Way Forward for Strengthening ASEAN's Capacity and Resilience in the ADMM-Plus

(Langkah ke Depan untuk Memperkuat Kapasitas dan Ketahanan ASEAN dalam ADMM-Plus)

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Abstrak, Artikel ini mengeksplorasi perjalanan ASEAN dalam kerangka ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus), dengan fokus pada penguatan kapasitas dan ketahanannya di tengah tantangan lanskap geopolitik yang terus berubah. Kerangka kerja ADMM-Plus, yang dimulai pada tahun 2010, memfasilitasi kerja sama pertahanan dan keamanan yang melibatkan mitra dialog eksternal, yang bertujuan untuk memastikan perdamaian di seluruh Asia-Pasifik. Meskipun ASEAN menghadapi kompleksitas seperti meningkatnya persaingan militer, ketegangan perbatasan, dan sengketa Laut Cina Selatan, secara internal, negara-negara anggota bergulat dengan permasalahan dalam negeri, konsekuensi perubahan iklim, keamanan energi, ancaman maritim, dan risiko dunia maya. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk memahami kapasitas historis dan terkini ASEAN dalam konteks ADMM-Plus. Untuk menilai tantangan dan ancaman yang berdampak pada ketahanan ASEAN dalam domain keamanan regional. Metodologi penelitian kualitatif mengadopsi gabungan data primer dari wawancara dan dokumen resmi ASEAN, dengan data sekunder dari sumber akademis, yang menyajikan pandangan holistik tentang keterlibatan ASEAN dalam ADMM-Plus. Analisis ini menggarisbawahi kapasitas ASEAN yang beragam, mulai dari interoperabilitas militer dan negosiasi diplomatik hingga kemajuan digital dan tanggap bencana. Selain itu, ketahanan ASEAN, yang tercermin dalam stabilitas politik, vitalitas ekonomi, strategi keamanan, dan kohesi sosial budaya, juga ditekankan. Untuk meningkatkan perannya dalam ADMM-Plus di tengah berkembangnya skenario keamanan Indo-Pasifik, rekomendasinya mencakup pembentukan Pusat Penggabungan Informasi ADMM-Plus, meningkatkan Kesadaran Domain Maritim, memprioritaskan keamanan siber, dan membentuk Satuan Tugas Khusus untuk Keamanan Hayati. Secara meyakinkan, ADMM-Plus tetap penting dalam menumbuhkan kepercayaan dan tindakan kolektif, menekankan perlunya langkah-langkah keamanan yang proaktif dan komprehensif untuk memastikan Asia Tenggara yang harmonis.

Kata Kunci: ASEAN, ADMM-Plus, Kapasitas, Ketahanan

Abstract

This article explores ASEAN's journey within the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) framework, focusing on strengthening its capacity and

resilience amid the challenges of a shifting geopolitical landscape. The ADMM-Plus framework, initiated in 2010, facilitates defense and security cooperation involving external dialogue partners, aiming to ensure peace across the wider Asia-Pacific. While ASEAN faces complexities such as growing military competition, border tensions, and the South China Sea disputes, internally, member nations grapple with domestic issues, climate change consequences, energy security, maritime threats, and cyber risks. This research objective is to understand the historical and current capacities of ASEAN within the ADMM-Plus context. To assess the challenges and threats impacting ASEAN's resilience in the regional security domain. The qualitative research methodology adopted combined primary data from interviews and official ASEAN documents, with secondary data from academic sources, presenting a holistic view of ASEAN's engagement in ADMM-Plus. The analysis underscored ASEAN's multifaceted capacities, ranging from military interoperability and diplomatic negotiation to digital advancements and disaster response. Additionally, ASEAN's resilience, reflected in its political stability, economic vitality, security strategies, and socio-cultural cohesion, was emphasized. To bolster its role in ADMM-Plus amidst the evolving Indo-Pacific security scenario, recommendations include establishing an ADMM-Plus Information Fusion Centre, enhancing Maritime Domain Awareness, prioritizing cybersecurity, and initiating a Special Task Force on Biosecurity. Conclusively, the ADMM-Plus remains pivotal for fostering trust and collective action, emphasizing the need for proactive, comprehensive security measures to ensure a harmonious Southeast Asia.

