COOPERATION IN CONTENTION:
THE EVOLUTION OF ASEAN NORMS

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores the dynamics of security cooperation in a regional context. It examines the behaviour of states within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). ASEAN’s declared norms provide a framework of principles and practices within which member states interact. However, regional security challenges have precipitated a shift from enthusiasm for ASEAN’s model of regional cooperation to criticism of member states’ lack of compliance with such norms. On these grounds, critics have questioned the Association’s relevance and legitimacy. I argue that such criticism is flawed, as it relies on the assumption that ASEAN’s normative context is static rather than dynamic.

In contrast, I demonstrate the ongoing evolution of ASEAN’s norms as member states seek to enhance the efficacy of the Association. The case study, examining ASEAN’s management of Burma’s membership, indicates a strengthening collective identity among states. As member states are faced with regional challenges, they increasingly perceive their security as interdependent and address such issues from a regional perspective. This supports the notion that, while ASEAN is not yet a security community, it is undergoing a community-building process.
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<td>AMM</td>
<td>ASEAN Ministerial Meeting</td>
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<td>ARF</td>
<td>ASEAN Regional Forum</td>
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<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asian Nations</td>
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<td>ASEM</td>
<td>Asia-Europe Meeting</td>
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<td>CLMV</td>
<td>Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar (Burma) and Vietnam</td>
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<td>EAS</td>
<td>East Asia Summit</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<td>ICG</td>
<td>International Crisis Group</td>
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<td>ICJ</td>
<td>International Court of Justice</td>
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<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<td>INTERFET</td>
<td>International Force in East Timor</td>
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<td>IR</td>
<td>International Relations</td>
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<td>NLD</td>
<td>National League for Democracy</td>
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<td>ODA</td>
<td>Overseas Development Assistance</td>
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<td>PMC</td>
<td>Post-Ministerial Conferences</td>
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<td>SLORC</td>
<td>State Law and Order Restoration Council</td>
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<td>SPDC</td>
<td>State Peace and Development Council</td>
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<td>TAC</td>
<td>Treaty of Amity and Cooperation</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNTAC</td>
<td>United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia</td>
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<td>US</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
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<td>ZOPFAN</td>
<td>Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality Declaration</td>
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Introduction

Since the Asian economic crisis in 1997, enthusiasm for ASEAN’s model of regional cooperation has waned. As Southeast Asian states struggled with financial decline and associated political and social instability, concerns were raised about the relevance and credibility of the Association. In addition, membership expansion posed further challenges to its principles and practices - ASEAN’s ‘norms’. The admission of less developed, semi-authoritarian states contributed to an altered security environment. ASEAN’s image was tarnished as it appeared ineffective in decisively responding to regional problems.

ASEAN thus poses pertinent questions in regard to state cooperation in a regional context. Cooperation cannot be assumed to be facilitated by a regional organisation. Interstate relations are fraught with myriad interests and concerns, which may or may not be congruous. As such, an organisation’s objectives and principles may not necessarily amount to more than rhetoric. Analyses of the dynamics of state interaction within a regional organisation thus encounter the dilemmas central to the study of international relations (IR).

ASEAN aims to facilitate regional stability and economic integration. It pursues these objectives in a region of significant diversity, with respect to political systems, economic development and cultural characteristics. In the immediate post-Cold War years, as the founding states were undergoing political reform and enjoying economic growth,
ASEAN was praised as an exemplar of regional cooperation in unlikely circumstances. Since its inception in 1967, member states have managed to prevent intra-regional disputes from escalating into armed conflict. Analysts have thus described the Association as a ‘community’ of states with converging interests and increasing integration.

Since the late 1990s, however, many scholars have been less effusive. Critics question ASEAN’s efficacy and legitimacy, suggesting that it is merely a façade constructed by a group of self-interested states. They refute the notion that it is a community, and thus vindicate realist expectations. However, such criticism tends to focus on a static notion of ASEAN norms.

This thesis is motivated by several questions: what is the impact of regional security challenges on ASEAN’s ‘experiment’ in regional cooperation? Does the Association represent a vehicle for effective cooperation, or are its declared aims merely rhetorical? Do member states identify with each other and regard security as interdependent, or do national interests and identities prevail?

In exploring these questions, I demonstrate the ongoing evolution of ASEAN norms. Analyses of the Association’s development should recognise the dynamic nature of its principles and practices, as member state behaviour responds to changing circumstances.
The evolution of ASEAN norms is particularly evident with respect to the Association’s handling of new member states. The most challenging of these is Burma, an international pariah.\(^1\) Burma’s admission in 1997 has provoked tensions both within the Association and with extra-regional actors. ASEAN has grappled with how to encourage political reform in Burma given the principle of non-interference.

However, ASEAN’s founding member states are increasingly willing to be critical of Burma’s military regime. This was demonstrated in the months prior to the Thirty-Eighth ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM) in July 2005, at which Burma announced it would not assume the position of ASEAN chair in 2006. Foreign ministers and parliamentarians from the founding states had stated publicly that it was in ASEAN’s interests for Burma to decline. Some representatives also met with Burma’s leadership and persuaded it to step aside. Such behaviour was incongruent with the ‘original’ ASEAN norm of non-interference.

I argue that this episode represents the continuation of a trend within ASEAN: the evolution of its normative principles. Further, it indicates an enhanced concern with ASEAN’s image that is best understood with reference to an evolving collective identity. This suggests that the notion of ‘community’ can indeed be invoked with respect to ASEAN. The Association is undergoing a community-building process as the interests of

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\(^1\) Burma’s military regime changed the English version of the country’s name from ‘Burma’ to ‘Myanmar’ in 1989. The use of the name ‘Myanmar’ remains controversial given the regime’s lack of political legitimacy (to be discussed in Chapter Three). Some states (including Canada and the United States) continue to refer to the country as ‘Burma’, as I will do in this thesis. However, some of the quotations I use refer to Myanmar. In accordance with common practice, I will refer to citizens of the country as ‘Burmese’, and to the majority ethnic group as ‘Burmans’. 
member states converge, and they increasingly conceptualise their security as interdependent.

Chapter One elucidates the conceptual puzzles motivating this thesis, and explores the theoretical context. The concepts of community and collective identity potentially assist analyses of security cooperation in a regional setting, where the mainstream IR theoretical framework is inadequate. Chapter Two then considers these conceptual puzzles with respect to ASEAN. It explores the Association's origins and normative principles, and the challenges posed since 1997. Research questions are formulated that recognise the dynamic nature of ASEAN's norms.

Chapter Three then applies these questions to the case study: ASEAN’s management of Burma’s membership and potential chairmanship. Evidence is drawn from ASEAN’s Joint Communiqués and press statements released after AMMs and other meetings. Statements by individual foreign ministers and parliamentarians are also procured from news reports. The case study demonstrates that ASEAN norms are evolving, and that member state behaviour indicates a strengthening collective identity.

The Conclusion explores opportunities for future research, particularly in regard to developments in Burma and the other ‘new’ member states. The establishment of the East Asia Summit (EAS) also provides fodder for analyses of regional interaction. As ASEAN seeks to expand its influence in the wider Asia-Pacific region, the security environment will continue to pose new challenges to interstate cooperation.
Chapter One

Analytical Framework: Security Cooperation in a Regional Context

This thesis explores how relations between members of a regional organisation drive their approaches to regional security challenges, and the resultant impact on the nature of the organisation itself. More specifically, this thesis is concerned with the dynamics between member states that are politically diverse, at various stages of development, and facing an array of security issues.

This chapter will elucidate the conceptual puzzles motivating this thesis. It will then consider the theoretical context of such motivating questions. I examine the relevant debates in the study of IR, and explain my ‘analytically eclectic’ approach. While this study is not oriented toward a particular theoretical paradigm, certain concepts developed in the constructivist literature assist my framing of the conceptual puzzles to be examined.

As the Introduction notes, these questions are motivated by the case of ASEAN. For reasons that will be explored, ASEAN represents a unique example of regional cooperation, and one that provides substance for an interesting research agenda.

The term ‘region’ is used in this thesis with reference to a group of states commonly understood to constitute a region in contemporary geopolitical terms. Specifically, I regard the notion of ‘region’ as socially constructed; regions are not objectively defined
by geography but come to be regarded as regions over time. Proximity is thus a necessary but not sufficient condition. In the case of Southeast Asia, common colonial experience provided the basis for a strengthening belief that a 'region' existed, comprising the states which eventually became the ten members of ASEAN. The founding states developed a shared understanding of regional boundaries, and aspired to create a regional organisation to reflect this. Such an organisation thus provides the framework for regional cooperation. ASEAN was consciously engineered to be representative of Southeast Asia, and provides the primary forum for intra-regional dialogue. It thus provides a useful case to explore the possibilities for security cooperation in a regional context.

The understanding of 'security' in this thesis is broadly conceived. In IR, security has traditionally been interpreted as the absence of threats to the state - the ultimate goal of state behaviour in an anarchical system. From this perspective, the military dimension of

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1 As Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett point out, the end of the Cold War and the debate over 'Europe' dramatically highlights that regions are socially constructed and are susceptible to redefinition: Emanuel Adler & Michael Barnett, 'A Framework for the Study of Security Communities' in Emanuel Adler & Michael Barnett (eds), Security Communities in Comparative and Historical Perspective, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 33. Amitav Acharya provides a detailed discussion of 'regionness' and regional identity, agreeing with Adler and Barnett that regions are contested notions, and socially constructed: Amitav Acharya, The Quest for Identity: International Relations of Southeast Asia, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 3-11

2 As Chapter Two will elaborate, the founders of ASEAN established the framework for other Southeast Asian states to later join the Association. From the international perspective, as Shaun Narine notes, the Allied-defined 'theatre of war' coined the term 'Southeast Asia' during World War II, although it did not include all the states now considered part of the region: Shaun Narine, Explaining ASEAN: Regionalism in Southeast Asia, Boulder, Colorado and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002, p. 9

3 The 'cooperation' of states within a region, broadly conceived, describes the coordination of state behaviour in pursuit of common objectives. As Chapter Two will elaborate, regional cooperation in Southeast Asia is consciously not legalistic and formal (and thus distinct from Western models), but takes place in the context of an organisation founded on the principles of informal, consensus-driven decision-making. Cooperation in this context is informal and propelled by interaction between small networks of elites, in the 'original' conception of ASEAN practices. As will be discussed in Chapter Two, the dialogue within ASEAN regarding security cooperation is increasingly a forum for a wider array of actors, including parliamentarians and civil society groups.
security is typically the focus of analysis. Since the end of the Cold War, conceptualisations of security have broadened to include concepts such as economic and environmental security. This thesis utilises a relatively broad notion of security that allows for the variety of threats perceived by states. Security interests depend on the perceptions of states, and thus can evolve over time. As Chapter Two will elaborate, ASEAN states’ conceptions of security are gradually moving away from a state-centric perspective, given the focus on nation-building at ASEAN’s inception. Regional security was originally perceived as secondary to (as ideally resulting from) the pursuit of individual states’ internal security. However, member states are moving toward a view that their security is linked and can be usefully approached at the regional level.4

Theorising Security Cooperation in a Regional Context

The nature of interstate relations within a region yields various theoretical problems in the study of IR. The potential for cooperation between states is a locus of contention in IR scholarship. At issue is the nature of state identities and interests which, taken as exogenously given in the mainstream IR framework, provide the foundations of the neorealist-neoliberal debate. From the neorealist perspective, any empirically observed

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4 Regime security is still a concern, given the persistence of internal security threats in several ASEAN states, but the point made here (and elaborated in the later chapters) is that security in general is increasingly approached from a regional perspective. This includes internal security threats, given the recognition that they have ‘spillover’ effects. However, it also refers to ‘non-traditional’ transnational security threats such as environmental pollution and transnational crime, which latter are receiving increasing attention in regional fora: Alan Dupont, ‘Transnational Crime, Drugs, and Security in East Asia’, Asian Survey, vol. 39, no. 3, May - June 1999, pp. 433-455; Kusuma Snitwongse & Suchit Bunbongkarn, ‘New Security Issues and Their Impact on ASEAN’ in Simon Tay, Jesus P. Estanislao & Hadi Soesastro, (eds), Reinventing ASEAN, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2001, pp. 148-162.
cooperation between states is explained in the context of unitary actors pursuing national interests in an anarchical system.\(^5\) Such cooperation is thus undertaken only when it is in states’ interests, and takes the form of temporary alliances in response to a commonly perceived threat, rather than ongoing collective action. Neoliberalism is predicated on the same basic assumptions, but recognises the potential for cooperation through institutions as (mainly economic) interdependence increases. Thus neoliberal institutionalists, as Robert Keohane and Lisa Martin point out, ‘only expect interstate cooperation to occur if states have sufficient common interests,’ and such interests are again taken as given.\(^6\) These mainstream theoretical perspectives have provided the foundations of much of contemporary IR literature, facilitating myriad analyses of state behaviour. However, the dominance of the mainstream theories should not preclude analysts from seeking alternative explanations when empirical observations cannot be adequately elucidated. Numerous conceptual puzzles presented by empirical observations demonstrate that the mainstream literature cannot provide a satisfactory explanation.

This has been recognised by scholars employing constructivist approaches to IR. They respond to the shortcomings of the mainstream literature, which relies on rationalist assumptions and material factors, by articulating the social context of the international

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\(^5\) The seminal neorealist work is Kenneth Waltz’s *Theory of International Politics*, which posits states as the primary referents and emphasizes material power and interests as the principle forces driving the international system. This environment is characterized by the ubiquitous potential for war: Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979

states system. State interests and identities are not taken as given, but as continually evolving as a result of interaction with other states and the influence of international ‘norms’ of behaviour. This conceptualisation considers ideational, as well as material, forces driving state behaviour. Thus, constructivist approaches do not necessarily discount the importance of power and interests; rather, they consider how such interests are constituted in the first place. They ask the logically prior question of how states come to ‘know’ what they want. As such, (conventional) constructivism does not undermine the tenets of the mainstream IR framework, but seeks to extend the analysis beyond its explanatory limits.

This extension, to incorporate mutually constituted identities and interests, facilitates analysis of empirical evidence that appears anomalous to realist expectations. As such, constructivist approaches have assisted analyses of interstate relations. Empirical evidence suggests that state interests do not necessarily remain static, but may alter over time as a result of the very act of cooperation with other states. While a state’s interests may diverge as well as converge with those of other states, the important point is that

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8 Martha Finnemore provides a standard definition of ‘norms’ as ‘shared expectations about behavior held by a community of actors’: Martha Finnemore, National Interests in International Society, p. 22
9 Martha Finnemore notes that traditional approaches have tended to ‘assume rather than problematize state interests’. She points out that if the interests and identities of actors guide their behaviour in the international system, we should consider the logically prior question of how they are constituted in the first place: Ibid., p. 7.
they are not simply a product of the desire for survival in a necessarily self-help environment. Interests and identities can evolve over time as states interact.

Collective Identity and Community Formation

Conceptualising the potential for state cooperation and the resultant convergence of interests opens up new possibilities for analyses of state behaviour and motivations. States may cooperate not simply to avoid conflict, but to consolidate sustainable conditions of peace. In so doing, they may foster an emerging sense of ‘community’, in which state interests converge. The notion of community relies for its conceptual basis on a sense of ‘collective identity’. As Alexander Wendt points out, ‘by engaging in cooperative behaviour...actors are simultaneously learning to identify with each other – to see themselves as a “we” bound by certain norms’.11 Thus, cooperation may instigate the process of identity formation and community-building. The dynamic nature of this ‘learning’ process means that collective identity is continually evolving.

