

# Security, Community, and Democracy in Southeast Asia: Analyzing ASEAN

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## Abstract

Is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) a pluralistic security community (PSC)? Does community cause security in Southeast Asia? In a PSC, member states are sovereign. So are the members of ASEAN. Before concluding that the ASEAN region is a PSC, however, one should distinguish between two versions: a thin or descriptive PSC, whose members share both a sense of community and the expectation of security, and a thick or explanatory version in which community has actually been shown to cause security. Depending on how a sense of community is defined, one may say that at certain times in its history, ASEAN probably has been a thin PSC. More recently, however, the cooperative identity of regional elites may have frayed, as democratization, especially in Indonesia, has incorporated non-elites into public life. Meanwhile the proposition that the assurance of security in Southeast Asia has resulted from this sense of community, that ASEAN is a thick PSC, remains to be proven.

## What is ASEAN?

In 2007 it will be forty years old. Yet analysts of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations still disagree about what it is. Have its ten sovereign member countries – Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar (Burma), the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam – merely joined an organization? Or do they also belong to a regional community that ASEAN has brought into being? Is inter-state security within Southeast Asia attributable to this community? If so, is that because its members share a cooperative identity that includes a norm against any one of them coercing or interfering with another? Or are there other and better explanations as to why, since 1967 when ASEAN was formed, a war has never broken out between its constituent states? In summary, to what, if any, extent is ASEAN a ‘security community’ in which a sense of community actually causes an assurance of security?

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An analyst who would entertain these questions may do so in any of five major ways: constructivist, liberalist, rationalist, culturalist, or realist (Emmerson, 2005). Innovative combinations are also possible: constructive or soft realism (Peou, 1999, 2002: 136), for instance, or realist institutionalism (Khoo, 2004). But the controversy over ASEAN's nature and what causes regional security has implicated mainly the opposite ends of this spectrum: constructivism on the one hand, realism on the other. It is in that context that I begin by invoking two very different understandings of what ASEAN is.

### **Arguing ASEAN: two views**

Philippine political scientist Estrella Solidum was a graduate student when ASEAN began. She saw it 'as the wave of the future in Southeast Asia' (Solidum, 2003: vi). She was not disappointed. She watched it grow into a 'community' based on cooperation (p. vii). She came to admire the Association's 'beliefs, practices, structures, responses, and values' – in a phrase, 'the ASEAN Way' – as the veritable 'prototype of an ASEAN culture' (p. 93).

Looking back on the Association in 2003, Solidum saw nothing but success:

With the highest commitment to its goals of peace, freedom, stability, prosperity, rule of law, and security, unwavering observance of all the principles which it had adopted from its establishment, and constantly mindful of the need for newer and appropriate strategies and building blocks, to achieve the aspirations of the people, ASEAN has remained vibrant and relevant as the 21st century has begun. ASEAN has been able to respond and adapt to the changing conditions at the regional and international levels in coherent ways. ASEAN has engaged more friends and partners in all its cooperative endeavours, and within itself, the members have remained cohesive. The ideal of ASEAN toward which it is moving in the 21st century is summed up in its ASEAN Vision 2020 which is 'a concert of Southeast Asian nations, outward-looking, living in peace, stability, and prosperity, bonded together in partnership in development, and in a community of caring societies. [p. 222]

In Solidum's eyes, security in Southeast Asia was indelibly an ASEAN product. Security was 'the enjoyment of the ASEAN values of peace, economic, social and cultural development, cooperation, political stability, and regional stability and progress' (p. 202). To illustrate this definition, she cited:

- (a) ASEAN entities and gatherings, including the ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Senior Officials Meetings, the ASEAN Secretariat, and the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies whose 'Track Two' diplomacy brought officials in their personal capacity together with non-governmental experts to discuss regional problems;

- (b) ASEAN documents, such as the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (1976) and the Hanoi Plan of Action (1998); and
- (c) ASEAN concepts such as ‘the ASEAN Way’ whose norms and rules were ‘mutual-restraint and low-key behavior’ and the ‘non-use of force, non-interference in each other’s domestic affairs, and mutual respect’. (pp. 203–204)

From Solidum’s account, the inference is clear: ASEAN is a security community in the full causal sense. ASEAN’s members enjoy regional security because of the normative community that ASEAN has created.

David Martin Jones, a professor of government in Australia formerly resident in Singapore, expressed a different view:

ASEAN is neither a security nor an economic community, either in being or in prospect. It is, in fact, an imitation community [comparable to a fake state whose insecure and illegitimate leaders, ensconced through bogus elections or military coups, wield unrestrained power over those whom they rule]. Such insecurity translated to a regional level produces a rhetorical and institutional shell. The shell delivers declarations, holds ministerial meetings, and even supports a secretariat, but beyond the flatulent musings of aging autocrats or postmodern constructivists pontificating in Track Two fora nothing of substance eventuates. However, because Southeast Asia’s political elites along with their academic fellow travelers have invested so heavily in ASEAN’s ‘alternative [non-realist] security’ discourse, it is regarded as impolite to point out [the Association’s] essentially ersatz quality. (Jones and Smith, 2001: 285)

In the same year that Solidum’s encomium to ASEAN appeared, Jones wrote that the Association ‘increasingly resembles other failed postcolonial Cold War organizations like the Non Aligned Movement, the Organization of African Unity and the Arab League’ (Jones, 2003: 43). Far from accepting her portrait of a vibrant, relevant, adaptable, coherent, cohesive – in a word, successful – community, for Jones it was time ‘to cope with the fallout from the slow motion disintegration of ASEAN’ (p. 44), as if that degeneration were already well underway. Southeast Asia itself, as a region, had been and remained a mirage – ‘a “region” that never was’ (Jones and Smith, 2002: 108–109).

