Anti-Terrorism, Maritime Security, and ASEAN-China Cooperation: A Chinese Perspective

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About the Writer

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Executive Summary

1. ASEAN-China relations are generally healthy. The strategic partnership between ASEAN and China will be further enhanced if coordinated efforts are taken to address terrorism and maritime security. Terrorism has affected China and some ASEAN countries for years, while maritime security is becoming a security issue of greater significance for both ASEAN countries and China. If handled improperly, the challenges of terrorism and maritime security may undermine economic and social development, and to a greater extent, national security.

2. So far, the primary source of terrorist threat to China is the so-called “East Turkistan” separatist movement that has attempted to establish a grand “East Turkistan” stretching across Central Asia. Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, a western province of China, is assumed to be a part of it. This “East Turkistan” is to be established by violent means.

3. In recent years Southeast Asia has risen to the fore in the international campaign against terrorism. As with in China, terrorist groups in Southeast Asia are, almost without exception, connected to religious extremism and separatism. The most notorious terrorist organisations active in Southeast Asia include Jemaah Islamiyah, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and Abu Sayyaff Group.

4. With regards to maritime security, the sea plays a hugely important economic role for both Southeast Asia and China. The sea carries the vast bulk of trade and communication, provides food supplies, and supplies substantial energy resources. As such, maritime security will be of increasing concern to Southeast Asia and China.

5. Piracy is perhaps the most serious maritime security problem in the region. In recent years, piracy in Southeast Asia has been more and more rampant. According to the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), the reported number of acts of piracy and armed robbery in 2004 was 330. Among all regions in the world, the Far East (including the Malacca Straits and South China Sea) was the most affected area.

6. Relating to issues of piracy and maritime security is the security of sea lanes of communication. For China, the security of sea lanes is vital to ensure the continued import of oil, energy and raw materials, all of which are crucial for its economic growth. Meanwhile, most ASEAN economies are export-oriented, heavily dependent on foreign trade, thus making sea lane security vital for the sustained economic development of countries in the region.

7. Successful response to terrorism and maritime security threats requires international cooperation. The normalisation of relations with China in 1990
by Indonesia, and then Singapore and Brunei Darussalam, set the path for China’s admission into the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1994 and, eventually, ASEAN dialogue partnership status in 1996. Since then, the partnership has resulted in the deepening of cooperation in economic, political and security areas. The signing of the Joint Declaration on the Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity in Bali in October 2003 was a very important milestone in ASEAN-China relations. This formal document elevated ASEAN-China relations to a new height.

8. Besides conventional forms of cooperation, much progress has also been made on non-traditional security issues. In 2002, the 6th ASEAN-China summit saw the issuance of a joint declaration on cooperation in non-traditional security issues. These issues include drug trafficking, people-smuggling, including that of women and children, arms-smuggling, money-laundering, and cyber crime. These issues have affected regional and international security and are posing new challenges to regional stability.

9. Although ASEAN-China cooperation is healthy, there are several obstacles that may hinder this relationship. Firstly, the issue of political trust - What are the implications of the ever-increasing power of China for ASEAN countries? Secondly, territorial disputes in the South China Sea are potential flashpoints. How these disputes are handled will reflect the quality of ASEAN-China relations. Thirdly, different ASEAN countries have different attitudes towards cooperation with China. This will make it hard for ASEAN countries to come up with a coordinated position on different issues. Fourthly, closer ASEAN-China cooperation may be read by the US and Japan as attempts by China to expand its influence and weaken their position in the Southeast Asia. It may be difficult for ASEAN to balance its relations with the US, Japan and China.

10. In conclusion, ASEAN and China have established a Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity. More needs to be done to enhance the quality of this partnership, while many new challenges and problems will emerge to test the resolve of this partnership. Among others, joint efforts in anti-terrorism and maritime security will give new momentum to further enhancement of ASEAN-China relationship.
ANTI-TERRORISM, MARITIME SECURITY, AND ASEAN-CHINA COOPERATION: A CHINESE PERSPECTIVE

After the end of the Cold War, we have witnessed fundamental changes in international security. We are now troubled not only by traditional security issues such as armed conflicts, territorial disputes and other military related ones, but also by non-traditional ones like international terrorism, transnational crimes, the spread of deadly epidemic diseases, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). Among others, terrorism and maritime security are two major issues of mutual concern for ASEAN and China. Terrorism and religious extremism have disturbed China and some ASEAN countries for years, while maritime security is becoming a security issue of greater significance for both ASEAN countries and China. If handled improperly, the challenges from terrorism and maritime security may undermine the process of economic and social development, and to a greater extent, national security. Common interests will be a driving force for closer cooperation in areas of anti-terrorism and maritime security between ASEAN countries and China.

Terrorist Threats to China

Terrorism is not a new phenomenon. And though this phenomenon may have come into being hundreds of years ago, it was not paid much attention before the end of the Cold War. The September 11th terrorist attacks in New York, however showed that no country, no matter how powerful, was immune to terrorism. Four years have passed since a global war against terror was launched, and international cooperation against terrorism has been greatly enhanced. Yet the shadow of terrorist threats still looms. So far as ASEAN countries and China are concerned, the fight against terrorism has been
and will continue to be one of the most difficult tasks in preserving their respective national security strategy.

Separatism and religious extremism are usually seen as the breeding ground of terrorism. This is the case with terrorism in ASEAN countries and China. So far, the primary source of terrorist threats to China comes from the so-called “East Turkistan” separatism that has been attempting to establish a grand “East Turkistan” stretching across Central Asia. Xinjian Uygur Autonomous Region, a western province of China, is assumed to be a part of it.