Collective identity is characterised by a state’s identification with the fate of the ‘other’. Wendt regards ‘identification’ as a continuum from negative to positive: ‘from conceiving the other as an anathema to the self to conceiving it as an extension of the self’.12 As such, he argues, it has the potential to conceptually transform the Westphalian states system. The neorealist perspective is located at the negative end of the spectrum,

12 Ibid., p. 386
where states define their interests in terms of relative gains. At the other extreme, collective identity implies that the boundaries of 'self' are drawn rather more widely. Interaction between states transforms state interests, yielding the potential to overcome the classic collective action problem. There is thus 'empathetic rather than situational interdependence between self and other', forming a basis for collective definitions of interest.\(^{13}\)

Amitav Acharya argues that there are four factors in the development of collective identity: multilateralism, norms, the creation and manipulation of symbols, and the principle of regional autonomy.\(^{14}\) The combination of these factors forms the basis of interactions on security, economic and cultural issues, and motivates cooperation to address security challenges. Thus collective identity and cooperation are mutually reinforcing. However, as Wendt notes, the formation of collective identities is by no means inevitable; it cannot be assumed to follow acts of cooperation, and faces many 'countervailing forces'.\(^{15}\) Nevertheless, theoretical perspectives that discount the notion of collective identity formation will neglect the possibilities for cooperation between states, and remain confined to a conception of state behaviour with limited explanatory power.

A further difficulty exists in that states may engage in the rhetoric of community-building in order to obscure self-interested behaviour. This vindicates the expectations of realists

\(^{13}\) Ibid., p. 386  
\(^{14}\) Amitav Acharya, 'Collective Identity and Conflict Resolution in Southeast Asia' in Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett (eds), *Security Communities in Comparative and Historical Perspective*, p. 208-212  
\(^{15}\) Alexander Wendt, 'Collective Identity Formation and the International State', p. 391
such as John Mearsheimer, who argues that institutions simply reflect the distribution of power among states, and 'are not an important cause of peace. They matter only on the margins'. From this perspective, cooperation is limited, and takes place only in the context of self-interest and the pursuit of relative gains. However, once again, analysts who readily discard the notion of community (perhaps because of an epistemological predisposition against the concept) limit the possibilities for analysis.

The debate among analysts regarding the relative merits of their theoretical orientations tends to dominate the body of scholarship. However, the IR research agenda should be problem- or question-driven, rather than approach-driven. Thus, while concepts such as 'collective identity' and 'community' have been developed in the context of constructivist approaches to IR, I do not assume that constructivism is the most appropriate and analytically useful paradigm within which to explore the research questions. Rather, I argue that empirical observations of Southeast Asian regional relations can be usefully analysed with reference to concepts that have been developed in the constructivist literature (as an extension of, rather than fundamental challenge to, mainstream IR). This is not to suggest that interest-driven behaviour is not prominent in Southeast Asia. Rather, my analysis is receptive to the use of alternative concepts where they overcome any limits of the traditional IR framework. It is desirable to approach the fundamentally complex and social processes characterising a region of substantial diversity from a position of what Katzenstein and Olawara call 'analytic eclecticism'.

This is especially so in a study of Southeast Asia, given its heterogeneous nature, and the network of bilateral and multilateral relationships that influence interstate relations.

The ‘Security Community’ Concept

The notion that community can exist at the international level opens up new possibilities for security studies. A group of states engaged in a process of community-building may increasingly coordinate their security efforts, or at least begin to perceive their security priorities as linked. Thus, the notion of ‘community’, as underscored by a collective identity, creates the conceptual potential for enhanced security cooperation between states. This connection between community and security has created new research agendas, on the premise that states may be able to overcome the classic security dilemma. The challenge is thus to examine empirical evidence to ascertain the adequacy or otherwise of traditional interpretations of state behaviour, and whether, alternatively, communities can be identified that explain security cooperation.

One notable product of this avenue of scholarship is the ‘security community’ concept, which has been utilised by analysts to explore community formation in regional organisations. Originally conceived by Karl Deutsch in 1957, it has experienced a scholarly revival in the post-Cold War period. A ‘security community’ is formed when norms are established that renounce the use of force to settle intra-group disputes.

Members of the community share expectations that disagreements between states, such as over territory, will be resolved pacifically. In addition, no state undertakes preparations, such as arms acquisitions, for war against another. Interstate war becomes unthinkable, and contingency plans are discredited. Moreover, the Deutschian security community is a group that has ‘become integrated’, where ‘integration is defined as the attainment of a sense of community, accompanied by formal or informal institutions or practices’. In an ‘amalgamated’ security community, such integration extends to the point where states relinquish sovereignty to a supranational authority. However, in the more frequently observed ‘pluralistic’ conception, with which the majority of the scholarship and this thesis are concerned, states retain independence and sovereignty. Nevertheless, they develop a degree of integration, embodied by a sense of community.

The pluralistic security community thus implies more than simply an understanding that force will not be used to resolve disagreements – also a characteristic of less integrated arrangements such as ‘alliances’ and ‘security regimes’. It requires a ‘fundamental,
unambiguous and long-term convergence of interests’, such that members recognise some degree of interdependence and cooperation. As such, they develop ‘dependable expectations of peaceful change’. Deutsch argues that this can be tested empirically by the absence or presence of arms race behaviour; we would not expect members of a community to be engaged in significant preparations for defence against each other. As Chapter Two will elaborate further, this indicator proposes difficulties with respect to ASEAN.

The security community thus approaches the conceptual puzzle of the possibility of regional cooperation in terms of mutual trust and shared understandings, enabling long term expectations of sustainable peace. For Deutsch, the development of a security community is an exercise in identity-building, creating ‘mutual identification, loyalties, and ‘we-feelings’. The notion of community formation is thus underscored by a collective identity, implying that states positively identify with the fate of others. Further, it suggests that states can redefine their identities, broadening their sense of ‘self’ to include the ‘other’. The possibility thus arises that a regional organisation may embody, or represent, a regional collective identity.

The Deutschian security community was conceived during a period of popularity of regional integrationist arguments, specifically with reference to Western Europe, which subsequently declined. However, the security community concept was reinvigorated in

22 Amitav Acharya, Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia, p. 17
the context of the post-Cold War resurgence of interest in norms, identity, and the social basis of global politics. Notably, Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett propose an evolutionary security community, which progresses through nascent, ascendant and mature phases (not necessarily in a linear fashion).\textsuperscript{25} This model is more flexible than the original Deutschian conception, allowing for the possibility of an emerging community among a more diverse group of states that do not necessarily share liberal democratic values. In contrast, Deutsch and other early scholars of the security community assumed that it required a liberal-democratic setting, given its European foundations. It has thus been conceptually linked to democratic peace theory.\textsuperscript{26}

However, Acharya’s application of the security community to ASEAN challenges the notion that it cannot be utilized in analysis of regions of developing, semi-authoritarian states.\textsuperscript{27}

The security community concept thus describes the sense of community that arises among states as a result of interaction and socialisation. Of course, interest-based behaviour can persist within a community, potentially provoking disagreement and conflict. Indeed, the security community does not require the absence of conflict and

\textsuperscript{25} Emanuel Adler & Michael Barnett (eds), \textit{Security Communities in Comparative and Historical Perspective}. This evolutionary model allows for recognition of emerging security communities, which Acharya applies to ASEAN (to be discussed in Chapter Two). Adler and Barnett distinguish between ‘loosely-coupled’ and ‘tightly-coupled’ variants of the mature security community. However, a detailed description of each is not necessary for my purposes here, particularly given that ASEAN does not fulfil the criteria of a mature security community in either variant (refer Chapter Two).


\textsuperscript{27} Amitav Acharya, ‘Collective Identity and Conflict Resolution in Southeast Asia’, p. 198. Acharya does not suggest that ASEAN is a full-fledged security community in the Deutschian sense, or that it fits Adler’s and Barnett’s ‘mature’ phase. However, as Chapter Two will discuss, he refutes the notion that liberal democratic values are a precondition to an emerging security community.
disagreement; rather, it is characterised by the ability to resolve such tensions without a resort to force. As such, it is a distinct type of ‘community’. As Adler and Barnett point out, other political communities will handle interstate conflict differently and may not generate dependable expectations of peaceful change, experiencing conflict and even war.\(^{28}\) For the purposes of this thesis, however, the formation of a ‘community’ implies a process of interaction and mutual identification that makes cooperation and conflict resolution more, rather than less, likely.

The Case of ASEAN

The conceptual puzzle motivating this thesis is whether a group of politically diverse states in a regional organisation can be described as engaged in a process of community-building, which facilitates security cooperation. A related question is whether the group can foster a collective identity, which underpins such a community. ASEAN is an exemplar of such problems. In the wake of challenges to ASEAN’s relevance and credibility, how are relations between member states best understood? ASEAN member states are certainly ostensibly pursuing a community. At the Ninth ASEAN Summit in Bali in October 2003, they declared their vision of an ‘ASEAN Community’, with three pillars: political and security cooperation, economic cooperation, and socio-cultural cooperation. They articulated the desire to pursue a ‘closer and mutually beneficial

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\(^{28}\) Emanuel Adler & Michael Barnett (eds), *Security Communities in Comparative and Historical Perspective*, p. 33-4
integration’ to ensure ‘peace, stability and prosperity’. However, it is of course possible that such proclamations are merely rhetorical, and that ASEAN member state behaviour validates realist expectations. Thus, we must ask whether the declared objective of fostering a community indicates a convergence of interests among ASEAN states, and reflects a sense of ‘we-feeling’. Alternatively, if such developments are yet embryonic, we should ask whether the declared objective at least reflects genuine intent.

ASEAN’s membership expansion adds another significant dimension to such questions. Its inclusion of semi-authorititarian states complicates the ‘community’ concept. Expansion has augmented the political diversity within ASEAN, and placed strains on declared principles and normative context. It has imposed a burden on member states’ security priorities and tested the cohesion of the Association. As the next chapter will explore in greater depth, this and other regional challenges have contributed to analyses of ASEAN that concentrate on compliance with ASEAN norms (or lack thereof) and perceived ineffectiveness and irrelevance of ASEAN. I will argue in Chapter Two that such questions should be reformulated to establish a more pertinent line of enquiry.

Critics who perceive a gap between the rhetoric of ASEAN’s set of principles and the reality of members’ behaviour object to the application of constructivist approaches to what they regard as a clear case for realist interpretation. In contrast, I argue that recent

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seemingly discrepant developments in relations between ASEAN member states can be better understood with reference to concepts developed by constructivist scholars, such as interaction and the consequent convergence of interests. The Association's handling of the Burma issue (to be explored in Chapter Three) indicates a convergence of interests among member states, and an enhanced concern with ASEAN's image, that are most usefully understood with reference to the notion of identity-formation as underpinning a community-building project.
Chapter Two

ASEAN: Exploring Member State Behaviour

The previous chapter outlined the conceptual puzzles addressed in this thesis, motivated by the case of ASEAN. I seek to analyse the dynamics of interstate cooperation in a regional organisation that faces a number of challenges: political diversity, various (perceived and actual) security threats, and external pressure to manage semi-authoritarian member states. The concept of a community of states provides an alternative means of analysis where the explanatory power of mainstream IR theoretical perspectives is limited. However, such challenges suggest that the label of ‘community’ should not be too eagerly applied. Analysis of ASEAN (and other regional organisations) should be driven by empirical evidence rather than a tendency to privilege (or refute) a particular theoretical perspective. In fact, the dominance of the latter in the literature on ASEAN suggests a need to reformulate the research agenda. This chapter will, therefore, examine the evolution of ASEAN and its function as the locus of interaction of Southeast Asian states. I will review prior analyses of ASEAN and argue that the questions typically posed are not the most useful.

ASEAN was praised in the immediate post-Cold War years for its unique approach to regional cooperation, and apparent ability to avoid intra-regional conflict even as it expanded to include semi-authoritarian states. The Association appeared to propel Southeast Asian regionalism, providing a forum for interaction both between member states and with the extra-regional state system. However, since the Asian economic crisis
in 1997, ASEAN’s image has been tarnished as critics question its ability to respond effectively to regional problems, and thus its relevance and legitimacy. The expanded Association has had to adapt to increased political diversity and a wider range of security issues. Its declared principles have been tested and certain member states have called for re-evaluation of its role in regional affairs. In an attempt to enhance its resilience and cohesion, the Association has proclaimed the pursuit of an ‘ASEAN Community’ as part of its ‘Vision 2020’. It is thus a pertinent time to examine the nature of ASEAN, its function with respect to member states’ security priorities, and its role in the international environment.

There has been a shift from ASEAN being hailed as a paragon of regional cooperation, and described by some scholars as a nascent security community, to criticism that it is increasingly irrelevant and ineffective. Many critics point to non-compliance with ASEAN norms, and the ‘lack of robustness’ of the ASEAN Way, as the basis for questioning the Association’s relevance and credibility. However, I argue that non-compliance with certain norms does not in itself suggest that ASEAN lacks relevance and is unable to cooperate effectively. In particular, challenging the norm of non-interference

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may indicate a reinvigorated desire for effective security cooperation. ASEAN’s normative principles may evolve as member states coordinate efforts to address regional crises. As such, the research questions posed by analysts should be reformulated. The more pertinent questions, which I address, are: What is the response of ASEAN member states to regional security challenges and international pressure to react to them? What does their behaviour indicate about the manner in which they conceptualise security and the role of the Association? Is increased political diversity (as a result of membership expansion) divisive or does it motivate cooperation? Has ASEAN thus enhanced its ability to address regional challenges, or is it becoming increasingly fragmented? These questions are driven by empirical observations rather than a preoccupation with the robustness (or lack thereof) of the ASEAN Way. This chapter will elaborate this theme, and Chapter Three will address these questions with reference to ASEAN’s management of Burma’s membership and potential chairmanship.

ASEAN: Origins and Normative Context

ASEAN has made probably the most successful attempt at regional cooperation in the non-Western world. Despite considerable political and cultural diversity, the Association has provided a forum for dialogue between Southeast Asian states, and the opportunity for cooperation. Such discourse is undertaken within a framework of norms including mutual respect for sovereignty and non-interference in each other’s internal affairs. These norms reflect the purpose and temporal context of ASEAN’s formation. The
Association was established in 1967 by five Southeast Asian states (Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines), to institute the renunciation of the use of force to settle interstate disputes. ASEAN intended to pursue regional stability in response to several bilateral disagreements, most notably *Konfrontasi* and the Malaysian-Philippine feud over Sabah. *Konfrontasi* (Confrontation) was a coercive strategy adopted by Indonesia’s President Sukarno against the newly independent Malaysian state between 1963 and 1966. The new Suharto regime’s termination of the policy served as a model for a regional order based on the principle of non-use of force.3 While the Sabah dispute continued after ASEAN’s creation, and posed an early test of this principle, the members managed to prevent it from escalating into armed hostilities.4 Thus, they established the foundations of the Association’s style of conflict management.

The initial concern with regional stability was addressed from the perspective of building strong states, given the wave of decolonisation across the region. The founding member states recognised each other’s mutual interests in nation-building. They faced the characteristic problems of newly decolonised states: ethnic secessionist demands threatening territorial integrity, and communist insurgency challenging regime security.5 As such, they supported common nation-building efforts by recognising each other’s independence and sovereignty, and agreeing not to interfere in each other’s internal affairs. Thus, ASEAN was formed hoping to overcome interstate tensions in order that

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3 Amitav Acharya claims that *Konfrontasi* was ‘a prime example of the use of force by a postcolonial state in Southeast Asia against a neighbour’: Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia*, p. 48. Other bilateral tensions that threatened to escalate into war existed between Singapore and Malaysia, and Singapore and Indonesia.

4 Malaysia and the Philippines resumed diplomatic relations, following ASEAN dialogue, in 1969: Ibid., p. 50.

such mutual interests could be pursued. While ostensibly ASEAN was not itself a ‘security-oriented structure’, it served to promote and protect regime security, given that security matters were of primary significance to member states.  

Further, ASEAN was intended to facilitate trade between member states, in recognition of the potential economic growth in the region. Intra-regional economic cooperation was an important part of the founding states’ vision. In the context of structural changes in the global economy, the founding states began to shift from import-substitution to export-led development in the 1960s, and this convergence of economic policy contributed to the emergence of ASEAN.

ASEAN’s formation was also propelled by a common concern about the role of external powers in the region. Member states were uneasy about Great Power rivalry, particularly amongst China, the Soviet Union and the United States of America (US). However, they also wanted to ensure that their security interests would be protected by these powers when necessary (although the founding states’ preferences differed in this regard).

