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Master Essay

Environmental Challenges and Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea: How the ASEAN Way of Governance Tackles the Issues

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Introduction

Southeast Asia is home to over 630 million people, is the third largest populated region in the world (ASEAN Secretariat, 2016), and is located at the critical junction of the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The South China Sea lies in the heart of the region and is the main passage that connects the world's primary sea lanes of communication. Southeast Asia is one of the most diversified regions in the world, culturally, socially, economically, and geopolitically. In this globalized era, the Southeast Asia region is important for the world's economy. Southeast Asia is the world's fastest growing economy (Kaplan, 2011), but it is also encountering many regional security challenges.

In recent years, territorial disputes and artificial islands building up in the South China Sea have become causes of regional security and environmental challenges. The competition and overexploitation for resources in the South China Sea are escalating and may cause irreversible damages to the marine ecosystem. While conflicts of natural resources may cause environmental insecurity, it is unlikely to cause an interstate war. This paper explains the broad definition of environmental security in the Southeast Asia context as well as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) governing principles. ASEAN is the mediator for many common regional issues in Southeast Asia using the "ASEAN Way." Koh and Karim (2016) described the ASEAN Way of solving problems as the non-interference of other states and one in which all countries adhere to the principle of national law, state sovereignty and the consensus of all national cooperations. This paper also includes a review of the ASEAN governance framework. The ASEAN underlying structure provides an assessment of the process of the

organization to solving the South China Sea environmental problems and settling disputes. A comparison of ASEAN and the Caribbean Community approaches to environmental problems provides some lessons that ASEAN could adopt. This paper analyzes environmental security issues in Southeast Asia from the perspective of the ASEAN position and action practicing their environmental governance. Using the South China Sea territorial controversy and impending environmental problems as a case study, I argue that ASEAN's inadequate ability to enforce its environmental commitment at the national and local levels exacerbates environmental security in Southeast Asian countries.

Environmental and National Security

Environmental security is a concept that interconnects other aspects of national interests that can enhance or degrade the stability of a nation. Environmental issues are a non-military scope of security that can affect the overall security of a nation. Magno (1997) assessed that threats from environmental degradation could undermine national security and international structure. A state's inability to self-govern its people and allocate resources within its borders will create instability and dependency. The theory of a state's sovereignty and independence originated from the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648. The treaty declared that a state has rights to independently govern its citizens and territories without the interference from other countries and to maintain its identity (Buzan & Waever, 2003). Buzan and Weaver (2003) elaborated that national security elements are a complex amalgamation of political, military, economic, social, and environmental securities. The effort in linking environmental threats to national and

regional security is the pivotal concept of environmental security that is as critical as military and economic securities. Resource depletion, for example, can cause a state to lose the ability to distribute assets and govern its people consequently forcing people to migrate to neighboring countries. Environmental scarcity is the decline of renewable resources such as fish, forests, and water, and is the combination of these components: decrease in supply, increase in demand, and an imbalance of distribution (Homer-Dixon, 1999). Thus, the issues related to resource scarcity gains more significance in the political process and security policy formulation (Dalby, 2002). National security vulnerability associated with depleted natural resources could potentially lead to national instability due to the adverse ramifications on livelihoods and society.

National security is based on a traditional view of military and economic securities and is, therefore, the highest priority of a security agenda, while environmental security remains a less significant concern of national security for many countries. The relationship between natural resource scarcity and national instability is ambiguous because changes in the environment result in chronic and diffuse effects on natural resources which might not have immediate impacts on livelihood or directly cause conflicts. For example, less rainfall in a year does not cause a drought, but continued reduced precipitation over decades will alter water consumption or affect crop rotations and food production. Consequently, resource scarcity may contribute to large scale migration and rapid urbanization. The competition for natural resources is not likely to be the cause of a "resource war, " but environmental stress can contribute to subnational or ethnic violence for countries that depend on natural resources for their livelihoods (Homer-Dixon, 1999). Environmental scarcity in Southeast Asia is related to population growth and accelerated

economic expansion, developmental pressure, and a socio-political shift after the end of the Cold War (Hirsch, 2015). The demand for natural resources to maintain livelihoods and supply industrialized production is increasing dramatically, which also threatens the health of the environment. In the scope of national security, environmental issues are interdependent with other national security elements, and these factors combined can cause regional interstate conflicts or create opportunities for regional and multilateral cooperation (I took out the 's' in "cooperations," unless you meant corporations).