Keywords: ASEAN, ADMM-Plus, Capacity, Resilience

1.   Introduction

ASEAN, a group consisting of ten nations in Southeast Asia, has made significant progress since it was established in 1967. Initially focused on promoting regional peace and stability, ASEAN has expanded its goals to include cooperation in areas such as economics, socio-cultural integration, and security (Acharya, 2012; 56). The ADMM-Plus, established in 2010, encompasses the aspect of security and defense cooperation. It includes discussion partners from outside of ASEAN to promote peace in the wider Asia-Pacific region (Goh, 2013; 215).   Over time, this mechanism has demonstrated multiple benefits. However, as ASEAN adapts to a changing geopolitical environment, it is crucial to prioritize and enhance its ability and durability within the ADMM-Plus framework.

Recognizing the need to remain pertinent and proactive, ASEAN's capacity and resilience are essential not just for its internal dynamics but in leveraging its collaborations with dialogue partners. This paper aims to delve into the intricate paths ASEAN has traveled within the ADMM-Plus, evaluating its strengths, confronting the challenges, and finding the way forward. Furthermore, the role of the Regional Initiative to Deliver Unity (RIDU) in ADMM-Plus showcases ASEAN's innovative strides toward cohesive defense strategies, reaffirming its commitment to peaceful coexistence and strategic collaboration (Nguyen, 2020; 78).

The discussion that follows offers insights into the accomplishments of ADMM-Plus, the inherent challenges faced by ASEAN, its capacity and resilience in this mechanism, and the imperative nature of these traits in ensuring a robust ADMM-Plus. By the end, we aspire to proffer tangible recommendations, carving the pathway for an even more resilient and capacitated ASEAN within the ADMM-Plus configuration.

As ASEAN progresses in its efforts to create a community based on common values and goals, it faces a range of complex issues that require a planned and cohesive response. The security situation in the Indo-Pacific region is highly unstable due to the growing military power and increasing competition between superpowers. This poses multiple challenges for ASEAN in its external relations. This issue is made worse by border tensions, particularly those arising from the disputes in the South China Sea, which have increased the complications related to sovereignty and marine rights (Thayer, 2016; 104).

Internally, each ASEAN member is dealing with domestic issues and facing internal conflicts that affect regional unity (Tow & Chin, 2016; 49). In addition to these challenges, ASEAN is faced with the formidable responsibility of addressing the consequences of climate change. This pervasive issue transcends national boundaries and has the potential to disproportionately harm Southeast Asian countries (Chaturvedi & Sakhuja, 2017; 61) (Jonni Mahroza et al, 2022).

Simultaneously, the region is facing the challenge of maintaining energy security due to rising consumption needs, the need to diversify energy sources, and potential risks to energy transit routes. This has become a critical issue for the region (Koh, 2018; 123).   The extensive marine region of Southeast Asia requires more vigilance, which calls for a strong maritime security architecture to address the escalating threats. In addition, in an era that is becoming more and more reliant on digital technology, ASEAN cannot ignore the imminent threats of terrorism and cyber-attacks, which can disrupt both its digital and physical domains (Sukma, 2015; 88). In navigating this intricate web of challenges, ASEAN's resilience and capacity are not just tested but are foundational to ensuring a harmonious and stable Southeast Asian community.

2.   Research Methodology

For the study titled "Way Forward for Strengthening ASEAN's Capacity and Resilience in the ADMM-Plus", a qualitative research approach was chosen to delve into the intricate facets of ASEAN's capabilities within the ADMM-Plus framework, as well as its resilience in the face of evolving geopolitical and regional challenges.

