



MANAGING ASEAN'S EXTERNAL RELATIONS VIA THE COUNTRY COORDINATOR: LESSONS LEARNED FROM THAILAND

Policy Report
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report explores the important yet under-examined role of ASEAN country coordinators in ASEAN's external relations. The study aims to provide additional insights to the interactions between ASEAN and its dialogue partners through the lens of international negotiations. The case study of Thailand's role as country coordinator managing the South China Sea (SCS) issue reveals how a coordinator can take advantage of its position to shape collaborations between states. In short, the paper shows how Bangkok, as the coordinator for ASEAN-China relations, was able to affect the SCS outcomes that resulted in the first formal consultation of the Code of Conduct (COC) in September 2013. Although the paper focuses on this specific case, it offers generalisable recommendations on how a country coordinator can shape bargaining results. Interested practitioners can apply the lessons learned to their own negotiations in other issue areas.

INTRODUCTION

With globalisation, the world has become increasingly interconnected, rendering one country's problems to no longer be confined within its own national boundaries. To effectively tackle transnational issues ranging from terrorism to economic development, international cooperation is required. Recognising such needs, the Association of Southeast Asian nations (ASEAN) has continuously fostered international collaboration with other players. Regarding its external relations, the Association appoints one of its members as a country coordinator to facilitate communication and act as a forefront negotiator between ASEAN and designated dialogue partners. So far, ASEAN has identified ten dialogue partners: Australia, Canada, China, the European Union, India, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Russia, and the United States.

This paper examines the role played by an ASEAN country coordinator in shaping negotiation outcomes. It argues that the country serving as the coordinator for the interactions between ASEAN and a dialogue partner can exert some influence over bargaining results. Thailand's role as country coordinator in managing the South China Sea (SCS) issue is analysed to validate the claim.

A coordinator's role in affecting bargaining outcomes deserves a closer examination for the following reasons. First, despite its common use in real-world ASEAN diplomacy, the influence of a coordinator is under-explored. Such neglect can yield serious consequences. For example, without relevant knowledge on how coordinators can alter results, ASEAN as a whole may be unable to find ways to get its interests addressed, boost its influence in building governance architectures in broader contexts, and enhance its voice in international arenas.

Second, the recent rise of tensions in the high seas has made the SCS become a potential flash point which can trigger full-blown interstate wars. This calls for a study looking into the micro-processes of negotiations. Without such knowledge, regional actors

may be unable to manage the SCS conflicts, which can further exacerbate Sino-ASEAN ties, jeopardise ASEAN's unity, and weaken its credibility as an international organisation. Moreover, being unable to tone down SCS tensions, regional instability can increase.

Moreover, lessons learned from the analysis can assist a state acting as a country coordinator in crafting bargaining plans and techniques to help reach agreements. For example, Singapore has been serving as the country coordinator of the ASEAN-China dialogue since August 2015 and will hold this position until June 2018. Hence, insights gained from this report could help Singapore to "punch above its weight" and steer the SCS talks in a more cooperative way.

This report is organised as follows. The first part outlines the roles and responsibilities of a country coordinator as mandated by the ASEAN Charter. It also touches on the coordinator's actual influence beyond the text's words. Second, the SCS conflicts and dispute management efforts up to July 2012 are discussed to show the SCS backdrop when Thailand assumed the role of a country coordinator. The following section probes into the role played by Thailand as the country coordinator, especially during 2012-2013, in affecting the SCS cooperation outcomes which ultimately led to the first official ASEAN-China COC negotiation in September 2013. Finally, this report extracts with lessons learned from the Thailand case and makes generalisable recommendations for countries serving as the coordinator in ASEAN's relations with dialogue partners.

It must be emphasised that this report only assesses the manner in which the Thai coordinator affected the SCS development which resulted in the start of the first formal COC consultation. It does not claim that such a launch means that SCS conflicts were completely resolved. The process of crafting a complete COC is still a work-in-progress, requiring collaboration from all stakeholders.