Regionalism was thus seen as a useful way to ‘enhance the bargaining power of small

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7 Ibid., p. 25
9 For example, Singapore has traditionally preferred an active US military presence in the region, while Indonesia and Malaysia have been more concerned with resisting undue Great Power influence. However, the nature of the ASEAN Way (to be discussed) is such that compromise is sometimes necessary. Thus, Indonesia and Malaysia were able to push the creation of the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality Declaration (ZOPFAN) in 1971 that asserted ASEAN’s self-reliance: Diane K. Mauzy, ‘ASEAN: Challenges of Regional Political and Economic Cooperation’ in Shalendra D. Sharma (ed), *The Asia-Pacific in the New Millennium: Geopolitics, Security, and Foreign Policy*, Berkeley, California: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 2000, p. 261
and weak states in their dealings with the Great Powers'. As ASEAN has developed, it has sought to balance the desire for engagement of the US and China with a trepidation about external influence. In particular, member states have been concerned with ‘how to handle an assertive China’.

The ASEAN Declaration (often referred to as the ‘Bangkok Declaration’) was signed in Bangkok on 8 August 1967. It asserts that, given the ‘existence of mutual interests and common problems’, the Association ‘represents the collective will of the nations of South-East Asia to bind themselves in friendship and cooperation’. ASEAN’s aims in the Declaration include the promotion of regional peace and stability, and ‘active collaboration and mutual assistance on matters of common interest’. Such matters include the expansion of trade between member states, and the acceleration of regional economic growth. However, the immediate priorities of the founding member states, unsurprisingly, were internally focused – consolidating independence, developing economically and managing internal security. Thus, their declared aims may have been somewhat rhetorical. Nevertheless, such proclamations suggest that ASEAN’s founders had expectations of future regional cooperation. Their postcolonial context likely gave rise to genuine intentions of fostering an organisation that would gradually facilitate cooperation.

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10 Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia*, p. 52
12 Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), *The ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration)*, 8 August 1967, http://www.aseansec.org/1629.htm, Date Accessed: 3 April 2005
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Acharya argues that ‘the founders of ASEAN had little conception of a regional identity. But they clearly hoped to develop one through regional cooperation’: Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia*, p. 28
The security priorities of member states in the following decade were directed toward the formation of bilateral security arrangements, largely to support mutual efforts to combat communist insurgency. This became an increasing concern during the 1970s given the communist victories in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Security arrangements were signed, for example between Malaysia and Thailand in 1970, to facilitate joint operations to pursue insurgents across mutual borders.\(^\text{16}\) ASEAN’s founders rejected formal multilateral security cooperation, preferring to enhance the bilateral border security and intelligence sharing arrangements which had begun to emerge before the Association’s establishment.\(^\text{17}\)

ASEAN also attempted to garner respect during the 1970s from extra-regional actors for its style of interstate cooperation. In this vein, the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality Declaration (ZOPFAN) was signed in 1971. It expressed the determination of member states to ‘secure the recognition of, and respect for, Southeast Asia as a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality, free from any form or manner of interference by outside Powers’.\(^\text{18}\) Member states wanted to assert self-reliance given their history of dependence on extra-regional powers for security.\(^\text{19}\) However, ZOPFAN represented

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\(^\text{16}\) Ibid., p. 62
\(^\text{17}\) For example, an arrangement was made between Thailand and Malaysia to cooperate to combat insurgents along their common border in 1959. A similar agreement was made between Indonesia and the Philippines in 1964: Amitav Acharya, *The Quest for Identity*, p. 87
\(^\text{19}\) Acharya notes that since World War II, Thailand and the Philippines had relied on security links with the US, and Malaysia and Singapore on Britain. Regional cooperation had thus been less of a concern. However, in the context of decolonisation and concerns regarding the role of Great Power rivalry in the
efforts (particularly by Indonesia and Malaysia) to develop Southeast Asia as an emerging regional order, and introduce the principle of regional autonomy. This does not imply that they wanted external actors to completely withdraw; indeed, Singapore and Thailand were less enthusiastic about ZOPFAN, ‘stressing the need for external linkages as opposed to the pro-autonomy views of Malaysia and Indonesia’.\(^\text{20}\) ZOPFAN did not amount to more than a declaration, and indeed ASEAN has continued to rely on US military presence, particularly to assuage fears in regard to a rising China. However, it contributed to the endeavour of establishing ‘a legitimate normative framework that was to guide future interstate interaction’.\(^\text{21}\) The founding member states thus began to articulate a set of ASEAN principles and practices.

ASEAN’s normative principles were largely established at the First ASEAN Summit in Bali in 1976, at which the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) was signed. The TAC articulates the principles governing relations between member states, including: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity; non-interference in the internal affairs of one another; the ‘settlement of differences or disputes by peaceful means’; the renunciation of the threat or use of force; and effective cooperation.\(^\text{22}\) These clearly reflect Westphalian norms, which is unsurprising considering that the founding members of ASEAN were newly independent states, keen to assert their sovereignty in the international system. These norms, described by Acharya as ‘legal-rational’ and by

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\(^\text{20}\) Ibid., p. 55


others as ‘behavioural’, form a code of conduct for the interaction of member states.\textsuperscript{23} These principles are frequently reasserted today, even in ASEAN statements that declare the intent to pursue greater integration and promote a regional identity.\textsuperscript{24}

The non-interference principle is a particularly significant aspect of this code of conduct; it effectively underpins the other TAC norms and has been frequently invoked in ASEAN affairs. As originally conceived, it was intended to ensure avoidance of involvement in other states’ domestic matters, given the mutual preoccupation with insurgency. The founding states agreed not to provide refuge to rebel groups threatening to overthrow neighbouring regimes, and to generally support each other’s efforts to eradicate challenges to regime security.\textsuperscript{25} Another component of the non-interference principle is the renunciation of public criticism. Acharya describes this as an agreement to refrain from ‘criticising the actions of a member government towards its own people, including violation of human rights, and from making the domestic political system of states and the political styles of governments a basis for deciding their membership in ASEAN’.\textsuperscript{26}

Given the founding states’ prioritisation of internal order and regime security, the non-interference principle supported ASEAN’s original objectives. As will be later discussed, this principle has evolved since ASEAN’s inception, as member states’ security priorities have changed.

\textsuperscript{23} Amitav Acharya, \textit{Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia}, p. 25; Nikolas Busse, ‘Constructivism and Southeast Asian security,’ p. 46; Alan Collins, \textit{Security and Southeast Asia}, p. 131
\textsuperscript{24} For example, the ‘Bali Concord II’ at which the ‘ASEAN Community’ was established: Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), \textit{Declaration of ASEAN Concord II (Bali Concord II)}, Ninth ASEAN Summit, Bali, 7-8 October 2003, \url{http://www.aseansec.org/15159.htm}, Date Accessed: 22 May 2005
\textsuperscript{25} Amitav Acharya, \textit{Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia}, p. 58
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
The Association’s distinctive approach to regional cooperation is embodied by the so-called ‘ASEAN Way’, which emphasises decision-making by consensus and informal dispute resolution. The ASEAN Way effectively denotes a second set of norms, referred to as ‘socio-cultural’ or ‘procedural’, which guides the processes of decision-making.\textsuperscript{27} ASEAN member states consciously reject the ‘legalistic’, formal style of Western institutional structures, favouring a private and informal political culture ruled by small elite networks. ASEAN thus embraces Westphalian principles while seeking a unique approach to regional cooperation through culturally appropriate decision-making processes. Moreover, as Brian Job notes, the ASEAN Way also reflects ‘the practical requirements of holding together such a diverse group of states’.\textsuperscript{28} It emphasises informal consultation and consensus, and the importance of public unity. Member states are spared the embarrassment of dissent, through closed-door dialogue that precedes formal meetings.\textsuperscript{29} The components of the ASEAN Way are not formally articulated by the Association. However, in 1992 the then Malaysian Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir bin Mohamed described the ‘5Cs’ of the ASEAN spirit: consultation, consensus, caring, cornerstone and consolidation.\textsuperscript{30}

The ASEAN Way was thus intended to complement the legal-rational norms articulated by the TAC. In particular, it has epitomised the nature of dialogue within the networks of elites, reflecting the tendency of ASEAN in its early history to be driven by personal

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., p. 25; Nikolas Busse, ‘Constructivism and Southeast Asian security,’ p. 47
\textsuperscript{28} Brian L. Job, ‘ASEAN Stalled: Dilemmas and Tensions over Conflicting Norms,’ Paper delivered to 1999 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, September 2-5, 1999, p.10
\textsuperscript{29} Amitav Acharya, \textit{Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia}, p. 68
\textsuperscript{30} Mahathir bin Mohamed, ‘ASEAN: The Next Generation’ (keynote address at the First ASEAN Congress, 8-10 October 1992, Kuala Lumpur), published in \textit{ASEAN-ISIS Monitor}, volume 5, October – December 1992, pp. 1-4
relationships between strong leaders. These leaders have not always agreed, but
ASEAN’s consensus-driven, informal approach favours compromise and presenting a
unified front. Mahathir has been particularly prominent in ASEAN’s development,
envisioning strong regional cohesion and autonomy from Great Powers. In addition, until
his decline in 1998, former Indonesian leader Suharto had substantial influence in
ASEAN dialogue, and his New Order regime was ‘an enthusiastic proponent’ of the
Association. Malaysia and Indonesia have thus tended to drive the ASEAN agenda.
However, a personal coolness between Mahathir and Suharto ‘kept the two countries
from forming a cabal within ASEAN’.

ASEAN as a Security Community?

This normative context has motivated perceptions of ASEAN as a unique and successful
experiment in regional cooperation, among a diverse group of developing states. This
diversity increased with ASEAN’s membership expansion during the late 1990s; since
1999 it has included all Southeast Asian states (except East Timor, which became
independent in 2001). The absence of interstate conflict among member states since the

31 Amitav Acharya, The Quest for Identity, p. 84
1997, p. 313. As the Conclusion will discuss, the absence of Mahathir and Suharto from today’s ASEAN
provokes questions regarding the notion of the Association as a security community.
33 Brunei Darussalam was admitted to ASEAN in 1984, Vietnam in 1995, Laos and Myanmar (Burma) in
1997, and Cambodia in 1999: Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Overview: Association of
Southeast Asian Nations, http://www.aseansec.org/64.htm, Date Accessed: 3 April 2005. East Timor was
admitted to the ASEAN Regional Forum (‘ARF’) at the ARF meeting in Vientiane, Laos on 26 July 2005,
with a view to eventually becoming part of ASEAN: ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), Chairman’s
Statement of the Twelfth Meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), Vientiane, 29 July 2005,
Association’s formation appears to vindicate the notion that some semblance of order and stability has been achieved in the region. Intra-regional disputes have certainly occurred, but have been managed without resorting to interstate war. Indeed, this ability to avoid resorting to force to settle disputes has motivated some scholars to describe ASEAN, following Adler’s and Barnett’s model, as a nascent security community.34

Of these scholars, Amitav Acharya has developed the most extensive body of scholarship. He regards ASEAN’s normative principles as underscoring the ‘collective identity’ central to the security community concept. He argues that ‘taken together, the practice of multilateralism, the ASEAN norms, the ASEAN Way and the principle of regional autonomy constitute the basis of ASEAN’s collective identity’.35 From this perspective, ASEAN norms have a constitutive effect that, through interaction and socialisation, serves to redefine the interests of member states and foster a collective identity. Acharya does not, however, suggest that ASEAN is a full-fledged security community in the classic Deutschian sense, or ‘mature’ in Adler’s and Barnett’s model. Rather, it is emerging or nascent, as member states perceive mutual interests and begin to consolidate a shared identity.36 Further, it should be noted that Acharya’s initial arguments regarding the notion of ASEAN as a security community were made in the

34 Amitav Acharya, Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia; Nikolas Busse, ‘Constructivism and Southeast Asian security’; Yuen Foong Khong, ‘ASEAN and the Southeast Asian security complex’. Adler’s and Barnett’s model was discussed in detail in Chapter One: Emanuel Adler & Michael Barnett (eds), Security Communities in Comparative and Historical Perspective, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998
35 Amitav Acharya, ‘Collective identity and conflict management in Southeast Asia’ in Emmanuel Adler & Michael Barnett (eds), Security Communities in Comparative and Historical Perspective, p. 213
36 Acharya notes that, prior to the development of Adler and Barnett’s model, he would not apply the term ‘security community’ to ASEAN, instead describing it as a ‘security regime’. However, he later describes it as a ‘nascent security community’. Amitav Acharya, ‘Collective Identity and Conflict Resolution in Southeast Asia’, fn. 80, p. 227.
context of the Association’s development before the mid-1990s. He later acknowledges that events after 1997 (to be discussed) cast doubt on this claim.37

This depiction of ASEAN as a nascent, rather than mature, security community reflects the limits to its regional cooperation experiment thus far. The declared norm of the renunciation of force to resolve disputes fulfils one of the basic criteria of the security community, given that compliance with this norm has been fairly stringent.38 However, the satisfaction of the criterion of states’ abstinence from preparations for war against each other is more ambiguous. As Acharya points out, ASEAN member states continue to undertake arms acquisitions, which, while not necessarily a response to intra-regional tensions, suggests that there are ‘limits to community-building’.39 At the time of writing, there is evidence of continued arms acquisitions in certain ASEAN states. For example, in the light of its recent tensions with Indonesia in the Sulawesi Sea, and sporadic territorial disputes with Singapore, Malaysia’s military modernisation cannot be dismissed as directed toward extra-regional threats.40 Similarly, Singapore has continued to enhance its military capability, purchasing fighter aircraft from the US and submarines from Sweden in recent years with a defence budget buoyed by economic

37 Acharya’s chapter in Adler’s and Barnett’s (1998) volume was written before the Asian economic crisis, the fall of Suharto in Indonesia, and the completion of ASEAN’s membership expansion (Ibid.). As will be discussed, these developments posed significant challenges to the security community argument. In his 2000 work, Acharya notes that, while ASEAN could be described as a nascent security community in the early 1990s, these later developments cast doubt on this argument. He describes ASEAN as engaged in a ‘security-community-building project’, but warns that it is ‘in serious need to reinvent itself’: Amitav Acharya, Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia, p. 204 & 206. As this chapter will further explore, the question of whether ASEAN can be considered a security community is affected by the later trend of democratisation among member states and the evolution of ASEAN’s norms and collective identity.

38 Indeed, the ‘absence of war among the ASEAN members since 1967’ is the starting point for Acharya’s application of the security community concept to ASEAN: Ibid., p. 200

39 Ibid.

40 Reme Ahmad, ‘Jakarta and KL bury the hatchet; Jusuf and Najib agree to reduce tensions in disputed oil-rich area in the Sulawesi Sea’, The Straits Times, 7 May 2005
growth. Such examples of military build-up challenge the applicability of the security community concept. Alan Collins goes further, arguing that ASEAN is not a security community because ‘the use of force to resolve member disputes is not inconceivable’. In any case, ASEAN clearly does not fit the Deutschian model; however, it satisfies, for Acharya, the ‘nascent’ stage of Adler’s and Barnett’s conception.

Further, as discussed in Chapter One, the security community requires more than the satisfaction of these two basic criteria. Integration, convergence of interests, and mutual identification must be observed. For Adler and Barnett, a mature security community is characterised by a shared identity, greater institutionalisation, multilateralism, and a high degree of military integration. ASEAN clearly does not fit this description. Member states have often not had common threat perceptions, given their traditional focus on internal security, and their political diversity which contributes to divergent outlooks and relations with extra-regional actors. Further, while some bilateral military exercises are undertaken between ASEAN member states, they have traditionally rejected collective defence.