Solidum did not describe Southeast Asia as a region that always was. But for her (2003: 1) ‘the concept of “Southeast Asia” begins with a patchwork of continuous settlements where inhabitants lived from about 2000 BC’. She cited the practice of reckoning descent equally through males and females as a general and long-standing feature of the area (p. 2). She defined ‘region’ in generously constructivist terms as ‘an analytic concept created by the selection of features relevant to the interest of the student or to the problem at hand’ (p. 11). From her own selection of bilateral kinship

as a distinguishing feature of ancient Southeast Asia, one could, therefore, infer the discernible existence of a 'region' millennia before modern states arose.

It would be hard to imagine two more opposite assessments. ASEAN's skeptics may find Solidum's enthusiasm naïve. The Association's fans may wince at Jones' remarks. But the polarity highlights vital issues. So does the disagreement between Acharya (2001) and Khoo (2004). In this respect, Solidum and Jones, like Acharya and Khoo, have done the field of ASEAN studies a favor.

Methodological clarity can help resolve this controversy. The tasks of *describing* what ASEAN is and *explaining* what it has (and has not) accomplished are necessarily related. But that is all the more reason to keep them analytically distinct. Is the Association a 'security community'? Before the question can be addressed, it should be unpacked. Needed is a 'thin' description of ASEAN usable by disagreeing scholars because it does not privilege any one judgment as to what the organization has (not) done. On that neutral basis, one could select and specify variables; cast them in operational form; rephrase a preferred explanation of ASEAN's putative achievement as a falsifiable causal proposition; carefully subject that proposition to empirical evidence; compare it with alternative hypotheses similarly subjected to evidence; and thus reach an assessment that has not been embedded in, and thus unfairly favored by, the assumptions from which it results. It is in this context that I will distinguish and tentatively review 'thin' (descriptive) and 'thick' (causal) appreciation of ASEAN as a security community.

My suggestion is not a counsel of scientism, positivism, or perfection. The study of knowledge and knowing – epistemology – is at least as controversial as the study of ASEAN. There is no catechism from Methodology 101 whose incantation will settle all scholarly disputes. Such is the nature of *social science*. ASEAN has changed and is changing. Analytically, therefore, it is a moving target. And, because we can never be absolutely or permanently sure of our non-trivial generalizations about it, dissensus is not just helpful; it is essential. Polemics are useful; they make us think big. Pedantics are too; they make us think small. But there is also room for thinking in the middle range, where creativity and consistency mix, for better or for worse. Managing that mix for the better is my concern here.

### **An analytic ladder**

In the path-breaking book by Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia* (2001), the notion of a security community (or SC) has four meaningful layers. It is a *particular description*. The description implies a *propositional concept*. The concept implies an *analytic framework*. And the framework, in turn, connotes a *general theory* of international relations. In these respects, for Acharya, the idea of an SC does quadruple duty.

There is nothing per se wrong with such richness. In his book Acharya argued the utility of the idea of a security community for understanding and evaluating the Association. He wished to explore the fit between a description–concept–framework–theory of security communities and the Southeast Asian case. In the voluminous but

traditionally atheoretical field of ASEAN studies, Acharya's agenda was refreshingly ambitious. Even so, Acharya did not encompass all the semantic levels implied by the notion of an SC. There is another and even more ambitious way of entertaining the notion of a 'security community', namely, as a *normative project*. Acharya was wise not to examine this fifth and loftiest sense of the term; the first four kept him busy enough. But, if SCs really are uniquely good at making and keeping international peace, it follows that there ought to be more of them – and that policy priority should therefore be given to their sustenance and replication around the world.

In the 1990s the admiral who ran the US Pacific Command, Dennis Blair, argued that building 'security communities' should be a part of American policy. His use of the term sent his advisers scrambling to the library to read Karl Deutsch. Among scholarly advocates of SCs, Charles Tilly found evidence of thriving and internally irenic SCs even in pre-modern times. 'Just as deliberate human action brought most earlier international communities into operation', Tilly (1998: 411) could 'imagine designing international security communities that incorporate age-old assurances of trust, reciprocity, and mutual identity' today. The latest scholarly book on SCs known to me agrees, in effect, that 'Deutsch's vision should be brought squarely back into the mainstream of practical and normative thinking about world politics' (Bellamy, 2004: 188).

Now consider the very different questions for ASEAN that the above five levels of meaning imply:

- 1 (a particular description): Does ASEAN fit some basic – minimally presumptive or 'thin' – definition of a security community?
- 2 (a propositional concept): If ASEAN is a security community by definition, is it also an SC in an explanatory sense – the 'thicker' sense in which ASEAN rather than some other factor (or factors) has caused regional security to exist?
- 3 (an analytic framework): If ASEAN is a security community by definition and explanation, does it also and even more 'thickly' authenticate the empirical and logical autonomy of an SC as one among other distinctive kinds of security arrangements?
- 4 (a general theory): If ASEAN is a security community in all of the above three meanings, does it also validate, at least for Southeast Asia, a constructivist approach to international security, if not international relations more broadly, that is superior to (or 'thicker' than) the neo-realist and neo-liberal alternatives?
- 5 (a normative project): If the general theory is valid, for ASEAN and a range of other security communities, does it follow (at this fifth level of 'thickness') that creating and sustaining security communities should be a policy goal of governments, international organizations, social movements, and other relevant bodies throughout the world, cooperating regionally to ensure global peace?

Thickness in this context is a synonym for presumption. Generally speaking, the higher the level, the more demanding is the task that it implies. Although I will discuss

here only the bottom two rungs of this analytic ladder – descriptive definition and propositional explanation – I raise it ultimately to wonder how high it can be climbed, that is, how many of its questions can be successively answered yes. I say successively because to reach a higher rung one must have attained the lower ones.

Solidum's enthusiasm for ASEAN notwithstanding, I will have difficulty confirming, on the second rung, that a sense of community really does cause the assurance of security in Southeast Asia. Yet I will not join Jones in refusing to climb this particular ladder at all, that is, in contending that ASEAN is not, 'either in being or in prospect', an SC. Finally, beyond the challenge of ascent, I want to argue against confusing or combining these different levels and their corresponding tasks – against, in effect, collapsing the ladder.

