

## Investigating the Contributions of Thailand's Defence Diplomacy for ASEAN Community Integration

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Submitted 20 October; accepted in final form 20 November 2016

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### Abstract

Defence diplomacy is receiving greater public attention as observers want to ensure that the defence sector is performing responsively in the changing world. ASEAN's defence diplomacy is largely carried out under the ASEAN Political and Security Community (APSC) framework, which is one of the three main ASEAN Community pillars. This study aims to investigate the contributions made by Thailand's defence diplomacy toward the integration efforts of the ASEAN Community, in increasing the understanding of the role played by defence diplomacy and see how such a role can be further enhanced. More importantly, this study also aims to propose policy recommendations on how Thailand's defence diplomacy can be made more effective, with greater impact on the overall efforts toward ASEAN integration. For the purpose of this study, primary and secondary data have been collected, examined and analysed, using the documentary research technique, together with interviews of key personnel at both operational and policy levels. This study finds that, as an instrument of foreign diplomacy, Thailand's defence diplomacy and its activities have significantly facilitated the process of ASEAN Community integration, but there remains much room for further improvement to optimize its usage. Despite the national consensus on its usefulness, Thailand's defence diplomacy still face challenges such as the lack of national integrated policy and guidelines, knowledge and competency of the personnel involved, and an adequate budget to support continuous defence diplomacy initiatives. Due to the above, recommendations have been made by this study on how such shortcomings and others can be overcome.

**Keywords:** *Defence diplomacy, political relations, security community, regional integration, Thailand, ASEAN*

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### 1. Introduction

Defence Diplomacy (DD) has become an important instrument for maintaining international security. In the environment of contemporary security, the defence diplomacy's role is to manage states' military forces, which could be induced in diplomatic negotiations in order to achieve the state's national interest or strategic objective. According to Fetic (2014), international actors must be stimulated to communicate and negotiate instead of initiating violent acts. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has largely relied on international diplomacy (Chow and Tan, 2013). Political relations have been managed by consultation, consensus, and declarations. In 1997, ASEAN member states proclaimed their vision for closer regional integration by 2020, aiming to become a community which would peacefully resolve disputes, forge closer economic integration, and be bound by a common identity. This initiative eventually led to the establishment of the ASEAN Political and Security Community (APSC), the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC).

In the APSC sphere, the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) was created in 2006 and it is the only regional defence body established currently. The meeting serves as a forum to build confidence and enhance transparency. The measures envisioned for future co-operation activities are formulated to strengthen regional defence and security cooperation, to enhance existing practical cooperation and develop possible cooperation in defence and security. It is also designed to promote enhanced ties with Dialogue Partners and to shape and share the norms (ASEAN Charter, 2007). The key role of external powers in the security of the region is recognized so that an ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) is organized, aiming to engage ASEAN Dialogue Partners for the matters of defence and security cooperation.

The ADMM and ADMM-Plus forums are the stages where defence diplomacy accumulates its importance in the engagement of the regional political and security cooperation.

## **2. Objective**

There is great attention from the public as to whether the defence sector is performing responsively in the changing world. For Thailand, the role of the Ministry of Defence (MOD) on the realisation of an ASEAN Community has been evolving. However, on many occasions, some parts of the Thai public seem to be skeptical of the roles and duties of the defence, or military sector in the new era of globalisation and regional integration. There are criticisms concerning involvement of the defence sector at both the national and international political levels. This study intends to both encapsulate practices of Thailand's defence diplomacy in the recent decade and illustrate the underlying mechanism that makes defence diplomacy an effective geopolitical tool for ASEAN community integration. It was largely carried out via the documentary research technique for qualitative analysis. Together with documentary research, interviews with key persons involved were also conducted in order to attain greater insights into research data and analysis. Reference has been made to theoretical aspects of defence diplomacy and other theorem of international relations. Actual practices of the defence diplomacy employed by Thailand have also been analysed. The perceived benefit of this research is the ability to establish policy recommendations for the enhancement of Thailand's role and contributions in regional defence diplomacy.

## **3. Materials and Methods**

This study attempted to explore and examine relevant factors that are key drivers to achieve the APSC's goal, leading to several important questions. This research, therefore, aims to answer these research questions which bring along the intention and the general objectives into a comprehensive exploration of the specified aspects of the defence diplomacy role to support ASEAN integration. The scope of this research covered only recent and current practices of Thailand's defence diplomacy aimed to support the process of ASEAN Community integration; particularly those activities under the ADMM and ADMM-Plus framework during 2006 – 2016, i.e. since the ADMM establishment and inaugural meeting in Kuala Lumpur on 9 May 2006. Findings on challenges in ASEAN community integration are also expected. It is perceived that these research findings would contribute to the specific knowledge of purposes and contributions of defence diplomacy in relation with ASEAN community integration. Based upon research findings, the expected utilisation of this research includes the development of policy recommendations for improving the performance of Thailand's defence diplomacy practices, which can be used for the enhancement of Thailand's role in regional defence diplomacy. The research framework has been developed as shown in Figure 1.

