



# Mind the Gap: New Zealand and Regional Institutions in Southeast Asia

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# Introduction

**Southeast Asia's regional institutions are central to New Zealand's engagement with the emerging East Asian region. In the past decade, New Zealand governments across the political spectrum have recognised this and have made Southeast Asia a higher priority in the country's foreign and economic policy. However, while New Zealand has been highly successful in managing its relations with the region, new energy and initiatives are essential to sustain past momentum and underscore that New Zealand is a committed and credible participant in regional affairs.**

This paper is in four parts. The opening section provides some historical background on the evolution of regional institutions in Southeast Asia, explaining their origins, their purpose and how they work.<sup>1</sup> The second part explains in broad terms why these groups are important, and how they contribute to New Zealand's interests. Part three focuses in greater detail on the alphabet soup of institutions themselves: the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the East Asia Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus), setting out New Zealand's interests in and its engagement with each. The final section identifies some future challenges and opportunities, including some recommendations for a range of relevant New Zealand actors to consider.

A tangible measure of the effectiveness of New Zealand's past policy towards regional institutions is the fact that it is a member of almost all of Asia's important groupings.<sup>2</sup> However, as more and more countries discover an interest in ASEAN and in Southeast Asia, New Zealand needs to keep running just to stay still. It has to show that it will be more than simply present at meetings. It needs to be a committed, active and *valuable* member of the region, making a substantive contribution to regional cooperation on a wide range of issues. This will be a challenge for a small country with limited financial and human resources. New Zealand must be careful that a gap doesn't grow between its rhetorical commitment to Southeast Asia and the means provided to sustain that engagement.



# The Evolution of Regional Institutions in Southeast Asia

For much of its history, Southeast Asia was a region without regional institutions. Efforts to create a regional grouping or collective security organisation after World War II struggled in the face of rivalry and diverse national interests.<sup>3</sup> The Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was established by the Manila Pact in 1954, but despite its name it was made up primarily of states from outside Southeast Asia, and it soon became dysfunctional and moribund.<sup>4</sup>

In 1961, Thailand, the Philippines and the Confederation of Malaya formed the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA), but it too struggled to overcome rivalries between Malaya and the Philippines over Sabah.<sup>5</sup> In July 1963 the Philippines convened a summit to propose the creation of MAPHILINDO – a non-political confederation for the Malay states of Southeast Asia. It failed when Indonesian President Sukarno launched his policy of Confrontation against Malaya.

Apart from SEATO, New Zealand had little interest in taking part in these early efforts at regionalism. New Zealand joined the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East when it was created in 1947, but only reluctantly. The government had not wanted to join and only did so as a “non-member” under pressure from

the British.<sup>6</sup> New Zealand was also hesitant to join the Asian Development Bank in 1966. For the most part, East Asia was seen as poor, weak and corrupt and a potential source of threats to New Zealand. It was somewhere that needed to be kept at a distance. Diplomatic representation in the region was modest and when New Zealand took part in groups like SEATO and the Australia-New Zealand and Malaya area, it was primarily because of the ties they created to the United States and the United Kingdom, not because of any particular desire to engage with Southeast Asia itself.<sup>7</sup>

The creation of ASEAN in 1967 changed the trajectory of Asian regionalism. For the first time, a genuinely indigenous institution came into being. In signing the Bangkok Declaration the

five original members (Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines) agreed to cooperate to accelerate “economic growth, social progress and cultural development” and to promote “peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law”.<sup>8</sup>

As the Vietnam War came to an end, New Zealand governments began to explore new ways to engage with Southeast Asia. By 1970, there were references to a policy of “active involvement” in efforts “to develop regional groupings” that might widen the scope for New Zealand “to influence Asian affairs”.<sup>9</sup> There was a growing sense that ASEAN could “make an important contribution to the long-term stability in the region”.<sup>10</sup> The Kirk government accelerated this policy as it sought to cultivate relationships beyond traditional alliance partners. It regarded ASEAN as “more appropriate to local conditions” than old alliances like SEATO.<sup>11</sup>

In 1975 New Zealand became ASEAN’s second Dialogue Partner (after Australia). Early interactions were primarily about the prospects for trade and development assistance, but they also took in a range of political and strategic

matters. After Vietnam invaded Cambodia in 1978, New Zealand supported ASEAN’s policy of not recognising the Vietnamese-installed government, despite misgivings on the part of officials and politicians.<sup>12</sup> By 1985 New Zealand’s assessment of ASEAN was becoming cautiously positive, describing it as “the most successful regional grouping of its kind”.<sup>13</sup> While noting that New Zealand-ASEAN ties still lacked “any great depth” (and certainly did not match the depth of the bilateral relations New Zealand had with the group’s then six members) officials recognised the need to “keep the relationship in good repair because of the political clout that ASEAN can muster on international and regional issues”.<sup>14</sup>

The end of the Cold War proved to be a second crucial turning point for regionalism. ASEAN’s membership, which had already expanded to include Brunei in 1984, grew further to take in Vietnam (1995), Laos and Myanmar (1997) and Cambodia (1999). The end of the super-power divide also allowed the group to take up new functions. During the Cold War, Asia’s key security structures had been the US-centred “hub and spokes” alliance system. Efforts to create a more inclusive regional security dialogue – even when



pressed by US allies like Australia and Canada – were dismissed by the US as “solutions in search of a problem”. However, during the 1991 ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference (PMC) Japanese foreign minister Nakayama suggested using the PMC as a forum for regional security discussions. The idea was taken up by advocates inside ASEAN, and in July 1994 the ARF was unveiled. This annual meeting of foreign ministers gradually became institutionalised, with a busy calendar of inter-sessional meetings among officials taking place each year.





