Subnational conflict mitigation and civil society: Networks, innovations, and the uncertain place of ASEAN

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Southeast Asia (SEA) is home to a number of subnational conflicts, either blatant or latent. As samples of Asia's 'most widespread, enduring, and deadly form of conflict' (Parks et al., 2013, 1-3, 17, 62), they are a serious drag on SEA's economic progress, extra-regional relations, and community aspirations.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is conscious of the need to respond to this challenge. Yet its history, its highly disparate membership, and its lack of internally generated resources complicate the task of forging a meaningful role in mitigating subnational conflict. ASEAN's specific difficulties are twofold. Firstly, civil society is a vital component of subnational conflict mitigation. Yet ASEAN is still in the process of working out the terms of its relationship with regional civil society, let alone with the many smaller local players that animate the peace support arena. Secondly, on the issue of conflict mitigation as on so many others, ASEAN is still balancing desired outcomes with available means and political will.

In order to flesh out the context in which ASEAN is trying to find its conflict-mitigation niche, this paper focuses on the areas of Mindanao and Aceh. Conflict scenarios are notoriously different, making it difficult to extrapolate patterns and recommendations from single cases. Nevertheless, these case-studies serve two purposes. The first is to highlight the innovations that have characterized conflict

mitigation efforts, particularly in the areas of hybrid mediation support initiatives, civilian peacekeeping, and education for peace. The second is to unpack some of the massively complex networks that animate these efforts, noting that the roles of 'non-state' and 'state' actors in the realm of conflict mitigation are often very blurred.

The paper is organized into four sections. The first defines what is meant by conflict mitigation and CSOs, and traces ASEAN's current profile in this area. The second briefly sketches the conflicts that have ebbed and flowed in Mindanao and Aceh. The third and longest section focuses specifically on the innovations and networks mentioned above, while the fourth, with this complexity in mind, tentatively discusses the future involvement of ASEAN and the embryonic ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (AIPR) in what is not only a fraught issue but also a tangled operational environment.

Definitions and profiles

Conflict mitigation and CSOs

Conflict mitigation is defined very broadly in this paper. Following Lund (1997), it understands conflict mitigation or management as 'efforts to contain and if possible, reduce the amount of violence used by parties engaged in violent conflict and to engage them in communication looking toward settling the dispute and terminating the violence'. This contrasts with conflict prevention, which consists of actions taken to stop the use of violence in the first place, or to prevent its recurrence after a peace settlement has been reached.

While the terms non-governmental organization (NGO) and civil society organization (CSO) are often used interchangeably, NGOs and their international equivalent (INGOs) are in fact a subset of CSOs, existing alongside self-help,

community-based organizations (or people's organizations), faith-based organizations, professional organizations, and so on (Chong & Elies, 2011, 22-23). This paper uses the term CSO to cover all unarmed, non-profit-making, voluntary entities existing in the (often blurred) spaces between the government and the market.[1]

Conflict mitigation processes in Southeast Asia (SEA) involve complex webs of actors, including – alongside states, inter-governmental organizations (IGOs), donors, academic institutions, and media – many types of CSOs. These run from the vast and highly diverse range of smaller CSOs, whose coverage might only extend to the local village, to the larger INGOs, whose increased prominence, *The Economist* notes (2011), indicates 'a shift in the way diplomats and others go about trying to solve conflicts': a quasi-privatization of certain kinds of diplomacy. The biggest players in what is now a 'crowded field' are the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI); the Carter Center's Conflict Resolution Program; the United States Institute of Peace; and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD). All have had some kind of involvement in SEA.

The use of INGOs in conflict mitigation has elicited positive and negative evaluations. On the one hand, they often carry less political baggage than states; they can be more flexible, less risk-averse, and more experienced in conflict mitigation than official channels; and they provide a way of internationalizing a conflict (a key goal of many insurgent groups) that does not directly involve other states (a key goal of many governments). On the other hand, at the sharp end of conflict mitigation, where INGOs are trying to mediate a resolution, it is clear that they do not have the 'clout' that states have; at some point, states usually have to be drawn in as guarantors, arm-twisters, or funders. This relatively new role for INGOs has also

created much competition, with the danger that enthusiastic supply may outstrip carefully considered demand. Equally, INGOs, by virtue of their larger resources, can eclipse smaller local actors (UN, 2009; *The Economist*, 2011; Jaques, 2013).

