INTRODUCTION

Malaysia has long been a proponent of closer cooperation among East Asian countries. Malaysia is the fourth most open trading nation. Therefore, for Malaysia, ensuring a stable external environment has always been a crucial element of its foreign policy.

As this is inextricably linked to the larger question of security, Malaysia believes that countries in the region should also cooperate not only in trade and economic matters but also in the political and security area as well.

Here lies the challenge, for a small country like Malaysia, a balanced approach would be necessary. An approach that is solely based on the realist school of thought would be too restrictive. Therefore, a balanced approach is preferred by Malaysia.

This paper begins with a discussion of the internal parameters that influence Malaysia’s perception of security followed by a brief description of the regional security situations. Although there is no formal or institutionalised security architecture in East Asia, this paper puts forth the case that the various processes and fora dealing with security and political cooperation in fact resemble security architecture. It goes on to discuss ways in which this architecture could be strengthened.

This paper is not meant to be a comprehensive survey of the security challenges in East Asia. It is more to explain the security environment in East Asia as seen by Malaysia, on the one hand, and about the possible options that could be explored to promote regional peace and stability, on the other. This paper, does not deal with the internal security concerns of East Asian countries.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE MALAYSIA’S SECURITY PERCEPTION

Malaysia’s regional security perception is governed by both economics and geopolitics. Foreign trade accounts for almost 185% of the Gross Domestic Product. Its major trading partners are East Asian countries accounting for about 42% of its total external trade. More than half of this is with ASEAN countries.

East Asia with its 2 billion people, or about 30% of the world population and a GDP in excess of some USD 7 trillion, not to mention, a foreign exchange reserve of some USD1.6 trillion is as much important to Malaysia as it is to ASEAN – and, of course, the world at large.

Geographically Malaysia sits astride one of the busiest waterways in the world – the Straits of Malacca. Given the importance of trade to Malaysia, the security of the Straits of Malacca is of paramount concern. To its east is the South China Sea where China, Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam have overlapping territorial claims.

Malaysia has a long tradition of practicing pluralist democracy, stressing inclusive governance, social justice and tolerance as well as maintaining forward momentum in terms
of modernisation. In short, Malaysia has always been – and will remain – progressive and moderate both domestically and vis-à-vis the wider world. Multilateralism and development of a multi-polar world is also important for Malaysia.

These are some of the basic factors that influence Malaysia's perception of the regional security environment.

OVERALL SITUATION IN THE REGION

The overall situation in East Asia is generally peaceful and stable. In Southeast Asia there is unprecedented stability despite pockets of instability in parts of the region.

Last year, several countries including Malaysia conducted their general or presidential elections. These elections had been peaceful. In some countries there was peaceful transfer of power. Indonesia's successful first direct presidential elections restored self-confidence in the region in democratic processes.

Malaysia has decided to settle long-standing territorial disputes with its neighbours through adjudication. The Sipadan-Ligitan case was the first of such case. Presently Malaysia and Singapore are in the process of seeking a solution to the Pulau Batu Putih case through adjudication too.

In the South China Sea, there is renewed hope since the signing of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea. An ASEAN-China Senior Officials working group has been established to identify specific measures to implement this Declaration.

In 2003, China acceded to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) followed by Japan and Korea in 2004. With that the TAC has become a de facto East Asian instrument for inter-state relations.

The situation in Northeast Asia however, is of concern. The Korean nuclear issue, the increasing tensions between China and Japan and the Cross-Straits relations are important security concerns in Northeast Asia.

Looking forward, there appears to be several challenges to peace and stability in the region. The challenges are basically of two type: the first type refers to the traditional security challenges, some of which have been mentioned earlier. These challenges include the situation in the Korean Peninsula, Cross Straits relations, proliferation issues, overlapping or unresolved territorial and jurisdictional claims, and challenges to the territorial integrity in certain countries.

The other type is basically non-traditional security threats. Since September 11, terrorism has come to occupy the top place in this type of challenge. Other non-traditional challenges include piracy, illegal migration, small arms and light weapons, trafficking of illegal drugs, money laundering and other criminal activities. Looming ahead are also challenges that could be posed by unmatched demand for critical resources such as food, water, energy and primary commodities.
AN EAST ASIAN SECURITY ARCHITECTURE?

Many experts on the subject have pointed out the notable difference between East Asia as compared to Europe is the absence of any overarching regional security framework or structure.

What exists in East Asia are various sub-regional fora and associations. Among these are ASEAN and the various ASEAN-led fora such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the Post Ministerial Conferences (PMC), the ASEAN+3 process and the annual ASEAN Summits including those with the Dialogue Partners as well as other intra-regional dialogues processes, such as APEC and ASEM.

In a sense, these overlapping fora create something resembling a security architecture or framework for East Asia. In Northeast Asia, however, even such loose framework is absent with the exception of the Six Party Talks on the Korean Peninsula.