I. THE ROLE OF ASEAN COUNTRY COORDINATORS

ASEAN set up a position of a country coordinator to manage interactions between the organisation and its Dialogue Partners. As Table 1.1 illustrates, each member state is assigned to act as the coordinator with a particular external partner for three years. The position is held on a rotational basis in a reversed alphabetical order, and the handover usually takes place in July.

The roles and responsibilities of country coordinators are outlined in the ASEAN Charter. Article 42.1 posits:

Member States, acting as country coordinators, shall take turn to take overall responsibility in coordinating and promoting the interests of ASEAN in its relations with the relevant Dialogs Partners, regional and international organisations and institutions.

Moreover, Article 42.2 adds:

In relations to the external partners, the country coordinators shall, *inter alia*:

- (a) represent ASEAN and enhance relations on the basis of mutual respect and equality, in conformity with ASEAN's principles,
- (b) co-chair relevant meetings between ASEAN and external partners, and
- (c) be supported by the relevant ASEAN Committees in Third Countries and International Organisations.

These Articles indicate that the coordinator's main task is to serve as a forefront negotiator of ASEAN, by representing the organisation, promoting its interests and facilitating interactions between ASEAN and its designated Dialogue Partners.

Table 1.1: ASEAN Country Coordinators (by Dialogue Partner), 2012-2021

ASEAN Country Coordinator	July 2012 - June 2015	July 2015 - June 2018	July 2018 - June 2021
Brunei	India	Japan	South Korea
Cambodia	Japan	South Korea	New Zealand
Indonesia	South Korea	New Zealand	Russia
Lao PDR	New Zealand	Russia	United States
Malaysia	Russia	United States	Australia
Myanmar	United States	Australia	Canada
Philippines	Australia	Canada	China
Singapore	Canada	China	European Union
Thailand	China	European Union	India
Vietnam	European Union	India	Japan

Source: ASEAN Secretariat¹

¹ ASEAN Secretariat. ASEAN dialogue coordinatorship, Accessed 10 April 2014 <http://www.asean.org/asean/external-relations/asean-dialogue-coordinator>.

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Despite the official conventions above, in practice, the coordinator's clout expands beyond what the Charter mandates. Illustratively, by presiding over the meetings as a co-chair, the coordinator can exert its influence in several ways. First, a chairperson can affect the tempo of the meeting as he "opens and concludes meetings, defines the meeting agenda, allots the right to speak . . . and summarizes results obtained [from a negotiation]".² With the power to summon meetings, a chairman can purposefully select specific venues as discussion arenas when the issues he wants the parties to discuss receive significant attention and advance cooperation progress in given areas.³ Moreover, history has shown

that chairmen sometimes intervene to settle disputes among players and help reach an agreement.⁴ In addition, chairing parties can affect the setting of agendas by, for example, linking different issues to create a package deal which benefits the involved stakeholders⁵ or framing or reframing the issues at stake to make cooperation more viable.⁶

In short, there exists some leeway for the coordinator to influence negotiation outcomes. The Thailand case study will demonstrate how Bangkok, taking advantage of its coordinator position, was able to shape the SCS talks in its favour, resulting in the first formal COC consultation in September 2013.

² Tallberg, Jonas. (2002) 'The power of the chair in international bargaining', Paper prepared for presentation at the 2002 International Studies Association Annual Convention, Chicago, Illinois.

³ Kelly, Brendan D. (2008) 'The emerging mental health strategy of the European Union: a multi-level work-in-progress', *Health Policy* 85(1), 60–70; Sherrington, Philippa. (2000) *The Council of Ministers. Political Authority in the European Union*, London: Pinter.

⁴ Quaglia, Lucia and Edward Moxon- Browne, E. (2006) 'What makes a good EU Presidency?: Italy and Ireland compared', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 44(2), 349–68.

⁵ Lohman, Susanne. (1997) 'New games: modeling domestic-international linkages', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 41(1), 38–67; Downs George W., David M. Rocke . and Randolph M. Siverson. (1985) 'Arms Races and Cooperation', *World Politics*, 38(1), 118–146.

⁶ Woll, Cornella. (2006) 'The road to external representation: the European Commission's activism in international air transport', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 13(1), 52–69.

