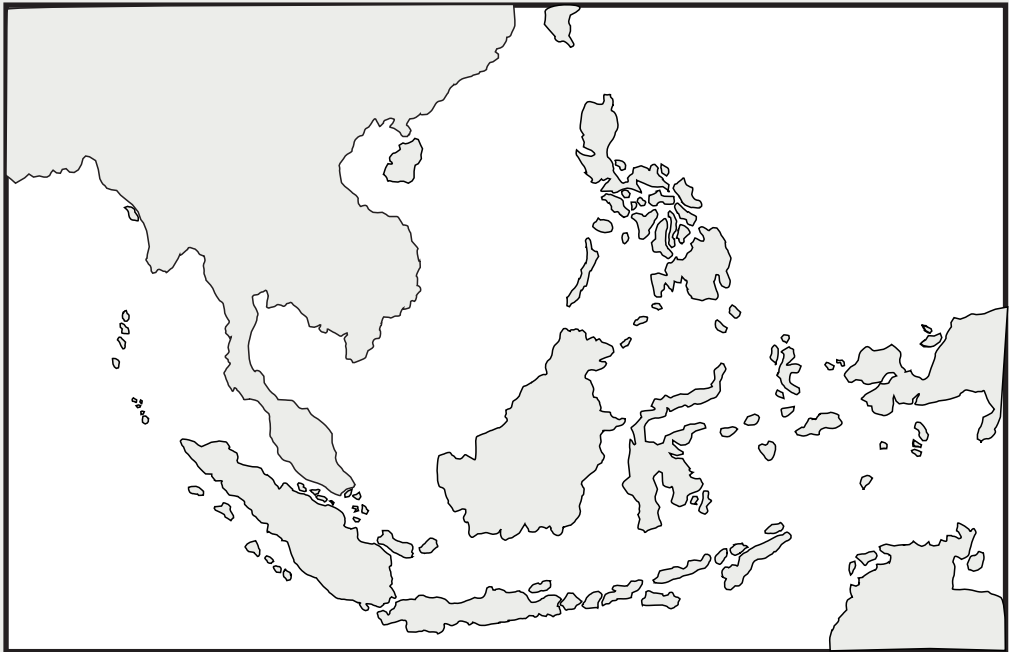


The Region



SOUTHEAST ASIA'S REGIONAL AUTONOMY UNDER STRESS

Carlyle A. Thayer

Political and security developments during 2015 posed major challenges to the Association of South East Asian Nations' (ASEAN) promotion of regional autonomy and community building. The vexed issue of maritime disputes in the South China Sea took a new turn with China's accelerated construction of artificial islands, Japan's stepped-up support for claimant states, and the initiation of freedom of navigation operational patrols (FONOP) by a U.S. warship and aircraft. These three developments illustrated once again the difficulties confronting ASEAN in maintaining Southeast Asia's autonomy in the face of intensified major power rivalry. During the year ASEAN continued to press China for an expeditious conclusion of a Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea.

During 2015 ASEAN encountered five significant challenges to its efforts at community building: the Rohingya refugee crisis; the flare-up of border tensions between Cambodia and Vietnam; competing organizational forms of regional economic integration; domestic political transitions in Thailand, Cambodia and Myanmar; and the resurgence of international terrorism.

South China Sea Dispute

China's Artificial Islands

In 2015 China accelerated construction of infrastructure on seven artificial islands in the Spratly archipelago — Fiery Cross Reef, Subi Reef, Mischief Reef, South Johnston Reef, Gaven Reef, Hughes Reef and Cuarteron Reef. Between February and September China completed construction of a three-kilometre-long runway on Fiery Cross. This became operational in January 2016 when China conducted

three test flights by civilian passenger aircraft. In mid-year China began building a second airstrip on Subi, while in September China commenced preparatory work for a third runway on Mischief Reef.¹ When completed, the total length of China's airfields (9,000 metres) will be more than twice as long as the four airstrips maintained by Malaysia (1,368 m), Taiwan (1,195 m), the Philippines (1,000 m) and Vietnam (500 m). With the exception of Vietnam, all the runways in the South China Sea will be able to accommodate jet fighters; but only China will be able to operate bombers.²