After the creation of the ARF, a number of other new arrangements followed, including ASEAN-Plus Three, the EAS (2005), the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM) (2006) and the ADMM Plus (2010). In a comparatively short period of time Asia's institutional landscape was transformed, shifting from a region that was supposedly "ripe for rivalry" because of its lack of multilateral institutions, to one where some have even detected "meeting fatigue" and put forward proposals seeking to simplify the region's complex multilateral architecture.<sup>15</sup>

Although multilateralism has flourished in the last two decades, regional groups vary considerably in their levels of institutionalisation. ASEAN's way of doing business is distinct from the forms of regional cooperation found in Europe. It has traditionally eschewed supranational governance, preferring "sovereignty-enhancing" regionalism, where most authority remains with national capitals, not the Jakarta-based Secretariat.<sup>16</sup> ASEAN functions on the basis of informality and consensus decision-making (the so-called "ASEAN way") and the norm of non-interference in members' internal affairs has long been regarded as a fundamental principle, although it is evolving

(and has often been honoured in the breach by ASEAN members themselves).<sup>17</sup> For advocates, ASEAN's way of doing business is an effective strategy for managing diverse interests and different levels of development. Critics on the other hand see the group as a talk shop and an "issue avoidance" organisation.<sup>18</sup>

Despite the oft-stated preference for informality, ASEAN has become increasingly institutionalised in the past decade. In 2003, ASEAN leaders declared the goal of establishing an ASEAN Community by 2020 (subsequently brought forward to 2015) based on three pillars: a political and security community; an economic community; and a socio-cultural community.<sup>19</sup> In November 2007 the group agreed to an ASEAN Charter, which sought to create a "legal and institutional" framework for the organisation, codifying norms, rules and values and setting targets for future cooperation.<sup>20</sup> There has also been a remarkable growth in functional and political cooperation under ASEAN's auspices, with meetings covering everything from police and customs matters to tourism and health issues. A staggering 1,400 ASEAN meetings are now held annually.



# Why do Institutions Matter?

**Why then do Southeast Asia's regional institutions matter to New Zealand? First, Southeast Asia matters for New Zealand and any institutions that promote economic cooperation, security and stability in the region are in New Zealand's interests. The 10 ASEAN states are part of the most dynamic and fastest growing region in the global economy. Collectively, they account for US\$1.8 trillion in GDP and at a time when much of the world has been mired in recession, Southeast Asian states have posted robust growth rates.**

There are 600 million people in ASEAN and as a group it is New Zealand's third-largest trading partner, with two-way trade worth more than \$10 billion annually. In 2011 New Zealand sent \$4.4 billion worth of exports to the ASEAN-10.<sup>21</sup> Two member states (Malaysia and Indonesia) are in New Zealand's top 10 export markets. Apart from trade, ASEAN's economic importance also lies in its central place in the region's growing transnational production networks.

As well as being an important engine for economic growth, Southeast Asia is also a key site for strategic relations between great powers. During the Obama administration, the US has stepped up its contacts with ASEAN and given Southeast Asia a much greater profile in its foreign policy.

As part of the rebalancing of its military forces towards East Asia, the US has established closer defence ties with Singapore, Vietnam and the Philippines and begun new political relationships with Myanmar and Laos. China also has many important economic, political and strategic interests in Southeast Asia. These two great powers have many shared interests, but also disagree about some key issues, including territorial claims in the South China Sea. Regional institutions provide a place where these can be discussed, and where trust-building and openness can be encouraged, even if strategic competition remains an immutable fact of international life.



Second, regional institutions reflect New Zealand's long-standing interest in the promotion of multilateralism in both the economic and the security fields. As a small state with limited hard power resources, New Zealand has a strong interest in institutions that promote cooperation and a peaceful, rules-based international order. Regional institutions amplify New Zealand's voice in the region, providing a way for it to cooperate with Asian countries collectively on a host of issues. The ability to deal with ASEAN as a collective, for example, has found fullest form in the conclusion of the 2009 ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (AANZFTA), which links ASEAN and the Closer Economic Relationship (CER). In addition, regional institutions provide a way to encourage cooperation on a diverse range of security issues that are important to New Zealand, including fighting terrorism, trafficking in drugs, arms and people.<sup>22</sup>

Third, in addition to supplementing New Zealand's bilateral engagement with the countries of Southeast Asia, ASEAN is a vital gatekeeper when it comes to participation in wider regional institutions like the EAS, ARF and ADMM-Plus.