As Santos acknowledges in his study of peace processes in South Asia and SEA, the impact of civil society's contribution is often difficult to quantify (2005, 6-8). Some studies find that the inclusion of civil society, either in the peace negotiations themselves or in the implementation of the agreement, significantly lessens the risk of peace breaking down (Nilsson, 2014). Others argue that the negotiation table should include only the 'veto-players' in a conflict (those with a decisive capacity to continue it) and no-one else (Cunningham, 2013).[2]

SEA's conflict mitigation profile

ASEAN has up to now played a minor role in subnational conflict. While non-interference is not the all-encompassing explanation that many would imply, it is nevertheless true that ASEAN's Cold War origins gave rise to a norm that opposed involvement in other members' domestic conflicts. The ideological overtones may have disappeared, but trust among ASEAN's members remains low, and sovereignty is jealously guarded. The result is a reluctance to internationalize internal conflicts, entrust too many powers to ASEAN, or enthusiastically embrace the Responsibility To Protect principle (Capie, 2012; Morada, 2014). Most of the conflict mitigation load in SEA has therefore been shouldered by individual regional states as opportunities arise, and by external players and civil society entities of various kinds (Della-Giacoma, 2011).

Peacekeeping missions within SEA, for example, have received support from individual regional states, and ASEAN corporately acquired a rather higher discursive profile in the Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM), which supervised the

implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM).[3] Nevertheless, peacekeeping *by* the region *within* the region has made little progress (Helmke, 2009).[4]

In this area as in many others, however, ASEAN is moving forward, albeit with its trademark slowness and ambivalence. The ASEAN Charter (2007) includes a provision for 'good offices, conciliation or mediation', and calls for dispute resolution mechanisms; the Blueprint (2009b, 13-15) spells out more specific ideas on conflict resolution, the peaceful settlement of disputes, and post-conflict peacebuilding; the ASEAN Peacekeeping Centres network (2011) aims to 'help promote regional cooperation to maintain peace and stability'; and AIPR held its first meeting in 2013. Clearly, this is an area where the Association *thinks* it should be more involved. But effectively institutionalizing and operationalizing these aspirations is a painful process, and ASEAN is still often left a 'by-stander' when conflicts break out (Iglesias, 2013).

The formation of AIPR is illustrative here. On the one hand, it represents an advance. On the other, as with so many ASEAN enterprises, the original ideal took something of a battering on the journey to actualization. In 2012, Termsak Chalermpalanupap, then head of the ASEAN Political-Security Directorate, noted that AIPR was one of the 'big ideas' that ASEAN regularly embraces in order to ensure its forward momentum:

> But we're seeing a mutation of this big idea – it's supposed to be an independent think tank, with access to all the ASEAN documents and ASEAN senior officials. But slowly it's being changed. This is what always happens. A big idea – you start with an ambitious idea, and then it has to be adjusted so that anyone will not object. And eventually it becomes what it is going to be.[5]

Lina Alexander, a security analyst in Jakarta, agreed, noting that Indonesia, a notable champion of AIPR,

> is still struggling because there is a division of positions among the ASEAN member states. Indonesia wants this institute in its work to also cover intra-state conflicts. But other countries … are actually reluctant to include intra-state conflicts. They want this institute to cover only inter-state conflicts… That's one thing. The second thing is also about the mandate of this institute. It is still unclear whether this institute would be able to play the function of monitoring certain conflicts in order to gather facts, to gather evidence.[6]

In 2013 the ASEAN Chair's first statement of the year and the foreign ministers' communique both adopted the formula that the institute 'would promote research activities on peace, conflict management and conflict resolution in the region' (2013b, 2013c), and 2014 saw considerable activity. The inaugural meeting of the Advisory Board proposed 'some initial themes for research, which include coming up with an operational definition of conflict resolution and management'; it also suggested AIPR 'take stock of past and current work in conflict management in the region to avoid duplication' (Philippine Mission to ASEAN, 2014). AIPR held two consultative symposiums on peace and reconciliation processes, and launched a book (ASEAN, 2014b, 2014a). The ASEAN Chair's statement (2014c) commended the symposiums, and noted again that AIPR's role is to provide 'recommendations, research and analysis'.

If ASEAN's regional profile on conflict mitigation is already a complex mix of ambition and reluctance, then adding civil society complicates the picture still further. A broad country-by-country survey of CSOs (Chong & Elies, 2011) reveals not only widely disparate backgrounds, constraints, thematic priorities, and levels of

connectedness with ASEAN, but also far fewer organizations focused on peace than on human rights, development, and the environment. At regional level, CSOs are still learning how to work together, and ASEAN is still learning how to relate to them (see the discussion in Quayle, 2013b, 125-152).[7]

Lastly, ASEAN's challenge is by no means eased by the complicated environments in which its efforts are likely to have to play out. These are amply illustrated by the conflicts in Mindanao and Aceh, which the following section briefly sketches.

Mindanao and Aceh: Complex and tenacious conflicts

These conflicts, at first glance, have similar profiles. The most dramatic presentation of both is as *vertical* conflicts, in which a minority with a distinct history, ethnicity, culture, and identity seeks redress against a distant central government that is perceived as not only failing to represent the interests of the minority but also as practising a form of internal colonialism, including demographic manipulation, resource exploitation, and cultural denigration.[8] In the case of Mindanao, the vertical conflict scenario is further complicated by religious difference; in Aceh, by contrast, an Islamic group has struggled against a Muslim-majority state.