During 2015, U.S. spokespersons repeatedly called on all claimants to halt land reclamation and new construction and refrain from militarizing the features that they occupied. For example, on 18 November President Barack Obama told a press conference in Manila, after meeting his Philippine counterpart Benigno Aquino, "We agreed on the need for bold steps to lower tensions including pledging to halt further reclamation, new construction and militarization of disputed areas in the South China Sea."³

China rejected these calls by arguing that it was only catching up and doing what other claimant states had already done. China also sent out mixed signals. On 5 August, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that land reclamation had "already stopped".⁴ In September, Xi Jinping stated, while on a state visit to the United States, that "China does not intend to pursue militarization" in the disputed Spratly Islands.⁵ Yet, on 24 November, Hong Li, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson, stated that China had completed land reclamation in June but that "some civilian facilities" were being built, including two lighthouses. He then observed, "We will also build necessary defence facilities on some islands and reefs. The relevant construction will be moderate, which has nothing to do with militarization, targets no countries, and [does] not obstruct various countries' enjoyment of freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea in accordance with international law."⁶

Japan Supports Claimant States

On 4 June, Japan and the Philippines agreed to enhance their strategic partnership during the course of an official visit to Tokyo by President Aquino. Aquino's host, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, pledged to increase development assistance to the Philippines, including the provision of ten patrol boats for the Philippine Coast Guard. Abe also indicated that Japan would consider providing the Philippines with three Beechcraft TC-90 King Air maritime surveillance aircraft, radar technology and possibly a used Lockheed Martin P3-C anti-submarine patrol plane.⁷

On 15 September, Nguyen Phu Trong, Secretary General of the Vietnam Communist Party, visited Japan at the invitation of Prime Minister Abe.⁸ The two leaders issued a Joint Vision Statement. Abe announced a new 200 million yen package of grant aid to Vietnam, including the sale of two additional second-hand patrol boats to the Vietnam Coast Guard. A separate memorandum of understanding included Japanese assistance for human resource development and capacity building for the Vietnam Coast Guard.

In November, Japan's Defence Minister Nakatani Shimoto paid a side trip to Cam Ranh Bay as part of his official visit to Hanoi. Vietnam extended an invitation to Japan's Maritime Self-Defence Force to visit the international port at Cam Ranh Bay and to conduct search and rescue exercises. Vietnam's invitation was issued at the same time as President Xi Jinping was on an official visit.⁹

U.S. Freedom of Navigation Operational Patrols

In May, the U.S. Navy flew a Poseidon P8-A maritime reconnaissance aircraft over the Spratly islands. During the course of its flight the P8 was challenged eight times by the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) with this message: "Foreign military aircraft. This is Chinese navy. You are approaching our military alert zone. Leave immediately."¹⁰ This encounter was dramatically filmed by a CNN team on the P8 and broadcast widely.

On 22 October, the guided-missile destroyer *USS Lassen* (DDG-82) formally commenced, without prior notification, a FONOP that passed within twelve nautical miles of five features — Subi Reef, Northeast Cay, Southeast Cay, South Reef and Sandy Cay — claimed by China, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam. The *USS Lassen* was shadowed for ten days by a PLAN guided-missile destroyer and a naval patrol ship. The Chinese repeatedly broadcast, "Hey, you are in Chinese waters. What is your intention?"¹¹