Since the creation of the ARF in 1994, ASEAN's so-called "driver's seat" role has been recognised by all of its dialogue partners. This means that ASEAN shapes the agenda of these meetings, an ASEAN member state co-chairs them, and ASEAN's preferred norms of interaction regulate the process.<sup>23</sup> New Zealand needs to work with ASEAN and with each ASEAN chair in order to participate fully in these broader political-security and economic structures. For example, ASEAN is at the centre of efforts to create a Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) that would harmonise trade ties between ASEAN and all its FTA partners. As Minister

of Foreign Affairs Murray McCully said in May 2012, "ASEAN is a crucial entry point for us into discussions in the region".<sup>24</sup>

Finally, regional institutions provide a way for New Zealand to engage with those extra-regional powers that are play an active role in Southeast Asia, including China, India and the US. New Zealand welcomed the admission of the US to the EAS in 2010 and has used multilateral arrangements like the ADMM and EAS to arrange bilateral meetings and talk about issues with key regional military and political leaders.



# New Zealand & ASEAN: “A Steadfast Friend and a Strong Supporter”<sup>25</sup>

ASEAN is central to New Zealand’s engagement with regional institutions for the reason that ASEAN is central to almost all forms of Asian regionalism. This makes a strong relationship an essential part of New Zealand foreign policy.

New Zealand’s ties with ASEAN have grown steadily in the past four decades. At first, bilateral relations with ASEAN’s individual members were given priority, but in the last decade there has been an increasing tendency to engage with ASEAN and its related institutions in a multilateral context. In October 2008, New Zealand was the third country (after the US and Australia) to appoint an ambassador to ASEAN by “double-hatting” the ambassador

to Indonesia.<sup>26</sup> Greater diplomatic resources have been directed to engaging Southeast Asia as a region. An Asia regional division was set up in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) in Wellington. More recently, a deputy Head of Mission position was created in the New Zealand embassy in Jakarta dedicated to ASEAN, along with a second secretary role focused on regional issues.

Gary Hawke has said that a basic chronology of New Zealand’s relationship with Southeast Asia is “a narrative in which a defence relationship was transformed into a modern economic relationship”.<sup>27</sup> There is no doubt that economic interests are a crucial driver of closer ties with ASEAN. The culmination of the burgeoning economic relationship was the 2009 signing of the AANZFTA. AANZFTA is a comprehensive,

high-quality agreement that promises a broad liberalisation of trade, investment and services between the CER and ASEAN.<sup>28</sup> The agreement came into force in 2010, and in January 2012 Indonesia became the 10th and final ASEAN state to ratify the agreement. With the conclusion of AANZFTA, New Zealand is now arguably entering a third phase in its relations with Southeast Asia in which a key component will be in connecting ASEAN as a bloc to the closely integrated political and economic trans-Tasman community. While New Zealand’s interests are not identical to those of Australia’s, there is significant common ground and there can be little doubt that New Zealand’s views are more likely to resonate when they are heard together with those of Australia.<sup>29</sup>



In 2010 ASEAN and New Zealand held a commemorative summit to mark 35 years of ties under the slogan “trusted friends, dynamic partners”. This meeting also marked the launch of the *2010-2015 Plan of Action*, which charts the future of the relationship. As part of a new strategic partnership, New Zealand announced four flagship initiatives focusing on scholarships, young business leaders, disaster risk management and agricultural diplomacy.<sup>30</sup> ASEAN leaders expressed appreciation for New Zealand’s “steadfast support” for ASEAN centrality in the emerging regional architecture.

Prime Minister John Key told an audience at the ASEAN Secretariat in April 2012 that “New Zealand is seeking to deepen its relationship with ASEAN members, both individually and collectively”.<sup>31</sup> In doing so, a challenge for New Zealand is finding ways to sustain the positive momentum. ASEAN matters much more to New Zealand than New Zealand matters to ASEAN. As such, New Zealand faces the ongoing challenge of showing that it “adds value” to the region and “deserves” its place in these regional groups. As one former official put it: “our relevance is determined by the contribution we make to the activities of the institutions, showing that we can add substance... we have to avoid being merely present”.<sup>32</sup>

A new set of initiatives will be needed in time for the 40th anniversary of the dialogue partner relationship in 2015. The year 2015 is an important date for two reasons: first, it represents ASEAN’s own ambitious target for the completion of the ASEAN Economic Community. Second, the conclusion of the current ASEAN-New Zealand *Plan of Action* will provide a reason for a review of activities. A review of the AANZFTA agreement is also scheduled for 2016.<sup>33</sup> Although New Zealand has good relations with much of the region, Southeast Asian governments have attracted many new suitors in recent years and New Zealand will need to do more to maintain its profile and show that it adds value to the region. As one commentator has noted, “the danger is complacency at a time when other actors are getting more engaged”.<sup>34</sup>

### **East Asia Summit (EAS)**

The EAS was created in December 2005, when Australia, New Zealand and India joined the ASEAN nations, China, Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK) for a summit in Kuala Lumpur. The summit’s declaration stated that the EAS would be a “forum for dialogue on broad strategic, political and economic issues of common interest and concern with the aim of promoting peace,

stability and economic prosperity in East Asia”. It described the EAS as “an open, inclusive, transparent and outward-looking forum” that would “strive to strengthen global norms and universally recognised values”.<sup>35</sup> In 2010, following discussions among the ASEAN states, the US and Russia were invited to join the EAS, and US President Barack Obama attended his first EAS summit in Bali in November 2011.

