

Ulasan Buku / *Book Review*

Akademika 88(1) 2018

Human Security & Peace in Archipelagic Southeast Asia

by Sity Daud, Zarina@ Zairina Othman & Rashila Ramli

Bangi, Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2015. ISBN: 978-967-412-131-0

This book aims at inculcating deeper understanding on human security and peace among its targeted readers (i.e. undergraduate students, researchers, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), political advocates etc.) in Southeast Asia. It consists of twelve chapters, covering four main sections. The first section (Chapter 1) provides the introduction to the concept of human security and the overview of the countries in the region. The second section (Chapter 2 & 3) discusses various security definitions and the understanding of its concept; followed by the introduction of *Bangi Approach to Human Security and Peace* (BAGHUS) as the alternative human security model that suit the region. The third section (Chapter 4-11) elaborates the conceptualisation of BAGHUS in all the nine dimensions of human security, accompanied by two examples of the best practices from each of the selected Southeast Asian countries. Finally the fourth section (Chapter 12) concludes the book with some recommendations.

Since the introduction of Human Security in 1994 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) encompassing seven human security dimensions (economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political) to replace the traditional ideas of state security, the formulation was further perfected by UNESCO with the inclusion of cultural security as its eighth dimension in 1997. However, although universally accessible, this book views the UN framework as too general, and could cause divisive conceptions of peace and human security in the region; as it does not provide a prospective definition of the concept or method of deriving or evaluating the elements of all the security dimensions in the context of the diverse needs of the Southeast Asia's multi-social groups with differing religious belief, ethnic, linguistic and political affiliation.

Towards this end, the book introduced BAGHUS as the alternative model of analysis for human security and peace to suit the needs and circumstances in Southeast Asia. Focusing on man-made "disasters", rather than "natural disasters" with less possibility of violent conflict, BAGHUS added the social security aspect as the ninth dimension into the existing UN framework to allow for a more holistic analysis based on the specificities of the region. BAGHUS is also recommended as a practical framework to be considered in other regions (i.e. Middle East, Central America etc.) where it could further be improvised to suit their local conditions.

While BAGHUS compiles multiple examples of good practices that should become the standard requirement for the region, there remain a crippling gap between the ambition of its implementation and the actual political (as well as financial) support in many countries in the region. Having all actors into complying with its recommendation and turn BAGHUS into actions towards change would not be an easy task considering the reality of the domestic actions within the region. The prolonged issue of the Rohingya ethnic cleansing in Myanmar is a good example in this regard where the ASEAN Way's emphasis on state sovereignty has been utilised by Myanmar political elites to deny the efforts made by other countries' in the region to protect the Rohingya ethnic in Myanmar from the ongoing crimes against humanity. Hence, new political commitments and policy reviews in the environment of less open political regimes in the region remains as the most daunting challenge for the implementation of BAGHUS in this regard.

Nonetheless, it is without doubt that BAGHUS could further deepen the understanding of the people in the region towards the concept of human security, while providing a practical methodology for the academia and civil society in the region to initiate a bottom-up promotion of human security agenda towards the creation of human-centric norms in the region. To allow for this, the public as a whole especially academicians and civil societies should not be too affirming in their idealistic principles and denounce state practices as it could alienate them from government bodies. Instead, they should seek to work together with governments to democratise public and security institutions in their respective countries through dialogues and partnerships.

On the other hand, challenges for ASEAN would be the serious need for it to further strengthen the role and capability of its Secretariat in conflict prevention and resolution. ASEAN Secretariat should work more closely with the ASEAN Troika mechanism (former, current and incoming Chair of ASEAN) in accommodating the transient one-year rotation of the ASEAN Chair while ensuring the continuity of the management of important issues of ASEAN from one chairmanship to another. Although upholding the rule of law has often been cited as the ideal solution in managing conflicts, experience had shown that ASEAN is most effective when its regional institutions employ informal arrangements within its formal frameworks. Even the European Union (EU) is now facing divides. Its strict adherence to the rule of law procedures was in many occasions has proven to be counter-productive. ASEAN "quiet diplomacy" approach is a useful mechanism to diffuse the tensions under such circumstances.

This boils down to BAGHUS emphasis on the specificities of the region based on its social maturity gap. ASEAN must start looking inward and begin to pursue the goal of reaching a holistic human security through the flexibility of its approach. BAGHUS recommendations in this regard would be a useful framework for ASEAN to cope with these challenges, and move towards a peaceful change in the region.

Mohd Ikbal Mohd Huda
Strategic Studies and International Relations Programme
Politics and Security Research Centre (POSEC)
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
43600 UKM Bangi
Selangor
Malaysia
E-mail: ibahuda@ukm.edu.my