Other associations, other ladders: one for the European Union (EU), one for the Organization of American States, the African Union, the Arab League, and so on. Failure to ascertain, on the first rung, that ASEAN is descriptively or causally a security community need not doom the idea, if the climbers of other regionalist ladders are more successful. In that event, knowing just how powerfully irenic a SC can be, ASEAN might be expected to try all the harder to become one. Conversely, if no other climber can confirm, for his or her case, the causation of security by community, ASEAN's leaders, members, and analysts may wish to think twice before spending resources and energy contriving to implement or discover so improbable a result.

What, then, *is* a security community? What definition should govern the analyst's ability to stand on the very first rung?

### **Security communities: thin and thick**

In his book, Acharya (2001: 16) summarized the basic notion of a security community developed four decades earlier by Deutsch:

A security community, as Deutsch [1961: 98] defined it, 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, sufficiently strong and widespread *to assure peaceful change* among members of a group with 'reasonable' certainty over a 'long period of time'. Such communities could either be 'amalgamated' through the formal political merger of the participating units, or remain 'pluralistic', in which case the members retain their independence and sovereignty. [Italics added]

Certainly ASEAN has never been an amalgamated security community and shows no signs of becoming one. But it could be a pluralistic SC – or, for convenience, a PSC. Hence the relevance of this summation of Deutsch's terminology by Adler and Barnett (1998a: 3): 'Deutsch observed a pluralistic security community whenever states become integrated to the point that they have *a sense of community*, which, in turn, *creates the assurance* that they will settle their differences short of war' (italics, again, are mine).

This is not a 'thin description' (Geertz, 1973). A Deutschian SC necessarily entails both presence and causation – (a) a sense of community (b) creates (c) the assurance of peaceful change. In contrast to this maximal or 'thick' SC, a minimal or 'thin' SC is an arrangement of states that displays both sensed community and assured security, but where the causal responsibility of the former for the latter is not yet known, pending future research, or already known, in the light of past research, not to exist. In such a thin SC, (a) and (c) have been confirmed, but (b) has not.

In a given region and corresponding regional organization, there may be (1) neither an assurance of security nor a prior sense of community; or (2) an assurance of security but no prior sense of community; or (3) no assurance of security despite a prior sense of community. In all of these circumstances, obviously, solidarity cannot possibly have fostered peace. Under these three conditions there would be no point in researching the second-rung hypothesis that community actually causes security. The analyst needs first to see if it is possible, with reference to ASEAN or another empirical case, to stand on the lowest and least demanding rung of the ladder. And the one discovery that would allow the analyst to stand on that first level is: (4) the presence of both an assurance of security and a prior sense of community. Only that fourth condition, empirically confirmed, would enable the climber to attempt the second rung, that is, to examine whether security was or was not *a consequence* of community.

Based on this reasoning, I offer these definitions: A pluralistic security community (or PSC) 'thinly' defined is simply *a group of sovereign states that share both an expectation of intramural security and a sense of intramural community*. Security is *the presence of a durable peace among these states, reflecting a lasting prior absence of war among them*. Community is *the presence of a cooperative identity among these states, including a commitment to abstain from using force against each other*. By logical extension, an amalgamated security community – not my concern here – is a group of *no-longer sovereign* states that share these same two conditions of security and community. By further extension, in security communities generally these same features would be shared by a group of *more or less sovereign* states. The more pluralistic the SC, the more sovereign its members. By the same token, the more amalgamated the arrangement, the less sovereign its components.

A thin PSC thus conveniently implicates only the first and lowest rung on the analytic ladder. The above definition purposely ignores the question of whether a community does or does not cause security. Defining a PSC thinly allows a researcher to widen and level the analytic playing field. Once a grouping of states can be described as a thin PSC by this thin definition, a variety of explanatory propositions can then be entertained, without prejudice, at the second, propositional level. And none of these propositions will have been definitionally privileged at the first level, including the hypothesis favored by constructivists, namely, that the expectation of security is caused by a sense of community. Confirming that causation makes a thin PSC thick.

A thin PSC is thus usefully neutral. It allows the constructivist to entertain, on the second rung of the ladder, distinctly anti-constructivist ideas – that the expectation of

security is caused by power balancing, physical deterrence, or material self-interest, for example. By the same token, a realist must consider the anti-realist idea that security could in fact be a product of community. And neither scholar can define the object of study in a way that entails seeing only what one hopes to find.

With a thin SC in mind one can even, and plausibly, reverse the arrow of causation – that a sense of community not only fosters the expectation of security but results from it as well. Note, in contrast, the straight-line, one-way nature of the Deutschian understanding of a PSC as summarized by Acharya, Adler, and Barnett: that ‘integration’ is the cause of the ‘community’ that in turn causes ‘security’. Using such a richly presumptive definition, an analyst who encounters an instance of regionalism in which this sequence of conditions is partly or fully reversed, or in which they influence one another, must either ignore the discovery and keep on looking for the supposedly ‘real’ thing, or start over again on the first rung by redefining the phenomenon in less-demanding – that is, thinner – terms.

### **From definition to application**

A ‘security community’ necessarily juxtaposes security *and* community. That is the point of using the term. In their influential essay, Adler and Barnett (1998: 30) and, quoting them, Acharya (2001: 16) defined a pluralistic security as ‘a transnational region comprised of sovereign states whose people maintain dependable expectations of peaceful change’. Does this wording facilitate research on the second rung?

The definition is usefully non-causal and the expectation of security is there, but a sense of community is not. The wording is incomplete – *too* thin, if you will. Fortunately, however, Adler and Barnett later (1998: 31–32) acknowledged the importance of community feeling, which they said exists among members who share ‘identities, values, and meanings’, have ‘many-sided and direct relations’ with one another, and exhibit ‘reciprocity’, meaning ‘a sense of obligation and responsibility’ felt by the group’s members, presumably toward each other and their association – something close to a sense of community.