Primary and secondary sources of data were employed to construct a comprehensive understanding of the topic. Primary data comes from in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, defense experts, and diplomats related to ADMM-Plus conducted on the sidelines of the NADI meeting in Hue City, Viet Nam. Furthermore, relevant policy documents, official statements, and ASEAN meeting minutes pertaining to the ADMM-Plus were perused. Secondary data was garnered from academic journals, books, research reports, and news articles that provided historical and contemporary perspectives on ASEAN's engagement within the ADMM-Plus.

Research Objectives, to understand the historical and current capacities of ASEAN within the ADMM-Plus context. To assess the challenges and threats

impacting ASEAN's resilience in the regional security domain. Identify strategies and initiatives that ASEAN has employed to bolster its position in the ADMM-Plus.

To elicit expert opinions on the way forward to strengthen ASEAN's engagement and efficacy in the ADMM-Plus.

The gathered data underwent thematic analysis, a method particularly suited for qualitative research. After transcription of interviews and collation of textual data, an initial set of codes was generated, which were then clustered into broader themes. These themes were aligned with the research objectives, facilitating a structured discussion on ASEAN's capacity and resilience within the ADMM-Plus. Comparing and contrasting the data from different sources ensured a multi-dimensional understanding of the topic, enriching the overall analysis and findings.

This qualitative research methodology, by amalgamating expert perspectives with official directives and academic discourse, aimed to present a well-rounded analysis, guiding the direction of the discussion and culminating in tangible conclusions and recommendations for the way forward.

3. Discussion

a. ASEAN's Capacity

The collective strength of ASEAN, as witnessed in various facets of regional integration and cooperation, can be attributed to the multifarious capacities it has developed and honed over decades. Crucially, in the context of the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus), understanding these capacities becomes imperative. First and foremost, the military and defense capabilities of ASEAN are not only about tangible hardware but also the harmonization of doctrines, training, and interoperability among its members (Acharya, 2009; 112). Parallel to this, the institutional capacity of ASEAN, undergirded by its Secretariat and numerous specialized bodies, has progressively evolved, ensuring that the bloc's principles and decisions translate effectively into actions (Severino, 2008; 57). Diplomatically, the ten nations, despite their diversity, have manifested a unique negotiation capacity,

often leveraging the famed "ASEAN Way" to build consensus and manage regional challenges (Narine, 2002; 44). In a world progressively steered by technology, ASEAN's strides in cybersecurity and digital capabilities have not only been about countering threats but also leveraging digital avenues for development and integration (Chia, 2019; 33). Lastly, in a region prone to natural calamities, the disaster response and humanitarian assistance capacity of ASEAN, exemplified by entities like the AHA Centre, underscores the group's commitment to the welfare and resilience of its populace (Caballero-Anthony, 2014; 91). Thus, as ASEAN continues to deepen its engagement in the ADMM-Plus framework, these capacities stand as its foundational pillars, determining its role, influence, and contributions in broader regional security dynamics.

b. ASEAN's Resilience

Over time, ASEAN has gained recognition not only for its diplomatic skills and ability to develop capabilities but also for its impressive ability to bounce back from challenges. The fostered resilience of the region is comprehensive, covering political, economic, security, and societal aspects. This ensures that the region remains strong and able to withstand a range of crises, both from inside and from outside sources (Jones, 2012; 35).

ASEAN has demonstrated political resilience by effectively preserving regional stability despite notable inter-state conflicts and historical animosities. The political resilience is based on the "ASEAN Way", which prioritizes consensus-building and non-interference. This approach guarantees that member states may peacefully coexist, despite their diverse political systems and ideologies (Narine, 2008; 78).

In terms of the economy, the region has successfully navigated through several crises, with the most significant being the 1997 Asian financial crisis. These issues have consistently resulted in the enhancement of economic cooperation,

integration, and the development of measures to mitigate global economic fluctuations, establishing ASEAN as a center of economic vitality (Hew, 2005; 62).

ASEAN demonstrates security resilience in its response to many regional security concerns, encompassing territorial conflicts as well as non-traditional security challenges such as terrorism and human trafficking. Platforms such as the ADMM-Plus have a crucial role in promoting a collaborative security environment, allowing member nations to cooperatively tackle and reduce security issues (Caballero-Anthony, 2014; 105).

