



The Implementation of Defence Diplomacy in ASEAN during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Case Study of ASEAN Center of Military Medicine (ACMM)

Therenza Prasticke Daos Kadati

President University

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E-mail address:

therenzaorsuti@gmail.com

Abstract

ASEAN is currently facing unprecedented security challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic since the beginning of 2020. Defence diplomacy has been playing a key role in addressing this issue. Thus, this paper aims to analyze the implementation and changes of defence diplomacy in ASEAN, particularly on ASEAN Center of Military Medicine before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research uses a qualitative method that is descriptive with a research question, "How was the implementation of Defence Diplomacy in ASEAN through ACMM during the COVID-19 Pandemic?". While the conceptual framework used in this research is defense diplomacy and defense cooperation. As a results, the paper found that ACMM has developed during the COVID-19 pandemic with the change in focus from disaster relief to humanitarian assistance, especially in the medical sector. The paper also found that there have been changes in the form of activities from face-to-face to virtual activities such as tabletop exercises and workshops online instead of joint training and field exercise.

Keywords: ASEAN, COVID-19, Defence Cooperation, Defence Diplomacy, Humanitarian Assistance

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered an unprecedented global economy, politics, and security challenges for the last decade (WHO, 2020). In Southeast Asia, COVID-19 has put millions of lives at risk. Many countries faced worsened economic contraction and increasing danger of the spread of the virus through travel and social activities (UN Sustainable Development Group, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic also raised a concern to ASEAN in security and defence issues. A Joint Statement by the ASEAN Defence Ministers in February 2020 in Vietnam stated that COVID-19 had affected regional security and stability in the region (ASEAN, 2021). Furthermore, on June 20, 2022, at the 21st ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) meeting in Jakarta, Indonesian Foreign Minister, Retno Marsudi stated that the COVID-19 pandemic has disturbed the world's geopolitical landscape and created uncertainties with potential impact on the ASEAN community-building effort and its regional stability (Marsudi, 2020).

Thus, it is interesting to look at how countries deal with regional defence and security in the region during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this case, the implementation of defence diplomacy in the region should be highlighted. The reason for this is that several reports have discovered that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted significantly to the implementation of defence diplomacy in many regions globally.

Defence diplomacy in ASEAN has many forms, in which one of them is manifested under the umbrella of the ASEAN Political-Security Community, whereby countries in ASEAN hold

many defence cooperation in a variety of sectors. Perhaps the most significant defence diplomacy occurred through the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM), a meeting in which countries discuss a variety of diplomacy activities in a wide range of issues such as "maritime security, counter-terrorism, humanitarian assistance, and others and implement some form of regional joint agreements" (ASEAN, n.d.).

Under ADMM, 15 initiatives have been made as part of defence cooperation in ASEAN. One of them is closely related to how countries handle the COVID-19 pandemic, which is the ASEAN Center of Military Medicine (ASEAN, n.d.). During the COVID-19 pandemic, ACMM has been seen as the most active cooperation done by ASEAN countries. Assessment of ACMM implementation should be seen as an important for the defence diplomacy in ASEAN since the unprecedented COVID-19 could have impact towards how the activities of defence diplomacy is running. However, there is a very few literatures that discussing about the implementation of ACMM during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly analysis about its differences before the pandemic.

Based on the above explanation, the question on this topic would be as follow, *"How was the implementation of Defence Diplomacy in ASEAN through ACMM during the COVID-19 Pandemic?"*.

Therefore, this paper aims to assess thoroughly the implementation of defence diplomacy through ACMM program during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as compare how it differs from the implementation of ACMM program before the COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis will revolve around the implementation of ACMM in terms of its activities, form of cooperation, and form of activities during the aforementioned period.

Conceptual Framework: Defence Diplomacy and Defence Cooperation

Before further analyzing the problem, it is essential to explain the conceptual framework that is relevant to the analysis, which is defence diplomacy and defence cooperation.