If a PSC consists of ‘states whose people maintain dependable expectations of peaceful change’, what is ‘peaceful change’? Adler and Barnett (1998: 16) defined that term awkwardly (p. 34) as ‘neither the expectation of nor the preparation for organized violence as a means to settle interstate disputes’. By this presumably they meant that, even if peace is expected, violence must not be prepared. Taken literally, this could imply pacifist naïveté: refusing even to anticipate or contingently plan for the chance of an attack by one or more states, including states outside the PSC, notwithstanding an agreed likelihood of peace. A less demanding definition, such as mine, would allow member states to plan their self-defense and would require them to expect only *intramural* peace – peace among themselves. Whether assured security inside a PSC correlates with an also durable peace between its members and outsider states would and should be an analytically separate question.



ASEAN's states all have some means and plans for national defense. Requiring no 'preparation for organized violence' would disqualify the ASEAN region from being considered a PSC. In Southeast Asia and beyond, that requisite would turn the PSC from a category with examples into a club so exclusive almost no one could belong. As for the presence of a long-standing and dependable assurance of regional security from extra-regional attack, if that meant an absence of actual war, would ASEAN qualify? That would depend on how an analyst dealt with possible exceptions, such as ASEAN's fear of Vietnam in the light of the latter's invasion and occupation of Cambodia in 1978 – neither country belonged to the Association at the time – and the periodically revived prospect of Chinese belligerence on behalf of its claims to the entire South China Sea, including the Paracel and Spratly islands. (An intra-ASEAN case of disputed sea space will be treated later in this essay.) Notable, too, in this context are ASEAN's efforts to incorporate outsiders into its security efforts, notably the ASEAN Regional Forum, and to persuade them to adhere to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (ASEAN, 1976) and its originally intramural norms against interference and the use of force.

Noteworthy, too, is Adler's and Barnett's requirement that 'dependable expectations of peaceful change' must be harbored broadly by the 'people' of the relevant states. Half a billion people live in the ASEAN region. Their views are not easily consulted in the Association's more authoritarian states, where political survey research is suspect. And how large a majority expecting peaceful change, and in how many member countries, would it take to certify ASEAN's region as a PSC by this measure? Definitions are more easily coined than applied. The literature on SCs is definition-rich and application-poor. Operationalization is now the highest priority task for future researchers on security communities.

In my analysis it is not the people but the state that does or does not have expectations of regional security and a sense of regional community. The state is usefully ambiguous, since it includes both an elite and a mass. When ASEAN began, democracy in Southeast Asia was less widespread than it is today. The Association was created, maintained, and still is maintained by member-state elites. Its 'dues', for example, are still paid annually by member states – US\$767,800 apiece in 2004, regardless of national wealth or size.

ASEAN is no longer purely a leaders' club; if and as Southeast Asia's polities become more democratic, researchers will wish to supplement evidence of elite perceptions of security and community with comparable data on security perceptions and community feeling among non-state elites and even non-elites. The rationale would be that, in a democracy, mass views matter more, and actual regional security is less the prerogative of a transnational elite, however cozy and cooperative its identity and peaceful its norms may be. In an ASEAN context, however, using the people as one's unit of analysis is still misplaced advice. Even in the ostensibly more democratic parts of the region, it is still state elites, in the end, who avoid war or make it. Relative to public opinion, their assurances of security and senses of community count for more.

### **A cooperative community?**

The factual, historical absence of war among ASEAN member states makes retrospectively rational the expectation of intra-Associational peace. Nor is it unreasonable to suggest, pending research, that relevant state elites still anticipate prolongation of that peace. But do they feel a 'sense of community' expressed in a 'cooperative identity'? These constructs are more elusive, and, therefore, deserve more attention in my limited space here.

I have emphasized that the members of ASEAN are states. They are represented by high officials acting in their official capacities, on Track I, or in their unofficial capacities, on Track II. Since 1967 these officials have worn ruts in ASEAN's conference circuit. In the latest documented period of 12 months from 1 June 2003 through 31 May 2004, for example, ASEAN organized 541 meetings that were governmental in nature (ASEAN, n.d.). And that total could be greatly enlarged by adding to it the contemporaneous gatherings that involved the Association or its name on Tracks II and III.

Often these conference-goers have been the same officials, traveling to the same regional destinations, year after year. Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew, Indonesia's Suharto, and Malaysia's Mahathir Mohamad are but extreme historical instances of the continuity of the political and, perhaps even more so, the bureaucratic elites of Southeast Asia. It would be surprising if, in the course of all this interaction, these people had not developed a cooperatively transnational identity of some sort. Cooperation, with limits, can become a habit, and identity can flow from that.

But how can the analyst be sure? Three ways of researching such slippery notions come to mind. First, of course, one could pursue them through interviews with relevant sets of actors, just as one would question these same informants about their regional security expectations. The nature and size of any given set of interviewees will depend on availability, among other considerations. Compared with sitting officials, for example, retired ones may be more accessible and candid about the regional identifications and security expectations they held while in office, notwithstanding the fallibility of memory and the temptation to read the present into the past.

Second, more easily than interviewing, one can scan official documents. The contents of the archives in the ASEAN secretariat, I have been told, are bland, in keeping with a tradition of keeping controversies, to the extent possible, off the record. Yet there is always value in what an organization authentically says about itself. A scan of ASEAN's most quoted and copied pronouncements, for example, will quickly reveal that the word 'community' appears in neither of the two most important texts adopted by the Association's leaders in its first ten years (ASEAN, 1967, 1971). Only in the third key statement, issued five years later, did the leaders of ASEAN describe Southeast Asia as a 'community of nations' (ASEAN, 1976).