Lastly, societal resilience refers to the socio-cultural cohesion that ASEAN promotes. The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community strives to foster a collective identity and social comprehension among its diverse population, encompassing various ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds. This project aims to cultivate harmony and common ideals (Acharya, 2013; 48).

Fundamentally, ASEAN's ability to withstand challenges, developed through years of cooperation and comprehension, forms the foundation of its strength. It guarantees the region's resilience, unity, and future-oriented approach, regardless of the obstacles it faces, strengthening its position in the wider Asia-Pacific context.

c. **Importance of ASEAN's Capacity and Resilience in the ADMM-Plus**

ASEAN plays a leading role in maintaining regional stability in the complex geostrategic environment of the Indo-Pacific. It utilizes its inherent capabilities and resilience within frameworks such as the ADMM-Plus. This is not simply a result of diplomatic ambitions, but rather a demonstration of ASEAN's deliberate plan to influence its future amid significant shifts in global power relations (Caballero-Anthony, 2014; 33). ASEAN preserves its interests and prevents them from being eclipsed by conflicts between major powers by developing strategic autonomy. This ensures that its actions and decisions are based on the overall well-being of its member states.

ASEAN's autonomy aligns smoothly to achieve regional peace through collaborative security. This allows ASEAN to act as a mediator and a unifying influence that reduces tensions and promotes discussion (Narine, 1997; 412). The association's ability to respond effectively to humanitarian crises and disasters is emphasized by its strong Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) structures. These mechanisms address the vulnerabilities of the region through joint emergency response techniques that go beyond national borders (Laksmana, 2019; 28).

ASEAN's ability to withstand non-traditional security threats is highlighted by its efforts in countering terrorism and addressing transnational crime. The organization enhances regional security and stability by promoting inter-agency cooperation and intelligence sharing, hence countering threats to the region (Jones, 2012; 53). Furthermore, given the significant maritime area of the South China Sea and its importance in global trade and geopolitics, ASEAN's emphasis on maritime security and the preservation of freedom of navigation is crucial and urgent. This ensures that the seas continue to serve as avenues for collaboration rather than conflict.

Essentially, ASEAN's competence and resilience inside the ADMM-Plus framework symbolize its larger ambition for a region based on peace, collaboration, and mutual respect, notwithstanding the obstacles it faces.

d. Recommendations to Strengthen ASEAN's Capacity and Resilience in the ADMM-Plus

Considering the changing security situation in the Indo-Pacific region and the complex interaction of geopolitical interests, ASEAN needs to take proactive measures to strengthen its ability and resilience in dealing with various problems, given its crucial role in the ADMM-Plus. Analysis of historical data shows that the effectiveness of ASEAN, particularly in the ADMM-Plus framework, has depended on both flexible innovation and synchronized teamwork (Caballero-Anthony, 2016;

73). To further strengthen ASEAN's position inside the ADMM-Plus framework, we might propose various suggestions based on the existing cooperative security heritage.

To begin with, the creation of an ADMM-Plus Information Fusion Centre may function as a central point for immediate exchange of intelligence and data between member countries, promoting improved understanding of the current situation and enabling prompt joint actions against developing dangers.   Furthermore, considering the complex maritime dynamics of the Southeast Asian region, it is crucial to enhance Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) as a top priority. A strengthened MDA structure, supported by collective monitoring and reconnaissance capabilities, can increase the security of vital marine routes and discourage potential maritime dangers.

By prioritizing cybersecurity measures inside the ADMM-Plus, we may effectively address common vulnerabilities and protect essential digital infrastructures in the rapidly evolving digital landscape. Furthermore, collaborative research and development (R&D) projects can effectively utilize the combined scientific and technological expertise of member nations, promoting innovation and creating a repository of native answers to both traditional and non-traditional security challenges. Finally, to acknowledge the increasing range of security issues, the establishment of a Special Task Force on Biosecurity can proactively tackle bio-threats and guarantee a synchronized regional reaction to possible biosecurity emergencies.

