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## Institutional Change in ASEAN: A Conceptual Analysis of the ASEAN Political-Security Community

### Original article

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### Abstract

**Objectives:** To figure out whether adaptation – specifically, Ernst B. Hass' incremental growth model – is able to account for institutional changes of ASEAN in the shape of the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC).

**Methods:** Use Ernst Hass' theoretical arguments and propositions to examine some of ASEAN's internal and external factors that have an impact on the discussion, planning, and implementation of the APSC. Three variables -- the types of knowledge used by ASEAN leaders in making choices, their political objectives, as well as the manner in which issues being negotiated -- are found in historical documents and academic analyses and then operationalized in a simpler way.

**Results:** The selection of the incremental growth model is justified and the incremental growth model can serve as an innovative analytical framework for the institutional change in ASEAN.

**Conclusions:** ASEAN is in a dynamic context where increased expectations and pressure from within and outside are taking place all at once. The institutionalization of ASEAN security arrangements, originally led by the initiation of the ASC/APSC, means that ASEAN has started facing these expectations and pressure and moved on to enhance security cooperation to a certain degree. It is time for students of international relations to apply again the previous finding of adaptation through incremental growth and conduct further field investigations into the current evolution of the APSC.

### Keywords:

institutional change, Southeast Asia, ASEAN, ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), incremental growth

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## Introduction

In November 2003, ten national leaders of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) met in Vientiane, Cambodia and announced their plan to establish an ASEAN Community, including an “ASEAN Security Community” (ASC) – latter renamed as “ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) – as one of the chief pillars for the realization of an ASEAN Community in 2020. The effort to build a security community for ASEAN manifests the regionalism concerning the fulfillment of the “One Southeast Asia.” Both history and empirical evident indicate that this idea of regionalism has been launched and endorsed by the ruling upper class who was often schooled in the West (Fifield, 1984, p. 128). The call for such an ASEAN Community with the ASC/APSC and the other two chief pillars – ASEAN Economic Community and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community – is basically a political design by the leaders of Southeast Asia (Stubbs, 2004, p. 13).

At the 12<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit in January 2007, ASEAN leaders decided to accelerate the establishment of an ASEAN Community and signed the *Cebu Declaration on the Acceleration of the Establishment of an ASEAN Community by 2015*. The *ASEAN Charter* that entered into force in December 2008 made ASEAN a legally binding regional institution and initiated a few organs for further building of a regional community for the very first time in history. In the *ASEAN Charter*, the ASC was officially renamed as the APSC.

In addition, under the framework of multilateralism, ASEAN has been able to create norms universally accepted by its own member states in order to facilitate the establishment and evolution of security institutions. The elite-driven, multilateral nature of ASEAN integration is further reinforced by ASEAN’s organizing principles, most importantly, the ASEAN Way (Huang, 2001, pp. 40–44)<sup>1</sup>. The ASC/APSC as a grand political design suggests significant changes in the institutional arrangements and mechanisms of ASEAN.

Why are there such changes in ASEAN – that is, what caused them? Is there any theoretical explanation as to the ambition of ASEAN to transform itself from a regional organization emphasizing economic, social, cultural cooperation for some thirty years to a regional community that is equipped with an obvious security component at the dawn of the new millennium? These are the key research questions in this essay.

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<sup>1</sup> Generally speaking, the ASEAN Way means consultation, the pursuit of consensus, the commitment to solidarity and mutual respect, the peaceful settlement of disputes, informality and minimal institutionalization, and the principle of non-intervention in domestic affairs. For details, see Kwei-Bo Huang (Huang, 2001, pp. 40–44).

To answer these questions, an internal-external account for such institutional changes in ASEAN's security arrangement will be introduced in brief. Then, I will discern these changes by the "incremental growth model" and the "managed interdependence model" put forward by Ernst B. Haas (Haas, 1990)<sup>2</sup>. The research conclusions are based on international relations theory and public information and hoped to be able to provide an analytical framework for a better understanding of the APSC's, or ASEAN's, institutional and norm changes in the future.

### **DRIVING FORCES FOR CHANGE: An Internal-External Review**

There is little doubt that both internal and external factors have contributed to the institutional change in ASEAN from a conflict management regime to a conflict resolution one. Internal factors that impact ASEAN are concerned with political statements of ASEAN that are aimed at developing or fostering durable security mechanisms in Southeast Asia, and they are further complicated by individual domestic concerns, as well as by bilateral and multilateral intra-regional relations.