Subnational conflicts are not always driven by poverty, but in these two instances, poverty rates compare badly with the national average (Parks et al., 2013, 31-33). Both these vertical conflicts also follow a recurring pattern of reaching, often with great difficulty, an agreed resolution, only to have conflict return as the agreement unravels. In Mindanao that syndrome has a particularly complex manifestation, as different peace deals, with different groups, currently overlap and compete.

Both Aceh and Mindanao, however, also demonstrate the characteristics of *horizontal* conflicts, in which different sectors of the population are at odds with each other. Mindanao, which is home to at least six major non-state armed groups, 'dozens of militia units', at least six distinguishable but overlapping types of violence, and marked ethnic diversity, has been described as 'one of the most complex conflict environments in Asia' (Adriano & Parks, 2013, 18, 25, 36-39). Aceh, meanwhile, since the Helsinki Accords brought the vertical conflict to a formal end, has witnessed the emergence or exacerbation of at least three sets of conflict patterns: among the former GAM elites; between those elites and the movement's former foot-soldiers; and among community groups, who may be divided along ethnic lines (into majority Acehnese, minority groups such as the Gaya, and migrants) or along economic lines (Ansori, 2012; Barron et al., 2013, 31-42).

Because of its clear international ramifications, vertical conflict is the genre that usually grabs the attention both of regional neighbours and external actors. Yet attempts to mitigate vertical conflict can unwittingly exacerbate horizontal conflict, which in turn not only exacts an enormous toll in terms of human lives and economic productivity but also constantly threatens to reignite the vertical conflict (Adriano & Parks, 2013, 28-29). Civil society efforts to deal with this phenomenon will be discussed below.

While Mindanao's conflict transition is still regarded as 'fragile', Aceh's has been termed 'advanced' (Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research, 2013, 97-99; Parks et al., 2013, 48-49). Yet even Aceh's situation offers no cause for complacency. On the one hand, Aceh can be regarded as 'arguably the best example in Asia of a long-running violent conflict transforming into a stable enduring peace'; on the other, as noted above, the conflict has morphed, rather than entirely

disappeared. Aceh has in the past experienced the re-ignition of conflict, often after considerable periods of time, as new elites and/or grievances emerge (Barron et al., 2013, 1, 9, 90-91). Horizontal conflicts can spark new vertical ones; and issues such as the design of the flag still have the capacity to evoke vertical tension (ICG, 2013; Boy Nashruddin Agus, 2014).

Though largely marginalized in the peace negotiations themselves,[9] Aceh's civil society has shouldered a number of supportive roles, including building confidence in the peace process (Afridal Darmi, 2008; CMI, 2012, 31-32; Cristescu et al., 2012; Iglesias, 2013). In Mindanao, while the 1996 peace process 'virtually excluded civil society' (Cagoco-Guiam, 1999, 56), consultations increased in the early years of the following decade (Arguillas, 2003, 14-16). This trajectory has continued. Nevertheless, opinions on degrees of influence (as opposed to degrees of engagement) still vary (see, for example, Coronel-Ferrer, 2005; Rood, 2005, 2013a).

The key point for this paper, however, is that both conflicts have witnessed the evolution of complex and innovative conflict management initiatives, which intimately involve civil society. These will be discussed in the following section.

Mindanao and Aceh: Innovations and networks in conflict mitigation

Hybrid groups, civilian peacekeeping, and peace education

States, IGOs, and latterly INGOs have played various roles in Aceh and Mindanao.[10] Particularly interesting, however, is the International Contact Group (ICG), the hybrid body that was established in 2009 by the government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) to shepherd a new phase in the peace negotiations. Originally consisting of four states (the United Kingdom, Japan, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia) and four NGOs (the Asia Foundation or AF, Conciliation Resources,

Muhammadiyah, and HD),[11] and tasked with supporting Malaysia, the official facilitator, the ICG represents an unprecedented iteration of peace support.

Again the ICG represents a compromise between internationalizing and not internationalizing, but its disparate membership also meant it was able to provide a very broad variety of expertise and influence. Corporately, it supported the formal negotiations, especially by helping to manoeuvre round impasses; individually, its members met regularly with various constituents of the peace process, including local civil society. While it is hard to know whether the circumstances that enabled the creation of the ICG are replicable elsewhere, its experiences, including a framework peace agreement signed at the end of 2012, are certainly worth noting for other conflict mitigation undertakings (Herbolzheimer & Leslie, 2013; Rood, 2013b).[12]

Possibly the least known member of the ICG is Muhammadiyah.[13] One of Indonesia's 'mass organizations', with a membership of at least 25 million, Muhammadiyah has a presence in several countries in SEA. Although the organization had some involvement in the Aceh peace process (Aspinall & Crouch, 2003, 30-32; Sudibyo Markus, 2007; Boy Nashruddin Agus, 2010), its peace profile has particularly grown since about 2005, with consultations at the UN, and a role in conflict mitigation attempts in southern Thailand as well as Mindanao (Anon, 2010b). Muhammadiyah's peace efforts, which include general peace education as well as mediation in specific conflicts, have a multi-faceted rationale. To religious motivations, its current chair, Din Syamsuddin, adds the urgency of pursuing 'regional stability' and 'a peaceful world order' (Anon, 2010b; Sasongko, 2010; Anon, 2014).

