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Strengthening ASEAN-UN Relations for a Sustainable Multilateral Rules-Based System?

By Alistair D. B. Cook

The United Nations General Assembly is scheduled to host the Summit of the Future in New York from 22nd to 23rd September 2024. Over the past year, negotiations have taken place between member states to draft the Pact for the Future, Declaration on Future Generations, and the Global Digital Compact. This process has been co-facilitated by Germany and Namibia through their permanent missions to the UN in New York.

Around the world political elites are engaging in various discussions on the future of the international system. In Southeast Asia, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is today one of the successful regional organisations worldwide. In 2021, ASEAN began preparing the ASEAN Community Vision 2045. It is a Vision document that builds on the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and aims to intensify integration and enhance connectivity across the economic and socio-cultural sectors. The discussions around Vision 2045 provides insight into the regional priorities such as sustainable development, digital transformation and tackling social inequities.

IN THIS ISSUE

CLIMATE CHANGE

ENERGY SECURITY

FOOD SECURITY

HEALTH SECURITY

HUMANITARIAN
ASSISTANCE AND
DISASTER RELIEF

MIGRATION

In 2021, ASEAN undertook its mid-term review of the ASEAN Vision 2025 on disaster management and published it as the ASEAN Disaster Resilience Outlook. The comprehensive review covers many aspects of disaster management. This article focuses on those most relevant to humanitarian concerns – institutionalisation, partnerships and anticipatory action – with implications for the forthcoming Summit of the Future.

In the most recent draft of the Pact of the Future, it notably includes, as Action 57, strengthening United Nations engagement with local and regional authorities within countries, as well as the enhancing of cooperation between the United Nations, regional and sub-regional organisations. In the latter effort, it is already included within the UN Charter as [Chapter VIII: Regional Arrangements](#) but has remained underdeveloped and deprioritised.

With the rise of successful regional organisations such as ASEAN notably in the realm of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, inclusion of this action item and a commitment to building on successful arrangements like the UN-ASEAN Summit and the enactment of efforts like the [ASEAN-OCHA Interoperability Brief](#) signed in 2016 to promote ‘dynamic simplicity’ to reduce overlap and aims to identify commonalities and complementarities between the two organisational efforts in the humanitarian realm. If such efforts can be moved towards a more institutionalised footing to redistribute power and decision-making, enhance predictability, further reduce redundancies, and promote greater collaboration then these would be measurable progress between the two entities.

In terms of the refocus on relations between the United Nations and local and regional authorities within countries, this has long been argued for as an important focus of development studies since the 1970s and more recently in discussions on localisation in the humanitarian community in the early twenty-first century. This will become more pronounced as international humanitarian action no longer meets identified needs, and the strength of local non-governmental organisations in conflict situations like that witnessed in Myanmar becomes recognised. This will necessarily twin with the second focus on partnerships.

There has been a rise in interest on the importance of partnerships, but these have often fallen into structural issues where local organisations are treated as service providers by their larger international partners and are excluded from designing strategies and policies upstream in the decision-making process. While there has been some movement in this area through efforts like the [START Network](#), the wider humanitarian community remains relatively reluctant to more substantively engage local organisations. The Pact of the Future should address such structural issues.

Finally, the role of anticipatory action has played an important dynamic in the evolution of the humanitarian system. However, its impact has been limited to understanding it as a financial accounting mechanism that releases monies when certain triggers are activated, like reaching thresholds in Early Warning Systems for natural hazards. While in itself a welcome development, it has stymied the need for anticipatory action to focus on shifting mindsets towards alternative scenario development in the humanitarian sector to better prepare for future challenges.

Overall, many of the ideas under discussion in the preparatory meetings ahead of the UN Summit of the Future, particularly in humanitarian affairs, have long been discussed in Southeast Asia, and the wider global discussions would benefit from a greater focus on the experiences and lessons learnt that the region has to offer in recommitting to a sustainable multilateral rules-based system.

SUGGESTED READINGS

ASEAN Secretariat. (2021). ASEAN Disaster Resilience Outlook: Preparing for a Future Beyond 2025. ASEAN. Retrieved from <https://asean.org/book/asean-disaster-resilience-outlook-preparing-for-a-future-beyond-2025/>

Cook, A. D. B. (2024). UN Summit of the Future: Prospects and Challenges. RSIS. Retrieved from <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/idss/ip24026-un-summit-of-the-future-prospects-and-challenges/>

United Nations. (2024). Pact for the Future. Retrieved from https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/pact_for_the_future_-rev.2-_17_july.pdf

CLIMATE CHANGE



NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Climate change fueled record early fires in Brazil's wetlands, study says

Climate change intensified by 40% the weather feeding devastating wildfires that have likely killed millions of animals this year in Brazil's Pantanal.