Authorities in Beijing adopted a less friendly line. The U.S. Ambassador to China, Max Baucus, was summoned to the Foreign Ministry and told the *USS Lassen*'s patrol was "extremely irresponsible".¹² A Foreign Ministry spokesperson told a press briefing the United States was continuing to "create tensions in the region" and China might decide to "increase and strengthen the building up of our relevant abilities". China's Ministry of Defence called the FONOP "coercive action that seeks to militarize the South China Sea region" and an "abuse" of freedom of navigation under international law.¹³

At the end of the year, tensions between China and the United States rose as a result of a series of interrelated developments. In November, U.S. B-52

strategic bombers conducted regular training flights over the South China Sea. On 8 December, Singapore and the United States announced that the Poseidon P8 would be based in Singapore for a week to conduct patrols over the South China Sea. The following day, China commenced large-scale war games across “several thousand square kilometres” of water in the South China Sea; PLAN warships and submarines combined with jet fighters simulating cruise missile strikes on ships.¹⁴

On 10 December, two U.S. B-52 bombers flew over the Spratly islands. China claimed that they entered Chinese airspace without authorization and were “a serious military provocation which complicates the general situation in the South China Sea, [contributing] to the militarisation of the region”.¹⁵ A spokesperson for the Pentagon said that the B-52 flights were a normal training exercise and were not a FONOP.

ASEAN and the Code of Conduct

Throughout the year ASEAN grappled with how to formulate an effective response to China’s accelerated construction on its artificial islands. ASEAN held its twenty-sixth summit in Kuala Lumpur from 26 to 28 April. The Chairman’s Statement contained four paragraphs on the South China Sea and took note of “serious concerns expressed by some leaders on land reclamation being undertaken in the South China Sea, which has eroded trust and confidence and may undermine peace and security in the South China Sea”. The statement then repeated past formulations in calling for the “full and effective implementation” of the Declaration on Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) in its entirety, the exercise of self-restraint, non-use of force, and the peaceful resolution of disputes in accord with international law. The Chairman’s Statement concluded: “While noting the progress made in the consultations on the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC), we urged that consultations be intensified, to ensure the expeditious establishment of an effective COC.”¹⁶

China’s so-called land reclamation was discussed extensively at the ASEAN Regional Forum Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) held in Kuching on 10 June. Official sources reported that Chinese representatives left the meeting early.¹⁷

South China Sea issues also featured at the 9th ASEAN–China SOM held in Tianjin in late July. Two developments are worth noting. China and ASEAN agreed in principle to set up hotlines between their foreign ministries to handle emergencies in the South China Sea as an early harvest measure. Second, the ASEAN–China SOM agreed to proceed to the next stage of consultations to establish the COC and focus attention on its structure and how to address some of

its “difficult and complicated issues”. ASEAN called for the operationalization of the relevant paragraphs of the DOC on “self-restraint in the conduct of activities that may complicate or escalate tensions”. Malaysia’s Foreign Minister Anifah Aman noted in his concluding remarks, “While we proceed with the implementation of the DOC and work expeditiously toward the establishment of the COC, recent developments have raised tensions and eroded trust and confidence among parties.”¹⁸

ASEAN Foreign Ministers held their 48th Annual Ministerial Meeting (AMM) in Kuala Lumpur on 4 August. In his opening remarks Malaysia’s Prime Minister Najib Razak said it was time for ASEAN to “take a more active role” in safeguarding regional security, including handling “overlapping [territorial] claims”.¹⁹ ASEAN Secretary General Le Luong Minh accused China of “eroding the very trust and confidence between ... ASEAN and China [through its] reclamation activities, illegal fishing bans and the harassment of fishermen”. Minh called on China to engage “in a really meaningful phase of consultations”.²⁰

Singapore’s Foreign Minister K. Shanmugam was blunt in his remarks. “We cannot keep talking about it”, he stated, “I have already said the last time we met that we are not happy with the progress that has been made so far.”²¹ Philippine Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario observed, “As we speak, we see no let up on the unilateral and aggressive activities of our northern neighbour in the South China Sea.”²²