II. SOUTH CHINA SEA: CONFLICTS AND RESOLUTIONS

The SCS is engulfed by several countries. It meets China and Taiwan in the north, the Philippines in the east, Brunei and Malaysia in the south, and Vietnam in the west. The sea is regarded strategically and economically important to regional states due to its potential hydrocarbon reserves and abundant fishing zones (Cronin, 2012) as well as it being one of the world's major maritime commercial routes.⁷

The SCS has also been a subject of disputes due to overlapping claims for land features and adjacent waters by several powers. China, Taiwan, and four ASEAN countries (Brunei, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam) had all lodged their claims. Competing claims led to interstate conflicts. For instance, Malaysia's claim led to the protests in China, Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines.⁸ Other examples include the 2012 Scarborough Shoal stand-offs between China and the Philippines⁹ and the oil rig incident between China and Vietnam in May 2014.¹⁰

To lessen the tensions and clashes, collective efforts have been garnered towards dispute management. For example, the 1992 ASEAN Declaration on the South China Sea and the subsequent joint statements by ASEAN foreign ministers in 1995 and 1999 emphasised the importance of relying on peaceful means to deal with the SCS matters and maintaining regional peace and stability.

However, an initial attempt to coin the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC) failed due to conflicts between China and ASEAN countries over certain areas: namely geographic scope, restrictions on constructions on occupied and unoccupied territories, military activities in waters around the Spratlys, and policies concerning the detainment of fishermen entering the disputed territories. Instead of a binding COC, these states signed the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) on 4 November 2002. Despite the DOC's non-binding nature, the implementation was slow-moving. This sluggishness also applied to the endorsement of the Guidelines for the Implementation of the DOC in July 2011, nine years after the DOC was signed.

Regional states continued to develop a COC amid many challenges. Tensions in the high seas partly deepened rifts between disputants. Another drawback was the failure of the 45th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting (AMM) to coin a joint communiqué in July 2012, which largely stemmed from the disagreements over the insertion of the SCS remarks in the document.¹¹ Against this grim backdrop, another development took place on the ASEAN side. The position of the ASEAN country coordinator in the ASEAN-China relations was handed over from Vietnam to Thailand in July 2012.

⁷ The US Energy Information Administration (US EIA) (2008). Report on "South China Sea: Oil & Natural Gas", Department of Energy, the United States, March 2008.

⁸ Roach, J. Ashley. (2014) 'Malaysia and Brunei: an analysis of their claims in the South China Sea', A CNA Occasional Paper, International Affairs Group, Center for Strategic Studies, CNA Corporation. Accessed 15 January 2015. <https://www.cna.org/sites/default/files/research/IOP-2014-U-008434.pdf>.

⁹ Dizon, Nikko. (2012) 'Chinese ships fire water cannon at PH fishers', Philippine Daily Inquirer, 25 February; Santos, Tina. (2012) 'PH, Chinese naval vessels in Scarborough Shoal standoff', Philippine Daily Inquirer, 11 April.

¹⁰ Toutitrenews (2014). 'Over 1,000 arrested in Vietnam riots that left one dead.' Toutitrenews, 16 May.

¹¹ Emmers, Ralf. (2014) 'Indonesia's role in ASEAN: a case of incomplete and sectorial leadership', The Pacific Review, 27(4), 543-562.

III. THAILAND'S ROLE AS THE ASEAN COUNTRY COORDINATOR

Before scrutinising Thailand's coordinator role, the state's foreign policymaking circle deserves to be discussed. The main locomotive to foster Thailand's ties with China is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). As a result, MFA led the negotiation team. Personnel-wise, the team included the officials from the Dialogue and International Organs Relations Division, the Department of ASEAN Affairs at the Ministry.¹²

A closer look at power dynamics between MFA and the Thai military government reveals significant bureaucratic leverage over the crafting of the country's foreign policy including the SCS. MFA was able to convince the military leaders to leave much of the foreign policymaking in its hands as such matters require taking into account multiple factors and decisions must be made on a case-by-case basis. This partially hinged on the government's trust in MFA's expertise on the SCS issue which made the former leave these matters to the Ministry. Consequently, Thailand's SCS position was largely shaped by MFA. The stance included settling the disputes peacefully, working on the COC and using ASEAN to "facilitate the dialogue leading to eventual solutions."¹³