The separatist movement in Xinjiang can be traced back to the great uprising of the Hui people in the mid-19th century. Nevertheless, it was in the 1930s and 1940s that a so-called “East Turkistan” state was actually established. Uygur separatists established the “Islamic Republic of East Turkistan” in November 1933, but the regime was short-lived, lasting less than five months. In November 1945, another so-called “Eastern Turkistan Republic” appeared in Yining, but survived for only half a year. In the four decades from the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 to the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan in 1989, “East Turkistan” separatists had little chance to undertake activities within Chinese borders. However, the collapse of the former Soviet Union and the emerging Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia in the early 1990s stimulated “East Turkistan” separatists to resume their separatist activities including deliberate act of violence in Xinjiang. The disturbance in Baren in Akto county of Xinjiang in April 1990 represented the beginning of the terrorism conducted by the “East Turkistan” groups. In one incident, a group of terrorists, supported by the “East Turkistan Islamic Party”, took ten people hostage, demolished two cars at a traffic junction and killed six policemen.

Since then, terrorist activities by the “East Turkistan” groups inside China have greatly increased. Kindergartens, schools, and government agencies are often the targets of their terrorist attacks. Over the past 10 years, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region encountered more than 260 terrorist incidents, with more than 160 people killed and 440 others wounded.1 In one of the most brutal terrorist attacks on March 27, 2003, the “East Turkistan Liberation Organisation” hijacked a passenger bus,
killed all the passengers and the driver, and set the bus on fire with the bodies inside. Terrorist activities conducted by the “East Turkistan” groups seriously jeopardise the lives, property and safety of the Chinese people of various ethnic groups, and undermine political stability and economic development in the province.

It must be pointed out that there has been clear evidence showing that the “East Turkistan” terrorist groups have become part of the international terrorist forces. Osama bin Laden has schemed with the heads of the Central and West Asian terrorist organisations many times to help the “East Turkistan” terrorist forces in Xinjiang launch a “holy war”, with the aim of setting up a theocratic “Islam state” in Xinjiang. The terrorist forces led by Osama have provided much financial and material aid to the “East Turkistan” terrorists. In early 1999, Osama met with the ringleader of the “East Turkistan Islamic Movement”, asking him to “coordinate every move with the ‘Uzbekistan Islamic Liberation Movement’ and the Taliban”. In February 2001, Osama’s terrorists and Taliban leaders met at Kandahar to discuss the training of “East Turkistan” terrorists. They allocated a sum of money for training the “East Turkistan” terrorists and promised to cover the funds for their operations in 2001. Moreover, Osama’s terrorists, the Taliban and the “Uzbekistan Islamic Liberation Movement” have offered a great deal of arms and ammunition, means of transportation, and telecommunication equipment to the “East Turkistan” terrorists. Osama’s group has also directly trained personnel from the “East Turkistan” forces. After the training, some of the key “East Turkistan” members were secretly sent back to China to set up terrorist organisations in order to plan and carry out terrorist activities. Some joined the Taliban armed forces in Afghanistan, some joined the Chechen terrorists in Russia, and some took part in terrorist activities in Central Asia. In August 2000, they took part in the invasion of Uzbekistan and the mountain area of south Kyrgyzstan, attacking local government forces of the two countries.

The Chinese police have so far arrested over 100 terrorists who sneaked into Xinjiang after being trained in terrorist bases in Afghanistan and other countries. The police of other nations have also extradited to China a dozen or so “East Turkistan” terrorists that they captured.2
The terrorist activities conducted by the East Turkistan forces have not only undermined social order and normal life of China, especially in Xinjiang, but also posed a threat to regional security and stability.

**Terrorist Threats to Southeast Asia**

In recent years Southeast Asia has risen to the fore in the international campaign against terrorism. Similar to China, terrorist groups in Southeast Asia are, almost without exception, connected to religious extremism and separatism. The most notorious terrorist organisations active in Southeast Asia in recent years include Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Abu Sayyaff Group (ASG).

**Jemaah Islamiyah** (JI) was formed in Malaysia around 1993. Its political objective is to create an Islamic state across Southeast Asia to include Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, southern Thailand, and southern Philippines. It has established cells throughout Southeast Asia. It is believed that the group has become part of the regional terrorist network controlled by al-Qaeda. JI is suspected of having executed the Bali car bombing on October 12, 2002, in which suicide bombers killed 202 people and wounded many in a nightclub. JI is also suspected of carrying out the 2004 Jakarta embassy bombing and the 2005 Bali terrorist bombing.

**The Moro Islamic Liberation Front** (MILF) is an Islamic separatist movement based in Mindanao and its neighbouring islands in the Philippines. Splitting from the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in 1977, the MILF is currently the largest Islamic separatist group in the Philippines. The MILF seeks to establish an independent Islamic state comprising Mindanao, Palawan, Basilan, the Sulu archipelago, and the neighbouring islands. In support of this aim, the organisation has conducted many attacks against civilian and military targets throughout the southern Philippines. In the early 1990s the MILF launched a wave of attacks that forced former Philippines president Joseph Estrada to pursue an “all-out war” against the organisation. President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo has been trying to find a peaceful solution to the problem since coming to office. However, peace efforts have failed to put an end to terrorist activities by the MILF.³
The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in the Philippines is an extremist Islamic militant group originated in 1990 as a splinter faction of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). It rose to notoriety because of its ruthless kidnapping and beheading of hostages. Despite a large-scale government offensive backed by American forces, Abu Sayyaf retains significant capability as demonstrated by its claims of responsibility for the 26 February 2004 sinking of Superferry 14 near Manila in which 116 people were killed. Although Abu Sayyaf has been under heavy pressure, it has not stopped its brutal terrorist activities.⁴

It is extremely worrisome that strong evidence shows the tendency of linkage and collaboration among different terrorist groups in Southeast Asia. This will make situation more serious and complicated.

