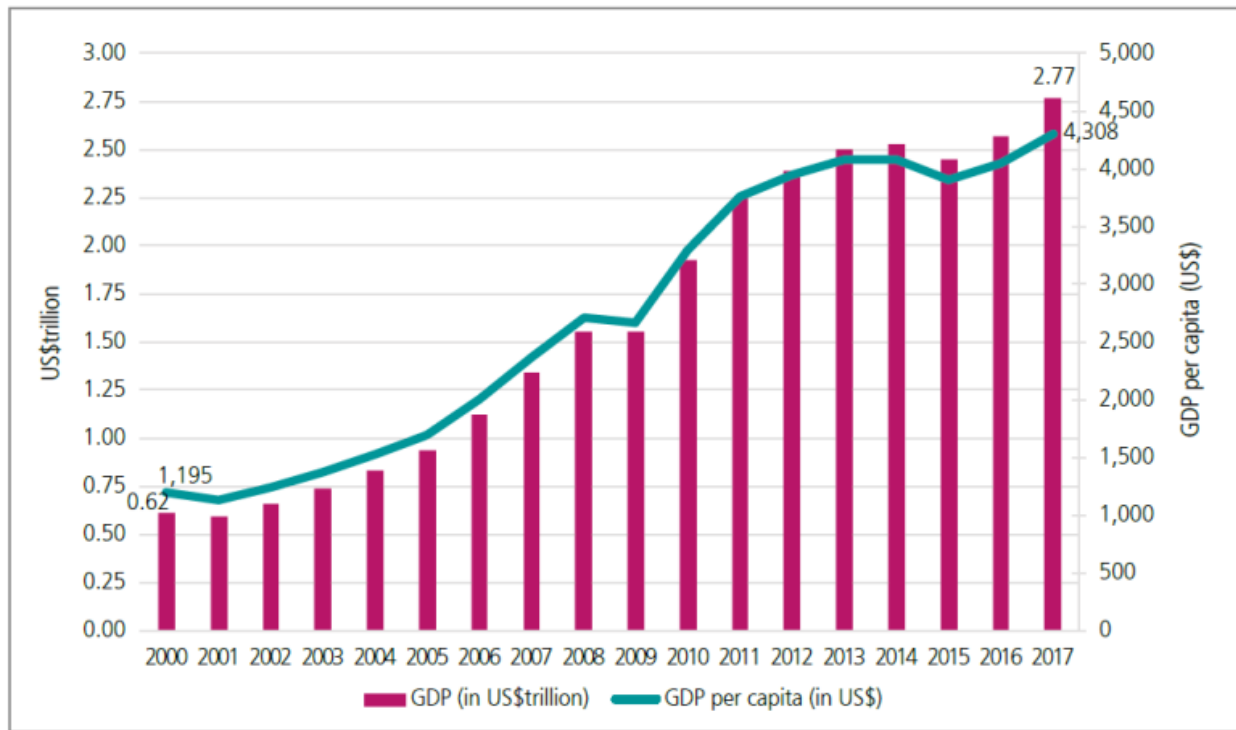
Developing a coordinated multilateral security framework with its ASEAN partners will allow USINDOPACOM to facilitate peace and stability in the South China Sea, while demonstrating strategic measured responses to competitive actions by China. The former SEATO represents a multilateral security framework that could be implemented as an effective approach to security cooperation in the region. Multilateral security cooperation will provide a number of significant benefits, including a balance of power in the South China Sea region, and ensuring ASEAN economic stability and growth. In the absence of a 21st century SEATO model of security framework, instability and conflict in the South China Sea will only continue to increase, leading to a more hostile and precarious operational environment. Simply allowing the status quo of volatility in the South China Sea will erode international order and could have considerable power balance consequences in the future. A 21st century SEATO will not instantly solve the security challenges of the South China Sea region, just as NATO did not serve as an instant solution to the security problems in Europe in the early years of the Cold War. However, if a 21st century SEATO has the opportunity to grow and evolve and capitalize on successes just as NATO did, there is cause for optimism that such an organization could achieve regional security successes over the long term in the South China Sea.

