

ASEAN's Role in Regional Natural Disaster Response

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Introduction

Southeast Asia is the most natural disaster prone region in the world. Rapid urbanization and drastic environmental changes have increased the exposure and vulnerability of major populations to natural hazards throughout the region. Because of this, regional cooperation towards addressing the rising frequency of natural disasters is of vital interest to ASEAN. The purpose of this analysis is to explore ASEAN efforts to improve its regional disaster response capability. This analysis will consider limitations of the *ASEAN Way*, and offer future developmental options. Whereas the international disaster response doctrine calls for the use of military assets as a last resort when responding to a large-scale natural disaster, ASEAN and the countries of Southeast Asia often rely heavily on military assets. With this in mind, this research project will limit its scope to military capacity building initiatives, while acknowledging parallel and cooperative non-military capacity building efforts that are also taking place.

First, the historical background of ASEAN's disaster response capability and its evolution will be discussed. Next, the role of capacity building from extra-regional military involvement will be explained, primarily using the United States as the example of extra-regional actor. Subsequently, the current status and obstacles for the unified disaster response proposed in *One ASEAN, One Response* will be addressed. Finally, future roles of ASEAN in disaster response will be offered for consideration.

Slow, incremental progress to reduce the devastation caused by natural disasters occurred prior to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and 2008 Cyclone Nargis. However, these tragic disasters served as an impetus for ASEAN to develop regional solutions to one of its most concerning regional problems.¹ Since then, a unified regional framework covering all aspects of disaster management was adopted in 2009 as the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER). The ASEAN Coordinating Centre for

¹ Lilianne Fan and Hanna Krebs, *Regional Organisations and Humanitarian Action: The Case of ASEAN*, (Working Paper, Humanitarian Policy Group, London, 2014).

Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management, or AHA Centre, was established in 2011 to oversee the implementation of AADMER.

In addition to receiving significant attention from IGOs and NGOs in building regional capacity and resilience towards natural hazards, disaster response capacity building initiatives has been a heavily targeted interest area of extra-regional militaries. Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response (HADR) is viewed by most as an “everybody wins” investment. ASEAN and its member states can further develop their regional capacity to both withstand and respond to regional natural disasters, while at the same time, foreign militaries can continue strengthening regional partnerships through active engagement, military exercises, and targeted investments. Because of this, increased focus has been placed on HADR in various regional diplomatic mechanisms such as the East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting (ADMM), ADMM+, and Senior Officials Meeting (SOM). Furthermore, the number of bilateral engagements concerning HADR has increased significantly over the past decade.

History of ASEAN’s Disaster Response Capability

The first notable attempt of ASEAN to identify disaster management and humanitarian assistance as a regional issue was the 1976 Declaration on Mutual Assistance on Natural Disasters. Intra-ASEAN cooperation included four elements for desired development: (1) improving disaster-warning communication; (2) expert exchanges in the areas of disaster management; (3) increased information exchange; and (4) identifying emergency relief logistical distribution chains.² This initial effort had good intentions, but the subsequently formed working groups had little influence at the national level to implement their ideas.

The end of the Cold War, the expansion of ASEAN to its full complement of 10

² Center for Excellent in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance (CFE-DMHA), *ASEAN Disaster Management Handbook*, (CFE-DMHA, Hawaii, 2015), 54.

member states, and the financial crisis of 1997 significantly changed the way security in the region was viewed. Non-traditional security threats such as financial crises, natural disasters, and environmental hazards started to gain more attention at the ASEAN regional level.³ The Hanoi Plan of Action in 1998 included ASEAN guidelines for cooperation between ASEAN member states and dialogue partners of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in order to strengthen interoperability between military and civilian relief operations. It also established shared fora to promote cooperation, bringing together multiple international and regional entities, including the UN system, East Asia Summit (EAS), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), and Asia-Pacific Conference on Military Assistance to Disaster Relief Operations (APC-MADRO)⁴

The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami affected several countries in Southeast and South Asia resulting in over 200,000 fatalities. Cyclone Nargis subsequently devastated Myanmar in 2008. The region has experienced two of the world's deadliest mega-disasters in the last decade.⁵ According to the International Disaster Database, Southeast Asia accounted for over 31 percent of all global fatalities resulting from disasters from 2003-2013. Losses related to natural disasters cost the ASEAN region, on average, more than US \$4.4 billion annually.⁶ These statistics reflect how important it is to create mechanisms for dealing with natural disasters in Southeast Asia. The 2004 tsunami served as an impetus for action, but tangible results were not produced overnight. ASEAN member states rushed to draft the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER), but took a considerably longer amount of time to adopt this agreement. The chart below depicts major events and guidance development in the field of disaster management and humanitarian

³ Andrew Tan, *East and South-East Asia: International Relations and Security Perspectives*, (Routledge Press, 2015) 231.

⁴ Center for Excellent in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance (CFE-DMHA), *ASEAN Disaster Management Handbook*, (CFE-DMHA, Hawaii, 2015), 54.

⁵ Daniel Petz, *Strengthening Regional and National Capacity for Disaster Risk Management: The Case of ASEAN*, Brookings-LSE Project on Internal Displacement (Brookings Institution, Washington D.C., 2014), 12.

