

ASEAN Member States Responses to the Russian Invasion of Ukraine

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Abstract: The military aggression on February 24, 2022, triggered a global crisis that impacted the Southeast Asian region in various fields such as economics, politics, and security. ASEAN as an international organization in the region has made a statement to seek peaceful dialogue and urge a ceasefire so that military aggression in Ukraine can find a peaceful way and reduce civilian casualties and losses.

Purpose: To find out the response of ASEAN members to Russia's military aggression against Ukraine.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Data was collected through a literature study of previous works and official documentation from ASEAN and its member states. From this research, it can be seen how each ASEAN member country responds to Russia's military aggression invasion of Ukraine. In addition, this research also comparatively describes the responses of the ASEAN members.

Findings: The comparison of ASEAN member states responses to Russia's military aggression against Ukraine varies. Some condemned the military aggression such as Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia. Some only did not respond or were neutral such as Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam. Some support the military aggression, such as Myanmar. The difference in response is due to the national political interests of each country.

Originality/Value: This study focuses on ASEAN member countries that responded to Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, so the author believes that no one has studied with the same focus as this research.

Keywords: ASEAN, Russia, invasion, military aggression

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Introduction

The inception of diplomatic ties between Russia and Southeast Asia may be traced back to 1996. Russia's primary goals within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) encompass enhancing collaboration with the nations of Southeast Asia, pursuing the establishment of a strategic partnership with ASEAN as a collective of regional organizations, and actively participating in multilateral discussion platforms and institutions across Asia. Russia's inclination towards establishing bilateral connections extends beyond China in East Asia, encompassing other countries adopting a multilateral approach. Russia's decision to pursue a multilateral approach was motivated by the United States' growing focus on the Southeast Asian region during that period (Adigapa 2019).

The invasion by the Russian Federation into Ukraine commencing on February 24, 2022, has elicited responses from several global entities. The aforementioned invasion was executed in accordance with 'military activities' directed by Russian President Vladimir Putin to acknowledge the autonomy of two Ukrainian areas, specifically Donetsk and Luhansk (Satura 2022; de Ornay and Azizah 2022; Firdaus 2022). The Southeast Asian region is anticipated to face significant economic challenges due to the global crisis triggered by the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. In 2020, it is noteworthy that Russia was the 11th largest bilateral trade partner, with a substantial investment of \$63.2 million in the respective region. The occurrence of the conflict resulted in elevated prices in various sectors, including oil and gas, food commodities (namely wheat and corn), and industrial minerals (such as nickel, titanium, copper, and platinum) Russia holds a prominent position as a major exporter of natural gas commodities in the Southeast Asian region (Bakrie, Delanova, and

Yani 2022). In addition, the efficiency of transportation networks, encompassing land, sea, and air routes, is also impeded. This conflict can potentially jeopardise the region's economic recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Russia has been an ASEAN dialogue partner in politics since 1996. Throughout this period, Russia has actively taken part in multiple ASEAN forums, including the East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus), and the Regional Forum (ARF). Despite the limited impact of the war on Russia and ASEAN relations, and the relatively mild response from ASEAN regarding the invasion, it is plausible that the conflict could have posed a potential obstacle to Vietnam's proposition of a free trade agreement between ASEAN and the Eurasian Economic Union, which Vietnam already has an existing free trade agreement with. The likelihood and probability of President Vladimir Putin's attendance at the ASEAN-Russia Summit and the East Asia Summit during the crisis were low. Regarding security, Russia has emerged as the predominant armaments provider in the region, having recorded sales amounting to a substantial sum of US\$10.7 billion since the year 2000. The imposition of export control sanctions by the United States will impact the provision of weapons systems and other military equipment to nations in Southeast Asia (Storey and Choong 2022).

This research explores ASEAN member's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. studies discussing Russia's invasion of Ukraine have only discussed the conflict between the two nations (Widiasa 2018; Puspita 2022; Syahbuddin and Haryati 2022); matters concerning international law (Susetio, Zulfikar, and Muliawan 2023); and Indonesia's political stance (Saryono et al. 2022; Hutabarat 2022; Hakim and Sadiyin 2022). Therefore, this research is renewable, and there is no similar research.

