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Reinventing ASEAN

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Reinventing ASEAN

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PREFACE

There is now widespread recognition that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) needs to be revitalized. Government ministers and officials have increasingly acknowledged that they must act or risk irrelevance. Singapore's Foreign Minister Professor S. Jayakumar was probably the most candid when he stated, at the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in July 2000, that, "If we continue to be perceived as ineffective, we can be marginalized as our Dialogue Partners and international investors relegate us to the sidelines. The danger is real."

This recognition of potential irrelevance contrasts sharply with the high reputation that ASEAN had previously enjoyed. The Asian crisis that began in mid-1997 has been a key trigger in this change in perception. The severe impact of the crisis threw ASEAN member states into disarray and exposed their limits of co-operation in dealing with the financial contagion. Although some ASEAN member states were buoyed by a sharp, V-shaped economic recovery in 1999–2000, the overall reputation of ASEAN did not improve much.

Moreover, even as the crisis abated, some continued to experience political and social instability, with Indonesia, the centre of gravity of the grouping by size and history, the worst hit. The worldwide economic slowdown in 2001, led by the downturn in the U.S. market, will not assist the region. Instead, it exposes the fragility of the economic development policies that ASEAN member states have adopted, especially when, in contrast, China seemingly continues to prosper. The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 on New York's World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in the United States add another challenge for the ASEAN member states. The terrible events have accelerated the economic downturn and worsened the external environment for ASEAN. Moreover, if the U.S.-led response against the terrorists in Afghanistan is perceived to be directed against Islamic countries and their religion, it can potentially increase tensions within and between the ASEAN member states. Three of them — the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand

— have sizeable Muslim minorities and another three — Brunei, Indonesia, and Malaysia — are predominantly Muslim.

The recent recognition by government ministers and officials of the dilemmas and challenges ASEAN faces, comes after expert opinion. Since the first two years of the crisis, think-tanks and academics who know ASEAN well have come increasingly to question the role of the institution. Among them have been members of two networks of think-tanks and academics, who have played a “track-two” role in ASEAN, providing exchange, ideas, analysis, and criticism on a wide range of issues.

One of these networks is the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS). The ASEAN-ISIS has been in existence for more than fifteen years. Founded with one institute each in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand, the ASEAN-ISIS network has expanded to include representatives from Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. The work of the ASEAN-ISIS has generated some results in policy initiatives, perhaps most notably the formation of the ASEAN Regional Forum as the main multilateral security forum in the region. The other network is the ASEAN Economic Forum. This brings together some of the leading policy-oriented economic experts of the region. This volume is the result of collaboration between members of these two networks.

In July 2000, immediately after the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, the ASEAN-ISIS and ASEAN Economic Forum networks convened a meeting, which included some of its leading members. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss frankly the difficulties and challenges facing ASEAN and to consider suggestions on how the Association might proceed. This was a response to the official recognition of the challenges faced by ASEAN, as well as to a call made by the then Thai Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan to these think-tanks and experts to serve as a reservoir of knowledge and wisdom for the region.

Many of the academics and experts from these two networks had, after many years of studying ASEAN closely, come, in their own manner and to their own thinking, to be increasingly critical of ASEAN. While loyal to the Association’s past achievements and consistent in their belief in regionalism, many had ideas of what might be done to respond to the problems and challenges.

From the deliberations, a book resulted, entitled *A New ASEAN in a New Millennium*, which was published at the end of 2000, barely four months after its conception. This allowed the book to be launched at the ASEAN Informal Summit of leaders, and at the first ASEAN People’s Assembly, a meeting for civil society groups of the region, held in Batam, Indonesia. The book was well received and quickly exhausted its print run.

This present book, *Reinventing ASEAN*, builds on the earlier effort. It brings together contributions by some of the leading and well-established experts on ASEAN. Many of the contributions have been updated since the first publication in 2000 to take into account new events, and to offer additional analyses. A number of chapters have also been added, most notably by writers from the newer ASEAN member states.

Reinventing ASEAN focuses primarily on the political-security and economic dimensions of ASEAN co-operation. In so doing, the authors have all treated the scope of their topics broadly. The idea of politics and security in ASEAN has been considered from many different aspects, under the rubric of “comprehensive” security or, to use a more recent term, “human” security. The consideration of economics is also rounded, and includes issues of development, as well as the political context for economic co-operation. Additionally, ASEAN’s processes and institutions, or what has been called the “ASEAN way”, are also studied. After all, co-operation between nation-states does not only encompass what the members are trying to achieve together, but also the rules of how they are to work together. Thus, other areas for ASEAN co-operation, such as financial matters and environmental protection, are also considered among the larger issues. The volume also sets out the context for change in ASEAN not just because of the recent crisis but also because of changing circumstances. It also seeks to give an idea of what ASEAN can do in the future, with a long-term view stretching to 2030. This is in keeping with the belief that policy prescriptions relate not just to the here and now but also to the future.

There are a number of overlaps and shared ideas between the different chapters. This is inevitable in the cross-pollination of ideas among the authors. As members of “track-two” networks, it is often difficult to pinpoint the precise originator of an idea. What the authors share most of all is their belief and hope in ASEAN. While critical of certain limits and policies in today’s ASEAN, they all share the wish to see ASEAN continue and adapt to new circumstances. What emerges, therefore, is a core of ideas that have the common aim of trying to revitalize and even reinvent ASEAN.

In bringing together this book, there are a number of people that the editors must especially thank: the Asia Foundation for the support it provided to enable the authors to meet to conceive the book; the authors of the different chapters, especially those who have updated their chapters or added new chapters; the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Indonesia, and its executive director, Dr Hadi Soesastro, for publishing the earlier work, *A New ASEAN in a New Millennium*, in such a short time; the staff of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), especially Professor Chia Siow

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