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42 Given terrorist attacks and piracy in the region, such military build-up may partly reflect perceptions of a new threat environment, in which security efforts are directed increasingly towards non-state actors. Indeed, Bridget Welsh argues that Malaysia’s military modernisation is largely a response to terrorist attacks in the region: Bridget Welsh, ‘Malaysia: Security Begins at Home’ in William M. Carpenter & David G. Wiencek (eds), Asian Security Handbook: p. 166. However, such threats cannot explain the acquisitions of fighter aircraft and long distance force projection.
43 Alan Collins, Security and Southeast Asia, p. 132
44 Emmanuel Adler & Michael Barnett (eds), Security Communities in Comparative and Historical Perspective, pp. 55-57
The complication of Adler’s and Barnett’s model is that its evolutionary or graduated nature allows for attribution to the nascent phase using subjectively determined indicators; the very nature of concepts like ‘common threat perceptions’ and ‘shared identity’ is that they rely on interpretation. Such difficulties are inherent to constructivist approaches. Realists would clearly be sceptical that such concepts could be applied to any group of states, much less Southeast Asia, a region seemingly characterised by regime instability and ‘traditional’ security threats. The late Michael Leifer was one of the more prominent doubters, preferring to describe ASEAN as a ‘diplomatic community’. He conceded that the Association had been able to prevent the escalation of intraregional disputes.45 However, he regarded this as simply the product of informal intergovernmental dialogue, rather than the development of any definitive institutional mechanism for the resolution of disputes.46

Post-1997 Challenges and Criticism

Such analysis has been complicated by the events of recent years. ASEAN’s image has suffered a setback, particularly since the Asian economic crisis in 1997. Praise waned for ASEAN’s model of regional cooperation as the Association appeared unable to respond to the crisis on a collective basis. This highlighted its lack of concrete institutional mechanisms, but also an inability or unwillingness to cooperate.47 In addition,

45 Michael Leifer, ‘ASEAN as a Model of a Security Community’ in Hadi Soesastro (ed), ASEAN in a Changed Regional and International Political Economy, p. 132
47 Brian L. Job, ‘ASEAN Stalled’, p. 1
membership expansion between 1995 and 1999 posed difficulties for ASEAN. Expansion has been somewhat of a mixed blessing; it has achieved the Association’s ‘One Southeast Asia’ vision, but has also increased the burden on the founding states to accommodate a wider variety of security concerns. Such difficulties have cast doubt on the applicability of the security community concept.

The post-1997 challenges to ASEAN norms pertain to three realms of regional security: arms acquisitions, conflict management, and the altered security environment. The first has been discussed: the build-up of arms by some ASEAN states may test the adherence to the principle of non-use or threat of force. Secondly, the ASEAN Way began to appear as an outdated style of conflict management, and the lack of formal dispute settlement mechanisms has led the Association to seek assistance from international organisations. Thirdly, the altered security environment has precipitated divergent threat perceptions among member states. These aspects of member state behaviour have tested the ‘original’ ASEAN norms. I focus on the challenges to the non-interference principle, as it is central to the Association’s normative context; it directly impacts conflict management, the renunciation of force, effective cooperation and the procedural norms of the ASEAN Way. It is effectively an indicator of the nexus between regime and regional security. Rather than justifying renewed realist criticism, challenges to non-interference point to the evolution of ASEAN norms.

48 These emanate from various developments including the impact of the economic crisis and the associated decline in foreign investment in the region; the violence in East Timor and the risk of the fragmentation of Indonesia; and environmental threats such as the ‘haze’ that spread from Indonesian forest fires across the region. I focus on the difficulties posed by expansion given that the broader membership enhances the diversity of threats.
The events after 1997 provoked the question of whether the original ASEAN principles remain efficacious. Collins notes that concerns were raised about the Association given various difficult circumstances, including the regional economic crisis and associated political turmoil, the complications of membership expansion, and transnational issues such as pollution and drugs trafficking. Such developments "fueled doubts about the practicality of the principles and processes behind ASEAN's success, and indeed raised doubts about the continued viability of the association itself."\(^49\)

The difficulties of the late 1990s thus precipitated a spate of renewed realist criticism of ASEAN.\(^50\) For such critics, the 'security community' concept is inappropriate for the Association, which is essentially a group of self-interested states best understood in traditional realist terms. They regard the ASEAN Way as not particularly robust, arguing that the informal, consensus-driven approach to decision-making has acted to delay rather than resolve intra-ASEAN disputes. Outright conflict may have been avoided, but not because of the strength of the Association's normative principles. They portend ASEAN's increasing irrelevance, given its apparent inability to respond decisively to regional crises.

Moreover, for such critics, inconsistent adherence to ASEAN norms by member states undermines its credibility, and the notion that it is engaged in community-building underscored by a strengthening collective identity. Nicholas Khoo argues that the non-

\(^{49}\) Alan Collins, *Security and Southeast Asia*, pp. 140-141
interference norm is regularly violated, indicating that ASEAN norms have a ‘tenuous connection with reality’. In fact, he perceives a contrary norm of interference in other states’ affairs as characterising member state behaviour.51 As such, he emphatically refutes the notion that ASEAN is a nascent security community, regarding it instead as a group of states that prioritise their national interests ahead of regional autonomy.52 Similarly, Samuel Sharpe argues that the norms of non-interference and non-use of force have been inconsistently upheld by member states. As such, he questions ASEAN’s ability to construct a ‘significant security identity’, and thus a security community.53 Going further, David Jones and Michael Smith perceive not just a lack of norm compliance, but a fundamental pretence in ASEAN’s very existence, dismissing it as an ‘imitation community’.54 However, they do not adequately explain why ASEAN members would go to the lengths of constructing a community for purely self-interested reasons. These analysts, all writing since 2002, reflect the scepticism characterising recent scholarship on ASEAN, in the light of the destabilising elements of the post-1997 period. Enthusiasm for ASEAN’s ‘unique model of regional cooperation’ has clearly waned.

51 Khoo’s examples of ‘interference’ include recriminations between Malaysia and Singapore over border disputes, and over the burning of the Thai embassy in Phnom Penh in early 2003: Nicholas Khoo, ‘Deconstructing the ASEAN security community: a review essay,’ International Relations of the Asia-Pacific, vol. 4, no. 1, 2004, p. 40
52 Ibid., p. 40
53 Samuel Sharpe, ‘An ASEAN way to security cooperation in Southeast Asia?’, p. 248
54 Jones and Smith adapt the term ‘imitation community’ from Michael Oakeshott’s term ‘imitation state’ (used to describe the incomplete nation-building of newly independent states). In a particularly vehement manner, they argue that ASEAN is merely a ‘rhetorical shell’ with form but no substance. It is constructed to give the appearance of a regional organisation, with annual ministerial meetings, a secretariat and a bureaucracy. However, it ‘makes no decisions and enforces no rules’. As such, it is an ‘imitation community’: David M. Jones & Michael L.R. Smith, ‘ASEAN’s Imitation Community’
ASEAN's relevance and utility has also been questioned in instances where international bodies have been required to address a particular dispute or crisis in the region. Khoo argues that 'since 2001, ASEAN members have increasingly ignored the ASEAN mechanisms for conflict resolution and looked to international institutions to settle bilateral disputes.'

For example, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) has been called upon to resolve territorial disputes, including that between Malaysia and Indonesia over the Sipadan-Ligitan islands off the Malaysian province of Sabah in December 2002. In addition, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) provided assistance during the Asian economic crisis in 1997, and the United Nations (UN) effectively governed and began the reconstruction of East Timor following Indonesia's withdrawal in 1999.

However, such criticism tends to be based on a notion of ASEAN norms as static. In fact, there is a disparity between the original norms and the evolving principles and practices in the contemporary context. Khoo does not overtly recognise this, and as such his critique is problematic. He laments the fact that member states fail to consistently adhere to ASEAN norms, but also argues that 'if principles associated with the ASEAN Way really matter, we should see them working when it counts – when states have disputes.'

He does not recognise that this actually indicates a constraint in ASEAN's *modus operandi*: the original norms effectively prevent decisive responses to many regional crises, because they preclude intervention, interference or even criticism. Khoo thus fails to address the underlying phenomenon: that a lack of compliance with the original conception of ASEAN norms may in fact indicate that the Association is

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55 Nicholas Khoo, 'Rhetoric vs. Reality', p. 53
56 Ibid.
adapting to new security priorities and the convergence of state interests. ASEAN norms should thus be regarded as dynamic. Challenges to them are indicative of an evolving collective identity, in which member states conceptualise security as interdependent and increasingly pursue collective responses to regional problems.

Further, a resort to international bodies does not necessarily indicate ASEAN’s ineffectiveness in dispute resolution. The Association was established with a consciously informal approach to conflict management. Disagreements requiring legal tribunals are outside the capacity of ASEAN’s institutional framework. However, the Association’s conflict management style is changing, as member states increasingly regard certain matters (to be discussed) as the realm of regional security, to be approached collectively. Moreover, intra-regional tensions have not been allowed to escalate into outright war; the use of international bodies to achieve this does not in itself preclude the existence of a security community.

A further aspect of the challenge to ASEAN norms is the divergence in (both perceived and actual) security threats. The Southeast Asian security environment has been altered by ASEAN’s admission of less developed, semi-authoritarian states. The overall increase in internal security threats has implications for member states’ conceptualisations of security, and the priorities for ASEAN dialogue. Such threats largely emanate from secessionist movements and communal violence. In Laos, for example, Hmong tribesman and other insurgent forces have resisted the communist government since it
took power in 1975, and violent conflict is ongoing.\textsuperscript{57} Burma has long struggled with clashes among ethnic minorities and the military junta, with the latter brutally suppressing expressions of ethnic nationalism in an effort to instil national unity. Of course, similar internal security threats persist in the founding states (some prominent 'hotspots' being southern Thailand, southern Philippines, and Aceh and West Papua in Indonesia). The point made here is that membership expansion increases the breadth of security issues and deepens the potential for bilateral tensions, particularly as today's internal security threats have multidimensional 'spillover' effects.

In addition, political instability and poor governance in the new states precipitate security threats and have consequences for neighbouring states. Cambodia, for example, exhibits lawlessness, corruption and human rights abuses. It is ostensibly a democracy but the fairness of elections is highly questionable.\textsuperscript{58} While Vietnam is more politically stable, it also suffers from official corruption, and from the government's willingness to crack down on organised dissent. Such crackdowns have instigated a flow of refugees into Cambodia, causing tensions between the two states.\textsuperscript{59} Thus, while internal (and regime) security continues to be a priority for ASEAN states, the greater number and range of 'spillover' effects mean that member states are developing evolved notions of security.

The regional security environment has also been altered by the increased salience of 'nontraditional', transnational security threats. These include drugs trafficking, illegal

\textsuperscript{57} William M. Carpenter, 'Laos: Learning to Live with the Outside World' in William M. Carpenter & David G. Wiencek (eds), \textit{Asian Security Handbook}, p. 162
\textsuperscript{58} Paul C. Grove, 'Cambodia: A Gathering Danger' in Ibid., p. 83
\textsuperscript{59} Mark Manyin, 'Vietnam: Focused Domestically, Adrift Internationally' in Ibid., p. 310 & 315
migration, piracy, and various other forms of transnational crime. Alan Dupont argues that the illicit drugs trade in Southeast Asia has ‘grown enormously in sophistication and volume in conjunction with the spread of Asian organized crime’ since the end of the Cold War.\(^{60}\) In addition, as Kusuma Snitwongse and Suchit Bunbongkarn point out, environmental degradation, resource depletion and energy scarcity are looming nontraditional security issues with which ASEAN member states are increasingly concerned.\(^{61}\) The altered security environment has encouraged the perception among some ASEAN diplomats that the Association’s normative principles are outdated.

Certain ‘traditional’ security issues have naturally persisted in the post-Cold War period. ASEAN remains concerned about a rising China. Territorial disputes in the South China Sea have provoked tensions with member states (particularly Malaysia), and motivated ASEAN to engage China in private diplomacy.\(^ {62}\) Member states have also sought to ensure US military presence in the long term while resisting excessive US influence with respect to immediate issues. ASEAN has thus sought to balance China and the US using ‘soft power’. An important aspect of this strategy is engaging them in multilateral security dialogue, primarily through the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) which was established in 1993.\(^ {63}\) Concerns regarding China, in particular, persist alongside the

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\(^{63}\) Tobias Nischalke argues that ‘the creation of the ARF hinted at the convergence of security perspectives among ASEAN members. Leaders in Indonesia and Malaysia realized the need to engage China and became more inclined to accept an American role in the new security structure’: Tobias Nischalke, ‘Does
challenges of intra-regional security. As shall be elucidated, the Sino-Burmese relationship was a factor in admitting Burma to the Association.

Challenges to the Non-Interference Principle

The norm of non-interference ostensibly prevents ASEAN states from publicly criticising even repressive regimes. However, ASEAN states have engaged in behaviour at times that could indeed be construed as interference. For example, in 1997 ASEAN postponed Cambodia’s admission due to Hun Sen’s violent coup, and demanded a peaceful resolution of the crisis. Cambodia was eventually admitted in 1999 after an ‘ASEAN troika’ (comprising Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand) effectively brokered a resolution through elections and installation of a coalition government led by Hun Sen.\textsuperscript{64} While Cambodia was not a member of ASEAN when this action took place, it was inconsistent with the understanding that domestic political circumstances would not be considered a criterion of membership. Moreover, it was inconsistent with ASEAN’s earlier treatment of the admissions of Vietnam, Laos and Burma.

However, ASEAN was under some pressure to become actively involved with resolving the crisis in Cambodia, given international scrutiny of the state’s affairs for several years. Vietnam invaded Cambodia in 1978, renewing intra-regional tensions and posing a

\textsuperscript{64} Robin Ramcharan, ‘ASEAN and Non-Interference: A Principle Maintained,’ \textit{Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International & Strategic Affairs}, vol. 22, no. 1, April 2000, p. 67
serious security challenge to ASEAN. Member states were concerned about the potential for Great Power rivalry in the region, and the implications for their pursuit of regional stability. Acharya argues that their response to the crisis was conflicted between accommodation and confrontation, and tested ASEAN’s approach to conflict management and its desire for regional autonomy. Several years of violent conflict followed between Cambodian factions, including the Khmer Rouge, and ASEAN and the UN sporadically called for the withdrawal of outside forces and Cambodian self-determination. Vietnam withdrew from Cambodia in 1989. The UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) was implemented in 1992 to supervise a ceasefire and the withdrawal of outside forces, and oversaw elections in 1993. Subsequent political instability under the elected coalition government, leading to Hun Sen’s coup in 1997, was thus scrutinised by international actors. ASEAN experienced an ongoing tension between its desire to uphold non-interference, and its pursuit of regional stability. The delayed admission of Cambodia was thus an example of evolution of the non-interference principle.

In contrast, Burma’s admission (also in 1997) was not postponed, despite the internal illegitimacy of the ruling military junta. Burma’s domestic political situation was less scrutinised by the international community than that of Cambodia’s. Moreover, as Chapter Three will elaborate, Burma was more strategically significant given its relationship with China. It was admitted to ASEAN on the grounds that so-called ‘constructive engagement’ was preferable to isolation or the imposition of sanctions, and that it furthered the vision of a truly representative regional organisation. However, little

\[65\] Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia*, p. 81
progress has been made in Burma since then. Certain statements made by member state representatives have amounted to ‘public criticism’, thus violating the spirit of the non-interference norm. As Chapter Three will discuss, member state ministers and parliamentarians have become increasingly vocal about pressuring Burma not to take up the chairmanship in 2006. Burma’s admission to ASEAN thus demonstrates the difficulties associated with expansion. As ASEAN shoulders the burden of new member states bringing additional security threats and poor human rights records, it is increasingly under pressure (from both member states and extra-regional actors) to encourage change in these states in a manner which challenges the non-interference norm.

As such, there is a certain incongruity between ASEAN’s explicit stance in favour of non-interference, and the increasing willingness of member states to be outspoken on certain matters in a manner which could be construed as ‘interference’ in each other’s affairs. However, I argue that non-compliance with the norm of non-interference does not in itself suggest that member states are unable to cooperate effectively. Further, it does not necessarily preclude the existence of a security community. On the contrary, challenges to the non-interference norm indicate member states’ increasing recognition that ASEAN’s normative principles must evolve. Moreover, this process of adaptation is motivated by an intensifying sense of community. An emerging willingness to be critical

66 This is not to suggest that the founding members of ASEAN have ‘clean’ human rights records. Indonesia, for example, attracted international condemnation for its human rights violations in East Timor in 1999, and earlier under the Suharto regime which fell in 1998. However, the founding states’ pursuit of democratisation in recent years ensures that they are among the more politically open within ASEAN. The democratisation trend is an important aspect of the changing normative context, as will be elaborated further in this chapter.
of individual states' domestic affairs indicates that ASEAN members increasingly regard their security as interdependent. They are concerned about the image and international reputation of the Association, and seek to enhance its efficacy and relevance. Their behaviour is thus indicative of an evolving collective identity.