⁶ World Bank, GFDRR, ASEAN, and UNISDR, *Advancing Disaster Risk Financing and Insurance in ASEAN Countries*, April 2012, http://www.gfdr.org/sites/gfdr.org/files/publication/DRFI_ASEAN_REPORT_June12.pdf.

assistance. Although many people tout the 2004 tsunami as a major turning point, there was not a lot of tangible progress until after Cyclone Nargis in 2008.

Chronology of Relevant Disaster Response/Humanitarian Assistance Guidance	
YEAR	TITLE
1976	Bali Concord I (BCI)
1976	ASEAN Declaration on Mutual Assistance on Natural Disasters
1976	Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC)
1998	Hanoi Plan of Action (HPA)
2003	Declaration of ASEAN Concord II (Bali Concord II or BCII)
2004	Vientiane Action Program (VAP)
2007	ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint
2007	Guidelines on the Use of Foreign Military and Civil Defence Assets (MCDA) in Disaster Relief – “Oslo Guidelines”
2009	ASEAN Agreement of Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER)
2009	Standard Operating Procedure for Regional Standby Arrangements and Coordination of Joint Disaster Relief and Emergency Response Operations (SASOP)
2009	ASEAN Regional Forum(ARF) Work Plan for Disaster Relief
2009	Cha-am Hua Hin Declaration on the Roadmap for an ASEAN Community
2009	Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) Strategic Framework and IAI Work Plan 2
2009	ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint
2009	ASEAN Social-Cultural Community Blueprint
2010	Bandar Seri Begawan (Brunei) Plan of Action to Strengthen the ASEAN-EU Enhanced Partnership
2010	ASEAN-United Nations Strategic Plan for Cooperation on Disaster Management
2011	Bali Declaration on ASEAN Community in a Global Community of Nations, Bali Concord III (BCIII)
2011	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation Agreement on Rapid Response for Natural Disasters
2012	Joint Statement of the 4th ASEAN-US Leaders Meeting
2013	Disaster Response in Asia and the Pacific: A Guide to International Tools and Services
2014	Asia-Pacific Regional Guidelines for the Use of Foreign Military Assets (FMA) in Natural Disaster Response Operations

Figure 1. Relevant Guidance for ASEAN and HADR Capacity Development⁷

Before the AADMER framework fully entered into force in 2009, ASEAN faced a major test in 2008 when Cyclone Nargis devastated Myanmar. This disaster resulted in at least 130,000 casualties.⁸ Mass confusion, combined with the military junta’s wariness to grant access to the United Nations and other seasoned disaster responders provided ASEAN an opportunity to play an instrumental role in the relief operation. This is an example where ASEAN’s preferred method of track-two diplomacy and unofficial networking paid huge dividends. Amidst the chaos and confusion, ASEAN took the lead in breaking down the communication and trust barriers that were preventing the flow of aid and international relief

⁷ Center for Excellent in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance (CFE-DMHA), *ASEAN Disaster Management Handbook*, (CFE-DMHA, Hawaii, 2015), 54.

⁸ Daniel Petz, *Strengthening Regional and National Capacity for Disaster Risk Management: The Case of ASEAN*, Brookings-LSE Project on Internal Displacement (Brookings Institution, Washington D.C., 2014), 12.

workers into the country.⁹ ASEAN's regional response was in line with the spirit and purposes of the AADMER, even though the 2005 agreement had not yet entered into force.¹⁰ The 2004 tsunami highlighted the need for a deeper regional cooperation with respect to HADR, but following Cyclone Nargis, ASEAN began experiencing evident results from its disaster response efforts.

On December 24, 2009, the AADMER was finally ratified by all ASEAN member states and became the cornerstone of a progressive framework to develop regional cooperation in disaster risk reduction (DRR), preparedness, response and recovery.¹¹ The AADMER is an ambitiously comprehensive, yet flexible, document that promotes individual member states to take the lead in developing their own HADR capacity. It aims to combine these individual efforts to enhance regional resilience and natural disaster response capability. Against the international humanitarian community's preference to utilize military assets as a last resort, Article 9 of the AADMER encourages both the use of military and civilian assets and personnel. This endorsement for using member state militaries during a disaster response is a pragmatic acceptance of the military's role in Southeast Asia. Additionally, articles 17, 18, and 19 promote the use of bilateral, regional, and international cooperation to increase regional capacity.¹²

HADR capacity building is considered a win/win subject for all participants. The ASEAN recipient nations are able to take advantage of extra-regional funding and expertise, allowing a more rapid development of HADR capability. At the same time, extra-regional states and organizations can fulfill their strategic foreign policy objectives through active engagement with both ASEAN and its individual member states. Although this is an area where everyone wins, the national interests between extra-regional countries do not always

⁹ ASEAN, *A Humanitarian Call, The ASEAN Response to Cyclone Nargis*, Report (ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta, 2010), 14.

¹⁰ The Tripartite Core Group, *Post-Nargis Joint Assessment, After-Action Analysis*, (July 2008), 46.

¹¹ ASEAN, *A Humanitarian Call, The ASEAN Response to Cyclone Nargis*, Report (ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta, 2010), 17.