Critics might think that Thailand's political crisis in 2012-2013 would have crippled its role as a coordinator. My interview with the Ministry's officers suggests otherwise. MFA's work was in

general insulated from the Kingdom's political instability.¹⁴ Admittedly, several anti-government demonstrations delayed MFA's work to a certain degree. For example, the protesters blocked the streets and public areas, making it difficult for the civil servants to commute to their workplace. However, the Ministry allowed its personnel to work outside the headquarters and set up temporary outpost stations to hold meetings. This resilience enabled the negotiation team to carry out their work and make progress on the SCS development. In sum, Thailand's domestic unrest slowed down MFA's work, but did not ultimately weaken Thailand's role as the coordinator for ASEAN-China relations.

Viewing the 45th AMM debacle and high seas tensions as backtracking the ASEAN-China relations, Thailand wanted to get the relations back on track by engaging China. To engage Beijing, the country identified three main channels (the so-called "three Cs"): Community-Building, Connectivity, and the Code of Conduct (COC). Regarding the latter, the country aimed to: (i) launch a formal discussion on the COC; and (ii) draft the agreement text as much as possible before its term ended in June 2015. Moreover, Bangkok also wanted to keep the SCS and COC matters to be settled within regional states, namely between ASEAN states and China (as well as seek ASEAN's unity in regard to SCS and COC).¹⁵

¹² Pitakdumrongkit, Kaewkamol. (2013). Interview with Thai officers, Dialogue and International Organs Relations Division, Department of ASEAN Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Thailand, by Kaewkamol Pitakdumrongkit. 26 December 2013, Thailand.

¹³ Chongkittavorn, Kavi. (2012). 'Thailand walks a tightrope on South China Sea, The Nation, 7 May.

¹⁴ Pitakdumrongkit, Kaewkamol. (2013). Interview with Thai officers, Dialogue and International Organs Relations Division, Department of ASEAN Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Thailand, by Kaewkamol Pitakdumrongkit. 26 December 2013, Thailand.

¹⁵ Ibid.

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Kicking off the Talk

What did Thailand do to achieve these objectives? First, Thailand, using the power to summon meetings, introduced a new discussion venue unprecedented in the ASEAN-China interactions. Intending to trigger a momentum of talks after the 45th AMM communiqué failure in July, Bangkok hosted the ASEAN-China Senior Officials' Meeting Retreat (SOM Retreat) in Pattaya, Thailand on 29 October 2012. The Retreat's key purposes were to: (i) bring the stakeholders to a negotiation table to jointly discuss the SCS and COC development; and (ii) gather information, especially other actors' interests and reasons behind the struggle to coin a COC.

Why was a SOM Retreat selected over the other available venues? Two main reasons stood out. The first one was that SOMs are actually where most major matters are decided.¹⁶ In principle, SOMs receive top-down orders from ministerial-level and summit-level meetings, and then assign issues to specific sectoral bodies to conduct detailed operations. However, evidence from actual practice reveals the opposite. SOMs can in fact influence higher-level meetings by being raising issues for discussions and deciding the course of actions.¹⁷ Their decisions are sent to the ministerial meetings and summits for approval. In short, SOMs' ability to exert

upward influence explained why Bangkok chose it over other platforms.

Second, a SOM Retreat was picked because of its informal dynamics. Thailand, learning from previous ASEAN-China interactions, avoided using concept papers or non-papers to guide the negotiations as doing so usually hinders a bargaining progress.¹⁸ Hence, a SOM in a 'retreat' format was suitable to advance the COC talks. The platform's modality involving informal discussions among senior officials can decrease the likelihood of doing concept papers or non-papers.

In short, Thailand intentionally held a SOM Retreat because the forum was where major issues are determined and its informal nature increases the chance of progressing the COC.