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its Environmental Governance Framework

The establishment of ASEAN in 1967 was to unite neighboring Southeast Asia states and to form stronger bonds creating a multilateral force in solving issues and advancing economics, politics, social and cultural development. Not until 1978 did ASEAN finally add regional environment cooperation with the goal "…to provide operational policy guidance on the various environmental programs being pursued" (ASEAN Secretariat, 2002). With competing interests in economics and politics, environmental issues were not at the regional forefront of discussion. The ASEAN governing approach is known as the "ASEAN Way." The ASEAN Way is characterized as a 'network structure…consultation, consensus, non-confrontation, private and personal diplomacy, and non-interference' (Elliot, 2012). ASEAN relies on non-binding agreements and national institutions which require complex cooperation among multiple layers of politics and more active participation than binding legal agreements to solve multinational

issues (Elliot, 2012 and Jayasuriya, 2009). The multilateral discourse on transnational environmental problems contrasts the ASEAN Way of governing (Hirsch & Warren, 1998). In addition, the ASEAN Way encourages its members to discreetly discuss transboundary environmental challenges to avoid open confrontation. However, with increasing international and regional environmental pressures, ASEAN finally responded with two binding Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEA). These binding agreements are based upon good faith and volunteerism and emphasize national sovereignty (Elliot, 2012). Since ASEAN adopted its first regional environmental policies and mandatory MEA's, Southeast Asia states continue to exercise the standard of the Westphalian State system of non-interference and have made minimal progress in regional environmental governing. Breslin, Higgott, and Rosamond (2002) criticized the ASEAN Way process for being slow, and many officials question its effectiveness and inability to solve environmental challenges; it is also an apparent failure of regional cooperation.

When common translational environmental challenges such as river pollution, transborder haze, and decreased fish stock in the South China Sea, arise within Southeast Asian nations, environmental issue discourses can be dubious and lead to confrontation, disputes and conflicts which is opposite of the ASEAN Way of governing (Hirsch & Warren, 1998). The ASEAN "top-down" management initiates the discussion. The highest decision making is held during the Summit of the ASEAN with Heads of State who provide proposals for projects to be adopted at the ministerial level which are responsible for formulating ASEAN environmental common standards (Koh & Robinson, 2002). Elliot (2012) elaborated that formal decision-

making for developing regional environmental policy and recommendations is then delegated to the ASEAN senior Officials on Environment (ASOEN). ASEAN Secretariat (2002) reported, the ASOEN holds several meetings to report on the progress of several working groups to provide guidance on the assortment of environmental programs such as Environmental Economics, Environmental Management, Trans-boundary Pollution, and Environmental Information, Public Awareness and Education. The ASEAN also identifies environmental activities and programs for future long-term undertaking. These initiatives are important in highlighting issues and cooperative plans at the ministerial level. It also recognizes the ownership and effort in each SEA state for their efforts in protecting the environment. ASEAN environmental cooperations initiated at the top level have great visions and are well-put together but not necessarily transcribed down to national or local level.

The ASEAN Way has been the core of regional governance, although it is without legally binding treaties on many issues. Minimal bureaucracy and legal structure within ASEAN has a limiting role in facilitating policies. With network structure cooperation, environmental governance in Southeast Asia is driven by elites or top-down management but not necessarily translated to the national or local level (Elliot, 2012). The ASEAN intergovernmental cooperation is a method of capacity and confidence building as a region rather than as a single nation. This network coalition of weak states can potentially shape an agenda and policy in regional and global contexts. The ASEAN multiple-level networking structure is complex and ambiguous, and the decision-making process is a state dependent rather than the collective action

of a region. Each Southeast Asia nation carries out its commitment and implements ASEAN initiatives based upon its capacity and ability to execute regional plans. The ASEAN Way of environmental governance has the potential to be reactive rather than proactive to the issues. At the cost of irreversible environmental depletion or species extinction, ASEAN protection and action plans are ineffective in settling environmental disputes.