All these show that ASEAN has emerged - and will remain - a bastion of stability not only in Southeast Asia but also has influenced the process of consultation and confidence building in East Asia as a whole. One cannot, therefore, minimise the role ASEAN continues to play in ensuring stability in, and around the ancient maritime route of, Southeast Asia, and by extension - to East Asia as well. Indeed, the role of Southeast Asia for the flow of trade and other exchanges within Asia and between Asia and Europe, not to mention, between North America and Asia as well cannot be over emphasised.

It is important to remember that initiatives such as, ASEAN–PMC, ARF, ASEM and ASEAN + 3, did not spring out of Beijing, Tokyo or Seoul. Rather, it required ASEAN to either to take the initiative or to modify initiatives emanating from others, so that ASEAN steers these processes for the sake of East Asian and global stability. Northeast Asia, given the historical baggage, cannot replace ASEAN when it comes to providing the glue for East Asian cooperation and security. The right to initiative or responses to outside initiative rests with ASEAN.

When we talk of security, there could be two approaches: from the interest-based approach originating from the realist point of view of inter-state relations or from an identity-based approach which has its roots in the constructivist point of view.

The interest-based approach is based on perceived national interest and the existence of an external threat. Hence this approach concerns itself with how states deal with each other in overcoming conflicts of interests. Such an approach demands that states cooperate with each other if it will bring about increased security or conversely reduce security if they do not cooperate. Such an approach favours strong institutions.

The identity-based approach however, argues that the web of interactions among states would create a "we feeling". It is believed that over a period of time, the concerned states would give due consideration for other states' needs in their strategic calculation and through this lead to a process of gradual adjustment of interests.

For a small country like Malaysia, the realist view is too restrictive. We do not believe that regional security should be seen as a "zero sum" game. Our approach to creating a security architecture can best be described as an amalgamation between the realist and
constructivist schools of thought.

Therefore, while the diversity of the security environment, national interests and differing policies of countries in the region may have prevented the development of a regional framework and organization for regional cooperation,³ this is not necessarily a weakness. East Asian security could perhaps be better served by encouraging and fostering stable and cooperative relations among the major powers in East Asia by strengthening regional and sub-regional processes in East Asia and encouraging regional integration with the aim of realizing an East Asian community that is open and inclusive.

**STRENGTHENING REGIONAL AND SUB-REGIONAL PROCESSES IN EAST ASIA**

ASEAN is no doubt the most successful forum in East Asia – and, indeed, in the world, perhaps after the European Union. Over the years it has proved to be an effective mechanism to maintaining peace and stability in the region.

Besides fostering trade and investment, ASEAN has also stepped up cooperation in the political and security fields within East Asia. Given its transnational nature and the complex nexus between terrorism, piracy, illegal migration, trafficking of illegal drugs, money laundering, small arms and light weapons, ASEAN considers the fight against transnational crime a priority. Among ASEAN countries there are various fora where officials dealing with the specific transitional crime can meet. They have also their own work programmes.

Cooperation with the Northeast countries in the fight against transnational crime is also given importance. Over the years, ASEAN has been expanding its political and security cooperation with the Northeast Asian Dialogue Partners on terrorism and transnational crime under the ASEAN+1 framework. Efforts are being made to expand such cooperation within the ASEAN+3 framework as well. Cooperation in dealing with other transnational issues such as the SARS and the avian flu, environmental problems and natural hazards provide a useful platform that could be expanded. Malaysia is strongly supportive of such efforts.

In the future, such cooperation could include meetings of security and defence officials. East Asian countries could also cooperate in matters involving resources like oil and gas to ensure that unmatched demand does not degenerate into a source of instability. Similarly cooperation in water and food security could also be undertaken.

As a grouping of small countries, ASEAN has been able to create, with it as the core, broader regional fora and processes such as the ASEAN Regional Forum and the ASEAN+3 process. The three stages envisioned by the ARF⁴ provides a useful framework for cooperative interaction among not only the major powers but also all the states in East Asia. The ARF is the only regional forum in which North Korea is a participant.

Stable, predictable and cooperative relations among the major powers are crucial for East Asian security. ASEAN has provided room for constructive interactions among the major powers in the annual Summits, Post Ministerial Conferences and the ARF. The common concern over the threat of terrorism and other transnational crime has provided a useful platform for such cooperation.
From its initial cautious beginning the ARF has progressed significantly. Today it deals with “harder” issues that would not have been possible a few years ago. There is also a move towards greater institutionalization with the establishment of an ARF Unit at the ASEAN Secretariat. There are also provisions for an enhanced role of the ARF Chair and a Register of Experts and Eminent Persons (EEP). At present discussions are on-going on how to deploy the EEPs.

Overall, there is evidence that the contacts within the ARF has increased the comfort level among East Asian countries in dealing with towards security issues. It also cannot be denied that the ARF has provided an excellent forum for major powers to engage each other on issues of importance to East Asia and beyond. Therefore strengthening the ARF progressively would certainly foster peace and stability in the region.