The circumstances surrounding East Timorese independence demonstrated the dilemmas regarding non-interference. ASEAN failed to provide an institutional solution to the violence that erupted following East Timor's referendum in 1999. Member states had generally treated Indonesia's claim over East Timor as an internal Indonesian matter, adhering to ASEAN norms. When the violence was unleashed on the East Timorese people by Indonesian military-sponsored East Timorese militias, ASEAN's ability to act was constrained by deference to Indonesia, the most powerful state in the Association, and often its unofficial leader. Ultimately, international actors responded to the crisis, precipitating a debate within ASEAN regarding non-interference and extra-regional involvement. Member states faced a dilemma: they did not want to set a precedent for intervention in each other's internal affairs, but its image as an effective regional organisation was at stake if it was unable to react. Moreover, certain leaders opposed international involvement; Mahathir was particularly outspoken about the West's 'hypocritical' intervention.

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67 Shaun Narine, *Explaining ASEAN*, p. 172
68 Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia*, p. 174
69 Mahathir objected that the West retained the right to determine when force against a sovereign state was warranted, and that it was hypocritical in rejecting Indonesia's claim to East Timor while ignoring similar transgressions elsewhere. Further, he regarded the West as causing the East Timor crisis, given its pressure on President B.J. Habibie to allow an act of self-determination: Alan Dupont, 'ASEAN’s Response to the East Timor Crisis', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 54, no. 2, 2000, p. 165
Nevertheless, some ASEAN states did participate in the UN-sanctioned International Force in East Timor (INTERFET) peacekeeping force in 1999. Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines participated as individual states and with Indonesia’s consent, and thus did not directly violate the non-interference norm. However, the principle was strained, particularly given the pressure put on Indonesia to make a formal request of Thailand to lead the ASEAN contingent.\textsuperscript{70}

Chapter Three will further explore the non-interference principle with reference to ASEAN’s handling of Burma’s membership. ASEAN member states have violated the non-interference principle with respect to Burma. While they emphasised that the onus was on Burma to decide whether it would chair the Association in 2006, the pressure on the regime to decline became increasingly explicit. This is far from indicative of the decline of ASEAN’s relevance. In fact, it demonstrates that ASEAN members wish to enhance the function of the Association. Moreover, it indicates that an altered, and evolving, collective identity is steadily emerging in the region.

Chapter Three will thus demonstrate that the public criticism component of the non-interference norm is evolving. This principle reflects the traditional importance of presenting a united front on contentious issues. It does not imply that member states remain uninvolved in one another’s affairs, but that they uphold the ‘ASEAN Way’ by holding private discussions within the network of elites. ASEAN’s Secretary General, Ong Keng Yong, acknowledges that while they have traditionally adhered to the norm of

\textsuperscript{70} Following a meeting between the then Thai Foreign Minister, Surin Pitsuwan, and General Wiranto (commander of the Indonesian army), Habibie formally asked Thailand to organize ASEAN’s military contribution to INTERFET, ‘removing the major political obstacle to ASEAN’s involvement’: Ibid., p. 166
non-interference, 'internally ASEAN member countries have always discussed some sensitive matters among themselves'. 

However, individual ministers are increasingly willing to make critical public comments that diverge from the official ASEAN position. Member states are driven by their sense of interdependent security to take more decisive collective action, and overcome the restrictions of an outdated principle.

Reformulating Research Questions

The questions posed by many critics are not the most appropriate or useful. Rather than focusing on compliance with ASEAN norms (or lack thereof) as grounds to portend the Association's demise and refute the security community notion, the research lens should be recalibrated. Some critics are perhaps motivated partly by an objection to the applicability of constructivist approaches to the Southeast Asian context. They are eager to dismiss the possibility of community- and identity-formation in the region. As explained in Chapter One, a preoccupation with the relative merits of disparate theoretical perspectives can divert analytical attention away from problem-driven research. In this vein, we can reorient the research focus to examine the response of

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71 'ASEAN Expects Myanmar's Decision on Leadership Issue Next Month', Agence France Presse, 17 June 2005

72 Khoo laments the tendency of constructivists to privilege so-called 'positive norms', and suggests that if norms really 'mattered', we would see them 'working when it really counts - when states have disputes': Nicholas Khoo, ‘Deconstructing the ASEAN security community’, p. 44. In a more scathing critique, Jones and Smith condemn constructivism as a 'voguish idiom of post-Cold War international relations' that has served to create the image of a distinctively 'Asian way' of regionalism, obscuring the tensions between and within member states: David M. Jones & Michael L.R. Smith, 'ASEAN's Imitation Community'.

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ASEAN member states to regional security challenges and international pressure to address them.

The evolution of ASEAN’s normative context is precipitated by the trend of democratisation among ASEAN member states. While several ASEAN states are still in the process of consolidating democratic governance, they increasingly realise that significant political diversity is not conducive to effective regional cooperation.\(^73\)

Further, they are aware that the inclusion of semi-authoritarian states threatens the Association’s international reputation. As the founding states democratis and the newer members lag behind in terms of development and political stability, there is a danger that a divided or ‘two-tier’ ASEAN will emerge.\(^74\) Changes to the founding states’ internal political structures precipitate a diminished concern with regime security and an orientation towards regional security. This has encouraged them to question the relevance of ASEAN’s principles and practices.\(^75\) Moreover, civil society and parliamentarians are becoming more involved in the discourse regarding regional

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\(^{73}\) Southeast Asia has been undergoing an ‘incremental process of democratisation’ since the ‘people’s power’ revolution in the Philippines in 1986. Thailand (1991-92), Cambodia (1993) and Indonesia (1998) have undergone democratic transitions, and are at various stages of consolidating democracy (with Cambodia the least democratic given its questionable election process). Malaysia and Singapore have had democratic institutions since independence and have not experienced a significant period of military rule, unlike the other core ASEAN states. However, ‘ethnic and communal discord’ in Malaysia and the government’s strict control of daily life in Singapore have contributed to the retreat of liberal democracy in both states: Amitav Acharya, ‘Democratisation and the Prospects for Participatory Regionalism in Southeast Asia’, *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 2, April 2003, p. 376, 378 & 380. Of the remaining ASEAN states, Burma is under authoritarian military rule, and Laos and Vietnam retain communist political systems. Brunei Darassalam is Southeast Asia’s only absolute ruling monarchy.

\(^{74}\) The notion of a ‘two-tier’ ASEAN generally refers to a ‘development gap’ between the six more developed ASEAN states, comprising the five founding states plus Brunei, and the four so-called ‘CLMV’ states, all admitted in the late 1990s – Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar (Burma) and Vietnam. Here I have extended this idea to refer also to the division between democratising states and the CLMV states, which are either not democracies (Laos, Burma and Vietnam) or have a very tenuous claim to democracy (Cambodia).

\(^{75}\) Amitav Acharya, ‘Democratisation and the Prospects for Participatory Regionalism in Southeast Asia’, p. 381
security. ASEAN dialogue is no longer solely the domain of a small network of elites. The democratisation trend has thus facilitated the evolution of ASEAN norms and collective identity. This is not surprising, given that ASEAN was not formed on the basis of liberal democratic values.

This chapter has explored the temporal context of ASEAN’s inception, and the origins of its normative principles. It considered the scholarship analysing the Association’s efforts in security cooperation in the post-Cold War period. The argument was asserted that the renewed realist criticism of ASEAN is flawed, as it tends to concentrate on the inconsistent adherence of member states to ASEAN norms. Such critiques rely on a perception or assumption that ASEAN’s normative context is static, and that the Association’s relevance, credibility and legitimacy can be gauged with reference to the extent to which it is upheld.

In contrast, I have argued that ASEAN norms are evolving, and moreover, have been undergoing a continual process of evolution since the Association’s inception. This process underscores an evolving collective identity. As some of the founding member states have democratised, their conceptualisations of security have changed; they exhibit an enhanced desire to approach security collectively. Chapter Three will demonstrate this argument with respect to ASEAN’s treatment of Burma’s membership. In managing this issue and attempting to mitigate damage to ASEAN’s reputation, there exists an opportunity for overcoming the division between old and new states by taking more decisive action than the declared principles allow.
Chapter Three

ASEAN: The Evolution of Normative Principles and Collective Identity

This chapter will first examine the motivations for expansion, and its varied results. The difficulties associated with expansion have threatened to render it counterproductive. I will then focus on the membership of Burma, an important and pertinent case study. The admission of Burma to ASEAN, and the issue of its potential chairmanship in 2006, has threatened to cause fissures within the Association and damage its relations with the international community. The issue has become a test case of ASEAN’s resolve, and its relevance and credibility as a regional organisation. Significantly, member states have been willing to ‘interfere’ more explicitly in Burma’s internal affairs, by engaging in public criticism. Indeed, while they emphasised that the decision regarding the 2006 chairmanship was to be made by Burma, foreign ministers and parliamentarians became increasingly willing to pressure the military junta to decline the chair. This chapter will explore the motives for doing so, and argue that such behaviour cannot be understood through a realist lens. While the US and European Union (EU) threatened to boycott ASEAN meetings if Burma took the chair, it is unlikely that they would have retracted trade with other member states, or that the US would have withdrawn its regional military presence. Strong bilateral relationships and economic ties, and the lack of precedent for such punitive action, would have obviated such outcomes.

Rather, I argue that the concern of ASEAN member states with the Association’s reputation can only be understood with reference to a growing sense of collective
identity. Statements made by ministers, parliamentarians, and ASEAN’s Secretary-General indicate that the request that Burma decline the chairmanship was a ‘face-saving’ measure, designed to protect ASEAN’s image and resolve international tensions. An examination of the motives of member states in pressuring Burma indicates that an evolving collective identity is steadily emerging in the region. This chapter thus asserts the importance of considering ideational, rather than only material, factors in member state behaviour.

Faced with the contention surrounding Burma’s membership, member states are motivated to interact, and seek cooperation. As such, the increased political diversity within the Association need not impede the process of identity-formation and thus, community-building. On the contrary, an increasing willingness to ‘interfere’ more explicitly in the internal affairs of states that threaten ASEAN’s reputation indicates a strengthening ‘we-feeling.’ Further, it demonstrates a desire to alter ‘outdated’ ASEAN norms in support of an intensifying sense of community. As such, while it is clear that ASEAN is not a security community, it can be described as being engaged in a community-building process. Its progress certainly stalled following the Asian economic crisis and subsequent political turmoil (particularly in Indonesia). However, the issue of Burma’s membership illustrates that ASEAN retains the foundations of a security community, and its normative context is adapting to incorporate an enhanced sense of interdependence.
ASEAN’s Membership Expansion

With the exception of Brunei Darassalam (admitted in 1984), ASEAN’s expansion took place between 1995 and 1999. Four states were admitted during this time: Vietnam in 1995, Laos and Burma in 1997, and Cambodia in 1999 (the so-called ‘CLMV’ states).¹ The immediate post-Cold War context gave rise to a desire for consolidation of the Southeast Asian region, as economic growth rates increased, the threat of Soviet influence dissipated, and concern over Chinese influence heightened. Also, as Acharya notes, the decision to expand ‘reflected ASEAN’s increasing self-confidence as an anchor of regional security’ (before the 1997 economic crisis and the political and social turmoil that followed).² The founding states wanted to make the Association representative of Southeast Asia, and thus enhance its international standing. They had apparently always envisioned an inclusive organisation; the Bangkok Declaration stated that ‘the Association is open to participation to all states in the South-East Asian Region’, providing they subscribe to its aims and principles.³ In fact, Burma and Cambodia were

¹ ‘CLMV’ refers to Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam, and is thus an acronym used to denote the newer, less developed member states. As noted in the Introduction, I have chosen to refer to Myanmar by its original name, Burma.
² Amitav Acharya, Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order, London: Routledge, 2001, p. 198. Such confidence had propelled ASEAN’s desire to extend its model of regional cooperation to the wider Asia-Pacific region, by driving the establishment of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1993s: Ibid., pp. 172-179
³ Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), The ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration), 8 August 1967, http://www.aseansec.org/1629.htm, Date Accessed: 3 April 2005
invited to join ASEAN at its inception, but declined due to their perceptions of ASEAN’s favourable attitude towards the US.\textsuperscript{4}

Thus, while there were certain instrumental motivations for ASEAN’s establishment (discussed in Chapter Two), of particular interest here is the Association’s intended function as a vehicle for the development of a regional identity. At the Thirtieth ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM) held in Malaysia in July 1997, the Foreign Ministers welcomed Laos and Burma to the Association, stating in the Joint Communiqué that the admission had ‘advanced the vision of the Founding Fathers to build a united community of the Southeast Asian Nations’.\textsuperscript{5} Despite (or in a sense, due to) concerns about the effects of the CLMV states’ domestic politics on the Association, the Foreign Ministers made sure to emphasise progress towards achieving this objective in official statements. They declared their desire to realise the founders’ vision ‘of all ten Southeast Asian countries living in harmony’,\textsuperscript{6} and their conviction that the admissions would ‘serve the long term interest of regional peace, stability and prosperity’.\textsuperscript{7} The theme of the Fifth ASEAN Summit in Bangkok in December 1995 had been ‘ASEAN towards One Southeast Asia’, and the process of admitting the new states (from granting Observer

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{ASEAN_AMM_30} Point 2 in Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), \textit{Joint Communiqué of the 30\textsuperscript{th} ASEAN Ministerial Meeting}, Subang Jaya, Malaysia, 24-25 July 1997, \url{http://www.aseansec.org/2369.htm}. Date Accessed: 4 July 2005
\bibitem{ASEAN_AMM_29} Point 3 in Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), \textit{Joint Communiqué of the 29\textsuperscript{th} ASEAN Ministerial Meeting}, Jakarta, Indonesia, 20-21 July 1996, \url{http://www.aseansec.org/2366.htm}. Date Accessed: 4 July 2005
\bibitem{ASEAN_AMM_30} Point 2 in Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), \textit{Joint Communiqué of the 30\textsuperscript{th} ASEAN Ministerial Meeting}
\end{thebibliography}
Status to eventual membership) was frequently rationalised with reference to this objective.

ASEAN's motivations for expansion were also pragmatic. An expanded ASEAN is perceived by member states as more influential, enhancing the salience of its members in international fora. Expansion increased ASEAN's collective population, gross domestic product (GDP) and market size, motivating aspirations of economic integration. The founding states (with Brunei) sought to include the CLMV states, despite political instability and lagging development, in light of the potential for future economic benefits. Moreover, they were concerned with balancing increasingly influential neighbours. As Shaun Narine points out, an expanded ASEAN 'has a better chance of being an economic and political counterweight to the large powers of the region, China, Japan and India'.

Expansion appeared to enhance ASEAN's international clout, as well as mitigating the risk that bilateral relations with these powers would threaten regional stability.

ASEAN's expansion has, however, been both a help and a hindrance to the Association's development. It has given member states a greater sense of regionalism, and conveyed the impression of a stronger regional organisation. Joining ASEAN has yielded clear benefits for the newer states themselves; they have somewhat overcome their isolation and gained access to international fora, such as the ARF and the Asia-Europe Meetings (ASEM). They also secured technical and development assistance, as part of their

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9 As the Conclusion will elaborate, these pursuits are, at the time of writing, evolving in a new direction with the development of a larger East Asian forum. The inaugural East Asia Summit is scheduled for December 2005 in Kuala Lumpur.
transitions to full membership. This should, in theory, improve prospects for regional stability. However, while statements following ASEAN Summits and AMMs promote the rhetoric of mutually beneficial regional stability and prosperity, the admission of the CLMV states has threatened the pursuit of such goals.

Membership expansion has posed a test of ASEAN’s norms. On one hand, it has solidified the foundations of intra-regional conflict resolution, given that new states were required to commit to the TAC code of conduct and the ASEAN Way. However, increased political diversity makes consensus in decision-making difficult. Narine notes that a further tension exists in the impact of expansion on ASEAN norms: the Association must be more flexible and informal in its decision-making practices, in order to accommodate the enhanced cultural, political and economic diversity among member states. Simultaneously, however, ‘there are pressures from within for ASEAN to become a more formal and coherent unit in order to deal with emerging economic and political issues’. The ability of ASEAN to adapt to changing circumstances is thus vexed by competing priorities.

