

Reproduced from *Hard Choices: Security, Democracy, and Regionalism in Southeast Asia* edited by Donald K. Emmerson (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009). This version was obtained electronically direct from the publisher on condition that copyright is not infringed. No part of this publication may be reproduced without the prior permission of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. Individual articles are available at < <http://bookshop.iseas.edu.sg> >

INTRODUCTION

CRITICAL TERMS: SECURITY, DEMOCRACY, AND REGIONALISM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Donald K. Emmerson

*Stanford University
United States*

Security, democracy, regionalism, and Southeast Asia are critical terms in many ways. There is a critical lack of knowledge about how they interact, yet the topics they denote are critically important. The concepts themselves invite critical—discerning—analysis of the kind represented in this book. As an instance of regionalism, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has been criticized for its inability to alleviate the insecurity and lack of democracy suffered by citizens of its most brutally ruled member state, Myanmar (or Burma).¹ Events in 2007–08 underscored the critical—urgent—need for reform and relief in that misgoverned country. In 2007, ASEAN’s effort to reform itself by drafting and signing a new Charter to orient its actions in the twenty-first century elicited critiques from inside and outside the region. In 2008, scathing criticism was leveled at the Association for failing to criticize the Myanmar junta’s malign neglect of the surviving but homeless and hungry victims of Cyclone Nargis.²

The egregious case of Myanmar evokes a wider range of issues, ideas, and interactions involving security, democracy, and regionalism that are fostering

¹ For example, in May 2008, eight globally known personalities, including former Czech president Václav Havel, South African activist cleric Desmond Tutu, and Russian reformer Grigory Yavlinsky, urged “Burma’s neighbors in ASEAN” to “stop looking the other way as Burma’s rulers trample on Burma’s citizens.” (“Referendum Farce in Burma,” Forum 2000, <<http://www.forum2000.cz/en/about-us/news-archive/detail/referendum-farce-in-burma-1/>>.)

² In the words of one respected American analyst, Myanmar’s junta continued “to kill its own people through brute idiocy,” by obstructing relief to the cyclone’s victims, and “conspicuous in its absence” was “one harsh word to Burma’s rulers from ASEAN.” Experts in Washington, he reported, were asking—in the light of ASEAN’s silence—how the organization could expect to be taken seriously, let alone respected. (Chris Nelson, *The Nelson Report*, Washington DC, 12 May 2008.)

hard choices for Southeast Asia³ in the twenty-first century. These matters form the subject of this book. Following this introduction, Jörn Dosch and Termsak Chalermpananupap offer, respectively, a scholar's and a practitioner's assessment of ASEAN as it faces the challenges of ensuring security, advancing democracy, and reforming regionalism itself.

Five key issues are then taken up by as many authors. Rizal Sukma asks whether ASEAN can augment its concern for security with an agenda for democracy. Kyaw Yin Hlaing reviews the resilience of autocracy and the suppression of democracy in Myanmar, and asks what if anything ASEAN can do about its most reviled member. Mely Caballero-Anthony examines ASEAN's nontraditional security agenda—coping with nonmilitary threats that ignore national borders—and asks whether human rights and democracy could become a new regional policy frontier. Simon SC Tay chronicles regional efforts to quell one of these nontraditional threats, the damaging smoke from fires in Indonesia, and asks whether that country's democracy could be part of the problem. Michael S. Malley explores the nexus between domestic political competition and nuclear energy security in light of plans to open nuclear plants in the region, and asks what ASEAN has done to forestall this future security risk.

Hard Choices ends with two views on whether, and under what conditions, regionalism should include a right to intervene in a country's domestic affairs. David Martin Jones argues for the value of decency over democracy and against the idea that ASEAN should promote liberal pluralism in Southeast Asia. Erik Kuhonta, with Myanmar in mind, argues against unconditional sovereignty and for regional intervention proportional to the severity of harm inflicted by a repressive government upon its own people.⁴

Critical Terms

My own purpose in this introductory chapter is to ask and discuss, in this order, these questions: What do security, democracy, and regionalism mean? How

³ In the later twentieth century, political observers conventionally defined "Southeast Asia" as a set of ten countries: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar (or Burma), the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. In 2002, the tiny ex-Indonesian province of East Timor gained full independence as Timor-Leste. Opinions differ as to whether Timor-Leste should be counted as Southeast Asia's eleventh state. It is explicitly included, in passing, in the chapters by Mely Caballero-Anthony and Termsak Chalermpananupap. In the other chapters, with one exception, Timor-Leste is not mentioned and the question therefore does not arise. The exception is this chapter, where I discuss the issue but remain agnostic about whether Timor-Leste is or is not a "Southeast Asian" state.

⁴ Some basic information is repeated in these nine chapters—that ASEAN was born in 1967, for example, and held its fortieth-birthday summit in 2007. The duplication has been retained to allow the essays to be read and understood in any order, depending on one's interest and regardless of prior knowledge.

are they related to a theme that is, for lack of space, underrepresented in this book, namely, the economy? What is the relevance of these topics for Southeast Asia? Why focus on this particular part of the world? What is the “ASEAN Way”? Is it on the way out? Does the ASEAN Charter augur reform, or will it reinforce the status quo? What about Myanmar? How did ASEAN respond to the repression of mass protest in 2007 and the mismanagement of natural disaster in 2008, and with what implications for the (in)ability of regionalism to promote security and democracy in Southeast Asia? After summarizing and interpreting my conclusions, I will close with some “unfinal thoughts” on the topics I have raised. By posing and exploring critical terms and hard choices in this first chapter, I hope to sketch a helpful context in which to read the findings and views of my co-authors: their assessments of ASEAN, their analyses of issues, and their arguments over intervention.

I now turn to the terms themselves. What do security, democracy, and regionalism mean—and what do they mean for this book?

Security

Like the other critical terms, security has many facets. These vary depending on the entity whose security is threatened, the nature and gravity of the threat, the source of the threat, and the authority responsible for identifying and describing the entity, the threat, and the source.⁵ Such an authority could be, for example, a government, an association, an activist, or a scholar. In this book, my co-authors and I all perform this identifying role.

Consider merely the choice of an entity in danger. This could be our physical planet and all humankind, particular regions and populations, specific states and societies within a given region, or areas and peoples either within a country or spanning the borders of countries. Or one could descend still farther down the ladder of abstraction and consider the security of ever smaller physical spaces or social groups, including—finally—the security of individual human beings, or “human security” as it is referred to in this book.

Nor is this an exhaustive list. One could consider as well the security or sustainability of a tradition, a language, a religion, an organization, a theory, or a practice—including the organization, theory, and practice of this book’s other conceptual pillars: democracy and regionalism. I will shortly note the ecological,

⁵ On the scope of security, see my “Goldilocks’s Problem: Rethinking Security and Sovereignty in Asia,” in *The Many Faces of Asian Security: Beyond 2000*, edited by Sheldon W. Simon (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 89–111; and Muthiah Alagappa’s discussion of “security with adjectives” in “Introduction,” 11–13, and “Conceptualizing Security: Hierarchy and Conceptual Traveling,” 677–97 (694–95), in Alagappa, ed., *Asian Security Practices: Material and Ideational Influences* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998). Whether the entity that identifies the threat is believed or not, and by whom, is a matter for empirical investigation. Obviously, the credibility of someone who cries wolf will be affected by the wolf’s own existence and behavior.

socioeconomic, and political heterogeneity of Southeast Asia. Can we speak, in that context, of the security of diversity? We can. Anything that is valued can warrant concern for its “security” on the part of whoever values it.

I will not even try to inventory the myriad possible dangers and sources of danger that an authority might identify. Suffice it instead to highlight two different targets and two different sources of threat that are especially relevant to the discussion of security in this book: state versus human security on the one hand, and external versus internal threats on the other.

Some quick definitions are in order. In this book, “the state” is an institutional structure of official authority with sovereign jurisdiction over a particular territory.⁶ A “society” encompasses the totality of persons living within that jurisdiction. A “country” incorporates both the state and the corresponding society. Sometimes, here and elsewhere in this book, if only to avoid repetition, “state” may be used interchangeably with “country,” but the intended meaning should be clear from the context. Finally, a “government” consists of a specific set of more or less temporarily incumbent officials speaking and acting on the state’s behalf by virtue of holding positions of authority in it. In the Kingdom of Thailand, for example, the monarch heads the state, while a prime minister leads the government. In Indonesia, on the other hand, the president plays both roles. When for stylistic reasons “state” and “government” are used synonymously, the context should clarify the difference.

Threats to the security of the state may come from outside the borders of a country. In 1975 Indonesia invaded and occupied East Timor. In 1978 Vietnam did the same thing to Cambodia. In 1979 China briefly avenged its Cambodian ally by attacking Vietnam. But not since then—some thirty years ago—has a war between two or more states or governments broken out inside Southeast Asia or along its perimeter.⁷

Far more relevant than interstate wars in Southeast Asia today, and hence in the pages of this book, are external or cross-border threats that do not involve troops intentionally transgressing borders but implicate dangers that ignore borders altogether. Perils of this sort include environmental degradation, ranging from air and water pollution to global warming; natural disasters such as the deadly Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami of 2004, or the already

⁶ For a state to exist, it need not exercise sovereignty across its territory fully, uniformly, or effectively—or even legitimately in the eyes of the population it ostensibly rules. In extremis, of course, the state may be so degraded or challenged that it no longer exists as a singular noun. In 2007–08 the boundary between the presence and absence of the state could be located somewhere between grossly mismanaged but sovereign Zimbabwe and the polycentric near-anarchy of Somalia.

⁷ These borders have not always been conflict-free, however. Most notably, in the mid-to-late 1990s, incursions from Myanmar into Thailand by the armed forces and armed opponents of the junta resulted in the deaths of “several” Thai nationals, according to Amnesty International, “Myanmar: The Kayin (Karen) State: Militarization and Human Rights,” 1 June 1999, <<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA16/012/1999/en>>.

mentioned and also lethal Bay of Bengal cyclone of 2008; maritime abuses, from piracy to overfishing; transnational crimes, from money laundering and “phishing” for identities in cyberspace to trafficking in persons and drugs; externally aided insurgencies and terrorism; perceived threats associated with unrestricted or illegal immigration; damage to cities and crops from floods and droughts; illnesses from infectious disease; sudden economic downturns of global or regional scope, including the financial crisis that swept parts of East Asia beginning in 1997; and the list goes on. In this book, along with Caballero-Anthony and Tay, Dosch also considers such “nontraditional” threats to human security. Unconventional, too, are the risks of shifting toward nuclear energy noted by Michael S. Malley in his chapter.

A disturbing aggregate assessment of threats to states and societies appears annually in the Failed States Index compiled by The Fund for Peace and *Foreign Policy*. The Index sums a dozen indicators of social, economic, and political insecurity, and then uses these to score and rank countries according to their vulnerability to “state failure,” including “violent internal conflict and societal deterioration.” Of the 177 countries whose risk was assessed for 2006, 20 were judged by *Foreign Policy* to be in “critical” condition. Another 20 were said to be “in danger,” and 20 more were placed on the “borderline” between stability and instability. By this evidence, sustainable internal security in that year had eluded one-third of all the world’s countries.⁸

Among the ten countries traditionally said to make up Southeast Asia, Myanmar was “critical,” while the “borderline” group, listed in declining order of vulnerability to failure, included Laos, Cambodia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. By this measure, fully *one-half* of all Southeast Asian states were said to be at risk of “state failure.” Timor-Leste was also deemed “critical,” and if that turbulent case is included in Southeast Asia, an actual if bare majority of the region’s constituent countries were internally insecure or at serious risk of such insecurity.

These judgments err on the side of alarmism. State failure in the sense of outright collapse is an extreme and rare condition. Yet the empirical data summarized by the Index do show that the insecurity of states and societies is a serious problem worldwide, and one from which Southeast Asia is hardly immune. The demonstrations that broke out inside Myanmar in August 2007, followed by their violent suppression in September, and the shooting of the prime minister of Timor-Leste in February 2008, in the aftermath of earlier strife, certainly confirmed the “critical” status of those countries.

⁸ For a list of the rankings, see The Fund for Peace, “Failed States Index 2007 [for 2006],” <<http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php>>. For explanations and interpretations, including the quoted phrases, see “The Failed States Index 2007 [for 2006],” *Foreign Policy*, July–August 2007, <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=3865&cprint=1>.

When it comes to asking Lenin's question—"What is to be done?"—cross-country aggregations and rankings are not enough. If by "the state" we mean to distinguish the ruling apparatus of a sovereign country from the society that it subsumes, one can easily picture a state whose brutality or indifference has left its people to contend with poverty, illness, exploitation, crime, and political violence, and yet for all that, remains itself relatively durable and secure. To the extent that the apparatus itself is responsible for such appalling conditions, it may be necessary to threaten or even disrupt state security in order to improve human security. But is this realistic? Even if it is, who can guarantee that coercion in a good cause will not simply breed chaos, that interference will not merely enlarge insecurity, leaving both the state and the society worse off than they were before?

Looking ahead to our next concept, what of democracy? Will democratization ensure an *effective* state—or merely an elected one? Are democratic procedures a necessary and universal prerequisite of human security? Or are there circumstances in which the introduction of democracy is likely to disrupt the capacity of the state to protect society? Is welfare a function of liberty, or is it the other way around?

Starkly phrased, these questions raise some of the hard choices implied by the title of this book. How should Myanmar's Southeast Asian neighbors deal with the malign regime in charge of that state? Should they intervene? Are conditions inside the country bad enough to warrant violating Myanmar's sovereignty for the sake of civility? Or are there softer choices between invasion and indifference, ways of nudging a misgoverned country toward a better future? In their chapters, Kyaw, Jones, and Kuhonta offer usefully diverging answers to these questions.

Democracy

In the 1990s Muthiah Alagappa wrote that the word "*security* is now used with more than thirty different adjectives," and listed thirty-seven examples. Fresh qualifiers have been popularized in the decade since he wrote, including two that recur in the present volume—"nontraditional" and "human" security.⁹ Yet this variety of understandings of security cannot compete with the expansion of "*democracy* with adjectives" to include not dozens but "hundreds of subtypes."¹⁰

⁹ Alagappa, *Asian Security Practices*, 11 (quote), and 694–95 (taxonomy). "Nontraditional" and "human security" roughly update his "non-conventional" and "individual security," respectively.

¹⁰ David Collier and Steven Levitsky, "Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research," *World Politics* 49, no. 3 (1997), 429–30, my italics.

There are several reasons for this lexical explosion. In contemporary discourse, by and large, “democracy” *as a term* is a good thing.¹¹ Some politicians, however, want the legitimacy that the word confers without the constraints that the reality can imply. Adjectives result, including Ayub Khan’s “basic democracy” in Pakistan, Sukarno’s “guided democracy” followed by Suharto’s “Pancasila democracy” in Indonesia, Vladimir Putin’s “managed democracy” in Russia, and Than Shwe’s “discipline-flourishing democracy” in Myanmar. Typically, these adjectives are meant to prevent a more or less subjugated population from thinking that the noun “democracy” should necessarily imply and require a different qualifier, namely, “liberal” as in “liberal democracy.”

Conversely, activists and analysts who are committed to liberal democracy as the only form of government worth seeking or having may insist on “democracy without adjectives,”¹² by which they most often mean the liberal kind, traditionally distinguished above all by the proposition that individuals have innate rights and freedoms that the state must respect. Such a commitment explains, for example, why the American organization Freedom House considers Laos, a self-described “people’s democracy,” to be the second *least* democratic country in Southeast Asia (after Myanmar).¹³

Related to a liberal democracy is an electoral one—a country whose people can “choose and replace their leaders in regular, free, and fair elections.” If the incidence, degree, and risk of state failure are hard to quantify, so too are the regularity, freedom, and fairness of elections. Nevertheless, in the last decades of the twentieth century, according to Freedom House data as interpreted by Larry Diamond, the proportion of all countries that were electoral democracies more than doubled—from 26.7 percent in 1973 to 61.3 percent in 1995.¹⁴ But the figure then leveled off. A decade later, in 2006, at 62.6 percent, the global proportion of electoral democracies had barely changed. And if the celebrated global “third wave” of democratization¹⁵ that had begun in the mid-1970s had petered out, democrats had reason to be concerned.

By 2008, a growing number of observers were indeed rethinking the answer to Diamond’s implicitly optimistic query, “Can the whole world become

¹¹ This is true despite the views of a small, extremist fringe, including radical Islamists who explicitly reject democracy as atheistic.