Hosting this SOM Retreat enabled Thailand to not only bring the involved players to jointly discuss the COC but also identify other actors' SCS preferences from the discussions. Beneath the participants' positions at the negotiation table sat their different concerns about SCS matters, varying from security to trade and investment.¹⁹ This information enabled Bangkok to establish issue linkage to frame the SCS subject matter in a more cooperative light, which will be discussed below.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Pitakdumrongkit, Kaewkamol (2015a). Interview with Dr. Nguyen Hung Son, Deputy Director-General of the Institute for South China Sea/East Sea Studies, Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam, by Kaewkamol Pitakdumrongkit. 19 January 2015, Singapore.

¹⁸ Pitakdumrongkit, Kaewkamol. (2013). Interview with Thai officers, Dialogue and International Organs Relations Division, Department of ASEAN Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Thailand, by Kaewkamol Pitakdumrongkit. 26 December 2013, Thailand.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Pitakdumrongkit, Kaewkamol (2015a). Interview with Dr. Nguyen Hung Son, Deputy Director-General of the Institute for South China Sea/East Sea Studies, Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam, by Kaewkamol Pitakdumrongkit. 19 January 2015, Singapore.

²¹ ASEAN (2013b). Chairman's Statement of the 16th ASEAN-China Summit, Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam, 9 October.

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Linking Issues and Framing the Subject Matter

From the interactions during the SOM Retreat, Bangkok knew that ASEAN and China had a shared interest in maritime cooperation and ASEAN states were keen to utilise the existing ASEAN-China Maritime Cooperation Fund. Officially announced by China in October 2012, the 3-billion-yuan Fund's main purpose is to give financial support to enhance ASEAN-China cooperation in the areas of maritime connectivity, marine science and technology, maritime scientific research, search and rescue, disaster management, and navigation safety.

As a result, Bangkok in September 2013 proposed two cooperative projects comprising a study of tuna stock in the SCS and a maritime environment conservation research.²² As the initiatives' focus fell under the areas of cooperation under the Fund, China welcomed the proposal and approved the tuna stock research in early 2014.²³

These projects connected diverse but reconcilable issues which the involved actors had their interests in, such as fisheries with food security, and ecological preservation with energy security. At first glance, the proposals seemed to tap on the Fund's money. In fact, however, a

real intention of Thailand's proposal was to show the SCS issue as multi-dimensional where joint benefits could be reaped through international cooperation (MFA Thailand interview, 2013).

The two studies actually changed the participants' SCS stance to be more cooperative with one another. One government official observing a shift in ASEAN's position mentioned that "ASEAN is now seriously looking into cooperative schemes with China on maritime cooperation".²⁴ Moreover, a similar change happened on China's side. For instance, Qiao Fangli, the deputy director of the First Institute of Oceanography under China's State Oceanic Administration, announced that his institute would work together with Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and Cambodia to develop maritime environment forecast and disaster warning systems.²⁵

In summary, by designing two cooperative projects that brought together dissimilar yet reconcilable matters, the Thai coordinator was able to show to others in a concrete way that the SCS issue is in fact multi-faceted. Bangkok was able to steer stakeholders towards more cooperation, thereby creating a more viable environment for the future advancement of the COC.

²² Chongkittavorn, Kavi. (2014b) 'Role of coordinating country: mission impossible', Presentation to Human Development Forum Foundation's Chairman Circle on ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) – Local and Regional Security Challenge, Imperial Queen Park Hotel, Thailand, 21 January.

²³ Chongkittavorn, K. (2014a) 'Asean-China looks for common grounds', The Nation, 14 April.

²⁴ Chongkittavorn, Kavi. (2013) 'China renews its efforts to re-engage Asean', The Nation.

²⁵ Wang, Qian., and Li, Xiaokun. (2013). 'Premier vows to lift maritime cooperation', China Daily USA, 12 October.

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Spinning the Momentum

The third factor leading to the successful launch of the formal COC consultation was Thailand's strategic use of agenda-setting power to include the SCS and COC matters on the agendas of consecutive meetings. A series of these talks were arranged (see Table 3.1). The lower-level meetings (e.g. working group-level meetings) were held first which were followed up by higher-level ones (e.g. deputy ministerial-level meetings). In each of these gatherings, Thailand repeatedly put the SCS and COC issues on the agendas to ensure that the participants would continue to discuss the COC development.