At the same time a major shift has taken place within ASEAN. From a passive reliance on enhanced economic interaction and integration, ASEAN is moving towards creating a shared vision of an ASEAN Community comprising three pillars namely the ASEAN Security Community, ASEAN Economic Community, and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. The ASEAN Security Community aims at creating favourable conditions for the member countries to live as a community by regarding their own security as fundamentally linked to the others. It is also aimed at forging a sense of collective identity such that differences will be settled without resorting to force.

A similar aspiration in Northeast Asia is absent. Indeed ASEAN encourages stable and good relations between the United States, Japan and China and views it as an important element for East Asian security. The Six Party talks on the Korean Peninsula is a good example where the major powers, whose interests overlap in the Korean Peninsula are able to jointly explore avenues to cooperate on common security concerns. Malaysia is supportive of such efforts. We would welcome such cooperation in other areas such as the Cross-Straits issue, trade and financial issues, terrorism, WMD, environmental and energy concerns.

REGIONAL INTEGRATION TOWARDS THE REALISATION OF AN EAST ASIAN COMMUNITY

Could East Asia as a region learn anything from the ASEAN experience? Since the financial crisis in 1997, the landscape in East Asia has changed. As explained earlier, the momentum toward community building has gained steam. The East Asia Vision Group (EAVG) report recommends the creation of an East Asian community with a primary aim of preventing conflict and promote peace among nations of East Asia. Malaysia is of the view that the security environment of East Asia could be improved by encouraging the trend towards regional integration and community building. It will be a community with ASEAN as its hub.

In his intervention, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia described a three-step road map for the creation of an East Asian Security Community as follows:

i. Promoting norms setting by fostering and encouraging values that contribute to peace

ii. Focusing on conflict prevention by enhancing security cooperation and

iii. Creation of an East Asian Free Trade Area
Firstly, is the promotion of solidarity and cohesion among East Asian countries or the “we feeling” as a means of contributing to the building of a democratic, open, tolerant and transparent community. Among the norms and values are: respect for sovereign equality, non-interference, territorial integrity, national identity, and shared responsibility for a peaceful and mutually beneficial co-existence, renunciation of the use of force, respect for human rights and dignity.

ASEAN believes that the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, which has been acceded to by all the ASEAN+3 countries, could be a regional code of conduct governing inter-state relations. The Malaysian Prime Minister suggested that East Asia be conceptualized as a conflict-free zone known as the East Asian Zone of Amity and Cooperation.9

The East Asian Study Group (EASG) which was set up to assess the EAVG report, recommended 26 specific measures to realize the East Asian community, one of which is the East Asia Summit.

At the 10th ASEAN Summit in Vientiane there was a consensus that the East Asia Summit should be convened in 2005. As the in-coming chair and host of the 11th ASEAN Summit Malaysia would host the first East Asia Summit (EAS) in December this year. The EAS should be an excellent means of conditioning the minds on the value of community building in East Asia. The Prime Minister of Malaysia outlined seven milestones that could mark the progress towards such a community as follows:

- East Asia Summit,
- Charter of East Asia Community,
- East Asia Free Trade Area,
- East Asia Monetary and Financial Cooperation,
- East Asia Zone of Amity and Cooperation,
- East Asia Transportation and Communications Network,
- East Asia Declaration of Human Rights and Obligations.

The next step would be to put implement these milestones. Malaysia believes that community building in East Asia should be open and outward looking rather than closed and restrictive.

CONCLUSION

The East Asian region still faces several important security challenges. ASEAN’s experience seems to indicate that a balanced approach of encouraging and fostering stable and cooperative relations among the major powers in East Asia by strengthening regional and sub-regional processes in East Asia and encouraging regional integration with the aim of realizing an East Asian community that is open and inclusive is probably the best approach to regional security.

It is also important to understand how ASEAN views its neighbours near and far. The emergence of countries, big or small, is not viewed as a threat; it is a great opportunity for Asia and the world as well.
NOTES

1 Based on the paper presented at the 7th Asian Security Conference organized by the Institute of Defense Studies and Analyses, New Delhi, 27-28 January 2005

2 For the purpose of this paper, East Asia is defined the ASEAN+3 countries only

3 Satoshi Morimoto “East Asia Regional Security”, Paper Presented at the Second Collaborative Workshop on East Asia Regional Security Futures, Centre for American Studies, Fudan University, Shanghai 3-4 March 2001

4 “The ASEAN Regional Forum-A Concept Paper”, adopted at the Second ARF Ministerial Meeting, 1 August 1995

5 Declaration of Bali Concord II adopted at the 9th ASEAN Summit, Bali October 2003

6 ASEAN Security Community Plan of Action adopted at the 10th ASEAN Summit, Vientiane, November 2004

7 Towards an East Asian Community- East Asia Vision Group Report (2001)

8 Intervention of the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the 2nd East Asia Forum, 5-6 December 2004, Kuala Lumpur

9 Keynote Address by the Hon. Dato’ Seri Abdullah Hj. Ahmad Badawi, Prime Minister of Malaysia at the 2nd East Asia Forum, 5-6 December 2004, Kuala Lumpur