Serious Maritime Situation
Ross Babbage and W.S.G. Bateman wrote, “The growing important of the sea is not always fully appreciated. The sea holds a central place in nearly all economics because it carries the vast bulk of trade and communication, it provides food supplies, it supplies substantial energy resources and it promises even greater mineral wealth. Moreover, the sea is an important focus for both security and insecurity”.⁵ Recent development in East Asia, especially in Southeast Asia shows that maritime security has become one of the major security concerns in the region. US navy lieutenant, John F. Bradford opined that “The sea dominates Southeast Asia, covering roughly 80 percent of its area. The region’s islands and peninsulas, wedged between the Pacific and Indian oceans, border major arteries of communication and commerce. Thus the economic and political affairs of Southeast Asia have been dominated by the sea”.⁶ Although it is somewhat of an exaggeration to say that “the economic and political affairs of Southeast Asia have been dominated by the sea”, Bradford is correct in pointing out the importance of the sea to Southeast Asia. As a growing economy, China is also attaching greater and greater attention to the maritime situation in the Asia Pacific region, especially in Southeast Asia where increasing Chinese interests lie, both in terms of sustainable economic development and national security.
Just as in other parts of the world, the maritime situation in Southeast Asia is uncertain, and faced with some serious challenges such as territorial disputes, transnational crime, and environmental degradation etc. Because of its strategic importance, maritime security in the region has aroused serious concerns not only from countries in the region but also some external major powers.

**Territorial Disputes**

For historic, economic, political, security and other reasons, there exists a number of territorial disputes among concerned countries in Southeast Asia. These territorial disputes can be generally divided into two categories.

The first is the disputes among some ASEAN member countries over territory and maritime rights. During the Cold War, such disputes were overwhelmed by the predominant rivalry between the US and the former USSR. Beginning from late 1980s, disputes over maritime territories and rights became one of the most intractable issues affecting relations among ASEAN countries, partly due to the end of the US-USSR confrontation that had dominated international relations in Southeast Asia for nearly 40 years, and partly because of increasing demand for resources with rapid economic development in the region. Main disputes include overlapping territorial claims between Singapore and Malaysia over Batu Puteh, between Malaysia and Indonesia over Ligitanden Sipadan northeast of Kalimantan (Borneo), between Thailand and Vietnam over the continental shelf, and some other issues relating to maritime rights.\(^7\)

The second is the complicated disputes and conflicts over territorial maritime rights over the archipelagoes scattered in the South China Sea. These disputes have occasionally strained ASEAN-China relations. Consisting of more than 200 small islands and reefs, the South China Sea Islands have been part of China's territory since ancient times. Given their increasing geographical, economic and strategic significance, these small islands have become the target of a struggle between surrounding countries. Besides China, Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei have also claimed sovereignty over some of the islands. Some have even taken military actions to reinforce their
positions. Their overlapping claims and some extremist activities make the region one filled with flashpoints, undermining normal development of relationship among concerned countries.

Map 1: South China Sea---- A Test for Relationship and Wisdom

Transnational Crimes
Piracy is perhaps the most serious transnational problem in terms of maritime security in the region. Piracy in Southeast Asia has been increasingly rampant in recent years. According to “Reports on Acts of Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships”, annual report by International Maritime Organisation (IMO) issued on 5 May 2005, the number of acts of piracy and armed robbery against ships that were reported to IMO
in 2004 was 330. Among all regions in the world, the Far East (including the Malacca Straits and South China Sea) was the most affected area. The number of acts of piracy and armed robbery against ships in the Malacca Straits and South China Sea was 174, or nearly 56 per cent of the world total (see Charter 1 below).^8

The reasons for rampant piracy in Southeast Asia are complicated. Extreme poverty is usually the economic reason for people to resort to piracy. Politically speaking, piracy is one of the easiest ways to finance separatism and extremism while the unstable political situation in some countries is a good condition for piracy. Furthermore, the weak capability of most countries in countering piracy has led to poor management of maritime order in the region.

Maritime terrorism may become an increasingly serious factor in the near future. The 9/11 Commission of the US reported that, “while commercial aviation remains a possible target, terrorists may turn their attention to other modes. Opportunities to do harm are as great, or greater, in maritime and surface transportation.”^9 Hitherto, there has been relatively little evidence of maritime terrorism in the Southeast Asia. The February 2000 bombing of the Philippine ferry Our Lady Mediatrix, which killed 40 people and wounded another 50 was clearly a maritime terrorist act. The attack was blamed on the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. Some terrorist groups like Jemaah Islamiyah have demonstrated their intent to conduct large-scale maritime terrorism. Since 2000, regional security forces have

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disrupted half a dozen plots to attack American warships transiting narrow waterways or visiting ports in Southeast Asia.

Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong voiced his concern over maritime security in Southeast Asia in a speech in June 2005:

One aspect of the terrorism issue is maritime security. Every year, 50,000 ships carrying 30 per cent of the world’s trade and 50 per cent of the world’s oil pass through the Malacca Straits. At its narrowest, between Raffles Lighthouse and Batu Berhanti in the Singapore Straits, this vital corridor is only 1.2 km wide. With growing Asian demand for energy, this traffic will only rise. Disruption of this vital artery would have immediate economic and strategic repercussions far beyond Southeast Asia. The threat is real and urgent. We know that terrorists have been studying maritime targets across the region. The recent spate of violent pirate attacks in the Malacca Straits shows up our vulnerabilities only too clearly, but a terrorist attack would be a threat of an altogether different magnitude.¹⁰

Security of Sea Lane of Communication

Relating to issues of piracy and maritime terrorism is the security of sea lanes of communication. The development of economy in ASEAN countries and China has been and will continue to depend on the normal operation of sea transportation. In the past twenty years, China has achieved unprecedented economic growth. One of the most important driving forces behind this has been the rapid expansion of foreign trade. The total value of imports and exports in 2004 reached US$1154.7 billion, up 35.7 per cent over the previous year.¹¹ About 70 per cent of China’s foreign trade was realised through sea and ocean transportation. With economic development, the import of energy and raw materials has increased substantially. In 2004, China’s net crude oil import reached 117 million tons.¹² About 90 per cent of imported oil was brought in by oil tankers going through sea lanes in Southeast Asia. From all these figures, it is not difficult to draw the conclusion that the development of Chinese economy has been and will continue to be heavily relied on the security of sea lanes of communication.
Most of the ASEAN countries’ economy is also export-oriented, heavily dependent on foreign trade. The security of sea lanes of communication is vital to sustained economic development of countries in the region.

**Need for Cooperation**

All in all, ever increasing terrorist threats and the state of maritime security in Southeast Asia is becoming more serious. Successful response to terrorism and maritime security threats requires international cooperation, especially efficient cooperation among countries in the region. As Ong Keng Yong, ASEAN Secretary-General, put it, “As terrorism transcends national boundaries, no country is insulated from it. Worse, the maxim of chaos theory, which says that if a butterfly bats its wings in one part of the world, its effects can be felt in the other side of the world, appears to hold true. This is evident in the fact that criminal activities that occur in countries other than your own may now have repercussions for you. Consequently, no country can fight crime on its own.”

Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong also expressed his strong desire for closer maritime cooperation with other countries in a speech. He said, “Another problem we must worry about is the continuing threat of extremist terrorism, and particularly the issue of maritime security. …… Although the littoral states have primary responsibility for ensuring maritime security in the Straits, we need the assistance of the US, Japan and China, and indeed of all major interested parties”.

**Basis for Cooperation**

The fruitful development of relations between ASEAN countries and China has paved the way for closer bilateral cooperation in nearly all aspects.

It is true that the development of ASEAN-Sino relationship has not been smooth, especially at the very beginning. When talking about ASEAN-China relations, Ong Keng Yong once said, “ASEAN-China relations in the last decade have not always been easy. In fact, the relationship has seen its ups and downs. Before ties between ASEAN and China were formally established in 1991, they were marked by mutual suspicion, mistrust and animosity largely”. The normalisation of relations
with China in 1990 by Indonesia and then Singapore and Brunei Darussalam acted as a catalyst to set the path for China’s admission into the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1994 and eventually the granting of ASEAN dialogue partnership in 1996. Since then the partnership grew from strength to strength, resulting in the expansion and deepening of cooperation in the economic, political and security, social and cultural and development cooperation areas.

**Ever Deepening Tendency of Economic Interdependency**

Both ASEAN and China agree that the strengthening of bilateral trade and economic cooperation to be an important channel for maintaining lasting peace and security in the region.

**Regional Economic Cooperation**

ASEAN and China have been actively pursuing all forms of regional economic cooperation and striving to open new avenues and raise the profile of multi-channel, multi-format and multi-faceted regional economic cooperation, working conjointly with other East Asian countries. Following the 1997 East Asian financial crisis, the countries of the region realised the need for regional economic cooperation, and as a result, a brand new form of regional economic cooperation - the 10+3 framework - came into being. That started the process of East Asia economic cooperation. Although there seems to be little substantial cooperation within the 10+3 framework up to now, some effective cooperation has begun. For example, in the field of monetary and financial cooperation, China and ASEAN have implemented a series of concrete measures within the 10+3 framework aimed at fostering cooperation. China has actively implemented the Chiang Mai Initiatives. China has concluded bilateral money-swap agreements with both Thailand and Malaysia.

**Bilateral Economic Relations**

At the end of 2001, China and ASEAN agreed to establish a free-trade area within a decade. Then on November 4, 2002, China and ASEAN signed the *Framework Agreement on China-ASEAN Comprehensive Economic Cooperation*. This marked
the official launch of a process that will lead to the establishment of an ASEAN-China free-trade area by 2010. In recent years, the scale of ASEAN-China trade and economic cooperation has been growing, its level improving, thus ushering in a prime era of development. From 2002 to 2004, the ASEAN-China bilateral trade increased at an annual rate of 38.9 per cent. In 2004, bilateral trade registered at US$105.9 billion. Since the launching of the ASEAN-China FTA in 2002, bilateral trade increased by US$50 billion within just two years. In the first half of 2005, the bilateral trade reached US$59.76 billion, increasing by 25 per cent. ASEAN is now China’s 4th largest trading partner. During his visit to the Southeast Asia in April 2005, Chinese President Hu Jintao pointed out that by 2010 trade between China and ASEAN should reach US$200 billion. In the field of investment, ASEAN has been an important source of FDI for China. In 2003, contractual FDI flows into China amounted to US$6.5 billion and the actual paid-up capital was US$ 2.9 billion. By the end of 2003, accumulated contractual FDI from ASEAN was US$64.3 billion and the actual paid-up capital was US$32.3 billion. The amount of direct investment from China to ASEAN has been low but is growing rapidly. The latest figures revealed that Chinese investments to ASEAN grew by 20 per cent to US$226 million in 2004, bringing China’s cumulative investment in ASEAN from 1995 to 2004 to about US$1 billion. These encouraging figures show the strong momentum of economic interdependency between China and ASEAN countries.