South China Sea and Environmental Challenges

The South China Sea, despite the name, is located in the center of the Southeast Asia nations. It is a crucial conduit that connects the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Its borders are shared by many countries including China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Brunei. The dispute in the South China Sea involves these coastal states and has been chronic since 1970 until 2002 when China and the ASEAN countries signed the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea. According to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 1982 (UNCLOS), territorial waters extend 12 nautical miles from the shoreline, thus a coastal state has legal control and sovereignty over those waters. The coastal state also has exclusive rights to exploit natural resources within 200 nautical miles (230 miles) of the sea, or it is known as the exclusive economic zone (EEZ). The EEZ provides a foreign country freedom of navigation on the sea and airspace over the waters, but it is subject to the regulation of the coastal state that legally possesses that area and requires permission to navigate through the water and/or fly over the airspace (Kenyon, 2006). In 2009 the South China Sea territorial dispute resurfaced when China asserted its claim beyond its EEZ and backed its claim by

building artificial islands on the Spratly Islands chain atolls (De Castro, 2016). The Spratly Islands are approximately 700 miles from China which are clearly beyond the Chinese EEZ, but the Chinese used ancestral rights as a base for the claim. The strategic significance of the South China Sea to the globalized economy is increasing and territorial claims in the South China Sea are to exclusively gain access to natural resources and be able to exercise sovereignty over the waters. Robert D. Kaplan (2011) assessed that approximately $5 trillion in world trade flows through the South China Sea every year and has proven oil reserves of seven billion barrels and an estimated 900 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. China is a regional superpower that has influences in Southeast Asia region and confidently claimed the South China Sea as its sovereign territory. The intention is unclear, but China is tacitly demanding control over vital sea lanes of communications and imposing its maritime power through civil and military presence. This claim by China will impact the freedom of navigation and may impede lawful international commerce. The ASEAN is unable to negotiate with China because each SEA nation has a deep economic and political relationship with China. China is a regional power and provides financial aid and economic stability to the region; therefore, none of the SEA countries are willing to risk upsetting China with the territorial claim issues and facing sanctions or restrictions.

A state that claims sovereignty over territorial waters has an obligation to protect, prevent and reduce environmental impact by eliminating sources of marine pollution. The responsibility of coastal states is specified under part XII of UNCLOS,"…coastal states must protect and preserve the marine environment" (Kenyon, 2006). The South China Sea is home to over 6,500 marine species and 571 coral species of which are relatively healthy and abundant in comparison

to other areas (Liu, 2013). Coral reefs and atolls in the ocean are ecologically unique and provide habitat and protection for many marine species. These shallow coral reefs have a role in the replenishment of fish stock in the South China Sea's coastal areas (Sutherland, 2016). More than 70% of the Southeast Asia population lives in the coastal zones, and their livelihoods depend on the sea (Naess, 2002). Fish are a vital food staple as well as a source of income for the coastal population. Large-scale destruction of the coral reef and seafloor can overwhelm a species' ability to regenerate and possibly cause permanent damage the environment. Irreversible damage to this important biological resource can cause a decline in fish populations, reduction of other marine-dependent animals, and other environmental degradations.

The South China Sea territorial dispute is causing disagreement among claimant nations, but because of the political and diplomatic tensions, environmental preservation is not high on the agenda. Therefore, it is unlikely that these countries will take full responsibility for environmental protection much less conservation of the ecosystem. The Chinese aggression in the South China Sea has caused other claimant states to take similar action by building artificial islands on these atolls and submerged rocks. Vietnam has sovereignty over Paracels Island chains and has been reasserting its claim over the islands by expanding the islands and building permanent structures. Reclamation of the emerged atolls in the sea requires a substantial amount of sand and sediment to build an island for human occupation. The process uses the suction-dredging method which requires cutting coral and pumping material from the seafloor and depositing the material on top of the atolls to construct artificial islands (Mora, Caldwell, Birkeland, & McManus, 2016). China's unilateral claims over the Spratly atolls and the

Vietnamese reasserting its claim on the Paracels have caused considerable damage to the marine environment. Furthermore, these artificial islands are vulnerable to run off and instability caused by the dredging process; these islands will need to be periodically filled with material from the seafloor. The building and maintaining of these islands will cause long-term or permanent ecological damage, marine life loss, and species extinction. The ecological recovery process that is, directly and indirectly, the result of dredging and suctioning of the seafloor is slow and can take decades (Dulvy, Sadovy, & Reynolds, 2003). Despite territorial claims and rapid development on these atolls, minimum environmental protection actions are taken. The destruction of marine life and ecosystem in the South China Sea requires multinational cooperation and firm actions to conserve the marine ecosystem in the contested waters.