In other to adapt and react effectively to the constantly changing security environment, ASEAN, through the ADMM-Plus, needs to adopt a proactive approach that combines conventional and unconventional security frameworks. By implementing these suggestions, ASEAN may strengthen its pivotal position in regional security frameworks and guarantee a stable, protected, and prosperous Southeast Asia.

1)   **Establishing an ADMM-Plus Information Fusion Centre**

The ADMM-Plus framework has provided ASEAN with an extended platform to facilitate more profound security engagements with its dialogue partners since its establishment. Due to the region's increasing significance in global geopolitics, there has been a significant increase in the amount and intricacy of information that must be processed, analyzed, and acted upon. Historical examples emphasize that the exchange of comprehensive information and synchronized efforts among ASEAN countries and their partners have played a crucial role in tackling regional difficulties (Acharya, 2009; 95).

Given this understanding, the construction of an ADMM-Plus Information Fusion Centre is seen as a crucial suggestion. A center of this nature would function as the central point for immediate intelligence, sharing of data, and analysis among the countries participating in the ADMM-Plus. The center aims to improve the overall situational awareness of the member states by gathering information from various sources, including satellite images and open-source intelligence. The past achievements of information-sharing endeavors such as the ASEANapol Database System highlight the potential efficacy of this proposition.

In addition, the fusion center would possess the ability to assess and forecast new security patterns, utilizing advanced technologies such as Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning, rather than just collecting information. Implementing this proactive approach will not only facilitate prompt response but also enable preventive measures, representing a substantial shift from reactive to anticipatory techniques for regional security.

The fundamental worth of a fusion center lies in its ability to surpass conventional security paradigms. It may address various complex challenges, ranging from maritime security concerns to transnational crimes, thereby reflecting the overall security strategy that ASEAN has consistently advocated for.

By creating the ADMM-Plus Information Fusion Centre, ASEAN, and its dialogue partners can initiate a new period of improved collaboration, well-informed decision-making, and proactive management of regional security. This will be supported by a comprehensive comprehension of the changing security environment.

2)   Strengthening Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)

The waters of Southeast Asia have always served as dynamic channels for trade, culture, and communication. However, in contemporary times, they have also evolved into sites of strategic rivalry, territorial conflicts, and security considerations. Amidst the changing maritime environment, it is crucial to prioritize the improvement of Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) as a means to protect the shared interests of the ASEAN nations and guarantee unrestricted and open passage in these areas (Thayer, 2013; 59).

Enhancing the capabilities of MDA (Maritime Domain Awareness) under the ADMM-Plus (ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus) framework necessitates the implementation of a comprehensive and multifaceted strategy. First and foremost, it requires the creation of a cooperative regional system for monitoring maritime activities. The integration of naval and coastal radar systems from member countries would establish a comprehensive network that offers real-time detection and notification of suspicious maritime activity or possible threats.

Furthermore, the facilitation of collaborative maritime drills among ADMM-Plus nations would bolster operational coherence and confidence. These drills will enhance coordination not only in prospective conflict scenarios but also in humanitarian and disaster relief efforts, which are frequently needed in the seismically active Southeast Asian region.

Moreover, harnessing technological progress is essential. The integration of satellite surveillance, autonomous underwater vehicles, and AI-powered analytical tools can greatly enhance MDA capabilities. These technologies can aid in the timely

identification of unlawful activities, including smuggling, piracy, and illegal fishing, thereby safeguarding the marine ecosystem and the economic interests of coastal states.

The foundation of these principles lies in education and training. Creating regional training facilities specifically focused on maritime security and domain awareness will guarantee that staff from all ADMM-Plus nations have up-to-date knowledge and optimal methodologies.

Finally, promoting diplomatic discussions regarding the shared maritime areas, separate from possible conflict situations, would establish an atmosphere of confidence and mutual esteem.   These discussions can facilitate the establishment of more extensive agreements and collaborations in the future, reflecting the essence of ASEAN solidarity.