In addition, the principle of non-interference has come under strain. Political instability within new states has tested the resolve of other ASEAN members to refrain from public criticism, and confine sensitive discussions to closed-door meetings. Aside from the

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10 The new states required assistance to enhance their development and facilitate ASEAN’s objective of economic integration. For example, Laos was (and still is) trying to make the transition to a market economy, notwithstanding its continued communist political structure. In the Joint Communiqué of the Thirtieth AMM, the Foreign Ministers ‘encouraged the ASEAN Secretariat to continue to provide technical assistance to Laos and Myanmar and urged the ASEAN Dialogue Partners to actively support this endeavour’: Clause 2 in Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), Joint Communiqué of the 30th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting.

11 Shaun Narine, Explaining ASEAN, p. 122
concerns of foreign ministers in maintaining a stable regional environment, pressures from parliamentarians and civil society actors have contributed to challenges to the non-interference norm. Ramcharan argues that ASEAN’s treatment of Cambodia’s admission (discussed in Chapter Two) amounted to ‘overt involvement in Cambodia’s domestic political process’.

Acharya agrees that Cambodia’s admission demonstrated the potential erosion of the non-interference principle. It was an explicit, unprecedented indication regarding the criteria for ASEAN membership. Had Cambodia already been a member when the coup took place, ASEAN may not have decisively responded and certainly would have been unlikely to expel Cambodia. However, its willingness to withhold admission based on domestic political circumstances suggests that the foundations were laid for an embryonic recognition that the non-interference norm must evolve.

The case of Burma’s membership will demonstrate that the problems posed by expansion can in fact lead to cooperation which enhances an organisation’s efficacy, and in doing so transform the declared principles and norms in a constructive way. The management of the ‘Burma issue’ has in fact spurred ASEAN states to begin to overhaul outdated normative principles.

**Burma’s Admission**

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12 Robin Ramcharan, ‘ASEAN and Non-Interference: A Principle Maintained,’ *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International & Strategic Affairs*, vol. 22, no. 1, April 2000, p. 68

13 Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia*, p. 120
The inclusion of Burma has been the most controversial and problematic of the CLMV states. The contention stems from the political illegitimacy of the ruling military junta and its poor human rights record, which have attracted international condemnation for a number of years. It is also apparently involved in the drug trade and other illicit transnational activities. The current regime, now known as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), has ruled Burma under martial law since 1988. It ousted the previous military-socialist government under General Ne Win. Popular discontent had become prevalent under Ne Win’s government, which had maintained its repressive rule since 1962. Resentment accumulated over several years, initially due to food shortages and economic stagnation, and becoming more specifically directed at the military’s domination of politics and economic mismanagement. Ne Win tried to reinforce control in the name of national unity by enhancing the army’s power, restraining ethnic minority groups, and repressing the rights to free speech and association. Demonstrations in March 1988 erupted into violent confrontations with riot police. Following Ne Win’s resignation in July, there were further clashes with the military leading to some three thousand deaths and two thousand arrests. The military

14 When it took power in 1988, the regime was known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). It became the SPDC in 1997. Robert Taylor notes that despite several ministerial changes made at the time of the SPDC’s succession of the SLORC, there was no significant change in policy: Robert H. Taylor, ‘Introduction: Stagnation and Stalemate’ in Robert H. Taylor (ed), *Burma: Political Economy under Military Rule*, London, Hurst & Company, 2001, p. 3


then staged a 'coup' in September and declared martial law. This seizure of power constitutes one element of the SPDC’s legitimacy crisis.17

The second element was its refusal to recognise the results of the 1990 elections. Following the coup of September 1988, the military junta declared that it would hold multiparty elections, assuming that it would win and thereby ratify its right to rule.18 However, it grossly misjudged. The regime refused to concede defeat and acknowledge the landslide victory of the National League for Democracy (NLD). To date, the SPDC has not recognised the election results, and the NLD’s leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, has spent most of the subsequent years under house arrest.

Her incarceration, and those of numerous other political prisoners, has provoked international criticism and ongoing campaigns by non-government organisations such as Amnesty International. Some governments, including the United States and Canada, refuse to recognise the SPDC as legitimate (and thus continue to refer to the country as ‘Burma’ rather than ‘Myanmar’). By international standards, the denouncement of the SPDC is understandable, but as David Steinberg notes, the military junta apparently considers other criteria for legitimacy.19 Moreover, it is determined to retain its grip on power, in the belief that the military is the only body capable of maintaining national unity.20 This assertion has underscored its use of coercion to subdue the populace, its

17 I use the term ‘legitimacy’ in the classic Weberian sense, referring to the conviction of the governed that the rulers of the state retain a moral right to exercise command, and that the citizens have a corresponding obligation to acquiesce.
18 Ibid., p. 172
repression of ethnic minorities, and the permeation of the military in all aspects of the socio-political sphere. It is now less concerned with demonstrating legitimacy than with regime survival. Further, apparent fragmentation within the regime exacerbates this potentially volatile situation.

The regime’s preoccupation with national unity is partly predicated on a traditional fear of external domination. Burma’s historical experiences, as filtered through a state-controlled lens, have contributed to fears of foreign intervention and reactive behaviour bordering on isolationism. The junta’s attitude to the outside world is characterised by perceived threats and insecurity, which are of course only exacerbated by its repressive nature. Further, the personal livelihoods of the leadership are at stake, particularly given its control of the formal economy and apparent involvement in the illicit economy (to be further elaborated upon). The junta has thus become yet more determined to retain power as international pressure has intensified.

Sanctions were imposed on Burma after the 1990 elections by several Western states.\textsuperscript{22} Japan has been much more willing to continue providing Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) to Burma, impairing the effectiveness of Western sanctions. However, it did place restrictions on new ODA in 2003.\textsuperscript{23} Burma’s admission to ASEAN thus provoked controversy and tensions with extra-regional actors. However, the process of granting its membership was in fact partly spurred on by perceived Western ‘meddling’ in regional affairs (to be later discussed). ASEAN’s motivations thus included the desire assert regional autonomy.

Burma’s accession was officially announced with reference to furthering the One Southeast Asia vision.\textsuperscript{24} However, in addition to such sentiments, a more immediate strategic concern played a crucial role: the perceived need to counterbalance Chinese influence. China has been an important source of investment, aid and military support for Burma, and their strengthening relationship was of concern to ASEAN. Narine notes that during the 1990s, member states frequently responded to Western criticism by asserting that isolating Burma ‘would only drive it more deeply into China’s embrace.’\textsuperscript{25} There were also commercial motivations, as Burma had begun since 1988 to open its economy

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{22} The International Crisis Group (ICG) reports that ‘the range and scope of sanctions on Myanmar has increased incrementally over the past fifteen years. Most Western governments have suspended non-humanitarian bilateral aid since 1988, imposed an arms embargo and deny tariff preferences to imports from Myanmar’: International Crisis Group, ‘Sanctions, Engagement, or Another Way Forward?’, ICG Asia Report No. 78, Yangon/Brussels, 26 April 2004, \url{http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/asia/burma myanmar/078_myanmar_sanctions_engagement_or_another_way_web.pdf}. Date Accessed: 8 August 2005, p. 15
\item \textsuperscript{23} In 2002, Japan was the largest donor of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) to Burma, focusing on humanitarian assistance and infrastructure development. Unlike the EU and the US, Japan sustained its ODA to Burma following the 30 May 2003 attack on NLD members, although it did suspend new ODA until Aung San Suu Kyi is freed: ‘Japan Tells Myanmar it will Suspend ODA Over Suu Kyi’, \textit{Japan Economic Newswire}, 4 July 2003
\item \textsuperscript{24} Clause 2 in Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), \textit{Joint Communiqué of the 30th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting}
\item \textsuperscript{25} Shaun Narine, \textit{Explaining ASEAN}, p 114-5
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
to foreign investment.\textsuperscript{26} ASEAN justified Burma’s membership by invoking the non-interference principle; its position was that excluding Burma on the grounds of political repression would amount to interference in its internal affairs.\textsuperscript{27} This clearly contrasted with its handling of Cambodia’s inclusion. This inconsistency did not appear to be particularly problematic for ASEAN member states; of greater concern was limiting Chinese influence. Burma had greater strategic significance than Cambodia, and thus an additional motivation was the opportunity to reassert the importance of the non-interference principle.

However, ASEAN recognised that Burma would be a problematic member. As such, its admission was supposedly undertaken on the condition that political reforms were to be implemented. At the 1994 AMM, to which Thailand invited Burma as its guest, ASEAN Foreign Ministers conveyed that they wanted Burma to join ‘but stipulated that conciliatory gestures on the domestic front were necessary before accession was possible’.\textsuperscript{28} After the junta released Aung San Suu Kyi in July 1995 (only to later re-imprison her twice),\textsuperscript{29} Burma was able to sign the TAC on 27 July 1995 and thus become an ASEAN observer. It applied for full membership during the 1995 AMM, which it

\textsuperscript{26}Ibid., p. 114
\textsuperscript{27} Amitav Acharya, \textit{Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia}, p. 108
\textsuperscript{28} Shaun Narine, \textit{Explaining ASEAN}, p. 115
\textsuperscript{29} Aung San Suu Kyi was again placed under house arrest in 2000 following her campaign to convene the parliament elected in 1990. She was released for the second time in 2002, in the midst of mounting international pressure and a financial crisis in Burma which was compounded by US investment, lending and diplomatic restrictions. However, following a violent clash between government supporters and NLD members on 30 May 2003, Suu Kyi was placed into ‘protective custody’ – essentially a third period of house arrest under which she remains at the time of writing. Ardeth Maung Thawngmung provides a detailed analysis of the circumstances of each release and re-incarceration (excluding the 30 May 2003 incident which occurred after his article was written): Ardeth Maung Thawngmung, ‘Preconditions and Prospects for Democratic Transition in Burma/Myanmar’, \textit{Asian Survey}, vol. 43, no. 3, May/June 2003, pp. 443-460. For detail on the 30 May 2003 incident and Suu Kyi’s third imprisonment, refer Kyaw Yin Hlaing, ‘Myanmar in 2003: Frustration and Despair?’, \textit{Asian Survey}, vol. 44, no. 1, January / February 2004, pp. 87-92
achieved, with Mahathir’s advocacy, on 23 July 1997. During this process, ASEAN responded to criticism of its policies towards Burma by arguing that it was pursuing ‘constructive engagement’. This originated from Thailand’s foreign policy towards Burma, which was motivated by security concerns regarding the Thai-Burmese border.

In granting membership to Burma, ASEAN member states effectively took a collective approach to constructive engagement, despite indications during 1996 that the Thai policy was failing. ‘Constructive engagement’ implied quietly encouraging the Burmese junta to change, while avoiding public criticism, exclusion or embarrassment. As such, it attempted to avoid violation of the non-interference norm. However, certain member states were beginning to consider whether this was the most appropriate course of action.

**Burma’s Membership: ‘Constructive Engagement’ and Non-Interference**

The debate among member states regarding Burma and other contentious issues indicated that the non-interference norm was in contention. The most significant challenge came from then Thai Foreign Minister Dr Surin Pitsuwan in 1998, reacting to the apparent lack

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32 Collins argues that by 1996 it was clear that Thailand’s constructive engagement policy towards Burma had failed; violence on the Thai-Burmese border continued and human rights abuses were increasing: Ibid., p. 144

33 Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia*, p. 110
of progress made by 'constructive engagement' of Burma. Surin believed that the non-interference norm must evolve. He proposed that ASEAN adopt a policy of 'flexible engagement', which challenged the contemporary understanding of non-interference in that it implied the use of public criticism to achieve change. His suggestion was based on the conviction that it was time for ASEAN to re-evaluate its norms and principles, and adapt them to suit changing circumstances rather than use them as an excuse to avoid decisive action. At the June 1998 Asia-Pacific roundtable in Kuala Lumpur, he argued that 'ASEAN members perhaps no longer can afford to adopt a non-committal stance and avoid passing judgement on events in a member country, simply on the grounds of “non-interference”...much can be said in favour of ASEAN members playing a more proactive role'. This proposal built upon the suggestion, made in July 1997 by Malaysia’s then Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, that ASEAN consider ‘constructive intervention’ in relation to Cambodia. Notably, at the time of Surin’s proposal, Cambodia’s admission remained on hold, despite the violation of non-interference. In this context, Surin’s position was an attempt to revise what was seemingly an outdated principle.

34 Alan Collins, *Security and Southeast Asia*, p. 144
36 Anwar argued that ‘ASEAN should accept the dawning reality that with the entry of new members...new problems will emerge...So much is at stake that ASEAN cannot afford to remain uninvolved’: Quoted in Robin Ramcharan, ‘ASEAN and Non-Interference: A Principle Maintained,’ p. 74. Brian Job notes that ‘most other members were quick to distance themselves from such a notion. Indeed, the impression was given that this was a personal foray of Anwar’s, not consistent with the Malaysian official view’: Brian L. Job, ‘ASEAN Stalled: Dilemmas and Tensions over Conflicting Norms,’ Paper delivered to 1999 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, September 2-5, 1999, p. 15. It has been primarily Thailand that has challenged ASEAN’s principles and processes, at least until the appointment in January 2001 of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra (to be discussed later in the chapter).
However, at the Thirty-first AMM in July 1998, ASEAN rejected Surin’s proposal in favour of a watered-down policy known as ‘enhanced interaction’.\(^{37}\) In the wake of ASEAN’s overt interference in Cambodia’s internal affairs, most member states sought to reinstate the non-interference principle ‘to its former sacrosanct position’ and repair the political damage.\(^{38}\) Such sentiment may have delayed more decisive action on Burma.

‘Enhanced interaction’ thus reaffirmed the importance of non-interference and did not signify a substantive change in ASEAN practices. Member states could supposedly be more open in discussion of regional issues, but public criticism was still to be avoided.

However, this ostensible reaffirmation of non-interference did not prevent public criticism from the Philippines and Indonesia regarding the arrest and detention of Anwar Ibrahim in 1998. In addition, Collins points out, an ‘un-ASEAN-like squabble’ regarding Cambodia’s admission broke out at the Sixth ASEAN Summit in Hanoi in December of the same year.\(^{39}\) Thus, while Surin’s proposal was unsuccessful, it contributed to the foundations of the evolution of the non-interference norm. The momentum of revision of ASEAN principles was initiated, which was related to an evolving conception of ASEAN’s collective identity. Indeed, while the official ASEAN response to Surin was to reaffirm non-interference, the behaviour of member states after this episode challenged the public criticism component of the norm.

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\(^{37}\) The then Philippines Foreign Secretary Domingo Siazon was the only foreign minister to support Surin’s proposal at the AMM: ‘ASEAN Ministers Adopt Policy of ‘Enhanced Interaction”’, *Asia Pulse*, 27 July 1998

\(^{38}\) Robin Ramcharan, ‘ASEAN and Non-Interference’, p. 76

\(^{39}\) Alan Collins, *Security and Southeast Asia*, p. 145
Burma’s Membership: Regional Management and Internal Fragmentation

Since Burma’s admission, ASEAN has encouraged it to make reforms and applauded apparent progress in a non-critical manner. During the first few years of its membership, Burma did not receive much attention in official statements. The few references made to Burma in AMM and ASEAN Summit documents mostly concerned plans for narrowing the ‘development gap’ between the newer and older member states, and thus enhancing ASEAN’s economic integration.\(^{40}\) No mention was made in AMM Joint Communiqués to Burma’s domestic political situation, apart from at the Thirty-Fourth AMM in July 2001, where ASEAN foreign ministers noted ‘encouraging developments’ and ‘reiterated support for ongoing reconciliation’.\(^{41}\)

However, following a violent attack on a convoy of NLD members by government supporters on 30 May 2003, and Aung San Suu Kyi’s subsequent re-imprisonment, Burma began to feature more prominently on the agenda of ASEAN meetings. Statements still, however, retained an encouraging tone. At the Thirty-Sixth AMM in Phnom Penh in June 2003, the Joint Communiqué ‘noted the efforts of the Government of Myanmar to promote peace and development. In this connection, we urged Myanmar to resume its efforts of national reconciliation and dialogue among all parties concerned

leading to a peaceful transition to democracy'. To this end, the Foreign Ministers ‘looked forward’ to the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and NLD members. Such statements are carefully worded and clearly take care to avoid ‘public criticism’.