ASEAN-China cooperation has also been expanded to other fields such as agriculture, human resource development, science and technology, and transportation etc. At the 10+1 summit meeting in 2001, Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji and ASEAN leaders together identified the key areas for bilateral cooperation for the early years of new century. Cooperation in these fields has already been strengthened. In the field of human resource development, China contributed financial support to the China-ASEAN Cooperation Fund and proposed 14 cooperative projects. Most of these projects have already been implemented and the results have been encouraging. In the field of science and technology, an ASEAN-China Joint Committee on Science and Technology was established. In the field of transportation, at the 5th in the series of 10+1 summit meetings in 2001, Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji proposed the
establishment of a mechanism for the meeting of transport ministers to further strengthen communication and coordination. In September 2002 the first ASEAN-China Transport Ministers’ Meeting was held in Jakarta. Agreement was reached to strengthen all-round cooperation in issues relating to transport by land, water and air.

**Political Cooperation**

Political trust between China and its ASEAN partners has reached a new high in recent years. China appreciates the positive role of ASEAN in the region while ASEAN sees peaceful development of China as an opportunity. Both sides have made efforts in enhancing cooperation in regional affairs. As a clear example of this, China has been firmly supporting ASEAN’s vital role in the process of multilateral security cooperation in the Asia Pacific, as seen in consistent Chinese support of ASEAN’s leading role in ASEAN Regional Forum since its foundation.

ASEAN and China have concluded a number of agreements ensuring the peace and security of the region, as well as creating a better international environment favourable to economic development. On November 4, 2002 after three years of consultation, ASEAN and China signed the *Declaration on the Conduct (DOC) of Parties in the South China Sea*, which signalled the mutual desire to promote trust and confidence to establish a regional code of conduct. The document was aimed at reassuring the world that the South China Sea would become a sea of friendship and harmony rather than a potential flashpoint for war, and that China and ASEAN would be able to solve disputes peacefully through dialogue.

The signing of the *Joint Declaration on the Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity* in Bali in October 2003 was a very important milestone in ASEAN-Sino relations. This formal document elevated the ASEAN-China relations to a new height. The two sides had worked out a 5-year plan of action to implement the Declaration. The significance of the document will be far-reaching. It symbolised a new stage in ASEAN-China relations. Ong Keng Yong, ASEAN Secretary-General, expressed his views on the importance of Sino-ASEAN partnership, at the ASEAN-China Forum 2004, Singapore, 23 June 2004. He said:
Why does ASEAN and China need to develop a strategic partnership? I cannot speak for China. For ASEAN, we see ASEAN and China as part of a contiguous geographical landscape in East Asia. China shares common borders with ASEAN and has historical and cultural linkages with many ASEAN countries. Both face similar challenges and opportunities and share aspirations, as developing countries, to achieve economic prosperity and higher living standards for their people. At the same time, they want to tackle the emerging transnational issues, which may have an adverse impact on their economy and society. Putting it another way, ASEAN and China must co-exist and share the responsibility of making our region a better place and be better global citizens.19

In the same year, China became the first Dialogue Partner to accede to ASEAN’s Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in Southeast Asia. By acceding to the TAC, China provided further reassurance to the peace and security of the region and for the treaty to become eventually a code for inter-state relations in the region. China has also shown its interest in signing the Protocol to the Treaty on Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (SEANWFZ). It is another example of Chinese commitment to the peace and stability of the Southeast Asia. These are reflection of ever improving political relations between the two sides.

**Cooperation in Non-traditional Security**

It is widely accepted that the concept of security has, in its connotation, expanded from its roots in military affairs and politics to embrace such diverse fields as economics, science and technology, the environment and culture. Today many countries face pressing problems relating to non-traditional security issues such as terrorism, drug trafficking, smuggling, illegal immigration, piracy and pandemic diseases. These problems are often beyond both national and regional boundaries, making it almost impossible for any single country to tackle them independently. The US-led campaign against terror is a very good example. Multilateral cooperation is the necessary way out.
Much progress has been made in areas of non-traditional security cooperation between China and ASEAN. At “10+3” summit meeting in 2001, Chinese premier Zhu Rongji proposed that, while maintaining economic cooperation as its core area, 10+3 cooperation should gradually expand to the fields of political and security cooperation, taking non-traditional security issues as its starting point. In 2002, the 6th ASEAN-China summit saw the issuance of a joint declaration on cooperation in non-traditional security issues. In the document, leaders of ASEAN countries and China expressed their deep concerns “over the increasingly serious nature of non-traditional security issues such as trafficking in illegal drugs, people-smuggling including trafficking in women and children, sea piracy, terrorism, arms-smuggling, money-laundering, international economic crime and cyber crime, which have become important factors of uncertainty affecting regional and international security and are posing new challenges to regional and international peace and stability”, and vowed to further strengthen and deepen cooperation in the field of non-traditional security issues. The document set out the priorities and identified areas for cooperation.