The Benefits of Multilateral Security Cooperation

Multilateral security cooperation brings nations together, collectively working towards increased security, stability, and several important benefits. The first three principles of the ASEAN Charter include, “Respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial

integrity and national identity of all ASEAN Member States; shared commitment and collective responsibility in enhancing regional peace, security, and prosperity; and, renunciation of aggression and of the threat or use of force or other actions in any manner inconsistent with international law.”³ These principles demonstrate the common bond between ASEAN member nations, their mutual respect for each other, and their commitment to long range regional security and stability. ASEAN’s shared beliefs and goals validate the need for a multilateral security framework in Southeast Asia.

ASEAN is an organization focused on sustaining and maintaining economic growth and prosperity. The South China Sea accounts for approximately \$3.37 trillion in trade annually, representing a critical commercial waterway for ASEAN and illustrating its tremendous commercial and global strategic importance.⁴ The key actors in the region, ASEAN, the U.S., and China, command the world’s fifth, first, and second largest economies in the world, respectively, accounting for over \$36 trillion.⁵ Economic growth and stability are correlated to a secure and stable operational environment. Therefore, sustaining and expanding economic development and success in the future is dependent upon minimizing threats and instability, and maintaining regional security. With trillions of dollars in global trade and commercial investment at stake for ASEAN in the South China Sea region, the creation of a 21st century SEATO would provide the stability required to sustain economic growth and prosperity. More specifically, the trend for ASEAN’s economic success has clearly been on the rise in the first two decades of the 21st century, as illustrated in Figure 1. In order to ensure that this economic momentum continues to thrive and grow, regional security is a top priority for the nations of ASEAN.

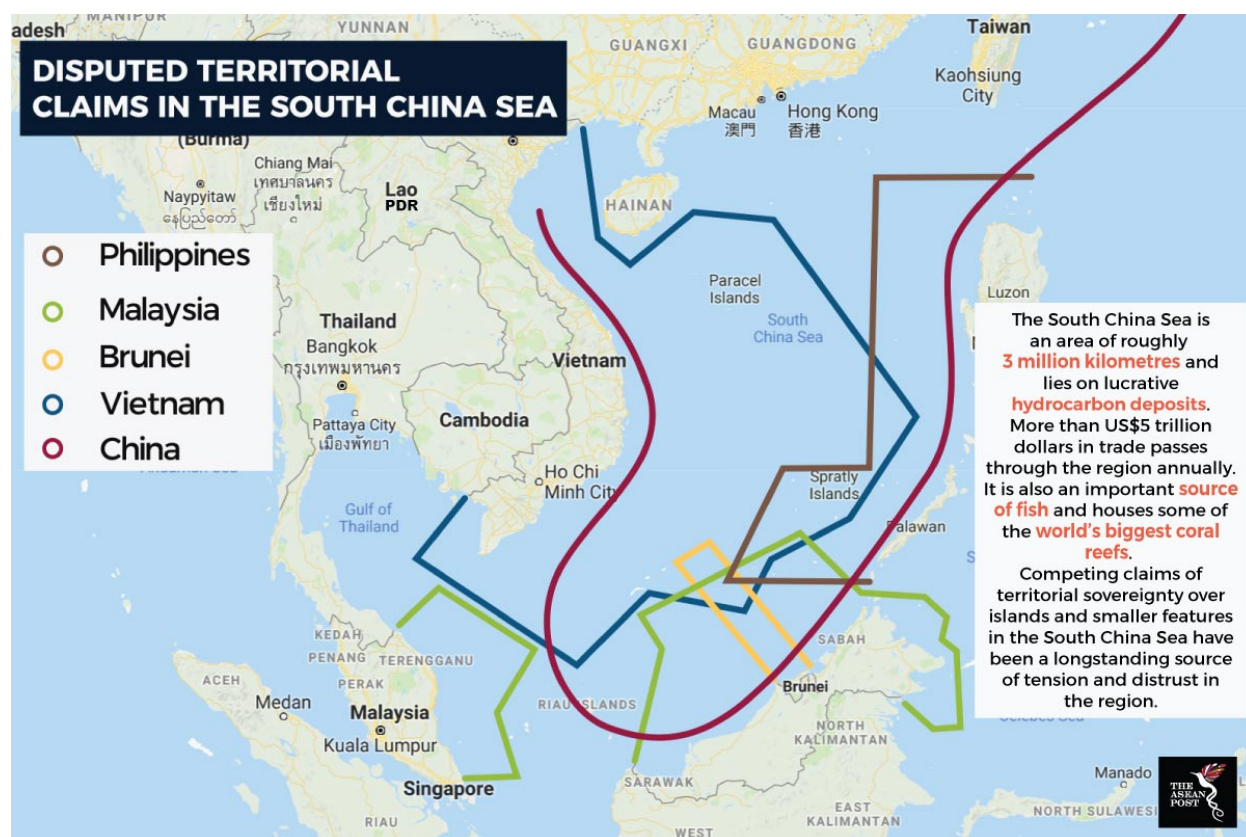
Figure 1. ASEAN GDP Annually Per Capita, 2000-2017⁶