The first is defence diplomacy. Defence diplomacy is a concept that was introduced after the end of the cold war which was driven by the political need to create a peaceful environment (Drab, 2018). According to Andrew Cottey and Anthony Forster, defence diplomacy has traditionally used weapons and infrastructure, as well as the instruments that support them, as part of its means in advancing its security and foreign policy (Cottey and Forster, 2004).

Historically, defence diplomacy has usually been carried out in defence cooperation and military assistance, which according to Morgenthau, are part of international realpolitik and the balance of power to serve national interests. In this diplomacy, a state engages in defence cooperation and assists other states in counterbalancing or deterring the enemy, managing the spread of influence, and support regimes that support them by suppressing domestic political opponents or positioning commercial interests (Morgenthau, 1948).

Defence diplomacy does not involve military operations but defence activities such as personnel changes or exchanges, visits by military aircraft and warships, meetings between senior officials and the ministry of defence, education and training, regional defence forums, assistance programs, actions to build trust and security, and activities for weapons development (Anwar, 2014).

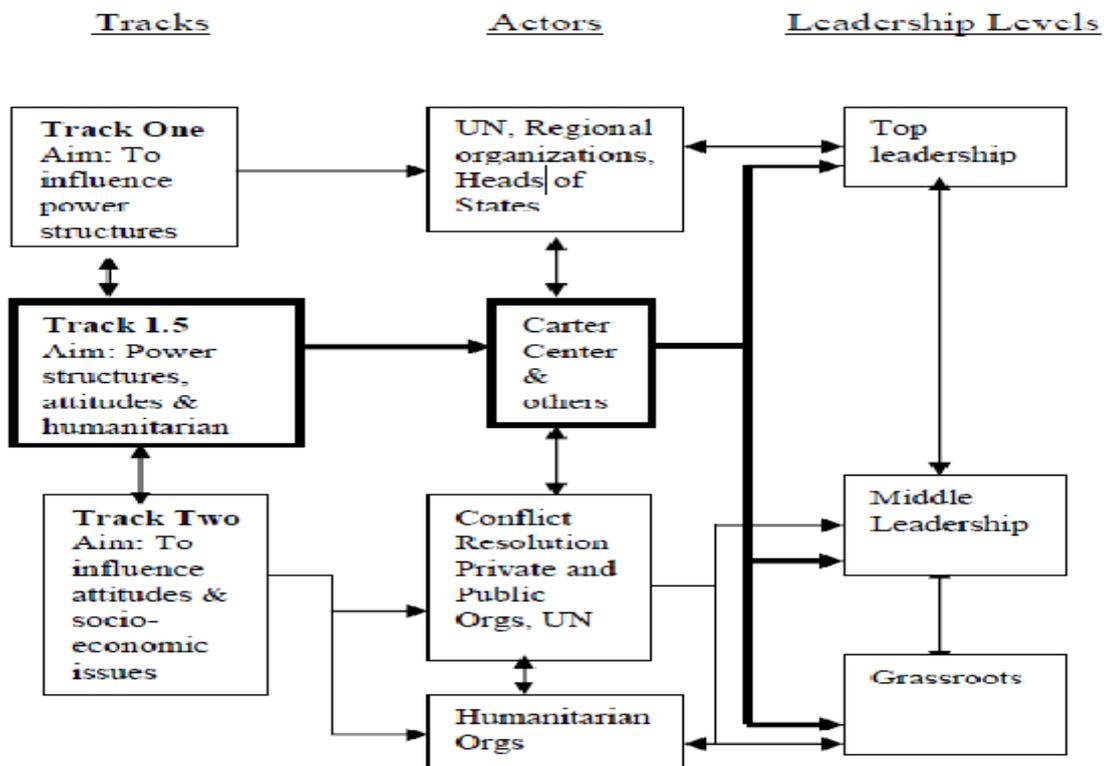
In contrast to military involvement, which is synonymous with coercion and violence, defence diplomacy is more non-coercive or involves violence and coercion. Furthermore, the

nature of defence diplomacy is based on transparency, reputation, and integrity, as well as using non-violent and coercive methods such as persuading to negotiate, can influence conflict escalation (Blake, 2016).