In Mindanao, Muhammadiyah has played a role in facilitating dialogue, and also plans for involvement in post-conflict rehabilitation and development. The

organization already offers scholarships to Moro students (among others), and has long-term plans for community support in Mindanao in areas including education, social development, health, and civil society consolidation (including the promotion of interfaith networks) (Muhammad Zahrul Anam & Surwandono, 2013; Anon, 2014).[14]

At the opposite end of the CSO spectrum from these international interventions is a no less innovative series of peace initiatives revolving around the idea of civilian peacekeeping. A striking example of one such endeavour is the creation of 'peace zones' or 'spaces for peace'. These are localities that have succeeded in persuading armed elements, from whichever 'side', to stay away. As well as directly responding to violence, they often conduct community participation and developmental activities, and they may be created by spontaneous local initiative or through the facilitation of NGOs and donors (Coronel-Ferrer, 2005, 9-14).

While some regard their effectiveness as debatable in times of heightened violence, others argue that they brought an improvement in inter-communal relations and a degree of security, even if only temporary (Arguillas, 2003, 13-14; Iyer, 2004; Rood, 2005, 24-26). Coronel-Ferrer sees them as the 'most solid manifestation' of a peace-focused people's organization, 'a concrete initiative coming from the people to regain control and normalcy in their lives' (2005, 9-14). And, certainly, there is a marked agential difference between standing up to mark out a zone of peace (even if this is later disregarded) and passively waiting for violence to happen. Nor has the idea lost its attractiveness. Two villages in Maguindanao, for example, according to a report from George Mason University (2014), declared themselves 'abodes of peace' in late 2013, laying down community-initiated rules about the carrying of weapons and the hosting of armed groups.

Along similar lines are the 'peace centred communities' that HD has helped to promote in Sulu. The driving idea 'is that people in these communities initiate interventions to create a secure environment... [on the basis] that communities are not passive receivers of violence, but are actively negotiating, mediating the everyday violence' they encounter. There are no rose-tinted spectacles here: the researchers are very clear that the peace community under scrutiny works because it has a strong leader who acts as a 'peace holder' even though he himself has a background in violence. Nevertheless, by dealing with horizontal conflicts that tend to draw little attention in the mainstream peace talks, local initiatives, however imperfect, demonstrate that 'the people have a vast array of mechanisms available to them to get out of the "victim-trap"' (Oreta & Tolosa, 2012, 5, 25, 29-32, 50-53, 56; see also Virola-Gardiola, 2012, 41-46).

HD, partnered by the European Union, has also promoted the 'Tumikang Sama Sama' initiative (TSS, 'together we move forward'). Led by scholars, CSO leaders, and 'eminent persons', TSS 'aims to give people and communities solid experience of resolving their conflicts through the use of non-violent ways' (Virola-Gardiola, 2012, 7, 11, 19, 28).[15] The AF and USAID have similarly supported research into 'rido', or clan feuding. As well as being significantly more disruptive than vertical conflict for many of the population, rido has also repeatedly triggered vertical confrontations between military and insurgents (Torres III, 2014, 3-5, 15-17).[16]

A more specifically targeted initiative was the formation of 'Bantay Ceasefire', which found its own niche in the complex peace-monitoring architecture of Mindanao by supplementing the civil-society trained and staffed Local Monitoring Teams (Rood, 2005, 28, 30; Santos, 2005, 6).[17] The Bantay Ceasefire initiative

brought together 'a group of local and international civil society peace activists and grassroots community volunteers', with the aim of supporting the ceasefire, reporting violations, and generally seeking to reduce threats to the civilian population in provinces in south, central, and western Mindanao. The group has conducted investigative and 'accompaniment' missions, and has enabled local people to react to potential threats by alerting the formal ceasefire mechanism, 'instead of just wait[ing] for the approaching conflict and being victims of war all over again'(MPC, 2013c). Since 2009, the group has focused on humanitarian protection (MPC, 2013a), producing detailed reports on ceasefire violations and related abuses (see, for example, MPC, 2011).