The EAS is the only grouping in the region where all the heads of government sit down to address the full range of political and security issues (leaders also meet at the annual APEC [Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation] summit, but India is not a member, and APEC has primarily an economic agenda). The 18 EAS members account for more than half the world’s population, 55 percent of global GDP and more than two-thirds of New Zealand’s exports. That notwithstanding, the EAS is a modest arrangement in institutional terms: “dinner followed by 16 speeches” was how one analyst described it in its earliest form. Its primary focus is the annual leaders’ meeting, hosted by the ASEAN chair. The EAS is a “leaders-led” process, which means the various heads of government have considerable flexibility to address a wide range of issues. Foreign and economic



ministers also have their own regular meetings, and education, environment, energy and finance ministers have also met under the EAS banner.

The addition of the US and Russia in 2010 marked a new beginning for the EAS. It is rare for the US to join an institution after its rules have been agreed, and some expected the US to press for a more “action-oriented” EAS, including greater discussion of security issues. However, dramatic changes seem unlikely any time soon and the EAS will remain primarily a forum for dialogue.

For New Zealand, EAS membership serves two key functions. First, it allows participation in an elite club. New Zealand is the smallest non-ASEAN member of the EAS, and the opportunity to sit at the table with the leaders of China, the US, Indonesia and other key regional players provides a valuable opportunity to project New Zealand’s interests. Second, even if the EAS is a modest arrangement for now, it has the potential to grow into a deeper community with time. As one well-placed New Zealand observer commented, if there is to be a future East Asian regional community, the “EAS has to be the nucleus or driving force of Asian regionalism...either the EAS or something built around the EAS”.<sup>36</sup>

The EAS has identified seven issues for its work programme: climate change/environment, natural disaster mitigation, energy, education, finance, health and connectivity. Although it does not deal with trade liberalisation, the EAS does address economic integration through discussions on connectivity, infrastructure and capacity-building. The third EAS in 2007 agreed to a Japanese proposal to create the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA). When it was first put forward by then Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda, the goal was for ERIA to grow into an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for East Asia.<sup>37</sup> ERIA functions as an independent academic think-tank, based in Jakarta, and its research agenda has three key themes: sustainable development; closing development gaps; and deepening economic integration. New Zealand was an early and strong supporter of ERIA. It was the first country after Japan to provide funding for the organisation (committing \$150,000 in June 2009). This comparatively modest contribution generated goodwill and helped to spur funding from other regional states, showing the value of well-targeted, niche investments in regional endeavours.

## ASEAN Regional Forum

The ARF was established in 1994 as the first inclusive security institution in the wider Asia-Pacific region. At the time it represented a striking departure from what had been the bilateral security order dominated by the US “hub and spokes” alliance system. The ARF’s membership has grown steadily, and it now has 27 members. Along with the 10 ASEAN countries and other “Asia-Pacific” states, it includes (among others) India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the European Union. This large and diverse membership, together with its preference for consensus-based decision-making, has hindered the ARF’s ability to make progress on many key security issues. However, if there is sometimes frustration with the pace of progress in addressing issues, New Zealand officials still talk positively about the role the organisation plays in building norms and habits of cooperation, even if these are likely to emerge over “decades” rather than in the near future.<sup>38</sup>



The ARF was originally based on a three-stage ASEAN concept paper, which envisaged a progression over time from confidence-building measures to preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution. This has not proved a smooth journey however, and the ARF has remained preoccupied with confidence-building measures and dialogue, and has only begun cautiously to take on modest preventative diplomacy activities in the past few years.<sup>39</sup> The forum has not become directly involved in trying to solve the most pressing security problems in the region such as the situation on the Korean peninsula, or territorial disputes between China and Japan, although there have been some surprisingly robust discussions on occasion. In 2010, with Vietnam in the chair, the annual foreign ministers' meeting saw a heated exchange between China and other members, after several countries raised the issue of Chinese territorial claims in the South China Sea.

The ARF has had somewhat more success with the so-called "non-traditional" or transnational security agenda, including issues such as transnational crime, and disaster relief. Here, there has been some modest progress in moving beyond talk into actual cooperation. A first 'desktop' exercise (ARF-DiREx), based on a collective regional response to a natural disaster, was held in

Indonesia in 2008 and in May 2009 the ARF convened the first multilateral disaster relief exercise in the Philippines. In March 2011, more than 4,000 personnel from 25 ARF member states took part in an exercise focused on a civilian-led response to an earthquake and a tsunami.