¹² A Latin American example is Enrique Krauze, *Por una Democracia sin Adjetivos* (Mexico City: Joaquin Mortiz/Planeta, 1986).

¹³ “Freedom in the World 2008,” <<http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fiw08launch/FIW08Tables.pdf>>. The country’s official name is the Lao People’s Democratic Republic.

¹⁴ For the definition and the data in this and the next paragraph, see Larry Diamond, *The Spirit of Democracy: The Struggle to Build Free Societies throughout the World* (New York: Times Books, 2008), 22 and Appendix (Table 2).

¹⁵ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

democratic?”¹⁶ Among the drivers of rising demo-skepticism were the deadly quagmire in Iraq, resulting from U.S. President George W. Bush’s experiment in democracy-by-invasion; the reversal of democratization in Russia under Vladimir Putin; and the durability of authoritarian rule in China despite the contrary predictions of demo-optimists who expected economic growth to foster political pluralism in that country.¹⁷ But more than these cases were involved. According to the annual surveys of all countries by Freedom House, freedom worldwide suffered successive net declines in 2006 and 2007—the first two-year slippage since 1994 and the worst ratio of improvement to deterioration since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.¹⁸

As with the evidence of insecurity in the Failed States Index, this ebbing of democracy’s “third wave” may have been interpreted with excessive dismay. Freedom House classifies each country as “Free,” “Partly Free,” or “Not Free.” These judgments aggregate the answers to a lengthy checklist of questions regarding different aspects of political rights and civil liberties. It is entirely possible for a country to retain or even raise its summary status while losing ground on one or more of these component dimensions of freedom. Despite net global declines in these finer gradations of freedom in 2006 and 2007, the distribution of countries across the “Free,” “Partly Free,” and “Not Free”

¹⁶ Larry Diamond, “Can the Whole World Become Democratic? Democracy, Development, and International Policies,” University of California-Irvine Center for the Study of Democracy, 2003, <<http://repositories.cdlib.org/csd/03-05>>. The question was optimistic because the scope of what *can* happen is so much greater than the chance that a particular phenomenon actually *will* occur. Buoyed by the “third wave,” Diamond argued by extrapolation (“most states can become democratic, because most states already are”) and by example (since democracy had arrived and survived in Mali, “in principle” it could develop “in most other very poor countries”). But he added some challenging provisos: “Virtually every country in the world may be[come] democratic,” he wrote, but only in the long run, and only *if* global, integrative economic growth and American support for democratization could be sustained.

¹⁷ Admittedly, the Bush administration stressed democratization as a rationale for its invasion of Iraq only *after* weapons of mass destruction were not found. By adding insincerity to ineffectiveness, however, that sequencing discredited freedom as foreign policy even more. As for disappointment at the longevity of autocracy in China, in 1996 Henry S. Rowen asked, “When will China become a democracy?” and answered “around the year 2015.” A decade later, acknowledging that by Freedom House standards China had “remained deep in Not Free territory,” he reset his deadline to 2025. Compare Rowen, “The Short March: China’s Road to Democracy,” *The National Interest* 45 (Fall 1996), 61, and “When Will the Chinese People Be Free?” *Journal of Democracy* 18, no. 3 (July 2007), 38, 50.

¹⁸ Larry Diamond, “The Democratic Rollback: The Resurgence of the Predatory State,” *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 2 (March–April 2008), 39.

categories in 2007, as compared with 2005, actually improved, albeit to a very small degree.¹⁹

This book is focused, however, on Southeast Asia, and there the trends have been more discouraging. Corruption and coercion in the Philippines, including reportedly massive electoral fraud and official intimidation of the opposition to President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's government, caused that country to be downgraded for 2005 from "Free" to "Partly Free," a label it kept through 2007. Meanwhile in Thailand, the coup d'état that overthrew the elected government of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in September 2006 dropped his country from "Partly Free" to "Not Free" for that year.

Thailand regained "Partly Free" status thanks to the junta's willingness to allow elections to take place in December 2007, which the opposition won. But the lesser shifts along finer gradations across the region were not encouraging. Of the component trends for 2006 and 2007 that were not large enough to lift or lower a Southeast Asian country from one to another of the three summary rungs—trends in Malaysia, Myanmar, and the Philippines (and Timor-Leste)—all pointed downward.²⁰ Nor did Southeast Asia look better compared with other areas. Among all nine world regions as of the end of 2006, only the one spanning the Middle East and North Africa was more authoritarian than Southeast Asia.²¹

The relevance of democracy for this book lies in this contrast between the global "third wave" of political reform and the regional "recalcitrance" that persists in Southeast Asia.²² The discrepancy poses a broader version of the question, already introduced, as to whether Myanmar's neighbors can or

¹⁹ For the list of 27 questions and 131 subquestions, see "Methodology," *Freedom in the World 2007* [for 2006], <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=351&ana_page=333&year=2007>. From 2005 through 2007, the percentages of "Free," "Partly Free," and "Not Free" countries shifted from 46 to 47, 30 to 31, and 24 to 22 percent, respectively. See "Historical Country Ratings," *Freedom in the World 2008* [for 2007 and earlier], <<http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fiw08launch/FIW08Tables.pdf>>.

²⁰ For the data, see "Table of Independent Countries," *Freedom in the World 2008* and 2007.

²¹ This comparison relies on Diamond's analytic categories and country assignments—"liberal democracy," "electoral democracy" (including Indonesia, the Philippines, and Timor-Leste), "competitive authoritarian[ism]" (including Malaysia), "electoral (hegemonic) authoritarian[ism]" (including Cambodia, Singapore, and Thailand), and "politically closed authoritarian[ism]" (including Brunei, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam). To single out Southeast Asia on Diamond's list of world areas, I divided his "Asia" into its three constituent regions: Northeast, Southeast, and South Asia. Even if Timor-Leste's "electoral democracy" is included as Southeast Asia's eleventh state, varieties of authoritarian rule characterize eight (or nearly three-quarters) of the countries in that region. See Diamond, *Spirit of Democracy*, Appendix (Table 5).

²² See my "Region and Recalcitrance: Rethinking Democracy through Southeast Asia," *The Pacific Review* 8, no. 2 (1995).

should try to impel its junta toward reform. If the Southeast Asian region itself has not democratized—not fully or sustainably, notwithstanding the (so far) “Free” status of Indonesia—is there a role for regionalism to play in trying to facilitate more open, competitive, and accountable rule, not only in Myanmar but in other ASEAN states as well? Or would such an effort, if it were attempted, either founder for lack of agreement or trigger conflicts that would, in the end, render Southeast Asia neither democratic nor secure?

Regionalism

Regionalism is a process. It is the intentional bringing together of physically more or less proximate states, societies, or economies, in various ways and to varying degrees, for ostensibly common purposes and activities—forming or nourishing a shared identity, improving conditions and solving problems, or projecting influence beyond the region whose nature is thereby purposely created or shaped.²³ Like democracy, regionalism can be the business of governmental or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or actors. And if “waves” of democratization have spread variations on that form of rule around the world, so too has the evidence of regionalism become ubiquitous.

An obvious way to estimate the incidence of regionalism is to ask how many regional organizations there are. The question is answered annually by the Union of International Organizations. The 2007–08 edition of their *Yearbook of International Organizations* identified 7,759 “conventional international bodies” (CIBs)—“membership organizations” that were “genuinely international in character” and operated in “at least three countries.” Of these CIBs, no fewer than 6,138, or 79 percent, were “regionally oriented” as opposed to global or near-global in scope and purpose. Striking, too, was the overwhelming preponderance of *nongovernmental* entities among these regionalist bodies—5,963 or 97 percent of the 6,138. Merely 175, or 3 percent, of these regionally focused CIBs were official—intergovernmental—in nature. Yet these 175 official regional organizations constituted 72 percent of all 242 intergovernmental CIBs.²⁴

To the extent that “regionally oriented” CIBs have regionalist intentions or potentials, in contrast to their presumably more globalist counterparts, one may infer from these comparisons that regionalism is far more common than globalism. The sheer prevalence of regional associations, compared with their

²³ Regionalization is, in contrast, a process whereby transactions and interactions across national borders, undertaken without the intent of forming a region in its own right, of and for itself, nevertheless facilitate that result. Decisions by firms in one country to invest in, import from, or export to one or more neighboring countries may thus be regionalizing without being regionalist.

²⁴ Union of International Organizations, ed., *Yearbook of International Organizations: Guide to Global and Civil Society Networks* (Munich: K. G. Saur Verlag, 2007), vol. 1B, 2995.

larger-scale globalist or potentially globalist counterparts, argues for a focus on regions. Compared with the world as a whole, regions are already well equipped with resident associations that could—if they are not already promoting security, democracy, prosperity, or some other value in their respective neighborhoods—be encouraged or given incentives to do so. At the same time, the near-totally *nongovernmental* character of these regional associations warrants the attention that Caballero-Anthony, Dosch, and others in this book pay to regional NGOs and the growth of civil society in Southeast Asia.

Abundance and influence are two different things. It does not follow merely from the large number of regional organizations, and their almost wholly nongovernmental character, that private-sector or civil-society regionalism—regional cooperation outside the state—is necessarily more effective than globalism, or than regionalism spearheaded by governments. As the *Yearbook* data show, nearly three-quarters of all intergovernmental CIBs are regional in character. In view of the largely regional (rather than global) contexts in which governments do choose to cooperate, official regionalism is hardly a spent force. And for all the talk of globalization erasing the sovereignty of states, they remain essential to the furtherance of security, democracy, and regionalism, and for that matter globalism as well.

These organizational patterns favor the approach adopted in this book: to acknowledge the intergovernmental Association of Southeast Asian Nations as the legitimate exponent and embodiment of official regionalism in Southeast Asia, yet also to recognize that ASEAN acting alone, without help from civil society, may not be able to prevent state failure, to improve nontraditional security, or to reduce what might be termed the “democratic deficit” in Southeast Asia compared with most of the rest of the world.

ASEAN is by far the most often recurring acronym used in this book. Every chapter deals with the Association—its background, organization, performance, members,²⁵ or prospects, including its past or future relevance for security and democracy in the region. As I will argue later in this introduction, ASEAN is hardly synonymous with Southeast Asia. But it is practically impossible to think or write about regionalism there without referring to the Association. If the region as a region is to cope with new and complex challenges to security and democracy, action by ASEAN will be necessary. ASEAN’s actions are unlikely to be sufficient, however, unless they are deepened and strengthened by unofficial regionalism—commitments, proposals, and actions by regional NGOs. Indeed, success in achieving human security, competitive elections, accountable government, and respect for individual and minority rights in Southeast Asia is

²⁵ ASEAN was founded in 1967 by five Southeast Asian states—Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. By mid-1999 the grouping had doubled its membership to include Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam as well. For a detailed review of ASEAN’s organizational development, see chapter 3, by Termsak Chalermplanupap, in this book.

likely to require initiatives on all three of the “tracks” that policymakers like to cite: “Track I” where governments operate; “Track III” where NGOs are active; and the intermediate “Track II,” where both kinds of actors meet and interact, informally and (one hopes) creatively, to address problems whose regional scope and local complexity exceed the ability of either set, by itself, to resolve.

As noted at the outset of this essay, the interactions of regionalism with security and democracy around the world are an understudied subject. Books on regionalism and democracy are especially rare. I say this based on a June 2008 search of the titles of books in English in WorldCat, a global catalog of more than 100 million bibliographic records in some 60,000 libraries around the world. As referenced in this database, book titles that include one or more of the “critical terms” in *Hard Choices* form a sequence of ever smaller circles (with the number of titles noted in parentheses). There is a vast literature that represents itself as being about “security” (104,773), one about “democracy” roughly one-third as large (31,554), and a much smaller one on “regionalism” (2,358). Far fewer are books whose titles include both “regionalism” and “security” (50), yet they are nearly twice as common as titles on “regionalism” and “democracy” (15). Surprisingly, only one book in English has a title that spans all three of these critical terms—“regionalism,” “security,” and “democracy”—and that book is *Hard Choices*.²⁶

If the case for this book’s focus is strengthened by its novelty, however, it certainly does not follow that its authors have begun from scratch. As the citations in their chapters attest, ideas and propositions relevant to the study

²⁶ It follows from this that no other book has all three of these key words and “Southeast Asia” in its title. Nor do “regionalism,” “democracy,” and “Southeast Asia” occur in any other book title. A search of article titles yielded comparable results. These key word frequencies are approximations that change as the database is updated, and they understate the actual-content coverage of these topics. One cannot, for example, conclude from the absence of the word “regionalism” in its title that Amitav Acharya’s *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order* (London: Routledge, 2001) is not about that phenomenon; it most certainly is. Nor can one say that it makes no mention of “democracy”; it does.

Electronically scanning all the words in all the books listed in WorldCat is of course not feasible. But I did expand the search beyond a book’s title to scan other information on its bibliographic record, which could include subject classifications and a table of contents. The results of these wider searches did not alter the *ordinal* sequence of the sets of titles enumerated here. Nor did they weaken the distinctiveness of *Hard Choices*. An inspection of the six books (other than *Hard Choices*) whose records referred to all four critical terms (even though their titles did not) revealed that none was about security, democracy, *and* regionalism in even roughly equal measure, and all six relegated Southeast Asia to brief treatment as part of a larger area such as the Pacific Rim, Asia, or East Asia. All searches of <<http://www.worldcat.org>> were performed on 13 June 2008. The precision of numerical results is less reliable than the orders of magnitude they reflect, especially with a database as large as this one.

of regionalism, security, and democracy in Southeast Asia may be found in a variety of existing works, whatever their titles may be.

Economy?

This book does not give equal treatment alongside security, democracy, and regionalism to a fourth topic—economy. Analyzing three chosen themes and the dynamics between them was challenging enough. Most of the chapters do, nevertheless, deal with economic variables. Termsak reviews the ASEAN Economic Community. Kyaw and Kuhonta write of economic sanctions against Myanmar. Tay conveys the economic consequences of “the haze” in Indonesia. Several authors, including Dosch, Malley, and Jones, discuss the possibly material basis of security advanced in the well-known argument that expanding commerce among countries makes them more interdependent and thus more likely to enjoy the comforts of a “liberal peace.” That said, however, none of the contributors pictures the economy as the primary driver of interstate security or intrastate democracy in Southeast Asia.

In 2005, an estimated 26 percent of all trade by ASEAN’s member economies was conducted with one another. In that same year, twice as much, or 53 percent, of all trade by the economies of East Asia—the ASEAN ten plus China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan—took place among themselves. Nor has the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement, signed in 1992, turned Southeast Asia into a trade bloc by enlarging the proportional extent of intraregional trade. Since 1995, that figure has stayed within a narrow range of 22 to 26 percent.²⁷

One may argue that threats to the security of Southeast Asia are less likely to come from within its own region than from Northeast Asia, especially given the geographic, demographic, and military imbalances between the ASEAN states on the one hand and China on the other. One could assess the materialist argument that intra-*East* Asian trade promotes interdependent prosperity and therefore peace, not to mention democracy, within that much larger zone. One could ask to what extent such effects, if real, have resulted from regionalization—the economic activities of millions of firms and entrepreneurs on Track III—or regionalism—including the ASEAN Plus Three (China, Japan, South Korea) framework for economic cooperation on Track I that ASEAN initiated in 1997. However, that far wider research agenda would have meant writing a different—and much longer—book. Moreover, inside a Southeast Asian rather than an East Asian frame, the case for interpreting commercial

²⁷ The data for 2005 are from Siow Yue Chia, “Whither East Asian Regionalism? An ASEAN Perspective,” *Asian Economic Papers* 6, no. 3 (October 1997), 3 (Table 1), <<http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1162/asep.2007.6.3.1>>. The range since 1995 is from the ASEAN Secretariat as reported by Denis Hew, *Brick by Brick: The Building of an ASEAN Economic Community* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies / Canberra: Asia Pacific Press, 2007), 211 (Fig. 10.1).

interdependence and material prosperity as drivers of security and democracy is harder to maintain.

The resource endowments of many Southeast Asian countries are more competitive than complementary. The needs of the hypermodern, high-income city-state of Singapore do mesh well with those of its immediate neighbors—vast, agricultural, low-wage, mineral-rich Indonesia, and the intermediate case of middle-income Malaysia. But this long-standing commercial nexus at the strategic southern end of the Strait of Malacca is exceptional in the larger context of Southeast Asia. As for a liberal peace, in the early-to-mid 1960s, for political reasons, the relative complementarity of these three economies did not stop Indonesia's then-president Sukarno from infiltrating Singapore and trying to “crush” Malaysia. Neither did it restrain Malaysia, which at first included Singapore, from expelling that island state.