The Joint Statement issued after the AMM contained seven paragraphs on the South China Sea. The first paragraph stated:

We discussed extensively the matters relating to the South China Sea and remained seriously concerned over recent and ongoing developments in the area. We took note of the serious concerns expressed by some Ministers on the land reclamations in the South China Sea, which have eroded trust and confidence, increased tensions and may undermine peace, security and stability in the South China Sea.²³

The Joint Statement called for the “full and effective implementation” of the DOC “in its entirety”, including self-restraint, “effective implementation of the agreed Early Harvest Measures”, and “the importance of expeditious establishment of an effective COC” by proceeding to the next stage of consultations. The Joint Statement also included a new element, the call for preventive measures to be undertaken “to address developments in the South China Sea”. The Joint Statement concluded by noting Indonesia’s proposal for a hotline and the briefing by the Philippines on its arbitration case against China.

ASEAN's 48th AMM was followed on 6 August by the 22nd meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum. Once again China's construction of artificial islands featured prominently in discussions. There was a delay in issuing the Chairman's Statement due to intense disagreement over the wording of the paragraphs relating to the South China Sea. In the end the Chairman's Statement was general in nature and repeated the standard ASEAN formulations on the South China Sea noted above.²⁴

The disagreements over South China Sea issues resurfaced at the 3rd ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus held in Kuala Lumpur on 4 November. China lodged strong objections to any references to the South China Sea in a draft Joint Declaration. The United States responded by refusing to support a Joint Declaration that omitted any reference to the South China Sea. Consequently, no Joint Declaration was issued. Malaysia's Defence Minister Hishammuddin, the host, issued a Chairman's Statement that elided the entire controversy in its brief mention of the South China Sea, while the Minister's press statement made no mention of the South China Sea at all.²⁵

ASEAN held its year-end 27th Summit from 18 to 22 November in Kuala Lumpur. The Chairman's Statement included five paragraphs on the South China Sea. Four of the paragraphs repeated previous statements (supporting freedom of navigation and overflight; self-restraint; implementation of the DOC in its entirety; expeditious conclusion of the COC; peaceful resolution of disputes under international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea). Of note was reference to a new security challenge:

We shared the concerns expressed by some Leaders on the increased presence of military assets and the possibility of further militarisation of outposts in the South China Sea. We urged all parties to ensure the maintenance of peace, security and stability.²⁶

ASEAN Community Building

Rohingya Refugee Crisis

In the first quarter of 2015, an estimated 25,000 Rohingya and Bangladeshis fled from the Bangladesh–Myanmar border area to seek refuge in Thailand.²⁷ Initially, Myanmar took no responsibility or action to prevent the outflow. When Thailand instituted a crackdown on traffickers and pushed the Rohingya back to sea, they fled further south to Malaysia and Indonesia or were left stranded on their boats.²⁸ Malaysia and Indonesia initially towed the boats back out to sea.

The reaction by Southeast Asian states provoked an international outcry. The United States called on ASEAN members to work together to save Rohingya stranded at sea. United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called on regional states to “ensure the obligation of rescue at sea is upheld” and to “keep their borders and ports open in order to help the vulnerable people who are in need”.²⁹

It was only on 20 May that the Foreign Ministers of Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand met in Putrajaya to discuss the Rohingya crisis. Indonesia and Malaysia pledged to stop turning refugee boats away.³⁰ On 29 May a Special Meeting on Irregular Migration in the Indian Ocean was held in Bangkok, attended by twenty governments, including Myanmar, and international agencies such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. This meeting agreed on a variety of measures, such as stepping up search and rescue operations, granting temporary asylum pending resettlement within a year, and combatting human smuggling networks by criminal syndicates.³¹ However, the root causes of the Rohingya exodus were not addressed — their stateless status and persecution within Myanmar.