ARF activities occur at two levels: an annual foreign ministers' meeting, hosted by the ASEAN chair in conjunction with the ASEAN PMC, and a programme of inter-sessional meetings held throughout the year. New Zealand has co-hosted a number of these inter-sessional meetings, including groups devoted to peacekeeping, preventive diplomacy and maritime security. The ARF also has an Expert and Eminent Persons (EEP) group, which was created to try to progress the ARF agenda. Members are typically former officials and academics (in New Zealand's case they have exclusively been former officials). The EEP has recently developed some modest proposals on preventive diplomacy. Despite the opposition of some members, the group agreed to send EEP monitors to observe the 2012 Timor-Leste elections.<sup>40</sup>

The ARF's place as the key regional security institution has been questioned recently with the rise of a parallel track of defence minister meetings, including the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) process and the Shangri-La Dialogue (SLD). The 2010 New Zealand *Defence White Paper* concluded that the "ASEAN Regional Forum will remain a significant body, but it will need to remain relevant as new entities such as the EAS and the ADMM-Plus emerge, and as the security architecture in North Asia responds to the changing strategic balance".<sup>41</sup>



## Defence Diplomacy

One of the newest parts of the region's institutional architecture is a growing number of dialogues among defence officials and military personnel. For decades, multilateral defence cooperation was seen as anathema to ASEAN. Member states preferred to pursue bilateral defence ties, with the result being a "spider-web" of overlapping arrangements, but no single multilateral forum. In 2002 the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) convened the first SLD in Singapore. This meeting of regional defence ministers and senior military officers has been held annually since, with a growing number of participants. The SLD is not an ASEAN creature; it is managed by IISS and funded by the Singaporean government and a range of corporate sponsors.<sup>42</sup> It does not produce a formal chairman's statement or list of outcomes, and the multilateral interactions between ministers are limited (consisting primarily of working lunches and dinners), but the meeting provides a valuable opportunity for numerous bilateral interactions. New Zealand has been a regular participant at the SLD since its inception, using the sidelines of the SLD to schedule numerous bilateral meetings. The SLD is now a fixture in the Minister of Defence's diary.<sup>43</sup>

The creation of the SLD helped ASEAN members to overcome their aversion to multilateral defence dialogues and paved the way for the creation of a formal "track I" inter-governmental defence ministers meeting. In 2006 ASEAN established the ADMM and in 2010 it created the ADMM-Plus process, which includes New Zealand, along with the US, China, Russia, Australia, India, Japan, and the ROK. ADMM-Plus is still finding its feet, but ASEAN and New Zealand officials have shown a real enthusiasm for this new group.<sup>44</sup> Following the first ministers' meeting in Hanoi in 2010, five Expert Working Groups (EWGs) were formed to address a diverse range of issues: maritime security, military medicine, peacekeeping operations, counter-terrorism and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.<sup>45</sup> These topics, focusing on the softer side of security, reflect ASEAN's preference for a cautious step-by-step approach to cooperation, but compared to the early years of the ARF, progress has been rapid.

New Zealand has been an active participant in ADMM-Plus. For the past two years it has co-chaired the EWG on peacekeeping with the Philippines and held three very positive meetings. After an initial planning session in the Philippines, a seminar held in Wellington in November 2011 focused on legal issues, including presentations

by Sir Geoffrey Palmer and a Filipino former United Nations force commander from the Golan Heights. A third meeting was co-chaired with the International Committee of the Red Cross and held at Indonesia's new peacekeeping centre in Bogor in November 2012. It focused on a range of peacekeeping issues from a command perspective. The EWG carried out a stocktake on member capabilities in mid-2012 and its future work programme seems likely to focus on force generation: how to assemble a peace-keeping force and get it into theatre.

ADMM-Plus is a new process but one where there seems to be potential for meaningful, practical cooperation. As one official noted, ADMM is one group where "the institutional arrangements don't yet match the comfort level of the participants".<sup>46</sup> The next meeting of ministers will be held in Brunei in August 2013, and after that ministers will meet every two years. There will also be changes in the work programme and leadership of the EWGs from 2014 onwards. New Zealand has expressed an interest in leading another EWG and continuing its high profile within ADMM-Plus.

## Track II: Bilateral, Trilateral and Multilateral

Alongside these inter-governmental (or track one) initiatives, a busy track II or track 1.5 programme of meetings has evolved in Southeast Asia. Track II dialogues are made up of academics, think-tank analysts, journalists and officials participating in their “private capacity”. They are supposed to provide a forum where sensitive issues can be raised and trial balloons floated. They can be bilateral or multilateral and more or less institutionalised. The ARF, for example, recognises a formal role for the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP) and the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS) networks as sources of ideas and proposals.

New Zealand is a member of CSCAP and in recent years has built a connection to ASEAN-ISIS through an annual trilateral meeting between ASEAN, Australia and New Zealand, in Kuala Lumpur. The effectiveness of these multilateral track II bodies has been questioned by some writers, who argue there is little evidence that track II has raised sensitive issue or been used as an “ideas factory” for track one.<sup>47</sup> Bilateral track II meetings seem to have been more successful, at least in supplementing official New Zealand diplomacy in the region.

The Centre for Strategic Studies and the Asia New Zealand Foundation have both undertaken bilateral dialogues with counterparts in China, Vietnam, India, Myanmar, Japan and the ROK, meetings in which New Zealand officials frequently take part.