Methods

A qualitative research methodology might be employed to investigate the response of ASEAN countries to Russia's military intervention in Ukraine. This particular strategy is deemed appropriate for the present study due to its capacity to facilitate the acquisition of comprehensive and meticulous insights into the reactions of ASEAN nations towards the Russian incursion into Ukraine. This methodology entails doing a comprehensive literature review, wherein researchers critically analyze and evaluate the findings of prior research studies.

Discussion and Findings

ASEAN Measures Against Military Aggression

ASEAN offered a range of comments in relation to the extensive military incursion by Russia into Ukraine, which commenced on February 24, 2022. On February 26, 2022, the Foreign Ministers of the ASEAN member states issued a statement urging all parties involved to exercise utmost restraint and engage in dialogue using diplomatic channels to address the issue at hand. The objective is to alleviate tensions and pursue a peaceful resolution in accordance with international law, the principles outlined in the United Nations Charter, and the provisions of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in Southeast Asia. The Foreign Ministers of the ASEAN member states believe that there remains an opportunity for constructive engagement to prevent the situation from escalating and achieve the goal of peace (ASEAN 2022a).

On March 4, 2022, the Foreign Ministers of the ASEAN member states released a statement urging for a cessation of hostilities in Ukraine due to the deteriorating humanitarian circumstances and its impact on the global landscape. There was a pressing need to promptly establish a truce and engage in ongoing political dialogue to facilitate a durable peace process in Ukraine. The significance of implementing a ceasefire lies in its

ability to establish a conducive atmosphere for engaging in negotiations to resolve the ongoing conflict and mitigate the hardships endured by civilians. ASEAN believes there is an opportunity for constructive discussion to avert the escalation of the situation and mitigate the increasing losses and injuries among civilians and military personnel. ASEAN has also conveyed its preparedness to facilitate peaceful engagement among the relevant parties in every feasible manner (ASEAN 2022b).

Neither of the aforementioned remarks by the Foreign Ministers explicitly referred to 'Russia' or any specific party responsible for the aggressive acts of invading a sovereign state. Furthermore, there was no acknowledgement of the legitimacy of resisting such crimes (Strangio 2022a). However, in 2004, Russia became a party to the 1976 ASEAN Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation (ASEAN 2019).

Response of ASEAN Member

To date, there is a lack of additional information regarding the ceasefire proposed by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). However, it is noteworthy that various ASEAN member states have exhibited divergent responses to Russia's incursion into Ukraine. This observation is based on the voting outcomes of the United Nations emergency session held from February 28, 2022, to March 2, 2022, which addressed the issue of military aggression in Ukraine. Specifically, eight ASEAN member states (Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, Philippines, and Singapore) supported the resolution. In comparison, two other member states (Laos and Vietnam) opted to abstain (General Assembly 2022). The analysis of the diverse responses exhibited by the member states of the ASEAN encompasses:

1. Indonesia

Indonesia's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Teuku Faizasyah, conveyed a statement on behalf of the country during a virtual

press conference held on February 24, 2004. The statement, in addition to other matters, conveyed apprehension at the intensification of the military conflict in Ukraine. It underscored the significance of adhering to international law and the United Nations Charter. Furthermore, it highlighted the imperative for all parties to prioritize discussions and diplomacy to achieve peace (Kementerian Luar Negeri 2022). The Indonesian government has expressed its stance against imposing sanctions on Russia, as it believes that such measures do not offer a viable approach to address specific issues (Nivell Rayda, Pichayada Promchertchoo, and Vincent Tan 2022). Indonesia has formally appealed to member states of the United Nations to prioritize humanitarian concerns in the context of the Ukraine crisis. The country urges all involved parties to pursue peaceful resolutions through dialogue and diplomatic means actively. The ongoing military actions in Ukraine have significantly disrupted the state of peace in Eastern Europe, thereby posing a grave threat to the lives and well-being of civilians (PTRI NY/Kemlu RI 2022).