Stefanie Eschenbacher

Reuters | 9 August 2024

By land, sea and sky, Māori are using Indigenous knowledge to combat climate change

There is a growing community of Māori who is working to counter the catastrophic effects of climate change, which is eroding the country's shores, destroying its biodiversity, fueling extreme weather and threatening to displace entire communities.

Alaa Elassar

CNN | 10 August 2024

Japan fuels U.S. LNG boom even as climate targets and impacts loom

Until 2016, the U.S. was sending virtually no LNG abroad, but a fracking bonanza, a price spike following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and growing demand in Asia are among the factors that have led to a surge in exports. Last year, the U.S. was the biggest supplier of LNG traded internationally, trumping Qatar.

Mara Budgen

The Japan Times | 11 August 2024

Legally green: How the courts help protect the environment amid climate change

Environmental laws could play a critical role in improving conservation efforts and encouraging corporate responsibility. Singapore's vision of being a "Biophilic City in a Garden" has influenced SG Courts' approach to environmental law and climate change litigation.

Rachel Chia, Content Studio

The Straits Times | 13 August 2024

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Highest ocean heat in four centuries places Great Barrier Reef in danger

The existential threat to the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) ecosystem from anthropogenic climate change is now realised. Without urgent intervention, the iconic GBR is at risk of experiencing temperatures conducive to near-annual coral bleaching, with negative consequences for biodiversity and ecosystems services.

Benjamin J. Henley, et al.

Nature, 632: 320-326 | 2024

Changes to tropical cyclone trajectories in Southeast Asia under a warming climate

The study observed changes to tropical cyclone (TC) trajectories in Southeast Asia, including: (1) poleward shifts in both genesis and peak intensification rates; (2) TC formation and fastest intensification closer to many coastlines; (3) increased likelihoods of TCs moving most slowly over mainland Southeast Asia; and (4) TC tracks persisting longer over land. In the cities of Hai Phong (Vietnam), Yangon (Myanmar), and Bangkok (Thailand), these variations result in future increases in both peak TC intensity and TC duration compared to historical TCs.

Andra J. Garner, et al.

Climate and Atmospheric Science, 7:156 | 2024

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

International Day of Clean Air for Blue Skies

This year's theme of "Together for Clean Air" focuses on the need for stronger partnerships, increased investment and shared responsibility to overcome air pollution. Working together, across borders and boundaries, between sectors and beyond silos, will help reduce air pollution, leverage finance and investments towards air quality measures and solutions, and provide many benefits.

Worldwide

7 September 2024

ENERGY SECURITY



NEWS & COMMENTARIES

International cooperation is critical to Southeast Asia's clean energy transition

While international assistance is crucial to achieving net-zero emissions, it must go beyond financial aid and extend to enhancing local capacity in policymaking, technical expertise, and public awareness.

Thang Nam Do

Hinrich Foundation | 23 July 2024

Singapore, US ink deal to study how nuclear technology can support climate and energy needs

There have been talks about exploring nuclear power's feasibility as a green energy source in Singapore as the country races to decarbonise its power sector to achieve its net-zero emissions target by 2050.

Vanessa Lim

World Economic Forum | 31 July 2024

IAEA mission assesses Japan's nuclear security

The Japan has a "robust nuclear security regime", an International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) team of experts has concluded.

World Nuclear News | 2 August 2024

Trinasolar sees growing opportunity for hybrid solar projects in Southeast Asia

In Southeast Asia, rapid economic development and increasing energy demands are often coupled with limited land availability. Floating solar presents an attractive solution by generating clean energy without using valuable land space.

PRNewswire

AsiaOne | 14 August 2024

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Climate resilience for energy security in Southeast Asia

The increasing impact of climate change is putting energy security at risk in Southeast Asia. Heatwaves, floods, droughts, tropical cyclones and rises in sea levels pose challenges to the energy system, affecting everything from fuel extraction to electricity distribution.

International Energy Agency

Paris: IEA | 2024

Tracking SDG7: The energy progress report, 2024

This report summarises global progress on energy access, energy efficiency, renewable energy, clean cooking, and international cooperation to advance SDG 7.

Raphael J. Heffron, et al.

The World Bank | 2024

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

Asia Clean Energy Summit

ACES is the region's leading event focusing on clean energy technology, policy and finance supported by leading government agencies, research institutes and industry in Singapore.

Singapore

22-24 October 2024

FOOD SECURITY



NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Readying for war or being prepared for crises? China's stockpiling of resources raises eyebrows and questions

China's June 2024 call for more grain purchases, by state-owned agricultural stockpiler Sinograin, has received significant attention recently as it coincided with significant imports over the past year of oil, as well as metals (cobalt, copper and iron ore). These have been interpreted as a sign of "preparedness", although the preparation for war has been seen as only one among many possible reasons. Experts have interpreted this as a normal behaviour to mitigate against impending shocks from the natural and global economic environment.