Cambodia-Vietnam Border Tensions

Between April and July, Cambodia's opposition, the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP), conducted a series of demonstrations along the border with Vietnam to protest alleged Vietnamese incursions in Kandal, Ratanakiri, Svay Rieng and Tboung Khum provinces. The CNRP claimed that Vietnam had fabricated maps drawn up by France and were unilaterally altering the border by digging fish ponds and constructing a road and a border post inside Cambodian territory.

As a result of CNRP pressure, Cambodia's Foreign Ministry issued a number of diplomatic notes demanding that Vietnam respect previous agreements not to change or move border markers and to prevent Vietnamese farmers from cross-border cultivation.³² On 23 June, Vietnam dispatched Deputy Foreign Minister Le Hoan Trung to meet with Cambodia's Foreign Minister Hor Namhong, who requested that Vietnam should “not do anything on the areas that have not been demarcated”.³³

A violent incident occurred on 28 June in Svay Rieng when several hundred Cambodian activists and monks led by a CNRP deputy attempted to inspect border marker No. 203. A clash broke out between the Cambodians and several hundred Vietnamese border guards and villagers, in which eighteen were injured.³⁴ In the aftermath, both sides convened a meeting of the Joint Border Committee in Phnom Penh from 6 to 9 July. The meeting agreed to set up a technical team of provincial officials to deal with incidents, to complete demarcation of the border

“very soon”, and to maintain the status quo in the meantime.³⁵ Nevertheless, the CNRP continued its protests along the border. On 19 July, for example, two CNRP deputies led a march of over one thousand supporters to inspect border markers in Svay Rieng.³⁶

Regional Economic Integration

ASEAN has attempted to promote Southeast Asian regional autonomy and its centrality in regional affairs through a variety of treaties among its members such as the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement. At the end of 2015 at the 27th ASEAN Summit, Southeast Asia’s leaders declared the establishment of an ASEAN Community whose centrepiece was the ASEAN Economic Community. While much work had been done to lower tariffs and create a single market through the ASEAN Free Trade Area, much work remains to be done to end non-tariff barriers to inter-ASEAN trade. Even more work must be done to create a sense of ASEAN identity across the region.

In 2012, ASEAN launched the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit in Phnom Penh. The RCEP is intended to include all ten members of ASEAN plus the six countries with which ASEAN has a Free Trade Agreement — Australia, China, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea and New Zealand. The United States is not included. ASEAN’s efforts at community building have been challenged by China–U.S. rivalry as each major power has promoted its own form of regional economic integration.

In 2014 China initiated a proposal for an Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). The United States opposed the AIIB and lobbied its allies not to join. Nevertheless, the final Articles of Agreement were adopted in May 2015 and on 29 June fifty of the fifty-seven prospective members met in Beijing to sign them, including Australia, France, Germany, South Korea, the United Kingdom and all ten members of ASEAN.

The United States has promoted its own brand of regional economic integration through the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) that excludes China. On 6 October the final agreement was concluded. The TPP comprises four members of ASEAN (Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam) and eight other states (Australia, Canada, Chile, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru and the United States). The TPP is open to accession by other members of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC). In mid-year the Philippines expressed its interest, while President Joko Widodo declared after the TPP negotiations concluded that Indonesia would like to join.

Domestic Political Transitions

Thailand

In September 2015 the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) rejected a draft constitution by the Constitution Drafting Committee that it had appointed. The NCPO commissioned another draft constitution, which is expected to be submitted early in the New Year. If accepted by the NCPO the draft constitution will be submitted to a public referendum. If approved the NCPO will face the challenge of holding national elections that are viewed as legitimate by a society that is divided between unelected officials and supporters of the monarchy, on the one hand, and democratic populists, on the other.³⁷

The decision to reject the draft constitution reset Thailand's political calendar back to zero and postponed the return of civilian government to mid-2017, if not later. The prolongation of military rule means that Thailand's leaders will be preoccupied with domestic politics. Thailand's transition to civilian rule is likely to be delayed by the incapacitation or death of the current monarch. The military is unlikely to give up power until the process of royal succession is concluded.