Further Contributions to Environmental Challenges in the South China Sea

Overfishing is one of the biggest threats to depleting resources in the South China Sea. The rise of industrialization and development in Southeast Asia countries has increased pressure on the natural environment and food sources. The South China Sea has been the primary source of fish for food, income, and livelihoods for coastal states' population. An estimated 10.5 million tons of annual catch from the South China Sea, or 15 billion dollars annual revenue, since 2010; China, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines combined account for more than 80% of the annual catch (Teh, Witter, Cheung, Sumaila & Yin, 2016). Commercial and subsistence marine fisheries are under pressure to catch more fish to support heavily industrialized and populated regions. The South China Sea fishing areas are considered open

access to coastal states. Therefore, competition for resources to over-capitalize intensifies as demand grows. For many decades damaging fishing techniques have been used in Thailand to maximize the catch. The extensive use of unregulated fishing gear and illegal fishing techniques, such as the use of explosives, continues to occur in the Gulf of Thailand to include the South China Sea due to inadequate enforcement. With the lack of mutually accepted marine fisheries regulations in the South China Sea, each country exploits fish stock at an irreplaceable rate. Also, the demand for rare and expensive seafood products such as shark fins, giant clams, and sea cucumbers is increasing in many countries as people are becoming more wealthy. Therefore, extensive fishing for these vulnerable species has resulted in a drastic decrease in population and potentially altered biodiversity structure (Christensen & Tull 2014). The Food and Agriculture Organization (2010) reported that over harvesting of fish occurs around the coast of Vietnam, Thailand, and China. Thus, fish stocks in these regions have sharply declined as a result of overexploitation and increasing number of commercial fishing vessels. Overfishing and capturing of juvenile fish impact regeneration and continue to threaten the declining marine ecosystem in the South China Sea.

Although China's aggression in the South China Sea is more prominent and on a large-scale, other claimants are asserting their plan of action in the contested water as well. These exploitation initiatives have negative impacts on the marine environment. In 2011, the Philippine government intended to offer 15 oil exploration contracts to foreign countries in the areas that are claimed by the Chinese (Hong, 2013). This action reaffirms the Filipino ownership of the disputed water. In addition, Vietnam also conducts oil production in the disputed water.

Hong (2013) reported that Vietnam has approximately 60 oil and gas exploration contracts to exploit territorial claims in the South China Sea. Offshore oil and gas exploration and drilling cause various forms of pollution that effect marine life and ecosystems. Exploration activities include conducting seismic surveys which generate a deafening sound that can kill fish or impair their hearing which disrupts the feeding or preying pattern (Waage & Chase, 2009). Exploration activities also pose a threat to migratory fish and cause them to change their corridor which effects fishing industries. Offshore oil drilling and production can cause spillage which increases levels of toxins and discharges contaminants into the water. The construction or deconstruction of these infrastructures is causing physical destruction of ecosystems, the sea floor, coral reefs and marine life habitat. The cumulative effects of gas and oil exploration and drilling can be devastating to the South China Sea ecosystem.

The ASEAN Way Toward Environmental Challenges

ASEAN environmental governance evolved from an informal agreement with limited standards and evaded legally binding multilateral agreements and trans-governmental networks. The 2007 ASEAN Declaration on Environmental Sustainability recognizes the growing "… global concern over the environment and ASEAN's obligation to its people…to ensure environmental sustainability" (ASEAN, 2007). ASEAN is committing itself and encouraging private industries, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and other institutions, to collectively tackle environmental issues. This multilateral environmental agreement is a positive transformation to address ASEAN's environmental challenges. Despite the environmental

agreements and capacity building through regional cooperations, ASEAN environmental governance still maintains the ASEAN Way policies. Kheng and Robinson (2002) described the weakness of the ASEAN Way in environmental policies as "…lack of effective dispute settlement process." The flexibility of the ASEAN Way contributes to the establishment of the loose environmental governance framework and the impotence of the process which is evident in finding solutions to many environmental challenges. Individual Southeast Asia countries have not shown a strong commitment to pursuing domestic environmental protection. The ASEAN approach toward environmental issues is a plan for cooperation rather than firm and decisive policies toward large-scale exploration and solving environmental problems. However, the challenges with Paracels and Spratly Islands territorial claims lie with the individual countries to confront China which has proven to be unsuccessful due to China's economic, political and military influences in the region.