This plausibly suggests that peace preceded community in the region. And that points to a possibility already alluded to: that it was security, achieved without community and thus for arguably realist reasons, that incubated community, not

the other way around. And if, historically, community was a product not an origin of security, to what (if any) extent has a sense of community among ASEAN's elites since grown and become efficacious enough to reverse that earlier causal arrow? Could the long confirmation of expectations of security inside ASEAN have made these views habitual independently, without reference to the possible existence or absence of a sense of regional community?

Third, one can study historical events. An examination of instances of back-from-the-brinkmanship might prove especially insightful. How was major inter-state violence, when it looked incipient, averted? What was said and done to forestall escalation? What subjective rationales were offered on behalf of peace? How effective were they? And to what (if any) extent did they invoke or imply a sense of community, including an ASEAN-normative commitment to avoid intramural force?

I happened to be in Jakarta in March 2005 when animosity flared between Indonesia and Malaysia over which state had sovereignty over East Ambalat, a block of maritime space in the Sulawesi Sea. At one point, in front of the Malaysian embassy, a crowd gathered and shouted 'Crush Malaysia!' – the catch phrase of the Indonesian confrontation with Malaysia whose recurrence ASEAN was in part formed to prevent. Anger also briefly flooded the media. But the most senior official elites, in their statements, basically ruled out state violence, and sometimes they mentioned ASEAN. Malaysia's foreign minister, for instance, after noting that 'both sides agree that the situation can be cooled down and wish to use an entirely diplomatic [i.e., non-violent] approach', added this: 'Since long ago a spirited resolve to solve [such problems] cooperatively has been apparent among ASEAN's members' (Presiden, 2005).

Is that evidence of a cooperative identity? Probably, if rather modestly, yes. A sense of community? Quite possibly, if only by implication. The Malaysian official's remarks contrasted, however, with the views of some people outside government. An Indonesian policy scholar, Rizal Sukma (2005), noted the lack of any 'significant efforts from ASEAN to help diffuse the tension' and concluded that 'the silence of ASEAN' had 'once again demonstrated the growing irrelevance of the association'. In the view of another Indonesian (Sukardi, 2005), the acrimonious atmosphere created by the dispute made it look 'as if ASEAN had ceased to exist'. The quarrel, he wrote, was 'tragic, absurd', even 'idiotic, if seen alongside ASEAN's original aspirations'. The vaunted 'ASEAN spirit' was only 'a formality', without 'deep roots'. Far from acknowledging ASEAN solidarity, he labeled it 'a thing of the past'. Yet he had enough confidence left in the Association to urge it to help end the crisis by sponsoring a joint Indonesian–Malaysian venture to exploit East Ambalat's marine-resource potential.

Neither of these Indonesian observers said he expected war. War did not occur. The two governments held talks. The tension subsided. But how many such bilateral responses to other flare-ups will it take to make the 'growing irrelevance' of multilateral ASEAN seem complete? It is hard to imagine the organization going out of existence. But one can readily picture it losing credibility in the eyes of Southeast Asians who see it as a talk shop and, when a crisis damages inter-member relations, want a repair

shop instead. If this happens, and if the region's politics become more democratic, public criticism may increase, and, to the extent that it does, the sense of a cooperative community felt by ASEAN's leaders could become scarcer.

In any case, whether that cooperative identity is what, or even mainly what, restrains these elites from going to war with each other – that question remains. The constructivist answer to this causal query inserts a logical and empirical link between identity and security: that embedded in the cooperative identity of ASEAN states, as embodied in their elites, is a *norm* – a commitment – against intramural force. As constructivism would have it, this norm is so strongly and habitually upheld by state elites, and so integral to their sense of belonging to a wider ASEAN region worth protecting and preserving, that a durable peace has become their dependable expectation.

One such ASEAN norm upholds the 'renunciation of the threat or use of force', another the 'settlement of differences or disputes by peaceful means' (ASEAN, 1976). Also relevant to intramural security and community, and to whether its region is a PSC, is ASEAN's respect for the sovereignty of its individual member states, and their associated support for the principle of 'non-interference in the internal affairs of one another' [ASEAN, 1976]. To that particular norm I now turn.

### **A date with a Junta**

In ASEAN discourse no dogma is more controversial, beyond or within Southeast Asia, than the injunction to avoid interfering in a fellow member's domestic affairs. Such non-intervention both reflects and reinforces member-state sovereignty. That is why Jones and Smith (2002: 108) argue that this principle, far from furthering regionalism,

negates any expression of regional identity. ASEAN's irresolvable paradox is that while it is intended to establish the notion of Southeast Asia, it calls on its members to recognize that there is no such entity. This implacable commitment to noninterference constitutes ASEAN's core weakness. It is simply a *non sequitur* to build a community among neighboring states on the basis of official indifference to those neighbors.

Well, no. To my knowledge no analyst – certainly not Acharya – has been so blind as to claim that Southeast Asia in Deutschian terms is an amalgamated SC, namely, one whose constituent states have been merged into a single superstate. Far from negating 'any expression of regional identity', the norm of non-interference is entirely compatible with – even, conceivably, in constructivist phrasing, constitutive of – a pluralistic SC, whose members retain their sovereignties intact. The paradox is that analysts as knowledgeable as Jones and Smith should have chosen to judge ASEAN by a standard that it never meant to meet – indeed that it intended *not* to meet.

Nor is it fair to equate non-interference in a member state's affairs with indifference toward that state. Indifference toward the victims of official abuses perpetrated inside that state – wrongdoing that might have been prevented or moderated by

interference – yes. But not toward the abusing government. Toward it, the norm of non-intervention reflects solicitude, which is the opposite of indifference.

The real challenge to ASEAN's identity, including its elites' sense of an ASEAN-based community, lies not in the chance that amalgamation could jeopardize non-interference, or vice versa, for amalgamation is not remotely in prospect. The challenge is, rather, democratization.

Among the Association's more or less authoritarian governments, none has earned more international opprobrium for suppressing democracy and violating human rights than have the generals in Yangon, Myanmar (or Rangoon, Burma). The chair of ASEAN's standing committee rotates alphabetically every year from one member state to the next. The incoming chair also hosts the Association's annual summit and ministerial conference, including a post-ministerial meeting with ASEAN's 'dialogue partners', the United States and the European Union (EU) among them.