First, such past efforts of ASEAN to maintain peace and stability as the 1967 *Bangkok Declaration*, the 1971 *Declaration of the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality* (ZOPFAN), the 1976 *Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia* (TAC), and the 1976 *Declaration of ASEAN Concord*, have paved a way for the enhancement of ASEAN security to a great extent. These political statements are not necessarily for the building of a security community in Southeast Asia only. They show a strong need for regional stability and a willingness of being socialized in the international community under the guidance of the *United Nations (UN) Charter* and commonly recognized international laws. After the Cold War, the 1995 *Treaty on Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone* (SEANWFZ), the terms of reference of the ASEAN Troika adopted in 2000, and the 2003 *Declaration of ASEAN Concord II*, for example, all revealed the apparent possibility that all, or most, of the ten ASEAN member states was moving toward the further institutionalization of critical security arrangements of ASEAN.

Take the *TAC* – the underlying spirit and principles endorsed by ASEAN member states – for example. Adherent to the spirit and modes of peaceful settlement in Article 33(1) of the *UN Charter*, the *TAC* specifies (i) mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality,

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<sup>2</sup> Ernst B. Haas' third model – "adaptation through turbulent nongrowth" – is not analyzed here mostly because the development of ASEAN has never been as incoherent and malignant as this model describes.

territorial integrity and national identity of all nations; (ii) the right of every state to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion or coercion; (iii) noninterference in the internal affairs of one another; (iv) settlement of differences or disputes by peaceful means; (v) renunciation of the threat or use of force; and (vi) effective cooperation among themselves. These have served as a key foundation of the security community building in Southeast Asia at a later time. Following the logical and normative thinking of the *TAC*, the ASEAN Troika, the call for a stronger secretariat, and the proposed ASC can be viewed as important instruments for the maintenance of peace and as salient indicators of growing institutionalization of ASEAN comprehensive security.

The High Council of the *TAC* consists of a representative at ministerial level from each of the signatories in Southeast Asia. Article 15 of the *TAC* stipulates that “the High Council shall take cognizance of the dispute or the situation and shall recommend to the parties in dispute appropriate means of settlement such as good offices, mediation, inquiry or conciliation,” or “upon agreement of the parties in dispute, constitute itself into a committee of mediation, inquiry or conciliation.” It is thus convincing that ASEAN is conceded to enjoy the legitimacy to carry on appropriate means of conflict management if deemed necessary – despite a leeway to the disputing parties to withdraw from the composition of the High Council if the parties do not agree to participate (Haacke, 2013, p. 50).

It is not yet sufficient to aver that the 2003 *Declaration of ASEAN Concord II* has somewhat created a security community in Southeast Asia, but it is evident that, with this political document, ASEAN is conceivably moving in that direction. In the *Declaration*, ASEAN member states form consensuses that future ASEAN cooperation in the realm of security relies “exclusively on peaceful processes in the settlement of intra-regional differences,” that their security is “fundamentally linked to one another and bound by geographic location, common vision and objectives,” and that the High Council of the *TAC* will become the important element in the ASC “since it reflects ASEAN’s commitment to resolve all differences, disputes and conflicts peacefully.” According to (Le, 2017), the political-security motivations that led to the creation of ASEAN, i.e., to build an environment of peace and stability, both domestically and regionally, allowing it to focus on development, remain fundamental to ASEAN today.”

Second, domestic political development and leadership change in several ASEAN countries have led to a process of reconsideration of the direction of ASEAN in the management of regional security. Meanwhile, it seems that much of ASEAN’s ideological convergence was somehow shaped by external environments and contingencies, despite the

fact that individual national interests of ASEAN member states still surpass the need for regional security designs (Tang, 2017, p. 36).

Domestic political development and regime change also resulted in the further breakdown of collective regional leadership of ASEAN after the demission of Indonesia's President Soeharto in May 1998. When Soeharto was in power, he brought Indonesia a status of *primus inter pares* within ASEAN and helped stabilize the region of Southeast Asia. When Soeharto stepped down, followed by Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew and Malaysia's Prime Minister Mohammad Mahathir, no major ASEAN leaders could resume the leadership left by them and constructed a regional security arrangement accepted by all ASEAN states.

In those few years before the establishment of the ASC, internal political challenges and regime changes possibly weakened regional political elites in many of the core ASEAN member countries – e.g., Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand in particular, thus leading to greater focus on an internal agenda of regime consolidation rather than on regional development. It was likely that “weakened internal political legitimacy and correspondingly reduced state capacity to coherently articulate policy output clearly inhibits regional cooperation” (Ganesan, 2004, p. 121).