Channel News Asia | 18 July 2024

Supply, price certainty of natural gas, agricultural effectiveness, key to food security

Natural gas remains a critical raw material for fertilizers. For Indonesia, therefore, having sufficient availability and affordability of natural gas is critical to supporting agricultural productivity improvement, in addition to agricultural effectiveness and the task of increasing the number of active farmers (including from the younger population).

Tenggara Strategics

The Jakarta Post | 18 July 2024

Gov't to implement stronger measures to ensure food security

Inflation remains a critical issue for policymakers in the Philippines. The National Economic and Development Authority anticipates an increase in crop and vegetable prices amidst the La Niña season, and is implementing a subsidised food campaign that limits rice prices to Php 45 per kilo (approx. USD 0.79), as well as fuel assistance to smallholder farmers.

Anna Leah Gonzales

Philippine News Agency | 6 August 2024

The vital role of nutrition in climate resilience and food security in Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia's malnutrition rates are at threat of worsening amidst the impacts of climate change on agriculture productivity, the increase in displacement caused by catastrophic events, and the rising proportion of the population depending on cheaper and less nutritious food. The authors call for policies that secure vital food value chain infrastructure, provide social protection, and the adoption of climate-resilient and biofortified crops, among others.

Elyssa Ludher and Miriam Romero

ISEAS Perspective | 7 August 2024

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

An analysis of the food security policy implementation framework: The case of food self-sufficiency and extension policy in Indonesia

The article's authors observed an reduction in village-level poverty from 40% to 8% amid the implementation of Indonesia's Food Self-sufficiency Village Program, "Desa Mandiri Pangan Program" or DMP Program. It relates this to the social assistance integrated into the farmer support program, leading to higher incomes and a smaller share of the income required for food purchase purposes, among others.

Muhamad Rusliyadi and Yu-Hua Chen

FFTC Agricultural Policy Platform | 2024

The state of food security and nutrition in the world 2024: Financing to end hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms

The 2024 edition of the annual report by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (UN FAO) highlighted the importance of innovative financing tools and related reforms within the "nutrition financing architecture". These include clarifying and establishing a common ground on how food security and nutrition financing are defined, among others.

UN FAO | 2024

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

ADB Food Security Forum: Mainstreaming Climate Resilience into Investment Projects to Support Food Security

This session discussed integrated approaches to developing climate resilience-focused and stakeholder-centric investment projects for the Agriculture, Food, Nature, and Rural Development Sector (AFNR) sector, using the cases of four Asian countries, namely, Georgia, Tajikistan, Pakistan and Uzbekistan. It highlighted the process and steps to identify actionable, scalable, and locally relevant interventions through evidence-based and participatory stakeholder engagements.

Recorded Webinar

23 April 2024

HEALTH SECURITY



Photo Credit: Freepik.com

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

From Evidence to Policy — Finding authoritative sources of information on health

Clinical trials provide top medical evidence, but policy-making is complex. The National Academy of Medicine and the Journal launch a series to bridge research and health policy.

Eric J. Rubin, M.D., Ph.D. and Victor J. Dzau, M.D.

The New England Journal of Medicine | 31 July 2024

The United States announces additional assistance for the Democratic Republic of the Congo

USAID announces nearly \$424 million in aid for the DRC, including \$414 million for humanitarian needs and \$10 million for mpox response, plus 50,000 vaccines. Total U.S. aid in FY 2024 exceeds \$838 million, supporting health and humanitarian efforts.

U.S. Embassy Kinshasa

U.S. Embassy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo News & Events | 7 August 2024

Strengthening post pandemic health system capacity to enhance regional resilience

At the 74th WHO SEARO meeting, health ministers discussed post-COVID-19 measures to build resilient health systems, highlighting efforts in Indonesia, Thailand, and Timor-Leste.

Ms Saima Wazed

World Health Organisation | 8 August 2024

Africa's CDC declares mpox a public health emergency

The African Union declared a public health emergency over the mpox outbreak, urging proactive measures. The virus has caused 38,465 cases and 1,456 deaths in Africa. The call to action by the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention aims to bolster proactive efforts to contain the threat of mpox.

The Guardian | 13 August 2024

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Pandemic Politics: The Deadly Toll of Partisanship in the Age of COVID

“Pandemic Politics” explores how political polarization and partisanship worsened the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S., highlighting the roles of political leaders, health system flaws, and social inequalities in the crisis.

Timothy Callaghan

J Health Polit Policy Law 49 (4): 665-671 | 2024

The 2024 Olympic Games: end the health hypocrisy

The Olympic Games inspire with stories like Simone Biles’ comeback and Léon Marchand’s wins. However, criticisms include corporate sponsorships conflicting with health goals and sustainability promises not being met, highlighting areas needing improvement.