The series of meetings started with the 8th ASEAN-China Joint Working Group on the Implementation of DOC (JWG on DOC) in Thailand in May 2013. At this JWG, the participants agreed to adopt the 2011 Guidelines for the Implementation of the DOC. ASEAN greeted such an outcome with enthusiasm and "stressed the need to maintain the positive

momentum on dialogue and consultations".²⁶ Seeing the adoption of the 2011 Guidelines as a step towards a formal discussion on the COC, the Thai coordinator, just a few months later, launched the High-Level Forum on the 10th Anniversary of ASEAN-China Strategic Partnership in Bangkok on 2 August 2013 (MFA Thailand interview, 2013). On the surface, it looked like this Forum's purpose was to assess ASEAN-China relations in the past 10 years and plan ahead how to strengthen the relationship in the next decade. However, because Bangkok wanted this Forum to serve as another channel where the stakeholders could again voice their concerns and stances after the previous JWG, the SCS and COC matters unsurprisingly appeared on the meeting's agenda. As a result, ASEAN and China updated their positions regarding the issues. For instance, Thailand encouraged all sides to work together to turn the SCS into the one of shared interests and cooperation. The Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi reiterated "China's commitment to the Declaration on the Conduct

Table 3.1: Selected Meetings Concerning the COC and Their Outcomes

Meeting	Date	Place	Outcomes
The 8 th ASEAN-China Joint Working Group on the Implementation of DOC (JWG on DOC)	29 May 2013	Bangkok, Thailand	ASEAN and China agreed to implement DOC and promote the 2011 Guidelines for the Implementation of the DOC.
High-Level Forum on the 10 th Anniversary of ASEAN-China Strategic Partnership	2 August 2013	Bangkok, Thailand	ASEAN and China updated their concerns and positions regarding SCS.
ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat (AMM Retreat)	13-14 August 2013	Hua Hin, Thailand	Parties deepened discussions on SCS and COC.
The 6 th ASEAN-China SOM on DOC	14-15 September 2013	Suzhou, China	The first official negotiation/consultation on COC.

Sources: Joint Ministerial Statements

²⁶ ASEAN (2013c). 'The Joint Communiqué of the 46th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting', Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam, 29-30 June.

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of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) [and said that] China would work with ASEAN countries to advance the COC process".²⁷

To carry on the momentum, Thailand took another initiative to host the AMM Retreat in mid-August 2013. Although the main discussion item was the COC process, Bangkok slipped in post-2015 ASEAN Economic Community issues on the agenda to avoid a perception that this gathering was solely about the COC.²⁸ Additional headway was made, when the Ministers agreed that both sides should expeditiously start and conclude COC discussions.²⁹

The continuous talks on COC eventually bore fruit. In September 2013, ASEAN states and China convened at the 6th ASEAN-China SOM on the Implementation of the DOC (SOM on DOC), the first official COC consultation took place in which the participants agreed to push forward the COC process during the full and effective DOC implementation. A JWG was assigned to conduct further negotiations over details and an expert group would be set up to help the drafting of the text.³⁰

It should be noted that there existed certain supporting elements which strengthened Thailand's activism. The first one was the state's perceived neutrality.³¹ Bangkok was viewed as a SCS non-partisan player partly because it is a non-claimant, and did not have disputes with China in the high seas.

Another factor was Sino-Thailand ties, which have been amiable.³² Bilateral ties between the two countries can be traced back to the Cold War era, especially the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1978 where both states became de facto allies against the incursion.³³ Also, despite the fact that Bangkok was a formal U.S. ally after the Cold War, Sino-Thailand ties continued to be collegial.³⁴ Furthermore, the ethnic Chinese Thais have been well assimilated into Thai society and the elite circle, which helped in the "softening [of] the ethnic/civilisational divide that can potentially raise tensions between states".³⁵

To sum up, Thailand used its coordinator position to shape the COC process which finally led to the formal consultation on COC in September 2013. To achieve this goal, the

²⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Thailand (2013). "ASEAN and China join High-Level Forum on 10th Anniversary of Strategic Partnership." Press Release, 2 August. Accessed 11 January 2016 <http://www.mfa.go.th/main/en/media-center/28/37427-ASEAN-and-China-join-High-Level-Forum-on-10th-Anni.html>.