Third, the admission of the new ASEAN member states – Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam (CLVM) – also caused restraints on the decision-making process of ASEAN as to the formation of a regional security community. The principle of non-intervention is one of the major benefits that attracted CLVM to join ASEAN in the 1990s. This principle can keep CLVM with totalitarian/authoritarian and relatively closed political systems from regional interventions in their domestic affairs. It was not yet very clear that time how ASEAN was going to plan its mechanisms on conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and post-conflict peace building in a coordinated way. Neither was it easy to strike a balance between the aforementioned mechanisms and the existing norms and principles such as mutual respect, non-intervention, and integrity of territorial sovereignty. As a result, there may be a divergence between CLVM and countries like Indonesia that initiates and promotes the idea of the ASC.

Last, but not least, “ASEAN Way” – according to Narayanan Ganesan (Ganesan, 2004, p. 120), “the ‘soft capital’ acquired over years of interaction and the passing down of such familiarization through regular tours for new incumbents in office have remained intact.” Hence, although ASEAN member states generally take into account neighboring states and their policies as a potential threat to conventional and non-conventional security in the region, and although territorial disputes in Southeast Asia have been existing for decades, ASEAN

member states' intramural threat perceptions seem to lower as the structural changes associated with the end of the Cold War took place.

It has been sometimes recognized that, before the birth of the ASC, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore constituted the security and geo-strategic core of ASEAN (Antolik, 1990, pp. 18–50)(Emmerson, 1997, pp. 34–88). Nonetheless, this security and geo-strategic core is not intact at all in the post-Cold War era. The Indonesian-Malaysian, Indonesian-Singaporean, and Malaysian-Singaporean tensions or conflicts never stopped. The Indonesian-Malaysian relationship suffered from a measure of over-exposure of Indonesia, illegal immigrants from Indonesia, historical security concerns when the Federation of Malaya was extended in 1963, interpersonal differences between Soeharto and Mahathir, as well as overlapping territorial claims (Ganesan, 1995, pp. 29–34). The Indonesian-Singapore tensions did not aggravate until the resign of Soeharto. The origin of tensions between them is not about sovereignty or territories but differences in economic and environmental policies (Chua, 1999). The Malaysian-Singaporean tensions were owing to the unpleasant historical experiences in the Federation of Malaya and differences in ethno-religious, defense and development policies. The relationship between Malaysia and Singapore was interdependent but lukewarm (Sudo, 2001, pp. 312–314)(Smith, 1999, pp. 250–251). In addition, Malaysia has had disputes with most of the ASEAN states after the Cold War, and some other bilateral tensions remained as well (Acharya, 1993, pp. 30–32)(Garofano, 1999, pp. 80–83).

The expansion of ASEAN membership occasionally intensified bilateral tensions in ASEAN, therefore encumbering the process of dialogue and consultation and the formation of consensus on security affairs. After the resignation of Soeharto who strongly supported the policy of non-intervention, a number of bilateral disputes have taken place in ASEAN (Smith, 1999, pp. 250–252). All these bilateral tensions made intra-ASEAN cooperation in security affairs a challenge.

Nonetheless, both proximate geography and shared history have contributed to the process of mutual bonding with ASEAN. Having overcome the initial intra-regional security concern, ASEAN leaders have learned the way to interact and other regions' experiences. With the precedent set by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), there has been a set of norms, most of which are quite informal, that aims to deal with internal security matters of ASEAN. These norms have played a significant role in confidence and security building and cooperation between ASEAN member states. After the Cold War, what with growing economic and military power and what with the changing regional security environment in Southeast Asia, ASEAN member states, with the signing of the *Charter of the*

ASEAN in November 2007, have begun to try more formal confidence and security building measures and other related mechanisms to prevent potential conflicts within or outside ASEAN<sup>3</sup>.

External factors that directly impact ASEAN have always had to do with the changing global configuration in the aftermath of the Cold War – particularly the United States (US) strategy toward the region, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the economic presence of Japan, and the economic rise of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of India. Such a dramatic change has given ASEAN a new awareness of the necessity of developing certain security mechanisms promoting peace and stability in the Asia Pacific.