Source: Dato Lim Jock Hoi, *ASEAN Key Figures 2018*, ASEAN Secretariat, ASEANstats Database (Jakarta, Indonesia: The Association of Southeast Asian Nations Secretariat Community Relations Division, 2018), 33.

The continuing tensions in the South China Sea have divided ASEAN over a range of issues and created hostility, uncertainty, and potential threats to trade and economic development.⁷ For several years, Vietnam has explored multiple opportunities to begin oil and gas production off its southeastern coast. Each venture has been quelled by China, often with the use or threat of force. Chinese ships cut the seismic cables of Vietnamese survey vessels in 2011 and 2012; more recently, China threatened attack on Vietnamese stations in the Vanguard Bank, if Vietnam continued exploration.⁸ The Philippines recently conceded to China, and will pursue hydrocarbon resource exploration in a joint capacity, despite it being in the Philippines own economic exclusion zone (EEZ).⁹ The most serious economic threat would be a military confrontation in the South China Sea, preventing passage by commercial vessels, or even a

Chinese naval blockade of shipping lanes, if China decides to make a stand when it comes to their claims of sovereignty.¹⁰ The tensions in the South China Sea operational environment are illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. South China Sea Territorial Claims¹¹



Source: Angaindrankumar Gnanasagar, “Is joint exploration the answer to the South China Sea dispute?” *The ASEAN Post*, March 25, 2018, <https://theaseanpost.com/article/joint-exploration-answer-south-china-sea-dispute> (accessed October 15, 2019).

The tendencies, potentials, trends, and tensions in the Joint Staff J-7 *Planner's Handbook for Operational Design*, demonstrate the significant forces in the South China Sea operational environment that must be understood and recognized in order to maintain stability in the region.¹² A 21st century SEATO would be an effective way to build unity and bring ASEAN

together in a united front to protect free trade and economic growth, and bring a balance of power to the region.

The rationale for multilateral security cooperation in the South China Sea region can be explained through Kenneth Waltz's neorealist balance of power theory. Waltz argues that in an anarchic structure with two or more states competing for survival, a systematic balance of power will be formed, as each state competes for control and attempts to follow the actions of successful actors.¹³ In his book *Joint Operational Warfare: Theory and Practice*, Milan Vego also explains the significance of the concept of balance of power. Vego describes that an aggressive actor may use an offensive strategy, in a particular region or on the global stage, in an attempt to alter the balance of power, while those states in a defensive posture, will attempt to repel these efforts and maintain the status quo in the system.¹⁴ These concepts reinforce the necessity of multilateral security cooperation, as China's aggression in the South China Sea attempts to tilt the balance of power in its favor, and ASEAN and the U.S. work to deter aggression, maintain regional stability, and create a free and open Indo-Pacific region.¹⁵

A multilateral security cooperation framework would provide ASEAN and the U.S. the means to achieve a balance of power with China in the South China Sea region. China's revisionist behaviors and competitive actions have included military modernization and a significant increase in defense spending. Over the past quarter century, China's military defense spending grew from approximately 5 percent of that of the U.S. in 1992, to approximately 38 percent of the U.S. in 2017.¹⁶ And, China spent more on military defense in 2017 than Japan, Russia, India, and Germany combined, shown in Table 1.¹⁷

Table 1. Military Expenditures Incrementally From 1992-2017 (In 2016 Millions of U.S. Dollars)¹⁸

Country	1992	2000	2010	2017
United States	\$521,934	\$420,496	\$768,466	\$597,178
China	\$27,172	\$41,324	\$138,028	\$228,173
Japan	\$43,657	\$45,402	\$45,595	\$46,556
Russia	\$40,786	\$20,405	\$43,121	\$55,327
India	\$16,592	\$27,339	\$48,600	\$59,757
Germany	\$53,972	\$42,353	\$41,488	\$43,023

Source: Created by the author using data from Joshua Shiffrin, “The Rise of China, Balance of Power Theory and US National Security: Reasons for Optimism?” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, December 26, 2018, 18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2018.1558056> (accessed October 3, 2019), Taylor and Francis Online.