2. Singapore

As an ASEAN member state, Singapore exhibited the most robust reaction by vehemently expressing its opposition to Russia's military aggression in Ukraine and relentlessly condemning Russia's actions. The incursion by Russian forces into the affected territory is in direct conflict with the principles outlined in the United Nations Charter, therefore constituting a breach of established norms within the realm of international law. Singapore strongly condemns the Russian government's use of violence, which flagrantly disregards sovereignty and territorial integrity principles. Consequently, Singapore will impose sanctions on Russia. One contributing element to the failure of the United Nations Security Council resolution to address Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine is the exercise of Russia's veto power. The imposition of trade restrictions, namely the

prohibition of exporting items deemed detrimental to the well-being of the Ukrainian population. In addition, the imposition of financial restrictions will encompass the targeting of banks, fundraising initiatives, and financial undertakings that confer advantages to the Russian government (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Singapore 2022). Singapore is the sole member state of the ASEAN that has advocated for implementing financial sanctions and export control measures targeting Moscow. The imposition of these sanctions represents a significant milestone for a relatively tiny nation such as Singapore, which faces numerous challenges. The issue has prompted Singapore to recognize the imperative of adequately developing its defence capabilities (Kit 2022).

3. Malaysia

The Malaysian government has conveyed its apprehension regarding the intensifying violence in Ukraine. It has called for prompt measures to de-escalate the situation and minimize the number of lives and losses. The principles of conversation and negotiation should guide the pursuit of peace in accordance with international law and the United Nations Charter. Malaysia asserts that the United Nations Security Council primarily upholds global peace and security (Putra 2022). Malaysia exhibits a clear reluctance to enforce sanctions unilaterally and instead proposes the implementation of a ceasefire, with the option of imposing penalties if deemed necessary. As per the statement made by the Foreign Minister of Malaysia, the imposition of sanctions necessitates adherence to the established protocol of the United Nations. The careful imposition of sanctions is necessary due to the potential repercussions on civilian populations. The sanctions Malaysia imposes are primarily symbolic, as the Ukraine crisis is expected to have little repercussions on Malaysia's economic landscape. This is because the volume of commerce between Ukraine and Malaysia constitutes a mere 0.5 percent of Malaysia's overall international trade (Lingan 2022).

4. Brunei Darussalam

Brunei Darussalam has conveyed its apprehension regarding military intervention and the escalating arms race in Ukraine while maintaining a vigilant stance in monitoring worldwide events. Brunei strongly disapproves of all violence and transgressions against a nation's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity. Furthermore, it underscores the significance of adhering to peace as enshrined in international legal frameworks. Brunei urges all relevant parties to engage in de-escalation measures and abstain from actions and behaviours that may exacerbate the situation. These efforts should be pursued peacefully, without resorting to threats or the application of force, in adherence to the principles and regulations of international law (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Brunei Darussalam 2022).

5. Thailand

Thailand has exhibited a greater degree of neutrality. Thailand refrained from expressing condemnation towards the attacks in Ukraine. Thailand expressed profound worry about the increasing tensions in Europe and adopted a policy closely monitoring their development. Thailand expresses its endorsement of ongoing endeavours to peacefully resolve the crisis through discussion (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Thailand 2022). Thailand's neutral stance towards the conflict can be attributed to its longstanding diplomatic ties with Russia. However, Thailand supports ASEAN's appeal for dialogue to address and end the ongoing situation (Storey 2022). In addition, Thailand is actively pursuing Russia's assistance in endorsing its proposed free trade deal with the Eurasian Economic Union. Furthermore, Thailand has expressed its desire for Russia to dispatch a distinguished delegation to partake in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit scheduled for 2022 (Post Reporter 2022).