ASEAN’s view of post-Cold War regional political and economic security is best observed in a 1996 speech of Ali Alatas (Alatas, 1996), then-Minister of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia:

*ASEAN can thus be seen to be engaged in two vital and complementary processes covering the Asia-Pacific region: APEC in the economic field and, in the political and security field, the ARF in which we in ASEAN serve as the driving force. Through APEC, we enhance and accelerate our social and economic development, thereby promoting our resilience, the first, inward directed concept in our security strategy. Through the ARF there could ultimately evolve code of conduct among the major powers and the regional powers such as envisioned in the concept of ZOPFAN, the second concept in our security strategy. These two vital processes, along with other arrangements and process in which ASEAN is involved, such as the SEANWFZ, the AFTA and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, complement one another in a positive and synergistic way and a network for building confidence and cooperative security...*

It is unambiguous that ASEAN has been adopting a two-tiered approach – economic cooperation and political/security dialogue – to enhance regional cooperation and pursue regional peace. This approach will not threaten the “ASEAN identity” because, as Lessee

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<sup>3</sup> Some recent discussions on the application and effectiveness of the *ASEAN Charter* in the realm of security affairs can be found in, for example, Susumu Yamakage (Yamakage, 2017, pp. 39–47), Frederick Kliem (Kliem, 2019, pp. 15–17, 20), Limsiritong, Springall, and Rojanawanichkij (Limsiritong, Springall and Rojanawanichkij, 2019, pp. 25–33), as well as Delfiyanti Delfiyanti (Delfiyanti, 2019, pp. 272–282).

Buszynski (Buszynski, 1997, p. 570). points out, “ASEAN leaders recognize that their security to a considerable extent would depend on an Asia-Pacific security dialogue that would involve all major actors, but they strive to protect their organization from the consequences.”

After the Cold War, ASEAN may have felt more secure mainly because it has been capable of including all Southeast Asian states in it and because the Soviet-Vietnamese influence diminished with both the settlement of the Cambodian issue and the collapse of the Soviet bloc. Yet, at the same time, ASEAN may have begun to feel a little bit uncertain of the development of regional security, for there was no multiple framework that could regulate regional politics when new power centers are looming (Snitwongse, 1995, pp. 523–524). ASEAN has always been in a dilemma where it wants to create a neutral zone in Southeast Asia on the one hand and use the strategy of balance of power among major actors on the other hand in order to maintain regional peace and stability. The idea of neutral zone or nuclear weapon-free zone does not seem feasible at the present time, so ASEAN appears to try to draw the US, Japan, the PRC and some other middle powers together to work on regional political and security consultation (Graham, 1998, p. 107).

In the 1990s and the early 2000s, there were some other structural challenges that confronted ASEAN as well. Internationally, the disappearing of a bipolar system in the world, including the Asia Pacific, and the collapse of the Soviet Union expedited the cooperation and integration between the communist and non-communist camps, resulting in convergent foreign and defense policies. A seemingly “power vacuum” in the region of Southeast Asia after the Cold War even brought more attention to the development of the security device that could result in a peaceful and prosperous environment for ASEAN member states. At the same time, the setback of the financial crisis in 1997 awakened some Southeast Asian countries’ desire for rejuvenating ASEAN (Acharya, 2004). A security community designed both to enhance the cooperative and comprehensive security of all Southeast Asian countries and to be open to all extra-regional countries has seemed to best meet ASEAN and its member states’ need.

Some issue-specific challenges also caused the acceleration of the formation of a security community in Southeast Asia. For example, there has been obvious international pressure, mainly from the US, on ASEAN to cope with terrorism proactively and effectively. The responses of ASEAN and its member states were complicated by anti-American nationalism, especially in the Islamic countries in Southeast Asia. Governments of Indonesia, Malaysia, and some Southeast Asian countries with huge Islamic communities had hard time



coordinating their anti-terrorism and Middle East policies with the US while meeting the needs of Islamic citizens for a square and objective justification of a cooperative policy with the US in this matter. In addition, the nature and spread of transnational crimes, which received greater attention after the end of the Cold War, was a reagent catalyst for ASEAN member states to pursue collective action favorable for themselves and the region as a whole.

The worry about domestic rebels or disorder that could lead to regional instability may account for the growing necessity of sending unarmed military monitors in an ASEAN, not bilateral, framework to observe ceasefires, help de-escalate tensions between parties in a dispute, and probably an incremental move to conflict resolution. All ASEAN member states have agreed that an enhanced version of security cooperation that does not contradict the existing norms and principles of ASEAN will benefit the future development of Southeast Asia as a whole. Yet, decisions about the ASC/APSC have not indicated clearly that there would be a permanent joint force for military operations. It is fair to contend that the APSC has an initial form of a regional security architecture, but challenges still exist because of the lack of a strong consensus about a permanent joint force established by ASEAN (Naganuma, 2020, p. 5).