However, ASEAN defense spending has also steadily increased in recent years, as they work towards achieving a counterbalance. In 2018, the ten member nations of ASEAN spent over 40 billion dollars (U.S. currency) combined in military defense, presented in Table 2.¹⁹

Table 2. Military Defense Spending of ASEAN Member Nations in 2018²⁰

Country	2018 Military Defense Spending (In Millions of U.S. Dollars)
Brunei	\$346.6
Cambodia	\$543.2
Indonesia	\$7,437.2
Laos	Data Unavailable
Malaysia	\$3,469.8
Myanmar	\$2,030.5
Philippines	\$3,769.7
Singapore	\$10,841.0
Thailand	\$6,829.2
Vietnam	5,500.0
ASEAN Total	\$40,767.2

Source: Created by the author using data from Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, “Military Expenditure by Country, in Constant (2017) US\$ m., 1988-2018,” accessed October 4, 2019, <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/Data%20for%20all%20countries%20from%201988%E2%80%932018%20in%20constant%20%282017%29%20USD%20%28pdf%29.pdf>.

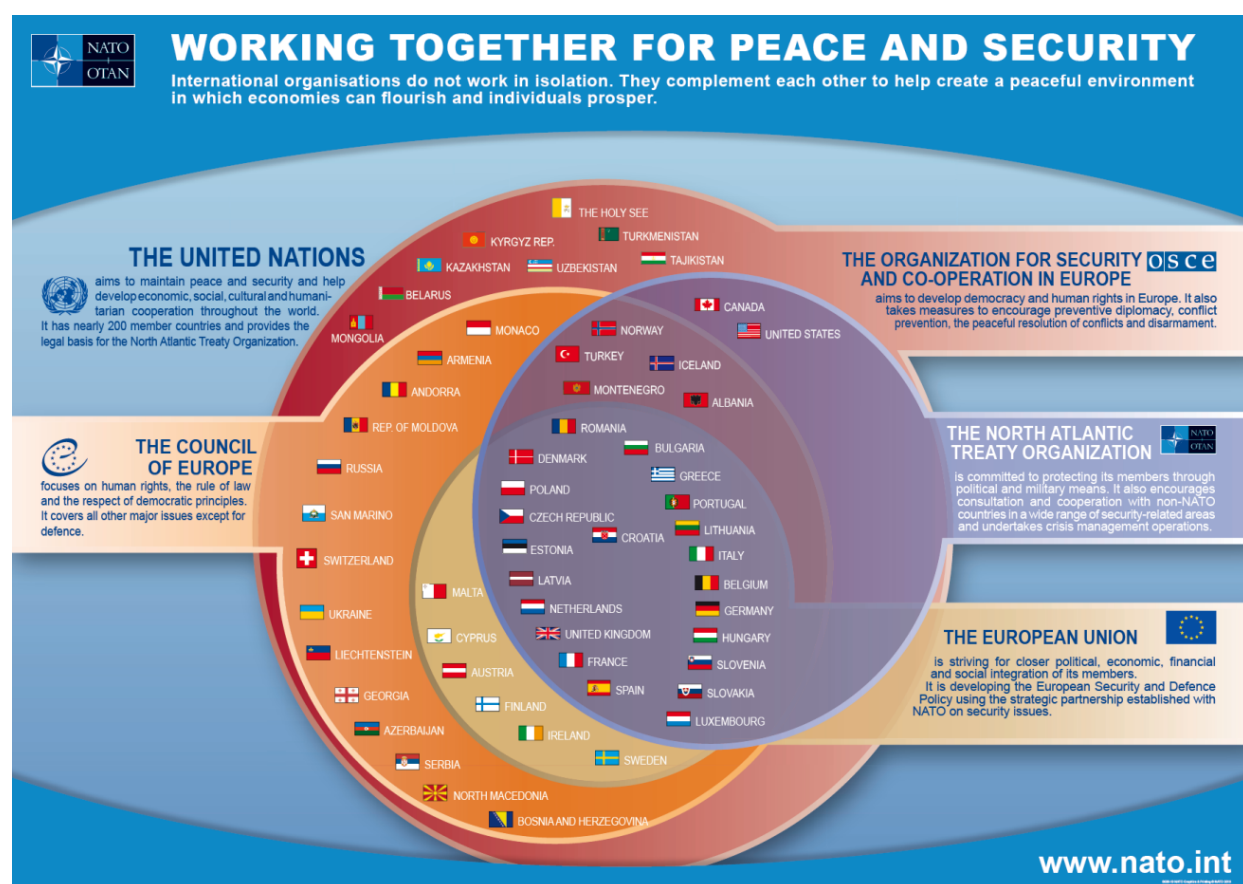
The size of their active duty forces also continues to increase; Vietnam, Indonesia, and Thailand currently rank ninth, twelfth, and thirteenth in the world when it comes to active duty personnel strength.²¹ An inference can be drawn that the increased attention on military defense by ASEAN is in response to China's military modernization and aggression in the South China Sea. These expanded military resources could be effectively combined and leveraged in a multilateral security framework to neutralize existing and future threats.