Nearly half a century later, despite the further meshing of these countries' economies and the firmly established peace among them, nationalist tensions continue periodically to mar their political relations, as I shall later illustrate. That Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore enjoy interstate peace reflects the record of cooperation among their political elites in an ASEAN context at least as much as, and certainly more directly than, it expresses the structural fit between their different economies. As for democracy, were it a function of either rates or levels of economic growth, Singapore would be a bastion of freedom and accountability, and Indonesia's poverty would have kept it autocratic. The reverse is true: Prosperous Singapore's illiberal polity incorporates “calibrated coercion,” while far-lower-income Indonesia is by Freedom House measures the lone liberal democracy in Southeast Asia.²⁸

Materialist theorists have been puzzled by the paucity of democracy in a region whose socioeconomic progress has been so remarkable. Worldwide, among all thirty countries and one territory ranked highest on the Human Development Index (HDI) for 2005, only three had not been designated “Free”

²⁸ See Cherian George, “Calibrated Coercion and the Maintenance of Hegemony in Singapore,” Working Paper Series No. 48, Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, September 2005, <http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/docs/wps/wps05_048.pdf>; and Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2008 [for 2007],” <<http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fiw08launch/FIW08Tables.pdf>>. For 2007, Singapore and Indonesia ranked 8th and 156th respectively in per capita GDP at purchasing power parity (PPP) among the economies of the world, according to *The 2008 World Factbook* (Washington DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2008), <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2004rank.html>>. An evaluation of just how liberal Indonesia's democracy is lies beyond my limited space and scope. For a skeptical view, see Richard Robison and Vedi R. Hadiz, *Reorganising Power in Indonesia: The Politics of Oligarchy in the Age of Markets* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), esp. ch. 10.

for that year by Freedom House, and they were all East Asian: Hong Kong (“Partly Free”), Singapore (“Partly Free”), and Brunei (“Not Free”).²⁹

Do these exceptions “prove the rule” that prosperity ensures democracy? Believers in that rule could dismiss the case of Hong Kong by noting its subordination to China, which is still poor and therefore still, in their view, “Not Free.” Brunei can be set aside because crude oil and natural gas account for so much—just over half—of its GDP. When prosperity pours out of the ground, rather than from a population’s own efforts, economic growth is likely to reinforce autocratic rule by whoever controls the flow, other things being the same.³⁰

The Singapore exception is harder to handle, but arguments can be made to explain its uniqueness as a materially flourishing autocratic state: Its perilous location between potentially hostile countries encourages Singaporeans to let their leaders do what they think is best. Capitalism has not yielded freedom in Singapore because market forces have been too constrained by government to play their natural role. Confucian culture has blunted the otherwise democratizing force of economic growth. Uniquely talented patrician leaders—who will not be easy to replace—have kept political pluralism at bay. Among these and other explanations, some imply permanent or only slowly changing barriers to the arrival of liberal democracy in Singapore. Other arguments, particularly those with a focus on leadership succession, could be used to predict major reform soon. What is noteworthy about all of these explanations, however, is that by stressing the causal power of noneconomic phenomena, they undermine the materialist argument in the act of rescuing it.

Rather than confirming a necessary or unilinear progression from economic development to liberal democracy, this book’s treatment of economic factors highlights their political ambiguity and the historical contingency of their political effects. Several chapters, for example, deal with the Asian financial crisis (AFC) that struck Southeast Asia in 1997. If we believe in straight-line fashion that economic miracles promote democracy, it should follow that economic debacles spawn the opposite—autocracy. Instead, the 1997 crisis, to varying extents from one more or less affected country to another, worked

²⁹ For each jurisdiction covered, the HDI annually averages measures of “three dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life; access to knowledge; and a decent standard of living.” The component indicators are “life expectancy at birth[;] adult literacy and combined gross enrolment in primary, secondary, and tertiary education[;] and gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in Purchasing Power Parity US dollars (PPP).” See Human Development Report Office, *Human Development Report 2007/2008* (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2007), 225 (definition) and 229 (data). The Freedom House designations are from <<http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/Chart83File137.pdf>> and <<http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/Chart84File136.pdf>>.

³⁰ They are not the same in Norway, whose oil-and-gas-rich political economy sustains a liberal democracy that earned the second-highest HDI in the world in 2005. See *Human Development Report 2007/2008*, 229.

to delegitimize *any* incumbent government that appeared passive, indifferent, or incompetent in the face of the crisis. In Indonesia, that delegitimation, in tandem with other conditions and events, did speed the shift from an existing authoritarian format to a new and democratic one. It would be unfair, however, to infer from this particular transition that economic downturns, regardless of initial political conditions, are conducive only to democratization—or that they are, for that matter, inherently despotic in political effect.

I have introduced this book's three analytic themes, and noted a foregone fourth. It is time to ask the next critical question: Why this particular region?

Why Southeast Asia?

Why focus on Southeast Asia? The answer is threefold: because the challenges that security and democracy pose for regionalism in that part of the world are, on balance, attractively *difficult*; because conditions there are creatively *diverse*; and because a book about these challenges in 2008 is especially *timely*.

Difficulty

Southeast Asia is an attractively *difficult* site for analyzing how regionalism can affect security and democracy.

It is helpful to picture a spectrum of instances drawn from different parts of the world. At one extreme, in Europe, security and democracy have already been achieved, and regionalism has been institutionalized. One can debate how much credit should be given to the entity now known as the European Union (EU) for achieving security and democracy (not to mention prosperity) in its neighborhood, and whether these historic gains are likely to be jeopardized in future. The Union remains, nevertheless, the single most successful instance of regionalism in the world.

At the opposite end of the spectrum of regionalist experiences, farthest from Europe, lie the countries of the Middle East and North Africa. There, Europe's accomplishments are more or less absent, and security has been a sometime thing. Since 1980, major violence—often prolonged and in some cases ongoing—has occurred across and/or within the borders of Algeria, Iraq, Israel, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, and Yemen. Democracy, too, has proven elusive. Of the region's seventeen states, only Israel and Turkey are democratic.³¹ As for regionalism, disunity has long bedeviled both of the larger official organizations in this part of the world—the African Union (AU) and the Arab League.³²

³¹ See Diamond, *Spirit of Democracy*, Appendix (Table 5).

³² Nor is such disunity a thing of the past. Half of the twenty-two heads of state or government entitled to attend the Arab League's summit in Damascus in March 2008 chose not to do so, and one (Lebanon) was not represented at all. See "A Snub for Syria," editorial, *The Boston Globe*, 29 March 2008, <http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/editorial_opinion/editorials/articles/2008/03/29/a_snub_for_syria>.

Political splits have also thwarted the ability of smaller-scale regionalisms in the area, such as the Arab Maghreb Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council, to foster security or democracy in their vicinities. Only in the AU has democracy been even a rhetorical priority for these organizations, which is not surprising in light of the mostly authoritarian make-up of their constituent states.

As a locale for scholarly analysis and policy prescription, Southeast Asia is an engaging mixed case between these European and North African–Middle Eastern extremes.

I noted earlier that since the birth of ASEAN in 1967, war has never broken out between any of its member states. This is striking circumstantial evidence that the Association has helped its members to achieve and maintain interstate peace. If non-ASEAN states in Southeast Asia had been as successful as ASEAN members in avoiding war, the grouping's edge in peaceability would disappear. In reality, when Vietnam overran Cambodia in 1978, neither belonged to ASEAN. Nor was Vietnam a member when China attacked it in 1979. Indonesia did belong to ASEAN when the Suharto regime seized East Timor in 1975, but with that exception no ASEAN state has so far invaded, or been invaded by, a nonmember. Looking still farther back in history yields ample additional evidence of warfare in Southeast Asia—between its polities, or between them and outsiders. This record of prior turbulence belies the idea that regional peace incubated ASEAN, rather than the other way around.

Nevertheless, even if the danger of outright invasion has been durably overcome and ASEAN is one reason why, there is still room for improvement along security's other key dimensions:

- “Human security,” including the protection of individuals and minorities from official predation, discrimination, and neglect
- “Nontraditional security (NTS),” at risk from environmental and other novel hazards that ignore national borders
- *Intrastate* security, as endangered by the rise and the repression of movements against central authority
- Better governance, including the rule of law and the reduction of corruption
- Effective democracy, including the protection of human rights and civil liberties

It is security in these senses that is featured in this book, and it is in these contexts that Southeast Asia is an attractively difficult case.

The difficulty lies in the challenges to ASEAN to adopt and address this new agenda—challenges the Association may well fail to meet. The difficulty is attractive for study and advice because the record of regionalism and its achievements is neither so fulsome as to ensure success, nor so abject as to preclude it. If official or Track I regionalism has managed to facilitate security at the level of states, can that achievement be extended to include the security

of societies and persons as well, including the diminution in Southeast Asia of opaque, abusive, and unaccountable rule? It is the surface plausibility of arguments on *both* sides of this question that recommends Southeast Asia as the spatial focus of this book.

Diversity

Another reason for exploring security, democracy, and regionalism in Southeast Asia is the region's creative *diversity*. It would be hard to imagine a more heterogeneous place. From Kachin in northernmost Myanmar to Papua in extreme southeastern Indonesia, from Aceh in far-western Indonesia to the easternmost Philippine island of Mindanao, the topographies and ecologies of Southeast Asia—subcontinental, peninsular, maritime—are spectacularly varied. The region's peoples speak some 1,500 languages, and all of the world's major and many minor religions are represented there. Southeast Asian countries differ greatly in their demographic size, from 235 million in Indonesia—the world's fourth most populous country—to a mere 375,000 in Brunei as of 2007. Per capita GDPs (at purchasing power parity) also ranged widely in that year, from US\$ 48,900 in Singapore—above the U.S. figure of \$ 46,000—to a scant \$ 1,900 in Laos.³³

Dissimilar, too, are the historical experiences and political systems of Southeast Asia's countries. Ten of the region's arguably eleven states were colonized prior to World War II, for varying lengths of time and in differing ways and degrees, by Britain (Brunei, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore), France (Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam), the Netherlands (Indonesia), Portugal (Timor-Leste), and Spain followed by the United States (the Philippines). One country (Thailand) was not colonized in a formal sense at all.

In mid-2008 in Southeast Asia one could find a military junta (Myanmar), an absolute monarchy (Brunei), two ostensibly communist one-party states (Laos, Vietnam), a dominant-party parliamentary monarchy (Cambodia), a dominant-party parliamentary republic (Singapore), a restored (post-coup) multiparty parliamentary monarchy (Thailand), a dominant-party parliamentary federation with a rotating king (Malaysia), a presidential republic of multiple but weak parties (the Philippines), a multiparty presidential republic (Indonesia), and a nascent and mainly parliamentary but also presidential multiparty republic (Timor-Leste).

³³ These estimates, which incorporate Timor-Leste, reflect Cliff Goddard, *The Languages of East and Southeast Asia: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 44, 47; "Languages of Indonesia (Papua)" in Raymond Gordon, Jr., *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* (15th ed., Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2005), <http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=IDP>; and *2008 World Factbook*, <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2119rank.html>> (populations) and <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2004rank.html>> (per capita GDP).

Southeast Asia is not democratic by Freedom House standards. Of the region's eleven states (including Timor-Leste) in 2007, only one was "Free." But that exception was Indonesia, by far the largest, most populous, and potentially most influential state in the region. The rest were evenly distributed between "Partly Free" (Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Timor-Leste) and "Not Free" (Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam).

Diversity is not a synonym for deadlock, any more than homogeneity implies harmony. But in conditions of such prodigious variety, how amenable to *regional* promotion are security and democracy as objectives? Is Southeast Asia's variegation so daunting in this context that regionalism's prospects look *unattractively* difficult?

It is roughly true that, compared with markedly similar states, highly diverse ones are more likely to have diverse outlooks, and that what it means to be "secure" or "democratic" is likely to vary depending on who, what, and where you are. Another look at the adjacent but very different states bordering the Malacca Strait will illustrate not only these points regarding the subjectivity of "security" in Southeast Asia, but also how, in this instance, a divergence that was attributable to diversity has been largely overcome.

Singapore is small, rich, mainly non-Muslim, and mostly ethnic-Chinese. Malaysia is much bigger, much less rich, and majority Muslim-Malay. Indonesia is huge, poor, largely Muslim, and overwhelmingly non-ethnic-Chinese. As Dosch notes in his chapter, the late Southeast Asianist Michael Leifer, drawing on some of these differences, portrayed Singapore's foreign policy as a mini-state's response to vulnerability and showed how Indonesia's outlook projected that vast country's sense of regional entitlement.³⁴

In ASEAN circles during the Cold War, different visions of regional security and how to achieve it competed for approval. Singapore's sense of vulnerability led its leaders to define regional security in *strategically inclusive* or balance-of-power terms. The city-state's rulers wanted major players such as China, Japan, Russia, and especially the United States to be present inside the region, where they could not only check one another but could also potentially restrain any local would-be hegemon—the most worrisome of which was Indonesia.

Malaysia championed a *strategically exclusive* concept of regional security, in which Southeast Asia would declare its neutrality in the Cold War, the United States would withdraw its forces from Vietnam, and outside powers would abstain from further interference in the region. Indonesia for its part felt entitled to recommend the *strategically privileged* concept of "regional resilience" as a larger version of the "national resilience" it had itself pursued, in which regional security would ultimately depend not on outside powers but on the strengths of Southeast Asians themselves. Viewed from Jakarta, not least among those

³⁴ See Michael Leifer, *Singapore's Foreign Policy: Coping with Vulnerability* (New York: Routledge, 2000), and *Indonesia's Foreign Policy* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1983).

strengths were Indonesia's own assets and authority as the region's largest and therefore most entitled member.

Regionalism, however, far from being undermined by these differences, bridged them. In 1971, Singapore, Indonesia, and the rest of ASEAN humored Malaysia by jointly stating a desire to turn Southeast Asia into a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN).³⁵ But the strategic abstention implied by ZOPFAN was never implemented on the ground, and eventually the end of the Cold War retired neutrality as a posture. Meanwhile, ASEAN's success in fostering comity among its diverse members helped to moderate both the vulnerability felt by Singapore and the entitlement felt by Indonesia.

In 2008, there was still no uniform view of regional security to be found across all of ASEAN's diverse members. Versions of strategic inclusion had, nevertheless, become conventional in the region. ASEAN's confidence in its ability proactively to engage outside powers had grown as fear that they would interfere receded, the ongoing phobias of Myanmar's junta notwithstanding. From worrying about foreigners destabilizing Southeast Asia, ASEAN had progressed to attempting to help foreigners stabilize the rest of Asia. A case in point was the 1994 launching of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), whose twenty-six members (as of mid-2008) included all the major powers.

When he was Indonesia's president (1998–99), B. J. Habibie, while addressing some foreign journalists, directed their attention to a map. "All the green is Indonesia," he said—and added dismissively, if not derisively as well, "That red dot is Singapore." Habibie's successor, Abdurrahman Wahid (1999–2001), made headlines by remarking, "Basically Singaporeans underestimate the Malays. They think we do not exist." Added Wahid, "If we hold the water for a moment, they will have no water to drink." By "we" he meant Indonesia acting jointly with Malaysia, for it was Malaysia on which Singapore—the "red dot"—relied for half or more than half of all its fresh water.³⁶ What is important about this contretemps, however, is how little it mattered to the actual security of the countries involved.

³⁵ "Freedom" in this context meant that the region should be "free of any form or manner of interference by outside powers." The text of the declaration is in K. S. Sandhu et al., *The ASEAN Reader* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1992), 538–39.

³⁶ See Michael D. Barr, "The Little Red Dot Speaks," *Asian Analysis* [Canberra], January 2001, <<http://www.aseanfocus.com/asiananalysis/article.cfm?articleID=345>>, and Vaudine England, "Singapore Greets Wahid Outburst with Silence," *South China Morning Post*, 28 November 2000, <<http://www.singapore-window.org/sw00/001128sc.htm>>. On Singapore's quarrels with Malaysia over fresh water, including disputed estimates of the city-state's dependence on its Malaysian supplier, see "Water: The Singapore-Malaysia Dispute—The Facts," *New Straits Times* [Kuala Lumpur], 21 July 2003, <<http://www.singapore-window.org/sw03/030721ns.htm>>.