¹² ASEAN Secretariat, *ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response*, (July 2006), 14-16.

perfectly align with the most efficient ways to develop HADR capability in Southeast Asia. This responsibility falls on ASEAN or the individual member state to balance its HADR interests with the strategic interests of donor nations.

As per the AADMER, the ASEAN Coordinating Center for Humanitarian Assistance (AHA Centre) was established and became operational in 2011. The AHA Centre serves as the central hub for ASEAN's implementation of the AADMER. However, with a staff of 17 people and a budget of \$5.8 million (of which only \$300,000 is provided by ASEAN member states)¹³ the ambitious goals outlined in the AADMER present a colossal task. The AHA Centre was developed to be the driving operational force behind AADMER's implementation. However, it has been forced to take a more narrow view due to its limited resources, prioritizing disaster monitoring and information management.¹⁴

In summary, ASEAN's disaster management and humanitarian assistance capability evolved from its initial concept in 1976 to its current form with AADMER and the AHA Centre. The 2004 tsunami and 2008 Cyclone Nargis were catalysts for a rapid change in ASEAN's approach to HADR. But, while ASEAN member states have agreed to the principles of AADMER, they have yet to fully commit the resources required to transform this vision into a reality.

Role of Capacity Building from Extra-Regional Military Involvement and Non-ASEAN entities

Despite an underlying wariness of foreign militaries using HADR as a guise for ulterior motives and external interference, the number of HADR capacity building collaborative efforts between ASEAN, its individual member states, and extra-regional actors

¹³ This amount of \$5.8 million is based on a 2013 AHA Centre budget, and can be found in a report by Daniel Petz, *Strengthening Regional and National Capacity for Disaster Risk Management: The Case of ASEAN*, Brookings-LSE Project on Internal Displacement (Brookings Institution, Washington D.C., 2014), 13.

¹⁴ Center for Excellent in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance (CFE-DMHA), *ASEAN Disaster Management Handbook*, (CFE-DMHA, Hawaii, 2015), 27.

have exponentially increased over the past several years. Based on ASEAN centrality, the below graph shows a simplified model of some of the HADR capacity building efforts taking place within ASEAN.

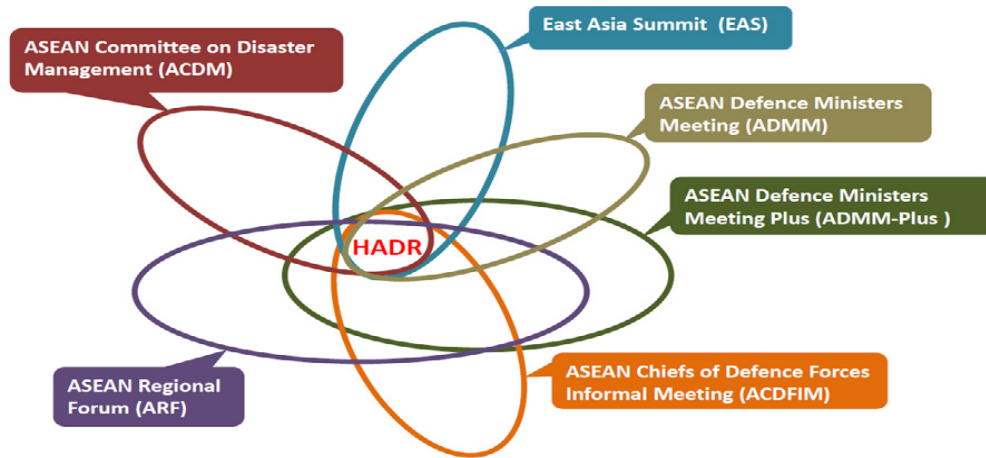


Figure 2 Key Groups in Regional Disaster Management¹⁵

The above chart depicts the various diplomatic forums by which regional partners are engaging with ASEAN in the area of HADR. In 2013, ASEAN leaders declared they “encourage a joint effort and more integrated coordination and synergy in disaster management among the various ASEAN-related mechanisms, wherever possible, in particular the AMMDM, ADMM, ADMM-Plus, ARF, and EAS.”¹⁶ As a result, the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Disaster Management (AMMDM) was created in 2013 to maintain attention on HADR at the highest levels of ASEAN. The goal of creating this ministerial level meeting was to prevent other forums from overshadowing the AADMER and AHA Centre’s objectives.

Two of the diplomatic forums worthy of more discussion are the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the ASEAN Defense Minister’s Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus). The ARF created its own non-binding strategic guidance for HADR, however it specifically deals with

¹⁵ Center for Excellent in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance (CFE-DMHA), *ASEAN Disaster Management Handbook*, (CFE-DMHA, Hawaii, 2015), 22.