An opposing point of view may argue that multilateral security agreements are difficult to establish, and once in place, face a number of challenges, including coming to collective agreements on key issues, how to manage the organization, determining who should be admitted as members, and maintaining sufficient funding. SEATO faced many of these problems, including insufficient funding and military resources, the lack of a central command structure, and the inability to include key nations in the region, such as India, Indonesia, Ceylon, and Burma.²² The most significant shortcoming was the absence of the firm NATO style treaty articles, including Article 5, which calls for the collective defense in the event that any member nation is attacked, as well as Article 10, which allows for the invitation of new members only by the unanimous agreement of all existing member nations.²³ These problems ultimately led to the dissolution of SEATO in 1977.²⁴ Although the original SEATO may have had a flawed design, there are a number of successful examples to point to, demonstrating that when applied and instituted properly, multilateral security agreements can be very beneficial.

The largest and most well known multilateral security organization is NATO. Retired Admiral James Stavridis, the former Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), points to the fact that NATO has kept the peace in Europe for 70 years, a clear indicator of its success.²⁵ Another less known, but effective multilateral security agreement is the Australia, New Zealand,

United States (ANZUS) Security Treaty, which has provided security cooperation and maintained peace and stability in the Pacific for nearly seven decades.²⁶ The United Nations (UN) is the world's organizing body for peace and stability, effectively integrating multilateral security organizations throughout the world, as is depicted in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Connectivity of International Organizations²⁷



Source: North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), “Working Together for Peace and Security,” April 15, 2019, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_publications/20170608_working_together_2017_en.pdf (accessed October 15, 2019).

Multilateral security frameworks keep the world connected and collaborating towards common goals of peace and stability. Without them, nations would become more fragmented, isolated, and contentious. One of the greatest historical examples of this was following World

War II, when the United Nations, NATO, and the Marshall Plan were introduced to the world, connecting nations, building alliances, and creating a stable environment in the postwar world.²⁸ General Joseph Lengyel, the Chief of National Guard Bureau (CNGB), offers compelling evidence pertaining to the benefit of military alliances, as the U.S. maintains close alliances with other nations totaling approximately four million personnel and \$1 trillion in military spending.²⁹ He applauds this as a tremendous force multiplier, and also points out the value of the National Guard's State Partnership Program (SPP), which builds security cooperation with allies of the U.S. through direct military to military relationships.³⁰ Military alliances, although never perfect arrangements, offer a common fabric that binds nations together, building communication, a shared understanding, and combining resources to increase efficiencies. The alternative is nations taking a unilateral approach, spending more of their gross domestic product (GDP) to finance, equip, train, and resource their militaries, which is an extremely arduous task, especially for smaller countries.

For multilateral security cooperation to be effective and achieve success in Southeast Asia, it must have advocates within the region that can provide strategic messaging towards legitimacy. The late Lee Kuan Yew, the former Prime Minister of Singapore, was a fervent supporter of multilateral security cooperation. Yew accurately predicted that China would not allow an international court to decide the South China Sea's territorial disputes, and that it would take continued U.S. partnership with nations in Southeast Asia to counter Chinese aggression and provide a balance of power.³¹ Roberto de Campo, the former Secretary of Finance of the Philippines pointed out that ASEAN's roots as an organization were based in economics, as a means to promote peace and stability, and the organization grew from five nations to ten.³² *The Manila Times* published an opinion-editorial arguing that economic growth is correlated to