The environmental security concept galvanized the ASEAN states to reform their cooperative approach to environmental governance to strengthen provisions of common resources (Magno, 1997). The loss of ecosystems and the accelerated rate of environmental deterioration in Southeast Asia are well documented, but the environmental policies and governance process are less known (Ananta, Bauer, & Thant, 2013). However, a few environmental initiatives emerged in response to the rising global problems. The 1985 ASEAN Agreement on Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources provides a robust legal framework for environmental policies if one chooses to adopt and enforce it (Springer, 2002). The increasing importance of effective management in marine waters within the ASEAN region was

acknowledged in the 2008 ASEAN Marine Water Quality: Management Guidelines and Monitoring Manual (ASEAN Secretariat, 2008). The publication was part of ASEAN states' partnership with the Australian Agency for International Development to create a project that identified legal issues, developed policies, and implemented marine water quality monitoring. The recognition of issues and concerted efforts to create the framework of protecting the environment provides opportunities for the ASEAN states to form an alliance with non-ASEAN members. The most recent ASEAN initiatives in response to environmental problems are documented in the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community 2025 where the environment is part of a larger vision in promoting sustainability (Chandra & Astriana, 2017). The challenges of these initiatives are implementing and enforcing the plan of action. Chandra and Austrian (2017) reported that 10 of 328 environmental actions were completed in 2015 and the remaining were in progress. The ASEAN approach in carrying out its commitments continues the tradition of the ASEAN Way that has hindered development and denied a sense of urgency.

The ASEAN Way of peacefully resolving any issues is the way of Southeast Asian village life reflecting on the regional level of cooperation which can be effective for certain issues and ineffective for others. Koh and Robinson (2002) agreed that the ASEAN Way consensus lacks legal and binding plans to avoid treaties and legislative rules; these mutual agreements create non-committal to the cause or inaction for many regional issues and conflicts. Also, implementing environmental commitment is dependent on each Southeast Asia country's capability, not as a regional reinforcement. Since the establishment of the ASEAN cooperation on the environment, the organization published the ASEAN State of the Environment Report

every three years. This report emphasizes on education, spreading information and raising awareness of environmental challenges (ASEAN Secretariat, 2009). These technical reports can also serve as data for future research and development. Despite the increasing recognition of environmental issues from the governments, there has been minimal change in the behavior at the national level. The ineffectiveness of the decentralized process can be explained as the complexity created by multiple actors involved in the policy and decision-making process; it is routinely an overlap of jurisdiction and contradictions (Edwards and Heiduk, 2015). Thus, the ASEAN Way is often reactive and vulnerable to corruption and collusion. The top-down process in responding to environmental challenges detracts from the urgency of solving environmental problems.

The ASEAN Way of Solving The South China Sea Environmental Issues

The South China Sea environmental and natural resources dispute prompted the ASEAN cooperations on many issues. Multilateral cooperation on the South China Sea's environmental problem is a relatively new concept (Naess 2002). Joint efforts in resource protection in the South China Sea began in the 1990's, but it requires tremendous effort in governing and enforcing common regional interests (Magno, 1998). The South China Sea Workshop started in 1990 to deal with the regional maritime environment and has been successfully disseminating information and knowledge about environmental problems. The lack of interest in conflict resolution at the regional and national levels makes solving issues a low priority (Harris, 2002). The South China Sea Strategic Action Program and the biodiversity proposal was initiated as a

result of the South China Sea Workshop; however, member states have not been implemented because the states did not agree on how to proceed with environmental cooperation (Naess, 2002). As ASEAN moved toward policy-oriented action, the lack of formal binding impedes the progress. ASEAN developed the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1994 as confidence building and a constructive dialogue platform to refine its role in regional security. However, the forum consists of ministerial level participants and continues its slow pace of any issues (Borchers, 2014). The ASEAN environmental governance has a loose, informal structure for handling issues and challenges. The discussion starts at the highest intergovernmental meeting, the ASEAN summit, and the decisions proceed down to national and local level. At any time, any interest groups or civil society can intervene or get involved in the process through various ASEAN meetings and workshops.