When it comes to defence diplomacy, there are several roles and objectives to consider. Defence diplomacy seeks to foster and sustain trust in the advancement of the armed forces (Drab, 2018). Andrew Cottey and Anthony Forste (2004) stressed that defence diplomacy in military cooperation could play a significant political role, especially to build broader cooperation and build mutual trust with one another. It can also be a means to build or strengthen common interests towards a peaceful environment.

Countries use defence diplomacy for a variety of reasons. The ASEAN countries' use defence diplomacy focuses on defence cooperation to achieve the regional defence sector's goals. Defence cooperation is a subset of defence diplomacy that encompasses all forms of support for defence interests (Mangindaan, 2013).

According to Kraft (2000), there are three types of defence diplomacy actors: level track one, track two and track 1.5. In track 1, defence diplomacy actors are managed by official actors include main and supporting actors. Track one seeks to influence power structures at the highest levels of leadership. Track two, also known as Backtrack Diplomacy, is accomplished through non-governmental, informal, and unofficial contact and activities between private citizens (Diamond, 1991). Meanwhile, track 1.5 is diplomacy practised by a mix of government officials who participate in unofficial activities and non-governmental experts at a single table. The table is provided below for better visualization on the concept of Defence Diplomacy as follow:



Source: *Second Track Diplomacy Phase. Kraft and Edy Kaufman (2000)*

In the case of the topic on this paper, track one is led by actors who have expertise in the field of defence and military; ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting forum such as the ministry

of defence or high-rank military leaders, and Army/Navy/Air Force generals. At the same time, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs plays the supporting role of the leading actor in diplomacy. Track two focuses on non-official actors such as the Network of ASEAN Defence and Security Institutions (NADI), think tanks, research institutions, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Track 1.5 is a hybrid of tracks one and two, such as ASEAN Center of Military Medicine, which comprises of both formal and non-formal events presented by official and non-official actors.

The second is defence cooperation, which is one of the means used by defence diplomacy as means to achieve state's foreign policy objective by creating activities that form a friendship, conflict prevention, and capacity building. According to Zandee, Drent, and Hendriks, there are several considerations for defence cooperation, namely: trust/confidence/solidarity, sovereignty and autonomy, strategic cultural similarities, geography and history, standardization and interoperability (Zandee et al, 2016).

It is important to note that defence cooperation is part of defence diplomacy, especially on Track 1.5 diplomacy since the defence cooperation involves formal actors to cooperate in the mix of formal and non-formal meetings. In the context of ASEAN, defence cooperation is often used to advance national foreign policy goals by implementing various activities such as joint training, information sharing, workshops, and other types of cooperation.

In this article, the author will focus on analyzing defence cooperation at track 1.5, namely ACMM which can be an instrument that countries use in the Southeast Asia region to establish defence diplomacy in ASEAN defence cooperation. The author limits the focus on multilateral defence cooperation with the role of the military as a factor that influences ASEAN defence cooperation in the mids of the pandemic, especially on strategic consulting activities as outlined through ADMM. The analysis of track 1.5 is considered as more relevant to the concept of defence diplomacy in answering the research question.

Research Method

This study uses a qualitative method that emphasizes a descriptive explanation of the problem using defense diplomacy and defense cooperation as a conceptual framework. The data collection technique used is literature study so that the data used comes from official reports and ASEAN websites, books, journal articles, institutional reports, and other additional data. Furthermore, this paper will discuss the ACMM program before and during the pandemic to examine the implementation of defense diplomacy in ASEAN.

Discussion

This research will begin by discussing ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) as a part of the ASEAN, which deal with defence and security issues. The explanation revolves around the goal of APSC in ASEAN, ADMM as an ASEAN defence cooperation mechanism, ACMM, the implementation of ACMM before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, comparison: changes and continuity.

ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC)

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a regional organization in Southeast Asia that has aim to promote regional peace and stability via close and successful active interaction with regional organizations and internationally (ASEAN, n.d).

Since its founding in 1967, ASEAN has become the primary vehicle for numerous Southeast Asian countries to work at the multilateral level. To achieve this goal, the ASEAN Community, which has three pillars of cooperation: the political and security pillar; the economic pillar; and the socio-cultural pillar.