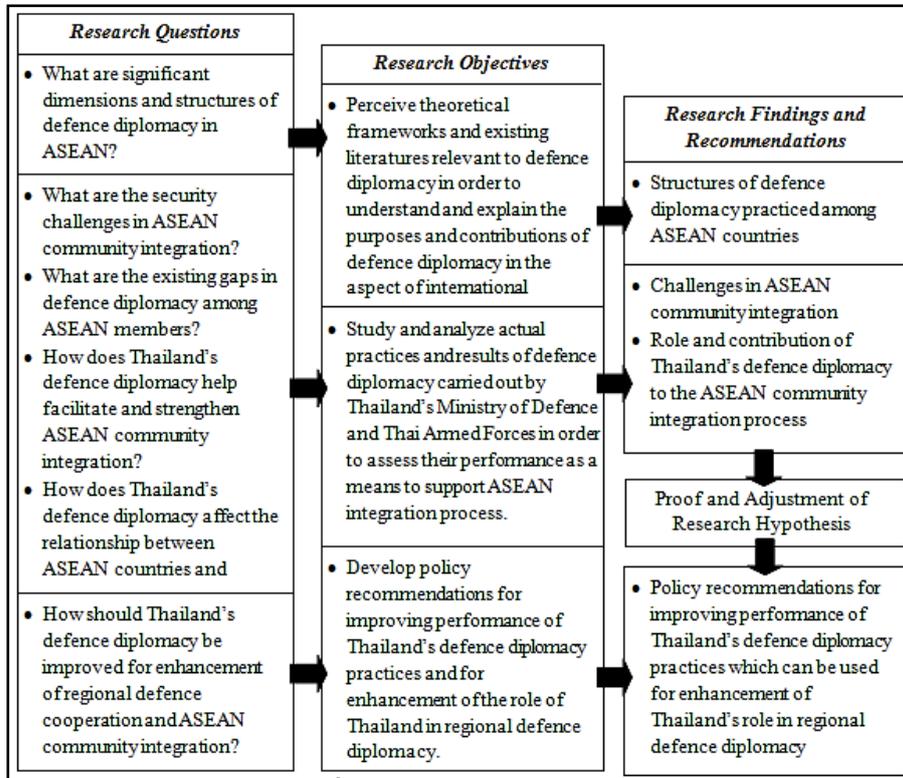


Figure 1 Research Framework

### 3.1 Diplomacy in Perspectives

Diplomacy has existed since the beginning of human evolution so that the act of conducting negotiations between two persons, or two nations at a large scope is essential to the upkeep of international affairs. Functions of diplomacy include preventing war and violence and fortifying relations between two nations. Diplomacy is most importantly used to complete a specific agenda. Without diplomacy, much of the world's affairs could be abolished, international organisations would not exist, and above all the world could be in a constant state of war. It is for diplomacy that certain countries can exist in harmony. According to Amacker (2011), there are four main functions of diplomacy:

- 1) Representing a state's interests and conducting negotiations or discussions designed to identify common interests; as well as areas of disagreement between the parties for the purpose of achieving the state's goals and avoiding conflict,
- 2) Gathering of information and subsequent identification and evaluation of the receiving state's foreign policy goals,
- 3) Expanding political, economic, and cultural ties between two countries, and
- 4) Facilitating or an enforcing vehicle for the observation of international law.

By looking at the various forms of diplomacy, it is possible to distinguish the differences between defence diplomacy and other types of diplomacy, which include:

a) **Traditional Diplomacy** is the form of diplomacy that comes to mind by the average person and is an attempt by an international actor to influence the international environment through engagement with other international actors (Cull, 2009).

b) **Public Diplomacy** is similar to traditional diplomacy except seeking to influence another international actor's population through informational and cultural programs (Swistek, 2012).

c) **Defence Diplomacy** is a nonviolent use of military forces through activities to further a country’s international agenda. Defence diplomacy uses a state’s defence apparatus to advance the strategic aims of a government through cooperation with other countries (Winger, 2014).

d) **Security Diplomacy** is comprised of defence, rule-of-law, human rights, and humanitarian crisis response initiatives that are packaged to meet the specific needs of its partners. Security diplomacy goes beyond defence diplomacy and harnesses a country’s security institutions into one combined effort in support of their diplomatic enterprises. This is not meant to replace defence diplomacy, but to be an option for policymakers (Kron, 2015).

e) **Preventive Diplomacy** refers to diplomatic action taken to prevent disputes from escalating into conflicts and to limit the spread of conflicts when they occur (United Nations, 2014), which can be carried out through peaceful non-military methods such as negotiations, inquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement of disputes and other non-coercive methods of resolution.

f) **Economic Diplomacy** is harnessing the international environment to advance an international actors’ foreign policy, and employing economic tools such as trade agreements and fiscal agreements to secure its economic strength (U.S. Department of State (USDS), 2016).

These various forms of diplomacy work best when used in combination with one another. However, if properly tailored to fulfill the needs of a partner nation, then they can effectively achieve a government’s end-state alone (Kron, 2015). From the paragraphs explained above, this study suggests that applications of diplomacy in various types can be summarised and illustrated as shown in Figure 2.

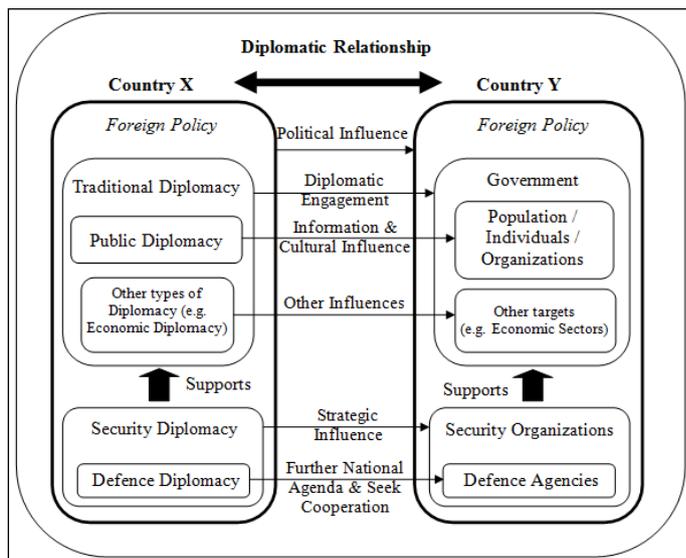


Figure 2 Applications of Diplomacy

Nye (1990) has earlier developed a concept of power and identified both its different variants and the modes in which they are applied. The three specific varieties of power identified are hard power, economic power, and soft power. Hard power is the use of pressure to force a government into surrendering the will of another country. Economic power is the capability to offer some form of incentives or rewards to a country for its support, and soft power is the ability to simply convince a country and its leaders to do what another country wants.

While the connection between hard power and the armed forces is well established, the use of a country’s defence resource as a source of soft or economic power is still mostly unexamined. In terms of economic power, it is easy to foresee how the offered arms transfers or security guarantees could be used to incentivise another country into a preferred course of action. The question of using the military as a tool of soft power is difficult and needs to examine the process through which soft power is actually utilised (Winger, 2014).

Concerning the military as a source of soft power, it can be observed how the military has implemented an indirect approach with military-public diplomacy, where public relations missions emerged as important operational components. Missions like development assistance, disaster relief, and humanitarian aid are not only acts of charity, but a way of developing valuable relations between the military and a foreign country. The efforts which use military forces and development projects to win popular support have been particularly noticeable and regarded as the universal efforts to win “hearts and minds.”

Regarding the application of soft power, the issues of defence diplomacy such as using military-to-military activities may result in defence institutions influencing foreign government institutions. Military diplomat posting, officer exchanges, joint exercises, training programs, and ship visits are not just peaceful means of using military force, but they are efforts to directly communicate the ideas and policy preferences of one country to another. The ultimate objective of such attempts is not just to foster cooperation as a universal good, but to build partnerships that are beneficial to the practitioners’ interests.

