

BOOK REVIEWS

The European Union, United States and ASEAN: Challenges and Prospects for Co-operative Engagement in the 21st Century. Edited by **K.S. Nathan**. London: ASEAN Academic Press, 2002. 398pp.

The central focus of this book is the increasing significance of inter-regional relations, especially the relations that link the European Union, the United States, and ASEAN. With each of these three main regional groupings going through critical changes, and with analysts chronicling the growing tensions between the United States and the European Union, the chapters in the book provide an excellent foundation for gaining an understanding of the history of inter-regional relations and how relations among these key regions might develop. Importantly, of course, each of the regions discussed in the book has either recently expanded its boundaries or is in the process of negotiating the terms for doing so. In Asia, ASEAN, while maintaining its core identity, has promoted the “ASEAN Plus Three” (APT) framework in which it coordinates its activities on a number of fronts with China, Japan, and South Korea. In Europe, the Union is set to add ten new members, mostly from Eastern Europe, by 2004. The United States is also currently seeking to expand the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) into the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) with thirty-four members by 2005. At the same time, a number of unilateral moves early in the George W. Bush Administration, most notably the denunciation of the Kyoto Accord and the decision to go ahead with the National Missile Defence system, as well as the debate over how to deal with Iraq and the Palestinian question, have been widely interpreted as indicating a growing division between Europe and the United States. Clearly,

then, regions, regionalization and inter-regional relations are pre-occupying analysts and practitioners alike. The publication of this book is thus most welcome.

The editor, K.S. Nathan, has brought together an impressive range of academics who are able to dissect the issues raised by inter-regional relations in a number of different ways. In his introduction to the volume, Nathan provides a central focus for the analyses which follow by exploring EU–U.S.–ASEAN linkages in terms of what he calls “co-operative engagement”. This essentially liberal concept emphasizes the positive aspects of the relations among regions by concentrating on a co-operative security approach in terms of dealing with strategic threats and open regionalism in economic relations. Nathan suggests the need for “discussion, debate, dialogue and strategic compromise in areas of divergence” (p. 18) and a multilateral approach to the resolution of specific problems. This is a refreshing antidote to the current emphasis on the seemingly increasing tensions between the regions.

The first set of chapters looks at security issues from the perspective of each of the regions which are central to the book. Trevor Taylor examines the relations among the three regions from the perspective of Europe, Sheldon Simon from the vantage point of the United States, and Chin Kin Wah from the point of view of the ASEAN members. For Taylor and Chin, clearly the United States is the dominant player and the relations between Europe and the United States, and between ASEAN and the United States are critical. Interestingly, however, the reader gets the distinct impression that there is still a good deal of uncertainty in U.S. policy. Taylor, for example, notes that “there is a new transatlantic ‘burden sharing debate’ waiting to happen” (p. 33), and Simon argues that important aspects of America’s strategy towards East Asia are “incoherent” (p. 61). The second set of chapters by H. Ruediger Korff, Ryan Bishop, and Shamsul A.B. address the social, cultural, and psychological links that tie the regions together. In particular, Korff notes the differences in the dominant political cultures of the three regions and the need to take these into account when looking at inter-regional relations, while Shamsul perceptively emphasizes the extent to which “colonial knowledge” underpins various aspects of the way people in each region view international and intercontinental relations.

The third set of chapters, by Leszek Buszynski, Greg Felker, and Wilfido V. Villacorta, examine the Asian economic crisis of 1997–98 and its consequences for regional security and cohesiveness. As Felker, notes, one of the most troubling features of the crisis was the inability of the regional organizations to contribute to managing the crisis in a timely fashion. In many ways, as a response to the problems created by

the crisis, the two chapters in Part Four of the book look at the development of economic regionalism, especially in Europe and East Asia. Both Giovanni Capannelli and Linda Low emphasize the benefits of an approach to economic regionalism that is open to expanded links with other economic regional groupings. In many ways, they underscore the “co-operative engagement” argument developed by Nathan in his introduction. Similarly, the four final chapters, by Robert N. Wells, Jr., Rizal Sukma, Fernando Rodrigo, and K.S. Nathan explore the prospects for “co-operative engagement” in ASEAN’s relations with the United States and with the European Union. It is made clear that, in terms of the U.S. government’s relations with East Asia in general and ASEAN in particular, the key is likely to be how the rise of China is managed. With regard to EU–ASEAN relations, the main problem lies with keeping the relationship moving forward rather than allowing it to get mired in disagreements over questions of human rights, or neglected because of what are perceived to be more pressing issues that need immediate attention within each region.

The one drawback in reading this book is that most of the chapters were completed before 11 September 2001 when the terrorists struck against New York and Washington. These attacks and the Bali bombings of 12 October 2002 have clearly had an impact on intra-regional relations. In his conclusion, which was written after 11 September, Nathan notes that “even as globalisation creates a borderless world, especially in the social, cultural and economic spheres, it unleashes various uncertainties that stimulate a strengthening of nation-state structures as the only available and manageable mechanism to cope with change” (p. 374). Within this context, he argues that 11 September has made co-operative engagement between regions even more imperative. It is only through co-operation that terrorism will be defeated. Unfortunately, barriers between regions seem to be increasing. The United States and Canada, for example, have made it much more difficult for the citizens of a number of East Asian countries to travel to North America. To a noticeable degree North America, for security reasons, has become more fortress-like. These latest developments thus make the points discussed in this book all the more pertinent. For the increasing number of scholars and practitioners who are interested in inter-regional linkages, this book will be very useful in exploring the long-term trends that characterize such relations.

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