ASEAN is taking a peaceful approach to capacity building and establishing an environmental security protocol to ensure sustainability of resources. This positive strategy to the environment can reaffirm the member commitment to regional security and encourage the claimant states to impose limits in extracting resources from the South China Sea. In 2002, the ASEAN foreign ministers and China agreed on the non-binding Declaration of Conduct in the South China Sea to avoid any hostility in the region. The revision of this document has been in progress since 2010 and is not yet complete. Furthermore, all ASEAN members complied with the 2002 version except for China. In 2016, the Arbitral Tribunal under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea delivered an overwhelming legal victory to the Philippines over China (Searight, 2017). The Spratly Islands are legally and internationally recognized as

the Philippines' territory. However, the Chinese continue its resistance and carry on with activities on the Spratly. The Philippine government and ASEAN remain mostly inactive and silent in response to Chinese resistance of the court ruling. During the 2017 ASEAN Summit, the South China Sea issues were never discussed at prime ministerial level (Wong, 2017). All member states have different opinions on how to handle the current development in the disputed water. At the conclusion of the latest summit, Southeast Asian leaders did not have a mutual agreement on how to address the South China Sea issues (Mogato & Dela Cruz, 2017). As a result of this divisive issue, solving disputes and environmental problems remain undetermined as the issues will continue to exacerbate the deteriorated South China Sea maritime ecosystem.

The ASEAN Way and Environmental Cooperative Opportunities

Competing interests of natural resources in the South China Sea have led to overlapping territorial claims and general dissent on sovereignty and responsibilities in protecting the surrounding environment. However, all claimants are quick to reclaim the submerged rocks and remove the resources within the disputed area. Hirsch and Warren (1998) found that the strength and weaknesses of institutions such as ASEAN become the critical foundation in securing political influence in regards to protecting the environment. Many environmental protection civil societies in Southeast Asia are risking compromises from bribery, corruption, personal interests, and political pressure. As China continues to assert its military and political powers in

the South China Sea, environmental problems have been underestimated as a result of the territorial claim. ASEAN must aggressively pursue the environmental governance to safeguard the heavily exploited region. Magno (1998) suggested that joint development in the South China Sea and diplomatic confidence-building measures are application concepts that will allow for marine ecosystem protection. To prevent environmental impacts from industrial-based pollution and other development projects in the South China Sea, claimants must find cooperative measures to avoid depositing waste or destroying habitat. Multilateral cooperation to maintain environment treaties, which are legally binding, has the potential for larger gains for future generations and can contribute to regional peace and stability.

Natural resources exploitation and depletion are increasing worldwide. Environmental issues are subdued, and nuance in many Southeast Asia states. Often it is the link to global problems rather than one country's issue. UNCLOS recognizes the integration of global and regional cooperation for protecting and preserving the marine environment (Kenyon, 2006). Many ecological and environmental changes in the region are the result of developmental pressure, population growth and socio-political shift (Hirsch, 2015). As a region, Southeast Asia is aware of the importance of protecting natural resources to achieve the global shift toward sustainable development. According to the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2009-2015, ASEAN will be working toward promoting a clean environment and conserving terrestrial and marine biodiversity in the region (ASEAN Secretariat, 2009). ASEAN must have firm mechanisms in disputed settlements. Environmental protection rules and regulations must be observed and enforced by all Southeast Asia states. Implementation of multinational

environmental agreements requires all relevant government agencies, stakeholders, and civil society organizations. ASEAN's capacity building and regional cooperation need firm and decisive actions to protect the environment.

Comparing Environmental Cooperation: The Caribbean Lesson Learned and the ASEAN

The Caribbean and the Southeast Asia region share similar geographical and climatological orientations. The two communities have almost identical characteristics— small developing countries with several archipelago island nations and also share a body of water. The Caribbean and Southeast Asia are both in close proximity to the world powers of China and the U.S. Environmentally they are also facing the same issues such as resource depletion and overfishing. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and ASEAN also pursue regional based cooperation toward conservation and environmental issues. While ASEAN has a top-down approach, CARICOM decision making is done at the ministerial level, but environmental activities are aimed at the local level. CARICOM focuses on regional NGOs that empower the communities to manage their resources by involving them in research, planning, and enforcing policies (Jácome, 2006). Regional environmental cooperation has proven to be difficult to achieve because each country has different interests and goals. However, CARICOM's approach has the aim of implementing policies and maintaining its status quo within communities, and many local NGOs have the same goals of conservation and economic developments in a single region. Thus, those at the national and local levels are embracing assistance from various organizations and networks. Jácome (2006) described the CARICOM environmental

cooperation as a bilateral relationship between local NGOs and regional or international NGOs. NGOs have a prominent role in the Caribbean region to protect the environment. There is less resistance and only a few steps in the process of carrying out environmentally related activities from the government.