In particular, ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) was formed to build a coherent, peaceful, and highly resilient area with shared responsibilities, as ASEAN also deals with political and security issues. According to ASEAN, APSC also aims to ensure that “Southeast Asian countries live in harmony with one another and with the rest of the world in a just, democratic, and peaceful environment” (ASEAN, n.d.).

As a regional framework for ASEAN members, the APSC was formed to resolve security issues and disputes within it as well as promote and accelerate higher-level cooperation (Sari, 2019). Therefore, to respond to various kinds of threats and to create a stable and safe region, ASEAN carries one of the significant APSC forums, namely ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting (ADMM).

ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting (ADMM) as an ASEAN Defence Cooperation Mechanism

Under the APSC, there is a forum agenda called as the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting (ADMM). ADMM is a platform for cooperation among ASEAN Defence Ministers that aims to strengthen Confidence Building Measures (CBM) and maintain peace and security stability in the area via dialogue and practical cooperation. The ADMM is ASEAN’s highest defence consultation and cooperation mechanism. ADMM can help foster mutual trust through improving awareness of defence and security concerns, as well as increasing transparency and openness (ADMM, n.d.).

At the 10th ASEAN Summit, APSC stipulates that ASEAN will hold an annual forum agenda, namely the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting (ADMM). Since the implementation of The Inaugural Meeting of ADMM in Kuala Lumpur in May 2006 and The Inauguration of ADMM-Plus in Hanoi in October 2010, ADMM and ADMM-Plus have made much progress, starting from capacity building cooperation, building mutual trust through various forums, dialogues, workshops, to practical and concrete cooperation such as improving coordination and interoperability between defence and military personnel of its member countries (ASEAN, n.d.).

Based on the Declaration of the Special ASEAN Summit on Coronavirus Disease 2019, stated that:

“We commend the efforts to enhance practical cooperation among ASEAN defence establishments to organise information and best practice sharing activities, and with our external partners, bilaterally or multilaterally, including the holding of a tabletop exercise on public health emergencies response by the ASEAN Center of Military Medicine (ACMM);”

Therefore, this paper seeks to analyze further the implementation of ACMM during the COVID-19 pandemic and how the ASEAN countries dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic through ACMM initiative.

ASEAN Center of Military Medicine (ACMM)

The ASEAN Center of Military Medicine (ACMM) was formed in Thailand in 2016 after ASEAN member countries decided to design coordinated military medical operations and

disaster assistance in the area. ACMM was founded to foster practical, effective, and long-term cooperation among member countries' military medical services in both routine and crises (ACMM, n.d.).

According to an ASEAN secretariat report, ACMM has the objective to assist regional efforts in the field, such as "drafting cooperative medical response plans, assessing medical requirements in crisis events, and conducting courses and research in emergency medical care".

ACMM holds an important role in handling the regional instability in the case of disaster management and medical crisis. The initiative was made to create a well-coordinated effort by ASEAN countries that are facing a variety of crises in particular to emergency medical care with the use of military means. The author further would like to assess the development of ACMM program before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Implementation of ACMM Program Before COVID-19 Pandemic

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, ACMM was meant to facilitate the coordination and cooperation among ASEAN countries, agencies, and international organizations to support collaborations in military medical areas. Therefore, ACMM often visited, shared practices, exchanged training and field exercises with military medical doctors from ADMM-Plus countries to enhance defence cooperation in the military medicine sector.

ACMM has implemented various activities such as workshops, forums, exercises, practise sharing, and online information. The vital role of ACMM is supported by the collaboration between the military and health sectors as part of its ASEAN defence cooperation mechanism (ACMM, n.d). For example, in March 2019, a MEDEX field exercise was held in India. ACMM sent a team of 10 to help lead a working group of military medical experts (ACMM, 2019).

Then, in April 2019, ACMM officials met with a delegation of US Armed Forces military medicine professionals at the ACMM facility in Bangkok to share information and skills in discussing the harmonization of cross-border public health surveillance and the prevention of significant disease outbreaks. Furthermore, to increase disaster response teams and preparation, ACMM provides training for medical emergency response teams that serve as mobile emergency rooms (IP Defence Forum, 2019).