¹⁶ ASEAN Heads of State, *ASEAN Declaration on Enhancing Cooperation in Disaster Management*, (ASEAN Secretariat, October 2013), http://www.asean.org/images/archive/23rdASEANSummit/4.%20asean%20declaration%20on%20enhancing%20cooperation%20in%20disaster%20management_final.pdf

the coordination of a relief effort immediately following a natural disaster. The ARF's focus on security issues makes civil-military coordination a good fit, and the ARF Inter-Sessional Meeting on Disaster Relief (ISM on DR) is the ARF's annual venue for discussing disaster relief related topics.¹⁷ ARF also organizes the ARF DiREx, a large multilateral HADR focused exercise, consisting of the militaries of ASEAN member states, many of the 17 ARF dialogue partners, and various IGOs and NGOs including the United Nations, World Food Program, World Health Organization, and the International Foundation of the Red Cross. This biannual exercise has proven to be a great venue to share best practices and improve coordination of disaster relief efforts.

An additional ASEAN-centric forum to note is the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus). This military-centric forum has two expert working groups making significant progress in the HADR field: the Expert Working Group on HADR and the Expert Working Group on Military Medicine. These working groups pair an ASEAN member state with a regional partner that possesses a robust HADR capability. For example, Laos and Japan are currently paired as the head of the HADR working group. This venue provides an excellent opportunity for confidence building and sharing best practices.

The above examples are only a couple of countless initiatives utilizing the ASEAN centrality framework. There are so many initiatives by various regional forums that ASEAN created a Joint Task Force for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response to keep track of them all and promote synergy. The ASEAN Committee of Disaster Management (ACDM) oversees the AHA Centre and was named the head of this newly created Joint Task Force. Participants of the Joint Task Force meetings include representatives from the ACDM, the AMMDM, the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting (ADMM), the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the East Asia Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM), the ASEAN Defense Senior Officials' Meeting (ADSOM), the ASEAN Senior Officials' Meeting on Health

¹⁷ Center for Excellent in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance (CFE-DMHA), *ASEAN Disaster Management Handbook*, (CFE-DMHA, Hawaii, 2015), 37.

Development (SOMHD), and the Senior Officials' Meeting on Social Welfare and Development (SOMSWD).¹⁸

To further complicate the spider web of HADR capacity building events, there are many initiatives that take place in Southeast Asia outside of the ASEAN centrality construct. These include multilateral and bilateral initiatives between ASEAN member states and non-ASEAN regional partners such as China, Australia, Japan, and the United States. An example of a non-ASEAN multilateral event would be the multilateral military exercise *Cobra Gold*, held in Thailand every year. This annual military exercise always has a HADR component and receives participation from many ASEAN and regional non-ASEAN countries. Additionally, the United States conducts multiple bilateral military and non-military capacity building events with almost every ASEAN member state. Other major regional players are currently implementing similar initiatives throughout Southeast Asia. Even though these events are not tracked by either the AHA Centre or the Joint Task Force for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response, these capacity building events are endorsed under the AADMER.

In summary, there is a sizable amount of resources and efforts being poured into the region to further enhance ASEAN's HADR response capability. However, the sheer number of initiatives and avenues being actively pursued creates its own set of obstacles.

Current Status and Obstacles for “One ASEAN, One Response”

In a communiqué released after the most recent ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting, there was unanimous support for the idea of *One ASEAN, One Response*.¹⁹ This idea focuses on ASEAN centrality and a unified disaster response led by the AHA Centre as laid out in the AADMER. The graphic below is from the Asia Pacific Economic Conference (APEC)

¹⁸ Brunei Times, *Task Force Meet to Encourage Synergy in Disaster Relief*, (May 2014), <http://m.bt.com.bn/news-national/2014/05/23/task-force-meetencourage-synergy-disaster-relief>.

¹⁹ Joint Communiqué 48th ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 4th August 2015.

Emergency Preparedness Working Group website. It shows the desired development plan of *One ASEAN, One Response*.