In 2011 the Australian and New Zealand prime ministers proposed an Integration Partnership Forum (IPF), a track 1.5 meeting to assist ASEAN countries with the implementation of the AANZFTA agreement by sharing lessons from the trans-Tasman experience of economic integration, and charting a course for closer relations in the future.<sup>48</sup> The first IPF was held in Kuala Lumpur in June 2011 and a second meeting was held in Manila in May 2012. The IPF is matched on the political-security side by the annual track II ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand meeting held in Kuala Lumpur (mentioned above). These trilateral interactions are useful, but could also be complemented by a process that brings in more senior policymakers and business figures, as well as perhaps political leaders. One mechanism that could be of service in this role is the Australia-New Zealand Leadership Forum (ANZLF), which meets once every 18 months. Inviting ASEAN representatives to attend a special session in 2015 would be a timely way to mark 40 years of Dialogue Partner status, and celebrate the inauguration of the ASEAN Economic Community.



# Challenges Ahead

**New Zealand has been astute in its dealings with ASEAN and other regional institutions in the past two decades. It has used its membership in regional groups to advance its claim to be a legitimate and constructive participant in East Asian regional order, and it has contributed to discussions on a wide range of economic, political and security issues. This track record notwithstanding, there are a number of challenges ahead that could make these ties more complicated in the future.**

The biggest challenge will be maintaining New Zealand's profile and influence in Southeast Asia as more and more countries find an interest in the region. Historically, Commonwealth connections helped New Zealand in relations with Singapore and Malaysia. New Zealand was one of the first ASEAN Dialogue Partners and New Zealand signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in November 2005. Today, however, Southeast Asia is a much more crowded space. More and more countries have declared interests in the region and have dedicated resources to develop their relationships with ASEAN. Countries as diverse as Brazil, Turkey, Argentina and Zimbabwe have all recently appointed ambassadors to ASEAN. European missions in Jakarta are investing heavily in strengthening their ties to ASEAN and other regional groups, and China, Japan and South Korea are all dramatically expanding the number of Jakarta-based diplomats they have working on ASEAN issues.

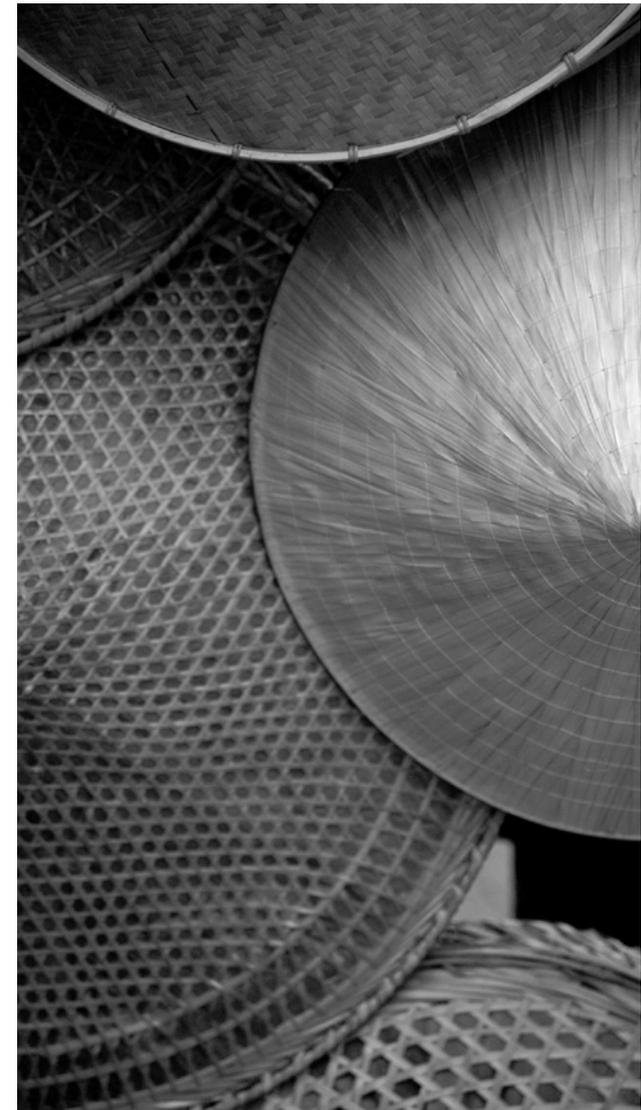
Southeast Asia is not only more crowded, it is getting busier. The founding of the ADMM-Plus process has created a new track of meetings that require New Zealand's participation, at the same time that defence activities and exercises are also increasing under the banner of the ARF. ASEAN's own activities are multiplying at a remarkable rate. The number of regional meetings already stretches New Zealand resources and these pressures seem only likely to increase in the future.



Showing a value proposition and remaining a step ahead in ties with ASEAN will require creative thinking, new practical initiatives and more resources. There is a question mark over New Zealand's ability to sustain its relationship with ASEAN and other related institutions in light of tight resource constraints. New Zealand has a limited diplomatic footprint in Southeast Asia, with posts in only 6 of 10 ASEAN states. It does not have direct diplomatic representation in the former, current or next ASEAN chairs (Cambodia, Brunei and Myanmar respectively). MFAT tried to work around this problem by sending an official from the Jakarta embassy to be based at the Australian embassy in Phnom Penh before the major ASEAN meetings during Cambodia's time in the chair.<sup>49</sup>

Officials are confident Brunei can be managed in the same way, but Myanmar's term will be a greater challenge. Although the Key government has announced it intends to establish a "diplomatic presence" in Myanmar in 2013, this is unlikely to be a fully staffed embassy.