Since then, annual activities have been implemented. So far, 16 workshops, seminars and training courses related to combating crimes have been convened, and some more are underway. ASEAN and China signed an MOU on Cooperation in the Field of Non-traditional Security Issues in January 2004 in Bangkok to implement the Joint Declaration in the Field of Non-Traditional Security Issues. Under the MOU, a 2004 Work Plan with many project activities was developed. These successfully implemented and a new Annual Plan was made out for 2005.

It is worthwhile to note that substantial maritime cooperation is now on the agenda. On 11 November 2004, ASEAN, in cooperation with the Plus Three countries (China, Japan and ROK) and Indian Ocean countries (India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh) adopted the Regional Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia. Under this agreement, an Information Sharing Centre would be set up in Singapore. And as a follow-up to the Declaration on the Conduct (DOC) of Parties in the South China Sea, ASEAN and China convened a senior officials’ meeting in Kuala Lumpur in December 2004. During the meeting, all parties
agreed that confidence-building activities in the South China Sea would “create a conducive environment for peaceful settlement of the overlapping sovereignty claims over disputed areas in the South China Sea among Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam on the ASEAN side, and China”. It may be seen as a start in maritime cooperation.

ASEAN countries and China all wish to create an increasingly peaceful and favourable international environment in which to pursue their economic development. Because of that, they have made joint efforts in cooperation in nearly all aspects of their relationship. This will serve as the basis for further development in the future.

Prospect for Future Cooperation: Achievements
Both ASEAN and China have made some significant progress in the fight against terrorism and preservation of maritime security, especially in recent years.

Fight Against Terrorism
ASEAN’s efforts in combating terrorism began long before 9/11. It was in 1997 when the ASEAN Ministers of Interior and Home Affairs decided to meet for the first time. The meeting issued the ASEAN Declaration on Transnational Crime and created the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC), which has been mandated to coordinate with other ASEAN bodies in the investigations, prosecution and rehabilitation of perpetrators of transnational crimes, including international terrorism. In November 2004, ASEAN countries concluded a Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters that would serve to enhance mutual legal and administrative assistance among ASEAN member countries. ASEAN member countries have established several regional centres dedicated to countering terrorism, such as Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement Cooperation (JCLEC) in Indonesia, Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT) in Malaysia, and International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in Thailand. These centres have conducted a number of activities relating to the transfer of technology and information on counter-terrorism. Moreover, ASEAN has been expanding cooperation with non-ASEAN countries. It has signed joint declarations in the fight against international
terrorism separately with New Zealand, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea, Australia, China, the European Union, India, Japan, Russia, and the United States.

China’s fight against terrorism has also produced some expected success. In this regard, China has always attached great importance to international cooperation. Under the framework of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) established in 2001, joint efforts have been made among China, Russia and some Central Asia Countries. The SCO was among the first international organisations to advocate explicitly the fight against the three evil forces (terrorism, separatism, and extremism). On 15 June 2001, the day when the SCO was founded, the Shanghai Convention Against Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism was signed, clearly defining terrorism, separatism, and extremism for the first time in the international arena. It outlined specific directions, modalities and principles of the concerted fight against the three evil forces, thus helping to lay a solid legal foundation for SCO security cooperation. At the June 2002 St. Petersburg Summit, the Agreement of the SCO Member States on Counter-Terrorism Regional Structure was signed. China and Kyrgyzstan conducted a bilateral joint anti-terrorism military exercise within the SCO framework in October 2002, and the SCO member states held a successful multilateral joint anti-terrorism military manoeuvre in August 2003. China also joined hands with the US, EU, ASEAN and others to counter international terrorism. Major forms of cooperation include information sharing, law enforcement support, and joint exercises etc. With joint efforts, terrorist activities inside China have been greatly reduced since 2001.

**Maritime Security Cooperation**

Maritime security has been high on the agenda for both ASEAN countries and China in the past decade. Regional cooperation has been gradually enhanced.

Generally speaking, maritime security cooperation among ASEAN countries is now developing at a faster pace in the new century than during the Cold War era. Countries in Southeast Asia have demonstrated greater desire for and commitment to expanding maritime confidence-building measures and operational cooperation. The emphasis of cooperation has been on containing transnational threats such as
terrorism and piracy. As a suitable vehicle in promoting regional security cooperation, ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) has made great efforts in the area of maritime security cooperation. In June 2003, ARF issued “Statement on Cooperation against Piracy and Other Threats to Maritime Security” and the “Work Program to Implement the ASEAN Plan of Action to Combat Transnational Crime”. The latter was endorsed by the January 2004 ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime.

Functional cooperation has also been under way. In September 2003 Thailand and Malaysia concerned about insurgents and terrorists, announced that they had invigorated cooperative maritime patrols in the northern Strait of Malacca. In June 2004, a meeting of FDPA defence ministers in Penang, Malaysia, decided to orient their organisation for the first time toward non-traditional maritime security, focusing on anti-terrorism, maritime interception, and anti-piracy. In July 2004, Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia began a programme of trilateral coordinated patrols throughout the Straits of Malacca. In November 2004, 16 countries (the ASEAN members plus China, South Korea, Japan, Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka) concluded the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia. The agreement will promote maritime cooperation on a regional level. Its significance will be far-reaching.