security stability, and applauded the implementation of the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting (ADMM) in 2006.³³ The top objective of the ADMM is “to promote regional peace and stability through dialogue and cooperation in defense and security,” illustrating ASEAN’s emphasis on security and stability.³⁴ Finally, Tran Viet Thai, Vietnam’s Director of the Center for Regional and Foreign Policy Studies, strongly supported Vietnam’s membership in ASEAN, believing that security and stability have increased, as well as Vietnam’s public image on the world stage.³⁵ These examples demonstrate largescale support for multilateral security and stability, and its importance to maintaining stable economic growth and prosperity for ASEAN.

The Necessity of a 21st Century SEATO

Recognizing the myriad of benefits that multilateral security cooperation can provide, the necessity of developing a 21st century version of SEATO could not be clearer. Without it, there is a risk of further instability and conflict in the South China Sea, marked by Chinese aggression. The most dangerous problem would be a decline or interruption to ASEAN’s economic stability and growth. China continues its aggressive actions, stationing long-range surface-to-air and anti-ship missiles on the contested Spratly Islands, conducting cyber theft of businesses and technology, executing anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) operations, participating in bilateral military exercises with Russia, and engaging in unethical economic practices such as predatory lending to other countries.³⁶ As long as China continues down this antagonistic path, peace and stability in Southeast Asia are at risk. The U.S. has maintained close ties with ASEAN, as a member of the East Asia Summit (EAS) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), working to reinforce multilateral security cooperation within ASEAN.³⁷

As the U.S. works with ASEAN to build security relationships, it is evident that security cooperation, and maintaining a balance of power, is a top priority for the ministers of defense of

the ASEAN member nations. The 2015 *Indonesian Defense White Paper*, asserts, "...Indonesia actively encourages global partnerships, promotes the spirit of togetherness and establishes a dynamic equilibrium, a condition characterized by the absence of a dominant state power in the region."³⁸ Malaysia's National Security Policy stresses the importance of its membership in ASEAN, maintaining regional peace and stability, and also its Five-Power Defense Arrangement (FPDA), a multilateral defense agreement with Malaysia, Singapore, New Zealand, Australia, and the United Kingdom.³⁹ Vietnam's National Defense Policy emphasizes the country's defense relations with 65 other nations, and most importantly, its multilateral relations as a member of ASEAN, ARF, and APEC.⁴⁰ Singapore's Defense Policy points to the fact that as a small nation with limited resources, building multinational security cooperation is extremely important to maintain regional peace and stability.⁴¹ And, the *Philippines Department of National Defense White Paper* highlights the importance of its multilateral relationships with ASEAN and other nations such as the U.S. as they, "...cooperate and collaborate in strengthening each other's defense and security forces for their mutual benefit."⁴² The national defense policies and strategies of these ASEAN member nations demonstrate their commitment to working together to build multilateral security cooperation in Southeast Asia.

Developing a viable and functional multilateral security framework involving ASEAN in Southeast Asia will take time. Although there are inherent differences in the operational environments in Europe and Southeast Asia that certainly must be considered, there are a number of important lessons, as well as similarities that can be applied from NATO. First, it is important to understand that NATO began as a means of collective defense and regional stability during the Cold War, working towards achieving a balance of power between western countries and the former Soviet Union. NATO began with 12 member nations in 1949 and has expanded over the

decades to 29 countries today.⁴³ Despite the fall of the former Soviet Union in the early 1990s, NATO endured and evolved as an organization, expanding its partnerships. NATO has worked closely with the European Union (EU), providing a stable security environment to set the conditions for economic success. The EU has also evolved, growing from six countries in 1951 to 28 member nations today.⁴⁴ The successful NATO and EU relationship could act as a model for a 21st century SEATO and ASEAN, ensuring that a stable and secure environment is maintained in Southeast Asia so that economic growth and success can be sustained.