This challenge could be further exacerbated by recent cuts in the funding of the New Zealand foreign ministry. In early 2012, reporting about the proposed restructuring of MFAT noted that it would include a reduction in staff in several important Asian posts, including a 40 percent cut in resources in Singapore.<sup>50</sup> Although aspects of the restructure were eventually dropped, some of the cuts have remained and changes within the ministry have also seen the loss of a number of experienced staff.



# Conclusions

From a New Zealand perspective, engagement with Southeast Asian regional institutions in the past few decades has been highly successful. The country has secured membership in almost all the major regional groups and has been adept at working through ASEAN and other forums to promote its interests and its role in the wider region. Successive governments have given high priority to the ASEAN relationship, and in the past three years the Key government has further elevated Southeast Asia's place in the country's foreign policy.

ASEAN and the broader institutional landscape are evolving, however, and many new players are directing attention and resources towards the region. New Zealand's engagement with regional institutions (and in particular with ASEAN) needs to be constantly refreshed if past gains are not to be put at risk. It needs to find new ways to show that it values and contributes to Asian regionalism and to ensure that there is no gap between fine rhetoric and the resources that are provided to make cooperation possible. This final section offers some suggestions for possible initiatives.

## **Increase diplomatic resources dedicated to the region.**

Given limited resources, New Zealand diplomats have achieved a great deal in terms of securing the country's place in the wider regional architecture. However, Southeast Asian posts with comparatively small staff are expected to manage a number of complicated bilateral relationships that provide a foundation for New Zealand's engagement in regional institutions. Indonesia has been identified as a priority for more resources (for example, the appointment of a trade commissioner to Jakarta in September 2012), but some other posts have seen shrinking or static numbers of overall staff.<sup>51</sup> As Myanmar emerges from its long period of isolation (and in particular when it takes up the chair of ASEAN in 2014) it will require a much greater level of engagement than it has in the past. Vietnam is another state with a rapidly growing international and regional profile, where New Zealand has an opportunity to build on positive relations.



This kind of capacity building is not simply a question of more people. It can also involve encouraging Southeast Asian language acquisition by New Zealand officials, in the way that Northeast Asian languages have been given priority in recent decades.

One option that has been suggested for demonstrating New Zealand's commitment to ASEAN is to separate the "double-hatted" ambassadorial appointment to ASEAN and Indonesia, and appoint a dedicated ambassador to the ASEAN Secretariat, based in Jakarta. The US, China, Japan and other states already have their own stand-alone missions to ASEAN. With an increasingly active Committee of Permanent Representatives in Jakarta and a growing number of countries with dedicated representation to the Secretariat, there is now an active and useful ASEAN diplomatic community with which to engage. Australia's decision to base its ambassador in Jakarta from the middle of 2013 will leave just India, Russia and New Zealand as the only EAS members without such representation. In these circumstances, it seems only a matter of time before an appointment will be made. A dedicated ambassador to ASEAN based in Jakarta would be a clear symbol of New Zealand's commitment to engage ASEAN as a group. It remains a balancing act, however, to ensure that appropriate resources are also directed to strengthen (or establish) posts elsewhere in the region.

## **Expand New Zealand's commitment to defence diplomacy**

One of the most exciting developments in regional cooperation in the last few years has been the burgeoning stream of multilateral defence diplomacy. The growing profile of the SLD and the creation of ADMM-Plus are the best-known of these initiatives, but a host of other bilateral and multilateral interactions are also taking place. There are signs that regional states are giving this new track of engagement greater importance.

Paradoxically, at a time when defence diplomacy in the region is becoming more dynamic, New Zealand has reduced the resources it dedicates to this work.<sup>52</sup> The 2009 Value for Money Review of the New Zealand Defence Force described military diplomacy as a "discretionary function" and recommended a reduction in the number of overseas posts and staff.<sup>53</sup> In 2012, the defence attaché (DA) position was withdrawn from Bangkok. Following the removal of the DA from Manila a few years earlier, this leaves New Zealand with just three DAs (based in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta) to cover all of Southeast Asia. While New Zealand's participation in arrangements like ADMM-Plus and the SLD does not depend on

staff based in the region, DAs play an important role in sustaining bilateral and regional defence connections. They have represented New Zealand at multilateral meetings and are of particular value in states like Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam and Myanmar, where the military plays an ongoing role in politics. Shrinking New Zealand representation looks out of step with decisions by key partners like Australia to expand their defence ties in ASEAN. The retention of large New Zealand defence staffs in Canberra, London and Washington also looks anomalous when Southeast Asia is so strikingly under-resourced.



## Look for opportunities to assist Myanmar as chair of ASEAN

In 2014 Myanmar will chair ASEAN for the first time. Former ASEAN Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan described this as a “critical landmark in the history of the organisation”.<sup>54</sup> Myanmar is undergoing an enormously challenging period of political and economic reform. It has limited resources and little experience in organising major international events. The Myanmar government will have a wide range of needs as it plans to take up the chair and New Zealand should look to identify projects where it can make an appropriate “niche” contribution to building capacity. Myanmar officials stress the need for very practical assistance, for example, training for officials in handling accreditation and event planning.<sup>55</sup> The Myanmar foreign ministry also wants to improve the English language and analytical skills of its staff. During a visit in April 2012, Minister of Foreign Affairs McCully offered 20 places in the English Language Training for Officials programme and MFAT has also provided scholarships for a group of five foreign ministry officials to enroll in postgraduate study in New Zealand. New Zealand universities have been engaged in training programmes for officials elsewhere in the region (for example, working with the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam) and could be well-placed to run similar exercises in Myanmar.