6. Philippines

According to the Defense Secretary, the Philippines has adopted a neutral stance in response to the war in Ukraine, asserting that it falls outside the purview of the Philippine's interests. The Defense Secretary further contended that neighbouring countries of Ukraine should assume the responsibility of extending support to Ukraine (CNN Philippines Staff 2022). Subsequently, the Philippines expressed its condemnation of the invasion of Ukraine. Amid numerous reports, the Philippines has encountered challenges in ascertaining the precise number of casualties from both opposing factions. However, the Philippines has advocated for safeguarding civilians and civilian infrastructure in Ukraine, emphasizing the need for substantial relief corresponding to the magnitude of the humanitarian crisis. Additionally, the Philippines has urged adherence to humanitarian norms to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure. The effective acquisition of aid must be ensured. The Republic of the Philippines advocates utilising the 1982 Manila Declaration on the Peaceful Settlement of International Disputes (Departement of Region Affairs Phillipines 2022).

7. Cambodia

The Cambodian Prime Minister, Hun Sen, expressed the stance of Cambodia's present administration, emphasizing their belief in the efficacy of peaceful dialogue to resolve the ongoing conflict. The nation of Cambodia firmly opposes all manifestations of interpersonal violence. In February, Cambodia publicly declared its stance, affirming its disapproval of territorial secession and its opposition to using armed coercion to resolve disputes between nations (Koemsoeun 2022). After the passage of one month, Cambodia, in its capacity as the chair of ASEAN 2022, expressed strong disapproval of Russia's incursion into Ukraine and advocated for an immediate cessation of hostilities. In a

statement released by Cambodia as the chair of ASEAN, the ASEAN organization has called for exercising caution and promoting dialogue. However, the statement does not explicitly address the involvement of Russia in the invasion (Thul 2022).

8. Laos

As conveyed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the official declaration of the Lao government affirms Laos' impartial stance on the situation in Ukraine. It is asserted that Lao is vigilant in observing Ukraine's intricate and delicate advancements. Lao urged all parties to exert concerted efforts to mitigate tensions that have the potential to jeopardize the maintenance of global peace and security. Lao further advocates for the ongoing pursuit of a peaceful resolution to the crisis via diplomatic channels (Laotian Times 2022). The Lao ambassador to the United Nations elucidated the rationale behind Laos decision to abstain, citing the country's adherence to General Assembly resolutions that prioritize the overarching goal of promoting mankind while avoiding politicization. Laos emphasizes the imperative of political and diplomatic resolutions, the pressing necessity to abstain from activities that contribute to heightened tensions, and the establishment of a ceasefire accord (Permanent Mission of the Lao People's Democratic Republic to the United Nations 2022).

9. Vietnam

The spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam, Le Thi Thu Hang, has conveyed apprehension about the ongoing violence in Ukraine. Hang has urged all involved parties to demonstrate restraint and adhere to the values outlined in the United Nations Charter and fundamental tenets of international law. Furthermore, she has emphasized the importance of sustaining dialogue to achieve a peaceful resolution (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Vietnam 2022). Vietnam has adopted a restrained approach to Russia's military incursion into Ukraine, likely due to the tight partnership between Vietnam and Russia in the

Southeast Asian region. Diplomatic ties between Vietnam and Russia were established in 1950, a period that encompassed the era of the Soviet Union. Russia emerged as Vietnam's inaugural strategic partner and played a significant role as a prominent benefactor. Russia is in a prominent position as Vietnam's primary defence ally, providing significant quantities of weaponry and military equipment to bolster Vietnam's armed forces (RFA Staff 2022). Moreover, it is worth noting that Vietnamese state media has presented a far more critical stance towards Ukraine in its crisis coverage, potentially providing Vietnam with a more objective understanding of the situation (Sebastian Strangio 2022b).