Over the years, new components – humanitarian, socio-economic, and civilian protection – have been added to the overall structure of the International Monitoring Team (IMT). The Civilian Protection Component, set up in 2009, is led by four NGOs. Three are local, including the Mindanao People's Caucus, from which the Bantay Ceasefire initiative sprang. The international contribution comes from Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP), which started its involvement in Mindanao in 2005, at the invitation of Bantay Ceasefire. NP's activities include 'protective accompaniment' of threatened individuals, early warning of danger to local people, pre-emptive information dissemination to armed actors on both sides, monitoring and verification, referral, and direct intervention (Hameed, 2008; Rood, 2013a; Gündüz & Torralba, 2014, 25, 31, 38).[18]

To hybrid peace facilitation and civilian peacekeeping can be added a third innovative area: peace education. Classic peace education 'not only provides knowledge about a culture of peace, but also imparts the skills and attitudes necessary to defuse and recognize potential conflicts, and those needed to actively promote and

establish a culture of peace and non-violence' (UNICEF, 2012; Education and Livelihood Skills Alliance, n.d., 3). Such programmes have a long history in Mindanao (see, for example, Coronel-Ferrer, 2005).

Newer, however, is a specific focus on peace education expressed in an Islamic idiom. Generally, Rasul Bernardo argues, previous peace programmes, while not necessarily secular, have not 'been designed for Muslims' or 'appropriated Islamic concepts and terms' (2012).

This need had already been identified in Aceh. The response there was the production of the 'Peace Education Curriculum', which draws on an Islamic heritage and on traditional Acehnese values (translated by Darni M. Daud, 2001). These explicit origins were reported to be highly regarded by principals, teachers, and students alike, and facilitators registered very positive results from following the curriculum (Ashton, 2002, 8-13). The programme expanded substantially, and had the added by-product of fostering an interactive style of learning (Husin, 2009, 135-136).

Similar projects were then undertaken in Mindanao, with the development of an 'Islamic Peace Education Model' in 2006, and attempts to institutionalize peace education within existing Islamic educational structures (Rasul Bernardo, 2012).

There is another element to peace education, however, that deserves discussion. Until comparatively recently, Islamic education in Mindanao could not be obtained within the state system. To gain a state-accredited education, children needed to pursue the state curriculum at a state school and Islamic instruction at one of the many Islamic schools (madaris). In 2004, however, the Philippines Government made madaris eligible for accreditation if they adhered to the Standard Curriculum for Elementary Public Schools and Private Madaris (Abdulkarim, 2010; Anon, 2010a, 9). Within such an accredited madrasah, children study national curriculum subjects, but

also Arabic, Islamic values, Koran-reading, Hadith, the history of the Prophet, and so on (Republic of the Philippines Department of Education, 2011). Another programme, the Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE), enables Muslim children in public schools to access these subjects.

A number of external donors – including AusAID, as part of the Basic Education Assistance for Mindanao (BEAM) project – have funded the upgrading of madaris to enable them to reach these standards. This is not only an exercise in improving basic education standards, with the goal of facilitating development and therefore peace. It also facilitates peace by promoting self-respect and dignity. It is a way of counteracting the double standard that in theory decrees the separation of church and state, yet in practice offers plenty of evidence that the Christian majority receives preferential treatment (Rasul Bernardo, 2012).

In Tawi-Tawi, where the Muslim population is by far the majority, the change has been broadly welcomed, according to a former teacher working at a madrasah hosted by Mindanao State University, under the BEAM scheme. Parents were happy to have the chance to actively choose an Islamic programme, and protested when funding cuts looked as though they might jeopardize the programme. They sent their children to this kind of school specifically to learn Islamic values, and become 'grounded Muslims'. In all, this respondent felt this is 'a very good project', which represents 'a very good step in reaching out to those people not open to the idea of integration', and in helping to form connections between the Philippines government and Islam.[19]

Networks

As is probably already apparent, these various innovations involve extensive clusters or chains of actors, drawn from both the state and non-state sectors, since all the non-

governmental members of the ICG, though working alongside states, particularly emphasize local agency and local civil society partnership.

Conciliation Resources (CR) offers an interesting example here. This organization, which was requested as an ICG member by a group of local CSOs already familiar with its work (Herbolzheimer & Leslie, 2013), 'facilitated an unprecedented level of public and civil society participation' in the Mindanao talks, and in 2013 launched two projects designed to further promote engagement with the peace process at community level, particularly among women, former combatants, and conflict-ravaged communities (CR, 2013, 6-7).

A glance at the CR 'family tree' abundantly illustrates the complexities of the civil society networks engaged in conflict mitigation. The Muslim Christian Agency for Advocacy, Relief, and Development (MuCAARD, n.d.), for example, draws together a complex network of people's organizations, representing among others fisherfolk, farmers, and urban poor. MuCAARD, along with 35 other groupings, is a member of the Mindanao People's Caucus (MPC, 2013b), the group associated with Bantay Ceasefire and membership of the IMT, as noted above (MPC, 2013c, 2013a).

The MPC, in turn, is a part of Mindanao Peace Weavers (MPW), 'a convergence of seven networks of peace advocates, which includes NGOs, academics, religious groups, human rights groups, people's organisations and grassroots communities' (CR, n.d.). Moving up the chain again, MPW (n.d.) is one of the nine 'partners' working with CR. And CR, as discussed above, is a member of the ICG.