ASEAN's Way

Strategic inclusion is one thing; sovereignty is another. If Cold War–derived neutrality has been superseded in Southeast Asia, ZOPFAN's emphasis on noninterference has not. That declaration committed ASEAN's founding states to a region freed of meddling by outsiders. Since ASEAN's founding, intraregional intervention—intrusion by one member in the affairs of another—has also been taboo. The defense of member-state sovereignty was critical to building confidence and reducing suspicion, especially in ASEAN's early years. In effect, the ruling elites overcame the conflictive risk of diversity by underpinning regional security not only positively, with proactive cooperation, but also negatively, with mutual assurances that no one member would fish in the troubled waters of another.

When “national sovereignty rules,” to cite Dosch's argument in this book, national sovereigns are essentially told they can stop worrying about what a neighboring sovereign might say publicly about them or plan privately to do to them. ASEAN's aversion to interference sustained a reciprocal kind of impunity: Each member regime could do what it wished behind its own borders, provided it gave the same leeway to other member regimes. In an abusively ruled country such as Myanmar, the arrangement fostered tolerance of repression—the region turning a blind eye. Yet the external security of all member states—as opposed to human security inside them—was thereby upheld, as was regional security defined in minimalist terms as the absence of interstate war.

In and of itself, the prohibition of interference was—and is—neither pro- nor antidemocratic. Observing this rule protected every member regime, despotic or democratic, from ouster through subversion or invasion by any other member, or by ASEAN itself. Whether an ASEAN country became more or less democratic, or prolonged its status quo, was left to the changing balance of power between the regime and its opponents. Noninterference in this respect supported the autonomy of political change.

ASEAN has always been and remains an intergovernmental body—an incumbents' club. To the extent that belonging to the Association bestows legitimacy, the direct beneficiary is not society but the regime that rules it—however civil the society and uncivil the regime might be. But if in the course of locally driven events society does somehow manage to “civilize” the state, replacing despotism with democracy, the principle of noninterference obliges ASEAN to accept the results—and seat the reformist leader of the new regime at the regional table. When democracy replaced autocracy in Indonesia in 1998–99, the country's new leaders were welcome to represent their country at ASEAN events. By the same token, none of ASEAN's leaders who gathered in the Philippines for a week of summitry in January 2007 demurred when the junta that had recently overthrown its elected predecessor in Bangkok arrived to speak on Thailand's behalf.

As these examples illustrate, the diversity of Southeast Asia's countries at a given point in time has been conducive to diverse changes inside them over time. If, back in 1967 when the Association was born, its originating states—Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand—had all been manifestly democratic, the new grouping might have followed Europe's model and required all future members to be democratic as well. Conversely, had ASEAN's founding members all been extremely and equally repressive, they might have used their creation to inoculate the region against democratization. Instead, the sheer heterogeneity of the region, the lack of trust among ASEAN's first leaders, and their wish to develop their respective economies in conditions of interstate peace led them to rest their cooperation on national sovereignty and its corollaries: noninterference and consensus.

These principles—flagstones of what became known as the ASEAN Way—impeded the ability of the grouping explicitly to advocate, let alone require, any one political format for its members. Noninterference meant limiting the drivers of domestic political change to events and actors inside state borders. Consensus gave each member state the right to veto the regional promotion of any particular type of regime. The doubling of ASEAN's membership since 1967, by further diversifying the grouping, has enhanced the restraining effect of these impediments.

It follows from this that if Southeast Asia's variegation inhibits *regional* action for or against democracy, the ASEAN Way is compatible with a range of *national* developments from reaction through reform to rebellion—and even, however unlikely, revolution. ASEAN's members are ten different experiments-in-progress. What happens to them will necessarily affect the organization to which they belong, including its future ability and inclination selectively to encourage, or discourage, any one kind of change.³⁷

Is ASEAN Losing Its Way?

Alongside attractive *difficulty* and creative *diversity*, the twists and turns of current events have made the study of security, democracy, and regionalism in Southeast Asia unexpectedly *timely* as well.

Writing *Hard Choices* was an idea conceived in 2006 in the knowledge that 2007 would be a watershed year for official regionalism in Southeast Asia. Forty years would have elapsed since ASEAN's birth in 1967. The onset of its middle age seemed a good time to reflect on where the Association stood, and might stand in the future, on matters of security and democracy.

But more than a birthday was involved. As Termsak relates in his chapter, it was already clear in 2006 that ASEAN hoped in 2007 to crown the celebration

³⁷ A book is sorely needed in which each chapter investigates how much and in what ways a particular member of ASEAN has influenced the Association, and considers consequences of the Association's ability, in turn, to influence the states that comprise it.

of its fortieth anniversary with the signing of an ASEAN Charter. Optimistic advocates of stronger regionalism began looking to the Charter as potentially a breakthrough text that, in putting the Association on a firmer institutional basis, might even amount to, or later evolve into, a regional “constitution” of sorts. Not surprisingly, such a term was too provocative for sovereignty-minded governments to entertain. A genuinely supranational institution was neither realistic nor desired. A “charter” sounded less intrusive, and more congenial to the ASEAN Way of noninterference and consensus.

Despite these qualms, however, the Charter’s planners—Keng Yong notably among them—did not wish merely to decorate the upcoming anniversary with cosmetic rhetoric. The drive to charter ASEAN, as Termsak explains in his essay, was motivated in no small measure by a perceived need to equip the Association with a legal personality. No one involved had the slightest intention to charter a Government of Southeast Asia. That was—is—a preposterous idea. But the plan for the Charter to include language that would render ASEAN a more fully and explicitly legal authority, with more clearly juridical rights and responsibilities, did reflect an intention to make the organization more “sovereign” *in its own right*, quite apart from the acknowledged sovereignty of its member states.

Some of the ways in which ASEAN would benefit by having a legal personality were minor. The Association would, for instance, be entitled to change the domain name of its Internet address from “.org” (for organizations in general) to “.int” (for organizations that are international, intergovernmental, and established by treaty). But other possibilities raised intriguing questions that some of the authors of this book discussed among themselves while writing it. For example, if ASEAN were to acquire a legal personality, and it agreed but failed to do something, could it be sued for breach of promise? Less fanciful would be the likely enhanced ability of the organization to raise money all by itself for its own budget, including funds endowed for use in perpetuity, thereby reducing its dependence on contributions by member states. As for the question underlying these and other possibilities, it was neither minor nor chimerical: How much authority should and would ASEAN have in relation to the authority enjoyed by each of its member states?

At ASEAN’s anniversary summit in Singapore in November 2007, the Charter was unveiled and signed by the leaders of all ten member governments. The text appears at the back of this book. In mid-2008 it was too soon to know whether the document would weaken or strengthen the ASEAN Way, or prolong, on balance, the status quo. All ten members must first ratify the document before it can come into force, and it will have to be interpreted and applied before its effects can be known.

I will return to the Charter at the end of this essay. For now, I will merely suggest a few of its implications. Once in effect, the document will allow ASEAN, as a legal personality, to reach agreements with comparable entities such as the EU, agreements that will be, in theory, binding under international law. Possessing legal status will also, though again only in principle, make it

easier for the Association to ensure that member states actually comply with its agreed-upon rules and decisions. The Charter will not transform ASEAN into a body with fully executive authority including the power to force its members to carry out its decisions. But the Charter could open at least some room for making the Association less allergic to interference, depending on the nature of the issue and the perceived danger of doing nothing. Reforming the ASEAN Way could, as a matter of practice, become marginally less difficult. National sovereignty as a barrier to regional action could become more conditional, albeit to a still unknown and possibly only modest degree.

The rule of consensus will not be abandoned, but it could be replaced by voting in certain circumstances—for efficiency to resolve an issue that does not elicit strong feelings or, conceivably and only in extremis, for effectiveness in overcoming a debilitating deadlock. These incremental shifts may not occur, but if they do, ASEAN could wind up stepping away from its prior emphasis on informal understandings and toward a more formal-legal or “European” way of doing regional business. Between noninterference seen as complicity in repression and interference feared as triggering division, between consensus at the risk of inaction and voting at the risk of splitting, what will the Association do? Hard choices indeed.

I have noted that this book was conceived in the knowledge that Southeast Asia on its fortieth anniversary might be on the cusp of change. What I did not know was that dramatic political events would break out in Myanmar to stain the celebration, embarrass the Association, and render this book even timelier than I had imagined it to be.

The Junta Cracks Down

The year 2007 in fact involved two anniversaries for ASEAN. Alongside its own would-be happy fortieth birthday was the distinctly less happy tenth anniversary of its 1997 decision to admit Myanmar to membership. That decision had benefited the generals in Yangon (formerly Rangoon)—and in Naypyidaw after a new capital was built there beginning in 2005—rather more than it had served the image of ASEAN in the capitals of democratic states outside Southeast Asia.

The Association had been turned into a tainted shield. Observance of the ASEAN Way protected Myanmar from intramural criticism while making the Association seem complicit in tyranny. Meanwhile the United States, the EU, and ASEAN’s other democratic partners faced hard choices of their own: to uphold human rights by downgrading relations with the Association insofar as they involved Myanmar at all, to work with ASEAN but attend its events only if the junta was absent or was represented by a lower-level functionary, or to cooperate fully with a successful regional organization in an economically attractive, strategically important part of the world.

In 2005 and 2006, as planning proceeded for the commemorative summit in Singapore, the political situation inside Myanmar was basically in stasis between the intransigence of the generals and the resistance of their nemesis, Aung San Suu Kyi. Detained and harassed, she remained unbowed. Her National League for Democracy (NLD) had won the 1990 elections by a landslide, but to no avail when the ruling generals canceled the result. The NLD could not achieve political reforms, but neither would it give up and go away. Since 1992 the regime had been pursuing at a glacial pace a “roadmap” toward a constitutional “democracy.” As noted earlier to illustrate “democracy with adjectives,” however, the sort of democracy Senior General Than Shwe had in mind was not just “disciplined” but “discipline-*flourishing*”³⁸—a format that would entrench the military’s political role and deny such a role to Suu Kyi.

In August 2007, with the Singapore summit barely three months away, alumni of an uprising that had failed nearly two decades earlier reignited public opposition to the Myanmar regime. What started as a protest against suddenly higher prices for energy and transportation, triggered when the junta cut fuel subsidies, became explicitly political in character. Soon Buddhist monks were leading mass demonstrations against the junta. In September the regime cracked down. Peaceful protesters were beaten and dispersed. Hundreds were arrested. Some were killed. Media reports and images of these brutalities triggered outrage not only in the West, but in parts of Southeast Asia as well.

ASEAN as an organization was eloquently silent in the face of these blatant violations of human security by a member state. The ASEAN Way of keeping quiet while turning a blind eye was on full display. The secretary-general of ASEAN had no authority to criticize the junta; his job definition was to manage policy, not make it. The doctrine of noninterference, in any case, implied nonresponsibility. Requiring ASEAN to keep its hands off the junta allowed the Association to wash its hands of the junta’s behavior.

ASEAN’s public indifference to events in Myanmar seemed to reveal the organization as nothing more than the sum of its sovereign parts. In reformist circles, this was all the more reason for a Charter that could transform the Association from a mere political arena into a legal personality capable of speaking and acting on its own. Conservatives, in contrast, endorsed organizational silence as preferable to polarizing the Association over an internal matter and setting a precedent that could haunt other states when in the future they too had to quash domestic opposition.

Of any ASEAN country other than Myanmar, Singapore had the most at stake. It occupied the chair of ASEAN’s Standing Committee. As host of the imminent anniversary summit, its image was most clearly at risk. News circulated at the end of September that the city-state’s leaders had been working

³⁸ “Junta Wants ‘Discipline-Flourishing Democracy’ in Myanmar,” Islamic Republic News Agency, 5 January 2007, <<http://www2.irna.ir/en/news/view/menu-239/0701058175140530.htm>>.

behind the scenes to persuade the leaders of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam to join Singapore in “urging the Myanmarese authorities to exercise restraint” and peacefully to seek a “political solution for national reconciliation.”³⁹ Other international organizations, including the United Nations (UN) and the EU, had already made public statements and taken public actions regarding the crisis in Myanmar.

In New York on 25 September 2007, the UN General Assembly began its annual ritual of listening to speeches by leaders from around the world. All ten of ASEAN’s foreign ministers, including Myanmar’s, were in town for the occasion. They met in private on 27 September to review plans for the ASEAN Charter. The crisis in Myanmar came up, and a rancorous discussion ensued.

The result of this meeting buoyed the reformist position that ASEAN needed to speak out. Singapore’s Foreign Minister George Yeo, in his capacity as the ASEAN chair and on behalf of his fellow foreign ministers, described in strong language the chagrin that he and his colleagues felt about events in Myanmar. They were, he said, “appalled” at “reports of automatic weapons” being used against demonstrators. Reports that the protests had been forcibly suppressed, with fatalities, had led his colleagues to voice their “revulsion” to the foreign minister of Myanmar. They had insisted that the government of Myanmar stop using violence. They had “strongly urged” a “political solution,” including the release of Suu Kyi and all other political detainees, and efforts to achieve “national reconciliation” and “work towards a peaceful transition to democracy.”⁴⁰

The ministers were concerned, said Yeo, that “the reputation and credibility of ASEAN” had been seriously impacted by the crackdown. He then added a remark whose ironic significance would only become clear at the summit in Singapore in November: ASEAN’s foreign ministers had urged Myanmar’s government “to cooperate fully and work with” Ibrahim Gambari, the special envoy for Myanmar appointed by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

Never before had a chair of the Standing Committee of ASEAN criticized more vehemently the actions of a member state, and done so in public and on behalf of “the ASEAN foreign ministers”—Myanmar’s own minister in this instance presumably excluded.

There is much to be said about Yeo’s remarks, including the unprecedented expression of “revulsion” at an ASEAN member’s behavior.⁴¹ What matters

³⁹ Gamar Abdul Aziz, “ASEAN Cannot Remain Silent over Myanmar Unrest: PM Lee,” *Channelnewsasia.com* [Singapore], 28 September 2007, <<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/302532/1/.html>>.

⁴⁰ The quotes in this and the next paragraph are taken from “Statement by ASEAN Chair, Singapore’s Minister for Foreign Affairs George Yeo in New York, 27 September 2007,” <http://app.mfa.gov.sg/2006/press/view_press.asp?post_id=3125>.

⁴¹ See, for example, my “ASEAN’s ‘Black Swans,’” *Journal of Democracy* 19, no. 3 (July 2008).

most in the present context is the extent to which Yeo contravened the ASEAN Way by appearing to violate its cardinal principle of noninterference. As for the principle of consensus, it has two different faces. It can imply a need for *unanimity* that empowers a minority to disagree, thus preventing action. Or it can, on the contrary, imply a norm of *solidarity* that encourages that same minority to acquiesce, thereby enabling action.

In New York in September 2007, solidarity trumped unanimity. It is my understanding that none of the foreign ministers knew in advance exactly what Yeo would say. (Had he told them, some might have objected.) Again to my knowledge, none later chose to contradict what he actually did say. By claiming to speak on behalf of all ten ministers, Yeo disguised interference as consensus. By not refuting him, the ministers went along. Arguably they did so to maintain an appearance of harmony. In this admittedly extreme instance, the consensus principle did not embolden Myanmar's foreign minister to object. He neither vetoed Yeo's statement in advance nor denounced it afterward. Consensus in this case did not slow ASEAN down to what its least willing member would allow. Instead, one part of the ASEAN Way—consensus operating not as an invitation to exercise one's veto but as a disincentive to doing so—was used to hide the violation of another: the principle of noninterference erected as a barrier to criticism.

Did the Singaporean chair's revulsion violate Myanmar's sovereignty? Only the paranoid would define sovereignty as the right not to be criticized in private, and it is hardly less extreme or naive to argue that the principle confers immunity from being criticized in public as well. ASEAN's rulers, including the junta, are more realistic than that. When Indonesian presidents Habibie and Wahid disparaged Singapore, the latter's leaders could not and did not claim that their sovereignty had been transgressed. Propriety perhaps, but not sovereignty. Revulsion is not invasion.

Yeo's criticism put Myanmar's generals on notice that they could not expect intra-ASEAN collegiality to let them off the public-relations hook whenever they behaved as egregiously as they had in suppressing the nonviolent "saffron revolution" (so named after the colors of the robes worn by the protesting monks). The junta's dilatory behavior in the wake of Cyclone Nargis in 2008, however, showed once again that in a crisis the generals would not subordinate their desire to remain in power to the niceties of regional public relations. Nor, in 2007, did ASEAN follow up Yeo's statement with action in the sense of taking the initiative to facilitate reconciliation, let alone democracy, in Myanmar. Instead, the Association urged the junta to deal with the UN, knowing that in the Security Council, China would veto intervention. In this respect, despite appearing to interfere, ASEAN continued to deflect responsibility for what its most reviled member was up to. In retrospect, Yeo's words resembled substitutes for deeds more than deeds themselves.

