

## BOOK REVIEWS

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***The New Regionalism in Asia and the Pacific.* By Norman D. Palmer.**  
Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1991. 221 pp.

The study of international regionalism, including theories of regional integration (non-functionalism and transactionalism), regionalist doctrines of peace and regional alliance systems, dominated the theoretical development of international relations literature in the first three decades after World War II. But after reaching its peak in the early 1970s, scholarly interest in regionalism waned sharply. Expectations raised by theory proved to be far ahead of actual progress of regional organizations in Europe and the Third World. A number of developments, such as the oil crisis of the early 1970s and the rapid expansion of trade and technology transfers across national and regional boundaries, seemed to confirm a growing trend towards global interdependence, rather than regional integration. In this context, regional integration theories were pronounced “obsolescent” and were overtaken by enquiries into the phenomena of global interdependence.

Yet, the 1980s revealed exactly the opposite relationship between theory and practice: while the theoretical neglect of regionalism continued, regional organization proliferated throughout the international system. Now, with the end of the Cold War and the escalating crisis in the global multilateral trade regime, the impact of regionalism has become a major and widespread policy concern. In the political and security arena, the potential for regional security arrangements replacing Cold War divisions and complementing the work of the United Nations has attracted considerable interest. In the economic sphere, the emergence and impact of regional

trading blocs is seen in the European Community's move towards a single market and the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). In the Asia-Pacific region, several developments, such as the decision of the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to create a free trade area (AFTA), the emergence of the Asia-Pacific Regional Cooperation (APEC) forum, and the controversial proposal by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad of Malaysia for creating an East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC, initially called East Asian Economic Grouping), have underscored the relevance and appeal of regionalism.

Against this backdrop, the publication of Norman D. Palmer's book, *The New Regionalism in Asia and the Pacific*, is a welcome scholarly event. Professor Palmer's study is the work of a long-time area specialist with a command of the earlier theoretical literature on the subject. As a result, this book must count as one of the more serious attempts to understand the dynamics and prospects for regionalism in the Asia-Pacific region in the 1980s and beyond.

Chapter 1 lays the conceptual framework of the study. The core of the framework is Palmer's distinction between "old" and "new" regionalism. The 1950s and the 1960s were the period of "old" regionalism, while "new" regionalism emerged during the late 1970s and the 1980s. "Old" regionalism was largely confined to Western Europe, especially the European Community (EC), while "new" regionalism was "a more truly worldwide phenomenon" (p. 2). More importantly, the main conceptual tool of "old" regionalism was the rigid and inward-looking notion of "integration" — a term which also assumed the possibility of transcending the sovereignty of the nation-state. "New" regionalism, in contrast, was "more outward- than inward-turning and its external links seemed to strengthen it, rather than undermine its regional effectiveness" (p. 2). While "old" regionalism was marked by a preference for autonomy, "new" regionalism can live with, or even thrive, by incorporating interregional linkages which are inevitable in an increasingly interdependent world. Finally, while "old" regionalism focused on regional organizations and their formal, institutionalized activity, "new" regionalism encompassed a broader and more flexible pattern of interaction. This is best encapsulated in the concept of international regimes, defined by Krasner as "sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations".

After outlining his conceptual framework, Palmer sets out to present the evidence for "new" regionalism in the Asia-Pacific region. In his view, the Asia-Pacific is the "third most important area" of "new" regionalism after Western Europe and North America. It is also possibly "the most

exciting area for analysis" of the impact of "new" regionalism (p. 19). This is despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that unlike the two other regions, the Asia-Pacific is characterized not only by "a relative absence of regionalism in the past", but also by "a long and continuous tradition of authoritarianism" (p. 24).

The book proceeds to examine in considerable detail the progress of regionalism in four "regions" within Asia and the Pacific — East Asia which is yet to have a formal regional organization; Southeast Asia (ASEAN); South Asia (the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation); and Southwest Pacific and Oceania (the South Pacific Forum). One chapter explores interregional organizations with a focus on the Pacific Economic Cooperation Conference (PECC), while another is devoted to analysing the role of the superpowers in relation to Asia-Pacific regionalism. The inclusion of South Asia within the purview of Asia-Pacific regionalism is an interesting and welcome departure, and contrasts with the tendency of policy-makers in Southeast Asia to exclude this area from most Asia-Pacific regional co-operation schemes (as evident in the non-inclusion of South Asia in APEC, EAEC or ASEAN-Post Ministerial Conferences).

Observers of regionalism in the Asia-Pacific will be disappointed that the book contains no reference to the Malaysian initiative on the EAEC. But the author can hardly be blamed for completing the manuscript before the Mahathir proposal was announced in December 1990, although he did foresee the "possible emergence of an East Asian, or perhaps an East-Southeast Asian economic group, or trading bloc, dominated by Japan and its powerful currency, yen" (p. 35). While the EAEC is far from becoming a reality, an assessment of the factors underlying the ambivalent (mostly on the negative side) response of other regional countries, including Japan, to the proposal would be an important component of any study of Asia-Pacific regionalism. One hopes that such analysis will be included in a future edition of Professor Palmer's book.

While the wealth of information on Asian regional organizations contained in the book is in itself a major accomplishment, a few aspects of its conceptual framework are somewhat problematic. The first concerns a question often posed but seldom answered by scholars of regionalism: what constitutes a region or subregion? Can the Asia-Pacific be regarded as one region or a cluster of many regions or subregions? Delineation of regions is often an exercise in political convenience. As the author concedes, the term "Asia-Pacific" "is more a political than geographical concept". But after recognizing the problem, the author does not even bother to look for an answer. For him, the problem of defining "region" is deemed "virtually unresolvable" (p. 22). There can be no universally-accepted criteria for establishing regional identity.

Another problem concerns the concept of “new” regionalism. One wonders whether this is a catch-all phrase for embracing a wide range of issue areas and institutional forms. The author could have made his framework of analysis more useful by developing a typology of regional groupings and elaborating on the important conceptual distinctions that can be made between functionally-specific (PAFTAD, PBEC, and so forth) versus multipurpose groupings (ASEAN, SAARC), security alliances (SEATO) versus common security forums (ASEAN-PMC), regional trade blocs (EAEG, as originally presented) versus consultative economic forums (APEC).

Furthermore, one may question whether “old” regionalism as conceptualized by the integrationists is really all that old (and obsolete) in view of recent theoretical work by European scholars which has attested to the renewed relevance of neo-functionalism in explaining the EC’s move towards a single market. In a related vein, one is entitled to wonder whether “new” regionalism is really new, given that much of the recent concerns about regionalism have focused on its potential to generate inward-looking and protectionist trading blocs, in contrast to the kind of soft and outward-looking notion envisaged by Palmer.

Finally, while the author seeks to move his analysis beyond the emphasis of “old” regionalism on formal institutions, the case studies in the book focus largely on organizations, their evolution and role. This deprives the reader of an opportunity to test the book’s theoretical framework which stressed the usefulness of the concept of international regimes as an analytical tool for understanding regional co-operation.

Notwithstanding these points, the book makes a significant contribution to the study of an important subject. Its generalizations about the characteristics of Asia-Pacific regionalism are insightful and should be of considerable interest to scholars and policy-makers interested in the future of international relations within the Asia-Pacific.

AMITAV ACHARYA  
*Centre for International and Strategic Studies*  
York University, Canada

***New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction.* By Ken Jowitt. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992. 342 pp.**

*New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction* by Professor Ken Jowitt, of the University of California, Berkeley, is primarily a collection of essays