It is important to note that, roughly since the early 1990s, ASEAN has had an attempt to approach and work in partnership with the major Northeast Asian countries through an institutionalized mechanism in the form of “ASEAN + 3” that involves the PRC, Japan, and the Republic of Korea. For some ASEAN member states, while exploring the possibility of further cooperation with these Northeast Asian powers, the economic and security nexus being demonstrated weakly among their member states has been the key to the completion of the community building in Southeast Asia (Sabastian and Chong, 2003, pp. 1–3). Consequently, the call for the ASC or a security community-like arrangement received more attention and became more attractive in Southeast Asia.

Owing to both internal and external factors explained above, in *The ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint 2025* released by the ASEAN Secretariat (The ASEAN Secretariat, 2016), foreign ministers of ASEAN agreed to make the APSC: (i) “a rules-based, people-centered community bound by fundamental principles, shared values and norms” such as tolerance and moderation;” (ii) “a resilient community... with enhanced capacity to respond effectively and in a timely manner to challenges for the common good of ASEAN;” (iii) “an outward-looking community that deepens cooperation with... external parties... based on an ASEAN common platform on international issues;” and (iv) “a community... through improved ASEAN work processes and coordination.”

The internal-external account presented above helps one understand those factors at different levels that caused decision-makers of ASEAN to launch plans of change in security arrangements. However, when and how did these decision-makers make such changes? Can one identify analytically distinct patterns of institutional change in the case of the ASC? It is obviously insufficient if only the internal-external account is applied. What can one do about it? The following section will make use of the “incremental growth model” – one of the commonly seen models of organizational change classified by Ernst Haas – to generate some innovative observations.

### **APSC AND ITS INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE: The “Incremental Growth Model”**

After the Bali Summit of 2003, ASEAN member states have decided on a tough plan of bringing ASEAN’s political and security cooperation to a higher plane. According to the *ASC Plan of Action* published at the Vientiane Summit of 2004, the ASC “promotes an ASEAN-wide political and security cooperation in consonance with the ASEAN Vision 2020 rather than a defence pact, military alliance or a joint foreign policy, and the ASC is mutually strengthening with bilateral cooperation between ASEAN member states while recognizing the significance of sovereignty of the member states to conduct their particular foreign policies and defense arrangements.

Scholars such as Amitav Acharya (Acharya, 1991, pp. 159–178)(Acharya, 2007, pp. 78–93), Narayanan Ganesan (Ganesan, 1995, pp. 210–226), Markus Hund (Hund, 2002, pp. 99–122) and Roldolf Severino (Putra, Darwis and Burhanuddin, 2019, pp. 33–49) analyzed the possibility and feasibility of ASEAN being a security community. In other words, hopes and uncertainties have co-existed. There were more discussions on centralized institutionalization of ASEAN (Hund, 2002, pp. 100–102)(Jetschke, 2009, pp. 407–426)(Roberts, 2012, pp. 11–25). The Indonesia-led proposal for the formation of the ASC may “entail ways and mechanism to peacefully settle persistent disputes and may even lead to the formation, with the support of the UN, of a standing regional peacekeeping force” (Alatas, 1996). When Jakarta led the stepping up of the ASC, some observers have doubted whether Indonesia leaders would be able to set an appropriate agenda with a correct attitude toward the increase in ASEAN members’ individual and collective security (Khoo, 2004, pp. 49–56). Notwithstanding these criticisms, it is useful to discern whether certain ASEAN member states, after an initial period of operation, did have become more aware of the constraint on ASEAN’s ability to solve regional security problems, and their disappointment or

dissatisfaction has enabled ASEAN to learn how to solve problems collectively and intended to promote better institutionalization of new security arrangements in the region of Southeast Asia – as the “incremental growth model” describes.