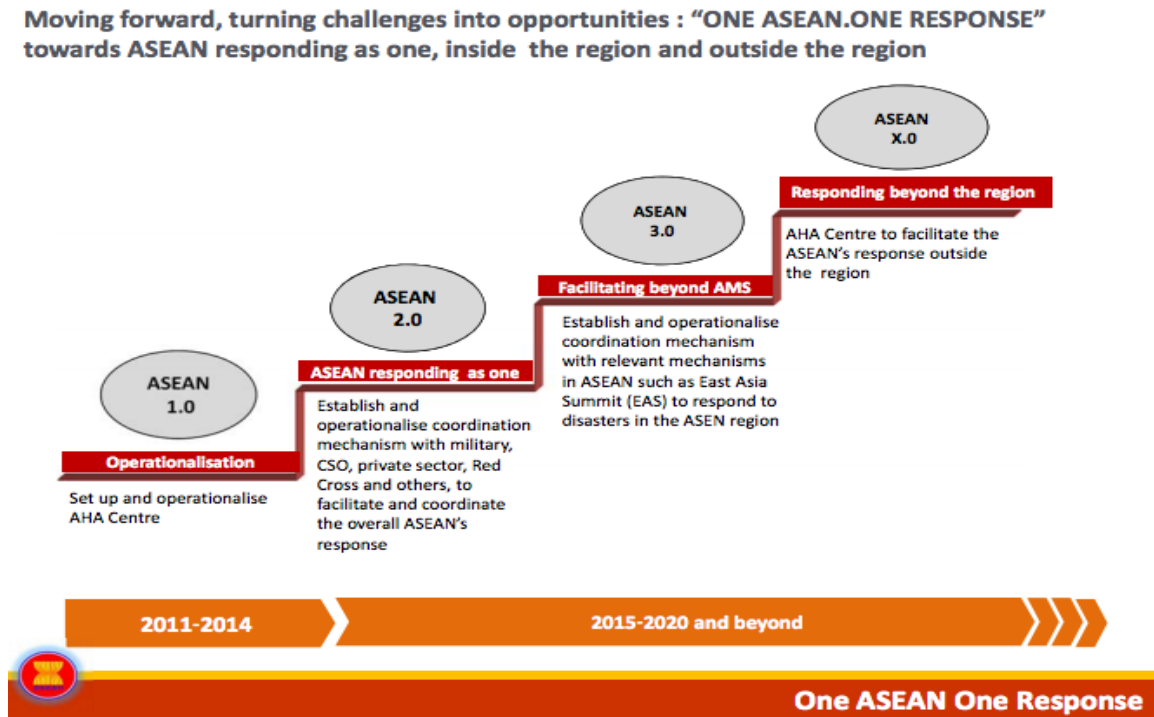


Figure 3. One ASEAN, One Response²⁰

ASEAN has already achieved ASEAN 1.0 by establishing and operationalizing the AHA Centre. Per the above model, the eventual goal is for the AHA Centre to facilitate a unified ASEAN disaster response beyond its regional borders. ASEAN is currently in the process of trying to achieve ASEAN 2.0, but faces several obstacles that hinder further progression.

The obstacles are more apparent when the situation is applied to the ends, ways, and means model. This is a simple model used by military strategists, and can also be applied to the issue of implementing AADMER within the construct of ASEAN. First, the end is a

²⁰ This graphic was taken from a slide presented on the APEC Emergency Preparedness Working Group, and can be located at <http://www.apec-epwg.org/public/uploadfile/act/d3da2f97e2a97449eb6597645704b499.pdf>.

strategic objective, or goal. In this case, the end is the implementation of AADMER. The way is the method(s) or process used to achieve a goal. Applied here, the way is the AHA Centre. It has been designated the agency responsible for ensuring the implementation of the AADMER. Finally, the means are the resources required to execute the way. Specifically applied to the implementation of AADMER, by designing an ASEAN-centric model for disaster response revolving around the AHA Centre as **the way**, yet neglecting to provide it **the means** cannot result in achieving **the ends**.

First, sovereignty and non-interference are two guiding principles of the *ASEAN Way*. The preoccupation with state sovereignty and non-interference make ASEAN member states reluctant to cede even small amounts of power to regional institutions, specifically ASEAN. The nature of this state-centric way of doing business is conflicting with the goals of AADMER and vision of *One ASEAN, One Response*.²¹

Adequate funding is an additional limiting factor. Currently, each ASEAN member state contributes a paltry \$30,000 per year to the AHA Center. According to a 2013 Brookings report, the AHA Centre has a staff of 17 and an annual budget of \$5.8 million. ASEAN member states contribute slightly more than five percent of the total amount, while the remainder comes from extra-regional donor governments including the United States, Australia, European Union, Japan, United Kingdom, and New Zealand.²² With such an insufficient budget, the AHA Centre has been forced to prioritize and focus on disaster monitoring and response, two areas that encompass only a small portion of AADMER's intent.²³ Furthermore, this creates a situation where the AHA Centre is ill equipped to track all of the great progress through the plethora of bilateral, multilateral, and ASEAN centric capacity building initiatives. This leaves the execution of strategic ASEAN HADR policy in

²¹ Lilianne Fan and Hanna Krebs, *Regional Organisations and Humanitarian Action: The Case of ASEAN*, (Working Paper, Humanitarian Policy Group, London, 2014).

²² Daniel Petz, *Strengthening Regional and National Capacity for Disaster Risk Management: The Case of ASEAN*, Brookings-LSE Project on Internal Displacement (Brookings Institution, Washington D.C., 2014), 13.

²³ Center for Excellent in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance (CFE-DMHA), *ASEAN Disaster Management Handbook*, (CFE-DMHA, Hawaii, 2015), 29.

the hands of each member state's disaster management office, where regional vision tends to take a back seat to national interests.

Member state contributions remain equal amongst the member states, and an increase in overall contributions requires an informal consensus. For example, Singapore's GDP is \$308 billion compared to Laos PDR's \$11.7 billion.²⁴ The consensus model prevents richer nations from making additional contributions. In the 1990s, there was contentious debate about whether a consensus model could remain effective if ASEAN accepted Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar as new member states. There was fear the development gap might create stagnation for the older members. However, it was finally agreed, "the only thing worse than a two-tier ASEAN is a two-tier Southeast Asia."²⁵ Although this decision may be the best decision for ASEAN as a whole, it remains a significant obstruction for the execution of the AADMER.