### **3.2 Defence Diplomacy**

In agreement with definitions by Winger (2014), which indicate that defence diplomacy is a nonviolent use of military forces through cooperation activities with other countries, Kron (2015) points out that defence diplomacy seeks to build partnerships through the use of defence related programs, and does not seek to intimidate its partners into cooperation. Muthanna (2011) also envisages defence diplomacy as constructing sustainable cooperative relationships to build trust, facilitate conflict prevention, introduce transparency to defence relations, build and reinforce perceptions of common interests, change the mindset of collaborators and introduce cooperation in other areas. Similarly, Tan and Singh (2012) describe defence diplomacy as the collective application of peaceful and cooperative initiatives by national defence establishments and military practitioners to build confidence, create trust, prevent conflict, and resolve the conflict.

The increasing emergence of new non-state actors and new global powers; as well as the growing complexity of world politics have influenced over renewed relationships between the armed forces and the diplomatic sector (Cruden, 2011). The focus of defence diplomacy, sometimes known as military diplomacy, is on giving support to create a stable, secure and flourishing international environment by creating and preserving trust between friendly armed forces and countries. Defence diplomacy is therefore positioned at the junction between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence.

Cooperation amongst states is understood as a social process that can have a positive and transforming effect on their relations through internalizing regulatory norms. According to Acharya (2001), attempting to address the security community construction, and affecting the conditions under which states establish a durable peace, and avoid the recurrence of war is one of the most difficult challenges for international relations theorists and practitioners. It was explained that the concept of a security community describes groups of states which prefer a long-term and peaceful interaction while ruling out the use of force in resolving disputes with other members of the group. The idea of a security community was kept alive in the work of regional security organisations such as ASEAN. In this research, the defence diplomacy was examined as to how it can facilitate ASEAN’s integration, especially in the shaping of norms and attitudes, and development of common understandings, expectations, and practices about peaceful conduct.

The APSC pillar of ASEAN recognizes the principle of comprehensive security and commits to address the broad political, economic, social and cultural aspects of ASEAN Community building. The APSC recognizes strong interconnections among political, economic and social realities such that sustainable economic development requires a secure political environment based on a strong foundation of mutual interests, generated by economic cooperation and political solidarity (ASEAN, 2012). APSC also promotes an ASEAN-wide political and security cooperation in conjunction with the ASEAN Vision 2020, rather than a joint foreign policy, military alliance, or defence pact. Its plan of action is mutually-reinforced with bilateral cooperation between ASEAN countries while recognizing their sovereign rights to pursue individual foreign policies and their defence arrangements.

#### 4. Results and Analysis

Results of the investigation and examination on Thailand's Defence Diplomacy contribution during the process of ASEAN Community Integration, through archival records and interviews, are presented in accordance with the research objectives as follows.

##### 4.1 Evolution of Defence Diplomacy in ASEAN: From Bilateralism to Multilateralism

Since its establishment, bilateralism has been the fundamental choice of ASEAN states regarding defence cooperation, despite enduring debates over the role and value of multilateralism (Tao, 2015). While rejecting the necessity for a military alliance, ASEAN member countries were forging bilateral relationships to cope with various threats, which appeared to result in an informal bilateral defence network, the so-called 'ASEAN defence spider web,' being developed. ASEAN leaders believed that bilateral cooperation was more beneficial than other forms of multilateral military cooperation (Irvine, 1982). However, following the end of the Cold War, defence relations within ASEAN noticeably undertook adjustments. ASEAN leaders began to think about a multilateral security framework for ASEAN but still opposed to a military pact (Acharya, 1990). The Malaysian foreign minister suggested an ASEAN defense community while their Indonesian counterpart similarly called for an ASEAN military arrangement.

In light of the aforementioned changing security context, ASEAN has therefore promoted a multilateral defence cooperation through gradual and institutionalised approaches such as the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM), in which Thailand has also been a key actor of the cooperation. Similarly, defence cooperation between ASEAN and major regional powers was further expanded.

The ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) is an annual meeting established in 2006, a result of the APSC Plan of Action, stipulating that ASEAN shall work towards the convening of an annual ADMM. The ADMM is the highest defence consultative and cooperative mechanism in ASEAN, aiming to promote mutual trust and confidence through greater understanding of defence/security challenges, as well as enhancement of transparency and openness (ASEAN, 2014). In order to guide the ADMM cooperation process, the 3-Year ADMM Work Programs have been consistently adopted since 2008, incorporating four areas: strengthening regional defense and security cooperation; enhancing and developing existing practical cooperation; promoting enhanced ties with Dialogue Partners; and shaping and sharing of norms. Concept papers, concentrating on the issues of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief have been progressing significantly in the ADMM while exercises on HADR have also been conducted (Tao, 2015).

Cooperation in the area of peacekeeping operations and defence industry has also moved apace with the adoption of the Concept Paper on the Establishment of ASEAN Peacekeeping Centers Network, and on ASEAN Defence Industry Collaboration in 2011 (ADMM, 2011). Initiatives on establishing the ASEAN Defence Interaction Program and an ADMM Logistics Support Framework were adopted in 2013. Implementation of these initiatives is currently underway. Another important ADMM initiative is Direct Communications Link, established in 2014, which is a practical confidence and security-building measure aiming to promote quick response cooperation in an emergency situation related to maritime security.

The ASEAN Chiefs of Defense Forces Informal Meeting (ACDFIM), established in 2003, acts as an annual mechanism for implementing decisions made by the ADMM. As a high-level military meeting, the ACDFIM is tasked with the role of serving as 'the center of linkage and coordination of military cooperative activities' in the region (ACDFIM, 2011). Furthermore, there are also the ASEAN Military Intelligence Informal Meeting (AMIIM) and the ASEAN Military Operations Information Meeting (AMOIM). The two meetings are also held annually and are accountable to the ACDFIM. It was pointed out that ASEAN military intelligence cooperation should be prioritized in order to help enhance and build the regional community (AMIIM, 2012).

Along with ADMM, the ADMM-Plus established in 2010 is a biennial meeting acting as a platform for ASEAN and its eight Dialogue Partners (i.e. Australia, China, India, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, Russia, and the USA) to strengthen security and defence cooperation for peace, stability, and development in the region. The ADMM-Plus' main work is undertaken by expert working groups (EWG) (ADMM, 2010), which currently cover six priority areas including Maritime Security (MS), Military Medicine (MM), Counter Terrorism (CT), Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), peacekeeping operations (PKO), and Humanitarian Mine Action (HMA). Each area is co-chaired by an

ASEAN Member Country and a Dialogue Partner. Meetings and exercises are organized accordingly by co-chairs during the chairmanship period. In May 2016, the ADMM-Plus meeting agreed to include a new EWG on Cyber Security (CS) in the next round of cooperation with the Philippines and New Zealand as co-chairs.