As the difficulties faced in maritime operations become more intricate, the implementation of a strong and collaborative Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) framework within the ADMM-Plus framework may guarantee that ASEAN continues to be a symbol of stability and prosperity in the marine sector.

3)   Advance Cybersecurity Initiatives within ADMM-Plus

The Southeast Asian region has experienced a significant increase in connection, digital transformation, and adoption of the Fourth Industrial Revolution as the global digital landscape continues to grow. However, alongside this technological progress, a series of security obstacles arise. The region's economic prosperity, security infrastructure, and social cohesion are at great risk from cyber attacks, which can come from both state-sponsored entities and non-state players (Chong & Vadaketh, 2016; 203). ADMM-Plus, with its increased membership and enlarged mandate, plays a crucial role in promoting cybersecurity efforts and strengthening ASEAN's ability to withstand cyber threats.

One key suggestion is to create a specialized ADMM-Plus Cybersecurity Working Group. The primary responsibility of this entity would be to develop

comprehensive cybersecurity strategies at the regional level, establish benchmarks for cybersecurity practices, and promote the exchange of information among participating nations. This group can assist countries with emerging cybersecurity frameworks in quickly developing their capabilities by utilizing the combined knowledge and skills of its members.

Moreover, it is crucial to advocate for the implementation of cross-border cyber drills and exercises. Similar to conventional military exercises, these drills would assist member states in comprehending the intricacies of cyber threats, refining their cyber defensive mechanisms, and improving interoperability in the event of regional cyber incidents.

Collaboration in the exchange of cyber intelligence is another crucial factor. Establishing a robust and encrypted network that facilitates the prompt exchange of real-time cyber threat intelligence among member nations will enable the rapid dissemination of detected threats, thereby enabling others to enhance their defensive measures.

On top of that, it is essential to give priority to the development of capacity. This encompasses the creation of regional cybersecurity training institutes and potentially even scholarship programs for renowned international cybersecurity universities. By ensuring that cyber professionals in ASEAN possess cutting-edge knowledge and skills, the region can enhance its ability to protect against advanced cyber threats.

Finally, cultivating public-private collaborations is essential. The collaboration of private companies is crucial in creating cyber norms, implementing early warning systems, and ensuring a prompt reaction to cyber crises, considering their significant involvement in the digital domain.

Overall, the complex digital age requires strong cybersecurity measures. By engaging in collaborative efforts, exchanging knowledge, and continuously enhancing capabilities, ADMM-Plus can strengthen ASEAN's cybersecurity

measures, guaranteeing a secure and prosperous digital future for all member nations.

4)   Promote Joint Research and Development (R&D) among ADMM-Plus

In recent decades, Southeast Asia has seen a significant transformation, emerging as a strong economic force that is propelling technical progress and fostering creativity. An area that requires immediate collective action is research and development (R&D), namely in the defense and security domains. Collaborative research and development efforts within the ADMM-Plus framework offer ASEAN a strategic chance to enhance its capabilities and resilience by combining resources, knowledge, and technological skills (Tan, 2018; 57).

To initiate collaborative research and development (R&D) efforts among ADMM-Plus members, the primary measure is to build a centralized R&D hub specifically for ADMM-Plus.   This institution would function as a central point for cooperative research initiatives, exchange of information, and transfer of technology among member governments. The main objectives of the initiative would be to identify prevalent security concerns, establish strategic research goals, and standardize research and development procedures throughout the region.

It is essential to provide grants and financing schemes as incentives for collaborative ventures.   One possible solution is to implement collaborative finance structures, which would provide robust support for research and development projects while distributing the financial responsibility fairly among all participants.

A further crucial factor is leveraging the existing strengths of academic and research institutions in the region. Frequent conferences, seminars, and symposiums can be arranged, where specialists from ADMM-Plus nations are invited to share their expertise, showcase their discoveries, and collaborate on developing innovative solutions to defense and security concerns. This will not only promote academic and technical cooperation but also facilitate the creation of innovative technologies and solutions tailored to the specific requirements of the region.