In an effort to augment the AHA Centre's regional capacity, Singapore created the Changi Regional HADR Coordination Center (RHCC). The RHCC's goal is to contribute towards a more effective regional response to disasters by facilitating military-to-military coordination. It aims to complement the existing mechanisms within the AHA Centre.²⁶ Whereas the AHA Centre mandate includes the synergizing of all ten members states' full disaster response potential (including military, civilian government, and NGOs), the RHCC appears to be more focused on military to military coordination. Its focus is narrower than the AHA Centre, allowing the RHCC to direct its efforts towards improving coordination amongst the most likely response mechanism of ASEAN member states, the military.²⁷ The

²⁴ The World Bank, 2015 rankings. <http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/GDP-ranking-table>.

²⁵ Alice Ba, *(Re) Negotiating East and Southeast Asia: Region, Regionalism, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations*, Stanford University Press, 130.

²⁶ Singapore Ministry of Defense website, *Fact Sheet: Changi Regional HADR Coordination Centre (RHCC), 2015*, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/nr/2014/sep/12sep14_nr2/12sep14_fs.html#.VIWDkGOrIUs.

²⁷ Military spending among ASEAN states has steadily increased over the past decade, from \$14.4 billion in 2004 to \$35.5 billion in 2013. State security remains among member states' highest priority, and there are little indication this trend will alter course. Consequently, the military are investing in training and equipment suitable for natural disaster response. For more info, see Benjamin Ho, *PacNet #42 - Defense*

issue with the RHCC is it lacks ASEAN support and was established without an ASEAN consensus. Although the Philippines have voiced support for the RHCC²⁸, no additional information indicates wider ASEAN support. Without an AADMER mandate, it is still undetermined whether the Singapore led RHCC will be able to synergize efforts with the AHA Centre.

The propensity to prioritize sovereignty and non-interference in lieu of a unified central effort has presented ASEAN with a set of challenges that hinder its execution of the AADMER. The practice of consensus and equality is also inhibiting the full potential of the AHA Centre. For ASEAN to become a powerful humanitarian responder in Southeast Asia, it will need to grow and develop, requiring a larger financial commitment by its member states. There is wide agreement that AADMER is a worthwhile program and it deserves further support to fully develop its vision.²⁹

The previous two sections have identified the various capacity building efforts taking place in Southeast Asia, through a myriad of both ASEAN and non-ASEAN centric initiatives. All of these efforts should ideally come together under the guidance of the AHA Centre to fulfill the vision of the AADMER. Additionally, the challenges ASEAN is currently facing to make the AADMER a reality was addressed. The next section will explain how ASEAN's current response capability fits into the greater international disaster response.

How does ASEAN fit into the international response?

When a sovereign state experiences a large-scale natural disaster beyond its own

diplomacy in East Asia: will ASEAN continue to be central?, (Centre for Non-Traditional Security (NTS) Studies, RSIS, July 2015), <http://csis.org/publication/pacnet-42-defense-diplomacy-east-asia-will-asean-continue-be-central>.

²⁸ Singapore Ministry of Defense website, *The Philippines Expresses Strong Support for the Changi Regional HADR Coordination Centre*, September 2014, http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/nr/2014/sep/25sep14_nr2.html#.VIWE4mQrIUt.

²⁹ Daniel Petz, *Strengthening Regional and National Capacity for Disaster Risk Management: The Case of ASEAN*, Brookings-LSE Project on Internal Displacement (Brookings Institution, Washington D.C., 2014), 35.

capacity to adequately meet the needs of its affected population, it can request international assistance. An international disaster response typically consists of a combination of worldwide IGO, NGO, and bilateral state-to-state assistance requests. Assuming the host nation agrees, responding nations can provide both civilian and military resources to meet the response requirements. Each disaster response is unique and the list of contributing nations and organizations is rarely the same, however the United Nations disaster response coordinators use the international cluster approach to guide this controlled chaos. Increasingly, regional organizations such as ASEAN are playing an evolving role in disaster response efforts.

Referring back to Figure 3, which outlines ASEAN's desired developmental path of the *One ASEAN, One Response* concept, we have established the current status and obstacles ASEAN must overcome before launching a fully unified, ASEAN led disaster response. To examine how effectively ASEAN has responded since the ratification of the AADMER and the establishment of the AHA Centre, we can examine subsequent ASEAN response efforts and how they fit into the larger international response efforts.

Typhoon Haiyan was ASEAN's first major test. When this super typhoon ravaged the southern islands of the Philippines in November 2013, the widespread devastation resulted in almost 6,000 deaths, 27,000 injuries, and over 4 million internally displaced people. The efficacy of ASEAN's response has received mixed reviews. Euan Graham criticized the ASEAN response and likened the experience to the United States' sluggish response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005.³⁰ Additionally, cash donations from ASEAN member states totaled less than US \$4.5 million, only a small percentage of the overall international funding reported at US\$538 million.³¹

³⁰ Euan Graham, *Super-typhoon Haiyan: ASEAN's Katrina Moment?*, PacNet #82 (Pacific Forum CSIS, Honolulu, HI, November 20 2013), <http://csis.org/publication/pacnet-82-super-typhoon-haiyan-aseans-katrina-moment>.

³¹ Daniel Petz, *Strengthening Regional and National Capacity for Disaster Risk Management: The Case of ASEAN*, Brookings-LSE Project on Internal Displacement (Brookings Institution, Washington D.C., 2014), 31.