China has shown more and more interest in maritime security cooperation with other countries. It has maintained maritime security dialogue with the US since late 1990s. Among others, ASEAN has been seen as one of the most important maritime security cooperation partners by China. Aside from being involved in some of the abovementioned cooperation, China has also made some progress with some ASEAN countries. On December 26, 2000, the foreign ministers of Vietnam and China signed in Beijing a boundary accord on the demarcation of the Beibu Gulf. The accord went into force in June 2004. It means that China and Vietnam have finally resolved a long-standing issue that had long plagued bilateral ties and had caused tension. China has been discussing practical cooperation in the South China Sea with ASEAN member countries in recent years and working to turn the South China Sea into a friendly and cooperative bridge. On March 14, 2005, the national oil companies
of China, the Philippines, and Vietnam signed a tripartite agreement for a joint marine survey in certain areas of the South China Sea. This further indicates that China and other Southeast Asian nations have been seeking practical ways in solving disputes through consultation and dialogue. Cooperation in other field has also produced substantial achievements. In October 2004, the Chinese maritime and other concerned agencies and the Philippine Coast Guard held in Manila the first-ever joint search and rescue (SAR) table exercise. The bilateral meet dubbed “China - Philippines Cooperation 2004” table top exercises was aimed at further strengthening cooperation between the Maritime Safety Administration (MSA) of China and the Philippine Coast Guard and fostering harmonious relationship between the two countries.

**Obstacles**

As all parties concerned may agree, it is necessary for ASEAN countries and China to join hands in the fight against terrorism and the maintenance of maritime security. However, the following obstacles may have negative impact on future cooperation.

**Political Trust**

Confidence-building among nations is always a long process that cannot be completed overnight. Through joint efforts by both ASEAN countries and China, bilateral partnership has been gradually strengthened and mutual trust greatly enhanced. Nevertheless, that does not necessarily mean the lasting problem of political trust has been solved for good. Mr S Pushpanathan, Head of External relations and ASEAN Plus Three Relations at the ASEAN Secretariat, noted:

> ASEAN and China has turned the corner in the last decade to establish a more fruitful partnership. However, new challenges and problems could emerge in the region that will test the strength of the partnership. ASEAN and China will have to take them in their stride as they forge a strategic partnership to benefit the present and future generations in the region.22

There has always been one question in the minds of ASEAN leaders: What are the implications of the ever-increasing power of China for ASEAN countries? It is
quite natural for ASEAN countries to contemplate this simply because the nature of contemporary international relations has been characterised by power politics.

Chinese government seems to have fully understood the existence of distrust or suspicion among ASEAN countries for various reasons. So efforts have been made by China to alleviate such distrust and suspicion. To that end, China has taken some concrete actions. To name some, annual dialogue between ASEAN and China was established for the exchange of views over a wide range of issues concerning regional security and bilateral relations. In 2003, China became the first Dialogue Partner to accede to ASEAN’s Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in Southeast Asia. China has shown its willingness to sign the Protocol to the Treaty on Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (SEANWFZ). These efforts are reflection of Chinese sincerity in promoting political trust with ASEAN countries.

However, the apprehension of some ASEAN countries over China is deep-rooted and will continue to exist. So, there is still a lot to be done for both ASEAN and China in order to build a brand new relationship based on mutual trust and confidence. As a Philippines scholar put it, “Both ASEAN and China must therefore exert greater efforts to expand mutual trust, promote mutual understanding of their convergent as well as divergent interests, and most importantly begin defining the norms which will guide their political-security as well as economic relations in the next century and in the next millennium, when China may have become the comprehensive power that it seeks to be”.23

**Territorial Disputes**

As elaborated above, territorial disputes in the South China Sea are extremely complicated. The issue involves not only geostrategic, economic and security interests, but also national sentiments of relevant countries.

To prevent conflict, the countries encompassing the South China Sea have been looking for ways to solve this problem in the interest of all parties. For example, they have hitherto convened several rounds of official or quasi-official multilateral forums to exchange views on this issue. The greatest achievement ever made is the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, issued in 2002. In the
declaration, the parties concerned “undertake to resolve their territorial and
jurisdictional disputes by peaceful means, without resorting to the threat or use of
force, through friendly consultations and negotiations by sovereign states directly
concerned, in accordance with universally recognised principles of international law,
including the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea”, and agreed “to intensify
efforts to seek ways, in the spirit of cooperation and understanding, to build trust and
confidence between and among them”. They agreed to take substantial measures such
as holding dialogues to exchange views between defence and military officials;
ensuring just and humane treatment of all persons who are either in danger or in
distress; notifying other parties concerned of any impending joint/combined military
exercise; and exchanging relevant information.24

Since then, the situation in the South China Sea has been basically stable. However, some parties have not always followed the rules of game dictated in the
declaration and have sometimes tried to adopt unilateral actions. Indeed, there have
been some frictions. For example, in April 2004, Vietnam organised tourist activities
to the Nansha islands. Such activities inevitably aroused concern and dissatisfaction
from other parties. Although these minor frictions have not led to sharp confrontation
or conflict, nobody can be sure that future frictions will continue to be well controlled.

In a word, territorial disputes over the South China Sea will remain a
barometer of the quality of ASEAN-China partnership, and pose a major obstacle to
future cooperation, especially maritime cooperation. ASEAN and China have got to
find some way out.