Another ASEAN-centered platform, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), has also made concrete achievements, increasing transparency promoted through the exchange of defence information and the publication of defence white papers; and networking between defence and military officials of ARF participants (ARF, 2011). ASEAN conducts regular negotiations with other ARF members under the framework of the “ARF Security Policy Conference,” an annual vice defence minister-level meeting initiated by China in 2004. According to the Declaration of ASEAN Concord II (Bali Concord II), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) shall remain the primary forum in enhancing political and security cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region, as well as the pivot in building peace and stability in the region. ASEAN shall enhance its role in further advancing the stages of cooperation within the ARF to ensure the security of the Asia-Pacific region (Doung Chanto, 2003). The Bali Concord II also states that an ASEAN Community’s three pillars shall be closely intertwined and mutually reinforce for ensuring durable peace, stability and shared prosperity in the region.

#### **4.2 Thailand’s Defence Diplomacy for ASEAN Community Integration**

Thailand’s Ministry of Defence has an important role in the realisation of the oncoming ASEAN Community. In the advancement of Thailand towards the realisation of an ASEAN Community in 2015, the Ministry of Defence has been a primary organisation in the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) in two distinctive dimensions: 1) Serving as a domestic cooperative organisation in carrying out government policies to prepare Thailand for the realisation of an ASEAN Community, and 2) Serving as an organisation to cooperate with international agencies to integrate Thailand and other ASEAN Member States into the ASEAN Community.

From a domestic standpoint, the Ministry of Defence has been operating under the mechanism of “The Supervising Committee of the Centre for the Readiness of Thailand towards ASEAN Community” which was established by the Prime Minister in November 2014. Subsequently, the Chairman of the Supervising Committee (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs) also established an “Ad hoc Committee Centre for Readiness of Thailand towards the ASEAN Political-Security Community” in February 2015. This Ad hoc Committee is chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister for Security Affairs with high-level officers of the Ministry of Defence as members of the Ad hoc Committee, while the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs serve as joint secretariats for the Ad hoc Committee.

From an international view, an important element is the cooperation with international organisations. Thus far, the Ministry of Defence has continuously participated with the Ministry of Defence of other nations in preparing towards an ASEAN Community on every level and in every aspect. Among the 10 Member States of ASEAN, there have been activities in the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting (ADMM) mechanisms. The Ministry of Defence has been involved with activities on every level, whether it is at the Ministerial level, Senior Officials’ Meeting (Permanent Secretary or equivalent) or the Working Group level. As for the Royal Thai Armed Forces Headquarters and Armed Services, there is also continuous and extensive participation in activities. For instance, there are ASEAN Chief of Defence Forces Informal Meeting and ASEAN Chief of Services meetings.

In fulfilling the research objective studying and analyzing the actual practices of Thailand’s defence diplomacy activities, within the ASEAN’s defence cooperation mechanism (presented in Figure 3); It can be seen that defence diplomacy activities solely lie under the framework of the ASEAN Political and Security Community pillar, which is one of three main pillars undertaken to achieve ASEAN Community Integration.

Figure 3 was developed in this study to help readers to visualize better linkages of defence diplomacy activities practiced by Thailand’s military sector. The arrows designate the line of communications between relevant agencies. The ASEAN Secretariat communicates ASEAN policy to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is the Chairman of the Supervising Committee for the Readiness of Thailand towards ASEAN Community, and also responsible for the formulation of the national foreign

policy. Then, such policy is further conveyed to the Ministry of Defence, which is a member of the Ad hoc Committee for Readiness of Thailand towards the ASEAN Political-Security Community, and shall plan and carry out defence diplomacy activities accordingly.