The Chair Backs Down

The junta itself, of course, resisted a role for ASEAN, but the Association could hardly use that as an excuse for regional inaction. Yeo had, after all, been able to criticize the junta while acting as the ASEAN chair and representing “the ASEAN foreign ministers,” who had themselves “agreed” to his speaking publicly on the matter. What was there to prevent Singapore from moving from words toward deeds by proposing actual steps to be taken in ASEAN’s name to help bring about security, or even democracy, in the errant state? If the junta refused to receive, for example, a good auspices mission seeking Aung San Suu Kyi’s release from detention, publicly offering to mediate would at least have limited the damage to “the reputation and credibility of ASEAN” about which the foreign ministers had been so concerned.

Southeast Asian rulers had already applied an “ASEAN Minus X” formula to boost economic cooperation. A subset of the ten members could decide to do something without having to involve reluctant states. The Myanmar issue was more controversial, of course. Yet a single member state could have organized a subset group—“minus X”—to encourage reform in ASEAN’s most problematic state. As a large democracy with a history of military rule, Indonesia was a logical candidate to play such a role. Conversations I had with relevant actors in Jakarta in December 2007 suggested, however, that Indonesia did not want to rock the ASEAN boat, but hoped instead to work in tandem with non-Southeast Asians: Ban Ki-moon’s Special Envoy Gambari on the one hand, and China on the other.

Kyaw notes in his chapter that China, too, may have encouraged the junta to engage with the UN. He favors trying to encourage China to play a more positive role in Myanmar. I agree. Unfortunately, in March 2008, a version of Myanmar’s “saffron revolution” broke out in Tibet and triggered a crackdown comparable to what the junta had done. The parallel between the two cases cannot have been lost on Chinese leaders. In March 2008, it was not easy to picture them trying to persuade Myanmar’s strongman Than Shwe to accommodate Aung San Suu Kyi, any more than they themselves were willing to reconcile with the Dalai Lama. (Chinese policy on one or both of these fronts could, of course, change.)

Also noteworthy is the evidence that Kyaw reports, based on interviews with nearly a dozen active or retired officials, that only if an effort were made to overthrow their regime would the generals actually cancel Myanmar’s membership in ASEAN. On a bleak horizon, this amounts to good news, inasmuch as it implies useful room for creative regional initiatives that would not cause the generals to quit the Association and thereby terminate whatever modest collegial leverage ASEAN might have. The bad news is that despite being revolted and appalled, Southeast Asian leaders showed no interest in creative *regional* diplomacy along “minus X” lines.

Any discussion of roles for regionalism to advance security and democracy must address the question of who: Who will represent the region in pursuing such goals? On this score what Foreign Minister Yeo said in New York was less important than who he was. As the 2008–09 occupant of the rotating chair of ASEAN’s Standing Committee, he could speak bluntly on controversial matters *and* represent the Association at the same time. Also at the same time, however, as foreign minister of Singapore, he represented a government alleged to enjoy close ties to the junta—ties representing leverage that Singapore was apparently unwilling to use in an effort to nudge the regime toward reform, or ties that existed partly because of that unwillingness and the generals’ knowledge that Singapore’s leverage would not be so used.⁴²

The ASEAN Charter signed in Singapore in November 2007, if and when it is ratified by all ten member states, will not only give the grouping a legal personality. It will also strengthen the position of the annually rotating ASEAN chair. The member state holding that position in a given year will host and chair two ASEAN summits, and will also chair nearly all of the Association’s other organs—a Coordinating Council, three Community Councils, relevant Sectoral Ministerial Bodies and meetings of senior officials (“where appropriate”), and a Committee of Permanent Representatives as well (see Charter, Art. 31.2).

According to the Charter, the chairing state “shall ensure an effective and timely response to urgent issues or crisis situations affecting ASEAN, including providing its good offices and such other arrangements to immediately address these concerns” (Art. 32.c). It is hard to read this mandate and not think of what George Yeo said as the ASEAN chair in New York in September 2007—and of what a future ASEAN chair might more legitimately be able to *do* to help resolve a crisis that endangers human security and implicates authoritarian rule in Southeast Asia.

I have argued that ASEAN’s diversity both limits and enables what the organization can accomplish. Its diverse members have upheld regionalism as

⁴² See Eric Ellis, “Singapore, a Friend Indeed to Burma,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 October 2007, <<http://www.smh.com.au/news/business/singapore-a-friend-indeed-to-burma/2007/09/30/1191090945019.html>>; Andrew Seith, *Burma’s Secret Military Partners*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence, No. 136 (Canberra: Australian National University Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, 2000); and Leslie Kean and Dennis Bernstein, “The Burma-Singapore Axis: Globalizing the Heroin Trade,” *Covert Action Quarterly*, Spring 1998, <http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Global_Secrets_Lies/BurmaSingapore_Drugs.html>. The authorities in Singapore might of course respond that nothing could reform the junta, and therefore that maintaining personal, financial, and military relations with it, insofar as these even existed, yielded no leverage at all. Or perhaps the response would be that using and thereby jeopardizing such leverage was simply less important than serving Singapore’s own economic and security interests, which had to be kept separate from, not used to advance, any ideology—indeed, that an ideological foreign policy was not something a vulnerable city-state, so unlike the United States, could afford.

a barrier to interference in their affairs—not a means of promoting, let alone imposing, any one kind of rule. But that same variety harbors the potential for political change, and if those changes are democratizing, they could increase resistance to using noninterference as an excuse to look the other way whenever state predation occurs. As different members succeed each other in the ASEAN chair, under the Charter’s provisions, the ASEAN Way could be, at least intermittently, revised.

Apart from the chair of ASEAN, could its secretary-general (SG) help orient the Association toward reform? The answer is yes, and the Charter does modestly strengthen that office. In 2007, the gap in authority and capacity between the ASEAN Secretariat and the heads of states or government gathered in summits was still far too great to expect the SG to lead ASEAN in a policymaking sense.⁴³ In 2008, however, the opportunity for leadership created by Nargis gave some reason to reconsider such a judgment, as discussed later in this chapter.

What of the ASEAN chair? Could a future occupant proactively help to pilot the region toward reform? Democracy’s proponents should not expect too much. The line-up of chairs to come does not inspire hope for future regional pressure for reform in Myanmar, for example. As of mid-2008, following the English-alphabetic rotation of member-state names, Singapore was set to be succeeded by Thailand, Vietnam, Brunei, and Cambodia before the lone democratic member in 2008, Indonesia, could take over the chair for 2013. Thailand was reckoned by Freedom House to be “Partly Free” as of 2007. But the government that emerged from the December 2007 elections was sufficiently pro-Thaksin to indicate that it would continue his policy of appeasing the junta for the sake of Thai access to Myanmar’s resources.⁴⁴ As for Vietnam, Brunei, and Cambodia in 2007, they were all “Not Free.” If they are still in that category when the time arrives to sit in ASEAN’s chair, they are not likely to ask Myanmar to accept political pluralism—not when they themselves refuse to do so.

Things could change in the meantime. In 2005 Myanmar was persuaded not to take its scheduled turn to occupy the chair in 2006, but it did not give up its right to take that turn later on. In 2008 the junta announced that multiparty elections would be held in 2010. Conceivably, the junta might use the ostensible legitimacy to be gained by that exercise, however manipulated by the regime the balloting might be, to claim the chair in 2010 or 2011. If ASEAN consented to Myanmar’s insertion, Indonesia’s turn would be postponed until 2014.

These potential developments notwithstanding, it is likewise possible that the situation on the ground in Myanmar could deteriorate, notably along its long border with Thailand. The case for democracy could be “securitized” in

⁴³ See my “Challenging ASEAN: A ‘Topological’ View,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 29, no. 3 (2007), 424–46.

⁴⁴ The Associated Press, “Thailand’s New PM Defends Myanmar,” *MercuryNews.com*, 16 March 2008, <http://www.mercurynews.com/breakingnews/ci_8592938>.

the sense that spillover effects from repression and misrule by the junta could endanger its neighbors enough to alienate them.⁴⁵ Worsening externalities, measurable in flows of drugs, pathogens, and refugees, could eventually justify ASEAN support for political reform in Myanmar, or conceivably even for regime change, as a means of reducing human insecurity in the region. In that strictly pragmatic context, one would not need to be a democrat to encourage democratization. A comparably instrumental logic had been evident in ASEAN's motivation in persuading Myanmar's generals not to take the chair, namely, to limit its own guilt by association with the junta in the eyes of democratic states outside the region.

One might have hoped that the generals, having passed up the chance to lead ASEAN in 2006 and having let the Singapore chair upbraid their government publicly in New York in September 2007, would have been similarly acquiescent at the anniversary summit two months later. They were not.

Singapore had invited the UN's envoy for Myanmar, Gambari, to give a short briefing on Myanmar to all sixteen heads of state or government assembled in the city-state for an East Asia Summit (EAS) on 21 November, the day after ASEAN's own summit. Just two days before Gambari's scheduled appearance, Myanmar's prime minister put his foot down. At a dinner with his ASEAN colleagues he insisted that Singapore cancel the invitation. Gambari was already in the air en route to Southeast Asia, but Myanmar's prime minister was firm: What had happened in his country was his government's own internal concern and the business neither of ASEAN nor the EAS. He invoked the principle of noninterference—and he won. To the embarrassment of Singapore as the host state, and by implication ASEAN as well, the invitation to the UN envoy merely to brief the EAS was withdrawn. This time, consensus showed its other face: not solidarity as pressure on Myanmar to go along, but unanimity as license for Myanmar not to do so.

From the outside looking in, a single government appeared to have held all nine of its co-members hostage to its wish to hide its misdeeds. The reality was less clear-cut. Some members complained that Singapore had not cleared the invitation with them first. Others did not want Gambari to air Myanmar's dirty linen in front of Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea—the non-ASEAN members of the EAS. Some at the dinner were likely thinking to themselves that the invitation could come back to haunt them if and when they too had to quell dissent within their borders. The fact that, in his remarks in New York, George Yeo as the ASEAN chair had specifically urged the junta to work with Gambari surely added to Singapore's discomfort, and to the sense that Myanmar's generals had brazenly won the day.

⁴⁵ On this concept, see Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

We are left, in retrospect, with a vivid if sobering illustration of what makes Southeast Asia such an intriguingly difficult case of regionalism in relation to security and democracy. In New York, the ASEAN chair had been able to skirt the ASEAN Way of noninterference and consensus-as-unanimity. Speaking on behalf of his fellow foreign ministers, Yeo had gone so far as to support a “transition to democracy” in a member state. In his *words*, in effect, state security had been superseded by human security, autocracy by accountability. Scant months later in Singapore, however, the ASEAN Way had staged a comeback. As a matter not of words but *deeds*, diplomatic propriety in the service of state security—Myanmar’s—had obliged that same chair to rescind an invitation, to back down. The clarity of the first outcome had been compromised, if not actually reversed, by the complicity of the second.

A charter, by definition, is all words. What deeds might the words in the ASEAN Charter sustain? Do its provisions, on balance, reaffirm or reform the ASEAN Way? I now turn to these questions.

Chartering ASEAN

Whatever its ultimate result, drafting the ASEAN Charter was a unique experiment. Never before had the Association tried to codify its goals and methods in what some hoped would be a legally binding blueprint for the future of regionalism in Southeast Asia.

Proponents of a charter for ASEAN were well aware of the ill-fated effort of European leaders to establish a constitution for the EU—an organization long thought to represent the gold standard of successful regionalism. What a feather in ASEAN’s cap it would be if a grouping mainly of developing Asian ex-colonies of Europe could manage to “constitutionalize” itself, and thus succeed where its older, richer, and institutionally more advanced Western counterpart had failed.

EU governments had signed the treaty to establish a European Constitution in 2004. Like the ASEAN Charter, it had to be ratified by all member states in order to come into effect. In referenda held for that purpose in mid-2005, absolute majorities in France and the Netherlands voted the document down. A less ambitious version, less presumptuously named the Treaty of Lisbon, was signed in that city in December 2007. Supporters of the latter text hoped for its ratification by all twenty-seven EU members in 2008 so that it could enter into force on 1 January 2009. In parallel fashion, advocates of the ASEAN Charter hoped for its prompt ratification by all ten of the Association’s states, so that it could become effective no later than December 2008, shortly before the planned activation of the EU’s Treaty of Lisbon. The race between regionalisms was on.

The Lisbon Treaty was to be ratified by all EU members “in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements,” which were not specified.⁴⁶ Fearing another debacle if voters were again allowed to have their say, member governments preferred to submit the text to their parliaments for approval. By 12 June 2008, France, the Netherlands, and sixteen other states had ratified, none of them by referendum. On that day, however, the Irish government did consult the voters, who rejected the treaty by 53 to 47 percent.⁴⁷

Compared with the Lisbon Treaty, the ASEAN Charter was even more vague on the method of ratification. Member states were free to approve the text “in accordance with their respective internal procedures.”⁴⁸ Consensus on method proved easier among ten relatively undemocratic governments than among twenty-seven relatively democratic ones. ASEAN rulers quietly agreed not to consult their populations. Singapore, the first to ratify, did not even bother to consult its parliament. Its prime minister simply declared his government’s endorsement. The next to ratify was Brunei. There the Charter could not be approved by the legislature because the country—a sultanate—lacked one. In other authoritarian states, such as Laos, legislative approval amounted to rubber-stamping what the rulers had decided to do.

By mid-June 2008, Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam—six of the ASEAN ten—had ratified the document. But further sailing looked less smooth. Myanmar’s intransigence at the anniversary summit had sufficiently angered Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo for her to warn that the Senate in Manila might not ratify the Charter unless the junta first freed Aung San Suu Kyi from confinement. Six months later, however, she was urging Senate ratification despite Suu Kyi’s detention having been renewed for another year.⁴⁹

If the Philippine Senate’s approval was not assured, neither was ratification by the People’s Representative Council (DPR) in Indonesia. In Jakarta, soon after the Charter was signed, an Indonesian colleague privately described it to me as “garbage” because it lacked strong provisions for human rights. Another Indonesian colleague, also privately, characterized the Charter’s content as a

⁴⁶ Treaty of Lisbon Amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty Establishing the European Community, Final Provisions, Article 6.1, <http://europa.eu/lisbon_treaty/index_en.htm>.

⁴⁷ “EU Sees No Quick-Fix after Irish Reject Treaty,” AFP [Agence France-Presse], 16 June 2008, <<http://afp.google.com/article/ALEqM5iunxsJK71tQi1A93m206mCUQqISQ>>. The referendum was required by Ireland’s constitution.

⁴⁸ ASEAN Charter, Art. 47.2.

⁴⁹ “Arroyo Urges Congress to Ratify Asean Charter,” GMA News.TV, 13 June 2008, <<http://www.gmanews.tv/story/101019/Arroyo-urges-Congress-to-ratify-Asean-Charter>>.

victory for some of the least democratic states in the region.⁵⁰ (Four of the six early ratifiers—Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam—were “Not Free” in 2007.) Nevertheless, as of mid-2008, and barring the unforeseen, there was a good chance that ASEAN could have all ten approvals in hand, as planned, by the next summit in Thailand in December 2008. Failing that, since the Charter specifies no deadline for completing the endorsement process, it could simply continue.

The vicissitudes of ratification in Europe and Southeast Asia highlight the ambiguity of democracy’s relationship to regionalism. Ireland’s referendum illustrated democracy at work, but the outcome did not. One percent of the EU’s 490 million people live in Ireland. By democratically rejecting the treaty and thereby ensuring its defeat, in effect, that one percent dictated to the other ninety-nine percent, including the citizens of the eighteen member countries whose democratically elected legislatures had all voted to approve it.

Like the Lisbon Treaty, the ASEAN Charter was drafted by elites. The Charter’s authors were not about to expose a consensus reached behind closed doors to the vagaries of public opinion. The Charter’s enthusiasts sought to deflect objections to the text by arguing that its critics should support ratification anyway, because only after coming into effect could it be amended. As specified in the Charter, however, the amendment process is a gauntlet of consensuses. Any change that a member state might propose must gain a consensus in favor among the foreign ministers of the member states. Only then would they pass the amendment up the ladder to the heads of state or government gathered in a summit, who would then have to reach their own consensus in favor. Only then would the proposed change be submitted for ratification by all member states, and only if that third and necessarily unanimous consensus was achieved would the change be made.⁵¹ In the light of this obstacle course, a state that ratifies the Charter is, upon doing so, more likely to lose leverage than to gain it.