Like the EU, ASEAN also began with humble roots in 1967, with only five countries, and has grown and achieved significant economic success, with 10 member nations today.⁴⁵ This, combined with ASEAN's numerous economic and security partnerships with countries throughout the world, demonstrates its interest in expansion. The fundamental question is, what would a 21st century SEATO look like? How would it be structured, who would be members, and how would it be governed? From a security and stability standpoint, and based on their national defense policies and military strategies, the ASEAN member nations are supportive of a multilateral security framework, working towards collective peace and stability in the South China Sea region. Particularly, the countries with smaller militaries and more limited defense capabilities, would welcome the idea of sharing military resources and building a defense coalition. NATO has successfully employed this defense strategy for decades, as each member nation contributes military resources across the air, sea, land, and even cyber domains, in an effort to fill military capability gaps and ensure that each country and their citizens are protected.

The evidence that this has been a successful strategy lies in the fact that not only has NATO managed to deter a major war involving its member nations, and generally maintain peace and stability in Europe for 70 years, today NATO is a highly regarded defense

organization that is well known and respected throughout the world. NATO did not fold or disband at the end of the Cold War as many predicted might have happened. Instead, NATO took on a new military expeditionary leadership role throughout the globe, conducting peacekeeping operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s, managing the Kosovo Force (KFOR) from 1999 to the present, participation in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and Resolute Support (RS) missions in Afghanistan in the early 2000s, providing relief assistance after the Pakistan earthquake in 2005, enforcing the no-fly zone in Libya in 2011, and a number of other important military operations.⁴⁶ These examples illustrate that with the right level of support and legitimacy, multilateral security organizations can be extremely effective in maintaining peace and stability, and can continually grow and evolve. A 21st century SEATO could be developed on this premise; although it may begin as a small and limited organization like NATO once did, it has the potential to expand and evolve into something much greater.

A logical counterargument against the formation of a 21st century SEATO is that it would simply be too monumental of a task to bring the ASEAN member nations together to agree on a structured multilateral security framework, and even if they did, it would never measure up to the success or prominence of NATO. The rationale for this argument is that Southeast Asia contains a wide range of geopolitical circumstances, differing interests, nationalism, and geographic distance between countries, making it challenging to develop a NATO type structure, especially without a neighboring threat like the former Soviet Union was for NATO during the Cold War.⁴⁷ Further, as previously discussed, the operational environments of Europe during the Cold War and Southeast Asia in the 21st century are vastly different, suggesting that the NATO “one size fits all” approach would be unsuccessful. Finally, there is an ongoing myth that if the ASEAN nations were to come together to form a multilateral security organization, they would be siding

with the U.S. and directly confronting and challenging China. These arguments are flawed because they are simply inconsistent with ASEAN and the current status of their military forces.

Although these differences exist, there are a number of similarities. First, as previously discussed, NATO began as a relatively small organization with only 12 members, just as the EU started with six members and ASEAN started with five. All three organizations have grown, flourished, and maintained stability over the past several decades. Therefore, the potential certainly exists for a 21st century SEATO to expand and develop in the future. Second, although the operational environments between Europe and Southeast Asia are admittedly very different, it is important to recognize that comparisons can also be made. Certainly, the concept of sharing military resources for collective defense and conserving GDP on military spending, is common to both geographic regions, particularly for smaller countries that have less military capabilities. Additionally, NATO, the EU, and ASEAN share many of the same organizational values and principles. The North Atlantic Treaty states that the parties were, "...founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law. They seek to promote stability and well-being in the North Atlantic area."⁴⁸ The values of the EU include, "...promote peace, its values and the well-being of its citizens...offer freedom, security, and justice without internal borders."⁴⁹ These ideals complement and align with the principles of ASEAN, stated earlier.

Finally, it is commonly understood that ASEAN does not want to be placed into a position where it is forced to choose sides between the U.S. and China. ASEAN is a major trading partner with both the U.S. and China, and seeks to keep these economic ties open. This raises the question of whether multilateral security and economic practices can be compartmentalized and yet still coexist. This is another important comparison that can be made with EU and NATO. Many of the EU and NATO member nations maintain trading relationships

with the U.S. and Russia, for example, but they have not been placed into a position where they are having to choose sides. In 2018, the EU's number one total trading partner was the U.S., at \$675,541 million euros; Russia was fourth, at \$252,990 million euros.⁵⁰ The impact that NATO and the EU have had in Europe, including their stability and success, further demonstrates that a 21st century SEATO would provide a number of beneficial outcomes.