If these traditions are kept, Myanmar will, for the first time ever, assume the chair in July 2006, host the 12th summit in Myanmar toward the end of that year, and do the same for the ministerial meeting to follow in July 2007, before relinquishing the chair to the Philippines. In these respects, for 12 months, one of the world's more odious regimes will, in effect, represent ASEAN, to Southeast Asia and the world. As of April 2005, one could readily imagine Washington and Brussels boycotting ASEAN meetings convened in Myanmar, including meetings of the security-focused ASEAN Regional Forum, to which the US and the EU belong.

As of mid-April 2005, Myanmar was still scheduled to assume regional leadership in 2006. An ASEAN foreign ministers' retreat, convened at a resort on the Philippine island of Cebu that same April, could only agree to disagree about what, if anything, the group should do. Among member states, opinions on the matter differed in basis, content, and intensity. From the evidence of my interviews in the region in March 2005, however, the affair did appear to have split the Association down the middle. With varying degrees of firmness and concern, Cambodian, Laotian, Vietnamese, and also to an extent Thai officials defended Myanmar's right to the chair, while their counterparts in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore wanted the junta in Yangon to show some sign of reform, as in freeing the renowned leader of the country's repressed opposition, Aung San Suu Kyi. If only roughly on average and with exceptions, this split pitted the less democratic and less developed continental member states against their more democratic and more developed maritime counterparts – and clearly strained any overarching sense of a single ASEAN community with a cooperative identity.

At the retreat in Cebu in April 2005, Singapore's foreign minister was said to have summarized what had happened (Macan-Markar, 2005): 'We reaffirmed that ASEAN cannot interfere in the domestic affairs of Myanmar. Indeed whatever steps Myanmar decides to take, it will be the Myanmars [the Burmese] themselves who bear the consequences, be they good or bad.'

Well, no. Were the junta to refuse to make any moves toward reform and were ASEAN then to allow it to assume the chair, the Association as a whole and all of its

member states, including Singapore, would bear the bad consequence: an image of their 'community' as indifferent to violations of human rights.

In this context, ASEAN's record on human rights warrants brief recapitulation. Already in 1993 the Association's foreign ministers agreed that ASEAN should 'consider the establishment of an appropriate regional mechanism on human rights' (quoted in Muntarbhorn, 2003). But nothing official came of this idea, not even a tentative sketch of what such a mechanism might look like or do. Toward the end of the 1990s, as if to compensate for this dragging of feet on fully official Track I, semi-official and private actors on Tracks II and III started to move.

Indonesia's democratic transition commenced in 1998. Soon thereafter, on the initiative of their member think tank in Jakarta, ASEAN's Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS) began planning the launch of a non-governmental ASEAN People's Assembly (APA). At its inaugural meeting in Indonesia in 2000, APA urged transforming ASEAN into a body 'of the people, by the people, for the people' of Southeast Asia (APA, 2001). Drawn from Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, the phrase connoted an 'American way' rather more than the 'ASEAN way'.

In 2001, still on Track III, the first Workshop for an ASEAN Regional Mechanism (WARM) was convened – again not by coincidence in Indonesia – to rehearse the foreign ministers' willingness, frozen since 1993, to consider implementing that proposal. A series of meetings of APA and WARM ensued in Thailand and the Philippines, countries whose (by ASEAN standards) democratic governments then differed with Myanmar, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Singapore over the sanctity of the no-meddling norm.

Enter, in 2003, Rizal, Sukma. He was the same Indonesian policy scholar who two years later would criticize ASEAN's inaction on East Ambalat. An analyst with the ASEAN-ISIS-affiliated Centre for Strategic and International Studies that had organized the first APA, he presented a paper to a seminar convened in June 2003 by the Indonesian mission to the United Nations in New York. His essay argued, in explicitly Deutschian terms, that ASEAN was not a security community at all. It was merely a security regime. Nor was he interested in either of Deutsch's two models: a pluralistic SC of still-sovereign states or an amalgamated SC of ex-sovereign ones. He argued instead for ASEAN to become a 'comprehensive security community [CSC] more attuned to the region's own needs and characteristics' – a potentially sweeping arrangement that would go beyond military security to give equal importance to the non-military kind, and move beyond war-prevention 'to prevent and resolve conflicts and disorder' as well (Sukma, 2003: [2]).

### **Sukma's way**

Sukma endorsed non-interference and acknowledged member sovereignty as, respectively, ASEAN's 'main feature' and 'highest principle'. But he did not want these norms to preclude the cooperative involvement of member states, 'through an agreed mechanism', in two sorts of domestic concerns: trans-boundary issues with regional impacts, presumably including narcotics trafficking, cross-border pollution,

maritime piracy, and the like; and humanitarian crises such as natural disasters and 'gross violations of human rights' – the focus of the proposal that ASEAN had frozen since 1993. Sukma argued that an 'appropriate mechanism' along these lines could help ASEAN governments become more willing to offer each other 'friendly' advice, and become 'less reactive' when criticized by 'voices of civil society' in other member states. Finally, he wrote, if 'internal conflict' loomed inside a member country, ASEAN should be able to engage in peace-keeping operations there with the consent of its government. In Sukma's vision of a CSC, 'security should encompass every aspect of life' (pp. 2–4).

Sukma's timing was impeccable. In June 2003 Indonesia was poised to occupy ASEAN's chair. While preparing for an unprecedented series of democratic elections at home in 2004, Jakarta was looking for ideas to pursue during its impending year in the regional limelight. Typically each upcoming incumbent hopes to influence the course of the Association during its time at the helm. (This is another reason why Southeast Asian liberals do not welcome a Burmese chair in 2006–2007.) Sukma's paper was a contribution to Jakarta's search for a theme to distinguish its turn at the forefront of ASEAN.