**Difficulties in Achieving a Coordinated ASEAN Position**

China is a single nation where a political decision is relatively easier make while it is
quite a different story with ASEAN. ASEAN is a regional organisation composed of
ten very different nations. The solidarity among ASEAN countries has been greatly
consolidated through joint efforts and the process of ASEAN integration has produced
abundant and fruitful results. Nonetheless, differences still exist due to different or
sometimes conflicting national interests, just like any other regional organisation.
Among others, different perceptions of the role of China will be a significant factor
that may slow down the pace of bilateral cooperation. Although nearly all ASEAN countries agree that enhanced cooperation with China in areas of anti-terrorism and maritime security will be beneficiary and conducive to their respective national interests, they do have different attitudes. Some countries harbour deeper suspicion over China and are thus somewhat reluctant to move too fast while some others see China as a reliable friend and are more active in further fostering relationship with China. With such differences, it is natural to see different attitudes towards cooperation with China. So, effective coordination among ASEAN countries will be difficult but very critical to future cooperation with China.

**External Factors**

The relations between the US, Japan and China have always been an important factor that, in turn, influences ASEAN-China relations. Closer ASEAN-China cooperation may be read by the US and Japan as attempts by China to expand its influence and weaken their position in the Southeast Asia. It may prove difficult for ASEAN to balance its relations with the US, Japan and China.

**Reflections**

In fostering bilateral relations, ASEAN countries and China all advocate the principles of mutual respect, mutual trust, mutual benefit, and equality. These principles must continue to be observed in future cooperation. In view of past experiences of cooperation and existing obstacles between ASEAN and China, it is also important to consider the following points in the course of anti-terrorism and maritime security cooperation:

**Confidence-Building**

Successful confidence-building is crucial for the enhancement of security cooperation between ASEAN countries and China. It is good to see that there are now various bilateral or multilateral channels of dialogue and exchange, contributing a great deal to the promotion of confidence between ASEAN countries and China. However, this does not mean that the process of confidence-building has been completed. It is
desirable for the process of confidence-building to deepen. For example, as an important part of dialogue, military-to-military relationship has yet to be strengthened.

**Evolutionary and Realistic Approaches**
The hitherto successful process of ASEAN integration may be good for ASEAN-China cooperation. To a certain degree, the success of ASEAN integration may be attributed to the evolutionary and realistic approaches adopted by ASEAN member countries in the past. “Evolutionary” means the pace of cooperation or integration should be properly tuned to the comfort of all member countries. Consensus is the precondition for any step forward. “Realistic” means having a clear idea about what can be done at the present stage of integration, what can be done in the near future or in the long run, and what cannot be done under any circumstances. Evolutionary and realistic approaches have helped ASEAN bypass various difficulties and make gradual but concrete progress. In view of the aforementioned obstacles, ASEAN-Sino cooperation in areas of anti-terrorism and maritime security will inevitably encounter some difficulties. In order to prevent partial differences from obstructing overall cooperation, future ASEAN-China cooperation may do well to adopt ‘evolutionary’ and ‘realistic’ approaches. It may start from relatively easy and less sensitive areas, such as sharing of experiences of countering terrorism and maritime crimes, establishment of coordination mechanism in areas of anti-terrorism and maritime security, information and intelligence sharing in transnational crime, cooperation in maritime search and rescue, maritime environment protection, law enforcement cooperation against transnational crimes, cooperation among defence education institutions, and joint efforts in peace-keeping in the region.

**Openness Rather than Exclusiveness**
The transnational or transregional nature of terrorism and maritime security dictates that successful cooperation in these areas rely, to a fairly large extent, on whether it can gather as much regional or global support as possible. Terrorism that undermines social stability of both ASEAN countries and China is just a part of the global issue of international terrorism. And in view of its close relations with international terrorist
organisations, terrorism will be better dealt with in an international context. By the same token, maritime security in the Southeast Asia will be better viewed and maintained in the broader context of maritime security in the Asia Pacific region or even in the world. Joint efforts by ASEAN countries and China can be more effectively carried out in close coordination with other parties. Therefore, future cooperation between ASEAN and China should be open rather than exclusive so as to invite active participation of other concerned parties.

**Bilateral and Multilateral Cooperation**

Hereby, “bilateral” refers to state-to-state cooperation between China and individual ASEAN member countries while “multilateral” refers to cooperation between China and ASEAN countries as a whole. For reasons mentioned above, it is sometimes difficult for ASEAN to come out with a coordinated position on specific issues including anti-terrorism and maritime security. Because of that, bilateral cooperation is usually much easier to attain. It is very important to strike a proper balance between bilateral and multilateral cooperation. Bilateral cooperation may serve as an interim stage for, or be complementary to, multilateral cooperation rather than weaken or undercut the latter. Also important, bilateral cooperation must take into account the interests of other parties. Otherwise, it may give rise to suspicions and consequently retard the process of multilateral cooperation. Moreover, ASEAN-China cooperation can also parallel other ongoing frameworks, such as “Ten plus Three”, ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the UN.

**Conclusion**

ASEAN and China have established a Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity. More needs to be done to enhance the quality of this partnership, and many new challenges and problems will emerge to test the resolve of this partnership. Among others, joint efforts in anti-terrorism and maritime security will further enhance the ASEAN-China relationship.
NOTES


4 http://cfrrterrorism.org/groups/abusayyaf.html.


17 “Securing a Win-Win Partnership for ASEAN and China”, Keynote Address by Ong Keng Yong, Secretary-General, Association of Southeast Asian

18 “Welcome Remarks” by HE Ong Keng Yong, Secretary General of ASEAN, at the 2nd China-ASEAN Business and Investment, Nanning, China, 19 October 2005, http://www.aseansec.org/17830.htm


**WTO Issues**


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