Though fearsomely complex, this kind of structure has much to recommend it, offering possibilities for small organizations to gain representation at much higher

levels of power and influence while still retaining considerable autonomy and flexibility on the ground.

Where doubts and questions start to creep in, however, is in the area of funding. In 2013, CR's 'unrestricted' income (not tied to a specific project) came from UK Aid, the European Commission, the Swedish International Cooperation Agency, and the foreign ministries of Norway and Switzerland (only 0.04% of annual income came from 'donations'). Income specifically earmarked for projects in the Philippines (bracketed with Colombia) again came from UK Aid, the European Commission, and the Norwegian foreign ministry (CR, 2013, 7, 23-24). Funding sources for AF's projects in the Philippines likewise include the World Bank, AusAID, and the British Embassy (AF, 2013, 23-25). The EU, likewise, has funded the HD, the NP, and the MPC (Vassallo, 2014).

These observations imply absolutely no conspiratorial overtones. Conflict mitigation requires funds. Donors allocate funds. And organizations at the bottom of the food-chain are no doubt grateful for the small sums that are filtering down via these international conduits to an increasing number of projects (Parks et al., 2013, 62-66).

But the overwhelming proportion of extra-regional, state-originated funding cannot but provoke questions. State donors, after all, are not wholly altruistic. They will inevitably prioritize projects they regard as supporting their national interests, in places they deem strategic – to the detriment of other projects in other places.

Major state donors are also unlikely to commit funds to areas where there is no formal peace process, so the gap tends to be filled by the development banks. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is the largest donor to areas experiencing subnational conflict (giving an amount almost equivalent to all the bilateral donors put

together), and together the ADB and the World Bank 'are programming at least 61% of all aid flows to subnational conflict areas in Asia' (Parks et al., 2013, 62-70). How grassroots civil society organizations experience this, both practically and ideologically, is an area begging for further research.

Which way forward for ASEAN?

The challenges for ASEAN in this area are clearly formidable. As noted earlier, every conflict situation is different, and conflict mitigation is an extraordinarily crowded and complex field. These factors alone make both learning and niche-finding difficult. But the previous section has also illustrated a fluid, constantly morphing and extemporizing arena, replete with ad hoc innovations and endlessly extending civil society networks. By contrast, ASEAN inevitably appears flat-footed and lumbering.

In view of this, there is an argument for counselling ASEAN not to involve itself too deeply in this area – to accept that not every role has to be within ASEAN's purview, and that bilateral, even unilateral, action can still be for the regional good. But, again as noted above, ASEAN clearly *wants* to include conflict mitigation in its remit, and external players clearly expect that it should. Adopting a hands-off policy could appear to be an awkward dereliction of duty.

If conflict mitigation *is* to be an active ASEAN commitment, then, five areas need to be addressed. Firstly, ASEAN as a whole needs not only to accept theoretically that civil society is an indispensable partner, but also to make concrete progress – and ideally, faster progress – in its relations with this sector. The pattern demonstrated by the ASEAN Commission on Women and Children, which is regularly commended by civil society for its receptivity and willingness to dialogue (Forum Asia, 2013), could be one that AIPR could follow. In its early statements on

AIPR, ASEAN emphasized think-tank involvement. But the Advisory Board also encouraged engagement with CSOs (Philippine Mission to ASEAN, 2014), and this theme was continued in the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' joint communique (2014c), which 'encouraged the AIPR to engage relevant stakeholders, including the civil society, to promote peace, reconciliation, conflict management, conflict resolution, and peace-building'.

Secondly, in this, as in so many other ASEAN agendas, the question of internal regional funding needs to be addressed. A commitment to conflict mitigation means a commitment to funding it, and even the ability to finance small, peace-oriented civil-society programmes could only add to ASEAN's presence and credibility.

Thirdly, part of the regional 'stocktaking' work that AIPR is enjoined to undertake (Philippine Mission to ASEAN, 2014) could involve the dynamic mapping of peace-oriented CSOs and their complex coalitions and umbrella groups. But the emphasis here should be on fact-finding, not vetting or micro-managing. A perennial tension between ASEAN and civil society is that the former prefers to deal with a relatively small number of identified entities (partly because of its limited administrative capacity), while civil society, almost by definition, consists of a vast number of ever- evolving groupings, subgroupings, and offshoots (and often views gatekeeping functions such as accreditation with considerable scepticism). The cascade structure that was highlighted in the third section of this paper is one possible way of reducing the space between these approaches. But locating the groups would be a necessary first step.

Fourthly, a key role for AIPR, as many have already suggested, could be that of creating a 'regional knowledge-system' (Morada, 2014). For Quintos Deles (2014),

this task involves 'gathering and consolidating all the narratives of peace in the region over the decades'. This undertaking clearly needs to draw in civil society, if it is to reflect the agential capacity highlighted in the previous section. (Of course, no peace narrative is ever neutral, and the further task of 'extracting the lessons learned and best practices, and finally, forging a consensus of how to move forward on future challenges', as Quintos Deles goes on to suggest, would involve AIPR in a much more political remit than it currently holds.)