²⁸ Pitakdumrongkit, Kaewkamol. (2013). Interview with Thai officers, Dialogue and International Organs Relations Division, Department of ASEAN Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Thailand, by Kaewkamol Pitakdumrongkit. 26 December 2013, Thailand.

²⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia (2013). "ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat, Hua Hin, Thailand, 13-14 August 2013." Press Release, 14 August. Accessed 11 January 2016 <https://www.kln.gov.my/archive/content.php?t=3&articleId=3258831>.

³⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs China (2013). "The Sixth Senior Officials Meeting and the Ninth Joint Working Group Meeting on the Implementation of the Declaration on Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea Are Held in Suzhou." Press Release, 15 September. Accessed 11 January 2016 http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1079289.shtml.

³¹ Pitakdumrongkit, Kaewkamol (2015b). Interview with Associate Professor Li Mingjiang, Coordinator of China Programme, Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, by Kaewkamol Pitakdumrongkit. 12 January 2015, Singapore.

³² Pitakdumrongkit, Kaewkamol (2015c). Interview with Dr. Hong Nong, Executive Director, Institute for China-America Studies and Director, Center for Oceans Law and Policy, National Institute for South China Sea Studies, Haikou, China, by Kaewkamol Pitakdumrongkit. 14 January 2015, Singapore.

³³ Sebastian, Leonard. (2000). 'The Southeast Asian perception of China: the challenge of a new strategic accommodation,' in Cunha, D. (ed.), *Southeast Asian Perspectives on Security*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

³⁴ Haacke, Jurgen. (2003). 'ASEAN and China: Setting parameters for future co-operation,' in Haacke, J., and P. Preston (eds.), *Contemporary China: The Dynamics of Change at the Start of the New Millennium*. London, U.K.: Routledge.

³⁵ Roy, Denny. (2005). 'Southeast Asia and China: Balancing or bandwagoning?' *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 27(2), 305-322.

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country utilised the power of convening meetings to call up a SOM Retreat and restore a SCS/COC talk. Based on the information about other actors' preferences, Bangkok created issue linkages in the form of cooperative projects. This was done to frame the matter of SCS as multi-faceted where different interests could converge. The programmes were able to steer the other parties' positions regarding the SCS towards more cooperation. In addition, via its agenda-managing power, Thailand persistently incorporated the SCS and COC matters as discussion items on the agendas of successive meetings. Bangkok's activism brought about a continuous momentum in talks, which finally led to the first official consultation on the COC.

It is an overstatement to claim that Thailand's work solely contributed to the successful launch of the first formal COC consultation. It is also partly due to Indonesia's and Brunei's earlier moves to advance the SCS/COC development. Hence, their actions deserve to be mentioned as they created a favourable environment for later negotiations, which later eased Thailand's work as country coordinator. Indonesia's shuttle diplomacy carried out by its Foreign Minister, Marty Natalegawa, in mid-July 2012 propelled the COC process as his efforts resulted in ASEAN's adoption of the six-point

principles. The adoption in turn triggered the visits by the Chinese Foreign Minister, Yang Jiechi, to Brunei, Indonesia and Malaysia to discuss the SCS issue with his equivalents. On 10 August 2012, Yang announced that his country was keen to work towards the eventual adoption of the COC on a consensual basis.³⁶ Additionally, Brunei's role as the ASEAN Chair in 2013 elevated the importance of the COC as the state saw it as a priority to jump-start the discussions with China.³⁷ During its term, Brunei also diligently sought consensus with ASEAN to ensure that the SCS talks were "without the contretemps of the previous year".³⁸ The Chairman's Statement at the 22nd ASEAN Summit in April 2013 which tasked the "Ministers to continue to work actively with China on the way forward for the early conclusion of a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC) on the basis of consensus" was positively received by Beijing. Soon after the statement was released, the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi travelled to Brunei, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, and Indonesia in late April 2013 to further discuss the SCS matter ahead of the scheduled ministerial meeting.⁴⁰ Wang also declared that China would discuss the COC at the upcoming JWG on DOC.⁴¹

³⁶ Saragih, Bagus. (2013) 'ASEAN chief pushes RI to act on South China Sea dispute', The Jakarta Post, 9 April. Accessed 11 January 2016 <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2013/04/09/asean-chief-pushes-ri-act-south-china-sea-dispute.html>.