On June 23, 2019, at ADMM Meeting at the 34th ASEAN Summit in Bangkok, the office of the ASEAN chair stated that ACMM is formally included in the ASEAN charter as a subsidiary organization. With this enhanced status, the ACMM will be able to contribute even more to improving cooperation in military medicine, increasing ASEAN's disaster response, and assisting in the consolidation of a people-centred ASEAN community (ASEAN, 2019).

In terms of the issue, ACMM was heavily involved in the disaster management issue. According to the ACMM spot report, during the 2016-2019 period, ACMM took various actions in the issues related to the disaster in the region such as volcano eruption, earthquake, flood, landslide and tsunami (ACMM, n.d.) ACMM also actively monitors crises in the region where medical intervention may be required, or disease outbreaks may occur. It then sends regular updates to ASEAN member countries.

However, since the COVID-19 pandemic occur, ACMM was taking a more active role in the humanitarian assistance related to the issue of the COVID-19 pandemic, which will be explained below.

The Implementation of ACMM Program During the COVID-19 Pandemic

ACMM first spotted the danger of COVID-19 on December 31, 2019, when the World Health Organization (WHO) China Country Office reported a pneumonia case in Wuhan, China. Since then, ACMM has been actively following the situation and on 7 January 2021, released the first spot report titled “Mysterious viral epidemic in China, it’s not SARS, so what is it?” to notify ACMM members about the dangers of COVID-19 in Southeast Asia (ACMM, 2021).

It should be remembered that the AMS (ASEAN Member States) response to the Covid-19 pandemic cannot be replaced by regional organizations given the principle of non-interference that must be respected if ASEAN experiences difficulties in creating integration in the regional response (RSIS VideoCast, 2020). This shows that the regional response is not a mandate during a pandemic because ASEAN does not have the competence to impose a COVID-19 response against AMS but instead aims to encourage a cohesive regional response to COVID-19. Based on a report from the OECD that increased policy convergence between AMS and a more integrated regional response to COVID-19 in ASEAN is evidence of the real effect of ASEAN's impact on regional integration (OECD, 2020, p.9).

On January 26, 2020, ACMM upgraded the Emergency Operations Center to a level-2 readiness (REDCON 2). The ACMM requested that the Board of Directors (BOD) meet via Video Teleconference (VTC) on January 28, 2020. They share the responsibility and responsibilities for dealing with the 2019-nCoV outbreak in the country in military medicine. Following the meeting of the BOD VTC, they state that each country’s military medicine will facilitate and coordinate military-civilian cooperation (ACMM, 2020). The ACMM video conference was hosted by Vietnam’s defence ministry on January 28 and was attended by all members of ASEAN (ACMM, 2020). According to a ministry statement on the videoconference, the discussion revolves around the prevention measurement and testing capacity by ASEAN countries for the infected people based on the report by the WHO.

The discussion also talked about how the current condition might would disturb many ASEAN activities, which resulted in decision that ACMM shall conduct drills to deal with the virus. The discussion also plans to include prior activities in the ADMM work plan for 2020-2023, specifically discussing ways to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic (ACMM, 2020)

In responding to the cases spike of COVID-19 in the region, ASEAN leaders on April 14, 2020, finally issued a declaration on measures to fight COVID-19 on Special ASEAN Summit. During this time, members of ASEAN reached a consensus to adopt a “*Declaration of the Special ASEAN Summit on COVID-19*”. The summit also created the first-ever guidelines in a well-coordinated manner to deal with COVID-19 pandemic (Kemlu, 2020).

The declaration mentioned that ACMM was given a mandate to “enhance practical cooperation” through best practice sharing activities and holding a tabletop exercise on public health emergencies.