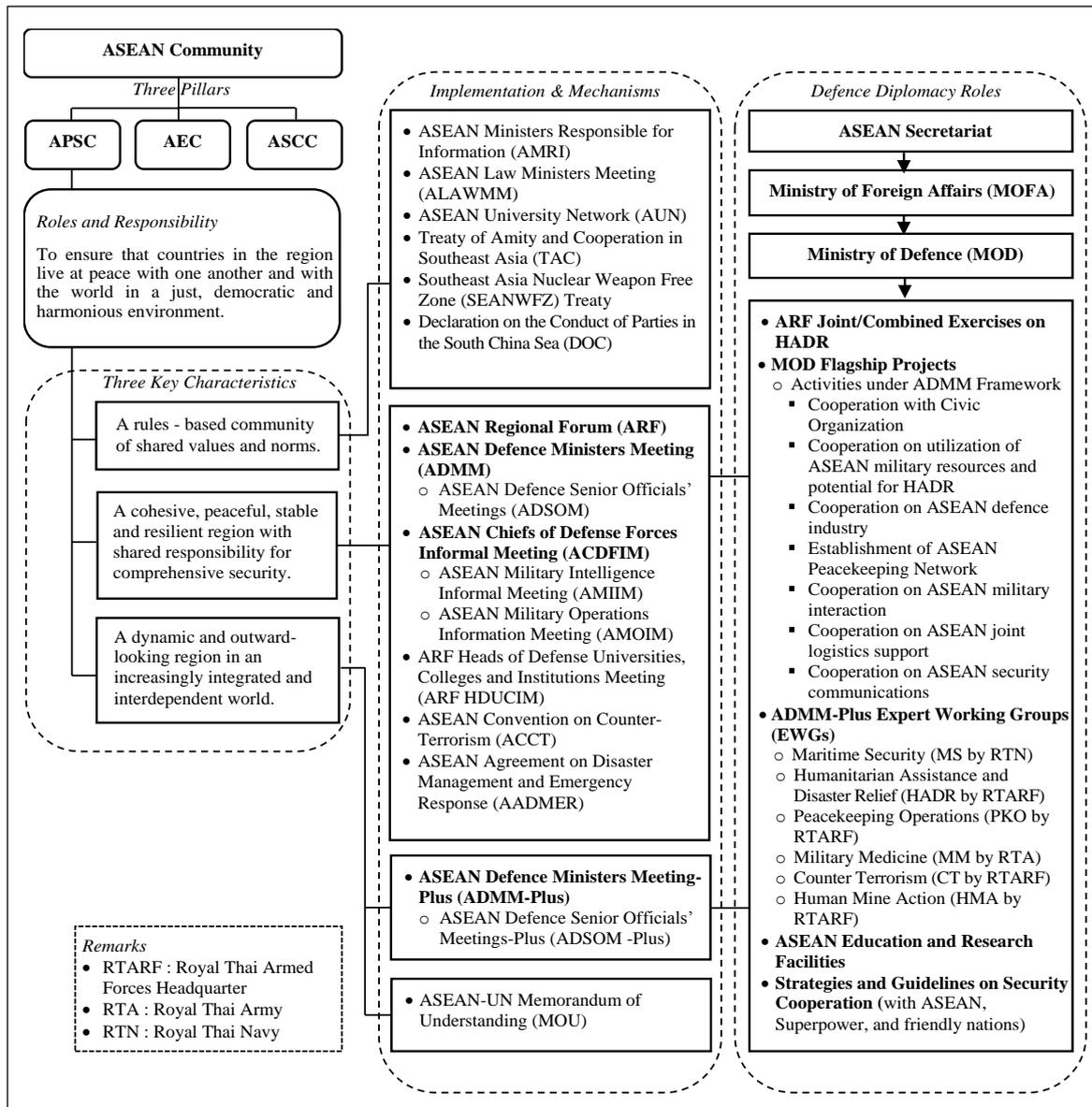


Figure 3 Defence Diplomacy Activities in ASEAN's Cooperation Mechanisms

### 4.3 Results from Interviews with Key Informants

Interviewees are comprised of nine officers from the Ministry of Defence, the Royal Thai Armed Forces Headquarters, and the Royal Thai Army, with more than ten years experiences in defence diplomacy. Two officers are at the policy level (Generals), four officers are at the high management level (Senior Colonels), and three from Middle management level (Colonels). All interviewees are working in the positions which directly deal with international relations and defence diplomacy in ASEAN contexts. To ensure full participation and open opinion expression, all interviewees are informed that their data and opinions shall be kept confidential. Results are summarised as follows.

#### 4.3.1 Contributions of Thailand's defence diplomacy to ASEAN community integration

The interviewees have similar views on the importance of Thailand's defence diplomacy and its influence on the process of ASEAN Community Integration. For example, the interviewee from policy level explained that:

...Thailand's defence diplomacy activities are very important to the process of ASEAN community integration as it greatly facilitates creating trust between ASEAN countries, strengthening the existing relationships which lead to accelerating implementation of security problem resolution...

...there is a need to carefully analyse strategic impacts of international security problems so that ASEAN countries can work together at a strategic level in order to alleviate and eventually solve such problems for a more secure ASEAN community...

Similarly, interviewees who are from high management level indicated that:

...Thailand's defence diplomacy plays a significant role in exploring new areas of defence cooperation and strengthening the existing cooperation, bilaterally or multilaterally, and also helps to effectively analyse requirements of both sides which help reduce suspiciousness between defence sectors in ASEAN countries...

...Thailand's defence diplomacy activities help strengthen bilateral and multilateral cooperation among ASEAN states as they provide more channels for cooperation including education and training...

Also, interviewees who are from middle management (operational) level pointed out that:

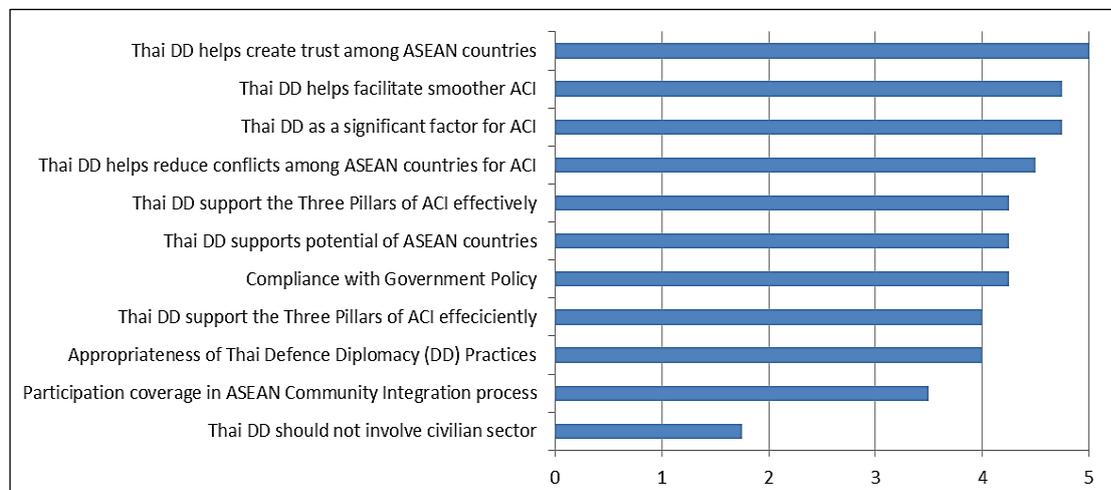
...Thailand's defence diplomacy is a primary tool for Thai Armed Forces in strengthening security cooperation between ASEAN countries, as it is a coordinating mechanism for establishing cooperative frameworks for operational level...

Responses from questions concerning contributions of Thailand's defence diplomacy to ASEAN community integration can be summarised as follows.

a) Defence diplomacy is a significant tool to coordinate and facilitate ASEAN countries to quickly attain bilateral/multilateral cooperation, based on mutual trust, in several fields with ASEAN countries during the integration process.

b) Defence diplomacy leads to cooperation at a strategic level which can alleviate and could eventually resolve conflicts in the region, so it is essential to explore cooperation opportunities and carefully analyse impacts of such cooperation.

The interviewees were asked to rate the performance of Thailand's defence diplomacy regarding its contribution on ASEAN Community Integration (ACI), by providing their level of agreement to 11 statements, and the results are as shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 4** Rating on Thailand’s Defence Diplomacy Practices (Using five-point Likert’s Scale; 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree)

From the scoring chart, it shows that all respondents strongly agreed that Thailand’s defence diplomacy practices have helped to create trust among ASEAN countries. Besides, it is considered as a significant factor that facilitates the ASEAN Community Integration process. Also, it was strongly agreed that Thailand’s defence diplomacy has helped a reduction of conflicts among ASEAN countries and also support their potential enhancement. It was also strongly agreed that Thailand’s defence diplomacy practices have complied with the government policy and effectively supported the three pillars of the ASEAN Community, but, however, slightly less agreed that such practices were carried out efficiently. This reflects that the optimal benefits of Thailand’s defence diplomacy practices may not yet be attained. As it is seen in two other factors, the form and types of Thailand’s defence diplomacy have not yet been practiced at its best capacity and appropriate level, which is evidently seen in another factor showing that Thailand’s defence diplomacy has not yet fully participated in the ASEAN Community Integration process.