However, a notable exception was Mahathir’s statement that Burma may need to be expelled from ASEAN if Suu Kyi was not released. This was the first prominent instance of criticism and was particularly salient given Mahathir’s previous support of Burma’s admission.

Following the 30 May 2003 incident, the SPDC made gestures towards reform, declaring a ‘roadmap’ to democracy. Thus, at the Ninth ASEAN Summit in Bali in October 2003, the ASEAN leaders ‘welcomed the recent positive developments in Myanmar and the Government’s pledge to bring about a transition to democracy’. They also agreed that ‘sanctions are not helpful’ to such efforts. Member states resisted the efforts of extra-regional powers to isolate Burma; they refused requests by dialogue partners to exclude Burma from meetings.

Unfortunately, this approach did not appear to make much impact. The SPDC has become known for making hollow conciliatory gestures, releasing small groups of...
political prisoners or declaring the intention to implement democratic reforms. At the
time of writing, the military junta has not made any substantial moves towards holding
free and fair elections, or implementing a power-sharing arrangement with the NLD.\textsuperscript{46}
The longevity of its illegitimate rule, and its use of coercion to resist opposition, suggests
that the prospect of regime change must now invoke fear among the leadership. Their
personal fortunes are at risk, given the regime’s control of the most lucrative sectors of
the economy, and its apparent involvement in the drugs trade and money-laundering
operations.\textsuperscript{47} The possibility of retribution unleashed by regime change must also be of
concern.

In the context of such pressure, the military leadership is apparently becoming
increasingly fragmented and exhibiting signs of power struggles. In October 2004, the
relatively ‘moderate’ Prime Minister Khin Nyunt was dismissed along with the entire
military intelligence sector. He was subsequently tried and found guilty of various
charges, including bribery and corruption, and sentenced to forty years’ imprisonment in
July 2005. His allies in the now-defunct military intelligence agency have also been tried
and jailed, a symptom of the long-standing rivalry between the intelligence and army
units.\textsuperscript{48} Thus, the military junta ‘forced the fifteenth cabinet shakeup in seven years’.\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., p. 174-179
\textsuperscript{47} The ICG notes that ‘the regime is believed to have important personal and political connections to the
extra-legal economy’, such as raising revenues from taxes on heroin refineries: International Crisis Group,
‘Myanmar: The Military Regime’s View of the World,’ p. 9. Similarly, Alan Dupont argues that there is
growing evidence of collusion between the regime and well-known drug traffickers: Alan Dupont,
\textsuperscript{48} ‘Former Myanmar PM charged with corruption: unofficial sources’, Xinhua General News Service, 7
\textsuperscript{49} Maureen Aung-Thwin, ‘Burma: Plus ça Change’ in William M. Carpenter & David G. Wiencek (eds),
M.E. Sharpe, Inc, 2005, p. 73
The SPDC is thus seemingly internally preoccupied with a political battle. Apparent positive developments, such as the release of political prisoners and the National Convention, must therefore be regarded with scepticism, rather than an indication of imminent democratic reform. Further, according to Narine, Burma ‘has strongly rejected the idea that “constructive engagement” was ever meant to influence its domestic politics’. Nevertheless, ASEAN member states continued to treat Burma largely in a manner congruent with the ASEAN Way – encouraging reform in an unobtrusive manner. In fact, the implicit pressure on Burma to reform has been somewhat relaxed by the appointment of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in January 2001, and his elevation to a ‘leading regional figure’ following Mahathir’s retirement in October 2003.

Thaksin’s policy towards Burma appears to be much more accommodating, and his foreign policy priorities sometimes ‘appear focused more on regional economic integration than national security concerns’. While ASEAN as an organisation maintained a unified position on Burma, key individuals in Southeast Asia have become increasingly vocal regarding the need to push for change. This trend reflects a disparity between individuals’ adherence to the common

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50 The junta announced in November 2004 that it would reconvene the National Convention, originally devised in 1993 to draft a new constitution as part of Burma’s ‘roadmap to democracy’: ‘Burma to relaunch democracy talks,’ BBC News, 23 November 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4035955.stm, Date Accessed: 24 November 2004. It was duly reconvened in July 2004, but was boycotted by the NLD. The results were not made public, but they certainly did not include favourable democratic reform: Kyaw Yin Hlaing, ‘Myanmar in 2004’, p. 175. In July 2005, the junta released 249 political prisoners, shortly before the chairmanship issue was to be considered at the Thirty-Eighth AMM. While international figures such as United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan welcomed the move, they pointed out that Aung San Suu Kyi and many other dissidents remained imprisoned, and reiterated calls for their release: William M. Reilly, ‘U.N. Welcomes Myanmar Prisoner Release’, United Press International, 6 July 2005
51 Shaun Narine, Explaining ASEAN, p. 115
position for the purposes of ASEAN meetings, and an increasing willingness to engage in public criticism outside official circles. The norm of non-interference is thus evolving in that individual ministers no longer refrain from expressing their opinions on regional security matters. This was demonstrated in late 2004 and early 2005 by member states’ treatment of Burma’s potential chairmanship.

Burma’s Membership: The Chairmanship Issue

The issue of Burma’s potential chairmanship of ASEAN exacerbated the impasse, and provoked some member states to take a more stringent position. In accordance with the system of alphabetical rotation, Burma (as Myanmar) was due to take up the chair of ASEAN in July 2006. As such, it was scheduled to be nominated as the Vice-Chair to Malaysia at the Thirty-Eighth AMM in Vientiane in late July 2005. The chair hosts the principal ASEAN meetings, including the annual Summit, AMM, Post-Ministerial Conferences (PMCs), and the ARF. It is thus a significant role, requiring the chair to host both regional and international dignitaries. The prospect of a pariah state holding this position was predictably contentious. The tensions caused by Burma’s membership were aggravated, and the issues of Aung San Suu Kyi’s house arrest and political prisoners gained renewed salience in the regional and international media.

In the months prior to the Thirty-Eighth AMM, representatives of some ASEAN member states indicated that they preferred that Burma decline the chairmanship. Pressure
accumulated on the SPDC to voluntarily step aside and enable the position of chair to pass to the Philippines a year ahead of schedule. Foreign ministers and parliamentarians made public statements declaring their desires for such an outcome. These comments reflected the founding member states’ concerns about the potential damage to ASEAN’s image and reputation. They wished to avoid pushing Burma into a more prominent position, given the probable ramifications for the Association as a whole.

Certain ASEAN member states engaged the SPDC leadership in dialogue and encouraged it to decline the chair. Adhering to the ASEAN Way of informal diplomacy, they persuaded Burma to accept a ‘face-saving’ solution that would spare it from further international criticism. The SPDC appeared at times to be amenable to this proposal. In April 2005, Burma’s Foreign Minister, U Nyan Win, met with his Indonesian counterpart, Hassan Wirajuda, on the sidelines of the Asian-African Summit in Jakarta. Marty Natalegawa, the spokesman for Indonesia’s Foreign Ministry, later reported that Burma was expected to announce its decision at the Thirty-Eighth AMM, and was likely to decline. He claimed that Burma was ‘now more aware of its collective interests in ASEAN’. After meeting with Wirajuda at the Summit, Thailand’s Foreign Minister, Kantathi Suphamongkohn, told reporters that ‘we have impressed upon Myanmar the concerns of the international community’. In the same month, Singapore’s Foreign Minister, George Yeo, reported that Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong had also met with

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53 Quoted in Salim Osman, ‘Myanmar may not chair ASEAN’, *The Straits Times*, 24 April 2005
54 Ibid.
Burmese leaders. They had expressed to Lee that ‘Myanmar was not a ‘selfish’ country and would take into account ASEAN’s views and consider ASEAN’s interests’.55

The founding member states thus became hopeful that Burma would decline the chair, but some were careful to emphasise that the decision was up to Burma. At the news conference following a foreign ministers’ meeting on 11 April 2005, Yeo reported that ‘we reaffirmed that ASEAN cannot interfere in the domestic affairs of Myanmar...ASEAN is in danger of being dragged into Myanmar’s internal politics because of the chairmanship issue’.56 In July, shortly before the AMM, Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar agreed that ASEAN leaders had communicated to Burma’s leaders the ‘ramifications’ of it taking up the chair, and ‘with all those matters placed before them, it’s up to them to make a decision’.57 Singapore and Malaysia thus implied that ASEAN was ensuring it did not violate the non-interference principle in its management of the issue. However, it can be argued that making statements regarding the damage to ASEAN’s image amounts to public criticism. While not directly critical, such comments were a clear judgement of Burma’s political situation. It certainly imposed pressure on Burma’s internal decision-making process. Even if the decision was ostensibly ‘up to Burma’, a concerted effort to pressure it into declining detracts from the claim that the decision was entirely unilateral. The founding member states were clearly more willing to be forthright with their positions in the media, irrespective of whether consensus had been achieved among ASEAN members.

55 Quoted in Luz Baguio, ‘ASEAN Chair: Your Move, Myanmar’, The Straits Times, 12 April 2005
56 Ibid.
57 ‘ASEAN’s image will be sullied by Myanmar chair, Malaysia says’
Various parliamentarians from founding member states also expressed concern about the ramifications of a Burmese chair. They were in a position to be more forthright in their views, and seek to influence their own foreign ministers to lobby against Burma taking the chair. In November 2004, the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Caucus on Myanmar was launched.\textsuperscript{58} Sixteen members of the parliaments of Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia and Cambodia met in Jakarta, led by Datuk Zaid Ibrahim of Malaysia’s ruling UMNO party. In an interview with \textit{The Jakarta Post}, Zaid advised that ‘I told my foreign minister that we would look ridiculous...Having ASEAN chaired by this kind of leadership...would not be acceptable.’\textsuperscript{59} Lim Kit Siang, the Malaysian parliamentary opposition leader, stated that the caucus aims to ‘ensure genuine democratisation’ in Burma, given that its membership in ASEAN ‘has caused grave embarrassment to ASEAN, imperilling international goodwill and investment opportunities for the region.’\textsuperscript{60} It is difficult to gauge the impact of the caucus on the ASEAN dialogue, but it does represent a discourse that exerts some degree of pressure on foreign ministers and heads of state. Further, it is the first interstate parliamentary caucus in Southeast Asia, and thus indicates the growing significance of a broader range of opinions in foreign policy matters generally, and specifically in the dialogue regarding contentious issues such as Burma’s chairmanship.

\textsuperscript{58} The caucus began as a bipartisan parliamentary group in Malaysia in 2004, and in November 2004 Zaid Ibrahim invited legislators from other ASEAN states to join, making it the region’s first interstate parliamentary caucus: Michael Vatikiotis, ‘Rethinking ASEAN principle’, \textit{New Straits Times}, 1 February 2005

\textsuperscript{59} Quoted in ‘Non-interference would abdicate responsibility’, \textit{The Jakarta Post}, 12 February 2005

\textsuperscript{60} Quoted in Michael Vatikiotis, ‘Rethinking ASEAN principle’
Ultimately, such efforts were successful. At the Thirty-Eighth AMM, U Nyan Win announced that Burma would relinquish the chairmanship. The Joint Communiqué states that the decision was made because Burma wants ‘to focus its attention on the ongoing national reconciliation and democratisation process.’  

Nyan Win told the news conference that 2006 will be a ‘critical year’, in which Burma will be draft a new constitution and prepare for free and fair elections. ASEAN foreign ministers reacted to the announcement with gratitude. In the Joint Communiqué, they express ‘sincere appreciation to the Government of Myanmar for not allowing its national preoccupation to affect ASEAN’s solidarity and cohesiveness... (it) has show its commitment to the well-being of ASEAN and its goal of advancing the interest of all Member Countries’.

This is an interesting and notable reversal of the ‘direction’ of ASEAN norms; where ASEAN’s normative principles were originally devised to support founding states’ objectives of nation-building, the livelihood of the Association itself is now regarded as of primary concern.

Individual reactions from Foreign Ministers were similar to the official position expressed in the Joint Communiqué. Yeo said the decision ‘removes a thorny issue’ from relations between ASEAN and extra-regional actors. However, he claimed that the decision was entirely Burma’s, and noted that no additional discussions on the matter had

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62 ‘Burma to skip being chairman of ASEAN’, *The Nation*, 27 July 2005
63 Point 70 of Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), *Joint Communiqué of the 38th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting*
taken place at the AMM.\textsuperscript{64} Similarly, Kantathi stated that the development was ‘a rare breakthrough in a positive way’.\textsuperscript{65} In the Philippines, Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo said that his country was ready to assume the chairmanship, and wished ‘to express its appreciation’ to Burma for sensibly stepping aside.\textsuperscript{66} The founding states thus seemed somewhat relieved that the tension had dissipated. Moreover, the result motivated Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono’s claim that ‘this demonstrates ASEAN’s fully developed capability to solve its own problems’.\textsuperscript{67} The outcome vindicated member states’ behaviour in pressuring Burma, and indicated a changing conception of ASEAN principles and practices.

\textbf{The Role of Extra-Regional Actors}

The founding member states’ concern with ASEAN’s image must have been somewhat influenced by the reactions of extra-regional actors to the issue of Burma’s potential chairmanship. The EU and US both threatened to boycott meetings with ASEAN if Burma took the chair.\textsuperscript{68} This is not particularly surprising, given these actors’ sanctions on Burma and continued calls for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners. In early May 2005, US Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick stated that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{64} This is to be expected, given the usual relegation of such issues to informal discussion: Amy Kazmin, ‘Rangoon opts out of ASEAN leadership’, \textit{Financial Times}, 27 July 2005; ‘Burma to skip being chairman of ASEAN’
\item \textsuperscript{65} Quoted in Amy Kazmin, ‘Rangoon opts out of ASEAN leadership’
\item \textsuperscript{66} Quoted in ‘Philippines hails Myanmar’s decision to give up ASEAN chairmanship’, \textit{Deutsche Presse-Agentur}, 26 July 2005
\item \textsuperscript{67} Quoted in ‘Susilo urges ASEAN to embrace democracy, free speech’, \textit{The Jakarta Post}, 8 August 2005
\item \textsuperscript{68} Terence Chong and Ooi Kee Beng argue that ‘Brussels and Washington can in no way be convinced to participate in any meeting with ASEAN to be held in Yangon’: Terence Chong & Ooi Kee Beng, ‘Myanmar Question: ASEAN Dilemma’, \textit{The Straits Times}, 16 April 2005
\end{itemize}
‘if Burma is the chair next year, it will obviously tie our hands’.69 However, he emphasised that the issue was ASEAN’s decision, and that Washington intended to be supportive. Nevertheless, as Ralph Cossa notes, Washington has been sending ‘mixed signals’ to ASEAN.70 In July 2005, US Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice announced that she would not attend the ARF meeting and PMCs that followed the Thirty-Eighth AMM in Vientiane. Zoellick attended in her place. This marked the first time in two decades that a US Secretary of State had not attended an ARF meeting. Although she cited ‘other vital travel’ in explanation, some ASEAN diplomats speculated that her absence reflected US concerns about Burma taking the chair.71 In any case, it gave the impression that ASEAN was slipping on the US scale of priorities.

Despite such developments, realist explanations for ASEAN’s pressure on Burma to relinquish the chair are inadequate. The behaviour of member states cannot be entirely understood with reference solely to self-interested motives and strategic concerns. Threats to boycott ASEAN meetings, whether or not they would have been carried out, do not necessarily also imply punitive action with respect to bilateral economic and strategic relationships. It is unlikely that individual member states’ commercial relations with the EU or US would have suffered had Burma taken the chair. As Chong and Ooi point out, such an outcome would be ‘a breach of capitalist logic...Cheaper labour, raw materials and government incentives will continue to be of primary concern for such

70 Ibid., p. 1
71 Joel Brinkley, ‘Rice, in Asia, takes heat for avoiding ASEAN trip’, The International Herald Tribune, 12 July 2005; ‘Condi less than candid on Burma’, The Nation, Editorial, 13 July 2005

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companies, not politics’. Moreover, Western countries do not generally impair their commercial relationships with a particular state because of human rights concerns regarding one of its neighbours.73

Similarly, it is unlikely that the US would have withdrawn its regional military presence. The significance of strategic imperatives would have prevented such an outcome. In particular, the current US focus on the ‘war on terrorism’ since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and its desire to ensure the support of Southeast Asian governments in this endeavour, has recently increased its regional military presence.74 Such activities are clearly of greater priority to Washington than taking punitive action against ASEAN states due to Burma.