On April 30, 2020, ACMM then visited the World Health Organization and the International Cooperation Office located in Thailand to discuss and develop a training session plan related to the TTX final plan conference which was then held virtually (ACMM, 2020). Since then, many ACMM activities was concentrated to fight against COVID-19. These activities are:

- Workshop with the theme “Quarantine Camp Management” on April 8, 2021,
- The Tabletop Exercise (TTX) COVID-19 ADMM on May 27, 2020,

- The TTX COVID-19 ADMM on August 27, 2020,
- COVID-19 Management in Disaster Area Workshop on 14-15 September 2021 (KEMHAN, 2021).

ACMM also actively monitors crises across the region when medical intervention is required or when disease outbreaks occur, such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. During the humanitarian crisis faced by ASEAN countries, ACMM distributes humanitarian assistance, especially in the medical field, in the form of efforts to produce COVID-19 test kits and use military barracks to quarantine those infected with the coronavirus. For details of ACMM activities during the pandemic, the author describes in the following table form:

Timeline of Activities of ACMM during COVID-19		
Date	Name of Event	Discussion
December 31, 2019	First spot report titled "Mysterious virus outbreak in China, it's not SARS, so what is it?"	Early detection of COVID-19 to be informed to ACMM members
January 26, 2020	ACMM Board of Director (BOD) Video Teleconference (VTC)'s meeting	ACMM scaled up the Emergency Operations Center to a level-2 readiness condition (REDCON 2)
March 5, 2020	Online ACMM meeting	Countries reported the COVID-19 developments in their countries
April 8, 2021	ACMM Logistics Management in Pandemic Workshop	ACMM members held a workshop on logistic management in handling COVID-19
April 14, 2020	Special ASEAN Summit on Coronavirus Disease 2019	Declaration against COVID-19, mandating ACMM as the main sub-body to address the issue
May 27, 2020	ADMM TTX COVID-19 online	Regulation on cooperation in forecasting and responding to pandemics
August 27, 2020	ADMM COVID-19 TTX	Discussing Quarantine Camp Management
September 14-15, 2021	COVID-19 Management in Disaster Area Workshop	Holding a workshop for ASEAN members on COVID-19 management by experts

Based on the timeline above, it can be concluded that the implementation of ACMM program during the COVID-19 pandemic was concentrated more on handling the COVID-19

pandemic. ACMM was initially focused on disaster response efforts but during this pandemic, the cooperation shifted its focus to the humanitarian crisis in handling COVID-19. The meeting was not only focused to find a strategy in handling COVID-19, but also stressing joint exercise for paramedical staff in the respective countries to deal with crisis medical care.

Based on the author's discovery, ACMM has been an integral component of Southeast Asia's response to the coronavirus. However, it is too early to conclude that ACMM will change the whole of its direction to deal with COVID-19 only since it is too early to conclude one-year activity of ACMM can determine how ACMM will be heading in the future.

Nevertheless, the ACMM activities during COVID-19 highlights the fact that this initiative has played a considerably essential contribution in responding to the COVID-19 in the region. This means that ACMM would further continue its integral role in the future when it comes to disease outbreaks specifically instead of taking care of the broader issue in disaster management.

Comparison: Changes and Continuity

The activities of ACMM during the COVID-19 has changed significantly in terms of the issue, which will be important to watch in the future. The author argues that it is still the responsibility for ASEAN countries to define the roles and duty for their respective military and medical sectors in fighting against COVID-19 pandemic, but the presence of ACMM has created a better coordination for all countries to reach a consensus on how to response to the disease and to reach a consensus on the cooperation mechanism among their forces as a unit.

Regardless, defence cooperation will continue to be carried out during the pandemic in collaboration with the health sector, to increase cooperation during a crisis by optimistically utilizing existing mechanisms. As a result, ASEAN defence cooperation has developed to focus more on health and humanitarian issue during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To make a better understanding, the author provides the comparison table between how ACMM operated before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic as follow:

The comparison of ACMM before and during COVID-19 Pandemic		
	Before the pandemic	During the pandemic
Area of focus	Mostly Disaster response efforts	Mostly Humanitarian aids and COVID-19
Form of activities	Mostly Offline	Mostly Online
Form of cooperation	Joint-training and field exercise	An online workshop and Tabletop Exercise

Based on the table above, we can see that the implementation of ACMM has changed in three areas, which are: Area of focus; Form of activities; and Form of cooperation.

