

Is asean a toothless tiger? essay sample

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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Association of Southeast Asian (ASEAN) established officially on 8th August 1967 in Bangkok by the participating Government and its members were Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines. Its purpose was to ensure the survival of its members by promoting regional stability and limiting competition between them.[1] The Bangkok Declaration gave birth to ASEAN and it states that the objectives of ASEAN are to accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region.[2] There are definitely some positive and negative perspectives on ASEAN especially when being struck by a few crises but on top of that, ASEAN is still breathing up till today. To today's date, ASEAN is made up of 10 countries namely, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. The achievements of ASEAN are impressive since its existence since there is no armed conflict between the ASEAN members in a region previously beset by confrontation although bilateral tensions arises on several occasions. Internationally, ASEAN has managed to attain a high profile and the regional grouping has acted in concert in the economic as well as in the diplomatic spheres.[3]

A tiger is being explain as a fierce or brave animal and is feared by anyone just by putting tiger on their mind. To be further explained in our context is brave in making decision and act accordingly to the decision made. On the other hand, a toothless tiger is a fearless animal and is a laughing factor even when putting it on our mind. Simply put, a toothless tiger in our context is an organisation that did not make any action but only say things without accomplishing it and in other words it is simply referred to ' a talk show'. Everybody would agree upon action speaks louder than words for which

ASEAN did not take this into their consideration by holding on to their principle of Non-interference. There are three important codes of conduct for the Non-interference principle governing intra-ASEAN relations. First, members are discouraged to criticise or intervene members' internal affairs. Second, it commits members to deny sanctuary or support to groups seeking to subvert or overthrow the governments of member states.[4] Third, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s the principle discouraged members from providing external powers with any form of support deemed subversive to other members.[5]

In the early 1960s, the non-interference policy has brought up conflicts of its origin that involves Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. Examples of this explained when an independent Malaysia is being opposed by Indonesia and Philippines for which the territories inclusive of Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei. Brunei and also some factions in Sabah and Sarawak opposed their inclusion. Konfrontasi was a policy of regional disruption that becomes the crucial conflict that involved Indonesia's aggressive acts against Malaysia. Also, Jakarta sponsored low-level military incursions into Malaysia and gave subversive groups in Sabah, Sarawak, Brunei and Mainland Malaysia training and other forms of support in an effort to destabilise the nascent nation. Moreover, the presence of the role of powers such as Britain, the Soviet Union, the U. S. and the Netherlands led to mutual distrust among future ASEAN states.

Another area to be looked at why ASEAN may be referred as a toothless tiger is for their tepid response to the Burmese junta's Human rights violations

and obstruction of democracy. Here, the relaxation of the non-interference doctrine has varying implications among the ASEAN members. As a result of this, the junta not only continues to resist visits by foreign delegations but also offers limited access to its domestic affairs, even to fellow ASEAN members. ASEAN is substantially at loss when dealing with Burma where this is further explained when there is no ASEAN states were aware of the junta's mysterious plan of moving its capital from Rangoon to the new site at Pyinmana.

Another ASEAN norm issue is the ASEAN way where it is based upon the Malay cultural practices of musjawarah and mufukat that represent an approach of decision making that emphasizes consensus and consultation. Musjawarah means “ that a leader should not act arbitrarily or impose his will, but rather make gentle suggestions of the path a community should follow, being careful always to consult all other participants fully and to take their views and feelings into consideration before delivering his synthesis conclusions.”[6]Mufukat means consensus and is the goal toward musjawarah is directed.[7] Another example why ASEAN is a toothless tiger is where in industrial policy, flexibility has not been a feature of the ASEAN way. Significantly, the creation of an ASEAN free trade area, which officially came into existence in 2002, together with Hanoi Plan of action of 1998 where the pace of integration accelerated by creating a common ASEAN investment area, has failed to transform the trade practice of the ASEAN states.

It has not established an integrated ASEAN economic community even though in 1998, the six longest-standing members-Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand agreed to a common effective preferential tariff scheme to reduce levies on one another's goods to a maximum 5 percent, nontariff barriers and excise duties remain in place. The recourse to bilateralism in practice, while paying lip service to economic integration at the annual meetings of ASEAN's economic ministers, reveal profound differences over regional economic cooperation.[8] For example, Singapore favors trade liberalisation where Malaysia is more toward mutual technical and economic assistance. In the nontraditional security threats, the ASEAN security community promulgated in the Bali Concord II seeks to resolve intrastate and transnational security threats without violating respect for territorial integrity outlined in the Treaty of Amity and Co-operation in Southeast Asia (TAC).