## Promote greater understanding of ASEAN in New Zealand

Finally, although ASEAN is one of New Zealand’s most important relationships, very little is known about it among the wider public. A 2012 study by the Asia New Zealand Foundation found that “an overwhelming majority of the participants in an online qualitative survey had not heard of the term ASEAN or knew very little about its meaning, let alone the organisation’s principles and functioning”.<sup>56</sup> This is perhaps not surprising, but educating New Zealanders about ASEAN should be part of the country’s growing efforts at raising its Asia literacy. Getting officials and business people to think about Southeast Asia as a region and not simply 10 individual states is something that needs to given emphasis as ASEAN moves towards its goal of establishing an economic community in 2015.

One way to raise ASEAN’s profile would be to open an ASEAN Studies Centre at a New Zealand university. These centres now exist across Asia and in the US but there is, as yet, no equivalent anywhere in Australia or New Zealand. An ASEAN Studies Centre would generate research on New Zealand’s ties with the region, promote knowledge within New Zealand and attract officials and experts on Southeast Asia. Another option would be to support an annual Visiting

Professorship or Distinguished Speaker Series, where a senior figure from within ASEAN (or an international expert on ASEAN from outside the region) could be funded to give public lectures and promoting understanding about contemporary issues in Southeast Asia, including business and economic opportunities, security, politics and cultural issues. This kind of initiative could be a fitting way to mark the 50th anniversary of ASEAN’s formation in 2017. Finally, there are opportunities to foster greater knowledge about ASEAN among New Zealand parliamentarians. An ASEAN Parliamentary Friendship Group could be created, modeled on the European Union, Pacific and Latin American groups that currently exist. This would provide a focus for visiting delegations and encourage parliamentary engagement on regional issues.



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In 2007, he was a visiting scholar at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard University, and he is also a research associate at the ASEAN Studies Centre at American University in Washington, DC.



# Endnotes

- 1 The term “institution” has many meanings in international relations. It can refer to a formal organisation or grouping, or to a series of rules and norms that are shared among states, but without any formal membership or structure. Furthermore, although many different kinds of organisation can be “institutions” (for example the North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO]), in East Asia the term has become synonymous with inclusive multilateral dialogues rather than military alliances. This paper follows this latter understanding, focusing primarily on Southeast Asia’s formal multilateral institutions, most notably the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its progeny, including the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the East Asia Summit (EAS) and the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus). It doesn’t examine closely other institutional arrangements, including alliances like the Five Power Defence Arrangements. Given space limitations and the fact that other reports in this series have looked closely at economic arrangements, including the role of the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (AANZFTA), the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), this paper pays greater attention to Southeast Asia’s political and security institutions rather than economic and people-to-people arrangements. For a discussion on economic arrangements, see Gary Hawke, *Close to Zero: New Zealand’s Economic Engagement with ASEAN* (Wellington: Asia New Zealand Foundation, August 2012); for a broader treatment, see Andrew Butcher, *Beyond Soldiers, Students and Sentiment: New Zealand, Southeast Asia and ASEAN* (Wellington: Asia New Zealand Foundation, May 2012).
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- 12 See Anthony L. Smith, “The Devil You Know: New Zealand’s recognition policy towards Cambodia from 1978-1990” *New Zealand Journal of History*, vol. 33 no 2. (1999), 221-241.
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# Glossary

<b>AANZFTA</b>	ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement
<b>ADMM</b>	ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting
<b>ADMM-Plus</b>	ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus
<b>APEC</b>	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
<b>ARF</b>	ASEAN Regional Forum
<b>ASA</b>	Association of Southeast Asia
<b>ASEAN</b>	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
<b>ASIAN-ISIS</b>	ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies
<b>CER</b>	Closer Economic Relationship
<b>CSCAP</b>	Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific
<b>DA</b>	Defence attaché
<b>EAS</b>	East Asia Summit
<b>EEP</b>	Expert and Eminent Persons
<b>ERIA</b>	Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia
<b>EWG</b>	Experts' Working Group
<b>IISS</b>	International Institute for Strategic Studies
<b>IPF</b>	Integration Partnership Forum
<b>MFAT</b>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>PMC</b>	Post-Ministerial Conference
<b>ROK</b>	Republic of Korea
<b>SEATO</b>	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
<b>SLD</b>	Shangri-La Dialogue
<b>US</b>	United States

# Asia New Zealand Foundation

The Asia New Zealand Foundation was founded in 1994 as a non-profit, apolitical organisation dedicated to building New Zealand's links with Asia. Through its activities in education, business, media, culture, research and policy, the Foundation aims to promote initiatives that deepen understanding and relationships between New Zealanders and the peoples of Asia.

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