In contrast, Lee Khiam Jin describes the response effort differently. He claimed some countries did contribute bilaterally, but the AHA Centre played a significant role by coordinating and mobilizing relief supplies from its warehouse in Malaysia and organizing transport of the relief supplies to disaster stricken areas.³² Regardless of the quality of its response, the important take-away is ASEAN only played a small role in the overall international relief effort. United Nations and extra-regional support was crucial. Another important note is that most ASEAN member states that transported relief supplies to the Philippines utilized military assets.

A few years later, in April of 2015, Nepal experienced a major earthquake that put ASEAN'S disaster capability to the test. Although the response effort was extra-regional, many ASEAN member states contributed. However, an ASEAN organized response effort seemed to be missing. Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore all sent relief personnel and aid. The Changi RHCC contributed its robust communications module and helped establish the multi-national coordination center. Each member state appeared to coordinate its response effort on a bilateral basis, bypassing the ASEAN coordination mechanism.

Finally, the most recent natural disaster was the flooding in Myanmar following Cyclone Komen in July 2015. Although the United Nations and extra-regional actors did provide significant contributions to the international response, ASEAN and the AHA Centre played a larger role this time. An AHA Centre supported assessment team was deployed to Myanmar for initial aid requirements, and remained throughout the crisis, coordinating the delivery of large amounts of relief aid.³³ Although ASEAN did play a larger role in this response effort, ASEAN member states also utilized bilateral coordination to expedite aid delivery. For example, Thailand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Royal Thai Air Force

³² Lee Khiam Jin, ASEAN's Response to Typhoon Haiyan, Penangmonthly.com, 2013, <http://penangmonthly.com/aseans-response-to-typhoon-haiyan/>.

³³ AHA Centre, *Situation Update #6*, <http://www.ahacentre.org/download-file/sr-WE08WdE3lkm5yETs.pdf>.

worked bilaterally with Myanmar to deliver relief aid.³⁴

As a whole, ASEAN and member state contributions to large, regional natural disaster relief efforts is a relatively small percentage when compared to the contributions of IGOs, NGOs, and extra-regional support from nations such as the United States, Australia, and Japan. ASEAN's role in regional disaster response has been limited due to many factors. First, budget constraints hinder the AHA Centre from funding more ASEAN centric initiatives in support of the AADMER. Additionally, the *ASEAN Way* of prioritizing sovereignty and consensus building reinforces member states' reluctance to relinquish funds and/or authority to the AHA Centre. Finally, bilateral track-two diplomacy continues to be the preferred coordination method, bypassing ASEAN.

Future role of ASEAN in disaster response

The purpose of this analysis is not to criticize the *ASEAN Way* or imply it is prohibiting further progress with regards to a unified ASEAN disaster response. That being said, it does present some challenges that must be overcome in order for coordinated regional disaster response to be effective. Liliane Fan and Hanna Krebs suggest multiple ways forward in *Regional Organisations and Humanitarian Action: The Case of ASEAN*. This analysis will focus on three big picture proposals: funding, legitimacy, and focus.

First, the budget for the AHA Centre must increase. The meager contributions ASEAN member states give each year show a major disconnect between AADMER's ambitious goals and its member state's dedication to achieve those goals. Incorporating foreign donations into the pursuit of capacity building should continue, but a suitable baseline operational budget should be fully funded by ASEAN member states.

A major obstacle to increasing AHA Centre's budget is a lack of consensus, and the

³⁴ Suwit Rattiwat, *Thailand continues to send flood relief to Myanmar*, (National News Bureau of Thailand, 8 Aug 2015), http://thainews.prd.go.th/website_en/news/print_news/WNPOL5808080010001.

norm that each member state should provide equal contributions. To understand this issue we must look back at the reason ASEAN was created. ASEAN was created in 1967 based on the perceived security threat of communism spreading across Southeast Asia to Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia. Threat perception within the organization has changed (ASEAN now includes two communist member-states). There is no longer a unified threat by which member states can rally against. Additionally, the security threat of natural disasters is a much higher priority for certain member states. For example, the Philippines and Myanmar are much more concerned with the devastating effects caused by cyclones and typhoons than Laos. Other than occasional flooding, Laos does not really face major threats from natural disasters. Because of this, Laos is significantly less likely to agree to AHA Centre budget increases when it is expected to pay an equal share. This is an overly restrictive precedent unsupported by current ASEAN agreements. Per the ASEAN charter, the only contributions that must be equal are contributions to the secretariat.³⁵ The AADMER also does not stipulate equal contributions. To the contrary, it specifically states “The Parties shall, in accordance with the decisions of the Conference of the Parties, make voluntary contributions to the Fund.”³⁶ Furthermore, the 2010 ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management (ACDM) reinforces the AADMER declaration by saying there must be compulsory contributions to support the operational budget, but additional funds to support rapid needs assessments, emergency activities, and initiatives under the AADMER World Plan can be contributed on a voluntary basis.³⁷ There is no mention of equal contributions.