The case for a more “people-centered” ASEAN is argued in several of this book’s chapters. To the extent that the Association does try to become more widely participatory, it may face a trade-off between regionalism as predictable cooperation managed by states and democracy as institutionalized uncertainty involving societies. Meanwhile, to the extent that the EU’s experience with regionalism by referendum has any influence on ASEAN insiders, it is likely to make them more elitist, not less.

If all ten ASEAN states do ratify the Charter, will it be a milestone of reform that invigorates the organization to do more and do it better? Or will it be a

⁵⁰ Interview, Jakarta, 8 December 2007. “Consensus,” said this person, “is at the heart of the Charter—and it kills the Charter.” A third Indonesian source, Jusuf Wanandi of the Jakarta think tank CSIS, called the Charter “a real letdown” and urged the DPR not to ratify it. See his “ASEAN’s Charter: Does a Mediocre Document Really Matter?” *The Jakarta Post*, 26 November 2007.

⁵¹ ASEAN Charter, Art. 48.

millstone of reaction, weighing the Association down to its lowest common denominator? Will the Charter help ASEAN to step up, as its chair did at the UN in New York, to defend and promote human security and political accountability in its region? Or will it incline ASEAN to back down, as that same chair did at the summit in Singapore, and wrap itself ever more tightly in the ASEAN Way of sovereignty, noninterference, and consensus-as-unanimity? Or are the Charter's contents sufficiently vague and varied to point in most or all of these directions?⁵²

Expectations that the text's provisions would orient ASEAN toward liberal reform were raised in January 2007 by the publication of the *Report of the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) on the ASEAN Charter*.⁵³ ASEAN's leaders had asked the EPG to review where ASEAN had been and should be going, and to recommend what the proposed Charter should say. As they read the report, democratically minded observers were surprised and heartened by the liberal-reformist tenor of the EPG's advice.

Far from endorsing a continuation of the state-centered ASEAN Way, the EPG spoke up for human security. Noting the damage done to the region by border-jumping calamities such as the AFC, the epidemic of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), and the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the EPG argued that the ASEAN Way should be revised. The well-being of the populations living in various ASEAN member countries had become "more intertwined." The unstated implication was that globalization, having shrunk the difference between domestic and foreign affairs, had weakened excuses for the sovereign impunity of irresponsible regimes. In the diplomatic language of the EPG Report, member states would need "to calibrate their traditional approach of non-interference in areas where the common interest dictates closer cooperation."⁵⁴

More remarkably still, at the top of the EPG's list of recommendations for the ASEAN Charter was

Promotion of ASEAN's peace and stability through the active strengthening of democratic values, good governance, rejection of unconstitutional and undemocratic changes of government, the rule of law including international

⁵² Directly or indirectly, this book deals at length with these and related concerns regarding the Charter. See especially the essays by Dosch, Termsak, Sukma, Kyaw, Caballero-Anthony, and Jones. My comments here merely open the debate.

⁵³ This and the next few paragraphs draw on a draft of my article "ASEAN's Black Swans." *The Report of the Eminent Persons Group on the ASEAN Charter*, hereafter the EPG Report, may be accessed at <[http://www.mfa.gov.sg/internet/press/16012007/ReportOfTheEminentPersonsGroup\(EPG\)OnTheAseanCharter.pdf](http://www.mfa.gov.sg/internet/press/16012007/ReportOfTheEminentPersonsGroup(EPG)OnTheAseanCharter.pdf)>.

⁵⁴ EPG Report, 12 (par. 18).

humanitarian law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.⁵⁵

Other striking innovations in the EPG Report included the idea that a “serious breach of ASEAN’s objectives, major principles, and commitments to important agreements” by a member state could result in the “suspension” of its membership rights; that in making decisions, if “consensus cannot be achieved, decisions may be taken through voting”; and that ASEAN needed “to shed its image of being an elitist organisation comprising exclusively diplomats and government officials” and become more “people-centred,” including allowing “civil society” and “human rights groups” to play larger roles in ASEAN affairs.⁵⁶

Unfortunately for the fate of these proposed reforms, the EPG’s role was purely advisory. In addition, its ten members, though drawn from all ten ASEAN states, were mostly *former* officials. Having retired from public service, they were free to think creatively. But they did not necessarily represent and certainly could not commit their home governments to whatever the EPG might recommend.⁵⁷ The actual text of the Charter was drafted by a High-Level Task Force (HLTF) whose ten members were all sitting officials with the authority to represent, and presumably also to commit, their respective governments.

Table 1.1 counts and compares references to the “ASEAN Way” and “liberal reform” in the EPG Report and in the ASEAN Charter.⁵⁸ The comparison may serve to indicate how much the liberal-reformist tone of the first document was diluted in the second. In the EPG Report, favorable mentions of items on an agenda for liberal reform outnumbered favorable mentions of components of the ASEAN Way by a ratio of 2.5 to 1. At 0.8 to 1, the comparable ratio in the Charter ran in the opposite, conservative direction. The Charter does favorably cite “human rights” and “democracy.” But in the Charter, compared with the EPG Report, these references are balanced by more conservative language.

⁵⁵ EPG Report, 1 (Executive Summary [EC], par. 3); see also 15 (par. 27).

⁵⁶ These references are drawn, respectively, from the EPG Report, 16 (para. 31) and 5 (EC, par. 8 and 9).

⁵⁷ The EPG member from Myanmar was a sitting official. However, in addition to the Group’s being merely advisory, his low-ranking position (as chair of the Civil Service Selection and Training Board) left the junta even freer to ignore the EPG Report, which the EPG members were not even asked to sign. The members are listed in Termsak’s chapter.

⁵⁸ For fuller quotations from these texts, see the comprehensive table in Dosch’s chapter.

Table 1.1 A Comparison of References to “Liberal Reform” versus the “ASEAN Way” in the EPG Report and the ASEAN Charter

References favoring	Frequency of references in EPG Report	Frequency of references in ASEAN Charter
A. Liberal Reform		
1. “Human rights”	16	7
2. “Civil Society”	15	1
3. “[Un]constitution[al government]”	11	1
4. “Rule of law”	6	3
5. “Democracy”/“[un]democratic”	5	4
6. “Fundamental freedoms”	4	4
Total references favoring Liberal Reform	57	20
B. The ASEAN Way		
1. “Consensus”	5	9
2. “Sovereignty”	5	3
3. “[Non-]interference”	6	3
4. “Territorial integrity”	4	3
5. “Right[s]” of member states	1	5
6. “Harmonious environment”	2	1
Total references favoring the ASEAN Way	23	24
Ratio of “Liberal Reform” references to “ASEAN Way” references within each text	2.5 : 1	0.8 : 1

Note: All references were read in context to ensure that the core concept was presented in a positive light. For example, a reference that criticized “unconstitutional” or “undemocratic” government or “interference” in a member state’s affairs was coded as favoring, respectively, “constitutional” or “democratic” government or “non-interference.” References that merely conformed to official usage, such as the “Lao People’s Democratic Republic,” were excluded.

Sources: *Report of the Eminent Persons Group on the ASEAN Charter* (EPG Report), <[http://www.mfa.gov.sg/internet/press/16012007/ReportOfTheEminentPersonsGroup\(EPG\)OnTheAseanCharter.pdf](http://www.mfa.gov.sg/internet/press/16012007/ReportOfTheEminentPersonsGroup(EPG)OnTheAseanCharter.pdf)>, and the ASEAN Charter, <<http://www.aseansec.org/21069.pdf>>.

The contrast should not be overdrawn. Where the EPG Report, for example, merely stated that creating an “ASEAN human rights mechanism” was a “worthy idea” deserving further study, the Charter says flatly that “ASEAN

shall establish” such a body.⁵⁹ Looking ahead from mid-2008, the nature and mandate of that promised entity and the timeline for creating it could become an early topic of controversy between those in ASEAN who favor liberal reform and those who oppose it. Of particular interest in this regard will be Indonesia, not only because of its uniquely “Free” ranking for 2007, but also because it is ASEAN’s largest and thus potentially most influential member.

Nargis and Noninterference

On 2 May 2008, Cyclone Nargis swept in from the Bay of Bengal and spiraled across the Irrawaddy Delta to devastating effect. An estimated 130,000 people died and some 2.4 million lost their homes or were otherwise seriously affected.⁶⁰ In the wake of the earthquake and tsunami that struck northwestern Indonesia in December 2004, killing around 170,000 people, the government in Jakarta had welcomed foreign assistance. In Myanmar in the aftermath of Nargis, the junta downplayed the emergency and refused, limited, or obstructed foreign efforts to provide relief, to the chagrin and fury of international observers.

As if this behavior were not deplorable enough, the regime then shifted priorities from lessening misery to stuffing ballots. The generals had long planned to draft and impose a constitution that would entrench their rule. A national referendum on the text had been set for 10 May 2008. Rather than postpone the vote until the victims of Nargis had been able to recover from the disaster, the junta held the referendum in two rounds: on 10 May in unaffected areas, and on 24 May in the delta. International observers were not allowed to observe the proceedings, and reports of manipulation were widespread. In announcing the results, the junta did not even bother to come up with two different numbers for the “yes” majority in each round, claiming instead that the constitution had been approved by 92 percent of those who voted in the inland areas on 10 May and by the same percentage in the delta two weeks later.⁶¹

In these depressing contexts, voices were raised in favor of violating Myanmar’s air and sea space—parachuting in needed water, food, and medicine, or delivering them on small craft to the delta’s villages. The largely Western proponents of such drastic action, notably French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, argued that the generals had failed so egregiously to fulfill their

⁵⁹ EPG Report, 21 (par. 47); ASEAN Charter, Art. 14.1.

⁶⁰ “Burmese Enduring in Spite of Junta, Aid Workers Say,” *New York Times*, 18 June 2008, 1A and 10A.

⁶¹ Compare “Burma ‘Approves New Constitution,’” BBC News, 15 May 2008, quoting the junta, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7402105.stm>> with Commission for Holding the Referendum of the Union of Myanmar, “Announcement No. 12/2008,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Naypyidaw, 26 May 2008, <<http://www.mofa.gov.mm/news/Announcements/26may08.html>>. In the BBC item, Human Rights Watch and an opposition group are respectively quoted as calling the referendum an “insult to the people of Burma” and “full of cheating and fraud.”

responsibility to look after their own people that humanitarian intervention was justified.

As Kuhonta notes in his chapter, this doctrine—the “responsibility to protect” (R2P) had been analyzed, defined, and proposed by an International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) in 2001. In 2005, at a World Summit, the UN General Assembly endorsed R2P. In 2006, the Security Council followed suit. A liberal optimist could believe that R2P was on its way to becoming a recognized part of international law, and that the UN might pioneer the doctrine’s implementation. In that scenario, the international community would cite the junta’s criminal neglect of the devastated and vulnerable victims of Nargis as justification for authorizing humanitarian intervention to save their lives—with or without the generals’ consent. If there was ever a time when other Southeast Asian governments would have to jettison, or at any rate revamp, the ASEAN Way of putting sovereignty above suffering, surely this was it.

The ICISS’s composition and approach were similar to those of the EPG. Like the members of the EPG, the Commission’s members—retired officials, ex-diplomats, former politicians, professors, a businessman—were on the fringes of the policy world, not on active duty at its center.⁶² Like the EPG Report, the ICISS Report was venturesome in its willingness to question the use of sovereignty to rationalize impunity. The R2P, wrote the ICISS, is “the idea that sovereign states have a responsibility to protect their own citizens from avoidable catastrophe,” and that “when they are unwilling or unable to do so, that responsibility must be borne by the broader community of states.” The catastrophe could involve “large scale loss of life, actual or apprehended, with genocidal intent or not, which is the product either of deliberate state action, or state neglect or inability to act, or a failed state situation.” “The substance of the responsibility to protect,” asserted the Commission, “is the provision of life-supporting protection and assistance to populations at risk” including the responsibility “to respond to situations of compelling human need.”⁶³

Read in retrospect, this language seemed written to fit the junta’s criminal neglect of the victims of Nargis and its inhumane thwarting of humanitarian efforts to help them. The ICISS Report was not the last word on its subject, however. The R2P idea was weakened as it traveled from the reformist intellectual ambience of the Commission on Track III in 2001 to the UN resolutions endorsed by incumbent governments on Track I in 2005–06. At the UN, the list of dangers from which governments had the “responsibility to protect” their populations was pared down to include only the most horrific:

⁶² There was even a small overlap in membership between the EPG and the ICISS; former Philippine President Fidel Ramos belonged to both.

⁶³ See *The Responsibility to Protect: Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty* (Ottawa: International Development and Research Centre, December 2001), XII (“large-scale loss of life” and “compelling human need”) and 17 (“populations at risk”), <<http://www.iciss.ca/report-en.asp>>.

“genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.”⁶⁴ The generals’ wrongdoing in responding slowly to Nargis and hampering efforts to assist its victims was not on the scale of these atrocities.⁶⁵ ICISS co-chair Gareth Evans raised the possibility that the junta’s actions might constitute a crime against humanity,⁶⁶ but the suggestion was not taken up. Myanmar’s generals escaped any comeuppance for violating the R2P principle, which remained on paper, awaiting implementation.

From Words to Deeds?

It is vital for students of regionalism in Southeast Asia to distinguish words from deeds. Even if the UN’s sovereign governments had not raised R2P’s threshold to a judgment—mass murder—more horrendous than what the junta plausibly deserved, ASEAN would still not have intervened in Myanmar without the junta’s permission. What, then, did the Association actually do?

At first glance, ASEAN’s response to Nargis can be summarized as “too little, too late.” Not until 9 June 2008, a full month and a week after the cyclone’s landfall, were full-scale teams finally assembled on ASEAN’s initiative to *assess* the damage and given a send-off in Yangon to *begin* their work. According to the announced schedule, the findings of these teams would only be published in *mid-July*—two-and-a-half months after Nargis touched down.⁶⁷

A fuller account of ASEAN’s actions, however, yields a more nuanced view. The Association moved quickly to make up for lost time. Preliminary findings from the assessment teams’ work were reviewed on 24 June, three weeks before

⁶⁴ UN General Assembly, “World Summit Outcome,” 15 September 2005, par. 138–39, <http://www.responsibilitytoprotect.org/index.php/united_nations/398?theme=alt1>, and UN Security Council, Resolution No. 1674, 28 April 2006, Art. 4, <<http://domino.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/361eea1cc08301c485256cf600606959/e529762bfa456f8852571610045ebef!OpenDocument>>. The watering down of the ICISS Report at the final, official level recalled the blunting of the EPG Report’s reformist thrust by the HLTF of sitting officials who actually wrote the ASEAN Charter.

⁶⁵ “Burmese Endure in Spite of Junta” offers evidence to this effect.

⁶⁶ Gareth Evans, “Facing Up to Our Responsibilities,” *The Guardian* [London], 12 May 2008.

⁶⁷ See these ASEAN Secretariat press releases: “Myanmar Deputy Foreign Minister Sent Off 250-Person Post Nargis Joint Assessment Teams,” Yangon, 9 June 2008, <<http://www.aseansec.org/21630.htm>>, and “SG Surin Assured of Smooth Aid Operations,” 14 June 2008, <<http://www.aseansec.org/21648.htm>>. The teams were said in the first release to consist of personnel from ASEAN member states, the Myanmar regime, the UN, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Red Cross in Myanmar, and local and international NGOs.

their scheduled completion and publication. Other action-oriented steps were simultaneously underway.⁶⁸

As for the reason why time had been lost in the first place, ASEAN had wanted to do something constructive by working with, not against, the junta. That meant first establishing a comfort zone within which the regime was willing to move. ASEAN also wanted to avail itself of the UN's resources and expertise. The assessment teams were in fact sent off by Kyaw Thu, Myanmar's deputy foreign minister, in his capacity as the chair of an ASEAN-Myanmar-UN Tripartite Core Group (TCG). Even as he presided over the ceremony, Kyaw Thu made sure to remind the 250 team members present that their assessments should have no political content.