In terms of area of focus, ACMM was heavily involved in disaster response management before the COVID-19 pandemic. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a shift of area of focus to humanitarian crisis and response to the COVID-19.

Several experts such as Frega Inkiriwang and Dr. Phil. Yendri Kurniawan believed that ACMM has a huge impact on ASEAN members to coordinate together in handling the issue of

COVID-19 in the region. ACMM is deemed as the main part of defence cooperation along the way until there is a cure for COVID-19 disease (The Habibie Center, 2021).

Moreover, there has been a shift in terms of the form of activities. Previously, it was done face-to-face, but since the pandemic, all defence cooperation activities have been conducted virtually. This allows for the development of an “open coordination method” that ensures the exchange of important health-related information regionally at the policy, strategic, and executive levels through various online meetings (Lamy & Phua, 2012, p.236).

While personnel changes or exchanges, visits by military aircraft and warships, meetings between senior officials and the ministry of defence, education and training, actions to build trust and security, and weapons development activities were all disrupted or delayed. Because of this disruption, there is a limitation on the number of interactions between military units and personnel. The bonding usually will be established if the military personnel meet personally and work together on the ground where they can build a common feeling that will be very useful to maintain personal relations with their peers from other countries.

In terms of the form of cooperation, the author found that online workshops and tabletop exercises (TTX) dominate the activities in ACMM compared to the activities before the pandemic when physical activities were often done. It was pretty understandable since physical activities such as joint training or field exercise were heavily restricted to prevent the spread of COVID-19. However, since the COVID-19 pandemic is yet to end, the author believes that activities related to the online form would continue in the future.

Nevertheless, the author sees that ACMM has been a perfect platform for defence cooperation in ASEAN to organize information and best practice sharing activities related to the issue of COVID-19. ACMM was also suitable to the nature of COVID-19, which requires well-trained organizations in responding to the crisis especially in dealing with medicine and aids for the victims.

Conclusion

COVID-19 is a global pandemic that has claimed millions of lives and caused a significant impact on various things in the world, including disrupting the stability of the Southeast Asian region. ASEAN synergizes with each other in tackling the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. One of the most essential aspects that must be considered is in the field of defence, where defence itself is one of the critical elements of regional peace and stability that plays a role in maintaining national security and the ability to accumulate assets and capabilities carried out by the military.

Amid a pandemic that has not yet ended, several defence diplomacy initiatives face several changes in their implementation. One of them is the ASEAN Center of Military Medicine (ACMM) which was seen as one of the most active initiatives in the region during the pandemic.

ACMM implementation has changed during the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of its area of focus, the form of activities, and the form of cooperation. During the period, ACMM was mostly focusing on humanitarian aids and COVID-19 related issues and most of the activities and capacity building were done in the form of online workshops and tabletop exercises. These activities were also conducted virtually via video conference, which encourages defence cooperation to develop during the pandemic.

With the change in focus from disaster relief to humanitarian assistance, especially in the medical sector and the change in the activity scheme from face-to-face to virtual, it has shown that defence diplomacy in ASEAN has developed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although it is too naive to say that ACMM would change and develop into something that takes more focus on the COVID-19 pandemic, however, we can see that ACMM is heading in that direction. Should there be any outbreak of diseases soon, ACMM would play a significant role in handling that considering its experiences and suitability to address the issue among any other initiatives.

The finding of this research contribute to academic literature on the implementation of defense diplomacy in ASEAN during the COVID-19 pandemic focuses on achieving common interests rather than the paths used, especially what is more important is increasing mutual trust between ASEAN member countries in dealing with a pandemic situation. The ACMM represents the role of defense diplomacy as an important instrument in building cooperation through the use of programs related to defense, both bilateral and multilateral cooperation activities. Thus, this research contributes to digging more broadly about the current understanding of defense diplomacy as a series of activities carried out by representatives of the ministry of defense or other institutions (ACMM) with the aim of winning national interests in the field of defense and security through negotiations and other diplomatic instruments which give rise to commitment between countries in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic.

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