10. Myanmar

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Myanmar has released a statement expressing strong condemnation towards the atrocities in Ukraine. Additionally, Myanmar urges its nationals to demonstrate solidarity with Ukraine (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Myanmar 2022). In addition, the representative of Myanmar at the United Nations expressed support for the resolution passed by the UN General Assembly, which condemned the Russian invasion (Myanmar Mission to UN 2022). Regrettably, this statement contradicts the stance of the Myanmar Military Junta. General Zaw Min Tun, the spokesperson for the Myanmar Military Council, expresses his endorsement of the justifications behind the military's alignment with Russian actions (VOA Burmese 2022). The rationale behind this is that Russia holds a significant role as a crucial ally and provider of weaponry to the military leaders in Myanmar. Moreover, Russia has consistently supported Myanmar, which has faced international isolation by the United Nations. In 2021, the junta leader, Min Aug Hlaing, met with Russia's top state arms exporter intending to explore possibilities for military-technical collaboration (France 24 2022).

The response of member countries of the ASEAN to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 can be observed through the representation of data in multiple tables:

Table 1. Comparison of ASEAN Responses

Strongly Condemn and Sanction	Singapore
Strongly condemns and does not want to sanction	Indonesia, Malaysia
Neutral then condemn	Philippines
Condemnation and passive/weak response	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia
Neutral and Passive Response	Laos, Thailand, Vietnam
Supporting Russian action	Myanmar

While most individuals disapproved of the action, it is worth noting that not all member states explicitly identified Russia as the party responsible for the aggression or perpetration. Hence, the response of each member state in the ASEAN to Russia's military intervention in Ukraine exhibits variation, contingent upon the distinct national political interests of each respective country. Singapore has emerged as the most prominent advocate in denouncing Russia and explicitly attributing responsibility to Russia (see Table 1). Singapore vehemently denounces and intends to enforce punitive measures against Russia due to its utilization of its formidable national might to engage in acts of aggression against smaller nations. This conduct poses a significant threat to the security and well-being of diminutive countries such as Singapore. The nations of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam condemned the conduct, refraining from explicitly attributing aggressor status to Russia (see Table 1). Indonesia and Malaysia have reached a mutual understanding to refrain from implementing sanctions, as they recognize that such

measures may not effectively address the underlying issues and may not align with their respective domestic policies. However, Brunei Darussalam has exhibited a more passive stance against the imposition of sanctions.

The governments of Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam expressed their disapproval of the act of aggression yet maintained a neutral stance and responded passively (see Table 1). This attitude can be attributed to their longstanding positive diplomatic relations with Russia, as well as Russia's status as one of its strategic partners. The initial stance of the Philippines was one of neutrality, as it deemed the military assault in Ukraine to be outside the scope of its national interests (see Table 1). However, eventually, the Philippines expressed condemnation of Russia's activities. In contrast, Cambodia initially pursued a neutrality policy but afterwards expressed disapproval of the aggression due to its role as the chair of the ASEAN. In the context of Myanmar, a distinction can be drawn between the governmental and military entities. The military in Myanmar stands as the sole party in Southeast Asia that lends support to Russia's offensive actions, mostly due to Russia's significant role as the primary provider of weaponry to the military leadership in Myanmar (see Table 1).

Despite the ASEAN countries' endorsement of a diplomatic approach centered on peaceful dialogue, in line with the principles outlined in the UN charter and the Southeast Asian Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, to mitigate tensions and advocate for a ceasefire to minimize human casualties and material losses, it can be argued that this response lacked sufficient strength. Singapore, known for its vocal stance on international issues, aligned itself with 81 other nations in co-sponsoring a resolution to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) that denounces the Russian incursion. Nevertheless, the resolution was ultimately unsuccessful due to Russia's exercise of veto power inside the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

This occurrence serves as a testament to the fact that, even within the UN framework, resolutions have the potential to encounter obstacles and not achieve their intended outcomes. The efficacy of ASEAN and its member states' peaceful dialogue remains inconsequential.

Conclusion

The analysis of the reactions of ASEAN member states towards Russia's military intervention against Ukraine demonstrates a range of differences. Several countries, including Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia, disapproved of the military aggression. A subset of countries, namely Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam, exhibited non-responsiveness or neutrality in their responses. Myanmar is among the nations that advocate for military aggression. The disparity in reaction can be attributed to the distinct national political interests held by each respective country

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