Local NGOs have the knowledge of the problems and understand the needs to improve and sustain the environment. The NGOs are the best tools for solving environmental problems. The organization structure of the CARICOM environmental group, the Caribbean Conservation Association (CCA), is made up of a majority of NGOs and interested individuals rather than governmental representatives (Jácome, 2006). The governments have fewer mediation roles in implementing plans or policies. The CARICOM is precise and locally focused on the issues in contrast to the ASEAN who have a long drawn out multiple layer process which produces minimum results at local levels. The bilateral approach between NGOs and the regional group is more efficient in the Caribbean for executing the plan; the technical and financial support proceeds go directly from the NGO to local communities. The bilateral strategy has minimized information sharing between groups or at the multilateral level because each NGO and project is independent and do not belong to the network. The lack of a regional mutual relationship indicates that the Caribbean regional cooperation in solving common environmental problems is an obstacle in achieving multilateralism. On the contrary, the ASEAN multilateralism approach is proven to be insufficient in addressing environmental problems. Many CARICOM states environmentally related projects fully integrate NGOs and other international organizations as part of the undertaking, while NGO roles within ASEAN is limited. The coalition of efforts has

been identified as an effective approach as environmental threats are becoming regional and global concerns; unilateral action is less practical in addressing environmental problems (Chasek, Downie, & Brown, 2017). In the pursuance of the regional environmental conservation, the ASEAN multilateral strategy revolutionized from focusing on projects to issues. However, each Southeast Asia country should focus on its internal institutions and influence its government and citizens to take more responsibility in solving its domestic environmental problems. CARICOM states committing themselves on local and national scales have more success in environmental conservation and protection while ASEAN regional efforts prove to be inadequate.

Conclusion

The ASEAN states share many regional interests and have a shared history with one another through peace and war. The region also shares common resources, such as fish and water. Natural resources exploitation and depletion might not have a direct correlation with armed conflict or traditional threats within a boundary, however, it contributes to other transnational problems such as illegal migration, trans-border smuggling, and human trafficking, as people are searching for more resources to sustain their livelihoods. Nevertheless, environmental security against the backdrop of economic expansion and diplomatic tension is likely to cause non-military conflict. Homer-Dixon (1998) noted that it is unlikely that environmental scarcity will cause a war on resources. These issues have become the global concern and lead to bilateral or multilateral cooperations (Magno, 1999). Environmental scarcity and competition for resources are new threats to national and regional security in a globalization

era which can affect the survival of the state. The ASEAN environmental governance was an after thought when the organization was created, and environmental challenges remain less important in the region and receive much less consideration. The lack of enthusiasm in environmental conservation or protection is possibly due to policies which are lost in translation from top-down management processes. Another contribution is the lack of policy checks and balances when each country is left to carry out the plan on its capability and willingness. For example, the wealthier countries, such as Singapore, will put more money and resources into protecting the environment, but the less developed countries, such as Laos, having less wealth and resources will be less vigorous in approaching environmental issues.

The current dispute in the South China Sea and its by-products of environmental degradation are within the framework of environmental security because it corresponds with Southeast Asia's expanding economy, growing population, and environmental transition. ASEAN's environmental governance is gaining importance because of the international environmental pressure. However, ASEAN environmental policies are still weak because of its non-binding agreements and loosely structured framework. Many states are exercising the ASEAN Way for solving issues to avoid confrontation. The process is time consuming due to multi-layered processes and stakeholders. Environmental issues in Southeast Asia are not at the top of the regional agenda because of political and diplomatic tensions. Subsequently, the South China Sea's environmental problems and resource disputes have been overlooked which cause issues to inflame. The destruction of coral reefs and marine ecosystems in the disputed areas will potentially contribute to loss of the livelihood and cause other regional trans-borders issues.

Thus, the environmental issues are impacting national and regional security. Environmental security in the South China Sea is exacerbated by these overlapping territorial claims for sovereignty and ultimately for natural resources. The ASEAN states and China must establish a legal framework to protect and preserve the South China Sea ecological systems to protect the common interests and promote regional stability.

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