Therefore, the ASEAN Standing Committee (ASC) envisages cooperative security deepening ASEAN integration without undermining the sovereignty of member states. Since the end of Cold War, nontraditional threats include haze pollution, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome epidemic, Avian Influenza and transnational terrorism that challenged the security of the ASEAN states. Assumptions arise where ASEAN was expected to gather intelligence factor by sharing it with the ASEAN states, intra-ASEAN police cooperation and a shared regional approach to the problem. Instead, shared norms have not engendered a sense of unity in the face of regionally generated transboundary threats that the ASC collectively faces.

For example, ASEAN response to regionally generated transboundary problems of air pollution contradicts official consensus and actual practice that do not confine to ASC approaches. Fires from Indonesia forests brought up air pollution to neighbouring ASEAN country members of Singapore and Malaysia and for ASEAN to address the problem is by following consensus-seeking norm and convened a number of meetings. However, failed to stop the most extreme, costly and life threatening haze of 1997. The outcomes from such meeting are to monitor and prevent haze pollution for which it lacks any mechanism of deterrence like all ASEAN agreements.

In terrorism, the response to the September 11 attacks and Bali bombings of 2002 and 2005 are further explained with the series of declarations outlining a common stance. To counter terrorism, the 2001 Declaration on Joint Action, ASEAN states required to strengthen national mechanisms to combat terrorism, deepen the cooperation of intelligence sharing and law enforcement and develop regional capacity-building programs to enhance the capabilities of member countries to investigate, detect, monitor and report terrorists activities. As for Bali bombings of October 12, 2002 reiteration in declaration for combating terrorism through enhanced cooperation and established a regional counterterrorism center in Kuala Lumpur. Additionally, ASEAN cooperate with states outside region to fight terrorism and in August 2002, a Joint Declaration for Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism with the United States was signed. This committed both parties to a series of counterterrorism initiatives with a proviso that safeguarded the national sovereignty of ASEAN states.[9] Being to the given declarations, any intelligence and information exchange central to

identifying, monitoring and disrupting terrorists' activity occurs at sub regional level. This is not an integrated community approach but somehow this is between ASEAN states and states outside the ASC.

It is argued that ASEAN is only an organisation that did not act upon the words spoken. It is all being proven with the real life examples as explained in the contents of this essay. To answer the question, yes, ASEAN is only a toothless tiger for which if the non-interference norm and ASEAN way contradicts the factors explained above. Sadly, the ASEAN members are only to sit and talk without successfully entailed a solution or any actions taken prior to the problem arises for the state members of ASEAN.

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[1] Narine Shaun, Explaining ASEAN: Regionalism in Southeast Asia, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, United Kingdom, 2002, p. 12.

[2] Rajah Ananda, ' Social and Cultural Issues in ASEAN', in Sandhu K. S, Siddique Sharon et al (eds.), The ASEAN Reader, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore 1992, p. 131.

[3] Ramcharan Robin, ' Insights from ASEAN's Foreign Policy Co-operation: The ASEAN Way, a Real Spirit or a Phantom?', Contemporary Southeast Asia, Vol. 22, No. 1, 2000. p. 89.

[4] Katanyuu Ruukun, ' Beyond Non-Interference in ASEAN: The Association's Role in Myanmar's National Reconciliation and Democratization', Asian Survey, Vol. XLVI, No. 6, 2006. p. 826.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Narine Shaun, Explaining ASEAN: Regionalism in Southeast Asia, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, United Kingdom, 2002, p. 12.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Jones David Martin and Smith Micheal L. R., ' Making Process, Not Progress: ASEAN and the Evolving East Asian Regional Order.', International Security, Vol. 32, No. 1, 2009. p. 167

[9] Jones David Martin and Smith Micheal L. R., ' Making Process, Not Progress: ASEAN and the Evolving East Asian Regional Order.', International Security, Vol. 32, No. 1, 2009. pp. 170-171.