³⁷ Thayer, Carlyle. A. (2013c) 'Incorporating a code of conduct for the South China Sea into ASEAN's political-security community: the road ahead', Presentation to Regional Conference on ASEAN and the South China Sea: Achievements, Challenges and Future Direction, Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace, Raffles Le Royal Hotel, Phnom Penh, September 19-20, 2013.

³⁸ Thayer, Carlyle. A. (2013a) 'ASEAN, China and the code of conduct in the South China Sea', SAIS Review of International Affairs, 33(2), 75-84.

³⁹ ASEAN (2013a). Chairman's Statement of the 22nd ASEAN Summit, 'Our People, Our Future Together,' Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam, 24-25 April.

⁴⁰ Thayer, Carlyle. A. (2013b) 'ASEAN and China consultations on a code of conduct in the South China Sea: prospects and obstacles', Paper presented to the International Conference on Security and Cooperation in the South China Sea, sponsored by the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, Radisson SAS Slavyanskaya Hotel, Moscow, Russian Federation, October 18, 2013.

⁴¹ Thayer, Carlyle. A. (2013c) 'Incorporating a code of conduct for the South China Sea into ASEAN's political-security community: the road ahead', Presentation to Regional Conference on ASEAN and the South China Sea: Achievements, Challenges and Future Direction, Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace, Raffles Le Royal Hotel, Phnom Penh, September 19-20, 2013.

IV. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has analysed the role of ASEAN country coordinators in the organisation's external relations with its dialogue partners. It has demonstrated how Thailand, via its coordinator role, was able to influence the SCS development which ultimately led to the first official consultation on the COC between ASEAN and China. Although the paper focuses on this specific case, some generalisable lessons can be drawn. Interested practitioners can apply them to their own negotiations in other issue areas.

The recommendations on how a country coordinator can affect bargaining outcomes are as follows:

1. A country coordinator can revitalise negotiations by injecting "pivotal" venues into the interactions. When a negotiation gets stuck or seems to slow down, a country coordinator can kick start talks by inviting the stakeholders to these platforms. Although there is no consensus on what "pivotal" venues are as they vary on a case-by-case basis, some common characteristics can be identified. These platforms are the ones where: (i) discussions are informal which involves no papers or non-papers; and (ii) major decisions take place. Informal interactions or non-reliance on papers and non-papers tend to put less pressure on the officials, allowing them more room to jointly explore issues at stake and get the negotiation rolling. A venue where major decisions occur helps set the directions of the negotiation and speed up agreements because it can lessen the likelihood of "going back-and-forth" between talks.
2. A country coordinator can help frame the subject matter as multi-dimensional by linking different yet reconcilable issues together (i.e. issue linkage) in the form of cooperative projects. Using such programmes as proofs that cooperation on the subject matter can be done in reality, a coordinator can influence the mindsets of the involved players and persuade the latter to collaborate and/or reach an agreement. In order to effectively connect different issues, information about other actors' preferences is key. A country coordinator needs to first gather such data via its interactions with the other states through multilateral or bilateral interactions.
3. A country coordinator can spin a momentum in talks by persistently inserting the issues as discussion items on the agendas of consecutive meetings. This agenda-setting method raises the chance that the same matters are continuously pondered as well as the chance of pushing forward a negotiation. Because an ASEAN country coordinator's term is three years, the country assuming this position can figure out in advance which meeting(s) will take place at which time(s). If applicable, a coordinator can devise a more detailed plan by thinking ahead on how the issues at stake will be discussed at a specific negotiation. Questions such as "Which aspects of the issue would the stakeholders focus on at this particular meeting?" can be considered.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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