Fifthly, AIPR could readily take on a peace education role in conjunction with civil society. ASEAN is now thoroughly convinced that it needs to communicate itself more extensively and more clearly, and a peace education component could be part of a broader strategy to disseminate information about ASEAN, the region, and the need to overcome residual tensions and differences. This task needs to be tackled in an inclusive and honest fashion, however, avoiding the whiff of propaganda that sometimes imbues ASEAN communication activities (see the discussion in Quayle, 2013a).

The above tentative recommendations on ASEAN, civil society, and conflict mitigation are intended to be pragmatic, taking into account ASEAN's current stage of evolution and the futility of prescribing courses of action that are unlikely to gain the required consensual backing in the near or mid-term. As such, these recommendations inevitably appear painfully slight in comparison with the problems sketched in the second part of this paper, and the innovations outlined in the third. This is ASEAN's dilemma. While it takes its small institutional steps forward, the region's problems – problems that ASEAN's structures are not yet equipped to deal with – continue to engender other solutions driven by other actors.

But the message is not wholly negative. AIPR's trajectory is representative of many ASEAN initiatives, with a clearly observable pattern. A bold idea is launched; on paper it becomes a shadow of its former self, giving rise to relief in some quarters and disappointment in others; but the original idea never quite fades away, so that its spirit continues to animate the project, often in quite creative ways.

Thus, while AIPR's remit looks very modest, it provides – as so often with ASEAN activities – a discursive launching pad for conceptual and behavioural evolution. 'Non-interference' did not prevent speakers at the first AIPR symposium, for example, from clearly rolling subnational conflicts into their discussions (Quintos Deles, 2014; Vassallo, 2014), or the Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for Community and Corporate Affairs from acknowledging the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (ASEAN, 2014b). Bagas Hapsoro, the Indonesian delegate to AIPR, frankly advocates a '"UN-plus" regional approach in dealing with local conflict situations', in which ASEAN members would help to deal with their neighbours' problems (Ismira Lutfia Tisnadibrata, 2014).

This creation of discursive space around a modest, consensually agreed ASEAN provision has seen the Association move forward – slowly, but perceptibly – on a range of issues, from human rights to migration. Such a procedure is hardly ideal. But it does ensure that progress continues to outstrip the lowest common denominator.

Conclusion

While the terms conflict mitigation, ASEAN, and civil society have considerable salience in their own right, combining them does not currently produce the super-charged synergistic whole that SEA's challenges demand. The subnational conflict

areas of Mindanao and Aceh demonstrate that CSOs can produce innovations, such as hybrid peace facilitation, civilian peacekeeping, and peace education; they can forge networks that bring small grassroots organizations closer to the negotiating parties and to sources of funding and training. But ASEAN, still in the initial stages of working out its approaches both to conflict mitigation and to civil society, does not easily find ways to connect with these innovations and networks.

The remedies that can realistically be proposed for this disconnect – persevering with channels to civil society; addressing funding issues; locating and mapping peace networks; recording and analysing civil society peace narratives; and extending the peace education programmes already in operation in the region – appear puny and inadequate. But until, step by step, a regional consensus can be built that supports a more rigorous conflict mitigation role, modest measures and the increased discursive space they create will at least enable ASEAN, AIPR, and civil society to keep moving in the right direction.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] See the discussion in Paffenholz and Spurk (2006, 2-12). But in SEA, as Weiss notes, it is more accurate to talk of 'civil society and close approximations thereof', since many of the assumptions often made about civil society (that they are necessarily independent from government, for example, or necessarily pro-democracy) often do not stand up to scrutiny in the regional context (2008, 147, 157-158).

[2] For a review of these arguments, and of the variety of roles civil society can play in peace processes, see Paffenholz (2014) and a report by Inclusive Security (2013).

[3] Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines, for example, were involved in the Australian-led peacekeeping mission to Timor Leste in 1999; Thailand and the Philippines were invited to Aceh in 2002; Malaysia was invited to monitor the ceasefire in Mindanao in 2004 (Helmke, 2009). The AMM, an unarmed mission, operated from September 2005 to March 2006, and drew its 200-odd personnel from various European countries, as well as Thailand, the Philippines, Brunei, Singapore, and Malaysia. But the AMM has been dubbed 'the first concrete security EU operation with *ASEAN'* (italics added, Vassallo, 2014); it left 'the EU and *ASEAN'* in a position to use this experience as a model for future cooperation (italics added, Feith, 2007), and the AMM's 'ASEAN' identity has also been suggested as one of the reasons for the oft-criticized brevity of the operation, since 'for ASEAN, participation in AMM signaled a move … toward some sort of emerging common security or defense mechanism', and they 'did not want to get bogged down in a lengthy intervention in the internal affairs of a member state' (Schiller, 2008).