The upshot of that effort was the Declaration of ASEAN Concord II (or Bali Concord II, or BC-II; see ASEAN, 2003). It was adopted by the ten heads of government gathered in Bali in October 2003, just four months after Sukma had delivered his paper in New York.

The Bali Concord II explicitly committed the Association to achieving a 'Security Community' (ASEAN SC) – and an 'Economic' and 'Socio-Cultural Community' to boot. The members of this ASEAN SC would not be amalgamated. They would retain sovereignty. They did not want a joint foreign policy. Instead they subscribed to 'comprehensive security' in a way that fell short of Sukma's proposal without contradicting it.

Sukma had mentioned human rights. The BC-II did not. But, while Sukma had not mentioned democracy, the BC-II did, and for the very first time at such a high level of official scripture. The 'ASEAN Vision 2020' statement issued in unsigned form six years before had upheld elements associated with democracy – government by consent, empowered civil societies, the rule of law – but had not actually used the 'D word' (see ASEAN, 1997). The BC-II, in contrast, envisaged an ASEAN Security Community that would lift cooperation 'to a higher plane', one where the region's countries would 'live at peace with one another and with the world at large in a just, *democratic* and harmonious environment' (ASEAN, 2003: Art. A1; italics added).

This was the sole reference to democracy in the Bali Concord II. But the prospect of using that term even once triggered sharp debate during the drafting process. According to one insider (an 'Asian diplomat' quoted in Strengthening, 2003), the dispute lined up Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand, who argued to include the term, against Brunei, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam, who 'objected to the promotion of democracy as an ASEAN objective'. It was these latter members, reportedly, who managed to discourage the idea that dissenting views might be welcome in ASEAN's

hoped-for 'democratic' environment by requiring it to be 'harmonious' as well – a throwback to the consensus-boosting 'ASEAN Way'.

In any event, democracy quickly became a standard reference in ASEAN rhetoric, as in the Vientiane Action Plan later adopted to implement the proposed ASEAN SC by growing 'a *democratic*, tolerant, participatory and transparent community in Southeast Asia' (ASEAN, 2004; italics added) – harmonious or not.

There may be less here than meets the eye. In the course of the Cold War, the meaning of democracy was enlarged in some communist countries to encompass its opposite. The lack of open political competition and citizen freedoms and rights in his country did not stop Laotian Prime Minister Bounnhang Vorachith from signing the Bali Concord II on behalf of the 'Lao People's Democratic Republic'. Even the Burmese generals say they favor 'democracy'. Still conspicuously absent in ASEAN statements is the 'L word' – liberal, as in liberal democracy. And, as if to deflect overly robust interpretations of the 'D word' now that it has entered ASEAN's vocabulary, the Association has taken pains to re-emphasize member sovereignty. While citing democracy once, for example, the BC-II reaffirmed state sovereignty thrice: in the 'fundamental importance' of non-interference inside ASEAN, in the right of member states to be 'free from outside interference in their internal affairs', and in the corollary obligation of those states to uphold the non-interference principle (ASEAN, 2003).

Did Sukma fail or succeed? For the time being, on balance, he seems to have failed. But beneath the ambiguous language, tension is building, as ASEAN's date with a Burmese chair in 2006 grows nearer. The norm of non-interference does not negate *any* expression of regional identity. But, if ASEAN wants to become a less strictly pluralistic security community, and especially if it wishes to become a liberal democratic one, it will have to clean its house. If member sentiment in favor of such a step increases in one part of the region, while opposition to it hardens in another part, ASEAN's incoherence could further its irrelevance. While it is difficult to imagine the Association winding up, it is not hard to imagine it winding down.

### **ASEAN: thin or thick?**

What, then, should we conclude? Has ASEAN's Southeast Asia been a thin and pluralistic security community in which a durable expectation of security has existed alongside at least a limited sense of community among official elites in sovereign member states? More systematic research could alter this first-rung conclusion and would specify its details, including plausibly major variations in both the expectation and the sense in the course of ASEAN's long life. Pending such research, however, I am comfortable in saying, provisionally, yes: *Historically the ASEAN region has been a thin and pluralistic security community*. This statement probably does not hold for the earliest years when the group was not old enough for its elites to have achieved either a sense of regional community or the assurance of regional security. And the conclusion's validity may have been compromised for a time by the group's expansion to include new members whose elites had not been socialized into the 'ASEAN Way' and had not



necessarily managed, since 1967, to avoid war with neighbors. For at least some of the other periods in ASEAN's history, however, the statement probably holds true.

But, if this qualified conclusion is fair to ASEAN's past, is the group now, still, a thin PSC? If so, will it remain one in future? If not, will it become one again? To these questions, the answers are much less clear.

The organization does appear to meet Deutsch's minimal requirement that there be 'a real assurance that [members] will not fight each other physically, but will settle their disputes in some other way' (Deutsch *et al.*, 1957: 5). But security in the region seems more evident than community. And the provenance of security's assurance may not be, or may no longer be, traceable to an ASEAN-based sense of community among official elites, let alone more widely in society.

It will be fascinating to watch as the implications for the future of Southeast Asian regionalism unfold. Will racing cyclists on Track II and especially Track III outpace the officials on Track I? A French analyst (Philippe Moreau Defarges in Smith, 2005) has said of regionalism in the EU, 'Europe is like a bicycle. It can only remain stable if it moves forward.' That could be true of Southeast Asia too.

Moving forward, for ASEAN, could imply or even require sinking social roots. In November 2000, Jose Almonte, a Filipino who as President Fidel Ramos' national security adviser had acquired intimate knowledge of the Association, urged it to relate 'to the daily lives of ordinary Southeast Asians' – to enable them 'to feel they too 'own' the Southeast Asian community'. ASEAN in his opinion was not yet 'a true regional community' (Almonte, 2001). Not coincidentally he said this while speaking to the first ASEAN People's Assembly, gathered in would-be democratic Indonesia.