Additionally, it is crucial to prioritize the practical implementation of research and development discoveries in business settings. Collaborations with the private sector have the potential to expedite the shift from research to practical, commercially viable solutions. This not only enhances the local economy but also guarantees the swift implementation of advances.

At last, it is crucial to establish strong intellectual property (IP) rights protocols. Establishing a well-defined intellectual property (IP) framework is crucial in cooperative research and development (R&D) projects to safeguard rights and ensure fair distribution of the advantages derived from innovative breakthroughs.

Ultimately, although ASEAN nations have achieved significant accomplishments through their individual research and development initiatives, the combined efforts and cooperation within the ADMM-Plus framework can propel the region to unprecedented levels of innovation. This will strengthen its defense capabilities and establish it as a leader in global security technology.

5) Initiate a Special Task Force on Biosecurity

Biosecurity is a crucial component of a region's defense strategy, as biological threats can damage societal structures, economics, and human health. Due to the high population density, rich biodiversity, and integrated transportation networks in Southeast Asia, the ASEAN region is especially susceptible to bio-threats, whether they be of natural or human origin. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to enhance the biosecurity of ASEAN, not only to safeguard the well-being of its population but also to ensure the stability and resilience of its member nations (Chong, 2017; 112).

Given the relevance and intricacy of the concerns, it is crucial to establish a Special Task Force on Biosecurity inside the ADMM-Plus structure. The main purpose of this task group would be to accomplish many primary objectives. Firstly, the initiative will prioritize the implementation of thorough risk assessments to identify and comprehend the distinct biological risks that the ASEAN region

encounters. This includes the surveillance of newly occurring infectious diseases, potential acts of bioterrorism, and occurrences related to bio-safety.

The primary duty of the task force would be to promote the sharing of knowledge and exemplary methods among member countries. This encompasses the dissemination of information regarding illness outbreaks, scientific discoveries, and measures taken to alleviate their impact. Collaboration of this nature can accelerate reaction times and provide member states access to a wider knowledge base and resources.

The task force should also play a crucial role in organizing collaborative training exercises and simulations. These operations would guarantee that member countries are adequately equipped to act together in the event of a biological emergency, hence optimizing efficiency and effectiveness in containment and response endeavors.

Meanwhile, the task force would have a crucial role in promoting scientific collaboration, namely in the areas of bio-threat detection, response, and prevention. Collaborative research endeavors can utilize the combined knowledge and skills of the area, resulting in the creation of inventive solutions specifically designed for the ASEAN environment.

Ultimately, the task force must proactively collaborate with external stakeholders, such as international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the commercial sector, to access worldwide knowledge and resources. This collaboration can also facilitate the harmonization of the region's biosecurity policies with worldwide standards, assuring a coherent and consolidated strategy.

The creation of a Special Task Force on Biosecurity under the ADMM-Plus framework is an essential measure to strengthen the ASEAN region's defenses against biological threats. This initiative represents the essence of ASEAN's collaborative approach, utilizing the combined power of its members to safeguard

the well-being, security, and adaptability of its populations in response to changing biosecurity threats.

4.   Conclusions

The ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) remains a crucial pillar for security collaboration between ASEAN and its dialogue partners. Its foundational principle of open dialogue, mutual respect, and comprehensive security provides a conducive environment for trust-building and joint action.

To increase regional security and resilience amidst growing threats, it is necessary to establish the ADMM-Plus Information Fusion Center to accelerate information exchange and improve joint defense mechanisms.

The evolving nature of security threats, especially non-traditional ones such as climate change, cyber warfare, and health pandemics, necessitates the ADMM-Plus to adapt and expand its focus areas. Integration of expert groups think tanks, and academic institutions in deliberations can provide fresh perspectives and innovative solutions.

In summary, the journey ahead for ADMM-Plus is one of adaptation, collaboration, and resilience. By evolving its strategies, intensifying cooperation, and standing united as a bloc, ASEAN can fortify its position and respond efficiently to the diverse challenges that loom in the horizon.

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