Another viewpoint on Thailand’s defence diplomacy practices is that the respondents agreed that the defence sector should work in relation to the civilian sector. In fact, the civilian sector such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other ministries are working in a larger scope and scale of cooperation during the ASEAN Community Integration process.

**4.3.2 Obstacles of ASEAN community integration with respect of defence diplomacy**

The interviewees have similar views on the importance of Thailand’s defence diplomacy and its influence on the process of ASEAN Community Integration. For example, the interviewee from policy level explained that:

The interviewees have a broad range of views on obstacles of ASEAN Community Integration. For example, the interviewee from policy level explained that:

...ASEAN community integration still faces major obstacles, which hinder effective implementation of defence diplomacy, such as internal security problems, domestic laws, borderlines, minorities, gaps in people’s income, lacking of trust, overlapping maritime territory, and separatist movements...

Likewise, interviewed officers from high-level management stated that:

...Major obstacles of ASEAN community integration are mainly from cultural differences, economic gaps, and even the ASEAN’s principles of non-interference and consensus which prevent ASEAN to fully unite in solving regional security problems...

...ineffective ASEAN measures of sovereignty non-interference and consensus decision making, lack of unity for solving problems in the South China Sea, skepticisms on each other, historical conflicts, economic imbalance, and unstable politics within a country can significantly hinder the achievement of ASEAN community integration...

Based on the interview results, it indicated that there are obstacles which hinder effective defence diplomacy and ASEAN Community Integration, including: 1) Inadequate trust, 2) Economic gaps, 3) Overlapping maritime boundaries, 4) Internal security conditions, 5) Incomplete border demarcation, 6) Minority groups conflicts, 7) Separatist movement, 8) Inadequate foreign language skills, 9) Cultural diversities, 10) The principle of non-interference and consensus decision-making, and 11) Lacking unity of ASEAN when an ASEAN nation is in conflict with non-ASEAN nations especially with major powers.

These findings reflect that defence diplomacy practiced by Thailand's and other ASEAN countries, especially those having borders together, where they faced obstacles which significantly hinder the optimized success of ASEAN Community Integration. In particular, complete mutual trust between ASEAN countries is not easy to create because every nation has its own national interest and would not wish to bring any further problems into their country or region. However, as the ASEAN Community is in its early stage, and as defence diplomacy is believed to be an effective means to create trusts among ASEAN nations, there is still a way to go to improve the situation.

#### **4.3.3 Shortcomings of Thailand's defence diplomacy and possible improvement**

There are interview questions designed to investigate weaknesses of Thailand's defence diplomacy practices, particularly for ASEAN Community Integration, and ways to improve them. The findings show that the shortcomings of Thailand's defence diplomacy practices include the following:

a) Lack of integrated strategy for implementation of the existing soft power of defence diplomacy to fully support the government's foreign policy and diplomatic activities. This indication also corresponds to findings in the previous section in which defence diplomacy is not yet optimally utilized at its full capacity. Also, the interviewees informed that, as each of the military services (Ministry of Defence, Royal Thai Armed Forces Headquarters, Royal Thai Army, Royal Thai Navy, and Royal Thai Air Force) have their own budget allocated from the government; they, therefore, may have their own initiatives based on needs corresponding to their plans and activities. As such, plans and activities of Thailand's defence diplomacy are not yet fully integrated into a holistic strategy.

b) Lack of a plan for the development of personnel to become experts in a specific area or country so that they can continuously work on the matter so that such personnel can be worthy assets to carry out the country's defence diplomacy effectively.

c) Inadequate budget to support integrated defence diplomacy plans and activities. The current activities under the ADMM and ADMM-Plus activities are carried out with some level of confusion. That is, the policy level has better knowledge, but the lack of operating capacity while the operating units have the capacity to carry out the task but they have limited understanding on the issues at hand, particularly at an international level.

d) Language barrier has caused Thai personnel facing difficulty in dealing with English as an international language, used in all cooperation documents, and this somehow affects Thailand's overall capacity to effectively carry out defence diplomacy activities.

In short, when, the obstacles and shortcomings of Thailand's defence diplomacy are mostly related to the existing national policy and structures of the defence sector, which causes unharmonious execution and unclear direction for planning and further development. When it comes to international issues such as ADMM and ADMM-Plus activities, problems such as a limited understanding of the holistic strategy of the country can cause unexpected failure of the defence diplomacy efforts.

## 5. Discussions

One of the aims and purposes of the ASEAN Community is to promote regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law in the relationship among countries in the region and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter (Chow and Tan, 2013). Also, ASEAN seeks to maintain close and beneficial cooperation with existing international and regional organisations with similar aims and purposes and explore all avenues for even closer cooperation among themselves (Acharya, 1990 and Gindarsah, 2015). Recognizing the strong interconnections among political, economic and social realities, the APSC acknowledges the principle of comprehensive security and commits to address the broad political, economic, social and cultural aspects of building an ASEAN Community. The idea of regional security can be attained by an established regional community structure as previously explained by Buzan and Waever (2003).

Focusing on ASEAN's idea of Regional Integration, it was found that this approach leads to greater regional security. This is in line with Singaporean research scholars who consider ASEAN, as a regional grouping has been successful in reducing and minimizing regional conflicts particularly inter-state conflicts among its members (SIIA, 2007). The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) provides a venue for multilateral and bilateral dialogue and cooperation including the networking and exchange of information relating to defence policy and publication of defence white papers. Thailand and Malaysia also exhibit strong collaboration, such as military-to-military cooperation in Exchange of Information, Transparency in Defence and Military Affairs, Joint Exercise and Training, Defence Technology, and Defence Industry (Saicheua, 2012). Such collaborations are significant actions within the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC).

The findings in this study show that there is still a lack of trust among ASEAN countries so that multilateral cooperation has not yet been fully achieved. This finding corresponds to the suggestion by Acharya (1990) stating that a lack of mutual trust is an important factor which limited ASEAN defence ties and the level of regional integration, while bilateral cooperation remains preferable among ASEAN states. Achievement of multilateral cooperation, as aimed by ASEAN Community integration plans, can, therefore, be accelerated by several forms of bilateral defence cooperation among ASEAN states (Tao, 2015), including border security arrangements, intelligence sharing, joint military exercise/training, and also defence industry cooperation (Saicheua, 2012). In light of the changing security context, ASEAN has therefore promoted multilateral defence cooperation through gradual, institutionalized approaches, such as the ADMM. Under ADMM, the ACDFIM, AMIIM, and AMOIM meetings are organized to enhance practical cooperation among ASEAN defence forces. Meanwhile, the ADMM-Plus meetings and activities have laid strong foundations for the ADMM to cooperate with Dialogue Partners. Similarly, the countries outside ASEAN also seek regional security via strengthened relationships with ASEAN (Fris, 2013).