If consensus on equal contribution is not attainable, there should be discussion and subsequent action to allow member states that view the security threat of natural disasters as a priority the approval to provide additional funding, equipment, and expertise in support of AADMER objectives. At a bare minimum, the AHA Centre should be given the latitude to pursue joint ventures with member states’ national capacity building efforts. For example, a

³⁵ ASEAN Charter, Article 30, (November 20, 2007), 26.

³⁶ ASEAN AADMER, Article 24, (ASEAN Secretariat, January 6, 2005), 19.

³⁷ ASEAN Secretariat, Report of the Fifteenth Meeting of the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management, (11-12 March 2010), 3.

unified effort between the AHA Centre and Singapore's RHCC has the potential to significantly bolster regional disaster response capacity.

Second, ASEAN must seek more centralized authority for the AHA Centre. More authority must be relinquished by individual member states and the AHA Centre must be seen as a legitimate, effective institution. Until this happens, member states will continue to bypass ASEAN coordination mechanisms and pursue bilateral methods. There are currently too many disaster response capacity building initiatives taking place to count. Capacity building efforts are taking place under most of the regional forums revolving around the ASEAN centrality model (refer to Figure 2). ASEAN sponsored and non-ASEAN bilateral and multilateral initiatives are also taking place. The only logical institution capable of tracking and guiding all of these initiatives is the AHA Centre. However, until it has the legitimacy to help guide these various initiatives, the AHA Centre will have little influence in improving regional initiatives or eliminating duplicative effort.

Finally, since the AHA Centre began operations in 2011 it has prioritized the objectives laid out in the AADMER, choosing to focus on disaster monitoring and disaster response. Through collaboration with the Pacific Disaster Center, the AHA Centre's disaster monitoring capability is fully developed. The disaster response aspect has made significant progress over the past five years. However, it still has a long way before a mature *One ASEAN, One Response* can be realized.

With an ambitious vision and limited resources, the AHA Centre is at risk for overstretching its capability. It should determine the mechanisms most feasible and relevant based on its institutional capacity.³⁸ Until the funding and legitimacy issues have been worked out, the AHA Centre should maximize its limited resources by shifting focus from disaster response to other targets within AADMER such as Article 6 (Prevention and Mitigation) and Article 8 (Preparedness). The disaster response piece is only one part of the

³⁸ Mely Cabeallero-Anthony, *Regional Security of Southeast Asia: Beyond the ASEAN Way*, (ISIS, Singapore, 2005), 50.

overall disaster management process, and ASEAN only consists of a very small percentage of the overall international disaster response mechanism. Furthermore, disaster response is significantly more expensive than investing in disaster mitigation. Every dollar spent on programs to reduce a population's vulnerability to natural disasters saves approximately seven dollars in economic losses.³⁹ The AHA Centre's limited resources would go much farther if they were invested in disaster resilience and preparedness initiatives instead of focusing on the disaster response phase. This strategy is essentially a shift from reactive to proactive disaster management.⁴⁰

In summary, it should not be ASEAN's goal to supplant the international natural disaster response system.⁴¹ ASEAN and the AHA Centre's role are still relatively new in disaster response and disaster management. Its role in the current international response construct has yet to be fully defined. It should carefully consider where its limited resources could best be allocated to make Southeast Asia a safer, more prosperous region.

Conclusion:

ASEAN has come a long way since its initial adoption of the *Declaration on Mutual Assistance on Natural Disasters* in 1976. Literature, interviews, and case studies indicate ASEAN's regional capability to respond to large-scale natural disasters in Southeast Asia has made significant progress. However, an ASEAN response will continue to play a limited role during a large-scale natural disaster such as Typhoon Haiyan or the earthquake in Nepal. External assistance will be required for the foreseeable future.

³⁹ UNDP, *Putting Resilience at the Heart of Development: Investing in Prevention and Resilient Recovery*, Report, (UNDP, Tokyo, Japan, 2012) 1.

⁴⁰ Daniel Petz, *Strengthening Regional and National Capacity for Disaster Risk Management: The Case of ASEAN*, Brookings-LSE Project on Internal Displacement (Brookings Institution, Washington D.C., 2014), 36.

⁴¹ Centre for Non-Traditional Security (NTS) Studies, *Enhancing ASEAN Regional Capacity for Disaster Response Operations*, NTS Bulletin (S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore, March 2015), 1.

This analysis began by explaining the history of HADR capacity building efforts from initial efforts in 1976 until the current vision under AADMER and the AHA Centre. Next, it explained how complex the network of capacity building efforts has become under the ASEAN Centrality concept. After that, it discussed the concept of *One ASEAN, One Response* and identified obstacles hindering it. The current international disaster response construct was explained, as well as where ASEAN falls within the international response effort. Finally, proposals were offered to help ASEAN and the AHA Centre maximize their current resources to support the realization of the AADMER.

Climate change and global warming are already having significant effects on the frequency of natural disasters in Southeast Asia. ASEAN has made great strides in developing its HADR capacity. There are billions of dollars, capacity building initiatives, information sharing, and best practice exchanges pouring into the region. ASEAN must make a further commitment to make sure this massive investment can be effectively utilized to fulfill its ultimate purpose...to reduce loss of life and alleviate human suffering following a natural disaster.

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