Broadening ASEAN's base to include 'ordinary Southeast Asians' could undermine it by politicizing the region's multiple cleavages. But, as illustrated by the East Ambalat crisis, which included a stand-off of sorts between Indonesian and Malaysian warships, state leaders themselves are not always in tune with the 'ASEAN Way'. At about the time that Almonte spoke, on Batam island, next door in Singapore an ASEAN summit was underway. Mere hours after they met with his ASEAN counterparts, Indonesia's president at the time, Abdurrahman Wahid, accused the city-state of being a bad neighbor, caring only for profits, and ignoring the ethnically distinctive societies to the north and south of it. 'Singaporeans underestimate the Malays', Wahid said. 'They think we do not exist.' As far as he was concerned, Singapore's then-prime minister Goh could jolly well 'go his own way. And we can also go our own way. . . . We can do well without Singapore' (England, 2000).

Nevertheless, this outburst was not made more likely by the fact that Wahid had been voted into office by a People's Consultative Assembly, formed in 1999 after the first fully competitive elections in Indonesia since 1955. A dictator could have said the same thing.

It is appropriate in such light to remain at least cautiously skeptical as to whether ASEAN will continue to qualify for SC-hood on the first rung, let alone succeed causally on the second. Such reserve seems wise even if the group has in the past been a first-rung

or descriptive SC, and even if that SC can be shown, on the explanatory second rung, to have used its sense of community to ensure the past accuracy of its expectations of security – out there in the vast and complex quotidian ‘real world’ of Southeast Asians, among whom probably only a few today could even identify the Bali Concord, I or II.

At least four arguments point in this provisionally skeptical direction. First, scholarly opinion about the past is still divided. The living scholar who has delved furthest into this matter, Amitav Acharya, a constructivist, could not make up his mind whether the Association had become even a ‘nascent’ security community. Rizal Sukma, also knowledgeable, concluded that it was still a pre-communitarian security *regime* (on which term cf. Krasner, 1983; Emmerson, 1983; Acharya, 2001: 7–8 and 13, n. 34; and Emmers [not a typo], 2003: 2–3 and 165, n. 3).

Second, the Association itself (ASEAN, 2004), by finally deciding to become a security community by 2020, admitted that it was not one yet. ASEAN may not have known what it really was. In social science a self-report is a datum not a conclusion. But an analyst needs strong evidence before arguing that an organization really is what it says it is not. Still less likely is it that ASEAN in 2004 was a causally thick PSC whose *S resulted from its C*.

Third, the C is, or has become, iffy. A sense of community may well prevail inside the limited circles that guide and manage ASEAN, notwithstanding the impatience, annoyance, candor, bias, and resort to exclusively national interests that can surface in corridor conversations, or even in public, as in Wahid’s outburst. But analysts of the Association still lack independent, reliable, and properly empirical data on the existence and nature of emotional solidarity inside the organization – a genuine cooperative *identity* among its elites, including who shares such feelings, how intense they are, and how they have changed over time.

Nor have reliably comprehensive data been gathered on these dimensions, to my knowledge, at social levels removed from the Association’s elite activities and statements. What sense of belonging to ASEAN or to Southeast Asia – still two very different things – do hundreds of millions of Almonte’s ‘ordinary Southeast Asians’ feel? How have such feelings changed over time? How many Southeast Asians even know enough about ASEAN or Southeast Asia to entertain a sense of community with either one?

Before reaching causal judgments, analysts also need to know how much of such a broader sense of community to attribute to ASEAN’s own doings, and how much of it may have had other sources – education, commerce, travel, and telecommunications, to mention a few. Has ASEAN been making waves of regional identity? Or merely surfing them? More broadly still, if ASEAN is an imagined community, how real – how concrete, interpersonal, or experiential – can its sense of community be? Democratization, if it continues, is likely to intensify the relevance of such questions.

Fourth and finally, even if the requisite sense of community can be shown to exist, is that what has caused peace to be kept among ASEAN’s members in the past – that and the claimed power of ASEAN’s irenic norms, internalized as beliefs, to stop one

member from attacking another? Or should peace be explained on other grounds: physical deterrence; material interdependence; wanting to develop one's economy free of wartime disruption or damages; or even a personal ethical calculus acquired prior to ASEAN's creation or without reference to its rhetoric? What mix of these two sets of conditions – ASEAN and non-ASEAN – best accounts for the result? And what proportional responsibility for intramural peace would the Association and its norms need to have before it could be considered a thick PSC? These queries have so far proven easier to pose than resolve.

Among ASEAN's possible future selves, an amalgamated security community is the least likely. It is far too early to endorse the speculation by Estrella Solidum that ASEAN is the prototype of a Southeast Asian culture. Viewed in the context of diverse societies that have evolved in place over thousands of years, ASEAN's norms are still too artificial and too thinly spread to play that role. As for Jones' judgment that ASEAN has no prospect of becoming a security community, it is too early to accept that foreclosure if we diversify what is meant by an SC to include its thinner variations – pluralistic SCs that do not succeed by dint of identity and norms alone, and are not expected to. If 'trust but verify' became ASEAN's motto, could it (still) qualify as a thin SC? Possibly, yes, although constructivists and realists would want to know the exact balance between faith and verification.

All the same, Jones is right to doubt that ASEAN will graduate to the status of what I am calling a second-rung PSC whose members keep both the peace and their sovereignty thanks to a sense of community inspired by norms alone – the venerable 'ASEAN Way' – without reference to other rationales or factors. Ground-level conditions change, despite norms, and solipsism hardly spells success.

Karl Deutsch was one of my professors in graduate school. I was one of his teaching assistants and knew him well. Were he alive today, what would he think about the revival of his idea so many decades after its coinage? What would he think about the discourse it has provoked, including its recent championing, in name at least, by the rulers of half a billion Southeast Asians?

I think he would smile. Not dreamily, with Solidum. Not ironically, with Jones. Just a smile that his model has come so far and been made to do so much. Too much? I leave that to the reader to decide.

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