Rather than criticizing the Association for delays that were attributable to Myanmar's leaders, and remembering the junta's adamant refusal to let the UN's envoy Gambari brief the EAS, one might instead admire ASEAN's success simply in coaxing the TCG into existence. As for the lag in bringing relief to the delta, other channels of assistance had already reached the victims of Nargis beginning in May, and the scale of the devastation and dislocation ensured the relevance of such aid for some time to come.

Nargis did not abate until 3 May 2008. ASEAN's first official response to the disaster came almost immediately thereafter, on 5 May. On that day at the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta, Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan, in office only since the start of the year, called on "all other ASEAN Member States to provide urgent relief assistance" to the cyclone's victims. Three days later, at his initiative, the Secretariat launched an ASEAN Cooperation Fund for Disaster Assistance to raise resources for post-Nargis relief.⁶⁹

The Fund's guidelines included two provisos that betrayed the tightrope on which the SG had to balance. On the one hand, to alleviate Myanmar's fears of political interference, donors were warned not to place any conditions on the use of their contributions. On the other hand, to assuage donors worried that the regime would misuse their gifts, donations were described as "solely intended" to alleviate the suffering of the cyclone's victims. The guidelines also included a curious avowal that "no legal actions and/or proceedings shall be taken against [the] ASEAN Secretariat in connection with" its effort to set up and fill the Fund.⁷⁰ Reading between the lines of this "disclaimer," one could

⁶⁸ ASEAN Secretariat, "Post Nargis Joint Assessment Teams Complete Assessment of Cyclone Nargis-Affected Areas," 21 June 2008, <<http://www.aseansec.org/21679.htm>>.

⁶⁹ Surin's appeal appears in ASEAN Secretariat, "ASEAN Members Urged to Support International Emergency Relief for Cyclone Victims in Myanmar," press release, 5 May 2008, <<http://www.aseansec.org/21505.htm>>. The Fund's 8 May start date appears in ASEAN Secretariat, "Guidelines on the ASEAN Cooperation Fund for Disaster Assistance," n.d., <<http://www.aseansec.org/21532.htm>>.

⁷⁰ The 8 May date is given in the Secretariat's "Guidelines on the ASEAN Cooperation Fund for Disaster Assistance," n.d., <<http://www.aseansec.org/21532.htm>>.

understand not only the intent to avoid possible wrath, but also a foreshadowing of the Association's legal and therefore liable personality that the Charter, once fully ratified, would bestow.

Additional moves by Secretary-General Surin quickly ensued. On 9 May he urged Myanmar's Foreign Minister Nyan Win (who had endured George Yeo's revulsion the previous September) to consider quickly allowing ASEAN to help. By "immediate assistance" Surin meant deeds, not words—not an assessment mission that would write a report for others to act on, but "ASEAN relief and rescue teams" tasked to save lives and lessen suffering straightaway.⁷¹

The generals declined Surin's offer. It was clear by this time that they had become part of the problem, unwilling as they were to open the country's doors to outsiders whose motives they suspected. Surin persisted. His goal was to form "a coalition of mercy for Myanmar relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction with ASEAN in the lead and [the World Bank] and the UN helping with their resources and expertise."⁷²

A smaller and therefore less intrusive ASEAN Emergency Rapid Assessment Team was dispatched to Yangon with the junta's permission. The team's report struck a delicate balance between explicitly praising and implicitly criticizing Myanmar's regime. On the one hand, the junta was described as having "tried its level best to meet the demands" of the crisis. This was manifestly untrue. On the other hand, the report acknowledged that "the issue of access to the affected areas" was "the main overarching concern for the international community including other ASEAN Member States and international organizations." The critical term "other" accurately implied that access was not the junta's main concern, despite "the possibility of a potential second wave of deaths and morbidity due to diseases and nutritional deficiency which could be avoided through a more coordinated effort between the international community and the Government of Myanmar."⁷³

On 19 May in Singapore, the ASEAN foreign ministers met and agreed to undertake three tasks. First, they would set up "an ASEAN-led coordinating mechanism" to facilitate international aid, including the expeditious deployment of relief workers; second, they would form a task force under Surin to pursue such coordination; and third, they would work with the UN to organize an aid-pledging conference for international donors six days later in Yangon. In announcing these results, George Yeo as the chair of the meeting offered the junta

⁷¹ ASEAN Secretariat, "ASEAN Stands Ready to Help the Affected Population in Myanmar in Response to Cyclone Nargis," press release, 9 May 2008, <<http://www.aseansec.org/21527.htm>>.

⁷² Surin Pitsuwan, personal communication, 13 May 2008, used with permission.

⁷³ "ASEAN Emergency Rapid Assessment Team Mission Report, 9–18 May 2008: Cyclone Nargis, Myanmar," <<http://www.aseansec.org/21558.pdf>>. As noted in the previously cited news item, "Burmese Enduring in Spite of Junta," later reports from the delta did not confirm these fears.

both a concession and a concern: Foreign assistance “should not be politicized,” but Myanmar “should allow more international relief workers into the stricken areas.”⁷⁴ At the 25 May donors’ conference, more than fifty countries pledged nearly \$50 million, but the United States and other major powers made their support contingent on the junta’s giving aid workers access to the delta.

On 4 June, as if to illustrate ASEAN’s ability to smooth the entry of aid, a thousand metric tons of relief supplies arrived in Yangon in a container ship filled and commissioned by France. Alongside the French ambassador to Myanmar, members of the TCG, including Singapore’s ambassador, watched the material being off-loaded to boats that the World Food Program had chartered for transport to the delta.⁷⁵ Although ASEAN could not and did not claim sole responsibility for this success, it had played an important intermediary role between the suspicious junta and the frustrated donors. The occasion was all the more notable in light of the French foreign minister’s argument only a month before that the UN would be justified in delivering aid by force, if force were necessary to override the generals’ refusal to discharge their “responsibility to protect” their own citizens.⁷⁶

Linkage versus Separation

I mention these details because the issues they raise illuminate the nexus of security, democracy, and regionalism featured in this book. It was not possible in mid-2008, with the crisis still ongoing, to know the full and ultimate implications of the handling of the cyclone’s aftermath—for ASEAN, for Myanmar, or for the impact of each on the other. The following tentative conclusions were, nevertheless, already plausible.

The cyclone transformed Myanmar from ASEAN’s embarrassment into its opportunity. The Association had long been challenged to disassociate itself from its blatantly antidemocratic member—enough to rescue its own reputation, but without splitting open its own ranks, divided as they were between more and less democratic states. Nargis changed ASEAN’s intimacy with the junta from a liability into an asset. The disaster led to the opening of negotiating space between the outraged impatience of foreign donors and the obstructive suspicion of the regime—space that the Association, led by Surin, proceeded to fill.

⁷⁴ “Special ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting Chairman’s Statement,” Singapore, 19 May 2008, <<http://www.aseansec.org/21557.htm>>.

⁷⁵ ASEAN Secretariat, “Tripartite Core Group Witnessing the Unloading of Relief Supplies for the Cyclone Nargis-affected Areas,” press release, 7 June 2008, <<http://www.aseansec.org/21623.htm>>.

⁷⁶ Steven Erlanger, “France Urges UN to Force Cyclone Aid on Myanmar,” *International Herald Tribune*, Wednesday, 7 May 2008, <<http://www.iht.com/articles/2008/05/07/europe/cyclone.php>>.

ASEAN sought to make itself doubly indispensable, to Myanmar's generals as a friend who could help ensure that foreign aid workers did not foment regime change, and to international donors as a friend who could persuade the generals to allow aid in. On the one hand, the French supplies arrived on 4 June in a civilian (commercial) vessel while French, British, and American warships waited offshore for permission that never came, in line with the junta's fear of being overthrown. On the other hand, the supplies were off-loaded and sent directly to victims in the delta to avoid their misappropriation by the regime. Thus did ASEAN, through the TCG, simultaneously serve the desires of its two mutually mistrustful clients.

In the process, ASEAN also served its own interest. Events in 2007, especially the last-minute kowtowing to Nyan Win in Singapore, had made the Association look cowardly, irrelevant, or both. In contrast, post-Nargis, ASEAN could be praised for having saved lives by cajoling the regime into opening its country's doors wider than it would have done without the Association's good-neighborly pressure.

According to this felicitous narrative, the implications of ASEAN's vigorous go-between role were encouraging. The Association had co-opted the generals into finally exercising their responsibility to protect the cyclone's victims. Success in persuading the junta to open its doors wider to incoming aid represented a victory for liberal international norms and a defeat for the junta-shielding ASEAN Way. One could only admire Surin's skill in using the force of Nargis to dent the principle of noninterference.

Or, conversely, had Myanmar's leaders effectively co-opted the Association into helping to entrench their tyrannical rule? On 25 May in Yangon, at the donors' conference that ASEAN had helped organize, foreign governments and international organizations pledged material support for the cyclone's victims. No political support was forthcoming for those same victims, however, despite their having been pressed on 24 May—just the day before—into voting in a sham referendum for a constitution that would prolong military rule, and whose text the great majority of them had not even read. Nor did ASEAN's success in opening the door to more foreign aid stop the junta from keeping Aung San Suu Kyi's door firmly shut. On 27 May, the day after the pledging donors had gone home, the junta renewed her house arrest for an additional year. Rather than crediting Surin with clever diplomacy on behalf of R2P, perhaps one should "admire" the generals' skill in using the cyclone's sympathy-generating force to shield their own cruel reassertion of sovereign impunity and political noninterference—not breaching but actually reinforcing the ASEAN Way.

These opposing interpretations of what happened in the aftermath of Nargis imply contrary prospects of whether and how security, democracy, and regionalism can be related in the future. The first, more sanguine argument highlights a *linking* of this book's three critical terms—and holds out hope. By this reasoning, regionalism (ASEAN's diplomacy) can use insecurity (Myanmar's devastation) as leverage to encourage democracy (if not the junta's full-scale

reform, at least a moderation of its behavior). The second, more skeptical argument features a *delinking* of security, democracy, and regionalism—and downplays hope. By this logic, unless insecurity is mainly and clearly attributable to autocracy (rather than to a natural disaster such as Nargis) and significantly worsens the well-being of the larger region (which Nargis did not), the provision of security (humanitarian aid) is unlikely to offer either an opportunity or a motivation to promote democracy (in Myanmar). The depoliticizing of intervention is instead likely to undercut the ability of a regional organization (ASEAN) to induce reform.

It is always risky to judge events while their repercussions are ongoing. Nevertheless, viewed in mid-2008 while the crisis was still under way, the story of Nargis and noninterference fit the second argument better than it fit the first. Rather than giving political leverage to ASEAN over the junta, Nargis changed the subject from politics to relief. That separation of politics from relief created an incentive for ASEAN and the foreign donors to censor themselves. How could one push to democratize the junta when people were suffering from an act not of Than Shwe but of God?⁷⁷ By resisting aid, the generals widened the distance between democracy and security. Emphasizing democracy in this context was made to appear inhumane. Reports of widespread starvation in the delta as a consequence of regime neglect could have reconnected politics and relief, possibly even making democracy appear to be a requisite for security. But conditions on the ground had not worsened to that degree as of mid-2008. International agencies engaged in relief operations were complaining of insufficient funds, but that implied criticism of ostensibly stingy foreign donors as much as it did of Myanmar's callous regime.

Reforming Regionalism

An important possible implication of the limits of linkage and the ease of separation is that ASEAN's energetic and creative post-Nargis diplomacy may turn out to matter more for the nature of Southeast Asian regionalism itself than for either security or democracy inside Myanmar. The tensions between ASEAN and Myanmar tended, on balance, to erode the ASEAN Way of consensus defined as unanimity. ASEAN managed to play an independent and proactive role in shaping events. Its statements and policies were not consistently limited to what Myanmar would allow. Despite successfully vetoing Gambari's briefing of the EAS in Singapore in November 2007, the junta could not prevent regional leaders from speaking critically and acting independently of its wishes. Especially intriguing in institutional terms in 2007–08 was the high-profile post-Nargis balancing act undertaken by Secretary-General Surin.

⁷⁷ The regime could have installed storm barriers and an early-alert system to warn the delta's residents of imminent danger, of course, but the cyclone itself was beyond human control.

ASEAN chairs come and go, but the Secretariat continues. The long-standing practice of recruiting SGs whose careers had been spent largely inside the civil services of their respective countries helped to ensure their deference, once in office, to the leaders of the Association's member states. Already comfortable with hierarchical discipline on Track I at the national level, these men had little difficulty keeping a low-to-fairly-low profile in ASEAN's regional hierarchy. Reporting to multiple bosses—the heads of state or government—further reduced the incentive to take independent initiatives. SGs were expected to manage and implement, not lead.

That said, the personalities of those who filled the position did matter. To cite a recent example, Secretary-General Ong Keng Yong's (2003–2007) roots in Singapore's civil service did not prevent him from making candid remarks about ASEAN, often disarmed with self-deprecatory humor, including his bemused self-description as “more secretary than general.”

In the history of ASEAN, Surin Pitsuwan, who took over from Keng Yong on 1 January 2008, is unique. Surin is the first SG to have been recruited not from the civil service but from civil society. Although he has held bureaucratic positions in Thailand, and served as his country's foreign minister (1997–2001), in the course of his career he has also been a newspaper columnist, a university professor, an elected legislator, a party politician, a liberal activist, and a public intellectual.

Of particular relevance to this book's critical terms are Surin's experience as the founding chair of the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats, his efforts as ASEAN chair to enlist member governments in the restoration of security to East Timor in 1999, his service on a UN Commission on Human Security, and his work on the Advisory Board of the ICISS that advanced the R2P idea and cited the failure to exercise it as a reason for humanitarian intervention. His degrees are not in economics but political science (BA, MA) and Middle Eastern studies (PhD, Harvard). As a Thai Muslim, he has a personal link to majority-minority relations in his Buddhist-majority country's shaky democracy. He is tall, handsome, energetic, articulate, and outgoing. If Keng Yong had been disarmingly realistic about the limitations of his position, Surin came across in his first months on the same job as charmingly idealistic about what ASEAN could accomplish. If ever an SG could turn his position into a bully pulpit for security, democracy, and regionalism, it was Surin Pitsuwan.

In May 2008, Surin told an audience in Washington DC, “I did not expect to be baptized by a cyclone, but that's exactly what is happening.” Not only was he baptized as ASEAN's spokesperson; Nargis's destruction and the junta's obstruction galvanized him into rounds of intense activity. Unforeseen events had created “a defining moment for ASEAN” and “a transformative

moment for the region.” There were “long-term implication[s] for the region” that depended “on how we play our hand,” “how we cooperate,” and “how imaginative we are.”⁷⁸ Wrapped inside the plural “we” one could discern as well a singular “I”—the sense in which what he himself did and did not do in that post-Nargis moment would define his own secretary-generalship for months or even years to come.

Once the crisis had abated, would Surin’s high profile also subside? Would the SG stop rushing around Southeast Asia—indeed, around the world—trying to make regional policy? Would the Secretariat be returned full-time to its usual agenda of administrative service and coordination for the rulers and ministers of the member states? In June 2008, in mid-crisis, it was hard to say. Nevertheless, in view of the challenges on the horizon, including the Charter’s ratification and implementation, and given Surin’s personal background and style and the remaining four-plus years of his tenure, it was hard to ignore at least a modest potential for regionalism in Southeast Asia to change.

As he operates at the crossroads of security, democracy, and regionalism in Southeast Asia, however, Surin may prove least successful in using ASEAN to promote democracy in its member countries. As an intermediary between angry donors and stubborn generals in Myanmar, he tried to save lives. But in doing so he also helped save the junta’s face, and to that extent his actions may have marginally prolonged its lease on life. Presumably, in view of the disaster’s scale and the urgency of relief, that was an acceptable cost. At what point, however, would working with the junta begin to serve the generals’ interest in survival more than that of the displaced people in the delta?

In any case, as a priority goal for ASEAN to implement throughout the region, democratization remains a nonstarter in Southeast Asia. Surin will have more success in pressing the Association to address human security, an issue that lay at the heart of the organization’s post-Nargis moment, than he will in persuading it to promote political pluralism. Unless member states themselves, first, become more enamored of liberal democracy, he is unlikely to jeopardize their support on other matters by leading them in that ideological direction.

Future historians may remember Surin most of all for an organizational legacy internal to regionalism itself. When he retires from office at the end of 2012, he may leave ASEAN in somewhat less diffuse, modestly more coherent, and perhaps more centralized shape than it was five years before. By alphabetic rotation, his successor will be Vietnamese. It will be interesting to learn whether Vietnam, the region, and the Association will have changed enough by then to preclude the naming of an obedient Communist Party bureaucrat to the position.

