

INDONESIA IN ASEAN

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INDONESIA IN ASEAN

VISION AND REALITY

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INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

Singapore

First published in Singapore in 2013 by
ISEAS Publishing
Institute of Southeast Asian Studies
30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace
Pasir Panjang
Singapore 119614

E-mail: publish@iseas.edu.sg

Website: [<http://bookshop.iseas.edu.sg>](http://bookshop.iseas.edu.sg)

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ISEAS Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Weatherbee, Donald E.

Indonesia in ASEAN : vision and reality.

1. Indonesia—Politics and government—1945–
2. Indonesia—Foreign relations—20th century.
3. Democracy—Indonesia.
4. Islam and state—Indonesia
5. Indonesia—Foreign relations—Southeast Asia.
6. Southeast Asia—Foreign relations—Indonesia.
7. ASEAN.

I. Title.

DS644 W36

2013

ISBN 978-981-4519-20-5 (hard cover)

ISBN 978-981-4519-23-6 (e-book PDF)

Typeset by Superskill Graphics Pte Ltd

Printed in Singapore by Refine Printing Pte Ltd

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Editorial Note

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This inaugural monograph is written by Professor Donald E. Weatherbee while he was Visiting Professorial Fellow at ISEAS from February to May 2013. It is based on research conducted during this period, which included a field trip to Indonesia in April 2013.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Institute of Southeast Asian Studies Director Tan Chin Tiong for the invitation to join ISEAS as a Visiting Professorial Fellow in the period February–May 2013. The resources and support provided by Director Tan and his staff during my tenure is deeply appreciated. Special thanks go to Daljit Singh, Coordinator of ISEAS’ Regional Strategic and Political Studies Programme, who husbanded the project from its initial formulation in 2012 to its completion. In Jakarta, United States–Indonesia Society (USINDO) representative Ms Hazelia Margaretha and her staff provided the logistical support for my April visit that allowed me to maximize the time available for interviews, meetings, and contacts. Every step of the way, from draft proposal to completed study, I had critical inputs and feedback, both in substance and style, from Professor Epsey Cooke Farrell-Weatherbee.

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Introduction

On 31 December 2015, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) will celebrate the establishment of the ASEAN Community (AC), designed to be a “dynamic, cohesive, resilient and integrated” institutional expression of “soft regionalism”. It is “soft” in the sense that the members did not give up any of their independent sovereign rights through multilateral cooperation. There is no central authority with plenipotentiary powers. There are no mechanisms through which members can be held accountable for violation of norms or rules. Over the years the regionalist vision, inaugurated in 1967 by the original core of five members — Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand — has become even “softer” with the inclusion of the CLMV states — Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam. The AC project comes onto the scene as ASEAN is characterized by intramural political divergence and diminishing international political relevance. The fact that ASEAN has survived its discords and travails over half a century to reach the point of an AC is in no small measure due to the commitment of Indonesia.

The vision of an ASEAN Community was given policy content at the 2003 9th ASEAN Summit chaired by Indonesia. Its “Declaration of ASEAN (Bali) Concord II” set forth the objective of the creation of an ASEAN Community by the year 2020.¹

The AC rests on three “entwined and mutually supportive” pillars: the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC); the ASEAN Security Community, renamed the ASEAN Political and Security Community (APSC); and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC). At the 2007 12th ASEAN Summit in Cebu, the Philippines, the timetable was accelerated, setting 2015 as a new date for completion. A reading of the summit’s “Cebu Declaration on the Acceleration of an ASEAN Community by 2015” confirms that the shortening of the calendar had more to do with the dynamics of change in the international environment than progress in community building. Historically, ASEAN has always seemed to be one or more steps behind the regional events affecting it.

As an international actor, the ASEAN Community will be little different than the historical ASEAN. The *modus operandi* is unchanged. The economic, political, and social integration inherent in the AC’s stated goals faces the insurmountable obstacle of the ASEAN principles of sovereignty, non-interference in domestic affairs, and a consensus decision-making mode in which the weakest or the most reluctant member holds a trump card. In the sovereign equality of ASEAN members, the asymmetries of real power within the grouping are not reflected in its decision making. Furthermore, the declaratory international posture of “community” only disguises, but does not alter, the realities of the divisions within ASEAN that inhibit common regional policymaking. This is particularly the case in shaping a common approach to perceived common interests in political stability and security in Southeast Asia.

The most ominous of ASEAN’s internal divisions for the AC’s future significance as an international actor is the deepening gulf between ASEAN’s continental and maritime states. Apace with the building of the AC, a subcommunity is emerging in the institutional form of the Greater Mekong Subregion (Wade

2011). Oriented to China, and especially Yunnan province, the Mekong states' growing economic ties to China increasingly influence ASEAN's political approach to China, to Indonesia's discomfiture.