While Rice’s absence from the ARF did cause consternation among ASEAN member states, it is unlikely that they feared it portended immediate or irreparable damage to bilateral relations. Syed Hamid Albar admitted that Rice’s absence did not ‘send a good signal’, but affirmed that ‘Myanmar’s position in ASEAN must be determined by ASEAN members and not by other nations’.75 Member states remain concerned with securing US trade relationships and military presence in the long term. However, persuading Burma to decline the chair was not regarded as hindering such priorities in the short term.

72 Terence Chong & Ooi Kee Beng, ‘Myanmar Question: ASEAN Dilemma’
73 Shaun Narine, Explaining ASEAN, p. 119
75 Quoted in ‘Malaysian Minister wants Rice to Attend ASEAN Regional Forum’, BBC Monitoring, 13 July 2005
Indeed, pressure from extra-regional actors has at times motivated ASEAN member states at times to reassert regional autonomy, rather than fret about bilateral relationships and national interests. Indeed, US and EU opposition to Burma’s admission to ASEAN in 1997 was somewhat counterproductive. While it communicated to ASEAN that Burmese membership would cause diplomatic tensions, it also provoked a backlash from member states against perceived Western ‘meddling’. In April 1997, US State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns declared that the US was ‘trying to use our influence to make the point that (Burma) should be given a stiff message that it is not welcome (in ASEAN)’.76 ASEAN member states responded by reasserting regional autonomy. Narine argues that ASEAN voted to admit Burma in 1997 as scheduled, ‘largely as a reaction against the perception that the West was trying to bully it and intrude on its internal affairs’.77 This may be overstated, since the US tempered its rhetoric and agreed at the ARF meeting in July that it was ASEAN’s responsibility to encourage reform.78 However, it certainly appears that international pressure only added to ASEAN’s determination to extend to membership to Burma. Notably, this ‘backlash’ occurred before the regional economic crisis had taken hold; ASEAN states were not yet in a position to require international assistance, and could afford to act in a self-confident manner.

However, when the issue of Burma’s potential chairmanship of ASEAN arose, member states now having largely recovered in terms of finances and self-confidence, they again

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76 Quoted in Shaun Narine, *Explaining ASEAN*, p. 116
77 Ibid., p. 116
78 Alan Collins, *Security and Southeast Asia*, p. 144
reacted to international pressure by reaffirming the Association’s independence. Marty Natalegawa (spokesman for Indonesian Foreign Ministry) stated shortly before the Thirty-Eighth AMM that ‘the Myanmarese chairmanship is something that we can decide on our own. We don’t need any warning or signal from other countries to help us in our decision’. Interestingly, he clearly did not share Yeo’s concern with emphasising that the decision was to be made by Burma). Thus, the behaviour of extra-regional actors has not had a significant impact on the evolution of ASEAN’s principles and practices, except to the extent that it has encouraged member states’ resolve to enhance its regional autonomy and internal capacity to address regional problems. As such, a realist explanation of ASEAN member state behaviour lacks credibility.

China’s influence is obviously a different matter, but similarly does not give weight to a realist analysis. The Sino-Burmese relationship continues to be significant; the ICG has expressed concern that a ‘special affinity’ between the governments ‘motivates Chinese moves to prop up the military junta and might produce even more direct support in case of a direct challenge to SPDC’s authority’. However, irrespective of the validity of this claim, the realist explanation for ASEAN member state behaviour remains insufficient given that their pressure on Burma risks driving it closer to China. Indeed, the Chinese Foreign Minister, Li Zhaoxing, visited Burma immediately after the Thirty-Eighth AMM, apparently seizing an opportunity to discuss ‘matters of mutual interest’. Yeo responded by acknowledging that ASEAN must now ‘work especially hard to maintain

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79 Quoted in Ivy Susanti, ‘RI Regret’s Rice’s Decision to Skip Security Forum’, The Jakarta Post, 16 July 2005
81 Quoted in ‘China Woos Myanmar as ASEAN Seeks Way to Deal with its Leaders’, The International Herald Tribune, 29 July 2005, p. 5
good relations with Myanmar', and announcing that he too planned a ‘friendly visit’. This was, however, a predictable outcome of Burma’s decline of the chair. Strategic or material factors continue to be influential in member state behaviour, but alone do not facilitate a cogent analysis; we must therefore recognise the significance of ideational factors.

The Evolution of Collective Identity and Normative Principles

The behaviour of ASEAN member states with respect to Burma can thus be better understood with reference to an emerging collective identity, centred on an evolving rather than static set of norms. ASEAN foreign ministers and parliamentarians are concerned about the impact of Burma’s domestic affairs on ASEAN’s image and reputation. Further, they prefer to manage the issues relating to its membership at the regional level. The founding member states share a desire to protect ASEAN’s interests, and as such demonstrate a strengthening ‘we-feeling’. They exhibit a certain convergence of interests which suggests that the act of interaction with respect to management of contentious issues is both a function and a source of mutual identification. Indeed, this conceptualisation of intra-regional relationships as dynamic, rather than static, assists our understanding of behaviour that is somewhat incompatible with traditional principles and the ASEAN Way.

The public statements made pressuring Burma to decline effectively constitute ‘public criticism’, and thus a violation of the non-interference principle as it is understood in

82 Ibid.
contemporary terms. ASEAN foreign ministers apparently wished to give the impression of compliance by reiterating that the decision was up to Burma, and through careful phrasing. Nevertheless, they implied that Burma’s internal affairs were indeed the business of other member states, by virtue of impacting ASEAN as a whole. Further, their cumulative efforts led to Burma’s decline of the chair, irrespective of claims that there was no pressure imposed. Even if it is not explicitly acknowledged, member states increasingly approach issues from the perspective of a regional identity, and their security priorities are conceptualised with respect to mutual interests. ASEAN norms increasingly concern the identity and interests embodied by the Association itself, rather than those of individual states.

To this end, member states are increasingly recognising that the norm of non-interference, and the ASEAN Way more broadly, must evolve. Indeed, Syed Hamid Albar stated immediately before the AMM in Vientiane that it was a pertinent time for ASEAN to reconsider the non-interference principle, because it is ‘limited’. He argued that ‘countries in the region should be concerned about their neighbours if there’s a spillover effect, such as in southern Thailand...We are all connected. It’s important for us to understand the situation’. Such sentiments reflect the strengthened understanding that security threats with consequences for other member states justify a collective approach, characterised by open and frank dialogue.

83 Quoted in ‘Malaysian FM: ASEAN’s non-interference policy has its limits’, The Nation, 25 July 2005. While Thailand resisted the notion that the insurgency in the south be treated as a regional issue, there is undoubtedly increasing pressure to relinquish such defiance. Syed Hamid pointed out that Indonesia set an example by explaining the situation in Aceh to its regional neighbours.
This dialogue is facilitated by the trend of democratisation in the region. Parliamentarians and civil society groups are becoming more involved, as demonstrated by the issue of Burma’s membership in ASEAN. Thus, domestic opinions affect the positions of foreign ministers and heads of state who participate in ASEAN meetings. Regional discourse is thus no longer the sole domain of a small network of elites. In June 2005, ASEAN’s Secretary-General, Ong Keng Yong, acknowledged the role of parliamentarians in expressing their views on Burma. He described it as ‘a reflection of the maturity of the political culture’ in the region, which demonstrates that ‘in public policy making, there is a growing acceptance that not everything has to come from the government’. 84 The Inter-Parliamentary Caucus is thus significant in terms of expressing a gathering sentiment within some ASEAN parliaments that decisive collective action must be taken regarding regional security issues. Indeed, some members of the Caucus are apparently campaigning for it to consider other regional issues, such as the violence in southern Thailand and Aceh. 85 Zaid believes that elected representatives in the region ‘have a collective responsibility to promote democracy’, and this requires burying the principle of non-interference. 86

ASEAN’s evolving collective identity is thus increasingly demonstrating a mutual desire to adhere to democratic norms. Syed Hamid Albar stated in July 2005 that he was sure that Burma ‘would not like to see ASEAN in any way being given a very negative view...as if we are not adhering to the norms of today, in terms of democracy, rules of

84 Quoted in ‘ASEAN Expects Myanmar’s Decision on Leadership Issue Next Month’, Agence France Presse, 17 June 2005
85 Michael Vatikiotis, ‘Rethinking ASEAN principle’
86 Ibid.
law, human rights.' The implication is clear: Burma is not considered by some member states to uphold such principles, and its internal political circumstances would negatively affect ASEAN’s reputation. Syed Hamid Albar recognises that ASEAN norms are changing with the common political outlook of the core states. As the focus shifts from regime security to regional security, at least among the founding states, ASEAN is becoming more concerned with upholding those norms deemed to promote regional stability and enhance the Association’s international standing.

This chapter explored the motivations for expanding ASEAN’s membership, and the challenges that expansion posed to the Association’s normative principles. It argued that the non-interference principle was tested by the difficulties of admitting less developed, semi-authoritarian states, and with managing regional security challenges more broadly. The recent episode of Burma’s potential chairmanship was instrumental in demonstrating the concern of member states with ASEAN’s image and reputation, and their approach to security from a regional perspective. Member states’ increasing willingness to publicly criticise Burma suggested that the norm of non-interference is increasingly regarded as outdated, and no longer appropriate for ASEAN’s contemporary approach to security.

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87 Quoted in ‘ASEAN’s image will be sullied by Myanmar chair, Malaysia says’, Japan Economic Newswire, 20 July 2005
Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated that the original norms and principles upon which a regional organisation is founded should not be regarded as static, and as consistently guiding state behaviour over time. Security challenges change as an organisation's membership expands and the external environment alters. Expectations that states will consistently adhere to the normative context as originally conceived are unrealistic, and moreover, obscure attention to promising developments in terms of security cooperation.

ASEAN member states' management of the Burma issue demonstrates that collective identity evolves as organisational norms and principles are challenged. Collective identity is thus not necessarily contingent upon norm compliance. Further, ASEAN's strengthening collective identity supports the notion that it is engaged in a community-building process. Through repeated acts of cooperation, made more likely by contentious issues that attract extra-regional scrutiny, member states develop expectations of future cooperation that propel a sense of community. Contrary to the expectations of some scholars, challenges to ASEAN norms can be conducive to the community-building process. This is because the resulting evolution in the normative context of intra-ASEAN relations promotes an Association that is more likely to address regional security issues from a collective position.

The finding that ASEAN is engaged in a community-building process provides support for the argument, confidently made in the early 1990s, that it is a nascent security
community. There are clearly still limits to the degree to which ASEAN can progress toward a mature security community. The persistence of internal security threats in the core ASEAN states hinder the fulfilment of the criterion of commonly perceived threats. Further, member states do not appear substantially more likely to implement a collective security arrangement. There is also a question as to whether a security community can be effectively pursued in the absence of strong leaders. Nevertheless, ASEAN’s renewed self-confidence following the difficulties of the late 1990s, and its strengthening collective identity, make the pursuit of a security community once again credible. This directly contradicts the position of realist critics.

ASEAN’s progress in future years will be interesting to observe and analyse. In particular, the resolution of the current impasse regarding Burma will have implications for the Association’s cohesion, resilience and relations with extra-regional actors. If regime change eventually occurs and democratic reforms are implemented, ASEAN is likely to benefit from enhanced security cooperation on the basis of mutual interests. If, on the other hand, the military regime implodes and Burma is plunged into internal chaos, the results will likely pose a transnational security threat. ASEAN will expect (and be expected) to respond, to the extent of the capacity of its institutional mechanisms. In any case, ASEAN’s normative principles will be further propelled to evolve, particularly if the latter scenario eventuates.

More broadly, analysts should explore the impact of future developments in the other new states, Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos. Given the political instability and tenuous
hold on democracy in Cambodia, and the persistence of communist systems in Vietnam and Laos, the progress of these states in political, economic and societal terms will have implications for ASEAN. While ASEAN’s founding states continue to maintain the most influence in the Association, and shape its collective identity, the future progress of ASEAN’s identity formation and community-building project will be affected by their management of these states and ability to close the ‘development gap’.

Notably, the public criticism of Burma emanated from representatives of the founding ASEAN states, rather than Cambodia, Laos or Vietnam.¹ These states did not overtly oppose Burma’s chairmanship, being presumably concerned about the implications of the outcome for their own circumstances. The attention to Burma’s membership means the other new states are likely to be attracting less scrutiny than they otherwise would. Thus, the implications of recent developments are unclear for these states. On one hand, given the evolution of the non-interference principle, it is likely that further pressure will be put on them to implement democratic reforms and integrate into ASEAN more completely (reducing political diversity and the development gap between old and new states). However, the Burma issue remains unresolved, and will flare up sporadically as long as the SPDC remains in power. Notwithstanding this ongoing impasse, the temporary mitigation of the contention surrounding Burma may diminish its relative priority on ASEAN’s agenda, and there is some speculation (which Syed Hamid Albar has denied)

¹ The latter three states maintained that Burma should be allowed to take up the chair, presumably fearing a precedent for interference in their own affairs: Luz Baguioro, ‘ASEAN Chair: Your Move, Myanmar’, The Straits Times, 12 April 2005
that ASEAN struck a deal with Burma and agreed to reduce the pressure to reform in return for its relinquishment of the chairmanship.²

The movement towards a larger East Asian forum is also pertinent for future research. Notably, the East Asia Summit (EAS) is due to have its inaugural meeting in December 2005 in Kuala Lumpur. It includes the ‘ASEAN + 3’ group (ASEAN member states plus China, Japan and South Korea), as well as India, Australia and New Zealand.³

According to Syed Hamid Albar, the EAS will commence by discussing ‘matters of mutual interest’ and then ‘expand to other areas such as security’.⁴ Given such vagueness, there is some question as to the significance of the EAS. While some observers question whether it will distract from the ASEAN + 3 dialogue, Thai Foreign Ministry spokesman Sihasak Phuangketkeow has affirmed that unlike ASEAN + 3, the EAS will remain informal.⁵ While the agenda has yet to be confirmed, ASEAN has proposed that EAS meetings are held every three years, and that the chair always be an ASEAN member. Japan has objected to the latter suggestion, and has also called on ASEAN + 3 ministers to consider US participation.⁶ ASEAN clearly intends to be the driving force behind the EAS, in presumably a reinvigorated effort to expand its influence in the wider Asia-Pacific region. However, China, Japan and South Korea may

² Syed Hamid Albar refuted these allegations in late July 2005, complaining that ‘now that Myanmar has decided to withdraw and we welcome the decision as good for ASEAN, they say we are giving carte blanche to Myanmar to do anything’: Quoted in ‘Malaysia Denies ASEAN Giving ‘Carte Blanche’ to Burma’, The Star, 28 July 2005

³ The Joint Communique of the Thirty-Eighth AMM in July 2005 affirms the participation of these states, and looks forward to the inaugural meeting of the EAS in December 2005: Point 56 of Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), Joint Communique of the 38th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, Vientiane, Laos, 26 July 2006, http://www.aseansec.org/17592.htm, Date Accessed: 28 July 2005

⁴ Quoted in John Kerin, ‘East Asia Summit’s Just for Starters’, The Australian, 27 July 2005

⁵ ‘ASEAN Ministers Prepare for Broad East Asia Summit’, Thai Press Reports, 29 July 2005

intend to be assertive. Future analysis should consider the implications of these developments for ASEAN’s community-building project.

A pertinent future research agenda will thus be fuelled by various developments in the regional security environment. The recognition that ideational factors are significant in understanding state behaviour broadens the scope of analysis and facilitates a more nuanced perspective. As events in Southeast Asia unfold, the evolution of ASEAN norms will continue to reflect states’ efforts to cooperate in an environment of contention.


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