



ASEAN 2045: Setting Ambitious Goals Amid Uncertain Times

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ASEAN 2045: Setting Ambitious Goals Amid Uncertain Times

By Jose Miguelito Enriquez

SYNOPSIS

The ASEAN Community Vision 2045 marks a significant evolution in ASEAN's regional integration. It addresses shifting geopolitical dynamics and emerging global megatrends with bolder goals across its community pillars. While ASEAN sets ambitious targets to solidify its relevance and resilience, its success will hinge on sustained commitment, coordination, and engagement amid growing global uncertainty.

COMMENTARY

One of the most awaited outcomes of the 46th ASEAN Leaders' Summit in Kuala Lumpur last 26-27 May 2025 was the unveiling of the [ASEAN Community Vision \(ACV\) 2045](#), the third iteration of ASEAN's community-building blueprints. Under the theme "Resilient, Innovative, Dynamic, and People-Centred ASEAN", the region seeks to seize the opportunities and confront the challenges that stem from seventeen key "megatrends", which include great power competition, digitalisation and new technologies, supply chain resilience, the climate crisis, and an ageing population.

Reckoning with New Geopolitical Realities

ASEAN's visions for its three community pillars – the ASEAN Political Security Community (APSC), ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), and ASEAN Sociocultural Community (ASCC) – are not simple rehashes of past Strategic Plans. As ASEAN recognises the realities of a more uncertain world, the ACV 2045 demonstrates how the regional organisation strategically places itself in this new geopolitical environment and how it can effectively advance regional interests.

For example, while some previous objectives in the [APSC Blueprint 2025](#) were

reiterated in the APSC Strategic Plan 2026-2035, many changes are apparent as ASEAN sets a markedly stronger tone. The newest APSC plan not only voices ASEAN's support for the multilateral system and aim to be a primary player in the regional security architecture, it also introduces ASEAN's goal to contribute towards the rules-based international order, a term not mentioned in Blueprint 2025. This is a clear acknowledgement by ASEAN that the region will inevitably be affected by the exacerbating strains within the international order.

Another area where the APSC breaks new ground is in its desire to project a common "ASEAN position on regional and global issues". While ASEAN has always endeavoured to maintain its centrality in regional affairs, in this new blueprint, ASEAN recognises that a timely and unified response to emerging developments will help to maintain its credibility in global affairs, but must be done in a way that would not violate long-held principles of consultation, mutual respect and non-interference.

In the 2026-2030 Strategic Plan for the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), ASEAN envisions harnessing emerging "megatrends" in the digital, green, and blue economies through six strategic goals with the ultimate aim of becoming the world's fourth-largest economy by 2045. The AEC's interest in these economies is familiar to observers as ASEAN members have already been working towards frameworks or strategies in each of these domains in previous years.

Where the AEC's goals have changed are in its plans to shockproof its supply chains and elevate its position in global value chains. While this partly reflects the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic disruptions, it also signifies bolder steps taken to protect the region from the economic vulnerabilities resulting from the global resurgence of protectionism.

While [the previous AEC Blueprint](#) outlined steps such as information sharing and standards harmonisation to enhance ASEAN's value chain, the new Strategic Plan seeks to facilitate regional industrial cooperation in pursuit of this goal for the first time. In fact, the AEC now names several strategic sectors that it aims to seek cooperation with, including semiconductors, agribusiness, and healthcare.

The ACV also includes a new strategic plan for the ASCC, which is geared towards making ASEAN more relevant to the people of Southeast Asia. The plan addresses people-centred issues such as access gaps to digital services, adequate employment opportunities, healthcare, and women's and youth empowerment.

The Challenges Ahead

The ACV 2045 demonstrates ASEAN's commitment to remain the centre for regional dialogue and a key driver for the region's security architecture. This means that the ASEAN-Plus meetings slated later in the year will be closely watched, especially the East Asia Summit, which failed to issue a joint leaders' statement last year, [allegedly over disagreements](#) between ASEAN's dialogue partners.

Moreover, in its relations with major powers, contentious issues remain. While both [ASEAN and China have committed to a final text](#) for the Code of Conduct on the South China Sea by 2026, key questions remain unresolved, particularly on the code's legally

binding nature. Relations between ASEAN and the United States have also been complicated by tariffs imposed by the second Trump administration. While not mentioning the US by name, [ASEAN leaders condemned](#) “unilateral actions” and protectionist restrictions and reiterated their support for the rules-based trading system in a statement.

More strains in the geopolitical environment threaten to further reduce trust in multilateral processes, such as the ASEAN-Plus mechanisms. Indeed, the APSC recognises this in the new strategic plan, which is why it insists on maintaining the rules-based order. Confidence-building and pursuing mutually agreeable, practical cooperation with external partners will be key to enhancing the credibility of ASEAN-Plus mechanisms.

For the AEC, it is important that while frontiers in the digital and green economies are reached, the region must be mindful of the need to close the regional development gap. Indeed, ASEAN’s frameworks have generated economic benefits, contributing an estimated 5 per cent of regional GDP growth over the past decade. However, more work to close this development gap needs to be done, especially as ASEAN works towards Timor-Leste’s membership accession later this year.

Moreover, in pushing for industrial collaboration, policy harmonisation remains a critical ingredient for a truly effective regional industrial policy. Uneven or divergent economic planning will inevitably reduce investor confidence and make it less likely that Southeast Asia will be viewed as a united economic bloc rather than the sum of ten (or eleven) member states. Regional frameworks such as the Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA), which is on track to be finalised this year, will be crucial building blocks in implementing the AEC’s new vision.

Conclusion

The ASEAN Community Vision 2045 represents the region’s higher aspirations to face the complexities of an evolving geopolitical environment. The ACV 2045 combines continuing previous progress in community-building, breaking new ground to seize the potentials in nascent trends, and achieving concrete milestones in previously challenging sticking points.

However, in taking its community-building initiatives to the next level, ASEAN finds itself swimming against the geopolitical currents of the day. This means that ensuring the progress in the ACV 2045 will not be easy and likely more difficult to implement than in previous iterations of the community vision. Nonetheless, ASEAN’s bold commitments in the ACV demonstrate members’ confidence that multilateral cooperation can still produce substantial and tangible benefits.

As ASEAN sets its sights for its 60th anniversary in 2027, the priorities set by the next two ASEAN chairs – the Philippines and Singapore – will be critical in setting the pace for implementing the ACV’s objectives. In the long term, all ASEAN members should recognise that significantly more effort and mutual commitment will be essential to maintaining the momentum and proving ASEAN’s resilience.

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