Cambodia

On 22 July 2014 a political agreement was reached between the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) and the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) that led to the CNRP ending its boycott of the National Assembly. In the first half of 2015 the CPP met its part of the agreement by reforming the National Election Committee, promoting a "culture of dialogue", and by ending political violence. After the CNRP agreed to a revised election law and a new law on non-governmental organizations, all seemed to be on track for an extended period of cooperation.³⁸

The CNRP's persistent needling of the Hun Sen government on the border issue was one of several factors that led to the breakdown of the 2014 accord between the CNRP and CPP. During the second half of the year, Hun Sen set about emasculating the CNRP. In July, eleven CNRP activists were imprisoned after being convicted of insurrection for their involvement in a 2014 protest in Phnom Penh.³⁹ In October, two CNRP deputies were beaten by protesters who attended a CPP demonstration calling for the resignation of Kem Sokha, a CNRP deputy who was vice president of the National Assembly. Demonstrators also besieged Kem Sokha's house for six hours. CPP deputies later removed Kem Sokha from office.⁴⁰ In November, a court ordered the arrest of CNRP leader Sam Rainsy

on charges of defamation.⁴¹ Sam Rainsy was overseas at that time and as of this writing he has remained in self-imposed political exile.

Myanmar

The November 2015 landslide victory of the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, has been described by one analyst as the most important political event in Southeast Asia this past year.⁴² Myanmar's first-past-the-post voting system greatly favoured the NLD, which won 79 per cent of the elected seats in the bicameral national legislature. The incumbent Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) retained only 8 per cent of elected seats. At the local level the NLD won 75 per cent of all elected seats and held a majority in Myanmar's seven Burman-majority regional assemblies and four of the seven ethnic minority state assemblies.

Virtually all political analysts agree that the NLD victory was an electoral tsunami that marked the beginning of a new phase of political contestation in Myanmar, but not the end of military rule.⁴³ It should be noted that, with two exceptions, political parties representing ethnic minorities did poorly in the November 2015 elections.⁴⁴ Ethnic minorities voted for the NLD. The electoral results gave Aung San Suu Kyi a clear popular mandate. There are high societal expectations for political and economic change that she may find difficult to meet. The NLD government will not take office until 31 March 2016.

Under the Constitution, the Tatmadaw (military) is entitled to appoint a quarter of all seats in both houses of parliament as well as state assemblies. In addition, the Tatmadaw will retain control of three vital ministries in the new Cabinet — Home Affairs, Defence and Border Affairs — and retain the right to veto changes to the Constitution. The Tatmadaw will also retain effective control of the states along the border with China. The entrenchment of the Tatmadaw's position in the government of Myanmar presents a major challenge to the incoming NLD government.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has stated she will give priority to national reconciliation when the NLD takes office. This involves not only working with the USDP, Tatmadaw, Buddhist nationalists and the Burman majority but also drawing in Kachin and Shan armed groups who were not among the eight major ethnic armed groups party to the ceasefire agreement brokered by the military in October. The NLD government must also address the problem of Rohingya citizenship rights. The Rohingya were gradually stripped of their access to citizenship rights by the Tatmadaw and disenfranchised in the November elections.

International Terrorism

In 2015 the threat of resurgent international terrorism in Southeast Asia became acute as militant supporters and fighters of the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) returned to Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. There are wide variances in the estimated number of Southeast Asians who journeyed to Iraq and Syria to support the new Caliphate after it was founded in June 2014. Estimates range from a few hundred to 2,500, including fighters, supporters and their families.⁴⁵ A number of Bahasa-speaking militants from Indonesia and Malaysia, grouped in a military unit known as the *Katibah Nusantara Lid Daulah Islamiyah* (Malay Archipelago Battalion), are currently fighting in the Middle East.