Defence diplomacy, regarded as non-violent use of military forces, is generally seen as one of the tools in the conduct of a country's diplomacy and international agenda, including specific national foreign and security policy objectives by managing defence foreign relations and supporting other diplomatic initiatives of the government. It has been observed that Thailand's defence diplomacy has an important role in supporting ASEAN Community integration process. Domestically, the Ministry of Defence actively operates under the mechanism of the Supervising Committee. Internationally, the Ministry of Defence should also lead in carrying out cooperation with international organisations and the Ministry of Defence of other nations, on every level and in every aspect.

Achieving ideal results of defence diplomacy is highly challenging because there are several existing gaps, such as economic and development gaps among ASEAN nations. It is suggested that these significant gaps should be effectively alleviated in order to strengthen confidence-building measures, promote greater transparency and understanding of defence policies and security perceptions, build up the necessary institutional framework, such as Joint Committees and Joint Working Groups to strengthen the cooperative process in support of the APSC. Eliminating the hindering factors would strengthen efforts in maintaining mutual respect and unity of ASEAN Member States, and promote the development of norms that further enhance ASEAN defence and security cooperation, which would eventually make the ASEAN Community completely integrated.

## 6. Conclusion

Thailand's defence diplomacy has noticeably played an active role to support the process of this regional integration. Concerning the constructivism concept, Thailand's defence diplomacy practices have created and strengthened relationships with the defence sector in ASEAN countries through various activities, especially multilateral engagements under the ADMM and ADMM-Plus framework. Recently, Thailand's defence sector had provided humanitarian aid to ASEAN countries when there were natural disasters in Myanmar and the Philippines, assisted Laos PDR in preparing the conduct of joint/combined exercise for the Expert Working Group (EWG) on Military Medicine (MM) and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR). Such cooperative engagement and participation have resulted in a positive and transforming effect on relations between Thailand and ASEAN member states.

Such achievement has contributed to attempts to address the construction of a security community which would eventually sustain durable peace and avoid the recurrence of war. This concept, which is compliant with the idea of transactionalism developed by Karl Deutsch, becomes an integral part of the regional integration. So far, Thailand's defence diplomacy has clearly facilitated the process of ASEAN community integration in the sense that it helps to shape of norms and attitudes towards the role of the defence/military sector. Development of common understandings on the significance of defence diplomacy leads to better perceptions and expectations of Thailand's defence diplomacy practices, which have been widely recognized not only in Thailand but also in other countries through peaceful conduct and exploitation of military assets and deployment personnel in several humanitarian assistance missions.

This research found that cooperation amongst defence sectors in ASEAN countries has been increased, particularly after the establishment of the ADMM framework. With this framework, defence diplomacy activities in ASEAN have been expanded to support other areas of cooperation especially those involved with civic assistance as well as social and economic development. Moving towards ASEAN community integration, Thailand's defence diplomacy practices have been involved with a number of activities under the umbrella of ASEAN cooperation. Major Forums for defence diplomacy interactions include the ASEAN Chiefs of Defence Forces Informal Meeting (ACDFIM), the ASEAN Chiefs of Army Multilateral Meeting (ACAMM), the ASEAN Air Force Chiefs Conference (AACC), the ASEAN Military Intelligence Informal Meeting (AMIIM), the ASEAN Military Operations Informal Meeting (AMOIM), and the ASEAN Armies Rifle Meeting. Other forums of defence cooperation such as the Navy-to-Navy Talk (NTNT), the Intelligence Exchange Conference, and the exchanges of visits among ASEAN defence sectors are also found supportive for creating trust and confidence building as aimed by the ASEAN Community Integration roadmap.

It was found in this research that there is a wide range of defence and security cooperation forums under the larger framework of ASEAN and also beyond ASEAN. Thailand's Ministry of Defence and other defence sectors have exerted their efforts and available resources to carry out their defence diplomacy activities to support the ASEAN Community Integration. However, as found in this research's studies on primary and secondary data as well as interviews with key informants at the policy level, there are still shortcomings and gaps for improvement of Thailand's diplomacy practices in order to strengthen relationships among ASEAN countries, particularly the defence sector, which would be supportive for better and sustainable ASEAN Community Integration.

When considering the induced research questions and research objectives, it can be seen that this study has found answers correspondingly. That is, the defence diplomacy in ASEAN has significantly influenced both domestic and international sectors, and all activities are in a peaceful manner which brings a positive contribution to the ASEAN community integration process. Concerning the challenges and gaps in defence diplomacy practices between Thailand and other ASEAN states, some challenges such as low mutual trust and inadequate support to perform defence diplomacy activities have been identified and remain challenging for ASEAN community to solve. Utilization of Thailand's soft power through defence diplomacy practices have noticeably reduced the previous gaps with some ASEAN countries via assistance programs, while exchange visits have strengthened bilateral and multilateral relations, and these strengthened relationships significantly facilitated the process of ASEAN community integration. Therefore, findings in this research lead to the achievement of research objectives and accordingly answer