⁷⁸ “A Conversation with Surin Pitsuwan,” Council on Foreign Relations, 14 May 2008, <http://www.cfr.org/publication/16284/conversation_with_surin_pitsuwan_rush_transcript_federal_news_service.htm>.

In the meantime, Surin's tenure and the hard choices he makes in the course of it will illustrate, however unevenly, both the limits and the potentials of leadership in changing how regionalism interacts with security and democracy in Southeast Asia.

Summary with Interpretation

I began by elucidating security, democracy, and regionalism in Southeast Asia, the critical terms used in this book. I argued that, as a site for studying how regionalism can affect security and democracy, Southeast Asia is attractively difficult, creatively diverse, and remarkably timely as well. In discussing the ASEAN Way's two main principles, noninterference and solidarity, I noted that the first implies indifference to domestic political change and therefore impedes neither democracy nor autocracy as such. The second, however, comes in two versions with opposite implications: consensus as unanimity, catering to the slowest or least willing member, and consensus as solidarity, pressuring such a member to go along. A third principle is informality, but it is less durable than the other two; witness the legalistic provisions of the Charter and ASEAN's corresponding acquisition of a legal personality.

Having reviewed the book's critical terms, I examined in some detail three critical occasions in the history of ASEAN in 2007–2008. All involved Myanmar, and each illuminated in a different way the nexus of security, democracy, and regionalism in Southeast Asia. In September 2007, the junta cracked down, leading the ASEAN chair to excoriate state violence and urge a transition to democracy. Two months later, the junta put its foot down, and the ASEAN chair backed down. In the eyes of democratic observers, ASEAN gained face on the first occasion but lost it on the second.

These incidents showed that the ASEAN Way's principles could be stretched in practice. Consensus as reluctant solidarity enabled George Yeo to express collective revulsion. Consensus as necessary unanimity allowed the junta to reverse an invitation. Member-state sovereignty and noninterference were not barriers to be clearly respected or clearly breached. They were subjective matters of degree, context, and interpretation. The differing outcomes on these occasions illustrated how the balance between what a critic was willing to say and what a target was willing to withstand could change, depending on the situation, the issue, and the actors involved.

I then summarized the evolution of the ASEAN Charter and compared its fate, as of June 2008, with the rejection of the EU's Lisbon Treaty by Irish voters in that same month. In the first instance, the cautious and constrained bureaucrats in the HLTf diluted the private-citizen EPG's liberal ideas. In the second, a referendum challenged Europe's rulers and the EU's official bureaucracy in Brussels. The two cases illustrated the tensions, disappointments, and ironies that can arise when regionalist projects are transferred from Track III to Track I (in Southeast Asia, from the EPG to the HLTf for actual drafting and

later signing by ASEAN's relatively illiberal governments)—or in the opposite direction, from Track I to Track III (in Europe, from the bureaucracy in Brussels for ratification by democratically elected legislators and the private citizens in Ireland who voted no).

The two cases illustrate the tensions and disappointments that can arise when regionalist projects are transferred back and forth between Tracks I and III. Comparable at the global level was the Track III-to-I narrowing of the scope of the R2P, as it was taken from the ICISS and filtered through the UN.

A main lesson to be drawn from the two-way turbulence between regionalist Tracks is that a “people-centered” ASEAN will be easier to advocate than to implement. Participatory regionalism will not split the organization apart,⁷⁹ but democracy is not a key that fits all locks. The challenge for participatory regionalists in Southeast Asia is not just to promote a fruitful intersection of Tracks I and III, but also to distinguish the extent to which solving a particular policy problem requires specialized knowledge or general consent—and what mix of expertise and participation should therefore be brought to bear on its solution. Implementing human security—defined as protection from infectious disease or violent weather—may call for the insulation of science from politics. Regular, free, and fair elections will be needed to sustain human security when it is defined as protection from state predation. With respect to referenda, the Irish “no” vote will not necessarily derail regionalism in Europe, any more than would such an outcome in Southeast Asia. Like the EU, in order to achieve regional goals, ASEAN is already accustomed to “minus X” arrangements and different deadlines suited to the differing capacities of its members.

On a physical and ethical scale unimaginably greater than the diplomatic incidents in New York and Singapore in 2007, a third critical moment for ASEAN arrived in May 2008, when deadly winds and surging waters smashed open Myanmar's delta and the junta tried to keep it closed. Led, in the full sense of that word, by its new SG, ASEAN interposed itself between foot-dragging generals who feared destabilization and frustrated foreigners who wanted to help the victims but not the regime. Nargis turned ASEAN's embarrassment into its opportunity. Surin planned, exhorted, cajoled. Words led to deeds, which answered—at least temporarily—the standard accusation that the Association was nothing but a talk shop.

⁷⁹ This judgment is in keeping with the implicitly incremental character of Amitav Acharya's definition of “participatory regionalism” as an arrangement in which officials take a “less rigid view of non-interference,” become “more responsive to the demands of civil society,” and thereby allow a “wider range of transnational issues” to be addressed. From a Track I perspective, of course, this argument could be reversed to suggest that two-way participation requires, on the part of civil society activists, a more realistic view of noninterference and of official constraints on meeting their demands, such that transnational issues are not only addressed but resolved. See Amitav Acharya, “Democratisation and the Prospects for Participatory Regionalism in Southeast Asia,” *Third World Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (April 2003), 388.

A key question in this book is the extent to which security, democracy, and regionalism can be linked in ways such that movement along one dimension leverages movement on another. ASEAN's response to the aftermath of Nargis did link regionalism to the restoration of human security, but it required the separation of both regionalism and security from democracy. Future analysts may look back and ask, Who co-opted whom? They may also note the extent to which Surin's handling of the crisis represented a change, however modest, in the nature of regionalism in Southeast Asia. Surin placed the Secretariat at the center of fast-moving events. He showed how the SG's personality and proactivity could, at least marginally and for the time being, raise the status of that position. One could imagine a future backlash from unreconstructed champions of the ASEAN Way, who push Surin's secretary-generalship back toward the purely administrative "secretary" end of that compound noun, especially were he to try wielding regionalism as a tool for fostering democracy in Southeast Asia.

If regionalism is ever to play a democratizing role in the region, it will have to operate in some fashion through security. The kind of security best suited to inducing a linkage of regionalism to democracy is human security—not the realpolitik business of protecting the state, but the moralpolitik challenge to protect society, ultimately including the protection of society from the state itself.

The raising of ASEAN's profile to defend human security after Nargis is discouraging, insofar as it required an explicit separation of security from democracy. That was a victory for the junta and the defenders of a strictly Westphalian version of the ASEAN Way. What if, however, Surin's upgrading of his role, and that of the Secretariat, were to outlast the exigencies of a natural disaster and become institutionalized in a chartered organization with a legal personality as well? In that event, ASEAN could more easily evolve toward participatory regionalism.

Paradoxical though it may seem, an optimal degree of centralization inside ASEAN could increase its receptivity to democracy. A key question for participatory regionalism is, Who participates? The number and diversity of NGOs in Southeast Asia is daunting enough. But the question should also be asked on Track I. The *regional* interests of an emerging civil society are more likely to be ignored than engaged by an Association that is no more than the sum of its parts—a loose grouping without a regional center of gravity strong enough to counterbalance its ten sovereigns and their diverging *national* (not to mention personal and political) agendas. As for operationalizing a regional response to human security—including assigning the optimal mix of expert knowledge and popular legitimation needed to overcome a given threat—that task, too, will be more effectively discharged by an ASEAN whose Secretariat plays a more than administrative role.

The closing section that follows offers some necessarily and intentionally unfinal thoughts on the fate of the ASEAN Way. They are unavoidably incomplete because they will be read with hindsight that was unavailable when

they were written. They are purposely so because they end only the beginning of a book whose remaining chapters greatly exceed in scope and detail my introductory assignment here.

Unfinal Thoughts

Is reform beyond ASEAN's grasp? In 2007, the retreat of the Charter's official drafters from the EPG's creative but purely advisory views paralleled the behavior of ASEAN's Singaporean chair in at first stepping up but then backing down. It does not follow from these reversals of direction, however, that ASEAN is in a long-term process of abandoning reform and reaffirming the ASEAN Way. The EPG Report is water under the bridge. If the Charter is ratified into effect, what will matter is the gap or fit between what it says and what ASEAN does.

Two key policy frontiers will continue to challenge the stewards of regionalism in Southeast Asia: (1) the extension of prior success in fostering interstate peace to encompass and improve human security; and (2) the even more venturesome broadening of regional authority and action to include the defense and nourishment of democracy—or of decency, at least, to use the term that Jones favors in his chapter.

Read in this forward-looking context, the 0.8-to-1 distribution of markers of liberal reform versus the ASEAN Way in the Charter's language reaffirms an argument I have tried to make in this essay: The prospects of movement toward these policy frontiers are notably difficult, and yet, at the same time, intriguingly open. To the obviously limited extent that words imply deeds, the nearly even balance between words of reform and retrenchment in the Charter suggests that it could be used to nudge ASEAN in either direction. There is, in short, no single way (or Way) ahead.

As for what will move regionalism down one path or another, I hope my discussion of Southeast Asia's diversity has made clear that potentials for political change on the ground could significantly affect how regionalism relates to human security and political accountability.

The surprising results of elections held in Malaysia on 8 March 2008 are potentially a case in point. The ruling National Front (NF) failed to win a two-thirds majority for the first time since 1969. From having lost control of only one of Malaysia's thirteen state legislatures in the previous (2004) election, the NF lost five in 2008.

Despite these casualties, the NF retained its parliamentary majority and the prime ministership that went with it. A resurgent opposition did not necessarily augur a more liberal political system, let alone stimulate official interest in human security or democratization as regional goals. An earlier instance of political change, the electoral restoration of civilian rule in Thailand in December 2007, did not yield a government with an interest in pressing the junta in adjacent Myanmar to reform. But it remains the case that if ASEAN is no more than the

sum of its sovereign component parts, it is from developments inside those ten parts that pressures to revise or reaffirm the ASEAN Way will arise.

Democratic Indonesia is a particularly suggestive illustration of the possible regional implications of national political change. Within five years of its own democratization in 1998–99, Indonesia took the lead in planning an ASEAN Security Community (ASC)—renamed in the Charter the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC). Though not an official, Rizal Sukma, a contributor to this book, played a key role in the process. As he relates in his chapter, Indonesia made clear from the start that it wished, in this instance, to widen the meaning of security beyond the state. The ASC’s Plan of Action explicitly defends democracy and human rights in this context. Indonesia never intended for the ASC to spread political pluralism around Southeast Asia, nor to threaten the ASEAN Way. But in this example a democratic government did, modestly but explicitly, help to legitimate reformist norms for the region.

To the extent that other member states *themselves* become more democratic, and Indonesia remains so, it is possible that the region’s largest state will draw more support from fellow members for enlisting regionalism, carefully and cautiously, in support of democracy in a reasonably “liberal” form—or in support of human rights, better governance, and the rule of law without reference to the contentious “L” word.

The logic of this expectation may seem tautological. That is, that already existing, national-level democracy inside member states may be a key precondition for the regional-level pursuit of democracy inside member states. In extreme form, such an argument suggests that ASEAN will be able to reform its members only when they no longer need to be reformed. Understood as a historical sequence, however, the notion is quite plausible: that the democratization of each additional member state should, if other things are roughly equal, marginally increase the capacity and willingness of a regional organization to encourage those of its members that are still not democratic to become so, and to defend or improve democracy where it already exists.

That is my adaptation of the main conclusion reached by Jon Pevehouse in his unique study of the impact of major regional organizations on democracy inside countries around the world. “The more homogenously democratic a regional organization’s membership,” he wrote, “the more likely it will be to pressure autocratic governments to liberalize.” At the same time, however, he found “little evidence that long-standing authoritarian regimes were effectively pressured to democratize by regional organizations. Rather, my cases indicate that only when a state suffers a breakdown of democracy is pressure from an IO [international organization] helpful in the emergence of democracy.” Applied to ASEAN, this finding may be good news for the nascent and vulnerable

democratic government of Indonesia, but it will also comfort the long-standing dictatorship in Myanmar.⁸⁰

A policy implication that Pevehouse drew from these results is that already democratizing states could protect themselves against backsliding by forming their own regional clubs. He cited the Southern African Development Community (SADC) as having adopted this strategy. Pevehouse did not predict that Southern Africa would succeed in becoming such a club. But he noted that “such an outcome” was “certainly possible,” *if* SADC’s already democratic members continued to use SADC “as a forum to pressure neighbors to undertake and continue democratic reforms.”⁸¹

They did not. Instead, the SADC stood by while Zimbabwe’s President Robert Mugabe made a mockery of democracy by plunging that SADC member country into what by 2008 had become a bloody vortex of political murder and intimidation, electoral rigging, blatant corruption, and financial chaos. Not only that. Compared with ASEAN’s ten members, SADC’s fourteen were markedly *more* democratic. In contrast to the Association’s 0.2-to-1 ratio of “Free” to “Not Free” states in 2007, the SADC’s ratio was a *more* encouraging 1.3 to 1 in that year.⁸²

In this instance, a contingent variable—leadership—mattered more than a systemic one—democracy—in explaining regional pressure for member-state reform. Like Indonesia inside ASEAN, South Africa in SADC is large, influential, and politically “Free.” Yet South African President Thabo Mbeki, tasked by the SADC to deal with Mugabe, indulged him instead, disappointing observers who thought that South Africa’s own democracy would incline its leader to support a similar system next door. If there was a lesson in this experience for democrats in Southeast Asia hoping for regional pressure toward reform in Myanmar, it was not to infer a democratizing foreign policy from the fact of democracy in Indonesia. It was, rather, to hope that a systemic incentive, if it did exist, would not be reversed by a leader in Jakarta more inclined to cater to Than Shwe and his generals than to try reforming their regime.

⁸⁰ Jon C. Pevehouse, *Democracy from Above? Regional Organizations and Democratization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 3–4 (“homogenously democratic”) and 213 (“little evidence”). Almost all of the fifty-five organizations, including ASEAN, still existed in his cut-off year, 1992; they are listed on 68–69 (Table 3.4).

⁸¹ Pevehouse, *Democracy from Above?*, 212 and 213 (quotes).

⁸² The proportions of members that were “Partly Free” were similar in ASEAN and SADC—respectively 35.7 and 40.0 percent. (Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2008 [for 2007].”) If ASEAN was privately divided over Myanmar, SADC was publicly split over Zimbabwe. If the ASEAN chair had expressed seemingly collective “revulsion” against Myanmar in September 2007, the SADC chair in June 2008 directed the word “scandalous” *at his own Community* for having “remain[ed] silent on Zimbabwe.” (Zambian President Levy Mwanawasa as quoted by Peter Grete, “Fresh Dilemmas over Zimbabwe,” BBC News, 22 June 2008, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7468399.stm>>.)

In the wake of World War II and its aggressive fascisms, Europe “securitized” autocracy as a threat to peace, and democracy as a requisite to peace, and proceeded to institutionalize that linkage in what became the EU. Southeast Asia’s experience has been altogether different. The record of interstate security of which ASEAN is so proud had nothing to do with democracy. If the theory of democratic peace⁸³ argues for democracy as a precondition of security on the grounds that democratic states do not fight one another, one might even say that regionalism in Southeast Asia has vindicated the opposite doctrine: an “autocratic peace theory” in which authoritarian states jointly and wisely avoided war.

Theories are never immune from realities and their changing interpretation. The established banality of peace between states in Southeast Asia has made violent conflicts within states stand out even more sharply, and their resolution seem more urgent. Would-be global norms, including a state’s responsibility to protect its population from harm,⁸⁴ have helped to limit regional patience with tyrannical misrule in Myanmar. Civil society has grown to the point where the state is less able to get away with conflating its own security with the security of its people.

Southeast Asian regionalism in the evangelical service of liberal democracy is political science fiction. A modest regional agenda on behalf of good governance, human rights, and the rule of law is not. The phrase “human security” appears nowhere in the ASEAN Charter. Regional efforts on its behalf, however, are not only feasible; they could also accelerate in the aftermath of the natural catastrophes of 2004 and 2008. Also missing from the Charter is any reference to the “ASEAN Way.” Sovereignty, consensus, and noninterference will sooner be amended than omitted as guidelines of regionalism in Southeast Asia.

⁸³ See Bruce M. Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World* (rev. ed., Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995 [1993]).

⁸⁴ See *The Responsibility to Protect: Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2001).