It is therefore interesting to see whether the incremental growth model fits in with the transformation of ASEAN into a political and security community, if loosely defined. It is also interesting to examine how ASEAN and its member states have adapted themselves to altering means of action without worrying about their coherence with existing goals of ASEAN. If changes in ASEAN’s “problem definition” emerge from bargaining processes influenced by forces mostly exogenous to ASEAN itself, what has not been answered is the very tough question of what factors determine whether they will lead to one or another type of adaptation. As mentioned earlier, this essay is not meant to provide a complete answer to these questions; rather, it is aimed at serving as a point of departure for a growing body of state-of-the-art research on institutional changes of ASEAN. To simplify this research, I will introduce the definitions of key concepts or terms and try to identify ASEAN’s adaptation through incremental growth by a simple set of evaluative variables – i.e., the types of knowledge used by ASEAN leaders in making choices, their political objectives, as well as the manner in which issues being negotiated.<sup>4</sup>

Adaptation through incremental growth is about “muddling through or efforts to improve links between means and ends without questioning the theory of causation defining the organization’s task” – that is, it brings changes in behavior in search for more suitable means to meet the new demands successfully (Haas, 1990, pp. 33–34, 36). In incremental adaptation, decision-makers “would have no problem in appreciating that efforts to improve their performance have to do with the unintended and unanticipated consequences of earlier choices... made in the context of a short time frame, concerned almost exclusively with immediate problems and solutions, without concern over the coherence of the ensemble” (Haas, 1990, pp. 188–189).

“Problem definition,” or “nested problem set,” involves one or more institutional, process, and material causes of the dissatisfaction that consists of the problem, as well as possible solutions to the problem. It, defined by the bargainers, influences the quality of the

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<sup>4</sup> According to Ernst Haas (Haas, 1990, p. 5), there can be three more evaluative variables, including the type of bargaining produced by issue linkage, whether these bargains result in agreement on new ways of conceptualizing the problems to be solved, and whether new problem sets imply institutional changes leading to gains or losses in the legitimacy and authority enjoyed by the organization. They are as important as the ones applied in this essay, but will not be included in the research mainly because of the higher intricacy and time constraint.

bargain to a great extent. In addition, its features – ranging from decomposable to non-decomposable – depend on the decision-making style and the way by which issues interconnect in consultations or negotiations (Haas, 1990, pp. 83–84).

The role of knowledge is indispensable to the judgement of the institutional change in an international organization – whether it is qualified as adaptation through incremental growth. If the knowledge available to decision-makers does not become more consensual and if no single epistemic community controls the flow of knowledge, then the “incremental growth model” could prevail in the study of changes in behavior of an international organization (Haas, 1990, p. 93) argues that an organization’s adaptation through incremental growth shows several characteristics:

*Prevalent decision-making styles pit eclectics and/or skeptics against each other... The modesty of the goals and the relative irrelevance of novel bodies of knowledge result in bargains that are “similar” at the intragovernmental and intracoalitional levels, and only “slightly dissimilar” at the level of intercoalitional encounters. The resulting problem definition is most likely to be a fully decomposable set; we have no reason to expect much intellectual coherence among the constituents of the organization’s program, as each item can flourish or founder on its merits without being aided or hindered by other items.*

In other words, in the “incremental growth model,” the type of knowledge available is not consensual or is consensual to some extent, and the manner in which issues being negotiated are either eclectic or skeptical. If the type of knowledge available is more consensual and the manner in which issues being negotiated are either pragmatic or analytic, it is more likely that a learning process toward managed interdependence – rather than adaptation through incremental growth – is taking place (Haas, 1990, pp. 96, 135–136).

What has not been noted is political goals – the second evaluative variable in this essay – which are concerned with the question of whether the organization’s political goal structure ought to remain unambiguous and unchanging in the context of increased complexity in regional affairs. Typically, according to Haas (Haas, 1990, p. 103), the model of incremental growth suggests that the organization has difficulty deciding political goals, but finds some resolutions by making a compromise in which the recognized goals are somehow combined or by identifying ultimate goals instead of agreement on causation of organizational change. If the organization’s political goal structure is expanding and increasingly interconnected in the

face of pressure to move toward interconnected and expanding goals, then it may be argued that learning to managed interdependence could better explain the ongoing changes in decision-making in that organization (Haas, 1990, p. 96, 135).

Now, how can one apply these theoretical suppositions to the case of ASEAN in terms of developing a security community? The growing consensus of ASEAN member states for a security community denotes a significant institutional change in ASEAN. It resulted partially from the response to dissatisfaction in the existing security arrangements of ASEAN in the era of globalization. By examining the history of ASEAN, it is evident that, descriptively, ASEAN's security arrangements feature the successive augmentation which new tasks and missions are being discussed, considered, and/or implemented without altering ASEAN's decision-making mechanisms and dynamics. This can be best exemplified by the evolution of the *TAC*, the development of *SEANWFZ*, and the creation of the ASEAN Troika.