It is generally acknowledged that the AC will be far from complete by 2015. Of the three pillars, only the AEC has reached a developmental level that merits the title "community". It had a head start, building on existing instruments like the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), the ASEAN Investment Area (AIA) and trade, investment, and services agreements. According to the Chairman's Statement at the 2013 22nd ASEAN Summit in Brunei, 259 measures, or 77.54 per cent of the AEC blueprint, have been implemented. But even as the AEC tackles tough remaining issues, its relevance is threatened by the centrifugal pulls of the East Asian Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) and the APEC-framed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). The seemingly competitive great-power economic strategies are already dividing ASEAN and diminishing the lustre of the AEC. Because of its nature, the AEC is the least entwined with the other pillars of the community. There has been little spillover into the political and security domains of the APSC. It could be argued, in fact, that the AEC — or at least the structures and institutions built into it — could exist on its own, independent of the other ASEAN frameworks.

The ASCC's programmatic agenda mirrors the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and, rather than regionalization in terms of allocation of resources and expertise, depends on the intensification of existing national and local programmes. The ASCC seems to be a lumping together of existing programmes and outreaches so as to give them an ASEAN identity and artificial coherence, without any functional linkages. The amorphousness of its regionalism makes it difficult to characterize

the ASCC as a community in any institutional way. One could imagine it as a community of shared ideas and intentions with respect to the social problems shared in common by the ASEAN nations. Unlike the AEC, there are few measurements or evaluations of the progress of the ASCC. Certainly its development is the least impeded by ASEAN member states' consideration of domestic and international political factors.

Outside of its cumulative economic integrative efforts, ASEAN has not had the capacity, political will, or strategic coherence to shape common policies necessary to be an effective international actor. In the uphill quest for ASEAN solidarity, Indonesia has been unable to move its unwilling partners to act together to meet common challenges. This has been thrown into sharp relief most recently by the serial crises over the contentious issues in the South China Sea. That Indonesia has failed to translate the three Bali Concord's appeals for a unified ASEAN voice into a unitary ASEAN international actor is not a reflection on Indonesian foreign policy but an artefact of ASEAN's decision-making processes. The question becomes, what are Indonesia's alternatives? This question has been raised earlier in the form of whether Indonesia has "outgrown ASEAN".² At that time, the issues were democracy and human rights, which are still ASEAN issues today. The question is also pertinent to Indonesia's national interests in the evolving regional political and security architectures within which ASEAN claims — but has not earned — centrality. How that question might be answered depends on a date in October 2014.

The second and final five-year term in office for President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono ends in October 2014, after his successor has been picked in the July 2014 presidential election. During his decade in power, President Yudhoyono (familiarily known as SBY) has been ably served by two foreign ministers: Dr Hassan Wirajuda

(2002–2009) and Dr Raden Mas Marty Natalegawa (2009–2014). Both Hassan and Marty, Western-educated, rose to the summit of Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs — Kementerian Luar Negeri (Kemlu) — through professional competence. President Yudhoyono and his foreign ministers will have advanced a foreign policy agenda with goals in ASEAN, in the East Asian region, in the Muslim world, and globally.

By the transfer of government in 2014, SBY and his ministers will have “owned” Indonesian foreign policy for a decade. They have set the interest priorities in the different, and not always complementary, spheres of activity. In mid-2013, SBY is already a lame duck with no new initiatives expected. The government is ticking over on autopilot. The president is seen as having wasted his electoral mandate. Indonesian foreign policy, once a strong suit, is described as “drifting” and “directionless”.³

A crucial question for future Indonesian foreign policy is whether the Indonesian identity and commitment to ASEAN so associated with Yudhoyono and his two foreign ministers will be shared in the administration that comes to power after the 2014 national elections. It may be more nationalistic and less willing to adapt nationalist demands to ASEAN requirements, and it may show a more Islamic face. Support for ASEAN may weaken as a result of Indonesia's inability to give ASEAN a single voice in accord with Indonesia's voice on issues of regional security. However, although a new president may set new foreign policy priorities and new policy directions, he or she does not start with a tabula rasa in the world, the Asia-Pacific region, and ASEAN. Future Indonesian foreign policy will reflect Indonesian capabilities, a continuity of principles and strategic goals, and the legacy of a decade of SBY's “democratized” foreign policy. The transfer of power will occur even as, the pages to follow will show, the regional dynamics of foreign policy are being reshaped.