[4] Regional ambivalence on this issue is nowhere more evident than in the inaugural ASEAN Security Outlook. While peacekeeping operations are included both in the ASEAN Regional Forum's Hanoi Plan of Action and in the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus remit, and many individual ASEAN members have quite an active UN peacekeeping profile, it is difficult to detect a group commitment. Indonesia mentions its diplomatic initiatives with Thailand and Cambodia, and its involvement in Mindanao, whereas Thailand, Cambodia, and the Philippines do not; Malaysia mentions its contributions in Timor Leste and the Philippines, whereas Indonesia and the Philippines do not; Myanmar stresses (several times) that 'no foreign troops shall be permitted to be deployed in the territory of the Union'; the Philippines mentions Mindanao only in the context of counter-terrorism efforts; and Thailand mentions nothing at all about the ongoing troubles in the south (ASEAN, 2013a, 12-15, 25, 31, 36-37, 39-40, 48).

[5] Interview, Jakarta, 2012.

[6] Interview, Jakarta, 2012.

[7] The difficulties ASEAN faces in translating its recognition of the importance of civil society into institutionalized modalities for dealing with it are well illustrated in the ASEAN Defence Establishments and CSOs Cooperation on Non-Traditional Security (ADPC, 2009; ASEAN, 2009a). For background on military-CSO cooperation, in the conflict-management context, see also Tan (2005).

[8] Many accounts usefully chronicle the history of the Mindanao conflict and associated peace processes (see, for example, Cook & Collier, 2006; Cook, 2014). Aspinall provides an excellent account of the various stages of the Aceh conflict and peace negotiations (2009).

[9] The difficulties here stemmed both from the attitude of the opposing belligerents, and from the constriction civil society had suffered as a result of Indonesian army crackdowns (Aspinall & Crouch, 2003, 12, 48; Kingsbury, 2006, 10, 40-41, 66, 93, 110, 162).

[10] The Mindanao peace process has involved facilitators/mediators both from states (including Libya and Malaysia) and from IGOs (the Organization of the Islamic Conference). In Aceh, an INGO, the Henry Dunant Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD), brokered a 'humanitarian pause' in 2000, and the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in 2002. Both were of short duration, but represented a breakthrough in terms of internationalizing a conflict that Indonesia had previously preferred to regard as purely a domestic issue (Reid, 2004, 310-311). For contrasting assessments of the reasons for these breakdowns, see Aspinall (2003) and Huber (2004). In 2005, another INGO, the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI), entered the fray, under the chairmanship of former Finnish President Ahtisaari, and successfully mediated the Memorandum of Understanding on which the Aceh settlement is based (Kingsbury, 2006). For comparisons of the two processes, see Kivimäki & Gorman (2008) and Iglesias (2013).

[11] The Community of Sant'Egidio, which has considerable experience in peace negotiations in Mozambique, was invited to join the ICG in 2013 (Huber, 2004, 7; Community of Sant'Egidio, 2013).

[12] As the process moves from negotiation to implementation, a follow-up group, the Third Party Monitoring Team, has been set up. This is led by a former EU ambassador to the Philippines, and consists of four organizations, two local and two international (Rood, 2013b).

[13] Public information on Muhammadiyah and its activities is relatively sparse (but see Fuad, 2002; Khairudin Aljunied, 2011; Bush, 2014; Ibnu Manshur, 2014; Muhammadiyah, n.d.).

[14] For a discussion of 'Islamic diplomacy' in general, see Santos (2014).

[15] The programme is supported by the Prevention and Reducing Armed Violence (PARV) initiative, which deploys 25 local monitors in a variety of peace-promoting activities. The

TSS has been cited as 'significantly blazing trails', by focusing on a community-based strategy and indigenous practices. It therefore 'combines the influence of local tradition with international third party presence' (Virola-Gardiola, 2012, 7, 11, 19, 28).

[16] See Adriano (2013, 83-84) for other instances of rido resolution.

[17] Reporting to the Coordinating Committees for the Cessation of Hostilities are the Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Posts (operated by armed staff from the Philippines military and the MILF) and the Local Monitoring Teams. In addition, the Ad Hoc Joint Action Group coordinates military and MILF action in pursuing 'lawless elements'. The International Monitoring Team (IMT, consisting of participants from Malaysia, Brunei, and Libya) came into being in 2004 (Gündüz & Torralba, 2014, 28, 31).

[18] NP's work is part of a wider movement of civilian peacekeeping: 'peacekeeping by un-armed civilians who take a non-partisan stance to the conflict'. Its rationale is 'a deterrence based on the concern a conflict party has for its international image', and a conviction that, by providing an information link to the outside world, nonviolent peacekeeping enlarges the political space available to local activists (Schweitzer, 2008).

[19] Interview with Kartini Tahir, PhD candidate and former madrasah teacher, Yogyakarta, 2014.

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