What concerns most is the analytical or evaluative work as to institutional change of ASEAN in political and security cooperation. As suggested earlier, in the case of the evolution of the APSC, the types of knowledge used by ASEAN leaders in making choices, their political objectives, as well as the manner in which issues being negotiated have to be taken into consideration in order to find useful causations accounting for the theoretical basis of adaptation through incremental growth. As indicated by the patters of organizational change provided by Haas, if the knowledge about a security community available to ASEAN leaders is not becoming consensus, if political objectives of ASEAN leaders for the establishment of the ASC/APSC are unambiguous and/or unchanging, and if ASEAN's manner in which the ASC/APSC issue being negotiated eclectic, then one can hold that the decision of ASEAN to move toward a security community has met the criteria for adaptation through incremental growth.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit the region of Southeast Asia, the APSC has had a few initiatives that first created frameworks of sectoral bodies and then turned into tangible actions. For example, in 2019, the joint effort of the defense sector was aimed at military operation safety in the air and exchange of counter-terrorism intelligence (The ASEAN Secretariat, 2019, p. 6). As Mely Caballero-Anthony (Caballero-Anthony, 2020, pp. 151–167) analyzes, the APSC with a “fragmented but more inclusive and participatory” nature have had “inherent tensions in security practices in ASEAN as states hold on to the principles of non-interference and state sovereignty.” As a consequence, the recent development of the APSC shows that knowledge about the APSC are not becoming consensual easily, it appears that there is an unambiguous objective of the APSC and that security officials of ASEAN member

states are negotiating an array of cross-cutting issues. Therefore, it would be far-fetched to argue that the APSC is developing in the form of adaptation through incremental growth.

An important and unresolved issue is about the knowledge acquired by ASEAN leaders to transform the regional security mechanism. It has always been a puzzle for students of international relations. For example, one cannot know exactly whether the knowledge available to ASEAN decision-makers have been true and nearly complete. There is no universally accepted criterion for determining truth and completeness. Moreover, one cannot easily distinguish acquired knowledge from political and transcultural ideology, either. Yet, it is undeniable that knowledge influences decision-making.

Knowledge is a little different from information in that it “implies the structuring of information about whatever topic engages the organization in conformity with some theoretical principle” (Haas, 1990, p. 74). Specifically, a decision based on knowledge that is not becoming more consensual is viewed as a consequence of adaptation through incremental growth, while a decision based on knowledge that is becoming more consensual is considered a result of learning to managed interdependence. An inference that can be drawn from the foregoing analysis is that in the absence of consensus, the decision is made probably after the resolution of disagreement among rival claimants to knowledge. Given that fact that the political and strategic divergence among ASEAN member states does exist, the knowledge available to ASEAN decision-makers may be perceived and received differently and thus has probably influenced the evolution of ASEAN’s regional security arrangements.

ASEAN political and security documents have indicated where ASEAN leaders’ ideas converge and how their knowledge about specific issues becomes consensual. While the broad principles of the ASC proposals have been agreed, the degree of divergence in knowledge about such an “ASEAN option” for security cooperation can be best observed by the individual policy statements and political behavior that are either in line with one another or in disagreement with one another.

A regional organization that has been in existence for more than fifty years and has the highest political authority, ASEAN has indeed learned a lot from the political dynamics of the region of Southeast Asia. In the case of the ASC/APSC, at the beginning, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam were reportedly uninterested in Indonesia’s proposal of forming an ASEAN peacekeeping force that might help settle disputes in the region of Southeast Asia (Bandoro, 2004)(Acharya, 2014, p. 88). The reason is twofold. First, there was a continued mutual suspicion within ASEAN. Second, there was unconsensual knowledge owing to regional diversity having to do with ASEAN member states’ own political and economic

systems. Although it is difficult to estimate how the knowledge available to ASEAN decision-makers might differ, at least the knowledge could be made politically relevant by stimulating incentives to be cooperative, confrontational, or indifferent.

Political objectives of ASEAN decision-makers are determined basically by the ideologies to which they have subscribed and the knowledge which they have accepted or learned. Although it is likely that some political objectives are based on raw interest that is not informed by knowledge at all, this essay instead suggests to focus on political goals of these decision-makers aided by any notion of structural information – the knowledge, consensual or not, recognized by the decision-makers or claimed by experts that still entered the decision-making process of ASEAN.