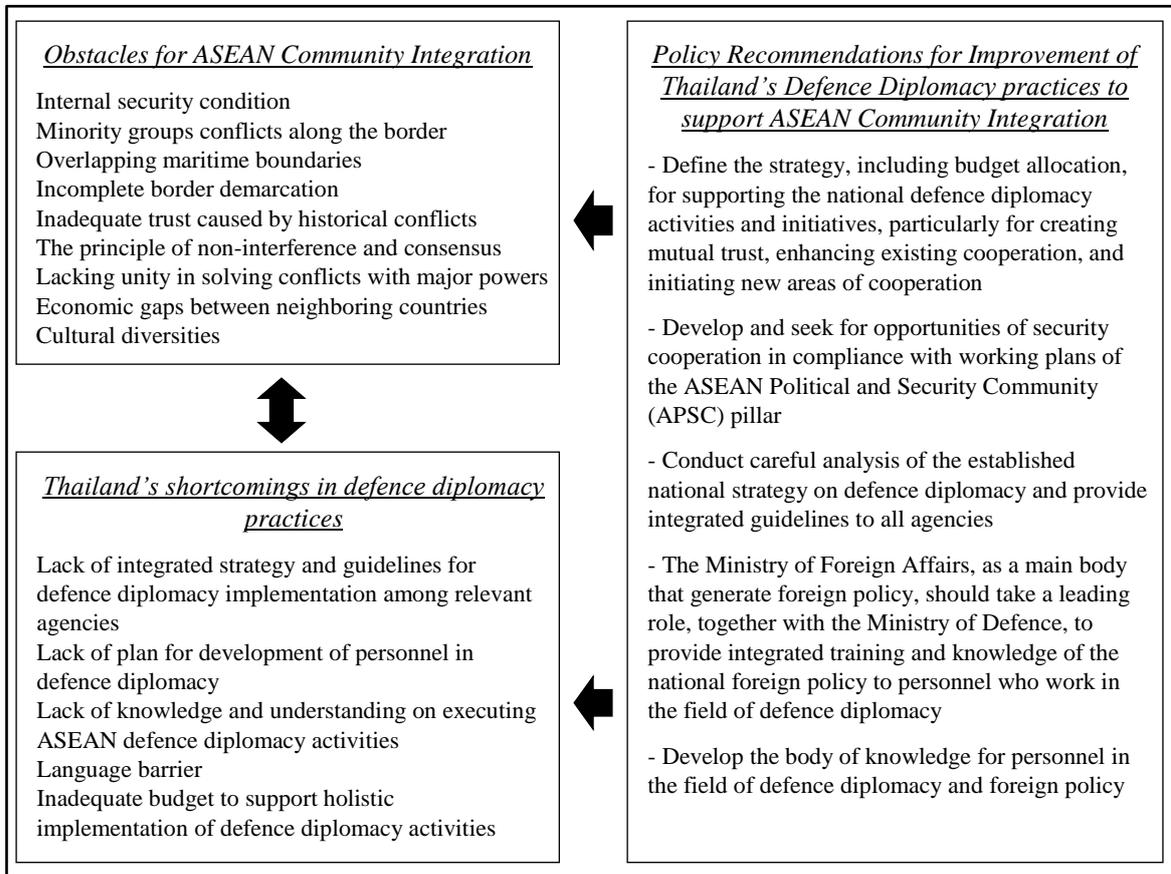
the induced research questions of this research, which shall end with the establishment of policy recommendations for improving the performance of Thailand's defence diplomacy.

It was found that, despite some shortcomings, there are several strengths of Thailand's defence diplomacy which could be utilized with prospective opportunities in order to alleviate those undesirable shortcomings. For example, border demarcation between Thailand and neighbouring countries in many areas are not yet completed due to several reasons, including the internal security, budget-related matters, and even lack of trust. The lack of trust, or inadequate trust, is considered as a significant challenge. Without trust, desirable outcomes or cooperation for supporting and maintaining ASEAN community integration can hardly be achieved. Thailand can exert more effort in utilizing soft power or economic power to assist neighbouring countries to develop the bordering area as the secured joint development zone, which can be seen as a local hub for international trade. The embedded defence diplomacy as a cooperative mechanism can facilitate economic and cultural cooperation as well.

In conclusion, the hypothesis of this research stating "Thailand's defence diplomacy plays a significant role in positively supporting the ASEAN community integration process" has been accepted. Evidence and findings show that Thailand's defence diplomacy practices have significantly and increasingly extended fields of cooperation with ASEAN countries and significantly contributed to trust and confidence building among ASEAN nations, which has helped to strengthen the process of ASEAN regional integration. However, there are still some shortcomings which can be improved by the proposed policy recommendations.

## **7. Recommendations**

Policy recommendations for improvement of Thailand's defence diplomacy policy and practices are made to fulfil the final objective of this research. It can be seen that there are existing obstacles that hinder the process of ASEAN Community integration. These obstacles may also affect Thailand's defence diplomacy plans and implementation. Figure 5 is developed to visualize the found obstacles, shortcomings, and recommendations for handling them.



**Figure 5** Policy Recommendations

Major obstacles of ASEAN community integration include internal security condition and conflicts among minority groups, especially along the border, in each ASEAN countries. Furthermore, problems of overlapping maritime boundaries and incomplete border demarcation, as well as economic gaps and cultural diversities, are also obstacles that hinder ASEAN integration process. Inadequate trust, which could be resulted from historical conflicts, is indicated as a major obstacle. To alleviate these obstacles, it is essential to carefully analyse the surrounding contexts before establishing a national strategy in order to carry out defence diplomacy practices successfully with the purpose to support the ASEAN community integration process.

For example, when Thailand wishes to initiate some kind of cooperation activities but the counterparts may not be ready, or not fully trust so that such cooperation initiatives have not been established. Likewise, when other countries wish to establish some cooperation initiatives but Thailand's defence diplomacy are not ready due to the existing shortcomings, or skepticism on such proposals, the proposed cooperation initiatives cannot be established.

Similarly, there are shortcomings of Thailand's defence diplomacy practices about the ASEAN community integration. Shortcomings include a lack of integrated strategy and guidelines for conducting the national defence diplomacy. Also, there is a lack of plans for the development of personnel in the field of defence diplomacy. As a result, there is a lack of knowledge and understanding to effectively execute defence diplomacy activities. Moreover, a lack of budget and existing language barriers noticeably hinder implementation of defence diplomacy activities.

To alleviate the foreseen obstacles and to improve the performance of Thailand's defence diplomacy within the context of ASEAN community integration, policy recommendations are adopted. The foremost recommendation is to define a strategy especially for executing the country's defence diplomacy

initiatives. This strategy formulation is essential, and it has to be led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs due to its responsibility to specify the nation's foreign policy so that the other ministries, such as the Ministry of Defence, can follow the set direction. Such policy shall aim to create mutual trust, enhance existing cooperation, and seek for new areas of cooperation so that security cooperation complies with the ASEAN working plans for the APSC pillar.

Upon the established strategy and strategic policy, an integrated guideline should be provided to all agencies so that they can use it as a pathway for their personnel to follow. Based on these strategies, policies, and guidelines, personnel working in the field of defence diplomacy should be provided with integrated training and a body of knowledge on the national foreign policy.

To implement the proposed policy recommendations, emphasis should be placed on introducing mechanisms that effectively strengthen bilateral cooperation, which is regarded as the priority and an important factor leading to further multilateral cooperation needed for the process of ASEAN community integration. To build mutual trust and increase confidence among each other, it is essential to increasingly initiate and enhance bilateral cooperation in order to facilitate and achieve the desired multilateral cooperation.

With the proposed policy recommendations, it is hoped that this study could lead to further in-depth research and improvement in the use of defence diplomacy as a tool in foreign relations among ASEAN countries in the process of attaining, maintaining and enhancing ASEAN community integration

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