In addition, over a hundred would-be ISIS volunteers were detained in Turkey and deported back to their home countries. Indonesia prevented around a hundred militants from leaving the country, while two thousand Indonesians reportedly attended rallies in support of ISIS. Police and security forces in Malaysia and Indonesia carried out raids and arrested scores of suspected ISIS supporters. At the other end of the spectrum, a number of ISIS Southeast Asian volunteers returned home disillusioned by their experiences.

In 2015 several prominent Muslim clerics, such as Abu Bakar Bashir, and extremist groups, including *Jammat Ansharut Tauhid* and *Mujihideen Indonesia Timur*, pledged loyalty to ISIS.⁴⁶ Four armed militant groups in the Philippines, including the *Abu Sayyaf*, came together late in the year and declared their loyalty to ISIS.⁴⁷ Australia's Attorney-General, George Brandis, warned that ISIS was trying to establish a "distant caliphate" in Indonesia.⁴⁸

Singapore's Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen echoed concerns by regional security officials that ISIS posed a "clear and present danger" because trained militants could link up with local groups and carry out attacks.⁴⁹ These concerns were confirmed when ISIS supporters carried out a series of armed attacks in Jakarta on 14 January 2016.

Conclusion

ASEAN's pursuit of community building must be viewed as a work in progress. This process is under challenge from without due to rivalry among the major powers, with a special focus on maritime disputes in the South China Sea. ASEAN's community building is also under challenge from within due to the spillover of domestic issues on regional security and the slow pace of political change towards stable, more democratic governance.

ASEAN appears to have succeeded in forging a working consensus on the South China Sea among its members as noted by continuity in policy statements emanating from the Annual Ministerial Meetings of foreign ministers and ASEAN Summits. ASEAN's quest for the full implementation of the DOC and the negotiation of a binding COC risks being overtaken in 2016 by China's colonization of its seven artificial islands. While ASEAN pursues dialogue with Beijing, China is slowly excising the maritime heart from Southeast Asia. The year 2016 may well be crunch time for ASEAN. If ASEAN wants to maintain Southeast Asia's regional autonomy it may have to engage in realpolitik to balance an assertive China. ASEAN's centrality in regional affairs risks being undermined if China and the United States, with its ally Japan, push back against each other in the South China Sea.

In 2015, ASEAN's community building came under challenge by competing approaches to regional integration. ASEAN's RCEP has made little progress, while China has succeeded in getting its AIIB up and running without the participation of Japan or the United States and is pressing regional states to join its One Belt, One Road initiative. Negotiations on the TPP, which includes four ASEAN states but not China, have been concluded and now await ratification by the U.S. Congress.

The resurgence of ISIS-inspired international terrorism presents ASEAN with both challenges and opportunities. Violent extremism could result in mass casualty attacks that adversely impact economic development and inflame communal tensions in Malaysia or Indonesia. On the other hand, If ASEAN states step up cooperation they could succeed in thwarting ISIS affiliates from gaining a foothold in the southern Philippines or Indonesia.

ASEAN's community building has also been challenged by domestic issues that have spilled over and affected regional stability. Myanmar's persecution of the Muslim Rohingya minority is a case in point. ASEAN addressed the symptoms of the problem, called on external states to bear the burden of resettlement, but failed to address the root cause of the problem — persecution by state authorities and Burman Buddhist nationalists in Myanmar.

Border tensions between Cambodia and Vietnam were the result of Cambodia's opposition party's opportunism in stoking anti-Vietnamese sentiment. This put the Hun Sen regime under unwanted political pressure and contributed to the breakdown of the political accord between the CPP and CNRP. As a result Cambodia's prospects of transitioning to stable democratic government has been set back.

Finally, the stalled political transitions in Thailand and Cambodia, coupled with the herculean challenges to the incoming NLD government in Myanmar,

mean that these states will remain inwardly focused and less able to contribute to regional community building.

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