In addition, political goals can either remain unambiguous or unchanging, or become interconnected and expanding. In the former, leaders seek the attainment of a single outcome, and such an effort will remain over long periods of time. In the latter, leaders attempt to establish “causal connections among the separate desired outcomes and enlarge their targets to include new goals in order to be able to satisfy the demands associated with the original goals” (Haas, 1990, pp. 74–75). It appears fair to maintain that ASEAN leaders’ political goals in this regard are unambiguous and unchanging. They have not changed what they pursued when ASEAN was to be established in 1967 – regional independence and autonomy, sovereign and territorial integrity, and economic prosperity through collective endeavors and collaboration. The *ASC Plan of Action* is a truncated version of the original Indonesia proposal which had urged AESAN to develop a variety of new institutions – including the creation of a Southeast Asian peacekeeping force – to strengthen regional security and defense cooperation (Acharya, 2014, p. 267). The general notion of having a political and security community to cope with regional security issues has been commonly recognized, but the goals set by Indonesia were perhaps too ambitious or too contentious for some of the ASEAN member states to accept at that time.

To put it simply, for ASEAN member states and their leaders in the discussion on the creation of a security community, the goal was the same, but the means was undecided. Therefore, the political objectives of ASEAN decision-makers toward the foundation of the ASC are still specific and static.

Again, the manner in which issues being negotiated – the decision-making style – has to do with the knowledge available to the decision-makers and political goals associated with the resolution or realization of the issues. When the knowledge base is not becoming more consensual and when political goals are specific and/or static, presumably the decision-

making style of ASEAN is likely to be eclectic. As Haas (Haas, 1990, p. 103) points out, “if all decision-makers share specific and/or goals and rely on existing bits of knowledge, the encounter must be eclectic. Therefore, the decision-making style of ASEAN in terms of the ASC tended to be eclectic, and the feedback such an eclectic decision-making style has is by and large positive, so that adaptation through incremental growth could continue.

An impressionistic review of the origin and development of the ASC/APSC seems to indicate that except its ultimate goals, ASEAN member states had little consensus on the task domain because they had no agreed criteria for evaluating possible political and security community programs. The design of the ASC was to deal with the unintended and unanticipated consequences of earlier decisions about the institutionalization of regional security mechanisms. To maintain the integrity of ASEAN, the decision-making about the ASC was in no hurry, trying to reach general agreement at a pace comfortable to all. Besides, the ASC employed the existing ASEAN political instruments and abided by the UN Charter and other principles of international law to work on the following areas: political development, shaping and sharing of norms, conflict prevention, conflict resolution, post-conflict peace building, and implementing mechanisms. Slightly different from the characteristics described by Haas, the decision-making style of the ASC tried to cope with immediate problems and solutions and upheld the organizational coherence at the same time.

## **Conclusions**

This essay first offered an internal-external explanation of the background of the ASC. Then, the conditions under which ASEAN has changed its methods for defining problems were examined in brief to figure out whether adaptation – the “incremental growth model” – was able to account for institutional changes of ASEAN in creating the ASC/APSC in the 2000s. By doing so did this essay reach a preliminary conclusion that adaptation through incremental growth is worth further scrutinizing in order to have a better grasp of future institutional changes in ASEAN. That is, for security matters, adaptation through incremental growth is an applicable way to depict institutional changes in ASEAN.

This essay has examined three evaluative variables – the types of knowledge used by ASEAN leaders in making choices, their political objectives, as well as the decision-making style – in order to present a tentative assessment of the APSC and institutional change in ASEAN. As noted at the very beginning, this essay is not a complete work on the development of the APSC but an attempt to create an analytical framework for a better



understanding of future institutional and norm changes of ASEAN, the APSC in particular. To external observers, all this may sound very puzzling because the role of knowledge at the international level, rather than power in the material sense, has been highlighted in this essay, but relevant research is inadequately present. However, when it comes to the analysis of international organizations, making effective propositions about the role of knowledge in organizational change is difficult but indispensable.

ASEAN is in a dynamic context where increased expectations and pressure from within and outside are taking place all at once. The institutionalization of ASEAN security arrangements, originally led by the initiation of the ASC/APSC, means that ASEAN has started facing these expectations and pressure and moved on to enhance security cooperation to a certain degree. It is time for students of international relations to apply again the previous finding of adaptation through incremental growth and conduct further field investigations into the current evolution of the APSC.

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