Conclusion

Multilateral security framework efforts between ASEAN and USINDOPACOM would demonstrate strategic measured responses to competitive actions by China, while facilitating peace and stability in the South China Sea. The operational environment of the South China Sea has been characterized by Chinese aggression, military modernization, and threats to sovereignty and free trade. A multilateral security framework in the form of a 21st century SEATO would provide the appropriate response necessary to work towards achieving a balance of power in the region. Multilateral security cooperation provides several important benefits, including increased security, stability, and bringing nations together to achieve a shared understanding. These benefits align with the principles of the ASEAN Charter, which could serve as the basis for a multilateral security framework in Southeast Asia. The necessity of developing a 21st century version of SEATO could not be clearer. Without it, there is a risk of further Chinese aggression, instability, and conflict in the South China Sea, and if left unimpeded, could jeopardize the economic growth and success of ASEAN. The strategic importance of the South China Sea will continue to increase due to its growing economic significance for global trade. Developing a viable and functional multilateral security framework in Southeast Asia will set the conditions for ASEAN to maintain the regional stability required to sustain long range economic growth and success.

Recommendations

For a 21st century SEATO to really take shape and be effective, it is important to start small, and use the building block approach to capitalize on successes. In his concept of operational design, Milan Vego describes this as using intermediate objectives in order to achieve the ultimate objective.⁵¹ In this case, ASEAN must continue moving forward with a series of short range objectives, building on successes and working towards achieving the long range goal of a multilateral security framework. ASEAN has three intermediate objectives on the path to its ultimate objective. The first includes security cooperation meetings, dialogue, and diplomacy. The second consists of joint military exercises and military partnerships. The third, involves the implementation of a regional security task force in Southeast Asia.

Over the past two decades, ASEAN has made steady progress on achieving the first two intermediate objectives. The ARF was established in 1994 to begin constructive meetings on security cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region.⁵² The ARF has steadily grown over the years and now has 27 participants.⁵³ ADM was founded in 2006, elevating security cooperation issues to the Defense Minister level for each ASEAN member, and was followed by the ADMM-plus in 2007, expanding the security cooperation of ASEAN to eight partner nations.⁵⁴ The ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF) was also created to specifically focus on maritime security.⁵⁵ These meetings have produced constructive security cooperation discussions among the ASEAN members. ASEAN has also steadily increased its participation in joint military exercises. In September 2019, the first ASEAN and U.S. maritime exercise was held in the South China Sea, and included eight warships, aircraft, and over a thousand personnel from all ten ASEAN members, working together to build operational capacity and security coordination.⁵⁶ The U.S. conducts approximately 90 joint military exercises in the Indo-Pacific each year, including the

Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) and Southeast Asia Cooperation and Training (SEACAT) Exercises, and the Pacific Pathways exercises.⁵⁷ The National Guard's SPP is another method of building security cooperation: Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam are current state partners. Adding the remaining countries of ASEAN to the SPP, Brunei, Laos, Myanmar, and Singapore, would further enhance security cooperation through formal military and diplomatic partnerships. Foreign military sales, military school exchange programs, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) will also increase security cooperation and build a shared understanding among the ASEAN members.

The third intermediate objective is more assertive and represents the next logical step towards a multilateral security cooperation framework. ASEAN should create a maritime security policy in the form of an ASEAN regional security task force, similar to the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) in the EU.⁵⁸ This objective would expand security by building on existing maritime patrols already taking place in the South China Sea. ASEAN members Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand routinely conduct patrols in the Malacca Straits, and Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaysia provide maritime security in the Sulu Sea.⁵⁹ The ADMM and AMF are suitably postured to oversee the implementation of an ASEAN regional security task force.⁶⁰ Maritime security is critical to ensuring economic growth and success in the South China Sea, and since patrols are already occurring in the region, this action would simply provide a more structured approach for ASEAN.

These actions follow the guidelines outlined in Joint Publication (JP) 3-16, *Multinational Operations*, which provides detailed guidance of diplomatic and military considerations for multinational security cooperation.⁶¹ The more nations interact with one another, the more connected they will become, developing a better understanding of the overall operational

environment in the South China Sea, and how each country plays a vital role in assuring future stability of the region. The theories and philosophies of Carl von Clausewitz form our modern U.S. Army definition of operational art: “ ‘the pursuit of strategic objectives, in whole or in part, through the arrangement of tactical actions in time, space, and purpose.’ ”⁶² If the ASEAN countries are able to work collectively with the U.S. and execute these tactical actions properly and in a logical sequence over time, space, and purpose, the strategic objective of a 21st century SEATO can be achieved.

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