The Lancet

The Lancet Editorial, Vol 404, Issue 10452, p. 495 | 2024

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

2nd International Summit on Vaccines Research and Development

The focus of this summit is to provide a platform for discussing the challenges in the vaccines research and development. This event will provide a valuable opportunity for the attendees to learn from each others work, exchange ideas, create networks and build collaborations. **Paris, France**

16-18 September 2024

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RELIEF



Photo Credit: DFID - UK Department for International Development via Flickr.com/Creative Commons

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

How the Philippines is using anti-terrorism laws to freeze disaster NGOs

A controversial anti-terrorism law passed in 2020 is being used to freeze bank accounts of several civil societies organisations in the Philippines with accusations of financing terrorism.

Nick Aspinwall

The New Humanitarian | 30 July 2024

Who is asking for capacity-building? Reflection on the Myanmar context

Capacity-building is being increasingly recognised as a key practical implementation of localisation by international humanitarian aid organisations.

Si Thu Htin Aung

Humanitarian Practice Network | 7 August 2024

Extreme heat continues throughout July with devastating impacts

Hundreds of millions of people were affected by the extreme heat that swept across the world in July, with the world's hottest day on recent record also registered – highlighting the urgency of the Call to Action on Extreme Heat issued by UN Secretary-General.

World Meteorological Organization | 7 August 2024

From billions to trillions – can the international financing for development system deliver this?

As needs continue to climb, we are off track in financing much of the global development agenda. These financing issues should not just be left to international financial institutions, but also heads of state as well as multilateral groups including the UN General Assembly.

Betty N. Wainaina

Amnesty International | 7 August 2024

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Resource pooling within the humanitarian ecosystem: Lessons learned from a case study of a cooperative-based initiative

This report examines cooperative ways of operating by organisations working in disaster response scenarios where there are scarce resources. It highlights the fact that although humanitarian organisations have not consistently adopted resource pooling practices, they are more inclined to pool transportation and warehousing resources.

HELP Logistics | 2024

Postcolonial Futures for Disaster Risk Reduction in South Asia

By bringing together localised perspectives on disaster risk reduction, this issue offers pathways towards rethinking disaster risk, enhancing people's everyday lives and livelihoods, and preparing for a complex future.

All India Disaster Mitigation Institute | 2024

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

Indo-Pacific humanitarian assistance & disaster relief: new actors, challenges & future directions

This webinar brings together experts to discuss the considerations likely to affect the future of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) coordination mechanisms in the Indo-Pacific region.

Recorded Video
2024

MIGRATION



Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

What we know about unauthorised immigrants living in the US

In the US, the unauthorised immigrant population grew to 11.0 million in 2022, according to Pew Research Center data. However, the number of unauthorised immigrants in the US in 2022 was below the peak of 12.2 million in 2007.

Jeffrey S. Passel and Jens Manuel Krogstad

Pew Research | 22 July 2024

Migration with dignity? Kiribati swaps escape to purchased Fiji plot for sea walls to save their land
Faced with rising sea levels, Kiribati has tussled between leaving for an undeveloped estate in Fiji or banking on climate finance for coastal defences to save its land.

Jack Board

CNA | 4 August 2024

Immigration policies in the UK and Turkiye - A comparative reflection

The immigration policies of the United Kingdom and Turkey, faced with their own unique set of challenges, offer two different lenses to examine the successes, failures and ethical consideration of immigration policies.

Dr Elif Selin Calik

Middle East Monitor | 12 August 2024

The Perils of Vilifying Chinese Migrants

In the first five months of 2024, over 24,000 Chinese migrants were apprehended in the Southern border of the US for attempting to illegally enter the country. Conservative US media and politicians have speculated that these migrants could be sent by the CCP and pose a threat to US national security. This rhetoric about the Chinese 'threat' is not new and has led to violence and discrimination.

Meredith Oyen

TIME | 13 August 2024

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Managing International Protection Needs at Borders

This report unpacks the characteristics that make an effective and protection-sensitive border management system. It examines the challenges of asylum and border processes as well as the creation of conditions for successful border management.

Migration Policy Institute

2024

The End of Asylum? Evolving the Protection System to Meet 21st Century Challenges

This publication presents a future-forward argument for the ongoing evolution of the international asylum system, examining promising developments around facilitating orderly entry, system efficiency, building of regional capacity and the securing of public trust.

Migration Policy Institute

2024

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

Migration as a Source of Resilience

This webinar organised by Resilience Links, a platform for humanitarian and development professionals, examines how migration can be a source of resilience and identifies policy opportunities for safer and productive migration. The panellists examine these through the lens of Mercy Corp's planning of its migration program in Niger.

Recorded Webinar

16 February 2024